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I

RABBI MOSES NAḤMANIDES (RAMBAN):
Explorations in His Religious
and Literary Virtuosity

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Introduction

Isadore Twersky

RABBI MOSES BEN NAḤMAN, Ramban or Nahmanides (1194-1270), comments—quoting from the halakic midrash *Sifre*—concerning the Song of *Ha'azinu* in Deuteronomy (ch. 32): “great is the song, embracing as it does present, past, and future.”¹ If we were to paraphrase this remarkable statement, we might comment concerning the genius of Nahmanides: “great is the literary oeuvre of Ramban, embracing as it does halakah, aggadah, Scriptural exegesis, homilies, kabbalah, philosophy, poetry, polemics.”² In order to complete the picture of greatness and comprehensiveness, we should mention also his intensive activity as communal leader of and spokesman for Spanish Jewry during prolonged

¹Ramban, Deut. 32:40 and see *Sifre ad loc.* Note R. Saadya Gaon, *Emunot ve-De'ot*, Treatise VII, ch. 3 (tr. S. Rosenblatt [New Haven, 1948] pp. 267-268). See the curious, chronologically impossible, anecdote in J. Heilperin, *Seder ha-Dorot* (Warsaw, 1876), p. 161, that this meta-literary statement by Nahmanides was the cause of the apostasy of “his pupil,” Abner of Burgos. The latter heard Nahmanides’ interpretation of *Ha'azenu* and, since it struck him as implausible and untenable, he converted! On Abner, see Y. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia, 1961), Vol. I, 327-354.

²These expressions of Nahmanides’ genius remain, for the most part, unstudied; there are many uncharted lanes waiting to be explored. Many of his works have recently been edited by C. Chavel. Some recent studies are: R. Chazan, “The Barcelona ‘Disputation’ of 1263,” *Speculum* LII (1977), pp. 834-842; A. Funkenstein, “Parshanuto ha-Tipologit shel ha-Ramban,” *Zion* XLV (1980), pp. 35-59; E. Gottlieb, *Mehkarim be-Sifrut ha-Kabbalah* (Tel-Aviv, 1976), esp. pp. 88-96 and 516-536 (an important critique of one of Chavel’s editions); M. Idel, “Perush lo Yadu’a le-Sodot ha-Ramban,” *Da’at* II (1979), pp. 121-126; A. Shohet, “Berurim...,” *Zion* XXXVI (1971), pp. 27-60; D. J. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy* (Leiden, 1965). Also the big book by C. Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Hoker u-Mekubbal* (Jerusalem 1978), dealing mostly with his interpretation of the *mizvot*, and large sections of G. Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah be-Gerona* (Jerusalem, 1964). There are not, as yet, any trend-setting scholarly monographs or decisive works of synthesis. E. Kupfer published an additional section of the famous sermon “Torat ha-Shem Temimah” in *Tarbiz*, XL (1970), 64-83.

periods of internal crisis, antagonism and strife as well as external oppression and turbulence.³ The central public events are, of course, the Maimonidean controversy of 1232 and the Barcelona disputation of 1263; the central literary-intellectual events—e.g. the critical study of Alfasi and Maimonides, the advancement of the conceptual-dialectical method of Talmud study, new patterns of exegesis, careful unveiling of kabbalah—will be noted in the following pages. The life of this social and spiritual aristocrat tells a story of an extraordinary fusion of the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, a leader of distinguished genealogy, of authority and responsibility, and a scholar of resourcefulness and piety and individuality; his writings reflect rigorous scholarship, aesthetic awareness, and religious spirituality. His outstanding achievement, in its multi-faceted splendor, rivets attention upon itself as one of the high points of the thirteenth century—and, unquestionably, of all Jewish history. While it appears formidable and awesome, it entralls and excites. Indeed, great is his song.

His imposing literary oeuvre is properly characterized as versatile, original, and profound, provided we are mindful of the fact that these adjectives are frequently used with abandon or imprecision. Versatile is often taken to mean journalistic and glib writing resulting in facile coverage of many topics, rather than sovereign, disciplined mastery of diverse fields, resulting in creative-critical contributions to these fields. Original is often applied impressionistically when the background of a theme has not been thoroughly investigated and the history of ideas not fully developed with the result that a commonplace idea may appear new for want of perspective while an original interpretation, novel emphasis, conceptual breakthrough or even significant redeployment of source material may not be fully appreciated.⁴ Profound is often used when obscurity, premeditated or unintentional, prevails, and readers are over-

³See B. Septimus, "Ma'avak 'al Shilton Zibburi be-Barcelona," *Tarbiz* XLII (1973), 389-400; *idem*, "Piety and Power in Thirteenth-Century Catalonia," *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 197-231. Cf. the note of M. Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), p. 263, n. 25.

⁴See, e.g., H. A. Wolfson, *Religious Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), p. 1: "For nowadays, as we all know, to be called philosopher one must be ordained and one must be hired to teach philosophy and one must also learn to discuss certain hoary problems as if they were plucked but yesterday out of the air." Julius Guttman (*Philosophies of Judaism* (New York, 1964), p. 153), says with regard to Maimonides, "But there is also such a thing as originality of creative synthesis...." See n. 17 below.

whelmed rather than enlightened.⁵ We may, with care and precision, with complete semantic accountability, affirm that Ramban was truly versatile, original, and profound. His creative contributions to the multiple disciplines which molded Judaism and through which the Jewish genius expressed itself were innovative and substantive, intense and penetrating.

Furthermore, his massive and original literary oeuvre was historically influential and vibrant; his great song continued to reverberate through the ages. Nahmanides is not merely of arcane or antiquarian significance—an interesting figure whose works should be salvaged and studied in compliance with the rules of the scholarly game; he appears on the historical scene as a towering figure whose resplendent multi-dimensional achievement was formative and remained resonant—constantly relevant, exciting and stimulating, eliciting admiration and amplification and, of course, dissent and qualification. His works were always alive and influential. It seems to me that we may say that he actually helped crystallize major areas of study; by this I mean that his own works in these fields were pivotal contributions, intrinsically important and repercussive, as well as formative and directive. They provided substrata and molds for further activity.⁶

I have often thought, for example, that his classic Bible commentary, which gave legitimacy and respectability to kabbalah⁷ while simultane-

⁵The story is told about Martin Buber who, many years after he had settled in Jerusalem, was asked "how good is your Hebrew?" His answer: "Good enough to lecture in—but not sufficiently good to be obscure." On obscurity, see Walter Kaufmann, *I and Thou* (New York, 1971), p. 20: "A lack of clarity is almost indispensable to the survival of a book."

⁶This influence was not always as planned or anticipated by Nahmanides himself. His commentary, which was quoted and anthologized by R. Bahya b. Asher and R. Jacob b. Asher (*Ba'al ha-Turim*), never really became popular in the sense that he expected: "to attract their heart by simple explanations and sweet words"—a goal of many commentators who used midrash for purposes of edification and consolation. On the other hand, the comprehensive world-view embedded in the commentary has not been fully reconstructed. R. Moses Sofer (*Hatam Sofer*, *Hoshen Mishpat*, n. 61), cited by Chavel, introduction to *Perush*, p. 11, notes pithily: כי ספרי הרמב"ם מצויים אלא שעתידים אינם מצויים. Scholars and the masses share the neglect of his commentary.

The work of any great author shares this fate. It bears unintended as well as intended fruits; its total influences and repercussions need not be designed, directed, or even desired by the author. See my *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven, 1979), p. 527.

⁷This is the insight of Joseph Solomon del Medigo, *Miktav 'Ahuz*, ed. A. Geiger, *Melo Hofnayim* (Berlin, 1841), p. 21. R. Isaac Luria singled him out as the "last"

ously underscoring the complexity inherent in the use of rabbinic aggadah and providing a spur to the quest for *peshat*,⁸ helped determine the contours of the so-called "Rabbinic Bible," the *miḳra'ot gedolot*. The mighty printers of the sixteenth century, whose selection of which books were to come off the fresh printing presses shaped Jewish culture to a great extent, certainly played a role here as they did in other areas,⁹ but Nahmanides' role was catalytic; by singling out the French Rashi and the Spanish R. Abraham ibn Ezra as the two weighty predecessors whose totally divergent commentaries engaged his attention and to whose wide-ranging exegetical attitudes and insights his own commentary related in a special way,¹⁰ Nahmanides set the stage for the emergence of the triumvirate which still casts its shadow over all Bible study. Rashi, ibn Ezra, and Ramban are the pivot, the point and counterpoint of Scriptural exegesis; neither Rashbam (R. Samuel B. Meir) nor Ralbag (R. Levi b. Gerson), R. Obadiah Siporno nor R. Ephraim Luntshitz achieved similar centrality or influence. Just as Ramban significantly and creatively relates to the previous two, so subsequent commentators and super-commentators interact with all three. Ramban's perception became regnant. The exegetical problems and hermeneutical issues, the tensions and complexities, emerging from this triple confrontation remained at the core of the history of exegesis. Ramban's richly-textured, many-tiered commentary is crucial.

authentic kabbalist prior to his own (Lurianic) system. F. Baer, *Galut* (New York, 1947), p. 51, refers to Ramban as "the first full and authoritative representative of the new orientation" (i.e. kabbalah).

⁸My student Mordecai Feuerstein is studying this facet of Ramban's commentary.

⁹See, e.g., I. Sonne, "Tiyyulim be-Historyah u-Bibliografiyah," *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1950), pp. 209-235.

¹⁰He used the phrase "open rebuke and concealed love" to characterize his attitude to ibn Ezra. See the comments of B. Septimus in this volume. His criticisms of Rashi generated an extensive and interesting literature, some of which is noted by Chavel in the introduction to his edition of the commentary (Jerusalem, 1957). See, e.g., the opening paragraphs of R. Elijah Mizrahi's supercommentary on Rashi where he dismisses Ramban's opening stricture as wide of the mark (תל שלא שאלוהו היא תשובה מסבכת עם לשון האגדה). Such figures as Maharal of Prague, R. Mordecai Jaffe and R. David b. Samuel ha-Levi (the "Taz") significantly augmented this literature. As in other areas, the development of commentaries and supercommentaries and their critical interactions is of major importance. This literature indirectly reflects the authors' perceptions of Ramban's critical attitude to Rashi.

Similarly, one could suggest that his works (*Sefer Milhamot* and *Sefer ha-Zekut*) on the *Halakot* of R. Isaac Alfasi determined in large measure the standard folio edition of the *Halakot*, accompanied by the highly critical *Sefer ha-Ma'or* of R. Zerahiah ha-Levi, the two sets of *ḥassagot* of R. Abraham ben David of Posquières—one being a selective critique of certain views of Alfasi and the other (*Katuv Sham*) an incisive rebuttal of R. Zerahiah's strictures against the *Halakot*—and the double-barreled, high-powered defense of Alfasi by Nahmanides against both Provençal critics—the *Milhamot* against R. Zerahiah and the *Sefer ha-Zekut* against Rabad. Moreover, the format of the folio edition is not merely a matter of external literary structure but impinges also upon the substance of post-Talmudic literature—the whole complicated process of Talmudic interpretation and the interrelation of authority and freedom. The complexity and dialectical involvement of the defense-criticism syndrome are amply illustrated. Nahmanides, whose avowed aim was a vigorous, imaginative defense of Alfasi, sometimes ends up as a critic dissociating himself from untenable attempts at defense.¹¹ The later, expansive commentaries on Alfasi—e.g. by R. Nissim Gerondi and R. Joseph ibn Habib—are structured around these works, while utilizing in addition Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* and the French-German *Tosafot*.

Ramban's centrality and durable influence in rabbinic literature are manifest in many other ways. In addition to the monumental, challenging *Milhamot*, his *ḥiddushim* achieved classic status and became a permanent component—enlightening and stimulating—of advanced Talmud study. He emerges as one of the architects of classical rabbinic study, a pioneering protagonist of profound analysis of the Talmud—its textual cruxes and moot halakic conclusions. No serious study would dare to omit "the Ramban." While the genre of *ḥiddushim* is by nature individualistic, even atomistic, his *ḥiddushim* are also the beginning of a great chain of such literary compositions (Rashba, Ritba, Ran, etc.).¹² Furthermore, while

¹¹See my brief comments in *Rabad of Posquières* (Philadelphia, 1980), pp. 151-155, and "The Beginnings of Mishneh Torah Criticism," *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 165-166. Note also *Torat ha-'Adam* in *Kirve ha-Ramban*, ed. Chavel, II, p. 294, and the interesting application of Ramban's attitude by R. Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea, *'Emunat Hakamim* (Mantua, 1730), ch. XVV, to the need of trying to defend and explicate Maimonidean doctrines, regardless of how faulty and fallible they appear. The entire issue of authority, criticism, independence and "exegetical relativism" needs more study.

¹²Recently, more works of the "Ramban school" have been published—e.g., the novellae of R. David Bonafed. The *ḥiddushim* of Ramban are also being re-issued in new editions, utilizing manuscripts.

we now know that Spanish and Provençal scholars at the beginning of the century—e.g. R. Meir ha-Levi Abulafia, R. Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarhi, R. Jonah Gerondi—started to study the works of the Tosafists and to “naturalize” them in the south, Ramban’s role in irreversibly integrating the far-reaching achievements of the Tosafists into Spanish Talmudism as well as showering them with honorific epithets and accolades is crucial. This marriage of French and Spanish Talmudism would last.¹³ His searching critique of Maimonides’ *Sefer ha-Mizvot* not only locked the two in intellectual battle and kept the issue of the precise enumeration of the 613 commandments alive—again there is a history of commentaries and supercommentaries¹⁴—but it is also symptomatic of the all-embracing dialectical Maimonides-Nahmanides relation—on the fronts of halakah and philosophy, aggadah and *ta’ame ha-mizvot*.¹⁵ Finally, mention may be made of the richly-textured *Torat ha-’Adam* which not only serves as a microcosm of the skills, methods, and versatility of Ramban, but continues and perfects the genre of halakic monograph (e.g. Rabad’s *Ba’ale ha-Nefesh*): an exhaustive summation of a legal topic together with systematic investigation and exposition of its meta-legal ideas and principles. The importance of the halakic monograph in the history of rabbinic literature—from the Geonic works of R. Hai Gaon and R. Shmuel b. Hofni Gaon to the contributions of modern Talmudists (e.g. the *Pe’at ha-Shulhan*)—awaits careful study, and the *Torat ha-’Adam*, with its famous eschatological section (*Sha’ar ha-Gemul*), is a paradigm for this.¹⁶

A rather neglected aspect of Ramban’s achievement is his role as kabbalist and his seminal contributions to the advancement and entrenchment of kabbalah.¹⁷ While the significance of his inclusion of kabbalistic teachings in his exoteric Bible commentary has been duly noted, their precise meaning has yet to be systematically determined. The scholarly task is two-fold: there is need to analyze the kabbalistic thought of Ramban in detail, with all its subtleties and nuances, its enigmas and

¹³See, of course, the famous statement at the beginning of *Dine de-Garmi*. The merger of Tosafot and *hiddushim* provides the matrix for subsequent Talmudic study.

¹⁴See, e.g., Jacob I. Dienstag, *En-Hamizvot* (New York, 1969) and the recent edition of Ramban’s *Sefer ha-Mizvot* by C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1981).

¹⁵The subject awaits detailed study. The article by S. Krauss in *Ha-Goren* V (1905) is clearly inadequate.

¹⁶Note also his *Mishpete ha-Herem* and *Dine de-Garmi*.

¹⁷See, e.g., G. Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah Be-Gerona*, and the works mentioned in n. 2 above.

ellipses, its symbolism and allusiveness and then to determine the extent of his influence or its gradual diminution. His major theories await disciplined explication. Hitherto unidentified citations in the works of thirteenth-fourteenth century writers—i.e. R. Moses of Burgos, R. Bahya ben Asher, or the school of Rashba—need to be collected and the many unpublished commentaries on the “secrets of Ramban” need to be made available. While this material will be useful and enlightening, great care will be needed in trying to chart the baselines of Ramban’s cosmology, anthropology, philosophy of history and eschatology. He had profound, all-embracing conceptions of God, Israel, history and the world, and his total *anschauung* needs to be meticulously reconstructed. He defies facile categorization, as evidenced for example by his agile critique of philosophy and deft use of philosophic materials and ideas.¹⁸ His discriminating eclecticism, if that is the proper term, is not an indication of intellectual fatigue and dependence but is rather a source of strength and expression of originality—as is often the case in the history of thought.

His intense, simultaneous preoccupation with halakah and kabbalah is also emblematic of the “law and spirituality” theme in Judaism—a creative, authoritative Talmudist of the first order, Nahmanides insisted with great pathos that study of Talmud must be supplemented by study of kabbalah whose concepts and symbols infuse the normative system with spirituality and theological vision. His own output in the field of kabbalistic study is skimpy compared to his output in Talmudic study, but the former has axiological supremacy in the hierarchy of disciplines.¹⁹

¹⁸J. Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, who devotes only a few lines to Nahmanides (p. 244), gives us a perceptive generalization: “R. Moses ben Nahman of Gerona, a Talmudic scholar and biblical exegete who adopted a mediating position in the polemical battle which raged around philosophy in the third decade of the thirteenth century, developed a unique and vigorous conception of Judaism which utilized some philosophic ideas in its details but sought to escape philosophic rationalism.” It is interesting that Nahmanides is often coupled with and compared to Judah Halevi just as Maimonides is often linked and likened to Abraham ibn Ezra. Nahmanides could be quite sharp and apodictic in his condemnation of philosophic views just as he could integrate select views very smoothly and unobtrusively. Most surveys of medieval Jewish thought—from I. Husik to C. Siratt—do not assign any place to Nahmanides.

¹⁹See, e.g., my “Religion and Law” and the brief remarks of J. Katz, “Halakah ve-Kabbalah—Maga'im Rishonim,” *Sefer Zikkaron le Baer* (Jerusalem, 1979), p. 169, and “Halakah ve-Kabbalah kenose'ei limmud mitharim,” *Da'at* VII (1981), p. 44.

In truth, however, kabbalah is not the only part of his oeuvre which awaits systematic study; most aspects of Ramban's achievement are neglected. We owe *him* a scholarly debt, payment of which will enrich us. While his works, as noted, have remained alive, systematic study of Ramban as halakist or exegete is not in a very advanced or felicitous state. We still lack a clear, comprehensive picture of Ramban as a halakist, and the patterns of his exegesis have not yet been analytically described. The list of lacunae and desiderata is long and impressive, including many basic tasks: careful editions, propaedeutic studies, topical and methodological explorations as well as comparative analyses, histories of ideas, imaginative syntheses. Most important, all of this should be geared to a holistic-integrative reconstruction of the complete persona and judicious appreciation of his genius rather than a fragmented-atomistic study of select facets. Ramban did not fritter away his erudition, ingenuity and subtlety on isolated topics or narrow undertakings: his grand oeuvre, which reflects comprehensiveness, cohesiveness and imaginativeness, should, in the final analysis, not be fragmented.²⁰ The tasks are inseparable, for "a work of synthesis does not venture where current scholarship has not gone."²¹

Indeed, were we to take our cue from the nations of the world, we would long ago have established an *Institute Nahmanides*, with an interlocking network of international scholarly committees for scientific publication of all his works, for annotated editions with commentaries long and short, for translation of select works, and for comprehensive-comparative analysis of the major trends of his thought and its total gestalt. Figures of lesser stature, to put it mildly, have merited such attention. The list of institutes and of special journals devoted to the

²⁰Somewhat symptomatic of the state of scholarship—its foci, priorities, imbalances—is the remarkable statement of Simon Dubnow that *Nahmanides* "report on the disputation of Barcelona has historic and religious value and will certainly live longer than his big books in the field of halakah." See S. Dubnow, *Divre Yeme 'Am 'Olam* (Tel Aviv, 1968), Vol. V, p. 66. Only one who never studied the *Milhamot* and *Hiddushim* closely, who has not savored the delicacy and dynamism, insight and ingenuity of their expositions—and who implicitly dismissed them as so much arid subtlety—could make such a tendentious statement. It is interesting to note that the disputation has, as far as I am able to see, continued to receive more attention in recent research than any other aspect of Ramban's creativity and historic legacy. See R. Chazan's article (n. 2 above) and the literature cited there.

²¹This formulation in *Speculum* LVI (1981), p. 191—in a review of Pierre Riché, *Les Ecoles et l'enseignement*—caught my attention. It is, of course, a scholarly commonplace which needs to be re-affirmed periodically.

legacy of individuals, let alone movements or periods, is well known.²² By all objective scholarly standards, an *Institute Nahmanides* should be widely acclaimed and supported.

It is our hope that the five elegant articles in this rich little volume, while shedding light on unexplored facets of his achievement and re-examining themes that have been studied but have remained moot, will also stimulate further study as well. We see it as constructive and suggestive—and, indeed, divergent approaches to certain issues (e.g. natural law) are presented. Ramban's attitude to aggadah, poetry, exegesis and rationalism, his coupling of genuine conservatism and powerful originality, his views on the nature of man, law of nature, miracles, history of kabbalah, dialectics of halakah, his relation to the Spanish intellectual-spiritual background, Provençal culture, and French Talmudism—these are some of the topics explored in these pages. In connection with these specific topics of Nahmanides research, some broader historical issues are also touched upon: continuities and differences between Islamic and Christian Spain; varieties of thirteenth-century kabbalah; preoccupations of medieval halakists; root problems of Scriptural exegesis; the re-orientation of Hebrew poetry in Christian Spain; the relation of philosophy and mysticism. Moreover, fundamental methodological questions—e.g. esotericism, how to resolve inner contradictions, the significance of “diplomatic insincerity” (in the Maimonidean controversy and the Barcelona disputation), the notion of relativism in halakah and kabbalah, the role of popular philosophy versus technical, scholastic philosophy, poetic convention and actual meaning of the text—are broached. This thematic affluence and methodological diversity attest to the centrality of Ramban—to his versatility, originality, and profundity; they echo the greatness of his song.

²²The most recent example that I have noted is the *Acta Alfonsinae*, “a new journal established to honor the seven hundredth anniversary of the death of Alfonso X, el Sabio.”

“Open Rebuke and Concealed Love”:
Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition
Bernard Septimus

FOR A VERY long time there has been an almost irresistible urge to juxtapose Nahmanides to Maimonides. They were the two most influential teachers of the Hispano-Jewish tradition, differed on many crucial issues and represented rival spiritual tendencies. Sometimes one also suspects the old rhetorical pull of *paranomasia contrarium*: look how that little shift from *n* to *l* moves us from Rambam to his antithetical counterpart Ramban!¹ In any case, rather than repeat such stale Rambam-Ramban oppositions as reason and faith, thought and feeling, philosophy and mysticism, I prefer to succumb to the traditional temptation with a contextual contrast: Maimonides was the last great figure formed by the “golden age” of Andalusia. Nahmanides was the first great Spanish figure belonging totally to the cultural environment of Christian Europe.²

¹For an interesting example, see the contrast of R. Hayyim Vital and its reinterpretation by Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism: A Selection* (New York, 1958), pp. 193ff.; see too the string of contrasts in Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden* (Leipzig, 1897-1911), VII, pp. 40-42. For early juxtaposition of Maimonides and Nahmanides, see e.g. R. Aaron ha-Levi, *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*, ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1961), no. 537, p. 657; R. Yom Tov ben Abraham al-Ishbili, *Sefer ha-Zikkaron*, ed. K. Kahana (Jerusalem, 1956), pp. 31-34. Cf. too Abraham Abulafia cited by J. Perles, “Ueber den Geist des Commentars des R. Moses ben Nachman zum Pentateuch,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, 7 (1858):88, n. 1. For its persistence, see e.g. Yosef Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto* (New York, 1971), p. 330. (For evidence of Hispano-Jewish attraction to paranomasia, see e.g. David Yellin, *Torat ha-Shirah ha-Sefaradit*, ed. Dan Pagis (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 220-242; on its semantic function, see D. Pagis, *Shirat ha-Hol ve-Torat ha-Shir le-Mosheh ibn Ezra* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 92ff.)

²On the transfer from Andalusia to Christian Spain and its cultural implications, see my *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1982). Ramah (R. Meir ha-Levi Abulafia) was

Nahmanides and his circle represent a distinctive Catalan strain within thirteenth-century Hispano-Jewish culture.³ Catalonia had been under Christian rule since Carolingian times. Nevertheless, as long as the bulk of the Spanish Jewish community was based in Andalusia, Catalonia remained an outpost of Judeo-Arabic civilization. But with the destruction of the Andalusian Jewish communities in the middle of the twelfth century, a rapid reorientation was inevitable. Nahmanides' Gerona, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, was as remote from Arabic influence and as close to the Jewish cultures of northern Europe as any community in Spain had ever been.⁴ Nahmanides was born in a thoroughly Christianized environment and was saturated from earliest youth in northern Jewish scholarship. His career so strikingly represents the new directions taken by Jewish culture in Christian Spain that it is easy to overlook lines of continuity. The Andalusian-Christian Europe dichotomy is helpful—but mostly as a prelude to its qualification.

Another integrating perspective on Nahmanides is to view him as a genius at intellectual crossroads. At Nahmanides' birth, the Tosafists had

an intermediate figure—formed educationally by the Andalusian tradition, but living his whole life under Christian rule in Castile. On Nahmanides' relationship to Ramah, see below.

³Catalonia, for the purposes of Jewish intellectual history, consists almost exclusively of Barcelona and Gerona. On the cohesiveness (cultural and political) of Nahmanides' circle in Barcelona and Gerona, see my "Piety and Power in Thirteenth-Century Catalonia" in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1979), pp. 197-232. In later generations Catalonia is singled out as an area in which Nahmanides' ideas held sway; see e.g. R. Isaac ben Sheshet, *She'elot u-Teshuvot* (New York, 1954), no. 415, p. 133c.

⁴Figures like Judah ben Barzilai and Abraham bar Hiyya in Barcelona at the beginning of the twelfth century are totally saturated with Judeo-Arabic culture. This remains true of figures like Sheshet ben Isaac Benveniste and Joseph ibn Zabara at the end of the century. An older contemporary of Nahmanides like Abraham ibn Hasdai of Barcelona still remained at home in Arabic; but this already reflects a special cultural commitment. Nahmanides, despite occasional mention of individual Arabic terms (see e.g. Perles (above, n. 1), pp. 87f.), read even basic Andalusian works (like Maimonides' *Guide*) in translation. Cf. Ch. Heller, ed., *Sefer ha-Mizvot le-R. Mosheh ben Maimon* (Jerusalem, 1946), intro., p. 8. In the generation following Nahmanides, R. Solomon ibn Adret could find no one in Barcelona to translate Maimonides' *Commentary on the Mishnah* from Arabic into Hebrew and had to assign the task to scholars in Aragon, where Arabic was better known; see the introduction of R. Joseph ben Isaac ibn al-Fawwal to his translation of Maimonides' *Commentary to Mo'ed* (in the standard Vilna edition of the Talmud, *Shabbat*, 187a).

just completed their revolution of talmudic studies;⁵ Kabbalah had recently emerged into the light of history in Provence;⁶ and Maimonides, the greatest representative of the Andalusian tradition, was completing his career in exile.⁷ All of these traditions converged at the turn of the twelfth century in Catalonia during a period of relative security and prosperity, releasing a remarkable burst of creative energy and versatile achievement. Nahmanides was the leading figure in this little Catalan renaissance.⁸ Certainly, the influence of Franco-German talmudic culture and Provençal Kabbalah set him on a cultural course unknown in Muslim Spain. But the confluence of these northern traditions with the still powerful and often divergent tradition of Andalusia contributed to the remarkable level of creative tension in Nahmanides' thought and helped to form his cultural ideal.

A careful consideration of the complexity of Nahmanides' attitude is particularly pressing with regard to the tradition of Andalusian rationalism. The current image of Nahmanides tends to underscore his opposition. Baer's characterization is especially emphatic but by no means atypical.

The attack against rationalism in the name of faith is typical of all the cabalistic works produced during this period. It is most pronounced in Nahmanides' commentary to the Pentateuch. His vigorous opposition to the allegorical interpretation of the Torah is expressed on every page of this work, the most popular of

⁵See e.g. E. E. Urbach, *Ba'ale ha-Tsafot*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1980). On Nahmanides' ties to the Tosafists see pp. 26, 263f., 479, 586. A crucial role in the twelfth-century revolution of talmudic studies was also played by Provence; see I. Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1962). For Rabad's influence on Nahmanides, see pp. 56-59.

⁶See Gershom Scholem, *Les origines de la Kabbale* (Paris, 1966).

⁷Despite the fact that Maimonides may have fled Andalusia at a relatively early age, there is no doubt that both in terms of scholarship and self-perception he belonged to the Andalusian tradition; for Nahmanides' perception, see below, n. 83.

⁸Besides Nahmanides, outstanding Catalan contemporaries include kabbalists like R. Ezra and R. Azriel of Gerona, Nahmanides' cousin the talmudist-pietist R. Jonah Gerondi, the civil-law codifier R. Samuel ha-Sardi and the poet Meshullam da Piera. Nahmanides' students include very important figures like R. Solomon ibn Adret and R. Aaron ha-Levi of Barcelona. See further, Scholem, *Les origines de la Kabbale*; H. Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit be-Sefarad uve-Provence* (Jerusalem, 1961), II, 238ff., 285, 291, 295ff., 319f., 326; C. Chavel, *Rabbenu Mosheh ben Nahman* (Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 47-71.

Nahmanides' writings. His avowed aim was "to silence the mouths of the men of little faith and meager wisdom who scoff at the words of our sages," and to refute the opinions of Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides, on whom the rationalists leaned for support.⁹

The only kinship that Baer recognizes is to Ha-Levi—a rebel, from within, against the Andalusian tradition.¹⁰

This image of Nahmanides has had a decisive—and I would maintain, not wholly fortunate—impact on the interpretation of two dramatic historical episodes in which Nahmanides stood center stage: the Maimonidean Controversy and the Disputation at Barcelona

The story of the Maimonidean Controversy—the great struggle over Maimonidean rationalism that erupted among the communities of Spain, Provence and northern France in the 1230's—is well known. During this controversy, Nahmanides—still young, but already well established as a major scholar—struck a diplomatic pose. He attempted to defend the Montpellier anti-rationalists from the ban of a Provençal communal establishment for whom Maimonides had become sacrosanct. At the same time he wrote a classic open letter to the Tosafist schools of northern France in defense of Maimonides and sought (apparently with some success) to have their ban against *Sefer ha-Madda'* and the *Guide of the Perplexed* withdrawn.¹¹ However, those who view Nahmanides as an unmitigated opponent of Andalusian rationalism are led to the conclusion that in principle he must have agreed with the anti-Maimonists—that his only real difference with them was tactical.¹² Nahmanides' defense of Maimonides is thus seen as an act of realistic statesmanship rather than an act of conscience.

⁹Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia, 1966), I, 245. Contrast the much more nuanced and still very interesting characterization of Nahmanides' *Commentary* offered long ago by Perles (above, n. 1), 80-97, 113-136, 145-159.

¹⁰See Baer, *History*, I, 67-76.

¹¹For a balanced account of Nahmanides' activities during the controversy, see A. Shoḥet, "Berurim be-Farashat ha-Pulmus ha-Rishon 'al Sifrei ha-Rambam," *Zion* 36 (1971):27-60. Nahmanides' position in the controversy is also touched on in my "Piety and Power" (above, n. 3).

¹²Baer, *History*, I, 103-105; H. H. Ben-Sasson, *Toledot 'Am Yisrael Bimei ha-Benayim* (Tel Aviv, 1969), pp. 155f.; Y. Kaplan, *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, s.v. "Mosheh b. Nahman." Perhaps the strongest formulation is that of S. Krauss ("Ha-Yihus ha-Madda'i ben ha-Ramban v. ha-Rambam," *Ha-Goren* 5 (1905):84) despite the abundant evidence for qualification that his own article contains. Cf. Shoḥet (above, n. 11), p. 39 (bottom) and Perles (above, n. 1), pp. 85-86, 157-158.

A central issue of the Maimonidean Controversy—the authority and interpretation of aggadah—crops up again, some thirty years later, during the Disputation at Barcelona.¹³ Here a new development in the history of Jewish-Christian polemic comes to the fore: an attempt by the Church to argue the truth of Christianity from aggadic as well as biblical *testimonia*. Nahmanides sought to cut the foundation out from under this new Christian method of argumentation by denying the authority of aggadah.¹⁴ This had been a long-standing position of geonic and Andalusian authorities,¹⁵ but what did Nahmanides himself believe? The current picture of Nahmanides has led many scholars to the conclusion that Nahmanides was arguing, under polemical pressure, against his own profound belief.¹⁶

The historiographical parallel is obvious: in both the case of the Maimonidean Controversy and the Disputation at Barcelona, the accepted image of Nahmanides has resulted in a refusal to accept what he actually said as representing his true conviction. This picture of diplomatic insincerity dominating the two major public pronouncements of “the faithful master,” while not *ipso facto* impossible, should at least give pause.

A first step toward a balanced view is to recognize complexity in the Andalusian tradition itself. I doubt that the picture of Halevi as a lonely rebel against a uniformly rationalistic Andalusian Jewish culture is a useful one. Medievalists, as far as I am aware, did not perceive him as such.¹⁷ Ha-Levi's defense of the faith with philosophical weapons could be viewed as in perfect Andalusian character. A critical stance toward philosophy is already evident in such eleventh-century stalwarts of the

¹³A recent study is R. Chazan, “The Barcelona ‘Disputation’ of 1263: Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response,” *Speculum* 52 (1977):824-842.

¹⁴*Kitvei ha-Ramban*, ed. C. D. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1963), I, 308.

¹⁵Nahmanides' declaration at Barcelona was put into this geonic-Andalusian context by S. Lieberman, *Shikhiin* (Jerusalem, 1939), pp. 81-83.

¹⁶Baer, *History*, I, 153; idem, “Le-Biqqoret ha-Vikkuhim shel R. Yehiel mi-Paris ve-shel R. Mosheh ben Nahman,” *Tarbiz* 2 (1930):184 and n. 1; M. Cohen, “Reflections on the Text and Context of the Disputation of Barcelona,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 35 (1964):157-192; Scholem, *Les origines de la Kabbale*, p. 484.

¹⁷See e.g. Yedaya ha-Penini, *Ketav ha-Hitnaẓlut in She'elot u-Teshuvot R. Shelomo ben Adret* (Benei Berak, 1958), I, 166, no. 418. Cf. Profiat Duran, *Ma'aseh Efoḏ* (Vienna, 1865), p. 25.

Andalusian tradition as Jonah ibn Janah and Judah ibn Bal'am.¹⁸ Ha-Levi's more sustained and thoroughgoing critique probably reflects the twelfth-century challenge of Aristotelianism more than any idiosyncratic repudiation of the whole Andalusian tradition. Nahmanides, I think, was making a similar point about the sources of anti-rationalism when, in the course of the Maimonidean Controversy, he quoted the anti-philosophical responsum of Hai Gaon to Samuel ha-Nagid.¹⁹ Whatever our view of the authenticity of this particular document, the general point is well taken: thirteenth-century Spanish anti-rationalism was not simply a northern European import; it had roots in the geonic and Andalusian traditions.²⁰ Moreover Nahmanides' relationship, even to Andalusians like Ibn Ezra and Maimonides, was hardly one of simple and diametric opposition. An instructive contrast to Baer's judgment is Nahmanides' own characterization of his relationship to Ibn Ezra. In the introduction to his *Commentary on the Torah*, Nahmanides announces that he will engage in dialogue with two classic predecessors: Rashi—an exemplar of Franco-German culture, and Ibn Ezra—a great synthesizer and representative of Andalusian culture. Toward Rashi he expresses reverence. Rashi's mastery of biblical and talmudic literature and his centrality are stressed. But Nahmanides tells us that he plans "to be infatuated with the love of Rashi's words"—perhaps ironically hinting at critical distance as much as passionate commitment. He will subject Rashi's words to careful analysis—"his plain and midrashic explanations and every impregnable aggadah quoted in his commentary." Of course, Rashi's anthologizing of difficult *aggadot* made them no less "impregnable"—that task was left to Nahmanides.²¹

¹⁸See e.g. Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976), p. 93; E. Ashtor, *Qorot ha-Yehudim be-Sefarad ha-Muslamit*, II (Jerusalem, 1966), 293.

¹⁹See the edition of Nahmanides' letter to the scholars of northern France published by J. Perles in *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 9 (1860):194.

²⁰See further in my *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, pp. 75-103.

²¹Nahmanides' *Commentary* is, among other things, a sustained critique of Rashi's more midrashic interpretations of Scripture. Although this criticism never approaches the harsh language occasionally directed at Ibn Ezra, it seems to me, substantively, more fundamental and thoroughgoing than the critique of Ibn Ezra. For some critical comments on Rashi, see e.g. the *Commentary* to Gen. 6:3, 19:24, 28:17, 49:22, Exod. 4:9, 10:14, 24:1, Lev. 19:16, Num. 14:21. But the more fundamental criticism is often understated or implicit; see e.g. on Lev. 19:19. Even when interpreting aggadic material quoted by Rashi, Nahmanides' assumption seems to

Nahmanides' definition of his relationship to Ibn Ezra is, by contrast, terse and explicitly tense: "For R. Abraham ibn Ezra we will have open rebuke and concealed love."²² In light of Nahmanides' well-known and sometimes stinging criticisms of Ibn Ezra, one nineteenth century *maskil* was moved to rhetorical bewilderment:²³ [Nahmanides] filled his commentary with the open rebuke and even added derision and ridicule, but where is the hidden love?"²⁴ In fact, Nahmanides' cryptic characterization of his relationship to Ibn Ezra seems designed precisely to caution the careful reader against letting occasional denunciations deflect attention from deep spiritual affinities. The occasions for Nahmanides' "rebuke" of Ibn Ezra are roughly threefold: cavalier treatment of aggadah;²⁵ overly rationalistic exegesis;²⁶ and pretension to esoteric wisdom.²⁷ I would suggest that Nahmanides' "love"—his sense of spiritual kinship with Ibn Ezra—is often to be found hiding not far from his "rebuke."

Keeping in mind Nahmanides' problematic proclamation during the Disputation at Barcelona, I will concentrate on the question of aggadah. Andalusian uneasiness with aggadic exegesis stemmed from a twofold desire to interpret grammatically and sensibly. These were qualities that Nahmanides liked in Ibn Ezra and strove to emulate.²⁷ His conception of

be that Rashi himself simply quoted it at face value. See e.g. the *Commentary* to Exod. 19:13; cf. Maharal of Prague, *Gur Aryeh*, ad loc.

²²See Prov. 27:5, where, however, open rebuke and concealed love do *not* coexist. In a poem of Samuel ha-Nagid to his son (in Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit* I, 119) they do coexist, but for educational purposes. Nahmanides' striking combination of open rebuke and concealed love expresses a sense of tension and complexity.

²³I. H. Weiss, *Dor Dor ve-Dorshav* (Vilna, 1904), V, 7.

²⁴See e.g. the *Commentary* to Gen. 1:1, 11:28, 24:1, 46:15.

²⁵See e.g. Nahmanides' *Commentary* to Gen. 18:20, Exod. 6:7, 28:30.

²⁶See e.g. Nahmanides' *Commentary* to Gen. 24:1. For disagreement with Ibn Ezra on kabbalistic grounds, see e.g. the *Commentary* to Exod. 3:2, 13:21, 14:19, Num. 8:2.

²⁷Even Nahmanides' implicit declaration of exegetical independence in his introduction to the *Commentary* ("...and may God, whom alone I fear....") is probably influenced by a very similar declaration in the introduction to Ibn Ezra's commentary. Cf. also Nahmanides' earlier introduction to his *Milhamot Ha-Shem* (*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 412). There are innumerable instances in which Nahmanides prefers Ibn Ezra's philological explanation to Rashi's interpretation; see e.g. the *Commentary* to Exod. 6:12, 9:30, 24:1, 33:12, Num. 4:20, Deut. 20:19. But more important than any individual instance of influence is the overall impact of Ibn Ezra's method. Besides Ibn Ezra, the other major channel through which Andalusian philology reached Nahmanides was David Kimhi. Though mentioned only

peshat is profoundly indebted to Ibn Ezra. The immense energy that Nahmanides devoted to uncovering the plain sense of Scripture—sometimes even engaging in lengthy linguistic discussions²⁸—shows him entirely free of the frequent kabbalistic tendency to devalue *peshat*.²⁹ Nahmanides significantly advanced the Andalusian tradition of *peshat*—not merely by proposing new interpretations but by broadening the conception of interpretation. Nahmanides went beyond Abraham ibn Ezra's definition of the exegetical enterprise as anchored primarily in the consecutive grammatical exposition of individual words and phrases (which seems somehow analogous to Moses ibn Ezra's atomistic conception of *poetic criticism*)—in the direction of a more organic, structural, and conceptual approach to the plain sense of the text.³⁰

once (see the *Commentary* to Gen. 35:16), his works were a major source for Nahmanides; see e.g. M. Z. Eisenstadt, ed., *Perush ha-Ramban 'al ha-Torah*, I (New York, 1959), pp. 34 n. 11, 39, 40 n. 8, 43 n. 4, 53 n. 8, 57 n. 3, 58 n. 2, 64 n. 1. For studies of Nahmanides as a biblical exegete, see Perles (above, n. 1); M. Z. Segal, *Parshanut Ha-Miqra* (Jerusalem, 1952), 96-102; E. Z. Melammed, *Mefarshai ha-Miqra* (Jerusalem, 1975), II, 937-1021.

²⁸See e.g. the *Commentary* to Gen. 9:20, 14:16, 24:64, 30:14, 30:20, 32:21, 32:25, Exod. 25:26, 25:29, Lev. 5:22, 19:16, 19:20, 23:28, Deut. 1:4, 2:23, 7:12. See further M. Moreshet, "Ha-Ramban ke-Balshan 'al pi Perusho la-Torah," *Sinai* 60 (1962):193-210.

²⁹For this tendency, see Zohar, III, 152a. For an even stronger formulation, see Nahmanides' older contemporary, R. Azriel of Gerona, *Perush ha-Aggadot*, ed. Isaiah Tishby (Jerusalem, 1945), p. 37. In Nahmanides' *Commentary* to Gen. 1:1, the implicit assumption is the opposite—that if the non-legal sections of the Torah were really meaningful only to kabbalists and without an ethical-historical significance accessible to everyone, they would not have been written! Nahmanides' formulation there suggests that affirmation of the importance of the non-mystical sense of Scripture is a correlative of his strict esotericism. The closest that Nahmanides comes to the reasoning of the Zohar is his suggestion that the apparent redundancy of a story (Isaac's wells) points to (non-esoteric) typological interpretation; see his *Commentary* to Gen 26:20. On Nahmanides' typological interpretation, see A. Funkenstein, "Parshanut ha-Tipologit shel ha-Ramban," *Zion* 45 (1980):35-59.

³⁰For Abraham ibn Ezra's characterization of his exegetical method as the application of grammar, see the introduction to his *Commentary on the Torah*. Although, in practice, Ibn Ezra's commentary offers more than grammatical interpretation, this characterization accurately reflects its centrality. The linkage of linguistic and biblical studies is characteristic of the Andalusian tradition, in which these disciplines are barely distinguishable. On the non-holistic view of poetry in Andalusia, see e.g. Pagis (above, n. 1), p. 142. The observation that the poetry of the Gerona school shows a new emphasis on the unity of the individual

Certainly the defense of rabbinic exegesis is a major concern of Nahmanides' commentary. But it is a defense that was made necessary by, and that at times made use of, the Andalusian exegetical tradition. There could be no return to the innocence of Rashi. Nahmanides attempted, for the first time, to show how the Andalusian philological sensibility could, at least sometimes, come to terms with aggadah. He presents *midrash*—both halakic and aggadic—as a legitimate method distinct from and parallel to *peshat*, which uses a real textual difficulty as a springboard for intelligently imaginative interpretation.³¹

Nahmanides did *not* see kabbalistic interpretation as a universal key to the understanding of all aggadah. When he does resort to kabbalistic defense it is often of *aggadot* that are entirely beyond the reach of Andalusian understanding. Rashi can simply quote such *aggadot*; Ibn Ezra disparages them. Neither knew of Nahmanides' kabbalistic solutions; but Ibn Ezra and Nahmanides are closer—in sharing a common problem that Rashi never felt.³²

poem (see Prof. Fleischer's essay in this volume) completes the parallel between poetry and exegesis. The decline of atomism in both domains may reflect weakening Arabic influence. An obvious example of Nahmanides' more total exegetical approach is his careful attention, throughout the *Commentary*, to questions of ordering, thematic unity and overall structure; see e.g. the introductions to the various books of the Pentateuch and on Exod. 4:19, 18:1, 23:7, 24:1, 25:1, 33:7, 35:1, Lev. 1:1, 7:38, 8:1, 14:43, 16:1, 25:1, Num. 1:1, 3:1, 7:1, 8:2, 9:1, 16:1, 28:2, Deut. 1:4, 3:24, 4:41, 12:32, 31:24. The shift away from the grammatical approach is most apparent in the central role Nahmanides assigns to questions of theology (see Perles (above, n. 1), pp. 118ff.), history, ethics, politics, rhetoric and character. A telling semantic symptom of Nahmanides' broadening of exegetical horizons is his application of the formula "al derekh ha-peshat" (itself derived from Ibn Ezra) to a question of *ta'amei ha-mizvot*; see the *Commentary* to Num. 6:11.

³¹For a few examples of *midrash aggadah* given a basis in *peshat*, see the *Commentary* to Gen. 1:11, 2:20, 11:32, Exod. 2:2, 4:3, 6:2, Num. 14:1, Deut. 6:18, 12:22. For some examples of *midrash halakhah* given a basis in *peshat*, see *Commentary* to Exod. 21:1, 21:9, 21:36, Num. 15:22. For rabbinic halakhah identified with *peshat*, see e.g. *Commentary* to Exod. 12:6, 22:6 (cf. Rashbam), 30:33, Lev. 3:9, 7:25, Deut. 12:21.

³²See the *Commentary* to Gen. 1:1 (directed against Ibn Ezra in the introduction to his commentary) and Gen 24:1 (against Ibn Ezra, ad loc.). Whatever the original function of these kabbalistic interpretations, Nahmanides makes it clear that their function in his commentary is to serve as a response to rationalistic critique. The plain sense of the *aggadot* under discussion, apparently accepted by Rashi, seems as unacceptable to Nahmanides as it is to Ibn Ezra. Cf. too the *Commentary* to Exod. 19:13. Here an original kabbalistic interpretation of aggadah serves precisely the function of philosophical allegory: it provides a non-literal interpretation

But did Nahmanides also share Ibn Ezra's sense of freedom from aggadic authority? Did he agree with the French anti-Maimunists for whom it was self-evident that any denial of the authority of aggadah was tantamount to heresy, or was there some glimmer of conviction behind his statement at Barcelona? I would venture to say that anyone who reads Nahmanides' commentary will find ample evidence that he did not accept the absolute authority of all aggadah. This is not really a new observation; an anonymous note published some eighty years ago in *Ha-Goren* listed a handful of instances in which Nahmanides' commentary rejected aggadic interpretation, accused Nahmanides of allowing himself precisely the sort of freedom for which he flayed Ibn Ezra, and chalked up pious acceptance of Nahmanides' commentary to the operation of luck in literary history.³³ Needless to say, Nahmanides' true position needs to be delineated with much greater responsibility and nuance.³⁴ Though I

of an aggadah (quoted by Rashi) that seems unreasonable when interpreted literally. Of course, not all kabbalistic interpretation of aggadah in Nahmanides' *Commentary* serves such an immediately defensive function; see e.g. the *Commentary* to Gen. 1:11, 2:3, 2:7.

Malice mixes with insight in the following lines from a poetic attack on Nahmanides by an anonymous defender of the rationalistic faith:

גם את יחיד הדור / חכם אבן עזרא / קטנה מסותרה / קנא בשממון
חשב בחידושיה / לעשות בפירשיה / אל יאמן בשוא / נתעה ובישימון
ירא כי לא יכל / ויהפוך הכל / ובסוד דרש בכל / ודמם כמו הגמון.

("Shir 'al ha-Ramban," ed. Y. H. Schorr, *He-Haluz* [1853], p. 162) Nahmanides' attitude toward Ibn Ezra is characterized here as one of "concealed jealousy" rather than "concealed love." Nahmanides, it is claimed, attempted to match Ibn Ezra's rationalistic exegesis, but finding himself unequal to the task overturned everything (*ha-kol*) by capitulating to Kabbalah. "Ha-kol" and "ba-kol" have a double meaning here—alluding also to the specific kabbalistic sense attached to these terms in Nahmanides' *Commentary* to Gen. 24:1. The expression "...דרש" "דרש" cleverly alludes to Nahmanides' own use of a bishop's sermon as an example of non-authoritative preaching; see below. But it may also imply the stock rationalistic argument that Kabbalah is as bad as, if not worse than, Christian theology; see e.g. Isaac ben Sheshet, *She'elot u-Teshuvot*, no. 157. Cf. the evaluation of Joseph Solomon del Medigo: "Nahmanides is generally right on target. I am passionately attached to his *Commentary on the Torah* with the exception of those places in which he embraced the alien woman [Kabbalah]..." (quoted by Perles (above, n. 1), p. 90 n. 5). Cf. (from a rather different quarter) R. Jacob ben Asher, *Perush ha-Tur 'al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1961), introduction. Much of this commentary is a dekabbalized summary of Nahmanides.

³³"Le-Toledot ha-Ramban," *Ha-Goren* 4 (1903):112-114. The note is signed ש"י.

³⁴Far more satisfactory is the brief characterization of Nahmanides' attitude to aggadah by Perles (above, n. 1), p. 120. Perles, quite correctly in my view, notes the

cannot pretend, now, to fulfill this desideratum,³⁵ I would like to call attention to a basic terminological point of contact between Nahmanides' polemical disclaimer and his mature exegesis.

Here is the way Nahmanides explained the nature and status of aggadah at Barcelona:

We have besides the [Bible and Talmud] a third [kind of] book called *midrash*, that is to say sermons—rather like the case should a bishop get up and preach a sermon and one of the listeners like it and write it down. Now this [kind of] book, if one believes in it—well and good—and if one doesn't believe in it, there's no harm in that [either].... We also call this [kind of] book aggadah...that is to say that they are merely things that one man tells another.³⁶

Peculiar to this denial of aggadic authority is the claim that aggadah is essentially sermonic and—especially important—that its non-authoritative status is implicit in the term "aggadah" itself.

That this interpretation of the term "aggadah" was not foreign to Nahmanides' real understanding is confirmed by his own usage in the *Commentary on the Torah*. Although Nahmanides' attitude toward the non-halakhic material in classical rabbinic literature is highly complex and undoubtedly more reverent than Ibn Ezra's, he almost invariably attaches the term "aggadah" to those interpretations about which he seems uneasy, which make sense only when interpreted non-literally, or whose seriousness and authority he is calling into question.³⁷ "Aggadah" can even be rejected in favor of kabbalistic interpretation.³⁸ There is also support in Nahmanides' usage for the linkage of the term "aggadah" and

relevance of the declaration at Barcelona to the spirit of the *Commentary on the Torah*.

³⁵See above, n. 14.

³⁶See e.g. the *Commentary* to Gen. 1:1, 14:17, Exod. 1:1, 2:6, 19:13, 33:7, Lev. 19:29, Num. 20:1, 25:5, Deut. 12:4, 27:26. Note that the term "aggadah" is applied even to material from the Babylonian Talmud; see, e.g., the *Commentary* to Num. 1:3, 25:18, Deut. 3:9.

³⁷See the *Commentary* to Num. 20:1. Nahmanides certainly understood some difficult *aggadot* kabbalistically—a position he even alluded to at Barcelona (*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 306). But the assumption that, because Nahmanides was a kabbalist, he must have accepted the authority of *all* aggadah seems to me fallacious; cf. Scholem, *Les origines de la Kabbale*, p. 484. In fact, the *Commentary* to Num. 20:1 is one of many instances in which Kabbalah and the search for *peshat* seem to converge in Nahmanides; see e.g. the *Commentary* to Gen. 11:3, 31:42, 38:8, 48:15, Exod. 3:13, 6:2, 33:14, Lev. 1:9, 10:2, 16:8, Num. 4:20, Deut. 32:7. Cf. Funkenstein (above, n. 29), p. 46. This phenomenon requires separate treatment.

popular homiletics—including one striking instance of an original interpretation proposed by Nahmanides “in the manner of aggadah.”³⁸ By contrast, a position referred to by Nahmanides as “the words of our masters (*divrei rabbotenu*)” is treated with respect and seriousness of a different order.³⁹ The term “*rabbotenu*” tends to suggest a somewhat more weighty consensus. Nahmanides’ tendency may therefore be akin to those geonic and Andalusian authors who deny absolute authority to individual *aggadot* while recognizing the more binding character of rabbinic teachings that represent a classical consensus.⁴⁰ I wish to stress, however, that, though the term “*rabbotenu*” generally accompanies respectful treatment, it does not imply acceptance as a binding last word. Nahmanides felt free, even in such cases, to offer his own alternatives “according to the method of *peshat*.”⁴¹

³⁸*Commentary* to Num. 1:32. See also the somewhat condescending approval of Ibn Ezra’s explanation of sacrifices (“*devarim mitqablim moshekhim ha-lev ke-divrei aggadah*”) in the *Commentary* to Lev. 1:9.

³⁹Nahmanides’ use of “*rabbotenu*” is similar, in some ways, to Ibn Ezra’s “*qadmonenu*”; see Joseph b. Eliezer Tov Elem, *Zofnat Pane’ah*, ed. D. Herzog (Cracow, 1912), p. 7. I do not wish to suggest that “*aggadah*” or “*rabbotenu*” function, for Nahmanides, as strict technical terms with fixed meanings and evaluations. Thus in the *Commentary* to Exod. 3:19 and Num. 13:2 both terms can be applied to the same interpretation; cf. too the *Commentary* to Num. 26:13. But the general pattern seems clear and significant. Note that Rashi can ascribe to “*rabbotenu*” an interpretation that Nahmanides will reject outright; see e.g. Nahmanides’ *Commentary* to Gen. 46:29; cf. Melamed (above, n. 27), I, 377f.

⁴⁰See e.g., my *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, p. 77. Note that this position is also implied in the frequent dismissal of *aggadot* as “the words of an individual”; see e.g. Maimonides, “Letter on Astrology,” ed. A. Marx, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 3 (1926), 356; *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:29; Ibn Ezra, *Short Commentary* to Exod. 13:18.

⁴¹This is sometimes the case even on halakhic questions; see e.g. the *Commentary* to Lev. 19:26, Num. 5:18. Nahmanides was probably operating here with a conception of the biblical text as multilayered; see *Sefer ha-Mizvot leha-Rambam ‘im Hassagot ha-Ramban*, ed. C. D. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 44–45. (Note the restrictive “*be-‘inyan ha-mizvot*” here.) See also Nahmanides’ *Commentary* to Lev. 27:29 and his earlier justification of the same interpretation in his *Mishpat ha-‘Herem* (in *Hiddushei ha-Ramban, Shevu’ot*, ed. M. Hershler (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 296–297). But comparison of the halting apologetic manner in which this non-rabbinic interpretation was first presented in *Mishpat ha-‘Herem* and the natural, confident tone of the *Commentary* suggests a certain development.

In the realms of aggadah, historical prediction, and Kabbalah, Nahmanides often uses the root נרמ to indicate a layer of meaning coexisting with but going beyond the plain sense of the text; see e.g. his introduction to the *Commentary* and

Other aspects of Nahmanides' "concealed love" that require exploration are his borrowing and adaptation of theological themes from Ibn Ezra⁴² and—most intriguing—his consciousness of points of contact with Ibn Ezra on kabbalistic questions.⁴³

to Exod. and the *Commentary* to Gen. 1:1, 3:14, 47:28, 48:7, Exod. 32:34, Lev. 26:16, Num. 3:1, 7:2, 14:1, Deut. 17:14, 18:21. Note too Nahmanides' approving quotation of Ibn Ezra on the simultaneously esoteric and exoteric meaning of Scripture (*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 180 and II, 297; referring to the introduction to Ibn Ezra's *Commentary on the Torah*). But in innumerable instances Nahmanides simply and straightforwardly presents his alternative to "the words of our masters" as if the two interpretations are mutually exclusive; see, e.g., the *Commentary* to Gen. 1:21, 2:5, 4:17, 13:7, 23:19, Exod. 2:14, 40:34, Lev. 7:38, Num. 13:2. Cf. too Num. 3:45 ("ve-yitakhen...ke-divrei rabbotenu"). Note too that very often Nahmanides rejects Rashi's interpretation when the latter is simply repeating a rabbinic source; see e.g. the *Commentary* to Gen. 12:11, 25:22, 38:26, Num. 1:18.

⁴²To give one example, Nahmanides' conception of "hidden miracles" (see David Berger's essay in this volume), which plays a central role in the "open rebuke" of Ibn Ezra in the *Commentary* to Gen. 46:15, may itself be influenced by Ibn Ezra's *Commentary* to Exod. 6:3. (See the allusion to this source in the *Commentary* to Gen. 17:1 and Exod. 6:2) (This may be the acid point of Nahmanides' anonymous poetic critic (above, n. 32) *דענו אשר עבדו ודפן ביחבד לסתור דבריו*) His reference may also be to Ibn Ezra's *Commentary* to Ruth 14:17.) Nahmanides argues (contra Ibn Ezra) that it is Scripture's practice not to narrate "hidden miracles" which are nevertheless preserved by rabbinic tradition. This may account for the fact that, alongside the tradition of "our masters" about Abraham's deliverance from Nimrod's fiery furnace, Nahmanides gives equal billing to a "hidden miracle" version of the escape from Ur that comes (via *Guide*, 3:29) from the *Nabatean Agriculture*! See the *Commentary* to Gen. 11:28, 12:2 (cf. too *Mishneh Torah*, *Avodah Zarah*, 1:3). Nahmanides also opposes his theory of hidden miracles to Maimonides' naturalistic tendency (*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 153) and yet elsewhere acknowledges a very important point of contact between that theory and Maimonides' theory of Providence (*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 109). The distinction between "hidden" and "revealed" miracles is also integrated into Nahmanides' Kabbalah; see the *Commentary* to Gen. 17:1, Exod. 6:2 and *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohot* (reprint: Jerusalem, 1963), pp. 65a, 70b-71a. This theory thus provides an example of the complex convergence of anti-rationalistic concerns, Kabbalah and Andalusian ideas in the thought of Nahmanides. Note also that Nahmanides' famous interpretation of Ps. 19:8 as stating the superiority of Torah to nature as a source of knowledge of God (*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 141)—which can be regarded as a counterstatement to Maimonides, *Yesodei ha-Torah*, 2:2 and *Teshuvah*, 10:6—is based on Ibn Ezra's *Commentary* to Ps. 19:8. Of course Nahmanides' relationship to other Andalusian figures (e.g. Ibn Gabirol, Ha-Levi, Abraham bar Hiyya) also requires careful treatment.

⁴³See e.g. the *Commentary* to Gen. 17:1, Exod. 20:19, 29:46, Lev. 17:18, 18:25, 18:29, 25:2, Num. 23:1, Deut. 11:22 (cf. to 26:19), 21:22, 31:16, 32:7, 32:35; Meir ibn

We have seen that Nahmanides differed from the French anti-Maimonists on the issue of aggadah. I believe that analysis of Nahmanides' *Commentary on the Torah* with regard to other issues debated during the Maimonidean Controversy would further support the sincerity of his famous letter to the scholars of northern France in defense of Maimonides.⁴⁴ Nahmanides' anti-rationalistic criticism of Maimonides in his *Commentary on the Torah* is primarily directed against the latter's philosophical naturalism and points of inconsistency with Kabbalah. On many of the issues raised in the French (as opposed to the Spanish) arena of the controversy, Nahmanides, consistent with mainstream Andalusian tradition, seems closer to Maimonides than to his critics.⁴⁵ Nahmanides'

Sahula, *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-Ramban* (Vilna, 1887) to these verses; *Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 165, 169, II, 297. The fundamental question is to what extent this reflects a sense of affinity to Ibn Ezra's "philosophical mysticism," or a belief that Ibn Ezra was actually privy to some genuine kabbalistic traditions, or both.

⁴⁴*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 336-351 and ed. by J. Perles in *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 9 (1860), 184-195.

⁴⁵On the differences between the French and Spanish arenas of the Maimonidean Controversy, see my *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, pp. 75-103. For examples of Nahmanides' criticism of Maimonidean naturalism see the *Commentary* to Gen. 5:4, 18:1. (Cf. however Nahmanides' scientific explanation [contra Rashi] in the *Commentary* to Lev. 13:3.) The vehemence with which Maimonides' historical explanation of sacrifices is dismissed in the *Commentary* to Lev. 1:19 is probably related to the fact that that explanation seems so diametrically opposed to the kabbalistic understanding. Elsewhere, Nahmanides does not hesitate to borrow Maimonides' historical explanations; see e.g. the *Commentary* to Lev. 19:19 (end), to Deut. 12:22. Nahmanides (as opposed to the French anti-Maimonists) felt an affinity to Maimonides on the issue of "reasons for the commandments"; see e.g. the *Commentary* to Deut. 22:6. (For a detailed study of Nahmanides on the commandments, with frequent comparison to Maimonides, see Ch. Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Hozer uke-Mequbbal* [Jerusalem, 1978].) On the issue of anthropomorphism, Nahmanides stood firmly within the geonic-Andalusian tradition. See e.g. the *Commentary* to Gen. 6:6 borrowing the formulation of Ibn Ezra. The hasidic scholar R. Zadoq ha-Kohen of Lublin perceptively observed that Nahmanides, in his letter to northern France, after quoting geonic and Spanish authorities, added a quotation from R. Eliezer Rokeah "so that his words would be acceptable to the French scholars" (*Divrei Soferim* [Benei Beraq, 1967], p. 55). For Nahmanides' complex relationship to the Andalusian tradition on eschatological issues, see below. For Nahmanides' interesting defense of scientific studies in his letter to northern France, see Perles' edition (above, n. 44), p. 186:

הדוחר לקרובי מלכותו ללמוד חכמה יוציא...אף כי אלה חכמות מותרות, ורבותיהן ההדירות בהן נתנו עליהן. וכאשר אבדו ספרי חכמותיהן באבדן מולדתו והוצרכו ללמוד בהן מספרי הדויתים...התחילו בשבחו וסייעו בענות, והנה שם הדב הגדול זיל ספריו כתרס לפני הפרענות.

defense of Maimonides was thus not only an act of diplomacy but also a statement of conviction. It was, moreover, of crucial historical importance. Nahmanides' letter seems to me to represent the single most important step in the development of the heroic image of Maimonides beyond its original role as an element of rationalistic ideology into a component of all Jewish culture.⁴⁶

Literary elegance and cultivated style were as much a part of the Andalusian educational ideal as philosophical and philological sophistication. Nahmanides shows strong lines of continuity with this aspect of the Andalusian tradition. Particularly interesting is the way in which the Andalusian ideal of gentlemanly refinement (*musar*) as well as its political application live in the sensibility of this master of Tosafistic and kabbalistic learning.⁴⁷ Nahmanides proudly proclaims his ability to conduct himself with dignity at court.⁴⁸ And if a biblical hero's behavior should appear less than courtly, that constitutes an exegetical problem for Nahmanides' commentary to address.⁴⁹

Besides the political-economic justification for cultivation of Greek wisdom, Nahmanides argues that scientific studies are permitted and in fact mandated by "our masters." Problems began only with the loss of Jewish scientific works due to Exile (see *Guide* 1:71), when recourse to non-Jewish scientific books became necessary. Against the dangers posed by these foreign books, Maimonides' works now stand as a shield. Cf. the text in *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, I, 339. Chavel's note, ad loc., requires correction. Nahmanides' own philosophical competence was called into question by R. Zerahyah Hen (in connection with the former's criticisms of Maimonides); see the letter to Hillel of Verona in *Ozar Nehemad* 2 (1860), 125. Zerahyah was born to political and spiritual opponents of Nahmanides ("the nedivim of Barcelona"); see B. Z. Dinur, *Yisrael ba-Golah*, vol. II, bk. III (Tel Aviv, 1968), p. 304; Septimus, "Piety and Power," p. 223 n. 32. But cf. also R. Yom Tov al-Ishbili, *Sefer ha-Zikkaron*, pp. 33, 35f., 39. While it may be conceded that Nahmanides did not have rigorous philosophical training, he could nevertheless do some very interesting and perceptive things with his "layman's knowledge" of the Jewish philosophical classics.

⁴⁶For the emergence of the heroic image among the rationalists of Spain and Provence in the early thirteenth century and the reaction of early anti-rationalists, see my *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, pp. 41-48, 63-64, 97-103.

⁴⁷*Musar* is a loan-translation of the Arabic *adab*; see B. Klar, *Mehqarim ve-Iyyunim* (Tel Aviv, 1954), pp. 353-354. For Nahmanides' use of the term, see e.g. the *Commentary* to Gen. 23:9, 24:15, 29:15, 33:5, 45:19, 47:7, 47:9, Exod. 10:17, Lev. 20:17,*Num. 16:4, 27:19; *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, I, 354f., 360f., 366, 370.

⁴⁸See *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, I, 303 (note the use of "musar" here).

⁴⁹See the *Commentary* to Gen. 47:9. Very interesting is the passion with which Nahmanides insists (contra Ibn Ezra) on the wealth, prestige and power of the Patriarchs; see the *Commentary* to Gen. 25:34. (For a biographical explanation of

The style of Nahmanides' *Commentary on the Torah* is compressed and, at times, quite challenging. In part, this stems from Nahmanides' intensive cultivation of the classic Andalusian "mosaic style."⁵⁰ This rhetorical tendency to incorporate classical bits and pieces in formal writing assumes a somewhat more substantive role in Nahmanides' exegetical-theological prose. A random illustration may clarify this: when introducing his famous figural interpretation of Jacob's victorious struggle with the angel, Nahmanides comments that "His [i.e. God's] angels [are] mighty ones who perform His bidding, and the reason that the angel could not prevail over him...is that he was not given permission to do any more than he did...—putting his thigh out of joint."⁵¹ The first words of this comment—"His angels [are] mighty ones who perform His bidding"—are borrowed from Ps. 103:20. The reader is perhaps expected to remember Ibn Ezra's explanation that "no creature can withstand them—and the angel who confronted Jacob was limited by divine decree."⁵² Nahmanides' statement thus elegantly constitutes its own proof-text. This sort of allusion is everywhere present in Nahmanides' commentary and helps give the work its unique flavor and occasional difficulty.⁵³

No reference to Nahmanides as a stylist can fail to mention that scattered here and there in his *Commentary on the Torah* are some of the more memorable prose passages in medieval Hebrew literature. In particular, his discussions of exile and redemption can, at times, capture some of the power and pathos of Andalusian *piyyut* in understated exegetical prose. The masterful way in which these passages slip unobtrusively into first person plural at crucial points gives a sense of movement beyond the realm of objective study to an almost liturgical act of collective self-definition.⁵⁴

Ibn Ezra's position, see Profiat Duran, *Ma'aseh Efod* (Vienna, 1865), p. 23.) Cf. the readings of Nahmanides and "our masters" in the *Commentary* to Gen. 23:19. See also the *Commentary* to Gen. 40:15, 46:32. For Nahmanides as an observer of the political process, see the *Commentary* to Exod. 1:10. Cf. also Nahmanides' unsentimental interpretation of Gen. 45:1.

⁵⁰On the "mosaic style" in poetry, see Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-'Ivrit*, I, general introduction, pp. 31-34; Pagis, *Hiddush u-Masoret*, pp. 70-77. For an early recognition of "mosaic style" as particularly characteristic of Hebrew rhetoric, see Duran, *Ma'aseh Efod*, p. 43.

⁵¹*Commentary* to Gen. 32:26.

⁵²Ibn Ezra, *Commentary* to Ps. 103:20.

⁵³For a few more random examples, see the *Commentary* to Gen. 2:3 (alluding to Deut. 32:7), Gen. 33:26 (alluding to Exod. 22:19), Exod. 35:1 (alluding to Jer. 31:31 and 2:2).

⁵⁴See e.g. the *Commentary* to Gen. 32:4-26, Exod. 17:9, Lev. 26:16, Num. 24:18-20, Deut. 29:42, 32:26, 32:40.

Like any good Andalusian gentleman, Nahmanides was educated in the art of Hebrew verse, a skill that he could use for social as well as liturgical purposes. His few surviving poems are of extraordinarily high quality.⁵⁵ Nahmanides and his poet friend Meshullam da Piera illustrate two interesting aspects of the reorientation of Andalusian poetic tradition in thirteenth-century Catalonia. Da Piera, standing in the old Andalusian tradition of the poet as public-relations man, propagandized brilliantly for the new non-Andalusian Kabbalah and against Andalusian rationalism,⁵⁶ while Nahmanides was the first to pour new kabbalistic themes into an old Andalusian liturgical genre.

Nahmanides' great kabbalistic soul-poem provides a nice example of the complexity of his relationship to the Andalusian tradition.⁵⁷ Nahmanides was very interested in Andalusian *piyyut* on the soul—not only poetically but theologically. He liked to invoke a poem of Ha-Levi, for example, when attacking the Aristotelian denial of the pre-existence of the soul.⁵⁸ Nahmanides also observed, quite correctly, that Maimonides' controversial reinterpretation of the rabbinic *'olam ha-ba* to mean individual immortality of the soul rather than the world after bodily resurrection could be traced back through Andalusian *piyyut* to Ibn Gabirol.⁵⁹ It was this issue that had led to the very first European confrontation over Maimonidean rationalism in the first years of the thirteenth century.⁶⁰ During this controversy a strong case against bodily resurrection had been made by the *nasi* Sheshet Benveniste, the dominant figure in Catalan Jewish culture in the generation before Nahmanides, and a man steeped in the Andalusian tradition.⁶¹ I believe that Sheshet's letter made a strong

⁵⁵See Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit*, II, 319f., and the essay of Prof. Fleischer in this volume.

⁵⁶See H. Brody, "Shirei Meshullam ben Shelomoh da Piera," *Yedi'ot ha-Makhon le-Heger ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit*, 4 (1938), nos. 3, 11, 12, 15, 24, 40, 44, 48, 49.

⁵⁷Published in *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, I, 392-394; Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit*, II, 322-325.

⁵⁸*Kitvei ha-Ramban*, I, 117, 159, 384. For the line to which Nahmanides is referring, see *Shirei ha-Qodesh le-Rabbi Yehudah ha-Levi*, ed. Dov Yarden, I (Jerusalem, 1978), 73. However, in criticizing the way in which "the translators" use the term *azilut* (*Commentary* to Num. 11:17), Nahmanides gives as an example a description of the soul ("*azulah me-ruah ha-qodesh*") from the same poem by Ha-Levi; see *Shire ha-Qodesh le-R. Yehudah ha-Levi*, I, 67.

⁵⁹*Kitvei ha-Ramban*, II, 311 quoting Ibn Gabirol's "Keter Malkhut" (in Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit*, I, 273, 285).

⁶⁰See my *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, pp. 39-60.

⁶¹Sheshet's letter to Lunel was published by A. Marx, "Texts by and about Maimonides," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 25 (1935), 406-428.

impression on the members of Nahmanides' circle. Sheshet argued that the notion of physical resurrection was religiously repugnant: the very idea that the soul, once liberated by death from earthly impurity and reunited with its heavenly source, should—as its ultimate reward—be cast down once again constituted a crass affront to spirituality. Meshullam da Piera concedes this problem in one of his polemical poems and indicates that there is a kabbalistic solution.⁶² I have attempted to show elsewhere that R. Azriel of Gerona addressed this problem with a radical reinterpretation of resurrection as transmigration.⁶³ Nahmanides' solution, I believe is implicit in his poem.

Nahmanides' poem belongs to a tradition of Andalusian soul-poems having a tripartite structure and progression: the soul's origin in the upper world; its earthly exile; and ultimate reunion with its heavenly source.⁶⁴ This Neoplatonic model, upon which Nahmanides chose to build, in itself underscored the problematic character of traditional eschatology; for the odyssey of the soul that it described clearly reached its literary/spiritual climax with the return of the soul to its heavenly source. There was no place here for the "comedown" of a bodily resurrection. Nahmanides, in his *Sha'ar ha-Gemul*, speaks derisively of the followers of the philosophers who claim to elevate the soul by finding its source in the angelic sphere—in fact the true kabbalah raises the soul to an incomparably higher level by teaching that its origin is in the realm of divinity.⁶⁵ The magnificent opening stanzas of Nahmanides' poem, in which the soul makes its descent through the world of the *sefirot*, thus constitute a kind of kabbalistic "tikkun" of the traditional Andalusian genre.⁶⁶ But pushing the origin of the soul still higher seems only to push

⁶²See Brody, "Shirei Meshullam da Piera," p. 18.

⁶³*Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, pp. 111-112.

⁶⁴Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit*, II, 320.

⁶⁵*Kitvei ha-Ramban*, II, 287f. Nahmanides also took strong exception, for this reason, to the statement of R. Zerahyah ha-Levi, in the introduction to his *Sefer ha-Ma'or*, that the soul is emanated from the Throne of Glory, which is identical to the Sphere of Intellect (*galgal ha-sekhelel*) (cf. Ibn Gabirol in Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit*, I, 271-273); see G. Vajda, *Recherches sur la philosophie et la kabbale dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1962), pp. 371-384. Note that R. Zerahyah also gave this idea expression in a poetic rebuke to the soul; see Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit*, II, 8-10. (*Kevod 'elyon* in that poem (*ibid.*, p. 8, l. 6) is apparently equivalent to the Sphere of Intellect; cf. too Ha-Levi *ibid.*, I, 515, l. 3). Correct, on this score, my "Piety and Power," p. 228, n. 117.)

⁶⁶Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit*, II, 322; *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, I, 392. For kabbalistic commentary, see Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah be-Gerona* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 319-321.

resurrection—which Nahmanides nevertheless included in his poem—still further away from the goal of spiritual return. Nahmanides was able to achieve this return in his final stanza by introducing his kabbalistic notion of the ultimate post-resurrection spiritualization and reabsorption of *all* things into the realm of the *sefirot*.⁶⁷ This “return of all things to their original state” finally establishes the spiritual and literary symmetry required by Andalusian sensibility—but it establishes it on kabbalistic terms, and without abandoning the traditional doctrine of resurrection.⁶⁸

Nahmanides provides powerful but hidden imagery for this symmetrical process of origin from and return to divinity. In both the poem and the *Commentary on the Torah*, the soul's origin in divinity is symbolically represented by God's breathing it out.⁶⁹ But in his *Commentary on Sefer Yeḥirah* Nahmanides also writes of that eschatological time “when the [Divine] will is reversed so that all things return to their original state—as one who draws in his breath.”⁷⁰ There thus stands behind (although not explicitly in) Nahmanides' poem an imagery for the soul's exile and return that might have surprised his Andalusian predecessors: the soul's odyssey begins with a divine exhalation, while its journey ends—together with that of all other things—in a final act of divine inhalation.

During the heat of the Maimonidean Controversy, Nahmanides had occasion to propose the venerable Ramah (R. Meir ha-Levi Abulafia) of Toledo as the arbitrator of a sensitive dispute. He did so in the following bit of rhymed prose:

Let's go to the land of *ma'arav*
to the most excellent scholar,
(*ge'on*) of [*'ever*] and '*arav*,
R. Meir ha-Rav.⁷¹

⁶⁷Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-'Ivrit*, II, 325; *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, I, 394. See on this notion Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah be-Gerona*, pp. 399-407.

⁶⁸This eschatological vision is not contradicted by Nahmanides' *Sha'ar ha-Gemul*. But there the stress is on a defense of resurrection and the talmudic eschatological tradition (see especially *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, II, 303ff.) rather than the preservation of spirituality and symmetry in the soul's odyssey. A careful study of *Sha'ar ha-Gemul* remains a desideratum.

⁶⁹*Commentary* to Gen. 2:7; Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-'Ivrit*, II, 323 (top). On this theme, see M. Halamish, “Le-Meqoro shel Pitgam be-Sifrut ha-Kabbalah,” *Bar Ilan Annual* 13 (1976), 211-223.

⁷⁰G. Scholem, ed., “Peraqim mi-Toledot Sifrut ha-Kabbalah,” *Qiryat Sefer* 6 (1930), 401.

⁷¹S. Halberstam, “Milhemet ha-Dat” in *Jeschurun*, VIII (1872-75), 117. For the insertion of '*ever* into the text, see my *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, p. 15 and notes, upon which this paragraph draws.

This description provides a final illustration of Nahmanides' Andalusian literary culture, for it echoes a line of Judah ha-Levi's famous first letter to Moses ibn Ezra. Ha-Levi, having traveled from Christian to Muslim Spain, addressed himself to "the light of the *ma'arav* [Andalusia], the scholar of 'ever and 'arav [Hebrew and Arabic], R. Mosheh ha-Rav."⁷² Apparently Nahmanides, from his Catalan vantage point, viewed Toledo as a remnant of the old Andalusia and admired Ramah's mastery of the Andalusian tradition of combining Hebrew and Arabic learning; but he could no longer view this Judeo-Arabic tradition as directly his own. Another occasion, however, shows Nahmanides conscious of sharing a common tradition with Ramah: the Spanish halakhic tradition.

Toward the end of the twelfth century, after a brilliant Provençal career, the great talmudist R. Zerahyah ha-Levi returned to his hometown of Gerona. With him he brought the custom of prefixing to the *Shema* the phrase "God, the faithful King." Nahmanides wished to suppress this northern interpolation and turned to Ramah for support.⁷³ Together they appear as defenders of the purity of Spanish tradition against the inroads of Franco-German custom. But one must wonder why Nahmanides was so zealous to change what had already become the status quo on this issue. R. Zerahyah ha-Levi had been the one important halakhist of Catalan origin in half a century. The interpolation was widely practiced in the communities north of Spain and all in Nahmanides' teachers—as far as we know—were northerners.⁷⁴ One, R. Judah ben Yaqar, is even known to have explicitly endorsed the custom.⁷⁵

But whatever his reason, Nahmanides' position in this case was by no means atypical. It would seem that, from the very beginning of his career, Nahmanides identified strongly with the old Spanish halakhic tradition. Nahmanides' preoccupation with the defense of Alfasi—not only in his *Milhamot* and *Sefer ha-Zekhut* but throughout his *Hiddushim*—should, I think, be seen in this context.⁷⁶ Any student of the writings of twelfth-century Spanish halakhists like R. Joseph ibn Megash, Maimonides, and Ramah must be struck by the way in which Alfasi seems almost to have

⁷²See the edition by S. Abramson in *Sefer Hayyim Schirmann* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 404.

⁷³See I. Ta-Shema, "'El Melekh Ne'eman'—Gilgulo shel Minhag," *Tarbiz* 39 (1969-1970), 184-194, and my *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, p. 35.

⁷⁴See e.g. Chavel, *Rabbenu Mosheh ben Nahman*, pp. 38-46.

⁷⁵*Perush ha-Tefillot veka-Berakhot*, ed. S. Yerushalmi (Jerusalem, 1968), p. 30.

⁷⁶For a brief description of these works, see Chavel, *Rabbenu Mosheh ben Nahman*, pp. 83-98, 102-106. Note also Nahmanides' early *Tashlum Halakhot*, designed to complete Alfasi's oeuvre; see *ibid.*, pp. 73-75.

eclipsed all earlier Andalusian authorities.⁷⁷ When Nahmanides began his career, there was thus a very close identification of Alfasi with the Spanish tradition itself.⁷⁸ One ought not, therefore, be overliteral in interpreting Nahmanides' claim that his defense of Alfasi resulted from zeal for the honor of the ancients.⁷⁹ Why, after all, did Nahmanides concentrate so much of his zeal on this one particular ancient?

Nahmanides did feel responsibility of a more general sort toward an earlier scholarship which he perceived to be under attack "in recent generations" by "hordes and hordes [of scholars], all clever, who roaring like lions bring forward their objections and arguments to lower the lofty ramparts, who hold a double-edged sword...to kill wisdom that ought not die and to give life to words that ought not live."⁸⁰ But the "ancients" toward whom Nahmanides' conservative sensibility inclined were the great geonic, North African, and Andalusian figures who had become the pillars of Spanish halakhah.⁸¹ Its central pillar, "our great master" Alfasi,

⁷⁷In fact, Nahmanides quotes pre-Alfasi Spaniards such as R. Samuel ha-Nagid and R. Isaac ibn Giat much more extensively than do any of the above-mentioned figures. He also quotes frequently from the early Barcelonans R. Isaac ben Reuben and R. Judah ben Barzilai.

⁷⁸Menahem ben Zerah (*Zedah la-Derekh* (Warsaw, 1880), p. 3b) writes that prior to and during the days of Ramah (d. 1244) only Alfasi's *Halakhot* (and not the Talmud itself) were studied in Spain. While this claim is doubtless exaggerated and probably reflects Ben Zerah's attempt to portray R. Asher ben Yehiel as the real founder of serious talmudic studies in Spain, it does underscore the centrality of Alfasi. It is interesting that as late as the sixteenth century the Sefardic scholars of Safed who attempted to revive the ancient *semikhah* established as their prerequisite for ordination a full knowledge of Alfasi's *Halakhot*. (This despite Alfasi's omission of the very *halakhot* that the revival of *semikhah* would have rescued from obsolescence!) See M. Benayahu in *Sefer Yovel le-Yitzhak Baer* (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 266.

⁷⁹See the introduction to Nahmanides' *Hassagot* to Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Mizvot* (*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 418-421).

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹See e.g. the references in Chavel, *R. Mosheh ben Nahman*, pp. 83f., 89f. For Ibn Megash, Maimonides, and Ramah, figures like R. Sherira Gaon, R. Hai Gaon, R. Hananel and R. Nissim Gaon seem more important than any Andalusian predecessor of Alfasi. For the centrality of the geonim in Andalusia, see also the famous remarks of Ibn Megash, *She'elot u-Teshuvot*, no. 114. Maimonides praised Alfasi's *Halakhot* as the culmination and peak of geonic literature; see *Mishnah'im Perush ha-Rambam*, ed. J. Kafih (Jerusalem, 1963-1968), I, 47. Maimonides and Nahmanides often use the term "geonim" broadly to include North African and Andalusian figures. This tradition must have seemed especially "Spanish" with Spanish Jewry's entry into Europe and confrontation with Franco-German halakhah.

received Nahmanides' most sustained and deeply-felt loyalty,⁸² while those roaring warriors of "recent generations" sound very much like masters of the new northern dialectic.⁸³

It is important, therefore, to keep in proper perspective Nahmanides' well-known praise of the French Tosafists in the introduction to his *Dina de-Garmi*: "they are the guides, they are the teachers, they reveal to us the hidden."⁸⁴ Following the lead of the sixteenth-century R. Solomon Luria, there has been a tendency to view this as a wholesale concession of the superiority of the Franco-German talmudic tradition to the Spanish tradition.⁸⁵ Now there is no doubt that without the achievements of the Tosafists and the Provençal school (particularly Rabad) Nahmanides' talmudic career would have been inconceivable. But it is precisely the predominance of northern influence in the formation of Nahmanides' analytical genius that renders so interesting his attempts to limit northern erosion of Spanish halakhic tradition. Although persuasive northern argumentation as well as Nahmanides' own irrepressible independence

Consciousness of defending a tradition rather than a single authority can be seen already in the introduction to the second part of Nahmanides' *Milhamot ha-Shem* (*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 412).

⁸²"Rabbenu ha-Gadol" is the way in which Nahmanides refers to Alfasi in all of his halakhic works.

⁸³I say this despite the fact that the passage comes from the introduction to Nahmanides' *Hassagot* to Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Mizvot*. Nahmanides, in this passage, is describing his defense of the "geonim and ancients" throughout his earlier career. The recent challenge to them by hordes of brilliant dialecticians seems to me to reflect Nahmanides' perception of the confrontation of the geonic-Andalusian tradition with the new northern halakhah.

That there is an element of real conservatism in Nahmanides' defense of the "ancients" is evident in the fact that his attitude toward more recent Spanish scholars like Ibn Megash and Maimonides is not nearly so deferential as it is to Alfasi and the geonim. Moreover, Nahmanides did defend the geonic *Halakhot Gedolot* against Maimonides in his *Hassagot* to *Sefer ha-Mizvot*. But one senses that Nahmanides seized upon this project more as an opportunity to engage in fresh and wide-ranging exploration of fundamental issues not treated in his earlier works. More often than not, Nahmanides, after defending *Halakhot Gedolot*, finally accepts Maimonides' position as his own; see C. Chavel, ed., *Sefer ha-Mizvot leha-Rambam 'im Hassagot ha-Ramban* (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 13f. Contrast Nahmanides' statement in his introduction to *Milhamot ha-Shem* (*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 414) that, although in some cases his defense of Alfasi is presented as mere *limmud zekhut*, in the majority of cases the reader will realize that Alfasi's position coincides with his own.

⁸⁴*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, I, 417.

⁸⁵R. Solomon Luria, *Yam shel Shelomoh, Baba Qamma*, introduction.

can be seen countering the pull of the "ancients" throughout the *Hiddushim*, devotion to the study and defense of the geonic-Andalusian tradition remained a major counter-theme in his halakhic career.⁸⁶

R. Zerahyah ha-Levi, as the only great talmudist ever produced by Gerona, might have seemed a logical boyhood hero for the young Nahmanides.⁸⁷ Instead he became the target of Nahmanides' youthful and sometimes stinging criticism.⁸⁸ For Zerahyah's loyalty was fundamentally different from that of Nahmanides; he went over to northern halakhah.⁸⁹ Zerahyah's criticisms of Alfasi frequently amount to an abandonment of geonic and Andalusian positions in favor of northern European positions, while Nahmanides' defense regularly invokes geonic and Andalusian precedent in support of Alfasi.⁹⁰

R. Zerahyah ha-Levi should not be viewed as an idiosyncratic defector from Spanish halakhah. In the twelfth century, it was not entirely clear where Catalonia belonged. Ibn Daud's *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* does not yet consider Catalonia part of Sefarad, whereas Ha-Meiri refers to twelfth-century Provence and Catalonia as a single "land."⁹¹ Political and linguistic ties could have supported a view of Catalonia and Provence as constituting a single realm. There are no known representatives of the Andalusian talmudic tradition in Catalonia in the second half of the twelfth century. On the other hand, the known teachers of Nahmanides

⁸⁶Note, for example, that Nahmanides stands with the old Spanish halakhic tradition, and against a very firm Franco-German consensus, in opposing the insertion of *piyyut* into the fixed prayers; see *Hiddushei ha-Ramban, Berakhot* 49a. For a few more examples from the *Hiddushim*, see to *Megillah* 2a s.v. *ve-ra'iti*; *Baba Mezia* 34a s.v. *ela*; *Baba Mezia* 82a s.v. *ve-hakha* (see *Magid Mishneh, Sekhirut* 10:1); *Baba Batra* 59a s.v. *ha* (see *Magid Mishneh, Shekhenim* 11:4); *Baba Batra* 114b s.v. *ve-hilkheia*.

⁸⁷For R. Zerahyah's biography, see I. Ta-Shema, "Zemanim u-Meqomot be-Hayyav shel Rabbenu Zerahyah," *Bar Ilan Annual* 12 (1974), 118-136.

⁸⁸See Nahmanides himself, in *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, I, 413.

⁸⁹Thus Zerahyah even adopts northern readings over those of the Spanish text tradition; see e.g. the *Ma'or* and *Milhamot* to Alfasi, *Berakhot* 16a.

⁹⁰See e.g. *Milhamot* to Alfasi, *Baba Batra* 70a, 82b, *Shevu'ot* 26b. It is interesting that Nahmanides (in his halakhic works) refers to Maimonides as "R. Mosheh ha-Sefaradi" (cf. the reported Christian citation in *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, I, 315). Nahmanides also describes Maimonides as a student of Alfasi (e.g., *Hiddushei ha-Ramban, Pesahim* 7a and *Avodah Zarah* 38b) reflecting a sense of their common tradition as well as Maimonides own declarations (e.g. *Mishneh Torah, She'elah u-Fiqqadon* 5:6; cf. already *Hassagot ha-Rabad, Sekhirut* 10:1).

⁹¹See Abraham ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, ed. G. Cohen (Philadelphia, 1967), pp. 78 l.29, 83 l.371; Menahem ha-Meiri, *Bet ha-Be'irah 'al Masekhet Avot*, ed. B. Prague (Jerusalem, 1964), intro, p. 53 (cf. p. 56).

and his Catalan colleagues are all northerners.⁹² The wonder then is that Nahmanides should suddenly emerge on the scene as a self-conscious representative of Spanish tradition. The story of how and why this happened remains to be written.

To conclude: the selective fusing and shaping of divergent traditions is a major theme in Nahmanides' thought. I have tried to give a few scattered, but hopefully suggestive, indications of the complex role played by the Andalusian component in some individual areas of his religious and literary virtuosity. This sketch has perforce omitted very many crucial points. But one cannot omit a final Andalusian aspect of the Nahmanidean intellectual enterprise, viewed as a whole: its breadth and versatility. A cultural ideal embracing several different disciplines that enrich each other without any one dominating entirely or crowding the others out—this was perhaps one of the finest gifts of the Andalusian heritage to the mind of Nahmanides.

⁹²It is probably in a purely metaphoric sense that Nahmanides refers to himself as "the smallest student of [Alfasi's] students"; see the introduction published at the end of his *Hilkhot Bekhorot* in the standard editions of the Talmud. The context suggests that Nahmanides has learned directly from Alfasi's works rather than from any living bearer of his tradition. Even Nahmanides' relationship to Ramah appears to have been occasional. I am unable to find any evidence that Nahmanides used Ramah's commentaries. It should be noted, on the other hand, that there was a strain of strong geonic-Andalusian influence within the Provençal tradition as a result of Spanish emigration to Provence and very strong Catalano-Provençal ties during the twelfth century. A good example of this tendency is the *Sefer ha-'Ittur* of Isaac ben Abba Mari of Marseilles. Contact with this strain in Provençal halakhah may have reinforced Nahmanides' identification with the geonic-Andalusian tradition. Particularly interesting in this connection is the fact that Nahmanides was a student of R. Nathan ben Meir of Trinquaille whose father, R. Meir, composed the unfortunately lost *Sefer ha-'Ezer* in defense of Alfasi; see Twersky, *Rabad*, p. 246.

The "Gerona School" of Hebrew Poetry

Ezra Fleischer

THERE IS NO doubt that focusing on the poetry of R. Moses ben Nahman means diverting the inquiry into the cultural legacy of one of the most prolific and colorful figures of medieval Jewry to rather a secondary field. It is true, Ramban was a highly inspired man and possessed a sensitive and poetic soul. His prose style, even on halakhic issues, was rhetorical and rich, and his somewhat eclectic Hebrew, unattuned to Sephardi puristic ideals, was of an exquisite plasticity. Nevertheless, his actual poetic output, if one may consider its remnants as representing his legacy in its entirety,¹ is small. Moreover, he expressed a rather negative attitude, even towards liturgical poetry (at least when considering the issue theoretically)² despite the fact that he was himself a gifted *payyetan*.³ On the other hand, there is no need to argue the truth, especially in cultural and literary contexts, of the saying of our sages:

¹The extant poems of Ramban, including the rhymed introductions to his various works and his sermons, were collected and published in a preliminary edition by Chavel in his *Kitvei Rabbenu Moshe ben Nahman* (Jerusalem, 1963) Vol. I, p. 372ff. The collection includes, besides the rhymed introductions and the sermons, four poems only. Three more *seliḥot* by Ramban were recently discovered and published by I. Hasida, "Shalosh Seliḥot Ḥadashot lehaRamban," *Sinai* LXI (1967), pp. 240ff. Zunz, in his *Literaturgeschichte der synagogalen Poesie* (Berlin, 1865), p. 478, lists ten items. See also Landshuth, *Amudei ha-Avoda* (New York, 1965), pp. 234-239.

²See his *Ḥidusshim* on *Berakhot* 59a (quoted by H. D. Chavel, *Rabbenu Moshe ben Nahman, Toledot Ḥayav Zemano ve-Hibburav* [Jerusalem, 1973], p. 83, no. 49):
לפי דרכו למדנו שהמוסיפים בפיתים חמירות אין נהגים בשורה. וכן מצאתי עד במדרש קהלת:
טוב לשמור גערת חכם אלו ודרשנים, מאיש שומע שיר כסילים אלו החזנים שמוסיפין על קבע
התפילה. The common editions of *Kohelet Rabba* have
אלו המתורגמנים שמגבדין קולם בשיר להשמיט את העם.

³Most of Ramban's extant liturgical poems are *seliḥot*. But among them there is also an ofan ("מידך ייה בחדך," Chavel, op. cit. [note 1], p. 394). Ramban's reserve undoubtedly refers to *piyyutim* inserted in the main body of the regular prayer and does not include *seliḥot*. However, Zunz's list of Ramban's poems contains also a *muḥarrak*, quoted by R. Simeon ben Zemah Duran.

הם מרוב המורכבות יש מרוב המחזיק את המורכבות there are indeed things, apparently small, that are nonetheless important and impressive in their impact. The poetical work of Ramban and his school illustrates the accuracy of this adage.

Actually, the poems of R. Moses are impressive even if considered in their narrow, particular context. His only extant secular poem, his famous "Mea Batim," sent according to a copyist's remarks to his cousin, the well-known R. Jonah, is altogether one of the most impressive Hebrew poems written in Spanish style.⁴ So are Ramban's *piyyutim* too, almost all of them outstanding examples of medieval Hebrew poetry. Scholars, even without focussing their research on Ramban's poetry, praised the high artistic value of these texts,⁵ and my teacher, the late Professor Schirmann, repeatedly stressed the necessity and the urgency of collecting and publishing Ramban's poetical works.⁶ But beyond their intrinsic value, Ramban's poetical heritage is most valuable as a cultural phenomenon considered in the wide framework of the history of Spanish Hebrew poetry. This aspect has not yet been sufficiently emphasized, either in studies of Ramban's poetry per se, or in dealing with the evolution and the history of Hebrew poetry in Spain. What follows is a modest attempt to examine tentatively this particular point.

That the peculiar traits revealed by the only secular poem of Ramban are not mere idiosyncracies, but rather evidence attesting the emergence of a new trend in Spanish Hebrew poetry, is borne out by the fact that

⁴This poem was published for the first time by H. Brody and M. Wiener, in their *Mivhar ha-Shira ha-Ivrit* (Leipzig, 1922), pp. 282ff. See the editors' note, *ibid.* p. 349. The title of the poem ("Mea Batim"—one hundred verse lines), is based on the colophon of Mss. Vatican Urb. 9 which reads as follows:

הנה מאה בתים שעשה הרב ר' משה בר נחמן שיחי לשלחם למורו הרב יונה קרוב זוקל

⁵See Michael Sachs, *Die religiöse Poesie der Juden in Spanien* (Berlin, 1845), pp. 321-331.

⁶See also Jefim Schirmann, *Ha-Shira ha-Ivrit bi-Sefarad uve-Provence* (Jerusalem/Tel Aviv, 1957), p. 319. A special interest in Ramban's poetry was aroused by the fact that he was, as already stated by Zunz (*op. cit.* p. 478), "perhaps the first Hebrew poet to use kabbalistic termini in his piyyutim." Actually, the ten sefirot are mentioned by their usual names in the Aramaic poem prefacing Ramban's *Pisqei Bekhorot*, see Chavel, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 403. Some slight mystical allusions may be found also in Ramban's *mostajib* *לכתובת* (see J. Schirmann, *op. cit.*, p. 322.) A German translation of this piyyut was given by Gershom Scholem in *Schocken Almanach 5696* (Berlin 1935/36), pp. 86ff. See also Scholem's remarks, *ibid.*, p. 88. The kabbalistic background of Ramban's piyyutim should be carefully analyzed by experts. The usual assessment of the mystical impact on Ramban's poetry seems much exaggerated.

these very traits, even in a more explicit form, occur also in the poetry of Rabbi Meshullam Dapiera, who was, according to his own testimony, Ramban's close friend and a member of his more or less inner circle.⁷ These characteristics are later to be found, in a somewhat deleted form it is true, in the works of the members of the pathetic 'academy' of Hebrew poetry in Sargossa, in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century.⁸ Their impact can easily be detected even in the neoclassical, epigonic poetry of Todros Abulafia. We may then consider the trend represented by Ramban and Rabbi Meshullam Dapiera, with some slight exaggeration to be sure, as a new school within the broader framework of Hebrew poetry in the Spanish style.

Spanish Hebrew poetry is erroneously considered, sometimes even by scholars, a monolithic, homogeneous continuum. A thorough examination of the Spanish legacy reveals in it not only the usual traits of evolution inherent in all living cultural phenomena, but also, to some extent, quite unusual changes and breaks that disturb its organic development and the scholar's theory alike. There is, for example, an evident gap, and a very important one, between the Andalusian Hebrew poetry and its chronological continuation in Christian Spain.⁹ The classical Andalusian Hebrew poetry (in its secular branch) was shaped, from both the formal and the generic points of view, by the model of the classic Arabic poetry. Andalusian Hebrew poems were written in monorhymed, non-strophic long lines, and were scanned in quantitative meters borrowed from the

⁷The extant poems of R. Meshullam Dapiera (died after 1260) were published in a scholarly edition by H. Brody, "Shirei Meshullam ben Shlomo Dapiera," *Yedi'ot ha-Makhon le-Heger ha-Shira ha-Ivrit* Vol. IV (Berlin/Jerusalem 1968), p. 1ff. Another poem of his, alluding to the Mongol invasion of Eastern Europe, was discovered and partially published by Schirmann in *Ha-Arez*, 5 (January 1940) and in his anthology (*op. cit.* note 6), p. 317. R. Meshullam's corpus entails fifty poems, most of them long. The characteristic traits discussed in this paper are of course more evident in R. Meshullam's poetry than in the sole extant secular poem of Ramban. There is no way to establish who influenced whom, but it might be assumed that R. Meshullam followed his highly revered master and, as usual, surpassed him in many points.

⁸The mentor of this circle of late poets was R. Meshullam's descendant, Solomon ben Meshullam Dapiera; see Schirmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 564ff. Among others, Don Vidal ben Lavi, Vidal ben Solomon, and Solomon Bonafed were members of this circle, all of them foremost representatives of the latest stage of the history of Hebrew poetry in Spain.

⁹See e.g. Dan Pagis, *Hiddush u-Masoret be-Shirat ha-Hol* (Jerusalem, 1956) pp. 173ff.

Arabic.¹⁰ Poetry was lyric only, and the genres cultivated were those cherished by the Arabs: panegyrics on the first place, and the subjects related to courtly life: love, nature, wine. Arabic too, in its very essence, was the social foundation of Andalusian Hebrew poetry. Poems actually had a single addressee: the Maecenas, the rich courtier, whose palace was the ideal setting on which Andalusian poetry, both Arabic and Hebrew, was displayed.¹¹ To be sure, one should not imagine the existence of secular Hebrew poetry in Spain exclusively within the narrow context of courtly life; poetry was taught and studied and enjoyed by a rather wide stratum of well-educated people outside the court palaces as well. But the poet himself was in principle *inside*; even when writing for his own sake or for the sake of his circle of fellow poets and literati, he had before him the courtly model, and the courtly model only. Many poems were actually performed in courtly circles, in aristocratic gatherings for wine, music and poetry, as was the custom in the highly refined and learned Arabic aristocracy, both eastern and western. The wide range of the lyric genres characteristic of the Andalusian Hebrew poetry actually expresses the broad variety of the real needs and literary desires of the Jewish Andalusian aristocracy. In Andalusia, the poet supplied artistic entertainment for courtly banquets. He did so usually by reciting a panegyric praising his protector, but he might sing instead a poem of love, or a wine song, or a metered and rhymed adage, or even a poem expressing a meditative or complaining mood, for the delight of his guests.

In Christian Spain, Hebrew poetry lost the very foundation of its former existence. There was no Andalusian-style Jewish aristocracy in Christian Spain. There were perhaps courtiers, but no more courtly life. The brilliant achievements in the period of Moses ibn Ezra and Judah haLevi, the last great figures of Andalusian Jewry, were looked upon as

¹⁰Some of the Andalusian poets, beginning with Samuel ha-Nagid, composed also strophic poems (*muwashshahāt*), but these texts were considered of lower value and were never included in the old diwans. They had a minor role in the history of secular poetry in Spain. The *muwashshahāt* were also metered according to quantitative principles and did not differ in subject matter from the classical monorhymed poems.

¹¹On the central role played by the courtly Maecenas in shaping the character of Hebrew secular poetry see the excellent essay of J. Weiss, *Tarbut Haʿzranit ve-Shira Haʿzranit* (Jerusalem, 1948). See also Schirmann, "The Function of the Hebrew Poet in Medieval Spain," *Jewish Social Studies* (New York, 1954) XVI, pp. 235ff., and Pagis, *op. cit.* (note 9), pp. 26ff. The role of the Maecenas was apparently decisive at the early stages of the emergence and the development of Hebrew secular poetry.

models to be emulated, but there was no longer a market for such poetry. The changes occurring in many aspects of Hebrew poetry in Christian Spain, repeatedly described by scholars but hardly ever explained, should be viewed against the background of these infrastructural mutations. In Christian Spain there was no need for panegyrics and no stage for the display of lyric poetry. The contacts between the poet and his only customer, still of vital importance for the artist but no longer so for his protector, became flimsy and shaky. The poet had to work hard for his wage. Instead of serving his Maecenas by delighting his guests, he had to praise him indirectly by dedicating to him long narratives written in rhymed prose.¹² Poems of love, wine and nature, once the pride of secular Hebrew poetry but now lacking any *raison d'être*, served him as mere intermezzos embellishing the rather low course of his humorous stories. Thus, instead of a normal 'Sitz im Leben,' lyric poetry was relegated in Christian Spain to a 'Sitz im Märchen,' truly a precarious seating for what was once the queen of secular Hebrew poetry!

Hebrew belles-lettres in Christian Spain never found either a new addressee or a new arena on which to be displayed. Its social foundations thus became even thinner and its achievements declined accordingly. Desperately, it tried to adapt itself to more diverse tastes. Its usual addressee, the rich Maecenas, had proved fickle: the more he grew in wealth the less he was interested in Hebrew poetry; on the other hand, there was a certain democratization of written culture in Christian Spain, as more and more ordinary people became acquainted with literature. Poetry was torn between two contradictory forces: humble people read

¹²This fact should partially explain the sudden popularity of the *maqāmā*-like rhymed narratives in Christian Spain. The almost complete disappearance of lyrical poetry after 1140 is undoubtedly one of the most intriguing phenomena characterizing Hebrew belles lettres in Christian Spain. The works I refer to, although mostly non-courtly in content, are all dedicated to courtly addressees: Joseph Zabara's "*Sefer Sha'shu'im*" to Sheshet Benveniste, Judah ben Shabbatai's "*Minḥat Yehuda*" to Abraham al-Fakhār, Isaac's "*Ezrat Nashim*" and "*Ein Mishpat*" as well as Judah ben Shabbatai's "*Milḥemet ha-Hokhma veba-Osher*" to Todros ha-Levi, Judah al-Ḥarizi's "*Taḥkemoni*" to no fewer than five different addressees. Jacob ben Eleazar's "*Sefer ha-Meshalim*" also bears a dedication in his first chapter (as yet unpublished).

Some of the authors mentioned used classical prosody in didactic poems on various subjects. The return of Hebrew poetry to the lyrical genera is forecast by Ramban's elder contemporary R. Meir Abulafia (the "Ramah") of Toledo, but his poems, published by Brody in *Yedi'ot ha-Makhon le-Heqer ha-Shira ha-Ivrit* (Berlin, 1936), Vol. II, pp. 11ff., follow the classical Andalusian conventions.

it,¹³ rich people financed it. The poet tried to serve two masters and failed, predictably, to serve either of them.

In Ramban's Gerona an attempt was made to uproot secular poetry from its historical ground and to transplant it into another, more fertile soil. In Gerona, for the first time in the history of Spanish Hebrew literature, poetry was performed far from the main centers of Jewish political life, and by poets lacking any but oppositional contacts with the Jewish oligarchic upper class. Through Ramban and R. Meshulam Dapiera, Hebrew poetry not only severed its traditional ties with the Jewish aristocracy, whatever this "aristocracy" looked like in the mid-thirteenth century, but it also became the representative expression of a new oppositional aristocracy, whose ideology was to be shaped with firm hands by the great master of Gerona. The poetics of Ramban and R. Meshulam, when considered from the historical point of view, might thus be accurately described as counter-poetics, displaying a complete structure of formal and generic peculiarities and offering an all but perfect alternative to the traditional poetics of Spanish Hebrew poetry.

As a matter of fact, in Gerona, Hebrew poetry became poetry again; it returned from its long peregrination on the fields of rhymed narrative to its lyric origins.¹⁴ It also dropped its low, humorous, sometimes hilarious and grotesque, attitudes so characteristic of Christian Spanish poetics, and became again grave and serious, self-content and self-sufficient, consciously meditative and sober. It also got rid of all formal brilliance and eccentricity so eagerly worshipped and admired by contemporary poetry and, returning to classical prosody, it voluntarily renounced some of its choices: out of the perhaps ten meters used by classical Spanish Hebrew poetry, the Gerondis use for the most part only two.¹⁵

¹³Hence the clearly humorous mood of most of the above-mentioned texts. Andalusian Hebrew poetry, typically enough of classical poetry in general, never laughs and seldom smiles. Some of the tales of *Sefer Sha'shu'im* are amazingly low; the book has, save for the form, little in common with the Arabic *maqāmā*.

¹⁴It should be stressed, of course, as an important phenomenon that R. Meshulam's poetry uses exclusively classical forms. There are non rhymed narratives and no *muwashshahāt* in his extant works. His classical exclusiveness is thus categorically opposed to the mainstream of the Hebrew literature of his time. Ramban's only secular poem is also monorhymed and metered. As a matter of fact, Ramban used rhymed prose in some of his prefaces, sermons, letters, and prayers, but never in secular works.

¹⁵The *merube* (*wāfir*) and the *shalem* (*kāmīl*). Out of 50 poems of R. Meshulam two (nos. 12 and 20) are metered according to the *mishkal ha-tenu'ot*, one (no. 22—two lines only) in an abridged form of the *mitpashet* (*basit*), and one (no. 24) in

The conscious avoidance of the Arabic Hebrew model of poetry helped Ramban and R. Meshullam in developing a new, fresh and spontaneous approach to their own poetical work. Both of them, for example, neglected the classical license that permitted, even recommended, that poets not care for the inner integration of their long poems. According to the classical poetics, a poem must display its ideas in a clear-cut and perceptible order, but there was no expectation of the successive sections of the poem depending on, alluding to, or explaining each other.¹⁶ The absolute independence of the sequences composing a *qaṣida* is notoriously emphasized as one of the most usual yet peculiar characteristics of the genre. Both Ramban's and R. Meshullam's poetry have in this point quite a different attitude.¹⁷ R. Meshullam even invented and developed special devices in order to stress the unity of his poems. In nearly half of his works, the first hemistich of the first verse figures also as the last half of the last verse, thus locking the poem, despite impressive length in some cases, into a tight and clear-cut framework, stressing (sometimes feigning) the strong coherence of all its components.¹⁸ Very often, R. Meshul-

a somewhat corrupted form of the *arokh* (*tawil*). Most of these poems have polemical content. Ramban's "Mea Batim" is also written in *shalem* form. The preference of both R. Meshullam and Ramban for this latter meter should be stressed. The *shalem* is one of the solemnest meters of Hebrew quantitative poetry and is most frequently used by Moses ibn Ezra in his great poems of complaint. It is worthwhile to notice that two of Ramban's poetical prefaces (both in Aramaic) are metered as well. So is his poem to *Pisqei Bekhorot* (Chavel, p. 403) as well as his preface to *Milhamot ha-Shem* (*ibid.*, p. 407). Both use an abridged form of the *arokh*, known as "the meter of Dunash." The text should be revocalized accordingly. The use of poetical prologues in non-poetical works follows a model established by Abraham ibn Ezra.

¹⁶On this issue, see e.g. Pagis, *Shirat ha-Hol ve-Torat ha-Shir* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 136ff.

¹⁷Actually, R. Meshullam's poems are very nonclassical from this point of view. The classical Andalusian long poem never has its subjects mixed and never returns to deal with an idea already dealt with. R. Meshullam has a categoric disregard for this rule and his long poems never have a clear order. His ideas move spontaneously and there is never an attempt at organizing them into separate sequences. Ramban's "Mea Batim" categorically differs from this point of view. Its inner order is all but classical.

¹⁸See nos. 1, 8, 9, 14, 16, 17, 27-32, 36, 37, 39, 42-46, 48, and 49 in Brody's edition. This device is not unknown in Spanish Hebrew poetry: it characterizes one of the payyetic genres created by Spanish liturgical poets, the metered *baqashot*. See E. Fleischer, *Shirat ha-Qodesh ha-Ivrit Bimei ha-Beinayim* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 410ff. The first to write a metered *baqashah* and to use this device was R. Isaac ibn

lam uses an even more subtle and original device for the same purpose: he begins many of his verses with a word or a phrase already used, mainly from the second half of the preceding line,¹⁹ thus forming a sort of incomplete anadiplosis, thanks to which groups of verses look like links fitted together in a longer chain of lines, step by step developing a given idea. This rhetorical device, used by R. Meshullam generally at the beginning of his poems and at their closure, is certainly the most typical and original feature of his poetry.²⁰ It also occurs, amazingly enough, twice, in two crucial points, in Ramban's "Mea Batim."²¹ It fascinated later Hebrew poets too, remaining the most obvious trace of the Gerona school's impact on later Spanish Hebrew poetry.

Most impressive in both Ramban's and Meshullam's poems is their new approach to poetic texture in general. As is well known, Arabic poetry is perhaps the fullest accomplishment of the classical ideal of seeing poetry as a picture ("ut pictura poesis"). Arabic lyric poetry has really not very much to say, but it certainly has a very subtle art of evoking vivid, colorful, surprisingly rich and impressive pictures of the feelings and the ideas it wants to convey. That is why its rhetoric is highly metaphorical, so much indeed that its texture often looks like a complicated, sophisticated, intriguing network of extremely evocative tropes. The Andalusian Hebrew poet also worshipped the metaphor and, although he was well versed in using figures of speech and rhetorical embellishments, he was never forgetful of the fact that only metaphor makes poetry.²² In Christian Spain, as poetry lost its social support and

Mar Saul in the second half of the tenth century. His model was very often imitated by later poets, but there was little use of it in secular poetry.

¹⁹The phenomenon is very widespread in R. Meshullam's poetry and it is amazing that it has apparently never been mentioned by scholars. It is of course most characteristic of his long poems.

²⁰This may well be considered an original innovation of R. Meshullam or of Ramban. Apparently nothing can be compared with it, either in Arabic or in European literature. There is of course a very frequent use of anadiplosis in the early payyetic poetry (see E. Fleischer, *op. cit.* [note 18], index s.v. "Shirshur") but R. Meshullam could hardly have known of it, as it had been discarded by Spanish payyetic poetry. Some accidental use of anadiplosis occurs also in medieval Galician poetry (the so-called "Leixa Pren"; see for example Gerald Brenan, *The Literature of the Spanish People* (Cambridge, 1950), p. 54) as well as in Provençal lyrics (see A. Jeanroy, *La poésie lyrique des Troubadours* (Paris, 1934) II, p. 325), but the very nature of these uses is quite different.

²¹See lines 3-4 and 32-33.

²²On this characteristic point of secular Hebrew poetry see Pagis, *op. cit.* (note 16), pp. 38ff.

its ideological foundations, the role and the prestige of the metaphor even increased. Ramban's and R. Meshullam's poetry reveals a very clear abandonment of this tradition. It goes without saying that there is no lack of tropoi in the Gerondis' poetry (no poetry can ever dispense with metaphors). But there is no further desperate search for metaphors in the poetry of Ramban and R. Meshullam; they are used mainly for local ornaments, or where they are really needed for conveying the poet's ideas. They do not evoke images and do not stimulate imagination. Instead of acting as a means of "*Verfremdung*," as usual in Arabic and Spanish Hebrew poetry, they convey, explain, even formulate in their own way the very subject matter of the poetical text. This rather modern use of metaphorical devices is perhaps the boldest innovation of the Gerona school, the very furthest point it reached in its departure from the most sacred ideals of the Andalusian tradition of Hebrew poetry.²³

The way the Gerona poets dealt with the conventional motifs of Spanish Hebrew literature is also most interesting. Similar to all medieval poetries (I would dare say: to poetry in general) Spanish Hebrew poetry was highly conventional, insofar as it moves, from the point of view of both its attitudes and ideas, in strictly circumscribed tracks. Medieval poetry hated originality in the modern sense of the term. The medieval poet never strayed far from the usual, never invented genres, never substantially changed given plots, conventional situations, well-known even worn-out ideas or moods. In choosing the genre, he implicitly chose its array of subjects, *dramatis personae*, motifs, images, atmosphere, and poetic tools; he simply reformulated all that in a new way, in his own, *original* way, putting it in a new setting of words, selecting the details according to his own original preference, and combining the chosen elements in a brand new order. Spanish Hebrew poetry adhered to this pattern.²⁴ It had its conventions established by early in the eleventh century, and these were thereafter further consolidated in the work of all

²³This point should of course be considered within the wider framework of Andalusian poetics. The metaphorical profusion of Arabic poetry is a logical, all but inevitable effect of the absolute scarcity of its conveyable ideas. Highly metaphorical style indeed characterizes most of the classical lyrical genres. Meditative poems, which try to express "important" ideas, although conventional and limited as well, have a less metaphorical texture. Unlike their predecessors, the Gerondis had a new ideological basis for their poetry and tried to convey new ideas in their poems. Their keeping far from metaphors should thus be viewed more as instrumental than as ideological.

²⁴See Pagis, *op. cit.* (note 16), pp. 401ff.

its great practitioners. Now in Ramban's, and especially in R. Meshullam's, poetry, there is no longer any respect for fixed topics and sacred uses. Both of them are of course aware of the conventions of classical poetry and occasionally even make some use of them in their poems.²⁵ But besides those conventions there is in their poetry a blessed abundance of new ideas, new images, new personae, new ways of combining words and a new phraseology. Their poems are never easily definable as to their genres.²⁶ Their plots are never predictable, nor is their meaning always clear and unambiguous. There is even an ironic use of conventional plots and motifs, obviously meant to be laughed at, in Ramban's and R. Meshullam's poetry. Ramban's "Mea Batim" is an example to illustrate this point. The classical convention of Spanish Hebrew poetry is categorically positive about youth and complains of old age. Through hundreds of verses written by Spanish Hebrew poets, there is hardly a single word of praise for old age, while there are many poems praising youth and cursing its brevity. Now Ramban's only extant secular poem is an absolutely unique hymn to old age, stressing its virtues, extolling its advantages over youth, and enthusiastically describing the rewards of its piety.²⁷ But the praise of old age, the main topic of Ramban's poem, does

²⁵The actual use of conventional motifs in Ramban's and R. Meshullam's poetry should be thoroughly analyzed. The Gerona poets' approach to these topics is often surprisingly original, as already stressed by Schirmann in his anthology, p. 298.

²⁶Actually, R. Meshullam's poems, save for his polemical ones, can hardly be included within the usual generic framework of medieval Hebrew poetry. Unlike J. Schirmann (*op. cit.* p. 297) I do not think that one can regard his poems addressed to different members of Ramban's circle as panegyrics. By the way, those poems seem always to deal with some specific, not always intelligible, issue, and look more like poetic letters than anything else. See D. Pagis, *op. cit.*, pp. 126ff.

²⁷Ramban's "Mea Batim" still awaits a serious literary analysis. There is also urgent need of a rigorous comparison between the idea of reward expressed in this poem and that alluded to in the other works of Ramban. Chavel, in his edition of Ramban's poems (p. 401), has no remarks on this issue. According to the poem the righteous may expect a fourfold reward for his good deeds: the first stage is *Gan 'Eden*; the second is *Ez ha-Da'at*; the third, *Ez ha-Ḥayim*; and the fourth, *Ẓeror ha-Ḥayim*. He will also be quickened on the day of resurrection (see ed. Chavel, ll. 74-80). As already mentioned, the poem has a clear structure and a logical development, save for its last part (ll. 81ff.), which praises the self-sacrifice of the righteous and their being prepared to accept God's deeds as justified, even seeing their children slaughtered for their faith. This passage seems to allude to some historical event, but its real meaning is still obscure.

not begin until the end of a long prologue which incorporates the usual, banal, oft-repeated, conventional complaint of lost youth.²⁸ The poem is thus seated in a dialogical framework, convention and anti-convention face to face. Nothing is indeed more remote from the world of secular poetry in Spain than the scorn of youth, the more so where full awareness of its conventional praise is explicitly demonstrated. Ramban's misuse of the established motif signals the almost complete release of Spanish Hebrew poetry from the crushing pressure of its own conventionality. More examples may be brought from Meshullam Dapiera's poetry.

We should say a word about the lexical peculiarity of R. Meshullam Dapiera's poetry. This point has already bewildered scholarship and has been designated the most puzzling feature in this poet's work.²⁹ We all remember of course that the Andalusian Hebrew poetry consciously adopted the biblical lexicon as the only one suitable for poetry. This ideal was most cherished by Spanish authors and there was a constant endeavor to meet its expectations. To be sure, in Christian Spain poets minded a little less having their texts spoiled by non-biblical words. But they mostly would violate the puristic laws in search of some special, mainly humorous, effects. They mixed talmudical phrases or Aramaic idiomatic expressions in their sentences, not as organic parts of their style, but merely as *shibuzim*, i.e. quotation-like inserts meant to embellish their work.³⁰ Now Meshullam Dapiera is the only Spanish Hebrew poet whose poetry is written entirely in non-biblical language.³¹ He not only uses many talmudic, midrashic and even medieval words, and that without any ornamental purpose; but the very construction of his sentences, their

²⁸Lines 1-21. It seems to me that the poet's answer, which actually begins at l. 28, is preceded by a long apostrophe describing the "friends" (ll. 22-27). Ramban's answer repeats some of the conventional praises of youth in an obviously scornful, ironic mood.

²⁹See Brody's preface to his edition of Meshullam Dapiera's poems, p. 9; Schirmann, *op. cit.* p. 297.

³⁰The first author to use talmudical inserts in a Hebrew secular work was apparently Isaac, the author of *'Ezrat Nashim*; see E. Fleischer, "'Ein Mishpat —Hibbur she-Nit'allem min ha-'Ayin le-Yizhaq Ba'al *Ezrat Nashim*," *Qiryat Sefer* XLVIII (1973), pp. 329ff. He was followed by Judah ben Shabbetai in his *Milhemet ha-Hokhmah veba-'Osher*, and to a lesser degree by Judah al-Harizi. The phenomenon occurs at first almost exclusively in rhymed narratives, and very seldom in metered poems.

³¹I do not include Kalonymos Ben Kalonymos' *Even Boḥan*, because it is written in rhymed prose—in the second part, in plain prose. Kalonymos' work is of course categorically negative towards poetry in general, and especially towards its secular traditions.

very atmosphere, is post-biblical as well. In many of his poems he looks as if he were completely ignorant of the puristic plea of Spanish Hebrew poetics.

This point in Meshullam Dapiera's poetry may be considered the most explicit denial of the classical Andalusian poetics. Though not at all characteristic either of Ramban's "Mea Batim" or of his piyyutim, R. Meshullam's abandonment of biblical language in his poems may be viewed as a logical, all but inevitable, conclusion of the new school's principles and of its critical attitude towards the old literary traditions.

The utter neglect of Andalusian poetics enabled the Gerona poets to divert poetry towards new targets hardly envisioned before. In Gerona there was no more need, when writing poetry, either to meet the literary taste of anybody other than the poet himself, or to take into consideration what the customer preferred to hear. For Ramban's poem *de senectute* was written not merely as a response to Andalusian literary conventions; its persuasive air and highly passionate style reveal major ideological aims. Indeed, in reasserting the virtues of old age Ramban fights not solely the Andalusian poetics, but also the Andalusian way of life, its hedonistic orientation and its secular attitude. A clear ideological focus characterizes Meshullam Dapiera's poetry as well; I refer not only to his fascinating polemics against the pursuit of philosophy³² but to his lyrical, personal poetry as well.³³ For the first time, then, since Dunash ben Labrat, Spanish Hebrew poets feel independent enough to express their views about non-poetical issues and to let their poetical work be involved in the major ideological controversies of their age.

³²Actually, Hebrew poetry got involved in the Maimonidean controversy some years earlier: short texts concerning the polemic are to be found already in al-Ḥarizi's *Tahkemoni*. Al-Ḥarizi also wrote an Arabic maqāma in praise of Maimonides, apparently also in a polemical context. Yet R. Meshullam's poems are by far the most remarkable literary expression of the anti-Maimunian camp. Out of the fifty poems of R. Meshullam, ten (some of them extremely lengthy) are dedicated to this issue. These texts should be thoroughly examined and their contents carefully assessed. Polemical poems referring to the Maimonidean controversy, both first and second, were collected and published by M. Steinschneider in his "Moreh Meqom ha-Moreh," *Kovez al Yad*, OS. Vol. I (1885), pp. 1ff., and *ibid.* Vol. II (1886), pp. 1ff.

³³See for example R. Meshullam's scorn for the study of Hebrew grammar in one of his poems (no. 17 ll. 38-48). This point is of course of major relevance when considered in its historical framework. The study of Hebrew was considered a sacred goal in Andalusia and was perhaps the most naturally accepted component of the Spanish-Jewish cultural tradition.

I have intentionally avoided mentioning some of the peculiarities of R. Moses' and especially of R. Meshullam's poetry already stressed or noticed by scholars.³⁴ I think that almost all of them are of little importance, and the emphasis accorded them by scholarship is due to a justifiable but ultimately unjustified eagerness to discover in those points the traits of European troubadour influence. I do not deny the possibility that for example R. Meshullam's way of mentioning his own name in his poems, or his use of certain images, might have been borrowed from Provençal poetry, but I cannot see any European influence explaining the formidable changes Ramban and R. Meshullam effected in the very substance of Spanish Hebrew poetry.³⁵ For to coincide with Provençal poetry in some minor points is certainly less a feat than to break off the long and prestigious tradition of Spanish Hebrew poetry, and to establish, as it were *ex nihilo*, new laws and new ways of writing Hebrew poetry. That was precisely what was done in Ramban's Gerona; there was a unique attempt at creating a new type of secular Hebrew poetry in Spain, a new type of poetry which had to have, besides the prosody and the rhyming system,³⁶ little in common with traditional Hebrew secular poetry in the Andalusian style.

Remodeling secular poetry was part and parcel of the tremendous effort displayed in Ramban's Gerona in reassessing (should we say:

³⁴See Schirmann in his anthology, pp. 292ff.

³⁵Schirmann's suggestion that R. Meshullam's rather obscure style may be a result of the impact of a certain trend in the poetry of the troubadours (the "trobar clus") seems to me very farfetched. Actually R. Meshullam's style is not obscure, only unusual. As already mentioned, his poems undoubtedly allude to concrete events and issues, well known by his addressees but lost to us. But for the use of obscurity as a rhetorical embellishment R. Meshullam could have had plenty of Hebrew examples, and there was no need for him to borrow from the Provençal. By the way, Provençal poetry was in decline in R. Meshullam's days, and the trend of "trobar clus" was already doubtlessly long forgotten by the troubadours themselves. Scholars should investigate the possibility of some esoteric, mystical hints in Dapiera's poems. His being accepted in the circle of the Gerona mystics may perhaps explain his continuous outbursts of apparently unjustified, and in any case unexplained, boastfulness.

³⁶The fidelity of the Gerona poets to the quantitative meters and to the old rhyme patterns, after the absolute betrayal of almost all the other Andalusian traditions, is of course an interesting phenomenon. The "return" to classical forms and the abandonment of rhymed prose was perhaps seen by them as a revolutionary gesture. But one should take into consideration also the fact that the Gerondis were trying to reform Hebrew poetry and that in those times only metered and monorhymed texts could possibly be regarded as poetry.

reforming?) the Jewish way of life in Spain, against the background of the cultural and spiritual breakdown forecast, maybe already represented, by the first Maimonidean controversy in the fourth decade of the thirteenth century. Secular poetry was indeed the purest and the most representative feature of Spanish Jewish culture, the very expression of its highest secular achievements. The reformulation of the ideological program of Spanish Jewry could not have left this crucial point unaffected. Still, at this early stage there was some attempt at ideological pluralism and continued tolerance of the most beloved and prestigious of the old ideals. Poetry was at this time also a powerful weapon to be used. Both Ramban and R. Meshullam were aware of its efficiency, and, unlike the professional poets of their time, they also had important things to say and strong emotions to express. On the other hand, they had no allegiance whatsoever to the courtly poetics and no respect at all for any of its sacred rules. They clearly felt that the tools provided by the old poetics, borrowed from the Arabic and expressing an now obsolete and rather anachronistic sensibility, were absolutely unsuited to convey their thoughts and echo the peculiar rhythm of their new spiritual life. They therefore abandoned this poetics and wrought new means of expressing themselves. They remolded Hebrew poetry in almost all its aspects and opened a new path for literature.

The Gerona upheaval might have been a new beginning for Hebrew poetry, a genuine, authentic one. But things were about to change in Spain, more radically than expected or even wished by Ramban. The hope for a reconsidered pluralism in Jewish cultural life soon vanished. The generations to come were torn between the two major trends contesting their supremacy over Jewish society, both of them absolutely self-sufficient and basically totalitarian. Neither of them needed poetry, each rejecting it for its own well-founded reasons. Poetry, then, had no choice but to return to its little corner, which became small, neglected, and more unimportant than ever; among the last remnants of the not-yet-converted Jewish oligarchy, still somewhat faithful to the traditions of Spanish Jewish aristocracy, still reading some Hebrew and still interested in old-fashioned courtly poetry.³⁷

³⁷Linked to this social stratum were the works of Todros Abulafia and of the Saragossa group of Hebrew poets. Some of the members of this group, including Solomon Dapiera, eventually converted to Christianity. The works of Abraham Bedersi, Yeda'ya ha-Penini, Isaac ha-Gorni, Samuel ibn Sason, Shem Tov Ardu-tiel, En Maimon Galipapa and other representatives of late Spanish Hebrew poetry should also be viewed in this context. The exception that proves the rule is

Hebrew poetry had little hope for survival, much less for renewal, in those circles. The Gerona experiment was undoubtedly the last serious attempt to change the already dead-ended course of the history of Spanish secular poetry. It was a genuine, powerful, imaginative, and daring experience, which tried to give poetry new purposes, new means of expression, and a new authenticity. Unfortunately, it came too late. The great historical events that changed the spiritual scenery of Spanish Jewry narrowed more and more the social and cultural basis of poetry, transforming it into a rather anachronistic, all but ridiculous remnant of old times.³⁸ The fact that these remnants, few and unimportant as they are, still reveal the impact of Ramban's and R. Meshullam's innovations, prove the impressive and long-lasting vitality of their poetic model.³⁹

Isaac ibn Sahula's *Meshal ha-Qadmoni* which makes an attempt to speak directly to humble people. Ibn Sahula was, like Ramban and Meshullam Dapiera, a kabbalist, and his choosing this way was undoubtedly connected with that fact. It is worthwhile noting that there are no lyrical inserts in *Meshal ha-Qadmoni*, save for the preface of the book. Kalonymos' *Even Boḥan* is of the same type.

³⁸See for example the scathing depiction of poets in *Sefer ha-Mevaresh* of Shem Tov Fallaera (Warsaw, 1924, pp. 75ff.) and in *Even Boḥan* of Kalonymos ben Kalonymos (Tel Aviv, 1956, pp. 53ff.). The precarious situation of the poet is already echoed by Jacob ben Eleazar in his *Sefer ha-Meshalim*, in its third chapter (as yet unpublished).

³⁹Meshullam Dapiera's poetic skill was highly appreciated by later poets; see H. Brody in his preface to the collected poems of Dapiera, p. 1. Todros Abulafia often uses Meshullam's way of ending a poem with a hemistich figuring in the first line. Solqmon Dapiera learned from his predecessor the technique of incomplete anadiplosis. Most of the later poets abandon the worship of the metaphor and often transgress the puristical restrictions, although in a less daring manner than R. Meshullam. The utter forsaking of the classical lyrical genres should also be considered as a proof of the Gerona school's influence.

"We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This"

Moshe Idel

I

NAḤMANIDES IS A well-known name in Jewish history and religious literature; less well known is the content of his thought. Despite the large number of studies on his contributions in various fields of literary activity—talmudic, exegetic, poetic or mystic—no accurate, complete, and detailed evaluation of his thought is yet available. Such research, essential for a proper understanding of the Jewish thirteenth century, will have to reconstruct the genuine figure of Nahmanides and the historical role he played, which legends, spurious attributions of works, and misunderstandings of his authentic oeuvre have conspired to distort. When this task is undertaken, the description of Nahmanides' kabbalistic thought will be, to my mind, its most tantalizing part. Almost all of the kabbalistic works once attributed to him have proved to have been authored by others.¹ What remains of his own kabbalistic writings is only a few pages published by Gershom Scholem, comprising three short treatises: Nahmanides' authentic *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*,² an exposition on *Ma'aseh Bereshit*,³ and a short passage on the kabbalistic meaning of the

¹See Gershom Scholem, "Problems of The Book מְסֵכֵת הָאֱלֹהִים and its Commentators," *Qiryat Sefer* 21 (1945) pp. 179-186 (Hebrew); idem., *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974) p. 66; Efraim Gottlieb in Georges Vajda's edition of *Meshiv Devarim Nekho'him* (Jerusalem, 1968) pp. 18-20 (Hebrew); G. Scholem, "The Authentic Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah of Nahmanides," *Qiryat Sefer* 6 (1930) pp. 386-387 (Hebrew); E. Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbalah Literature* (ed. Josef Hacker, Tel Aviv, 1976) pp. 128-131, 570 (Hebrew).

²Scholem, *Commentary*, pp. 387-396, 401-410.

³*Ibid.*, 415-417; Gottlieb, in *Studies*, p. 569, points out that in the circle of Nahmanides' students, there were doubts on the authenticity of this explanation; but compare Gottlieb's own discussions, *idem.*, p. 63 and n. 14.

Nahmanides himself writes in his *Commentary on the Torah*, Genesis 1:6: "This is a matter concerning *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and (therefore) do not expect from me that I shall write down anything [on it] because it is one of the secrets of the Torah...and

forbidden sexual alliances;⁴ in his other works, one can find only a few dozen short kabbalistic statements and hints. That is a poor remnant when compared to the prolific literary activity of Nahmanides in other areas.

This paper will examine Nahmanides' discussion on the meaning of the forbidden sexual alliances and its implications and present a brief comparison between Nahmanides' orientation in his kabbalistic writings and that of his older and younger contemporary kabbalists, with reference to the impact of Nahmanides on the further evolution of Kabbalah.

II

In his *Commentary* on Leviticus 18:6 Nahmanides quotes the explanation of Maimonides and Ibn Ezra on the aim of the incest interdictions⁵ and disproves it; afterwards he writes:⁶

But we have no [kabbalistic] tradition concerning this [matter]. However, it may be supposed that in this matter [i.e. incest interdictions] there is one of the secrets of creation⁷ which is connected to

the exposition [of *Ma'aseh Bereshit*] is forbidden to whoever knows it *a fortiori* to us." In his sermon *Torat ha-Shem Temimah* (*Kirvei ha-Ramban*, ed. Chavel, vol. I, p. 158) Nahmanides writes: ch. B, "But the matter of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* is obscure, and I do not know it, and even if I did know it, I would be forbidden to reveal it publicly." Compare also his *Sermon on Ecclesiastes*, *ibid.* p. 180. These passages indicate that Nahmanides acknowledged his ignorance on the real kabbalistic meaning of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and therefore, probably, he did not write a kabbalistic commentary on this issue. However, in his commentary on Genesis 1:1 (Chavel's edition, p. 1) Nahmanides hints that the exposition of the first verse may be dangerous, since it may be misunderstood and explained rationally.

זאי אפשר להאריך בפירוש זה הענין במכתב והרמז רב הנזק כי יסברו בו סברות אין בהם אמת.

⁴Scholem, *Commentary*, pp. 397-398; 417-418. Scholem's view of Nahmanides' authorship of this passage was accepted by M. Henoch, *Nahmanides—Philosopher and Mystic* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 390-391. This issue will be discussed below.

⁵As Nahmanides pointed out, the two thinkers had given very similar explanations; after quoting Maimonides, he wrote: "וכבר כתב רמ' (ראביע) גם כן." Compare *Guide of the Perplexed* II, 49 to Ibn Ezra's commentary on Leviticus 18:6. On Ibn Ezra's influence on Maimonides see Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (*Mishneh Torah*) (New Haven and London, 1980), p. 252 note 33.

⁶My rendering of this passage differs from Chavel's English translation; cf. Chavel, *Ramban, Commentary on the Torah* (New York, 1974), vol. 3, p. 247. "זאין בידינו דבר מקובל בזה, אבל כפי הסברה יש בענין סוד מסודות היצירה דבק בנפש שהוא מכלל סוד העבר שכבר רמזו אליו" (פירוש התורה לרמב"ן מזה" ח.ד. שערעל. תש"ך ב' עמ' קא).

⁷In Nahmanides' terminology, *סוד היצירה* means *סוד מעשה בראשית* that is, the speculation about creation. See his sermon *Torat ha-Shem Temimah, Kirvei ha-Ramban*

the soul and belongs to the secret of impregnation,⁸ to which⁹ we have already alluded.

The Hebrew original of the beginning of this quotation is ראין בידינו דבר and it is important to adduce the reasons for my translation of מקובל as "[kabbalistic] tradition."

a) This passage implies a polarity between the lack of any tradition and Nahmanides' attempt to suggest a possible kabbalistic explanation for the incest interdictions. It seems that Nahmanides had not received any kabbalistic interpretation that could serve as an alternative to the philosophical explanation of this issue, and that he therefore tried to supply a kabbalistic interpretation which only general content was alluded. Any-

(Jerusalem, 1963), p. 155. A similar link between סוד העיבור and the research on the creation of earth and heaven seems to be alluded to in R. Jacob ben Sheshet's *Meshiv Devarim Nekhohim* (ed. Vajda; Jerusalem, 1968), p. 101:

"מה שמצאנו בהעתיקת המורה כי השכל הפועל הוא הנקרא שור של עולם לא יתכן לומר כן לפי מה שכתבתי בשכל הפועל כן לפי החקירה האמתית בחדוש השמים והארץ ולא יוכל לעמוד על אמתות הדבר הזה רק מי שיכנס בסוד העיבור וידע ענינו הוא סוד העבור הנמצא בפרקי ר' אליעזר ובנס אברהם אבינו בסוד העבור ועבר את השנה תגלה עליו הבה וברכו אברהם מסור ליצחק"

The link between the "soul" and the impregnation is clear: another soul is supposed to be impregnated on the original soul. This passage can be considered one of the first uses of עיבור as distinct from גילגול i.e. transmigration.

According to Nahmanides' words in his *Sermon on Ecclesiastes, Kitvei ha-Ramban* I, p. 186, the secret of transmigration seems to belong to a more comprehensive esoteric domain, the secrets of impregnation:

"ידע לרבותינו בפסוק הזה שאלה שהקשה ואמר דוד בא דוד הולך. והשיבו כזה סוד גדול מן הסודות הנבללות בבלל סוד העיבור"

Chavel, in his note *ad loco*, simply identifies the two subjects.

As R. Isaac of Acre states: "The secret of impregnation (is connected) to the secret of the soul, but the secret of transmigration (is connected) to the secret of the body."

"סוד העיבור בסוד הנפש וסוד הגלגול בסוד הנפש" (ספר מאירת עינים כ"י מינכן 17 דף 139ב).

On the difference between the two kabbalistic concepts see G. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 331 and note 57 (Hebrew). Scholem's view (*ibid.* p. 332) that these concepts have been distinguished from each other only since 1300 has to be corrected. The concepts seem to be clearly distinguished already by Nahmanides himself, from when his students inherited the distinction. See also Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Berlin, 1962), p. 404. Basing himself upon Scholem, Daniel J. Silver did not distinguish transmigration from impregnation when dealing with Nahmanides; see "Nahmanides' Commentary on the Book of Job," *Jewish Quarterly Review* (NS) 60 (1969-1970), p. 24.

⁹See Nahmanides' *Commentary* on Genesis 38:8.

way, no hint of an inherited kabbalistic explanation of incest can be found in his long discussion of the subject.

b) The Hebrew phrase *בדיט דבר מקובל* seems to be a negative formulation of the phrase used by Nahmanides in order to allude to an esoteric tradition:¹⁰ *יש בדיט קבלה של אמת*.

The term *מקובל* cannot be understood in this particular passage as "received as part of a tradition," since Nahmanides begins his commentary on Leviticus 18:6 with these words: "The meaning of the interdiction of incest in connection with relatives is not explained." This sentence seems to refer to the lack of an explanation of the meaning of incest in talmudic or midrashic tradition; Nahmanides then brings the philosophical explanation, and only afterwards does the statement containing the term *מקובל* appear. We thus find here, in a parallel series of Peshat-Philosophy-Kabbalah, the last level of interpretation alluded to by the term *מקובל*.

c) Last but not least, some kabbalists understood Nahmanides' statement as a reference to the lack of a kabbalistic tradition: R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon¹¹ speaks about the lack of *מקובל*, which must be understood as

¹⁰See Nahmanides' Introduction to his *Commentary on the Torah*, Chavel's edition, p. 6. On the background of the tradition quoted by Nahmanides, see Moshe Idel, "The Concept of the Torah in Heikhalot Literature and Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* I (1981), pp. 52-53. It is worth mentioning that Nahmanides conceives of Kabbalah as a tradition about the Divine Names having no explicit theosophical implications; compare the similar use of the term "Kabbalah" which occurs in R. Eleazar of Worms' *Hilkhot ha-Kisse*; cf. Scholem, *Ursprung*, p. 231; see also Idel, "Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrines," (Ph.D thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1976), p. 438 and notes 31-33. It is important to stress that the concept of a transmission of the Divine Name since Moses was known by Nahmanides' younger contemporary, R. Moses of Burgos; see his *Commentary on the 42-Letter Name*, printed by Scholem in *Tarbiz*, V (1934), p. 52 and note 6 where, on the same page, "the kabbalists of the Holy Name" *מקובלי השם הקדוש* were mentioned. Compare also to R. Bahya ben Asher's *Commentary on Torah* (Numbers 6:27, Chavel's edition, p. 34) who asserts that he received from the Ashkenazi Kabbalah a tradition on the vocalization of the letters of the Holy Name: *יאמנם קבלת אשכנזי בלחישת ההרדף הרדף ירדוף והמשכיל יבין*.

For an Ashkenazi parallel to Nahmanides' tradition on the Torah as a continuum of Divine Names, see Joseph Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism* (Jerusalem, 1968), p. 124 (Hebrew). The term *מקובל* occurs also in Nahmanides' Introduction to the *Commentary on the Torah*, p. 3, in connection with esoteric speculations, and *ibid.*, p. 10; cf. note 39 below.

¹¹*Keter Shem Tov*, printed in *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, ed. Koriati (Livorno, 1839), fol. 43r.

"kabbalistic explanation" and Recanati writes,¹² "טעם איסור העריות אין לבועלי קבלה דבר מקובל בר."

Despite Nahmanides' own confession that he did not receive a kabbalistic explanation on this subject, and his proposal for such an explanation being only a vague indication as to the possible connection between incest and the secret of impregnation, an esoteric explanation of incest is quoted in the two most reliable commentaries on Nahmanides kabbalistic allusions: both Shem Tov ibn Gaon and Joshua ibn Shuaib attribute to Nahmanides a rather long passage dealing with incest. Ibn Gaon writes:¹³

The true kabbalistic secret of it [i.e. incest] is not known to me and you can see that the Rabbi [i.e. Nahmanides] said that he has no kabbalistic explanation concerning the secret of incest, and also [my] teachers said that they had not received his view. But I found a secret treatise of the Rabbi which he received from the Ḥasid on the explanation on the interdiction of incest."

The "Rabbi" in R. Shem Tov's book is always Nahmanides, while the Ḥasid is usually R. Isaac the Blind. Ibn Shuaib introduces the parallel text to that cited by ibn Gaon with this sentence:¹⁴

The Rabbi [i.e. Nahmanides] made no allusions here [i.e. when dealing with the subject of incest]; but we have found a secret treatise of his written by his own hand.

Gershom Scholem accepted these remarks as reliable evidences of Nahmanides' authorship and printed the passage in his paper on Nahmanides.¹⁵

If we accept this view, we face an obvious contradiction: Nahmanides and his direct students deny the reception of a kabbalistic tradition on incest, whereas the students of his students do possess such a tradition, ostensibly originating with Nahmanides himself. This dilemma can be resolved by disproving Nahmanides' authorship of the explanation quoted in his name by his students' students, on several grounds:

¹²*Commentary on the Torah*, "Aḥarei Mot."

¹³*Ma'or va-Shemesh*, fol 43r.

"החסיד האמתי המקובל בהם אינו יודע והנך רואה שהחידל אמר שאין לו טעם מקובל בסוד העריות וגם חידל [רבתי ז"ל] אמר שלא דעתו ואני מצאתי במגלת סתרים מהרב שקבל מהחסיד טעם איסור העריות."

¹⁴*Be'ur le-Perush ha-Ramban la-Torah* (Warsaw, 1875) fol. 25v:

"הנה הרב ז"ל לא רמז בבאן שום דבר; אבל מצאנו לו מגלת סתרים כתוב בכתב ידו חזק לשון"

¹⁵Scholem, *Commentary*, p. 397.

a) Ibn Gaon's testimony is very problematic; as E. Gottlieb has already noted,¹⁶ there are manuscripts wherein the authorship of the quoted passage is not mentioned at all.

b) In undisputed Nahmanidean sources, there is an important connection between the secret of incest and the secret of impregnation; but such a connection is not even mentioned in this particular passage attributed to Nahmanides.

c) There is extant a letter, written by a certain R. Meshullam to an anonymous correspondent and including the whole passage under question as a revelation received in a dream.¹⁷ Although someone might dream a solution that had previously been written down,¹⁸ it seems that in this particular case the hypothesis of R. Meshullam unconsciously forging an existing text is highly improbable, so that we may consider this piece of evidence as a final proof that Nahmanides has not written an esoteric explanation of incest. It is possible that he was the unnamed addressee of R. Meshullam—and Nahmanides was acquainted with at least two rabbis named R. Meshullam;¹⁹ if he had received this R. Meshullam's letter, he might have copied it, and this copy might have reached R. Joshua ibn Shuaib, who testified that he saw this passage written by Nahmanides' own hand. Once again, Nahmanides' kabbalistic legacy has to be reduced.

But the solution to the bibliographical quandary does not resolve the puzzle of Nahmanides' words "we have no [kabbalistic] tradition" quoted above. This sentence, which *prima facie* seems so clear, is amazing when contrasted to the kabbalistic discussions on the meaning of incest found in the writings of R. Isaac the Blind and his students R. Ezra and R. Azriel.²⁰ In the Gerona kabbalistic school there was a tradition on the subject, but Nahmanides claims to know no kabbalistic solution. We must ponder the accurate meaning of Nahmanides' words: are they evidence of his ignorance of an interpretation stemming from R. Isaac the

¹⁶E. Gottlieb, *Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa* (Jerusalem, 1970) p. 75 note 3 (Hebrew).

¹⁷Ms Vatican (Hebrew) 211 fol. 116r.

¹⁸See R. J. Zvi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic* (Philadelphia, 1977) p. 42 note 7; Idel, "Inquiries into the Doctrine of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*," *Sefunot* (NS) vol. II (17) (1983), forthcoming.

¹⁹R. Meshullam ben Moses and R. Meshullam ben Solomon Dapiera; see Scholem, *Ursprung*, pp. 352, 362.

²⁰See Gottlieb, *Kabbalah*, pp. 74–75. I hope to deal with the various kabbalistic interpretations of incest in a detailed study wherein the pertinent texts will be published.

Blind and adopted and expanded by Nahmanides' colleagues? or an elegant expression of a reservation concerning the kabbalistic tradition which he indeed knew from his colleagues but did not himself receive from his teacher of Kabbalah, R. Judah ben Yaqar? The first hypothesis seems quite implausible; it implies ignorance of a concept unanimously accepted by the kabbalists who had close relations with Nahmanides. The second hypothesis, though strange too, seems to be the correct understanding of Nahmanides' statement, and I shall adduce several reasons for my giving preference to it:

a) Nahmanides was rather cautious when using Geronese concepts. The most important textual "influence" of R. Ezra on Nahmanides²¹ was quoted by the latter thus:²² "The kabbalists would interpret this matter..." but Nahmanides ends his quotation by writing:²³

It is their way [of interpreting] those verses, and these things may permit such an explanation, and if it is a kabbalistic tradition, we shall accept it.

This sentence cannot be understood as doubting the theosophic nature of R. Ezra's interpretation—this nature is obvious even in the concise form as it was quoted by Nahmanides; what Nahmanides questioned is whether the interpretation quoted by him is part of a kabbalistic tradition, since he himself did not receive such an explanation on the verses of Job he is commenting upon.²⁴ Not every theosophic view was, in Nahmanides' eyes, part of a reliable kabbalistic tradition; it seems that the source from which Nahmanides quoted this passage was rather doubtful;

²¹Compare Nahmanides' *Commentary on Job* 28, ed. Chavel, *Kirvei ha-Ramban* I, pp. 88-90, to R. Ezra's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, *idem*, II, pp. 481-484. The source of R. Ezra's exposition is R. Isaac the Blind: see Scholem, *A New Document*, p. 156 note 2. The similarity between Nahmanides' and Ezra's texts has already been recognized by A. Jellinek, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kabbala* I (Leipzig, 1852) p. 77. Another alleged reference of Nahmanides to a Geronese kabbalist, R. Jacob ben Sheshet, found in a unique manuscript, seems to be the result of a mistake: see Scholem, "A Study of the Theory of Transmigration in Kabbalah during the XIII Century," *Tarbiz* XVI (1945), p. 141 note 30 (Hebrew).

²²Nahmanides' *Commentary on Job*, p. 88, "בעלי הקבלה יפרשו הענין."

²³*Ibid.*, p. 90:

"זהו דרכם בפסוקים הללו הדברים עצמם ישתבחו ויתהללו אבל לא ידעו אם הענין טובל הפירוש הזה ואם קבלה נקבל."

²⁴Compare to Scholem's statement that Nahmanides' commentary "to the book of Job is based on the theory of transmigration and on the views of his companion, Ezra, concerning the Sefirah Hokhmah" (*Kabbalah*, p. 51). It seems that there is, here, a confusion between quotation and influence.

we feel that R. Ezra is not reliable enough and it seems clear that R. Isaac the Blind's letter to Nahmanides, wherein the teacher accused his former students, R. Ezra and R. Azriel, of disclosing kabbalistic traditions, might be one of the reasons for Nahmanides' reservations about his colleagues' Kabbalah.²⁵

b) In his commentary on Genesis 1:6, Nahmanides writes:²⁶ "The exposition [of Ma'aseh Bereshit] is forbidden to whoever knows it, a fortiori to us." The term used in Hebrew, יודעיו, may refer to the kabbalists, who are hinted at in Nahmanides' works by the term יודעי חן.²⁷ As we know, exposition of Ma'aseh Bereshit was a literary genre in Provençal and Geronese Kabbalah and Nahmanides' remark may be a hidden critique of his contemporary kabbalists.²⁸

c) In the three last quotations cited above, Nahmanides uses the plural forms: לא ידעו, נקבל, אולי, though he refers to himself. It is possible that the phrase אין בידינו, which appears in the statement we are dealing with here, means "I have not"; and it can be interpreted this way: "I have not received a kabbalistic tradition," that is to say, I can rely only on kabbalistic tradition I myself received. Such an interpretation fits one of the most important statements made by Nahmanides on the natures of Kabbalah.²⁹

Indeed, this matter contains a great secret of the secrets of the Torah,³⁰ which cannot be comprehended by the understanding of a thinker, but [only] by a man who gains them, learning [them] from the mouth of a teacher, going back to Moses Our Master, from the mouth of the Lord, blessed be He.

The secrets of the Torah cannot be arrived at by deduction, whether its premises be philosophical or theosophic; the only way to get them is to receive the unbroken tradition whose beginning is the Sinaitic revelation. The Kabbalah Nahmanides inherited was a closed corpus of secrets not to

²⁵Scholem, *A New Document*, pp. 143, 145-146.

²⁶See above note 3. "זהפירוש [של מעשה בראשית] אסור לידעיו וכל שכן אלינו."

²⁷See Scholem, *Ursprung*, p. 360; note 87.

²⁸See Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 59-87.

²⁹*The Commentary on Job, Kitvei ha-Ramban I*, p. 23:

"אבל באמת יש בזה הענין סוד גדול מסודות התורה לא ישיגם דעת חושב רק הווכח להם לומד מפי מלמד עד משה רבינו ע"ה מפי הגבורה יתברך."

Compare to Nahmanides' statement in his *Sermon on Ecclesiastes*, *ibid.*, p. 190. "אבל דברים הללו וכיוצא בהם אין אדם עומד על אמתתם מדעת עצמו אלא בקבלה זה הענין מבורר בתורה לכל מי ששמע טעם המצות בקבלה כראוי וזו מקבל מפי מקבל עד משה רבינו מפי הגבורה"

³⁰I.e. the secret of transmigration. This subject is of utmost importance for Nahmanides, much more than for other Geronese kabbalists.

be expanded;³¹ and this seems to be the most important implication of our discussion on the meaning of incest. Nahmanides was, apparently, not ready to accept the interpretation stemming from R. Isaac the Blind's school; when he tries to supply a kabbalistic explanation, he explicitly indicates that it is "a reasoning"—סברא—which only alludes to the possible area of theosophic thought that may be connected with the incest interdiction. Nahmanides does not claim any authoritative status for his supposition. Even his attempt to provide such an explanation might be, in Nahmanides' own view, dangerous; he himself writes in the introduction to his *Commentary on the Torah*:³²

I bring into a faithful covenant and give proper counsel to all who look into this book not to reason³³ or entertain any thought

³¹Compare Nahmanides' attitude towards the use of gematria: "No one is permitted to deal with the numerology [חשבון אותיות] [in order to] deduce from [numbers] something that occurred to his mind. But in the hand of our masters [there was a tradition] that [some] well-known gematriot were handed down to Moses at Sinai and they are a reminder and a sign of the subjects handed down orally, together with the remnant part of the Oral Law; some of those [gematriot deal with] the subjects of Haggadot, others with the issue of *Issur we-Heter*."

Text printed by E. Kupfer, "The Concluding Portion of Nahmanides' *Torat Ha-Shem Temima*," *Tarbiz* XL (1970) p. 74. Compare also Nahmanides' words in *Sefer ha-Ge'ullah*, *Kirvei ha-Ramban* I, p. 262. G. D. Cohen, "Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim," *Studies of the Leo Baeck Institute* (New York, 1967) p. 141, asserts that "Nahmanides' treatise on redemption reflects the newer emphasis of the rabbinic circles, of which he was a member, on gematriot, thereby providing a bridge between the Franco-German computations and the indigenously Andalusian literary genre." See also *idem.*, p. 132. I am not aware of usages of gematriot in the writings of the Geronese kabbalists or rabbis.

³²Chavel's edition pp. 7-8; Chavel's translation pp. 15-16 is used.

³³Nahmanides' contrast between קבלה and סברא was obviously influenced by R. Judah ha-Levi's view in *Kuzari* III, 38. See also *ibid.* III, 48; III, 23; I, 79. Compare also to R. Abraham ibn Ezra's statement in his *Commentary* on Exodus 2:22: "כ"ל ספר שלא כתבדו נביאים או חכמים מפי הקבלה, אין לסמוך עליו" A similar though not completely parallel, view can be found also in R. Judah ben Solomon ibn Matka's view of *Kabbalah* versus *Sevarah*: see Colette Sirat, "La Qabbala d'après Juda b. Solomon Ha-Cohen," *Hommages à Georges Vajda* (Louvain, 1980) p. 194. Compare also to Nahmanides' *Sermon on Ecclesiastes*, *Kirvei ha-Ramban* I, p. 197 "The words of Elihu were [kabbalistic] wisdom received from the prophets (whereas) the words of the friends [of Job] are suppositions."

"כי דברי אליהוא חכמה מקובלת מן הנביאים ודברי החברים — סברות."

I have rendered חכמה מקובלת by [kabbalistic] wisdom received because Nahmanides clearly intended to distinguish between the real secret underlying the fate of Job

concerning any of the mystic hints which I write regarding the hidden matters of the Torah, for I do hereby firmly make known to him [the reader] that my words will not be comprehended nor known at all by any reasoning or contemplation, excepting from the mouth of a wise kabbalist (speaking) into the ear of an understanding recipient; reasoning about them is foolishness;³⁴ any unrelated thought brings much damage and withholds the benefit.

Reasoning without reliable inherited tradition is folly; in Nahmanides' view, it is better to confess one's ignorance, as he himself does in his sermon *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*.³⁵

לֹא יִדְעַךְ הַעֲלֵהּ i.e. the secret of transmigration, a pure kabbalistic concept which was exposed by Elihu, and the plain and simplistic view of the friends who understood only רִשְׁעֵי הָעוֹלָם. See *ibid.*, p. 198: "וְהוּא מְזַכֵּר שְׂדֵרָתוֹ חֲכָמָה; כְּלָמֶר מְקֻבְּלָתָּהּ." *ibid.*, p. 199: "כִּי רַבִּיר אֱלִיהוּ דְּבָרִים מְקֻבְּלִים מֵאֲנָשֵׁי תוֹרָה." On Elihu as a kabbalist see *ibid.*, p. 199 and in the *Commentary on Job* pp. 23, 28, and Nahmanides' view in his introduction to the *Commentary on Pentateuch*, ed. and trans. Jacob Newman (Leiden, 1960) p. 25: "For from where should Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite be enabled to reveal unto Israel the secret lore of Behemont and Leviathan and how could Ezekiel come and reveal unto them the secrets of Merkabbah? The explanation is in the verse: 'The King has brought me unto his (secret) chambers' (Song, 1:4), meaning that everything can be learned from the Torah."

יִדְעַךְ מִנֵּי יוֹבֵא אֱלִיהוּ בֶן בְּרַכְאֵל הַבּוּזִי הַגִּלְגָּלִי לְהַרְגִּיל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל סֵתֵיר בְּחִמּוֹת וְלִרְתֹן וּמִנֵּי יוֹבֵא יִחְזָקֵאל הַגִּלְגָּלִי לְהַרְגִּיל לְהַרְגִּיל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל סֵתֵיר מִרְכַּבָּה, אֲלֵא וְהָיָה הַבְּרָאִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרִי, כְּלָמֶר שְׂדֵרָתוֹ לְגַמֵּד מִתּוֹרָה. Nahmanides apparently uses a concept stemming from the *Heikhalot* literature—i.e. חֲדָרֵי תוֹרָה—which seems to be closely related to סֵתֵיר מִרְכַּבָּה. See Idel, "The Concept of the Torah in Heikhalot Literature and Kabbalah," pp. 33-34 note 34. It is important to stress that in Nahmanides' opinion Solomon learned what he knew from the Bible, not with the help of his human wisdom but rather by the wisdom and understanding God gave him; Nahmanides, *ibid.*, p. 25. Therefore esoteric knowledge can be obtained not only by oral tradition which discloses the inner meaning of the Bible, but also from a prophetically inspired person.

Another distinction between סֵתֵיר and traditional ideas occurs also in Nahmanides' *Sermon on Ecclesiastes*, p. 189.

³⁴Compare Ibn Gaon's warnings to the reader of his *Keter Shem Tov, Ma'or va-Shemesh* fol. 45r: "If you have received [the esoteric tradition about] the fifty gates of wisdom and have received from mouth to mouth what I have hinted at...you will understand this. If not, no reasoning will be useful about this matter, I pray you will not be damaged," or to his concise but meaningful statement (*ibid.*, fol. 38v): "If you have not received the esoteric meaning of this matter, close your mouth!" "וְאִם לֹא תִדְעַךְ...אֲלֵא חֲסִידִי" See also *ibid.*, fol. 29r: "וְאִם לֹא קִבַּלְתָּ—כְּלָמֶר פִּיךָ." The contrast between Kabbalah and sevarah was also discussed by R. Isaac of Acre, in his *Me'irat 'Einayim*: see Vajda, *Recherches sur la Philosophie et la Kabbale* (Paris, 1962), pp. 394-395.

³⁵*Kirvei ha-Ramban* I, p. 163:

I see that the Torah is speaking about Ma'aseh Bereshit and the science of creation, but I do not understand where it [i.e. the Torah] is alluding to Ma'aseh Merkavah. However, the supernal Merkavah, which is the gnosis of the Creator,³⁶ is written down in the Torah, whereas concerning the Merkavah of the Palaces, I do not know [where there is] an allusion to it, and, perhaps, there was an oral [esoteric] tradition which [reached] [to the time] when Ezekiel and Isaiah came and linked it [to the biblical verses].

It seems that here is a sincere confession, which testifies to the fragmentary nature of the esoteric tradition handed down to Nahmanides by his predecessors; but, more important, Nahmanides clearly states that a central esoteric subject—i.e. the relation between the lengthy descriptions of the supernal palaces found, according to Nahmanides, in Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Merkavah literature, and the Torah, which is supposed to include all the secrets—was indeed known in remote antiquity—but it was forgotten. This particular loss seems to be only part of a greater loss; when speaking about chiromancy and physiognomy, Nahmanides writes:³⁷

But all these matters and similar ancient sciences³⁸ are true and were received in the hand of the receivers of the Torah; and, when

"אני תמה שאני רואה התורה מדברת במעשה בראשית ובחכמת היצירה אבל אני יודע היכן היא מרמזת מעשה מרכבה. אבל המרכבה העליונה, שהיא ידיעת הבורא, כתובה בתורה היא אבל מרכבה של היכלות אני יודע לזה רמז מן התורה ואולי קבלה על פה היתה. עד דאזא יחזקאל וישעיה ואסמכיהו."

³⁶Nahmanides alludes to the *Sefirot*.

³⁷*Torat ha-Shem Temimah, Kitvei ha-Ramban*, p. 162:

"וכל אלה הדברים וכיצד בהם חכמות ישנות אמתיות הן ומקובלות ביד מקבלי התורה וכשאבדו אבדו החכמות עמנו תשאר זכרם בשבט ביד מעטים ובאו הפילוסופים והכחישום."

Compare to Joshua ibn Shuaib's complaint in his *Commentary* on the beginning of *Terumah* pericope:

"וכל ציור המשכן והמקדש הם רמז לעליתים כענין אילני גן עדן ונהריו כי כלם ציורים לדברים דחניים... ואם בענותינו אבדה ממנו חכמת הענינים למה הם רמזים, אלא מעט מזעיר מן המותט ההוא שהשגנו אנו יודעים כי מה שאבדנו הוא דבר לא יסופר מרוב."

³⁸Chiromancy and physiognomy were, indeed, part of an ancient Jewish tradition which belongs to the *Merkavah* literature: see Scholem, *Sefer Assaf* (Jerusalem, 1957), pp. 459-495 (Hebrew); *idem*, "Ein Fragment zur Physionomik und Chiromantik aus der Spätantiken Jüdischen Esoterik," *Liber Amicorum, Studies in Honour of Prof. Dr. C. J. Bleeker* (Leiden, 1969), pp. 175ff. Nahmanides himself regards these issues as esoteric lore involving the hidden meaning of Genesis 5:1, but he indicates that he did not receive it: "לא זכינו בהם"

we were lost, the sciences were lost with us; only their distorted³⁹ memory remained in the hands of a few, and the philosophers came and denied them.

It is worthwhile to compare this conception of the loss of the Jewish ancient esoteric lore with that of Maimonides' view of the disappearance of the esoteric philosophy from the Jewish tradition.⁴⁰ The difference is clear as regards the content: ancient mysticism versus philosophy.⁴¹ But what is more pertinent to our discussion is Nahmanides' statement that, despite the loss, there are still memories of the ancient lore in the hands of a few, as opposed to Maimonides' unqualified claim that the ancient lore is lost. This esoteric tradition can be learnt from the mouth of the few, whereas the philosophical knowledge cannot be found among the Jews as a living tradition; that is why Maimonides felt himself free to use medieval Aristotelianism in order to reconstruct the allegedly lost Jewish lore. Not so Nahmanides; we cannot use the סודא whenever we do not possess an inner interpretation of the Bible; we must preserve and hide those pieces of the secret doctrine that have reached us.

But even such a careful and dedicated preserver of Kabbalah as Nahmanides could not ensure that some esoteric explanations of biblical verses had not been lost. According to R. Isaac of Acre, Nahmanides did forget such a kabbalistic secret and therefore it has vanished:⁴²

My teacher told me that toward the end of the Rabbi's [i.e. Nahmanides] days, R. Sheshet⁴³ went to him in Acre⁴⁴ and asked him

³⁹בשימוש Perhaps this word is a mistake and the original could be בשימוש—i.e. “the memory of their [magical] use.” Immediately after the translated passage, Nahmanides refers to a Greek man who received from the Jewish pietist in Germany: חסיד אלמאני: the lore of physiognomy, and used it; this man seems to be R. Shabbetai Donnolo. Compare Nahmanides' statement in his *Introduction to the Commentary on the Torah* (Chavel's edition, p. 10):

“השם בן עיב[...]. יתחלק לחיבות של שלוש אותיות לחלוקים אחרים רבים כפי השמוש לבעל הקבלה.”

On the connection between Kabbalah and the Divine Name see above note 10.

⁴⁰See *Guide* I, 71, and Twersky, *Introduction* (note 5 above) pp. 69ff.

⁴¹Chavel, in *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*, p. 162 note 40, already pointed out the difference between the subjects by Maimonides and Nahmanides, but he ignored the conceived divergence between a lost tradition and a lingering one.

⁴²*Me'irat 'Einayim*, Munich Ms 17 fol. 22v:

“אמר לי מורי כי באחרית ימי הרב הלך רב ששת אליו לעבו תשאל הסוד ואמר כי לא חיד וזכר בו כי אמר שהיה סומך בבורותו על חדרו ולא השגיח לרמח אותו.”

Indeed, R. Isaac did not mention any kabbalistic explanation on this verse.

⁴³On this kabbalist see Scholem, *The Theory of Transmigration*, pp. 140-150.

the secret [explanation] of the giants in Genesis and Nahmanides said [to him] that he remembered it no longer since, he said, in his youth he was confident of his sharpness, and he did not care to hint it [i.e. the secret] [in writing].

This evidence corroborates our analysis of Nahmanides' discussion of the explanation of incest: he was not ready to innovate a kabbalistic interpretation when he had not received such a tradition, and even when he was sure that a kabbalistic meaning existed, he would not dare to speculate on the matter.⁴⁵

III

At this point let us summarize the most noteworthy features of Nahmanides' conception of the nature of Kabbalah: It is a limited corpus of secrets consisting of theosophic explanations of biblical verses, primarily the meaning of the commandments; this corpus was received by Moses and transmitted orally until Nahmanides,⁴⁶ who tried to keep it, as did

⁴⁴R. Isaac of Acre seems to be the single kabbalist who mentioned this incident, and this fact apparently points to a tradition originating in Acre, R. Isaac's native city.

⁴⁵This interpretation of Nahmanides' concept of Kabbalah differs from the way Jacob Katz views Nahmanides. According to him, Nahmanides' reticence in dealing with Kabbalah was caused by his unwillingness to interfere with halakhic matters; see Katz, "Halakhah and Kabbalah—First Contacts," *Yitzhak F. Baer Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem, 1980) p. 171; see also p. 169, where Katz seems to imply that Nahmanides' approach to the unfolding of kabbalistic secrets was through the combination of letters. Another view of Nahmanides' Kabbalah seems to be held by Amos Funkenstein, who uses such phrases as "kabbalist reading" or "mystical-theosophical exegesis" when he discusses Nahmanides' interpretation of the Pentateuch; see "Nahmanides' Reading of History," *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, eds. Josef Dan and Frank Talmage (Cambridge, Mass., 1982) p. 134. These terms fit the zoharic perception of the Torah and its exegesis, rather than Nahmanides'. In light of our discussion here, it seems doubtful whether Nahmanides had a kabbalistic hermeneutical method of his own. In another discussion (*ibid.*, p. 146 note 20), Funkenstein asserts that "Nahmanides developed his doctrine of *ta'amei ha-mizvot* in contraposition to Maimonides," apparently implying that Nahmanides innovated the kabbalistic interpretations of commandments occurring in his works. For a similar interdiction against the innovation of secret interpretations of classical texts, see R. Meir Abulafia's passage discussed by B. Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982) p. 58.

⁴⁶Compare Isaac Luria's perception of Nahmanides as the last genuine kabbalist; it is a strange stroke of historical irony that almost all the kabbalistic works recommended by Luria were written after Nahmanides' death and can be described as parts of the "innovative kabbalah."

secrets they learned from their teachers, writing at the end of the thirteenth century and at the beginning of the fourteenth a series of commentaries on the Torah or on Nahmanides' hints to the secrets included in the Torah.

We can distinguish two main attitudes toward Nahmanides' Kabbalah in this literature. Some of the kabbalists remained faithful to the esoteric tradition they inherited and conscientiously avoided the use of other kinds of Kabbalah which were totally or partially alien to the spirit of Nahmanides' thought. This is the way R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon and R. Joshua ibn Shuaib deal with the secrets they explain in their earlier works. The others, such as Bahya ben Asher, immediately integrated into their works the various kabbalistic trends that flourished in the second half of the thirteenth century. Moreover, even the most devoted disciples of Nahmanides, such as R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon and R. Joshua ibn Shuaib, changed their minds in their later works, where the influence of new kabbalistic thought can easily be detected. It seems that we face a strange paradox: the kabbalistic tradition represented by such eminent scholars as Nahmanides, R. Solomon ibn Adret and R. Yom Tov Ashvili, who seemingly preserved ancient pieces of esoteric thought, succumbed to new, strange, even outrageous forms of Kabbalah, espoused by such "notorious" figures as R. Moses de Leon or R. Abraham Abulafia. How was it possible that the thought of these authors, whose position in Jewish society could not even be compared to Ibn Adret's, could prevail despite his fierce attack on their ways of thought⁵⁰ and even infiltrate the very stronghold of Nahmanides' school—the students of Ibn Adret. It seems that the answer is simple enough: the battle was lost even before it began. The authority of distinguished talmudists could not save a waning kabbalistic way of thought⁵¹ from the assault of such creative people as Moses de Leon, Gikatilla or Abulafia, even if their prestige in the talmudic field was negligible. I would like to elaborate upon what seem to

Against the Study of Kabbalah Before the Age of Forty," *AJS Review* V (1980) p. 10 note 53 (Hebrew).

⁵⁰See Ibn Adret's *Responsa* I, 548; a detailed discussion of parts of this important document will be the subject of another study. See also Judah Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar" in *The Messianic Idea in Israel—Eighty Years of Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem, 1982) p. 123 note 155 (Hebrew).

⁵¹Even the students of Ibn Adret did not always understand the kabbalistic traditions they received. See Ibn Shuaib's *Be'ur* on Nahmanides' *Secrets* on Genesis 33:20 (fol. 21v): "לא נתחדד לי מה ששמעתי בזה הכונה." *Ibid.*, on Genesis 38:8: "ענין היבום נפלא מאד והנה הרב קיצר בו מאד כדרכו ולא רמז בו אלא מעט ויש בו כמה ענינים צריכים באור ואינו מקובל בידים...ואם כלל האמת מקובל בידים."

presumably his predecessors, as an esoteric teaching;⁴⁷ and its content cannot, and should not, be deducted by reasoning or supposition.

This conception of Kabbalah and its specific content were handed down by Nahmanides to his students R. Solomon ibn Adret, R. Yom Tov Ashvili, R. Isaac ben Todros, and R. David ha-Kohen.⁴⁸ Faithful to their master, they avoided the dissemination of their kabbalistic secrets by writing, and transmitted them orally to their own students—R Shem Tov ibn Gaon, R. Bahya ben Asher, R. Joshua ibn Shuaib, R. Meir ibn Avi Sahula. These students began to disclose, in a cautious way, a part⁴⁹ of the

⁴⁷Compare to Nahmanides' statement in his *Sermon on Ecclesiastes*, *Kitvei ha-Ramban* I, p. 180: "ויבינו מה שהם חכמה חזקה כלומר סוד שאסור לפרשו"; cf. note 3 above. On Nahmanides' careful use of the term סוד see Scholem, *Ursprung*, p. 343, and his *Reshit ha-Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1948), p. 151.

⁴⁸See Idel, "The Evil Thought of Deity," *Tarbiz* XLIX (1980), p. 360 note 11 (Hebrew).

⁴⁹It is worthwhile to cite here R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon's remark in his *Baddei Aron*, Ms Paris 850 fol. 17r:

Since I stood in the presence of my masters and sat in their [secret] council, I did not reveal to flesh and blood [i.e. to man] until now the year 75 of the sixth millennium (= 1315), and I carved these things on the [writing] table, in order that my spirit and heart will rest...for who can tell me what will occur after me.

מאז עמדתי במעמד רבותי נני וישבתי בסודם, לא גיליתי לבשר דם עד היום שנת ארבע מאות השש שחקקתי אלה הדברים על לוח, למען ינוח רוחי ולבבי...כי במה שיהיה מי יגיד לי.

After *Keter Shem Tov*, *Baddei Aron* yet contains explanations of secrets not explained in the prior work. This "transgression" was, at least partially, made possible by the death of the teachers; the author confesses shortly after the above quoted passage:

I have found responsa of the Gaonim and of the ancient kabbalists on the titles, the points [i.e. the vocalization signs] and [melodical] accents, after the death of my masters, and perhaps it will be right in the eyes of God that I shall follow the right path [when dealing with] them. Then I shall announce my opinion [on them]...and since I had not received from my masters their words, I closed the door in their faces (Paris BN, Ms Heb. p. 50 f. 17r-v).

"מצאתי תשובות הגאונים ומקובלים קדמונים בענין התגים והנקודות והטעמים אור שנתפזר רבותי ואולי יישר בעיני האלהים ואדריך בהם על הדרך הישר ואז אודיע דעתי...ולפי שלא קבלתי מרבותי נני דבריהם, סגרתי הדלת בפניהם."

We learn from this significant passage that a) there were kabbalistic issues which Ibn Gaon did not receive from his masters; b) he began to learn them after his masters' death; and c) his study of these subjects was based only on written sources, without any living tradition. See also Idel, "On the History of the Interdiction

me to be the four main features of Nahmanides' thought which, when compared to his contemporary and younger kabbalistic thinkers, will reveal the insufficiency of Nahmanides' Kabbalah for his age.

a) Nahmanides intended to keep his kabbalistic tradition limited to his intimate students, and he succeeded.⁵² These students even imposed further restrictions on handing down Kabbalah: part of the secrets should not be revealed, according to one of these restrictions, even to a kabbalist, until he attained the age of forty.⁵³ The commentaries on Nahmanides' secrets written by authors belonging to his school disclosed only a part of the meanings of these secrets,⁵⁴ and this was often done in a veiled and obscure jargon. This fact had already been noted in the fourteenth century by R. Nissim of Gerona, who is quoted thus by his student, R. Isaac bar Sheshet:⁵⁵

Nahmanides, his memory be blessed, has involved himself too much in his believing in that Kabbalah, but I shall not involve myself in this science because I did not receive it from a learned kabbalist, even if I have seen the commentaries on Nahmanides' secrets; [because] even they do not reveal the principles of that science, but they reveal a span and obscure several spans more and it is easy to err in one of these matters; therefore I chose not to engage in secrets.

In the eyes of such an eminent figures as R. Nissim, already in the first half of the fourteenth century, in the geographical area in which Nahmanides flourished, Kabbalah was a sealed book.⁵⁶ As we know, R. Nissim was

⁵²See Idel, "History of the Interdictions," pp. 9-10.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁵Ribash, *Responsa*, no. 156:

"יזכר הדעתך מה שאמר לי ביחוד מורי הרב רבינו נסים ז"ל כי הרבה יותר מדאי תקע עצמו הרמב"ן ז"ל להאמין בענין הקבלה ההיא ולזה איני תוקע עצמי באותה החכמה אחר שלא קבלתי מפי מקובל חכם ואם ראיתי ביאורים על סודות הרמב"ן ז"ל וגם הם אינם מגלים שרשי החכמה ההיא ומגלים טפח ומכסים כמה טפחים וקורב לשעות בדבר מהם. לכן בחרתי לבל יהיה לי עסק בגסתרות."

⁵⁶It would be interesting to compare the fate of Nahmanides' kabbalistic tradition to that of R. Isaac ibn Latif's thought. The latter's irksome esoteric language is the main cause of the scarce influence of his books on the Kabbalah. It is highly significant that Ribash dealt with Ibn Latif's works immediately after the passage on Nahmanides' Kabbalah quoted above, though the link between these discussions is not the issue of esotericism. Ribash nevertheless wrote about two of Ibn Latif's books: "[in *Sha'ar ha-Shamaim* there are] few things which he conceals saying: Understand that, but in his book you hinted at [i.e. *Zurat ha-Olam*] all his words are obscure. No one can understand them...and in this obscure book he

not a kabbalist, and perhaps he never intended to be one; but his diagnosis is accurate enough and convincingly shows that Nahmanides indeed succeeded in his effort to limit the transmission of his secrets. But even a kabbalist, writing in the 1290s, could not decode Nahmanides; an anonymous author who wrote a commentary on Nahmanides' secrets, apparently without receiving any oral tradition from Nahmanides' school, completely misunderstood his hints.⁵⁷

In the same years when Nahmanides' disciples were so zealous in hiding their master's Kabbalah, Moses de Leon, Joseph Gikatilla and Abraham Abulafia were writing the kabbalistic handbooks which were the foundation of the later Kabbalah. Moses de Leon's Hebrew writings, parts of the *Zohar*, *Ginnat Egoz* and *Sha'arei Oraḥ, Or ha-Sekhel* and *Ḥayei ha-'Olam ha-Ba* explain the principles of their authors' thought; some of them are systematic books that remain to this day the most famous kabbalistic textbooks. Now whoever could read Hebrew could learn Kabbalah, מפי ספרים ולא מפי סופרים. Esotericism was no longer a meaningful obstacle. The above-mentioned kabbalists were not the first to elaborate upon kabbalistic matters in writing; the Geronese kabbalists wrote lengthy treatises as early as the first half of the thirteenth century; but we can sense that they hesitated to reveal all their kabbalistic traditions, and their booklets are only rarely systematic works that could become useful manuals.

b) Nahmanides' kabbalistic tradition is fragmentary and deals especially with the secrets of the commandments. The theosophy of Nahmanides is not clear, and no systematic discussion of it can be found in his writings. But already in his time, in other circles, both the kabbalistic theory of the commandments and the kabbalistic theosophy were established literary genres: R. Isaac the Blind, R. Ezra of Gerona, and, to a lesser extent, R. Azriel wrote explanations on the kabbalistic meaning of the commandments, supplying Nahmanides' students with important ideas they could not find in their own tradition or which were occasionally preferred even when an existing tradition could be traced to Nahmanides himself. At the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth, a large kabbalistic literature emerged, the single aim of which was the explanation of the meaning of the commandments; the books belonging to this expanding genre deal with each one of the command-

mentions the ten sefirot but not in the way of Nahmanides' Kabbalah or [that] of his followers."

⁵⁷See Idel, "An Unknown Commentary on the Secrets of Nahmanides," *Daat*, 2-3 (1979), pp. 121-126 (Hebrew).

ments, and their total length amounts to approximately a thousand folios. Two other kabbalistic genres—the exposition of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and the commentaries on the ten sefirot, which include meticulous discussions on the process of emanation within the Divinity—began with R. Isaac the Blind and the Geronese kabbalistic school; once again, the late thirteenth century kabbalists widened these discussions and offered complete pictures of the whole process of emanation, which could not be found in Nahmanides' works.⁵⁸

As far as I know, there was only one significant attempt made to supply, on the basis of Nahmanides' Kabbalah, a systematic description of his theosophy and his commandment theory; and that is *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*. In the third decade of the fourteenth century, when almost all of Nahmanides' disciples were already immersed in kabbalistic speculations alien to their master's thought, an anonymous kabbalist, who apparently was not a student of Ibn Idret or R. Isaac Todros,⁵⁹ broke the irksome style of hints and allusions so delicately cultivated in Nahmanides' school and explained, in a carefully written book, some of the tenets of this school. This work is no mere commentary dealing with the kabbalistic subjects according to the biblical order of verses; it is a masterfully arranged book which uses Nahmanides and some of his commentators⁶⁰ in order to attack the mythical Kabbalah which had become so strong since the dissemination of the *Zohar*.⁶¹ But despite the

⁵⁸A clear example of the way the late thirteenth-century kabbalists from the circle of the *Zohar*'s author used earlier ideas which had previously been presented as innovations and turned them into the cornerstones of their thought is the metamorphosis of R. Jacob ben Sheshet's passage in *Sefer ha-Emunah veha-Bitahon*, ch. V, on the possibility of changing the meaning of words in the Torah by a shift in their vocalizations; R. Jacob says that it is his own innovation—"חדשתי". Nevertheless this idea occurs time and again in later Kabbalah; see Idel, "The Commentary on the Ten Sefirot by R. Joseph of Shoshan ha-Birah and Fragments from His Other Works," *Alei Sefer* VI-VII (1979), p. 75 note 15. See also Vajda, *Recherches*, p. 44 note 1, and Scholem, *Ursprung*, p. 343.

⁵⁹See Gottlieb, *Kabbalah*, pp. 249-250.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 250-259.

⁶¹Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 317ff. It may be important to point out the fact that in *Ma'arekhet*, fol. 110v, we can find a phrase peculiar to R. Joseph from Shoshan ha-Birah's style: "להשתמש בשרבישו של מלך הכבוד". This phrase occurs several times in R. Joseph's, *Commentary on Mizvot*, and despite its older source (e.g. *Midrash Tehilim*, xxi) it may be regarded as evidence of a possible influence on the anonymous author of *Ma'arekhet*.

success of *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*,⁶² it came too late; the zoharic Kabbalah was then at its apogee, Nahmanides' Kabbalah at its low ebb. Its popularity notwithstanding, this book could not change the direction of development; ironically enough, the two most important commentaries on *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, including the only printed one, were written by kabbalists influenced by the new kabbalistic trends: R. Reuben Zarfati wrote a commentary in the fourteenth century that was influenced by Abraham Abulafia,⁶³ whereas R. Judah Hayyat, author of *Minhat Yehudah*, was a fervent admirer of the zoharic literature, which he used in order to explain the text of *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*. It is important to note that this book became a kabbalistic classic only because its author ignored the esoteric vein of his sources.

c) The desertion from Nahmanides' camp implies more than a change in allegiance; it represents the preference for a creative and vigorous emerging Kabbalah over a fading and waning structure of thought. It seems that Nahmanides, though conscious of the problems and the quandaries of the Spanish Jew, hesitated to present openly the Kabbalah as an ultimate answer. It is clear that he himself did not accept philosophy as an adequate interpretation of Judaism; nevertheless, he undertook no serious and complete critique of it as a harmful way of thought. His attitude toward philosophy is ambiguous, while his position in the controversy on Maimonides' works was moderate, even sympathetic. He was clearly, and at times deeply, influenced by R. Judah ha-Levi⁶⁴ and R. Abraham bar Hiyya. Similar intellectual positions were held by Bahya ben Asher and R. Solomon ibn Adret. The former, in his *Commentary on the Torah*, included allegory as a legitimate mode of exegesis, whereas Ibn Adret's *Commentary* on the talmudic *Aggadah* is based on the contemporary allegorical way of thought. Another eminent scholar, R. Yom Tov Ashvili, though also a kabbalist, defended Maimonides' views against Nahmanides' "misunderstandings." Taking this moderate attitude toward philosophy, Nahmanides' school did not differ from the earlier Geronese position: both R. Ezra and R. Azriel used Neoplatonic thought in their kabbalistic writings; but a different attitude towards philosophy seems to emerge at the end of the first half of the thirteenth century; R. Jacob ben Sheshet clearly rejects philosophical views in two of his books, whereas R. Meshullam Depiera fiercely attacks Maimonides in some of

⁶²See Scholem, "Problems of the Book *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* and its Commentators," *Qiryat Sefer* xxi (1944-5), pp. 284-295.

⁶³See Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," pp. 27, 90, 174.

⁶⁴See Scholem, *Ursprung*, pp. 362-364 note 97.

his poems. In the second part of the thirteenth century, philosophy was increasingly combatted by such kabbalists as Moses of Burgos,⁶⁵ Moses de Leon,⁶⁶ Abraham Abulafia,⁶⁷ or Isaac of Acre.⁶⁸ Only when a certain denigration of philosophy had been achieved could Kabbalah be convincingly presented as a complete alternative.

Nahmanides attempted to point out the fact that there are kabbalistic secrets different from the allegorical explanations cultivated by philosophers; but he did not disclose them. It seems that hinting without revealing was an insufficient strategy; in contrast to this hesitant position, Moses de Leon, Abraham Abulafia, and Joseph of Shushan ha-Birah generally took a clear, and negative, attitude towards philosophy and also presented audacious kabbalistic systems that left philosophy, according to their views, only an insignificant role in Jewish culture.

d) The last and most important difference between Nahmanides' view of Kabbalah and that of R. Moses de Leon and R. Abraham Abulafia is their perceptions of the nature of the Torah. According to Nahmanides, a limited corpus of secrets had been transmitted esoterically and could not be expanded. There is an esoteric system, part of which has been lost, and this is the single authoritative kabbalistic explanation of the Torah. When Nahmanides provides a possible kabbalistic explanation on a subject in which he had not received a true kabbalistic tradition, he does not reveal it but rather hints at it by the tantalizing phrase *המשכיל יבין*. When he himself dared to fill a gap in the kabbalistic tradition he had received, his words were clearer—but unauthoritative.⁶⁹ This is the trap Nahmanides' Kabbalah fell into: when authoritative, it was enigmatic; when clear, it was unauthoritative. The creative forces Nahmanides was blessed with were deliberately directed to other areas: exegesis, halakhah, polemics.⁷⁰

⁶⁵See Scholem, "An Inquiry in the Kabbala of R. Isaac ben Jacob Hacohen," *Tarbiz* 3 (1932) p. 263.

⁶⁶Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1967), p. 203.

⁶⁷See Idel, *History of the Interdiction*, pp. 16-18; Henoch, *Nahmanides—Philosopher and Mystic* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1978) pp. 31-32 and the notes there.

⁶⁸See Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah* p. 174 (Hebrew).

⁶⁹See above Nahmanides' attempt to provide a kabbalistic explanation of incest relationships and compare to R. Joshua ibn Shuaib's commentary on Deuteronomy 19:17: "I did not hear anything on it but only as probable (explanation)...and, indeed, there are doubts [about it]." See also Nahmanides' statement in *Sefer ha-Ge'ulah* (*Kirvei ha-Ramban* I, p. 290):

שדברנו בקץ דברי שמה ואיפשר ואין אצלנו בו דבר ראוי לגזור עליו גזרה אמתית ולאמר
בו מאמר חלול שהוא ככה. כי אין את נביאים לאמר כן בסודות האלהיים.

⁷⁰For a differing evaluation of the focus of Nahmanides' literary activity see Funkenstein, "Nahmanides' Reading of History," p. 142.

A perusal of the lengthy kabbalistic testimonies of Moses de Leon and Abraham Abulafia reveals that their creative religious imagination turned primarily to innovations in the field of Kabbalah. Whatever the differences between their brands of Kabbalah, they shared a common, and most significant, assumption: Torah has more than one kabbalistic meaning, or, to put it bluntly, the Torah has as many kabbalistic meanings as the kabbalist is able to find in it. Zoharic Kabbalah introduced the large-scale use of symbolistic interpretation, and virtually each biblical verse was interpreted in more than one way.⁷¹ Abraham Abulafia, using the techniques of gematria and letter combinations—צירוף אותיות—explains a single verse in various directions.⁷² The role of received kabbalistic traditions was reduced;⁷³ whoever knew the techniques of interpretation could take part in disclosing the infinite, mystical dimension of the Torah. The techniques were amply described by these kabbalists, who wrote, as we have already mentioned, kabbalistic manuals. Torah turned into an "open book." Everyone had the ability and, according to these kabbalists, the obligation to discover new facets. The religious imagination, often the religious fantasy, received its supreme legitimization. Each new interpretation of the Zohar is presented by Gikatilla or Abulafia as an authoritative view, without any sign of hesitation; the inhibitions of a talmudic scholar of the rank of Nahmanides seem unknown to them.

⁷¹Though R. Moses de Leon and the Zohar mention only one method of kabbalistic interpretation—סוד—this type of interpretation was applied several times to the same biblical verse.

⁷²See Idel, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 224-232.

⁷³It may be interesting to stress that the same kabbalists who used the first elaborate hermeneutical methods, such as Abraham Abulafia and the Zohar, also highly regard revelation as a way of receiving Kabbalah. For a discussion of the ancient connection between decoding Torah and mysticism see Idel, "The Concept of the Torah in Heikhalot Literature and Kabbalah," pp. 33-38 (Hebrew). The combination of privately revealed secrets with the large-scale use of hermeneutical methods in order to interpret the Torah kabbalistically diminished the importance of inherited kabbalistic traditions. On the sharp difference between Nahmanides' approach to Kabbalah and Abulafia's claim of revelation and innovation, see Henoch, *Nachmanides*, p. 28 note 51, where an interesting quotation from Recanati has also been adduced.

It may be mentioned that, though the zoharic literature includes obvious references to the existence of previous esoteric traditions and the need for concealing certain kabbalistic subjects, the *Zohar* reveals much more than it conceals; see Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar," pp. 134-145.

When faced with such an outburst, the “timid” Kabbalah of Nahmanides’ school was doomed to collapse. It could not provide the complete answer to the quandary the Maimonidean theology caused in Spanish Jewry: belief in the utmost spirituality of G-d, versus the traditional theology stemming from the Heikhalot literature’s conception of Shi’ur Qomah.⁷⁴ This answer was supplied by the zoharic theosophy, which was immediately accepted and remained the main kabbalistic theosophy for centuries.

Nahmanides helped, indirectly, the smooth reception of the Zohar in two ways: a) his great authority helped Kabbalah to attain a respectable position in various Jewish circles,⁷⁵ and b) the Kabbalah Nahmanides hinted at was vague enough not to obstruct recognition of zoharic Kabbalah as the true Kabbalah and the true answer to the challenge of philosophy.⁷⁶

It is curious to see how what seemingly is a true old tradition can wane because of its tendency to keep its secrets for the few, whereas new and amazing types of Kabbalah come to be regarded as old esoteric traditions.

The kabbalistic thought Nahmanides represents collapsed because it refused to use the forces inherent in the creative religious imagination,

⁷⁴Compare R. Meshullam Dapiera’s lines on his teachers, R. Ezra, R. Azriel and Nahmanides: “They know the size of their creator but they stopped their words out of the fear of the heretics.” “הם ידעו אל יצרם שער אבל – מלים לידאח כופרים ענין.” H. Brody, “Poems of Mesullam ben Selomo da Piera,” *Studies of the Research Institute for Hebrew Poetry in Jerusalem* (Berlin/Jerusalem, 1938) IV, p. 104 to the anthropomorphism developed in the Zohar. The Zohar was not afraid of “heretics”—who in R. Meshullam’s terminology would seem to be the philosophers. Compare also to R. Meshullam’s statement in another poem (*ibid.*, p. 18):

The wise men of the time received “rashei perakim” [notes] and learned [them] from the mouth of scholars. They knew the secrets though they did not stand in the council [of God]—They knew the form [of God] though they did not measure.

It is obvious that he hints to his teachers, who learned from a living tradition the secrets of *Shi’ur Komah* hinted at in the two quotations.

⁷⁵See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 50.

⁷⁶Nahmanides’ thought had deeply influenced the zoharic eschatology; his *She’ar ha-Gemul* provided a new answer to the Maimonidean eschatology, and this answer was accepted by both kabbalists—including the Zohar itself—and Jewish philosophers who were not adepts of the Maimonidean philosophy like R. Hasdai Crescas and R. Simeon ben Zeman Duran; see for example Sara Klein-Braslavy, “*Gan Eden et Gehinnom dans le Système de Hasdai Crescas*,” *Hommages à Georges Vajda* (Louvain, 1980), pp. 263-278.

forces that zoharic Kabbalah and Abulafia strongly used;⁷⁷ but these types of Kabbalah began a process of departing from the halakhic tradition, and the thought of *Ra'aya Mehemna*, *Tiqqunei Zohar*, and *Sefer ha-Qanah veba-Peliah* is clear witness of this process; it will end in the most violent religious crisis Judaism has known: Sabbateanism. The divorce of esoteric kabbalistic thought of Nahmanides from its creative, innovative forces was fatal for this kabbalistic tradition; but, in the realm of religion, imagination without tradition is prone to produce abortive results. Nahmanides probably realized the last danger; but he seems to have ignored the first one when he wrote: "We have no kabbalistic tradition on this."

The success of the conservative trend of Nahmanides' school—its faithfulness to its tenets—was its failure; the failure of the innovative Kabbalah was inherent even in its complete victory over the conservative elements.

⁷⁷Compare, for example, Nahmanides' accurate quotation of an old myth to the four metamorphoses of the same myth in Moses de Leon's writings; the latter was not able to quote exactly even his own innovations. See Idel, "The Journey to Paradise: The Jewish Transformations of a Greek Mythological Motif," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* II (1982), pp. 7-16, especially p. 16 (Hebrew).

Rabbi Azriel and Nahmanides:
Two Views of the Fall of Man
Bezalel Safran

INTEREST IN THE diverse interpretations of Adam's sin by Rabbi Azriel¹ and Nahmanides,² two Kabbalists in thirteenth-century Gerona, stems from a general interest in diverse medieval Jewish notions of the ideal human type.

To identify for a given writer the state from which Adam fell is to reconstruct that writer's concept of the ideal human being and the ideal human condition. This ideal will be found to be all-pervasive in that writer's thought system. Thus, the messianic period will be viewed as a restoration of Adam's condition before the Fall,³ and for the period between the beginning and the End—the here and now—a program will be conceived to retrieve the lost ideal. At a minimum, such a scheme provides a helpful perspective on a writer. At best, it may provide the key to his thought.

There is special fascination in applying this construct to Rabbi Azriel and Nahmanides. Where a priori, we might have expected a consensus, if not unanimity; in fact, we find total divergence.

I

To reconstruct R. Azriel's notion of Adam's sin our main source is his letter to Bourgos.⁴ Since this is a Kabbalistic document, i.e. a document of סתרי תורה, esoteric teaching, it is written in a fragmented, contradictory

¹On R. Azriel see I. Tishby in *Zion* 2 (1944), pp. 178-185; *idem* in *Sinai* 16 (1945), 159-78, now reprinted in I. Tishby, *Hikrei Kabbalah u-Shluhotiha* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 3-30.

²The editions of Nahmanides' works used in the preparation of this article are *Peirush ha-Ramban al ha-Torah*, ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1959), 2 volumes (henceforth *Peirush*) and *Kirvei Ramban* (Jerusalem, 1954), 2 volumes (henceforth *Kirvei*).

³On the restorative aspect of messianism see G. Scholem, "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea," *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, (New York, 1971), pp. 1-4.

⁴*Madaei ha-Yahadut II* (1927), pp. 233-240 (henceforth "Letter to Bourgos").

and allusive manner in order to conform to the Talmudic requirements regarding the transmission of such knowledge.⁵ It would be impossible to comprehend the document without correlating it with other writings by R. Azriel: his Commentary on the Ten Sephirot,⁶ his Commentary on Talmudic Aggadah,⁷ and other short writings.⁸ R. Azriel's correspondents in Bourgos, already initiated into Kabbalah and therefore familiar with R. Azriel's mode of expression, would presumably have no difficulty in understanding the master.

Before his Fall, says R. Azriel, Adam was not human in the sense we recognize human beings after the Fall. He was incorporeal, a spiritual being consisting exclusively of three types of souls which drew their sustenance correspondingly from the three supernal sephirot, Keter, Hokmah and Binah.⁹

Human will existed only potentially. That potential will should ideally have been renounced;¹⁰ Adam would have then sustained his communion

⁵Esoteric communication of kabbalistic materials is alluded to by R. Asher ben David in his "Sod ha-Shevua," *Ha-Segula*, No. 13, p. 20. In effect, the esoteric method for communicating philosophic materials is transferred to Kabbalah. For an account of the method for esoteric writing employed by Maimonides and Maimonidean writers, see Lawrence Kaplan, "Rationalism and Rabbinic Culture in Sixteenth Century Eastern Europe" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1975), pp. 181-186. Contradiction, scattering and fragmentation, allusion and equivocal terms are some of the devices of esoteric writing.

⁶*Peirush Eser Sephirot* (Berlin, 1850), pp. 2a-5b (henceforth *Peirush Eser Sephirot*).

⁷*Peirush ha-Aggadot le-Rabbi Azriel*, ed. I. Tishbi (Jerusalem, 1945; henceforth *Peirush ha-Aggadot*).

⁸G. Scholem, "Seridim Hadashim mi-Kitvei R. Azriel mi-Gerona," in *Sefer Zikaron le-Asher Gulack veli-Shemuel Klein* (Jerusalem, 1942), pp. 201-222 (henceforth "Seridim").

⁹See "Letter to Bourgos," p. 234 (line 21) to p. 235 (line 11); p. 236 (line 30) to p. 237 (line 19). This material could have been presented in a unified fashion. There are, in fact, overlaps between the two sections. It is fragmented because that is how *seridim* are presented (see note 5). On *אימון* and *אמן*, *אמן*, see, *Peirush*, p. 24, n. 3. R. Azriel identifies Adam, Eve, and progeny with Keter, Hokmah and Binah respectively. That the power of the respective sephirot is expressed in different faculties of the person is indicated in *Peirush Eser Sephirot*, 3b. The three highest sephirot correspond *גור* *רוח*, *נפש*, *חיה*, i.e., to three souls, hence the existence of Adam, Eve and their progeny was totally spiritual. The lower sephirot correspond to increasingly more physical faculties, but these are not operational until much later, in consequence of the Fall.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 236 (line 21)

ואדם נברא יחיד... והי' ראוי שידי' רצון אחד... ושלשתם רצון אחד שלכך הי' גלם אחד כדי שיתקים רצון העליון בשלשתם בשוה

with the highest levels of divinity.¹¹ But that was not to be, and therein consisted the fall of man. Instead of renunciation, "levelling" his will so that it accord with the supernal Will, he asserted it, and thereby differentiated himself from his source.¹²

Adam was given ample opportunity to renounce his will in order to achieve the intended closeness with divinity. He thus maintained his incorporeal existence for two thousand years. These are the 2,000 years or 974 generations prior to Creation, which were governed by the primordial Torah, rooted in Hokmah, a spiritual Torah which corresponded to Adam's own spiritual makeup.¹³

Repeated failures made it clear, however, that Adam could not "level" his will as a purely spiritual being, oriented exclusively by the three highest sephirot, regulated exclusively by a purely spiritual Torah. He was therefore endowed with a physical body, was given the Torah that we know, not the primordial one, and was oriented by the seven lower sephirot.¹⁴ These lower sephirot were not intrinsic to the Ensof, for they

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 235 (line 1)

ומן הרצון עצמו שהי' מתחייב, היה זוכה אסתי' מכין להשלמת האחרון

Ibid., p. 236 (line 31)

וכי שינהיג עצמו בכח שיה מכל צד עשאו גלם שיה בכל צד להיות אב או אם או תולדה או שלשתם ראוים להיות מכל צד שיש בו שלא יהי' יתרון זה על זה

The alternative given in this last passage is for Adam, Eve and their progeny either to be distinct as אב, אם, and תולדה (see their meaning in "Seridim," p. 216), or to level any excess or distinction vis-a-vis each other. This latter passage is parallel to the one cited formerly in this note, וזמן הרצון עצמו.

¹²I. Tishbi, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, vol. II (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 291.

¹³*Peirush ha-Aggadot*, 101-102. Following this text closely shows that the following notions are equated. The 974 generations preceding creation are equated with the 2,000 years preceding creation, which are in turn identified with שנים שאין שני תהו and סדר זמנים קדם לכן, all of which are rooted in the sephirah Hokmah. This was the "time" before time, when the primordial Torah was operating, and during which God was creating worlds and destroying them. On Adam's relation to this milieu see the next note.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 236 (line 33)

וכי שינהיג עצמו בכח שיה מכל צד עשאו גלם שיה בכל צד להיות אב או אם או תולדה או שלשתם ארבע דורות שקמטו בעצמם להבראות קדם שנברא העולם

This passage is a telling example of R. Azriel's esoteric method of writing. His reference to the aggadic account of 974 generations wiped out prior to creation is at first glance incongruous. Only when correlated with *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, pp. 101-102, is the allusion clarified. What is being said here is that Adam should be cast into the spiritual milieu indicated by this aggadah (see the previous note). R. Azriel's understanding is that worlds were created and destroyed because of the assertiveness of the Adams who refused to renounce their will. Finally, people were

were not there from the primeval beginning as were the first three.¹⁵ The lower sephirot were emanated for the sake of regulating the mundane world, and even contain corporeal elements.¹⁶

The messianic period for R. Azriel is a restoration of the human being to the three supernal sephirot. The "messianic days" have no temporal, no earthly or physical dimension. They occur for the individual soul after it passes from the World of Souls to the World of Spirits, from the World of

at last endowed with a body, in addition to their soul, in order to facilitate the goal of *שפל ורם*, the levelling of all differentiated existence. (That *שפל ורם* may apply to the sephirotic world as well may be inferred from *Peirush Eser Sefirot*, p. 2b.) What is presumably entailed in the new corporeal plan for Adam's creation is a pedagogic consideration. Rather than require renunciation of will immediately (as in the case of the spiritual beings created initially), people are now permitted to indulge their selfish will until they realize it is to no avail and are then willing to phase it out, to level it, gradually, through *devekut*.

In becoming physical, Adam is no longer oriented by the supernal sephirot, but rather by the seven lower ones. *Ibid.*, p. 235 (line 5).

ואם ה' רצון שלשתם אחד...לא ה' אדם צריך להתנהג בשאר המדות אלא כפי הרצון הנעלם המנהיג. ה' ראו להתקיים בלא אכילה ושתייה ואף לחיות לעולם ה' ראו

וכיון שחטא באומן, נקנסה מיתתו...תנן בכל דרכי התמורות *Ibid.*, line 9
הם שבע, p. 213, "Seridim," p. 211. That *שבע תמורות* refers to the seven sephirot can be seen from "Seridim," p. 211. *שבע תמורות* See also the complementary passage, *ibid.*, p. 211. *שבע תמורות* מדות השבע תמורות שד"ח יס סדר סליחה. See I. Tishby's comment on *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, p. 101, n. 3.

That the corporeal Adam was given the Torah we have now, though he was guided previously by a spiritual Torah, can be inferred from the discussion in *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, where on p. 10, line 25 through p. 102, line 2, R. Azriel speaks of a primordial Torah and on p. 98 (line 16) speaks of *תשובה* operating before creation. Yet on p. 102 (lines 14-15) he speaks of a lack of a Torah and of *תשובה*. The apparent discrepancy is resolved by what follows in lines 15-17: the creation of a new, mundane world, with a "mundane" Torah. The theme is repeated in "Seridim," p. 212, where "ways of repentance" are guiding the mundane world. The primordial Torah was rooted in the supernal sephirot (*Peirush ha-Aggadot*, p. 98): the "ways of repentance" operating in the mundane world are rooted in the sephirah of Tiferet. On the primordial Torah in Kabbalah see G. Scholem, "The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism," *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1965), pp. 66-67.

The notion of a corporeal body generated as a result of the Fall is shared by another member of the Gerona kabbalistic school, Rabbi Ezra, in his *Sefer ha-Yesodei*. See G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 404, n. 87.

¹⁵See *Peirush Eser Sefirot*, p. 3a, section 8; p. 4b,

רע כי יש מהם מקורב ויש מהם מרחוק

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 4b, section entitled *גבול ושמורת*.

Life to that of the Intellect, and beyond to the Transcendent World.¹⁷ All souls living through the messianic days bask prophetically in the light of the supernal sephirot.¹⁸

The messiah is not a physical figure, just as the pristine Adam, whose spiritual state the messiah restores, was not a physical being.¹⁹ He represents the *שלמות*, perfection, of all the sephirot.²⁰ *שלמות* for R. Azriel is the overriding goal of his system.²¹ It may be characterized²² as the subordination of all existence to the one supernal Will, or as the levelling of all assertive tendencies which differentiate themselves from the highest sephirot. It represents the coincidence of all opposites²³ in the sephirah of Keter or in Ensof, the equalization of all being so that it is indistinct, undifferentiated, united with the highest levels of divinity. When R.

¹⁷The totally spiritual character of the messianic period can be inferred from "Letter to Bourgos," p. 238,

וכל אותם הימים שהי' מן השפע הנובע מן הדברים העליונים נקראים ימות המשיח

The function of this statement is to serve as a summary of R. Azriel's account of the journey of souls from one spiritual world to another. No physical image is suggested in the course of the journey (except for a physical resurrection of the dead, restricted to those who are not worthy to make a further spiritual ascent).

¹⁸*Ibid.* וכל אחד ואחד יתגבא בבה האור המושכל...ובכח אור האצילות...ובכח אור הנאצל
The account of messianic prophecy evokes the three highest sephirot. See "Letter to Bourgos," p. 233, line 27 to p. 234, line 1.

¹⁹On the messiah's restoration of the pre-Fall situation see *ibid.*, p. 237

ואין עולם הגופות ראוי לשוב לכח שלימות שהי' ראוי לעמוד ולהתקיים בו קודם שחטא אדם עד שיבא משיח...ואז יהי' כל דבר דבר בגמר מלאו וסוף כל גרע...יתעלה מעלי עליו עד סוף השלמות.
If the pristine Adam was totally spiritual and undifferentiated, the restoring messiah must be so as well. See, for example, *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, p. 96 (and note 3), אור של משיח הוא מידו המושכל

In the context of the former passage, *שלמות* is clearly identical with *השואה* and *אחדות*. So is *השלמה*. For a context in which the idea of spiritualized messianism may be considered, see M. Idel, "Kitvei R. Avraham Abulafia u-Mishnato" (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1976), vol. II, p. 395-401.

²⁰*Ibid.* These terms represent the full gamut of the sephirotic world from its most "physical" to its most spiritual. See *Peirush Eser Sefirot*, p. 3a.

²¹The recurrent juxtaposition and identification of the terms *השואה* and *אחדות* (and their derivatives) is a hallmark of R. Azriel's writing, a few examples will suffice. "Letter to Bourgos," p. 235, מהשואה גמורה באחדות, *Peirush Eser Sefirot*, p. 2a, מה שאינו מוגבל קרי' אין סוף והוא בהשואה גמורה באחדות, *ibid.*, p. 2a, שפע השלימות הבא מאין סוף, *ibid.*, p. 2b, השלימה שאין בה שינוי אין סוף הוא, *ibid.*, p. 2a, הספירה הראשונה שהיא שיה לכלם, *ibid.*, p. 3a, שלימות בלי חסרון

²²See G. Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah be-Gerona* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 156-165.

²³See G. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Berlin, 1962), pp. 388-390.

Azriel speaks of messiah as representing the *שלמות* of all sephirot, two points are intended. First, messiah represents the restoration of the pristine, spiritual Adam oriented by the three supernal sephirot. Secondly, the seven lower sephirot, emanated with a measure of corporeality for the sake of the created world, will also be "levelled" in the messianic period, achieving total spirituality.²⁴

The physical resurrection of the dead occurs only for those who are not worthy of elevation to the spiritual World of Life. R. Azriel offers a proof-text for this assertion: Daniel 12:2 speaks of *many* rising from the dust, not all. The truly righteous ones will continue their immortal

²⁴"Seridim", p. 211

כח הנברא המתנהג בשבע תמורות שהם יג' סדרי סליחה... שהעולם מתנהג בהם עד שיכלה החטא ויבא המשיח... וכשיבא המשיח... תנח עליו רוח השם... הרי שבע תמורות שהמשיח מתנהג בהן That the latter seven messianic תמורות are a "levelled" form of the former seven pre-messianic תמורות can be inferred from correlating this passage with "Seridim," pp. 218-219.

ולפי שלא רצה המקום להודיע האחדות הסובבת לכל צד עד שיתבלע יצר הרע מן העולם ויבא משיח יראה כזו השוה בכל צד.

The seven messianic תמורות will have gone through השואה and become יצר הרע. See also "Seridim," p. 213

וכנגד השבע תמורות שהן כלל ליג' סדרי סליחה שהעולם מתנהג בהן ברחמים וברין עד שיבא המשיח, אופן העולם יתן לו לעשות תשובה שלימה לפניו.

In this passage two types of repentance are set off from each other. The "ways of repentance" anchored in תמורת, on the one hand, and the תשובה שלימה anchored in a supernal sephirah, on the other. See note 14.

When R. Azriel says in *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, p. 99

וכן אורו של משיח דודו נברא הוא כח המלכות וממנו הוא עתיד להבראות כשיגיע זמן he may mean something analogous to the other passages in this note; namely, that *המלכות*, focused on the physical world, will serve as a basis for creation of Messiah. Messiah will be created from it because the Shekinah as representative of the seven lower sephirot will be levelled in order for the messiah to emerge and for his presence to be apprehended.

R. Azriel's reference in *Peirush ha-Aggadot* (p. 112, p. 98) to the suffering messiah

נברא אור הראוי למשיח ולדודו תננו תחת כסא הכבוד וקבל עליו משיח יסורין כדי לזכות את ישראל ולהחיותם בתשובה

may be another way of stating R. Azriel's basic scheme. The pre-Fall Adam, the future messiah, undertook suffering in the sense that he, like his progeny, became corporeal in order to facilitate the renunciation of will necessary for the ultimate *השואה*, for apokastasis. The difference between this notion and the Christian incarnation of the messiah is clear. What is involved for R. Azriel in an incarnation of messiah is an incarnation of Adam-kind, the emergence of a fleshly, physical humanity, in order to facilitate the restoration to its source.

existence, ascending to even higher spiritual realms until they reach the supernal sephirot.²⁵

A clear pattern emerges from R. Azriel's notions concerning the beginning and the end of time. The body is a hindrance to spirituality; it is a consequence of original sin and must be overcome if the ideal state is to be retrieved. Since the soul failed to achieve union with the divine in the ideal disembodied state, governed by the strict justice in Binah, it should now do better in a physical state, governed by justice and compassion.²⁶

R. Azriel's attitude to the body probably results from his neoplatonism.²⁷ Neoplatonist writers know matter as the last, "non-existent" stage in the emanation from the One—the "downward" path. When the individual soul seeks to reverse its decline, to retrace its steps and take the "upward" path back to the One, it would attempt to escape the material body through a mystical flight. The flight consists of the purification of the soul from its material yoke followed by intellectual illumination, and culminating in union.²⁸

R. Azriel's evocations of *deveikut*—in his case to be defined as attachment to the divine through an ecstatic experience²⁹—suggest the divorce of the soul from the body,³⁰ preceded by moral purification,³¹ and followed by an ascent to the sephirah either of Hokmah or Keter, an ascent which culminates in a temporary union with one of these sephirot.³² The active attempt of the soul to unite with the sephirah of Hokmah or Keter is significant. It was after all union with these supernal sephirot which was frustrated by the Fall, and reversing the Fall's effects through *deveikut* becomes the supreme religious obligation. R. Azriel quotes this statement

²⁵"Letter to Bourgos," p. 238.

²⁶See note 14.

²⁷Concerning R. Azriel's neoplatonic sources see A. Altmann, "Isaac Israeli's 'Chapter on the Elements'," *Journal of Jewish Studies* VII (1956), pp. 32-33; *idem*, *Journal of Jewish Studies* VII, pp. 203-206; A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli, a Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* (Oxford, 1958), pp. 131-32. See also A. Altmann, "The Motif of the 'Shells' (Qelipoth) in Azriel of Gerona," *Journal of Jewish Studies* IX (1958), pp. 73-80.

²⁸A. Altmann, *Isaac Israeli*, pp. 185-196; *idem*, "The Delphic Maxim in Medieval Islam and Judaism," *Biblical and Other Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 222-232.

²⁹See I. Tishbi, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, pp. 288-293 and n. 89.

³⁰*Peirush ha-Aggadot*, p. 34. אין הצדיק מקבל רב טוב הצפון עד הסתלק הנפש מן הגוף
Ibid., p. 39-40. ועל כן החסידים הראשונים היו מעלין מחשבתם עד מקום מציאה
Ibid., p. 54.

³¹"Letter to Bourgos," p. 239, lines 25-29; *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, pp. 32-33.

³²*Peirush ha-Aggadot*, p. 20, p. 26. להצדיק המחשבה בחכמה להיות היא הוא דבר אחד

from R. Isaac the Blind, his Provençal master:³³ "The principal task of the mystics and of those who contemplate on His Name is 'And ye shall cleave unto Him,' and this is a central principle of Torah." Furthermore, the Fall consisted in an assertion of will. R. Azriel hence stresses the crucial need to renounce the will in the course of *devekut*. Any insinuation of selfish desire during ecstasy will disrupt the experience.³⁴

II

Nahmanides' views contrast with R. Azriel's—one might almost say in a symmetrical fashion. Adam before the Fall was not a purely spiritual entity composed exclusively of souls; he was a spiritualized body rather.³⁵ Nahmanides explains it as a state where נַפְשׁ (soul) predominates over גּוּף (body); evokes an image of a spiritual body by pointing to the spiritual radiance of Moses; and finds an analogy in the spiritual presence which comes from a life of intellectual pursuit. The spiritualized body lost after the Fall will be retrieved during the messianic period. Nahmanides explicitly defines the content of the messianic period as a return to Adam's state before the Fall, just as did R. Azriel.³⁶

The messianic period for Nahmanides is temporal and earthly. Following the soul's sojourn in Paradise after death—the Paradise (Eden) for Nahmanides too is temporal and physical, though it becomes less so as the soul progresses spiritually—the messianic period will come at the appointed time.³⁷ In *Sefer ha-Geulah* Nahmanides interprets literally the Biblical prophecies of a national restoration in the land of Israel. In addition, there will be a more intense spiritual climate in messianic days than that which prevailed in the pre-messianic period. An objective indicator is the escalation to the eighth sephirah of Binah.³⁸ Pre-messianic reality was regulated by the seven lower sephirot; now there is a move upward. The effect of this rise is greater closeness to the divine, made possible by the dissolution of the evil urge.³⁹ At the culmination of the messianic period will come the last judgment and the resurrection of the dead.⁴⁰ Nahmanides, unlike R. Azriel, insists on physical resurrection for everybody, not just for those unworthy of Eden.

³³*Peirushei ha-Aggadot*, p. 16.

³⁴"Letter to Burgos," p. 238, lines 19-21; *Peirushei ha-Aggadot*, p. 40.

³⁵Nahmanides' *Shaar ha-Gemul*, *Kitvei II*, pp. 303-307.

³⁶Nahmanides' comment on Deuteronomy 30:6; *Sefer ha-Geulah*, *Kitvei I*, p. 269; *Vikvuh*, *Kitvei I*, p. 309.

³⁷Nahmanides' *Shaar ha-Gemul*, pp. 296-299; p. 306.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 303.

³⁹Nahmanides' comment on Deuteronomy 30:6; *Sefer ha-Geulah*, p. 280.

⁴⁰*Shaar ha-Gemul*, p. 306.

The stage after the resurrection is עולם הבא, the world to come. Whereas the messianic period represents an elevation to the eighth sephirah, the world to come entails a full awareness of the divine; all ten sephirot will be revealed.⁴¹ For R. Azriel, only the soul who had already traversed several spiritual worlds is capable of such a magnificent achievement. For Nahmanides, it is the resurrected body who is thus endowed. The resurrected body is a spiritualized body, and it draws its sustenance not from food and drink but from the supernal splendor. The spiritualized bodies of Adam, Enoch, Moses and Elijah are introduced as examples of what the world to come will restore.⁴²

Just as R. Azriel's concept of the beginning and the End of time entailed a program in the here and now to retrieve the pre-Fall situation, Nahmanides too formulates a program of *devekut* to retrieve his own concept of the pre-Fall ideal even in the present.

For R. Azriel, *devekut* entails an active act of divorcing the soul from the body and elevating it to the supernal sephirot. For Nahmanides, on the other hand, *devekut* is not an active human gesture. It is a divine gift that comes from without, and then only as a result of a certain way of life. *Devekut* with the Shekinah comes at the end of a process, a process of spiritualizing the body.⁴³ Spiritualizing the body means denying the body

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 304.

⁴³That *devekut* with the Shekinah is the climax of a process is indicated by Nahmanides' comment on Deuteronomy 26:19, לדבקה בר' בסוף, on וליהייתך עם קדוש—לדבקה בר' בסוף, Exod. 22:30; שתהיה אנשי קדש בעבור שתהיה ראויים לי לדבקה בי לדבקה ב' בסוף, on Deuteronomy 11:22; שאנחנו נוכח לדבקה בו, on Leviticus 19:2; ללכת בכל דרכיו עד שתהיה ראויים לדבקה בו בסוף בהיותנו קדושים.

On גלי שכינה as a reward that comes from without, see Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 18:1. There Nahmanides distinguishes between a revelation of the Shekinah intended to convey a didactic message, on the one hand, and one designed as a reward or as an expression of divine approval, on the other. The latter category is where *devekut* fits in.

גלי השכינה...גמול המצוה הנעשית כבר, ולהודיעך כי רצה האלקים את מעשיהם. כענין שנאמר אני בצדק אחזה פניך אשבעה בדקדק תמותך.

That *devekut* is precipitated from without is possibly suggested by Nahmanides' construction of the following sentence in his comment on Deuteronomy 11:22. יתכן שתכלול הדביקה לומר שתהיה זוכר השם ואהבתו תמיד לא תפריד מחשבונך ממש בלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך, עד שיהיה דבריו עם בני אדם בפיו ובלשונך ולבו אינו עמהם אבל הוא לפניך.

The first part of the sentence, containing the directives to be pre-occupied with God and to love Him, are formulated as an imperative in the second person singular. This is the way preparatory to *devekut*. The climax (בסוף) is formulated in the third person future tense, in order to set apart the effort that is exerted actively in the present from the reward, i.e., the mystical experience—the ability to

overindulgence in this-worldly pleasures, to which it is attracted; withdrawal from mundane concerns, to which the body gravitates; concentrating on the divine, from which the body is distracted.⁴⁴

When the mystical experience of *devekut* does set in, it does not take place through the divorce of soul from body. *Devekut* occurs within; the body becomes an "abode for the Shekinah."⁴⁵ The gift of *devekut*

converse with people while cleaving to God—over which the person has no control.

Nahmanides links up his notion of *devekut* with the Shekinah to Judah ha-Levi's notion in his *Kuzari*. The reference appears to be to III:20 and III:11. The former deals with praying for cleaving to the divine light even in this life, while still in the throes of the body; the latter concerns pursuit of the *Kuzari*'s religious ideals (III:1-20) which he refers to as חסידות:

ואם יחזק בחסידות ויחי במקומות הראים לשכינה יחבריהו בפעל (המלאכים) ויראה אותם עין בעין
For ha-Levi, too, the way of חסידות is consummated by a mystical experience that comes from without.

By the time of M. H. Luzzatto's *Meshilat Yesharim*, Nahmanides' notion is formulated clearly and concisely. In the last chapter of the work dealing with חסידות—Luzzatto's appellation for *devekut*—he writes as follows:

עין הקדושה כפל הוא, דהיינו תחלתו עבודה וסופו גמול, תחלתו השתדלות וסופו מתנה, דהיינו שתחלתו הוא מה שאדם מקדש עצמו, וסופו מה שמקדשים אותו

In R. Elijah de Vidas' *Reshit Hokmah* (Shaar ha-Anavah, chapter 3), two centuries earlier, the "work" and the "exertion" which lead to *devekut* with the Shekinah are spelled out as follows:

האיש אשר ידבנ לבו לתקן מדותיו...להיות עלוב ולא יעלוב שומע חרפתו ולא ישיב, מיד תשרה עליו השכינה ולא יצטרך ללמוד מבשר דם כי רוח א' תלמדנו

This statement is recorded in the name of R. Isaac of Acre who heard it from a student of R. Joseph Gikatilia.

⁴⁴These three elements are mentioned as prerequisites to *devekut* in Nahmanides' comments on Leviticus 19:2, Leviticus 18:7, Deuteronomy 11:22.

⁴⁵Nahmanides' comment on Deuteronomy 11:22

יתכן באנשי המעלה הזאת שתהי נפשם גם בחייהם צרורה בצרור החיים כי הם בעצמם מעין לשכינה
צרור החיים is equated by Nahmanides in Shaar ha-Gemul (p. 297) with Eden:
יש בעליזים השנה שנקראת בדבר רבותינו נ, ברם השנה למעלה ממנה שהיא הנקראת עין הוא הנקרא צרור החיים

Eden, however, is not equated with a particular sephirah; it is a variable spiritual state which depends on the spiritual quality of the righteous person's life תחיל ערך חשקם אין כתיב כאן, אלא תחיל ענין מלמד שכל צדיק צריך יש לו עין בפני עצמו
This variable status make it possible for Nahmanides to use the term in connection with the Shekinah as well. (See in this connection R. Asher ben David's view mentioned in *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, p. 5, n. 1). In fact, Nahmanides' next sentence begins (*ibid.*)

ובאמת כי המקום הזה נן עין משמש עוד בגמול גשמי ממש לזמן התחי...הה שג וסבר עתיד כזמן התחי' הראות השכינה...השנה המעלה וענה התיחדות מתוך שמחה גופנית

consists of the capacity to relate to people while simultaneously cleaving to God.⁴⁶ Divinity, Nahmanides says in effect, may be experienced in the physical world as well. That the body is an "abode for the Shekinah" would be unthinkable for R. Azriel, as he would also find mere communion with the Shekinah unsatisfying, his mystical goal being the supernal sephirot of Hokmah and Keter.

That divinity may be experienced in the physical world is a recurrent theme for Nahmanides. Being a "kingdom of priests" is preparation for being "a holy nation," for *devekut*, and may be attained in this world as well as in the next.⁴⁷ In the letter to his son, Nahmanides speaks of eliminating anger and living humbly, modes of spiritualizing the body, and promises that as a result "the Shekinah will rest upon him."⁴⁸ Those who "withdraw from this-worldly concerns...as if they were not physical people and who are preoccupied with their Creator only, as were Elijah and Enoch and as will be the resurrected bodies, when *devekut* with the Shekinah sets in, they will live eternally in their bodies and souls."⁴⁹ That Nahmanides is here referring to "eternity" in this life rather than in the next world is clear. He does not equate those people under consideration with the resurrected bodies in the world to come, whom he provides as an example; they are in separate categories. For those people who

The latter phrase, שמחה גופנית, points up once again that *devekut* with the Shekinah is within the body, not transcending it.

Proof that the meaning of צורך הדעות varies with the perspective—in this case whether the viewpoint is this worldly or other worldly—can be adduced from Shaar ha-Gemul, p. 308. Discussing the rewards of the soul after death, Nahmanides invokes Leviticus 11:22 and applies it to a mystical experience much superior to the one he treats of in his comment *ad loc*. The difference is one of perspective. Whereas in the latter the mystic stays in the world while cleaving, in the former, after death, צורך הדעות would vary then according to its context.

Throughout his writings Nahmanides refers to *devekut* with the Shekinah either by explicating it or by using a shorthand לרביקה. This is the word in Deuteronomy 11:22 on which passage he provides his fullest explication of *devekut* with the Shekinah. Nahmanides' writings know also of an experience where the soul transcends the body. See for example, Nahmanides' comment on Exodus 16:6 and on Deuteronomy 5:23.

⁴⁶See G. Scholem, "Devekut," *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), pp. 203-208; I. Tishbi, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, pp. 288-293; C. Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Hoker vehi-Mekubal* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 243-261.

⁴⁷Nahmanides' comment on Exodus 19:6.

⁴⁸Nahmanides' "Iggeret Musar," *Kitvei I*, pp. 374-75.

⁴⁹Nahmanides' comment on Leviticus 18:4. See also his comment on Leviticus 26:12. עיקר שכינה בתחתונים הייתה, והנה החבר באן נ עזר והעולם הבא לידיעו.

"withdraw from this-worldly concerns," the "touch of eternity" in this world stems from *devekut* with the *Shekinah*.

We have surveyed R. Azriel's and Nahmanides' contrasting notions of the Fall and the messianic period, and noted how these theoretical notions become orienting principles in the here and now. We have also noted that for R. Azriel the sin of Adam was the assertion of individual will. What was the sin according to Nahmanides? The answer is somewhat elusive.

III

Adam's pre-Fall condition was characterized by Nahmanides in *Shaar ha-Gemul* as a spiritualized body. In his comment on Genesis 2:9 Nahmanides amplifies this notion. In his pristine state, Adam did naturally that which was just and proper. His conformity to divine law was analogous to the conformity of the heavens and planets to natural law, "faithful workers who do not deviate from their course." Just as the planets are not diverted by passion—love or hatred—so in the case of Adam. He had no will to disobey because he had no will. It was the fruit of the tree of which Adam partook which gave rise to will and desire; those who ate of it had the power of choice, to choose a thing or its opposite, good or evil. The power of will and freedom, Nahmanides says, is Godlike on the one hand because it can lead man to do good; on the other hand, it may have bad potential if misused.

Nahmanides' comment is ridden with difficulties. Two of the most obvious have already been posed by medieval writers.

Rabbi Bahya ben Asher, a fourteenth century Spanish Kabbalist and a student of Nahmanides' commentary, asks the most obvious logical question.⁵⁰ If Adam had no will, no desire before the Fall, how did he fall? If he had no capacity for choice, how did he choose to deviate from the natural planet-like orbit into which God launched him?

But there is another, serious, difficulty posed by Rabbi Isaac Arama, the fifteenth century Spanish author of *Akedat Yizhak*. He finds Nahmanides' comment puzzling⁵¹ for "it was after all God's intention to create

⁵⁰Bahya ben Asher, *Beur al ha-Torah*, ed. C. D. Chavel, Vol. I, p. 78 (comment on Genesis 3:6). Bahya's answer that there are angels who may independently stray from their proper course is not shared by Nahmanides. This is evident from the latter's divergent interpretation for the prooftext adduced by Bahya, Gen. 19:13. See Nahmanides' comments on Genesis 19:12 and 19:17 concerning the role of the angel of destruction. If he operates independently, it is for the sake of facilitating Lot's rescue, not for doing harm.

⁵¹*Akedat Yizhak*, Vol. I (Presburg, 1849), p. 58b (towards the end of the seventh *Shaar*).

Adam with freedom of choice. That freedom is in fact the essence of his humanity, and his capacity for choice is the good in him. His whole perfection depends on the existence of choice, which is meaningful only when there is good and evil. How can the mind then tolerate the notion that God wished man to be devoid of will and freedom, and to act in the manner of natural objects? How can God forbid eating the fruit which generates this capacity for choice, a capacity which Nahmanides himself concedes to be a divine quality?"

There is another difficulty as well. Nahmanides contradicts himself. Commenting on the phrase "God will circumcise your heart" (Deuteronomy 30:6) he says, "since the time of creation, man has the power to do as he pleased, to be righteous or wicked." This formulation contradicts what Nahmanides stresses in Genesis 2:9; namely, that the power to do as one pleases exists since the fall, not since creation. At the time of creation, Adam was a spiritualized body—if you will, a spiritual automaton—who had no power to do as he desired, for he had no desire. Further compounding the difficulty, Nahmanides reverses himself once again in the very same comment on Deuteronomy 30:6. The messianic period is portrayed as a restoration to what man was before the sin of Adam, when there were no conflicting desires in his will, "as I have explained in Genesis." Nahmanides ignores what he said just a few lines before. Whereas at the beginning of the passage he affirmed that freedom of the will was exercised from the time of creation; now he maintains that the original human condition was a spiritualized body with no will, reverting back to his formulation in Genesis.

There are additional problems. Following their eating of the apple (Genesis 3:8) Adam and Eve "heard the voice of God walking in the garden." Nahmanides considers in his comment on the verse that the walking voice of God could refer either to the revelation of the Shekinah in the garden, or to its withdrawal therefrom. The opinion of Rabbi Abba is noted who in Midrash Rabbah interpreted "walking" as the withdrawal of the Shekinah on account of Adam's sin. Nahmanides, however, curtly and inexplicably interprets that "walking" to mean the revelation of the Shekinah, and insists that this is the "correct and fitting explanation." The difficulty stems not so much from Nahmanides' terseness but rather from the fact that he ignores his own contention in Exodus 23:20 that sin results in the withdrawal of the Shekinah.⁵² Why after the incident in Paradise does Nahmanides inscrutably insist on *ללכת* *שכינה* in the face of the apparently more defensible view of Rabbi Abba

⁵² כּאן נִתְבַּשֵּׁר שֶׁנֶחֱדִיד לַחֲטֹא וּשְׂכִינָה אוֹמֶרֶת כִּי לֹא אֵעֲלֶה בְּקִרְבָּךְ

See, in a similar vein, Nahmanides' comment on Leviticus 20:3.

that sin resulted in *הסתלות שכירה*? There was after all a sin in Eden too, or was there?

That there may be more to Nahmanides' interpretation of the incident in Paradise than meets the eye might by now have been inferred from the enumerated difficulties. But Nahmanides spares us the need to conjecture. He says explicitly that there is a double meaning to this event, an obvious literal meaning and a deeper one. Commenting on Genesis 3:22, Nahmanides first states that Paradise exists in a physical as well as in a heavenly sense, and that Adam's fall had implications below and on high, in deed and in thought.

Then he goes on to ask the following two questions: First, if the fruit of the tree was "good to eat" and *נחמד אליו להשכילו*, why did God prevent Adam from eating it? God after all is good and does good, and would not withhold a good thing from those who walk uprightly. The phrase *נחמד אליו להשכילו* should at first glance be rendered as "desirable for Adam in order to make him wise." This question is left unanswered, and another one is posed. The serpent nowadays has no speaking faculty. If he had possessed it originally, "God would surely have mentioned in His curse that the serpent became mute, as this would have been the most grievous curse of all." Nahmanides implies therefore that the serpent never possessed the power of speech; how then could he converse with his human companions in the garden? This question too remains unanswered by Nahmanides, and he considers the force of these two unanswerable questions sufficiently strong to warrant the inference that "all these things (concerning the Paradise story) have a twofold significance, exoteric and esoteric," *גלוי וסודות*.

Let us return to the first of Nahmanides' two aforementioned questions in order to examine it more closely. The question is that God should not have forbidden the fruit since it was *נחמד אליו להשכילו*, presumably to be rendered as "desirable...to make him wise." But such a rendering runs counter to Nahmanides' own interpretation of this phrase when it figures in Genesis 3:6. *וכי נחמד העץ להשכיל* is rendered by Nahmanides, "by means of the fruit, one becomes wise to desire," *כי בו ישכיל לחמד*. Indeed, Nahmanides is consistent in interpreting Genesis 3:6 in conformity with the notion (expressed in his comment on Genesis 2:9) that Adam's fall generated a previously non-existent capacity for desire. But if this is Nahmanides' sense of the phrase, what could be the meaning of his first question which we are now considering? Nahmanides asks why God prevented Adam from eating the apple though it was *נחמד אליו להשכילו*. But the answer should be obvious! God forbade the fruit because it generated desire, and desire would destroy the spiritualized body of Adam. It is precisely because "God is good and does good" that He

forbade the fruit. Yet Nahmanides does not consider this obvious answer and insists that his question warrants an allegorical re-interpretation to arrive at the esoteric meaning, חסות, of the happenings in Eden.

There are only hints in the Commentary as to what the esoteric meaning is. In Shaar ha-Gemul, however, in the course of a discussion on the meaning of Paradise and Adam's fall,⁵³ Nahmanides repeats his contention that the Eden story is allegorical, סוד הענין הזה [של גן עדן] שהדברים, and goes on to explain that the serpent is symbolic of Samael, of Satan. This allegorical identification of the serpent in Shaar ha-Gemul corroborates the reader's sense of Nahmanides' direction, הדברים בפוליס, Nahmanides' questions force a re-interpretation which will do justice to the force of the questions. If no muteness is mentioned as punishment for the serpent, there must be a sense in which the serpent is no real serpent, but Samael rather. By extension the reader may surmise that if Nahmanides in his first question considers God's injunction against eating the fruit as problematic (though we do not yet know why), this problem too will force a re-interpretation which will show that God did not really forbid the fruit. There is a parallelism which Nahmanides suggests here: just as the serpent is no serpent, the injunction will emerge as no injunction.

One final difficulty with Nahmanides' account of the Fall should be noted. The Fall figures in a discussion of the Kabbalistic reason concerning the four species of fruit used on Sukkot, in Nahmanides' comment on Leviticus 23:40. The etrog, Nahmanides says, is the fruit in which there is much desire and through which Adam sinned. Genesis 3:6 is adduced as a proof-text as Nahmanides goes on to stress, "the sin is in it [the etrog] alone," דומה החטא בו לבדו. Later in the passage the Bahir's view is cited which equates the etrog with the Shekinah, and the six branches (one palm branch, three myrtle and two willow branches), with the remaining six of the seven lower sephirot.

R. Bahya ben Asher unravels Nahmanides' meaning as follows: Adam's sin was קצץ בנטיעות, "cutting off the shoots," the Kabbalistic expression for creating discord in the divine world by focusing on one sephirah and denying or ignoring the others, i.e. absolutizing one aspect of divinity instead of meditating on the whole. The impact of Adam's sin was to separate Shekinah from Tiferet; hence, the etrog which symbolizes the Shekinah finds itself apart from the six sephirot focused on Tiferet. By joining the etrog to the six species at the time of fulfilling the mizvah, the Shekinah is re-united with Tiferet.⁵⁴

⁵³Kitvei II, p. 296.

⁵⁴Bahya's *Beur*, Vol. II, p. 556 (comment on Leviticus 23:40). An analogous approach is presented by Meir ibn Sahula, *Beur le-Ferush ha-Ramban al ha-Torah* (Warsaw, 1875), p. 27, p. 5.

R. Bahya assumes that Nahmanides considers Adam's sin to have been קצץ בנטיעות. But Nahmanides is careful to say nothing of the sort. It is not as if Nahmanides minces words when he considers a sin to be "cutting off the shoots." He explicitly explains the sin entailed in the building of the tower of Babel and the making of the golden calf as "cutting off the shoots."⁵⁵ Abandoning the Oral Law is characterized as such,⁵⁶ as is blowing the trilling sound of the shofar without surrounding it with simple sounds.⁵⁷ Focusing on the voice of the Sinaitic revelation, the Shekinah, without relating it to the other sephirot, is deemed "cutting off the shoots."⁵⁸ If Nahmanides avoids the phrase in relation to Adam's sin, it is intentional. Furthermore, the phrase in the passage before us, חסדו לברו, appears to be superfluous. Nahmanides is here not concerned with determining the identity of the fruit, a problem which the Midrash is concerned with.⁵⁹ What does he gain by repeating himself to stress that the sin lies in the etrog alone? Could it be that in stressing "the sin is in the etrog alone" Nahmanides relates the cause of Adam's fall to the etrog-Shekinah (hence his emphatic repetition), thereby exonerating Adam from the sin of "cutting the shoots"? We will see about this soon.

Six major difficulties have been noted in Nahmanides' treatment of Adam's sin. Lest we lose the garden for the trees, let us recapitulate the difficulties, make some inferences, and construct a hypothesis which will synthesize these inferences. Finally, we will seek independent corroboration for the hypothesis in other Nahmanidean passages.

Nahmanides has constructed a scheme whereby Adam could not possibly have sinned, for he had a spiritual body with no will. This was R. Bahya's observation which may be strengthened by comparison with similar models for Adam's condition before the Fall. Origen, the patristic writer, also views the fall from the state of a spiritual body, but assumes that the spiritual body had free will which made the fall possible.⁶⁰ Augustine assumes that Adam would have become a spiritual body if not for the fall; the fall, however, took place from a physical body with a will.⁶¹ Gregory of Nyssa views the fall from a spiritual state minus a body,

⁵⁵Nahmanides' comments on Genesis 11:2 and on Exodus 32:7, 27.

⁵⁶Nahmanides' comment on Exodus 23:20.

⁵⁷Nahmanides' comment on Numbers 10:6.

⁵⁸Nahmanides' comment on Deuteronomy 4:15.

⁵⁹Bereshit Rabbah 15:8 with parts in B. Talmud Berakot 40a.

⁶⁰Norman P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin* (London, 1924), pp. 212-13.

⁶¹*De Genesi ad Litteram*, in *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, Vol. 48 (Paris, 1972), pp. 491-503.

but he too assumes a will operating.⁶² By constructing a model of a spiritual body for Adam without will, Nahmanides forces us to consider that Adam had indeed fallen, but might not have been the cause for his fall.

Next there is Arama's point about the noble consequences of Adam's fall. The fall brought about the means for actualizing Adam's humanity to facilitate what was after all God's intention, to create Adam with freedom of choice, even desire. Nahmanides himself, in a comment on Genesis 2:20, says that God wished to remove Adam's rib (this is yet before the fall) in order to create a desire on his part for a helpmate like Eve.⁶³

Nahmanides' enigmatic insistence on the revelation of Shekinah after the Fall, rather than its withdrawal which he posits in truly sinful contexts, indicates that there was no cause for a withdrawal of the Shekinah, presumably since Adam was not culpable.

The passage concerning the Kabbalistic significance of the four species on Sukkot closes the circle. The sin was in (or through) the etrog-Shekinah exclusively, הוֹסֵט בּוֹ לַבֵּד. The Shekinah, not Adam, was responsible for the fall and for the resultant separation between Shekinah and Tiferet. The phrase קִצּוֹן בְּנִשְׁמֹת, which would impute the blame to Adam, is therefore omitted.

Nahmanides' statement, both in his Commentary and Shaar ha-Gemul, that there is an allegorical significance to the Eden incident also includes a guide for unraveling that significance. Nahmanides says in effect (on Genesis 3:22) that God would not have forbidden the fruit which generated will and desire in Adam, נִחְמַד אֵלָיו לְהַשְׁכִּיל, since the resultant will is good for man, and God "who is good and does good" could not possibly have intended to rob Adam of this gift. Stated differently, Nahmanides is saying that God did not really forbid the fall, for it generated Adam's freedom of the will, an instrument which would enable him to realize his *raison d'être*. The allegorical meaning of the serpent as Samael indicates the means through which the fall—with God's consent—took place. Samael for Nahmanides in other contexts is not a force independent of God, but His servant rather, an emissary of the sephirah of Judgment.⁶⁴

⁶²Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-271.

⁶³That Adam was from the beginning meant to have free will can also be inferred from Nahmanides' comment on Deuteronomy 32:26.

הָשֵׁם בָּרָא אֶת הָאָדָם בְּתַחֲוֹנִים שִׁכִּיד אֶת בְּרָאוֹ וַיְדַד לְשֹׁמוֹ וְשֵׁם הָרִשׁוֹת בִּדְדוֹ לְהַרְעֹ אוֹ לְהַטִּיב

⁶⁴Nahmanides' comment on Leviticus 16:8; Nahmanides' introduction to his commentary on Job, *Kirvei* I, pp. 24-26; Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 1:31.

Nahmanides' characterization of Adam in Shaar ha-Gemul as a spiritualized body, occurs in his discussion of the world to come, עולם הבא, which represents the highest attainment of divinity. All ten sephirot are revealed to its inhabitants in contrast to eight in the messianic period and seven in the pre-messianic era. According to Nahmanides, עולם הבא existed even before creation.⁶⁵ It is there that Adam lived as a spiritual body.⁶⁶ This characterization of Adam is reflected in the Commentary as well.⁶⁷ His fall, then, occurred from the most exalted heights of divinity.

⁶⁵Nahmanides' Shaar ha-Gemul, p. 307; see also the relation of the statement to the remainder of the paragraph.

⁶⁶Nahmanides' Shaar ha-Gemul, pp. 303-304. See the larger context: Adam is one of a galaxy of spiritualized bodies.

⁶⁷Adam's spiritualized body, a theme developed by Nahmanides in previous passages (see notes 65,66), became corporeal when God decreed the trials of his new situation. Nahmanides comments on Genesis 2:17

וכאשר גזר עליו ואכלת את עשב השדה, ובזעת אפך יאכל לחם האדמה ה"י זה טובה להפסד כי עפר הוא
תעפר יאכל ואל עפר ישוב

In context, *כי עפר הוא* is part of the decree, not a description of the existing situation. The proof is that just prior to this statement Nahmanides mentions that the fruits of the garden were ingested in Adam's limbs like the manna. Now concerning the manna, Nahmanides inclines to the opinion (in his comment on Exodus 16:6 and Shaar ha-Gemul, pp. 304-5) that the account of the manna reflects an experience of *devekut* with the supernal world in עולם הבא, a situation of a spiritualized body. With the decree, Adam lost his status and became physical.

That *כי עפר הוא* is a prescriptive, rather than a descriptive, phrase can also be established from the contrast to Adam's creation. In his comment on Genesis 1:26 dealing with the creation of pristine Adam, Nahmanides interprets *שדמה* as *דמות* שדמה, i.e., there is resemblance to the physical, because Adam is a spiritualized body. There is no identity, however, as there is here (in Genesis 2:17) *כי עפר הוא*. This is in line with the context of the comment on Genesis 1:26 where Adam's spiritualized status is suggested (see n. 70).

That Eve turned physical as a result of the decree is apparent from Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 3:13,

מה זאת עשית לעבור על מצותי, כי האשה בכלל הזהרת אדם, כי היתה עצם מעצמי בעת ההיא, וכן
היא בכלל הענש שלי.

The last phrase indicates that Eve shared Adam's lot, i.e., his physical status, as a result of the Fall. Nahmanides may actually be saying this much more explicitly if we are attuned to his statement (on Genesis 3:22) that the Fall and its consequences should be interpreted on a deeper level.

At first glance, Nahmanides seems to be saying that the admonition concerning the fruit (Genesis 2:16-17) was addressed to Eve as well as to Adam, though she was created subsequently (2:22). This is possible because at the time of the admonition she was a part of him, "a bone of his bones" (2:23). While ingenious, this comment

Linked with the supernal sephirot, Adam's spiritualized body basked in supernal splendor; his bodily faculties were numb, and he fed on divine light, not on food and drink. He could not possibly fall from such a high level of divinity for he had no desires. Unless God wanted him to fall; that is, unless God wanted worship not only from spiritual automatons, but also from "lower ones." חזותיים, people with fleshly bodies and free will⁶⁸ who have to struggle in order to serve God.⁶⁹

How God's intention that Adam should fall was realized is the subject of the third chapter of Genesis.

ignores the realistic consideration that Eve was not in fact admonished. What Nahmanides really means is in line with his comment that Eve is the Shekinah and in that sense was latent in Adam's spiritualized body. (In fact, Nahmanides' observation that Eve was the Shekinah is noted in his comment on the phrase (2:23) "a bone from my bones.") That is to say, both Adam and Eve were part of the luminous celestial world. This is what Nahmanides means by the phrase כי האשה אדם. בכלל הוזהרת אדם. To denote admonition or prohibition, Nahmanides invariably employs the word הוזהרה. When he writes הוזהרה he refers to light or splendor as in his comment on Genesis 1:14 והנפחים האלה מקבלי אור מזהירים כגון האספקלריאות. The splendor referred to here is that of the supernal world in which Adam and Eve shared. When Nahmanides ends off by saying וכן היא בכלל הענש שלו, he means that Eve became corporeal as did Adam.

⁶⁸It has emerged from the discussion that Nahmanides operates with both the simple and the deeper meanings of the Eden affair, in his own words both the גלוי and the חתום. This awareness may enable us to approach anew his comment on Deuteronomy 30:6 when he seems to contradict himself in connection with free will, maintaining now that free will existed from the time of creation. The passage reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּרִצּוֹנוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּרְצוֹנוֹ
The stress is on וַיֹּאמֶר מִן הַכְּתוּבִים עֵינֵינוּ זֶה שֶׁאָמַר כִּי מִלְּפָנֵי הַבְּרִיאָה הָיְתָה רְשׁוּת בְּיַד הָאָדָם לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּרְצוֹנוֹ
It is the context of the verses, i.e., the overt level, which induces Nahmanides to speak of free will from the beginning of creation. When he says a few lines later,

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּרִצּוֹנוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּרְצוֹנוֹ
לא הָיָה לוֹ בְּרִצּוֹנוֹ דְּבַר הַפְּתוּחַ
he adds immediately, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפִּירְשְׁתִּי בְּסֹדֶר בְּרִאשִׁית. His comment on Genesis, we have seen, reflects the deeper meaning. If we are attuned to Nahmanides' double track, the contradiction is only apparent. What he contrasts elsewhere as גלוי and חתום, he juxtaposes here as וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּרִצּוֹנוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּרְצוֹנוֹ and כְּמוֹ שֶׁפִּירְשְׁתִּי בְּסֹדֶר בְּרִאשִׁית, i.e., in variance from the literal meaning.

⁶⁹See Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 6:3. In contrast to Rashi and Ibn Ezra who see the verse as disparaging of people in their fleshly situation, Nahmanides shows empathy. The use here of Ecclesiastes 7:29 may be correlated with its use in Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 2:9. That is to say, the verse is used in the latter passage not to signify the spiritual "automaton" stage but the subsequent one, הַעֵץ, אַחֲרֵי אֲבָלוֹ מִן

Adam was first created as a spiritualized body;⁷⁰ a paradigm of the spiritual goal. If the pristine Adam was a spiritualized body, who was the Eve created out of his rib? According to Nahmanides, the pristine Eve was the Shekinah.⁷¹ Shekinah is the last sephirah, which serves as a receptacle for the divine effluence of the higher sephirot; it does not generate its own. The serpent, Samael, is the direct emissary of the higher sephirah of Judgment. He induces Eve to taste the fruit latent with desire; in other words, fills Eve with a will she did not independently have, she being the Shekinah, the receiving sephirah. Filled with desire, the Shekinah tempts Adam with the fruit. Adam assumes that whatever the Shekinah, his God-given "helpmate," advises him to do must be obeyed,⁷² goes on to taste it and himself becomes a person with will.

The tree of knowledge too must have an esoteric meaning, says Nahmanides,⁷³ and goes on to intimate what it is. He cites the midrashic

⁷⁰That the pristine Adam was a spiritualized body is evoked by several comments of Nahmanides. On Genesis 2:3, he says

היתה הבריאה ביום הראשון האור, כנגד האלף של ימות אדם שהי' אורו של עולם מכדי את בורא
This statement is to be correlated with Shaar ha-Gemul, p. 307, where the light referred to in Genesis 2:3 is shown to be the light of האב, the state of Adam as a spiritualized body before his transformation.

On Genesis 2:7, explaining the meaning of נפש האדם לפני ה', Nahmanides ends up by noting:

או אמר שחזר כולו נפש חי' ונרפך לאיש אחר, כי כל יצירותיו הי' עתה לנפש הזאת
Adam's whole being (his physical aspect as well) was transformed into a living soul, was converted into another (i.e., spiritual) being, as all his faculties were now had by this soul. The last phrase כל יצירותיו הי'...לנפש הזאת is reminiscent of Nahmanides' characterization of the spiritualized body of האב in Shaar ha-Gemul, p. 306, העולם הבא שבו ישוב הדרך כמין הנפש. The phrase preceding, נרפך לאיש אחר, is equally suggestive. It is borrowed from I Samuel 10:6 where Saul's transformation through a prophetic experience is anticipated.

On Genesis 1:26, Nahmanides tells of the pristine Adam's resemblance to the supernal beings as well as to the lower, in appearance and in glory, והנה האדם ודומה למגמות פניו בחכמה וברעות... and goes on to say, ודומה לתחתונים ולעליונים בנאר הדר On the face of it, Nahmanides seems to be saying that Adam's destination (or aspiration, based on Habakuk 1:9) is wisdom and knowledge. That would diminish his resemblance to the supernal beings, for it would make the resemblance consist only in his aspiration to be like them, not in his actually being like them. Nahmanides, however, avoids such an impression. He says not דומה פניו חכמה (presumably "knowing the Creator" (as indicated in Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 2:3), with wisdom and knowledge.

⁷¹Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 2:20.

⁷²Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 3:12

⁷³Nahmanides' Shaar ha-Gemul, p. 296.

exegesis of Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer as a key to unraveling the allegorical meaning of the events in the garden. The verse "from the fruit of the tree within the garden...you may not eat" (Genesis 3:3) is euphemistically interpreted as concern for sexual contact between Adam (the tree) and Eve (the fruit...within the garden). The larger context for Nahmanides' citation of this midrash is a discussion in Shaar ha-Gemul of the eschatological garden of Eden, where the garden is evoked as the Shekinah (Eden is a different category, alluding to the higher sephirot). If the garden is the Shekinah, the fruit contained "within the garden" must also be the Shekinah. The spiritualized Adam (the tree of knowledge) who united with the Shekinah (ate of the fruit) is therefore to be identified with Yesod,⁷⁴ the sephirah which generates (not only receives) the divine effluence of the higher sephirot.

Union between the spiritualized Adam and Eve, between Yesod and Shekinah, thus resulted in a second creation of man and woman. As a result of this second creation, the "fall," Adam and Eve were converted into physical beings from their state as spiritualized bodies. They were no longer spiritual automatons. The will which was implanted in them by the serpent's persuasion entailed an evil urge which they had now to overcome. Their humanity required that they be "evicted" from the celestial bliss of the garden of Eden into a physical world, that they be "punished"⁷⁵ with hard work, suffering, struggle and mortality; in effect,

⁷⁴The identification is made by R. Isaac of Acre, *Meirat Eynaim* (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 42, on Genesis 2:10.

⁷⁵In approaching Nahmanides' interpretation of the "punishments" meted out after the Fall, we should once again recall his observation that the Eden story is to be taken figuratively as well as literally.

It is true that in his comment on Genesis 3:13 and 3:16 Nahmanides uses the term *עושה* to characterize the new state of Adam, Eve and the serpent after the Fall. It is necessary to consider, however, what the term denotes for him. Commenting on Exodus 21:22, Nahmanides says that *עושה* is a fine imposed on someone against his will and includes cases when the obligation to pay is not justified. In fact, both Biblical prooftexts adduced by Nahmanides to illustrate the meaning of the term *עושה* entail situations when a tax or an obligation was imposed arbitrarily and unjustifiably.

Adam's "punishment" is considered by Nahmanides in his comment on Genesis 2:17 and is referred to as *גזירה*. It entails his corporeality (see n. 67), his mortality and a struggle to attain his livelihood. This is in contrast to his pristine state when he was spiritual, eternal and nourished spiritually by the manna. On manna in Nahmanides, see references in n. 67.

Eve's "punishment" is her new corporeality (see n. 67). Nahmanides' comment dealing with her corporeality (Genesis 3:13) is as follows:

לא אמר באשה ותאכלי מן העץ, כי היא נעשית על אכילתה ועל עצתה כאשר נעשה הנחש ועל כן אמרה הנחש השואני ואוכל כי העתה גדול על האכילה

an evocation of the human condition. But their incipient humanity was not a curse; it was an opportunity. Within their human context, people

On the face of it, Nahmanides notes that Eve was addressed in general, "what did you do," rather than specifically (as Adam was), you ate of the tree. The reason is, says Nahmanides, that she was punished, just as the serpent was, for two violations, for her own eating and for her counsel to Adam to eat. (The last phrase, *כאשר נענש הנחש* would naturally have to be qualified according to this reading; for the serpent was punished for his counsel only, he did not eat). Since Eve was charged for both violations, she said "the serpent incited me and I ate," as the punishment for eating is greater. Nahmanides' conclusion, as expressed in the last phrase, is a jarring non sequitur. The thrust of his remarks is to prove that the sin of incitement is greater than the eating, or at least that there is parity between the eating and the incitement. But he ends up saying the very opposite: namely, that the sin of eating is greater. Such a conclusion restores his original question, why was Eve not charged for the eating? C. Chavel in a note (*Peirush* I, p. 41) is aware of the difficulty and seeks a way out through emendations or different versions.

Actually, if we be mindful of Nahmanides' inclination to explain the Eden incident and its aftermath allegorically, his formulation is eminently sensible. His meaning is as follows. Eve was not charged with a specific violation because she was "punished" for everything (incitement and eating) when the serpent was "punished" *כאשר נענש הנחש*. *כאשר* can mean "just as" or it can mean "at the time that," as Nahmanides is aware in his comment on Exodus 21:22, remarkably the same passage where he explains his understanding of the term *נענש*. That Eve was "punished" when the serpent was is intelligible according to Nahmanides' reconstruction of the Fall. The serpent, God's emissary, entered the Shekinah in order to sway her to eat of the tree. Being the receiving Shekinah, she was completely helpless to resist. Understandably then, when the serpent was "punished" (we will soon see what the meaning of his punishment is), the serpent within her was "punished," not she.

כי היא נענשה על אכילתה ועל עצתה כאשר נענש הנחש
Eve was not "punished." That is why she said "the serpent incited me and I ate."

ועל כן אמרה הנחש השיאני ואוכל כי העתה גדל על האכילה

It follows that according to Nahmanides this statement was not a mere "excuse," a false alibi; it was completely true. Her "fall" was identical with the serpent's incitement. She had nothing to do with it. That is why Eve mentioned "the serpent incited me...and I ate" rather than "...I ate and incited" because the eating is considered more severely than the incitement, presumably since eating entails a sinful act, which incitement does not. Since Eve is imputing total responsibility to the serpent—and justifiably so—to say that the eating is more severe than the incitement means that the serpent is charged not only with incitement but with Eve's eating as well. Nahmanides' next statement therefore follows smoothly: *הנחש דברו*. *מכאן נכלל לעמד עתה למחטיאי אדם*. That *מחטיאי אדם* are charged not only with their own crime but that to which they had incited as well is evident from Avot 5:18, *חטא והחטיא את הרבים חטא הרבים תלי בו*.

Nahmanides' formulation of Eve's "punishment" in his comment on Genesis 3:16 is also to be taken figuratively as referring to the Shekinah. Such an approach

were summoned to recognize the Creator, a summons which Nahmanides repeatedly formulates as the goal of human beings in the world.⁷⁶ They

is already suggested by Menahem Reccanati in his commentary. See *Levushei Or Yekarot* (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 14b. The pain of childbirth, for example, is interpreted by him as the union between Tiferet and Shekinah which results in offspring, as in Deuteronomy 14:1. The craving for the husband is therefore that of Shekinah for Tiferet. Reccanati's approach may be pursued further. The servile status alludes to the Shekinah's function as receiving not dispensing. Nahmanides' phrase *מדה כנגד מדה* does not have to be interpreted as *measure for measure*. *מדה* for him means also *sephirah*. The *sephirah* of Shekinah is now across from Tiferet, not united with Him. Nahmanides indeed goes on to describe the new status of the Shekinah. Her supernal status was relegated downward. Relevant here is the midrashic statement cited by Nahmanides in his comment on Leviticus 26:1 *עיקר שכינה בתחתונים היתה*. Nahmanides is saying that the Shekinah desires to be in closer communion with the sephirothic world, but God has focused Her on the physical world. As is explained in the article, this was done to facilitate people's religious service within the world out of their physicality, in their human situation. The Shekinah's accessibility makes this service a viable undertaking. On the place of the Shekinah in Nahmanides' account of the "reasons for the laws" see the citations in Henoch, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-53, 119-121. Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 11:2 to the effect that the sin of the builders of the Tower of Babel ("cutting of the shoots") resembled (*דומה*)—but is not identical with—Adam's Fall is also to be understood in this context. Both resulted in a separation within the sephirothic world. The difference between them is crucial, however. In the former, people initiated it; in the latter, God did. The resemblance between the two lies in the result, not in the cause.

We come now to the "punishment" of the serpent. In his comment on Genesis 3:15 Nahmanides has once again constructed an awkward passage on the surface level (see C Chavel's reference to a suggested emendation, *Peirush I*, p. 41), which impels the reader to resort once again to Nahmanides' suggested allegorical approach as the only reliable guide to his intended meaning.

On the allegorical level, Nahmanides has equated the serpent with Samael in Shaar ha-Gemul, p. 296. In his Introduction to the Commentary on Job, p. 24, he cites approvingly the Rabbinic identification of Satan with the evil urge *יצר הרע*. How is this to be transferred to the comment on Genesis 3:15? The text reads as follows:

טעם תשובת עקב שיהי לאדם יתרון עליך באיבה, כי הוא ישובך ראש ואחז לא תשובתו רק בעקב ירצץ מחרך שם.

If the serpent be the evil urge, ראש and עקב are to be interpreted as beginning and end, respectively. This is what Nahmanides states in his comment on Deuteronomy 7:12:

יקראו בלשון הקדש תחלה כל דבר בלשון ראש...וכן יקראו אחריה כל דבר עקב כי הלשון יתפוס דמיונו באדם והראש תחלה והעקב בו אחריה וסוף

Applied to Genesis 3:15, Nahmanides says in effect that people will have an advantage over the evil urge (for they will be capable of generating more energy

are charged with the task of earning a spiritualized body, merged with the Shekinah, not to be merely born into it.

Immediately following the "fall" (Genesis 3:6-7), Adam and Eve heard the "voice of God walking" (Genesis 3:8). That voice was the Shekinah, says Nahmanides, not withdrawing, for nothing sinful was perpetrated. The Shekinah revealed itself, rather. Released from Eve as Eve was becoming physical, the Shekinah manifested Herself to the newly emergent humanity, as if to reassure them by Her continued presence, as if to suggest the viability of their new, arduous undertaking: to recognize God in the world albeit they are human, not supernal.

than the evil urge will be able to muster). The progeny of Eve will be capable of striking the evil urge at the beginning of his assault, to nip it in the bud. It, in turn, will be able to strike only at the end, that is, if people let it. This process of the gradual entrenchment of the evil urge—the ease with which it can be squelched at the beginning and the difficulty of resisting it once it becomes habit—is described in several passages in B. Talmud Sukkot 52a-b (a *locus classicus* replete with observations on the evil urge). But Nahmanides indicates that, though it becomes more difficult to overcome the evil urge at the end (עקב) after it has taken hold, it is still possible to vanquish it even at that late stage. This notion is reinforced in an explicit discussion of the workings of the evil urge in Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 4:7. Even Cain can dominate his evil urge by repenting.

Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 3:14 is by his own admission intended allegorically

כי מדרש הכתוב ומזיון מקובלים, ובהם להם סודות עמוקים בתולדות ובכל דבר

As far as can be ascertained, however, Nahmanides has not supplied a key for unraveling this particular allegory.

It should finally be noted that in calling for an allegorical approach, Nahmanides is not supplanting the literal meaning, הגלוי והחצותם אמת. Both levels are true. While the allegorical level meshes more smoothly with Nahmanides' comments to Genesis 3:13-16, Nahmanides has not discarded the literal meaning in other contexts. For example, in his sermon "Torat ha-Shem Temimah" (*Kitvei I*, p. 155), he takes Genesis 3:15 literally and sees the serpent as typical of the rapacious behavior of beasts, a behavior which was ushered in by Adam's "fall." Beasts too were inflicted with an evil urge.

ואולי לא הדי' טרפות זו את זו עד שחטא אדם שנתארה האדמה בעבורו.

What is stated here is that not only did Adam become physical and potentially evil but the reality into which he was thrust too became provocative and tortured. See also Nahmanides' comment to Leviticus 26:6.

וברא... "In his sermon "Torat ha-Shem Temimah," p. 142, Nahmanides says ... See also *ibid*, p. 152; Nahmanides' comment on Exodus 13:16; on Leviticus 17:11; on Deuteronomy 32:26.

IV

Recognizing God is a process achievable on two levels, a pedagogic level and a higher experiential one, entailing *devekut* with the Shekinah. The first, pedagogic level, entails observance of the laws, especially those prescribed by the Torah to commemorate God's miraculous involvement in history. Keeping those laws bespeaks affirmation of God's omniscience and omnipotence, His creation of the world and providence thereof, His relation to it through prophecy, His concern with it through grace.⁷⁷ Laws are also intended to purify a person morally, but the ultimate goal of this moral cleansing is to make possible a more perfect apprehension of religious truths.⁷⁸ Recognizing the Creator, then, on this first level, results in a theoretical assent to religious doctrines, on the one hand,⁷⁹ and reciprocally, in God's providence, on the other.

This providence consists of the divine quality of Judgment which metes out reward and punishment to individuals measure for measure, "to give unto every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."⁸⁰ It is this very quality of Judgment which God employs to rule the world: hence, Nahmanides' characterization of it as *מנהג העולם*⁸¹ or as

⁷⁷Based on Nahmanides' comment to Exodus 13:16.

⁷⁸Nahmanides' comment on Deuteronomy 22:6. To cite one example,

המאכלים האסורים... שהוא להיותו נקי הנפש, חכמים משכילי האמת

⁷⁹Nahmanides' comment on Exodus 13:6.

⁸⁰The citation is from Jeremiah 32:19 and is adduced by Nahmanides in two places to exemplify this level of providence: in the Introduction to the Commentary on Job, p. 18, and in his comment to Job 36:4, *ibid.*, p. 108. This basic notion of providence leads to acceptance of the higher Biblical notions of miraculous providence—entailing the rewards mentioned in the Torah. The former is called *השגחה גמורה*, the latter, *השגחה מופתית*. The former sort of providence stems from the fact that man knows his creator, and it applies universally. The latter is restricted to *צדיקים גמורים* or *רשעים גמורים*, according to Nahmanides' comment on Deuteronomy 11:13, one of several places where this restriction is made. There too Nahmanides contrasts the *צדיקים* with the intermediate group, *בינונים*:

אבל הבינונים בדרך מנהגו של עולם יעשה בהם טובה או רעה כדרכם וכעלילותם.

The last phrase, *כדרכם וכעלילותם* (whether reflecting Ezekiel 36:17 or paraphrasing Jeremiah 32:19) clearly indicates that reward and punishment operate in relation to this group *עולם* בדרך מנהגו של עולם. For another example of how religious observance minus *devekut* is rewarded *עולם* see Nahmanides' comment on Leviticus 18:4.

⁸¹Sermon on Kohelet, *Kirvei I*, p. 191

בספר הזה (קהלת) ידבר כמנהגו של עולם תחת השמש, והיאך היא בריאתו והנהגתו במדת הדין *ibid.*, p. 195, *עולם* בדרך מנהגו של עולם

מקרים.⁸² It is true that this mode of divine governance may operate through the "intermediate" causes of natural law,⁸³ but Maimonides has already shown (says Nahmanides) that even these causes are ultimately traceable to His Will.⁸⁴ There is therefore nothing arbitrary or happenstance about human existence on this level; reward and punishment follow naturally and necessarily from religious action or sin, respectively. Benefits are intrinsic to performance of *mizvot*; harm, to sinful violations.⁸⁵ These natural consequences of religious or irreligious

⁸²It was observed in n. 80 that מנהגו של עולם is used by Nahmanides in the sense of the first category of providence. This use of the term is clarified by his comment on Numbers 11:19 where the providential nature of "intermediate" causes is stressed: וכן ה' שנסע רוח מאת ד' כמנהגו של עולם... ולא רוח... כאשר זכר בזוהר... אבל רוח שנתם כנהוגים.

מקרים is used by Nahmanides synonymously with מנהג העולם and carries the identical providential valence. Nahmanides' comment on Numbers 11:19 treats of רוח מק as follows:

השם השיבו כי אין ד' השם קצרה לתת להם שאלתם גם בדרך המקרים וזה טעם המקור דבר אם לא... In the Sermon on Kohellet, p. 199, there is an identification of מקרים with the sephirah of Din, Judgment וכן... לא דבר אלא במקרה העולם במדת הדין.

⁸³Comment on Job 36:7 (*Kitvei I*, p. 109)

...רק הענין כי ראויים להתנהג בדרך הטבע והמקרה, וזהו הוה באור הרב וצ"ל ביאור יפה בספר מורה הנבוכים.

⁸⁴The reference to the *Guide for the Perplexed* in the preceding note is not to Guide II:18 as C. Chavel indicates ad loc. The antecedent for הרב באור הרב is discussed in Guide II:48. Maimonides classifies three "intermediate" causes: essential or natural causes, voluntary causes, accidental causes, or chance. Everything produced in time has an intermediate cause which may be related to a prior one, and the latter to yet another, until the series reaches the First Cause, i.e., God's will. Maimonides notes that the Bible ignores intermediate causes and ascribes all events directly to God's will. Clearly, Maimonides believes that even causes operating בדרך הטבע והמקרה are related to God's will, and thus Nahmanides has given his first level of providence philosophical support. Concerning Maimonides' position see A. Altmann, "Religion of the Thinkers," in *Religion in a Religious Age* (Cambridge, Mass. 1974), pp. 42-44. For Nahmanides this notion figures also in his introduction to Job, *op. cit.*, p. 26, and חננויות הרחם להפיל הבית על הנערים כאלו החקו בלבע, הוא ענין אלקי, p. 19. This latter passage may be understood against the background of its probable source in *Kuzari* 5:20 containing the exegesis of I Samuel 26:10. See Yehuda Even Shmuel's edition (Tel Aviv, 1972), p.225, and for the effect of divine will on "intermediate causes," p. 228.

⁸⁵In his comment on Deuteronomy 6:24, Nahmanides distinguishes between the good that flows from the laws naturally and the good that will flow from God's reward mentioned in the Bible. This distinction accounts also for the fact that no reward is mentioned for observance of the last five of the Ten Commandments. Since they facilitate human welfare, their reward is built in. The comment on

acts are not spelled out in the Bible; they are alluded to in a general way.⁸⁶ When rewards are stated in detail, a different, miraculous sort of providence is presupposed, where there is no natural, causal relationship between an act and its reward or punishment.⁸⁷

A rationale for mizvot on the level of natural providence is further developed in the Sermon on Kohelet, an interpretation which centers on Kohelet's exclusive use of the divine name of Elokim, the name which signifies the quality of Judgment, of meting out measure for measure.⁸⁸ The last verse in Kohelet therefore serves Nahmanides as a guide to coping in a world ridden by מקרים of the divine Judgment.⁸⁹ After Solomon realizes that he, like his world, is ephemeral and hence not real,⁹⁰ he decides to achieve permanence through mizvot. The limbs and body of the human being are indeed evanescent. If viewed as mizvot in potentia, however, the limbs of the otherwise transient body can be actualized and "realized" when mizvot are fulfilled,⁹¹ so that, though the body perishes, it will ultimately be resurrected. Nahmanides' discussion implies that resurrection as a reward for mizvot is a natural rather than a miraculous consequence.⁹²

Close to a fifth of the Sermon⁹³ is devoted to an analysis of the significance of charity in the Bible and Rabbinic literature, showing in effect how its rewards follow necessarily and naturally. The disproportionate attention showered upon this particular precept is intended to identify clearly an oasis in the midst of an exacting and severe world dominated by the divine quality of Judgment. Charity is a paradigm for the operation of natural providence in consequence of a mizvah. "Charity saves from death";⁹⁴ it neutralizes God's stern Judgment against non-virtuous, even wicked people.⁹⁵ This is so

Deuteronomy 4:5 enumerates some of the inherent benefits in the laws: social, religious benefits as well as popular acclaim.

⁸⁶See for example the comment on Deuteronomy 7:20. Even if not alluded to, they are taken for granted. Concerning robbery see Nahmanides' comments on Genesis 6:2 and 6:13.

⁸⁷Nahmanides' comment on Leviticus 26:11.

⁸⁸Sermon on Kohelet, pp. 191, 195, 199.

⁸⁹See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 203. תעתה נחזור לעצת שלמה שאין לו אלא שני דברים עבשיו שסלק עצמו מן המקרים ודמו לסוף דברים. לכן אמר חז"ל, *ibid.*, p. 199.

⁹⁰This is Nahmanides' understanding of הבל הבלים, see *ibid.*, pp. 184-190.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁹³*Ibid.*, pp. 204-210.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 206. This verse from Proverbs 10:2 is paradigmatic of a series of benefits which charity will trigger.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 207, שאפילו בשעת הכעס של הקבה הצדקה טובשת.

naturally; human compassion in the form of charity must be reciprocated by divine compassion and consideration, *quid pro quo*.⁹⁶ The naturalness of this reciprocity is further demonstrated by its universality. The rewards of charity are reaped by all people, Jews and non-Jews.⁹⁷ Sodom was destroyed for its callousness, its insensitivity to charitable giving. It would have been spared, even after its fate was sealed, if the way of charity had been pursued.⁹⁸ This then is one mode of countering the travails of Judgment, by acting in a way that appeals to divine justice and fairness and would elicit a response in kind.

There is another way of overcoming Judgment and that is by transcending the system altogether through *devekut* with the Shekinah.⁹⁹ While the providence generated by the first level is natural, necessary and universal, the higher level entails a providence which is not necessitated by reason, is supernatural, and restricted to a spiritual elite.

We saw earlier (in Section II) that the way of life climaxed by *devekut* with the Shekinah (the climax is precipitated from without) involves spiritualizing the body, defined by Nahmanides as asceticism, forbearance, pre-occupation with God. In response to this way of life, the Shekinah produces "hidden miracles," a special providential system of rewards and punishments explicitly set forth in the Torah. This providence is regulated not by the divine quality of Judgment, but by that of the Shekinah, which tempers strict Judgment with Compassion.¹⁰⁰ What makes this providence miraculous rather than natural is the fact that there is no necessary relation between the act and its promised reward or punishment (as there was on the first level); no causal link between righteous living and a blessed abundance of food, to take one example of hidden miracle.

Not everyone is privy to this special providence. The way climaxed by *devekut* with the Shekinah is the way of the צדיק,¹⁰¹ and the rewards of

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 191.

הצדיקים בספר הזה העושים במצות שלמה (לא לתור אחרי תענוגות העולם) יחי' כאברהם יצחק ויעקב...ונעשו להם נסים נסתרים.

¹⁰⁰Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 17:1 מטה של מטה refer to the Shekinah.

¹⁰¹The first systematic indication that there are three levels of virtuous people, (aside from the רשעים גמורים who are the negative correlative of צדיקים גמורים, as in Nahmanides' comment on Deuteronomy 11:13) comes from Nahmanides' categorization in his comment on Job 36:7 (*Kitvei I*, pp. 108-109). That the terms *Zaddik* and *Hasid* are not synonymous can be established

devekut are currently reserved for him only. He enjoys special attention from the Shekinah "from the beginning of the year until the end of the

by correlating what is being said of the Hasid's type of providence in the comment on Job 36:7 and how this type of providence is explained in the Sermon on Kohelet, p. 192. Transcending nature or causing mutations in it is achievable by devekut with *שם המיוחד*, the sephirah of Tiferet. Those benefiting from such providence are the *דבקי שם המיוחד*. These very benefits are assigned to the Hasid in the comment on Job. The Zaddik, on the other hand, in devekut with Shekinah, not Tiferet, benefits from the providence of "hidden miracles" (*Kirvei* I, p. 192), but being within nature is sometimes susceptible to *מקרים*. The paradigm for devekut with the Shekinah here (*ibid.*, p. 191), and elsewhere, are the Patriarchs (see Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 17:1 and Exodus 6:2).

Nahmanides' use of the terms is precise and consistent. See, for example, his comment on Genesis 17:1

כי בו [בשכינה] יעשי הנסים הנסתרים לצדיקים להציל ממות נפשם...לפדותם במלחמה ככל הנסים הנעשים לאברהם ולאבות ולכל הבאים בחקותי ובפרשת...כי תבוא בברכות ובקללות שכולם נסים הם.

See also his comment on Genesis 6:9 concerning Noah: רק בשם [הנכבד] לבדו הוא. *שם* refers to the Shekinah.

In his comment on Genesis 25:3 Nahmanides defines the Zaddik in terms of the asceticism which, as he says elsewhere, leads ultimately to devekut with the Shekinah.

בצדיקים מזה טובה בהם שלא יתאו במזותיות, ולא כמו בשאר האנשים אודם כסף לא ישבע כסף. Commenting on Genesis 18:1 Nahmanides distinguishes between *גלוי שכינה* intended to convey a didactic message, on the one hand, and one designed as reward (גמול המצוה) or as expression of divine approval, on the other. The devekut which climaxes the Zaddik's way of life would be in the latter category. Nahmanides concludes this discussion by saying *ידויה זה להגן על עבדי המצויים ילכדם* (Reflected in the last phrase is the protective quality of devekut with the Shekinah, a quality which is also indicated in his comment on Deuteronomy 22:6 concerning reasons for the law:

אין התעלול לו [במצות] רק שנתע אנתו האמת תוכה בו עד שנהי' ראים להיות מגן עלינו. Nahmanides moves here from the first level of observance of the laws and the knowledge of God which it communicates onto the second level, characterized by devkut with the Shekinah and its protective quality.)

Nahmanides is equally consistent in his use of the term Hasid.

In his sermon "Torat ha-Shem Temimah" (p. 168) he speaks of the power the Hasid has to cause changes in nature through his knowledge of the divine name of 72 letters:

שם של שבעים ושתיים אותיות שבו משתמשין חסידי הדודות הידועין אותו להמית ולהחיות...

See also *ibid.*, p. 155. Nahmanides' comment on Genesis 18:1, dealing with the extraordinary vision of which Hasidim are capable, apparently refers to a subtle expression of Tiferet. See R. Isaac of Acre's *Meirat Eynaim* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 67-68, where Nahmanides' notion of a spiritualized body in *עולם הבא* is brought to bear, and *ibid.*, p. 42 for the casual reference to the meaning of *איש* (in Genesis

year."¹⁰² The community as a whole will join in witnessing the realization of the as yet unfulfilled Biblical promises for reward and punishment, when the Shekinah makes its home within the people, at the "time of the consummation."¹⁰³ Everyone must believe in the ultimate fulfillment of these promises. The one who does not can have no share in this special miraculous providence which the "Torah of Moses our Teacher" holds out and would have to resort to the natural providence discussed earlier.¹⁰⁴

Nahmanides is aware of, and describes, the effects of an even higher sort of *devekut*, with *Tiferet* rather than with the *Shekinah*. This *devekut* is not a mystical gift that comes from without, only as the result of the way of the *צדיק*; it is a mystical experience rather, initiated by man, the *חסיד*, entailing the divorce of soul from body. In contrast to *devekut* with the *Shekinah* where the mystic remains within his body and within nature, the higher *devekut*, the mystical transport of the *חסיד* to *Tiferet* enables him to transcend the restrictions of nature, even to cause mutations in it.¹⁰⁵ But Nahmanides' awareness of this ecstatic mystical phenomenon of

3:23). When Nahmanides couples *צדיק* and *חסיד* in his comment on Genesis 18:19, it is because they are jointly contrasted with the first level of providence, set off from the higher levels.

A transition from *devekut* with *Tiferet* to a *devekut* with *Shekinah* is indicated in Nahmanides' comment on Deuteronomy 11:22. The move from the *Tiferet*-saturated atmosphere in the desert which was productive of manifest miracles (on the relation of these to mutations in natural law, see Sermon on *Kohelet*, p. 192) to *devekut* with the *Shekinah*, productive of "hidden miracles" only, was going to be difficult. But Jews are cautioned to pursue this latter *devekut* just the same.

¹⁰²Nahmanides' comment on Job 36:7. The phrase is borrowed from Deuteronomy 11:10 where Nahmanides links up this special providence with the special relation of the *Shekinah* to the land of Israel.

¹⁰³Nahmanides' comment on Leviticus 26:12

דע כי לא השיג ישראל מעולם לברכות האלה בשלמותו... כי לא נתקיים אבל יתקיים עמו בזמן השלמות.

¹⁰⁴Such would appear to be the meaning of the following passage in Nahmanides' comment on Exodus 13:16,

שאין לאדם חלק בתורת משה רבינו עד שנאמן בכל דבריו ומקרינו שכלם נסים אין בהם טבע ומעורר של עולם בין ברבים בין ביחוד. אלא אם יעשה המצות יצליחו שכרו, ואם יעבור עליהם יכרתו ענשו, הכל בגזרת עליין.

"אלא" does not serve in apposition to the previous clause, but in contrast to it, in the sense of "but rather." If one does not believe in hidden miracles, one cannot share in the unique reward and punishment system of Mosaic law, and hence has to resort to the first level of providence.

¹⁰⁵See note 101. For an account of the generally imprecise usage of the terms *Zaddik*, and *Hasid* by medieval ethical and kabbalistic writers up to and including

union with Tiferet¹⁰⁶ nowhere impels him to treat it as normative, as universally relevant. Devekut with the Shekinah is so treated.¹⁰⁷

The Fall resulted in the Shekinah's revelation rather than its withdrawal, because man's religious struggle precipitated by the Fall was now focused on union with the Shekinah in devekut. In fact, it is not only people who attain their *raison d'être* in this life by communing with the Shekinah; it is the Shekinah itself who somehow needs the service of the physical person.¹⁰⁸ Having received (and still receiving) the veneration of supernal beings with no freedom of choice, God now seeks the service of "fleshly ones" with free choice. This service, as mentioned previously, leads to a knowledge of the Creator on two levels. The first level will ideally result in theoretical assent to fundamental religious doctrines. The higher level is devekut with the Shekinah in the body, through control of body and mind. This devekut consists in an intimate knowledge of God, not merely through theoretical assent but through being worthy of the gift of mystical union with the Shekinah. Recognition of the Creator becomes a fact of life, not only an intellectual datum.

We noted earlier that through devekut with the Shekinah in the world, followed by more intense devekut in Eden, and more intense still in messianic days, then in the world to come, there is a progressive spiritualization of physical reality. This process of apokastasis is characterized by Nahmanides as השבת והדברים להיות.¹⁰⁹ Even when material reality reaches this ultimate consummation,¹¹⁰ however, the body is not spiritualized away. In tribute to its past role, God wishes to preserve it as a "spiritual body" though it no longer has any functional value. Created "to realize a great need and for a lofty reason," namely, to

the Zohar, see I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, pp. 655-667. Nahmanides fits this general pattern insofar as he does not distinguish between the terms along the lines of "normal" vs. "radical." The new distinction that he does make seems to be employed consistently.

¹⁰⁶See Nahmanides' comment on Exodus 16:6, כי הנפש במחשבתה תדבק בעלייתם, and the end of note 101.

¹⁰⁷Relevant here is Nahmanides' comment on Deuteronomy 11:22 ולדבקה בו, and his recurrent use of it as a paradigm of his notion of devekut.

¹⁰⁸See Nahmanides' comment on Exodus 30:46,

כפי פשט הדבר השכינה בישראל צורך הדין ולא צורך גבוה, אבל הוא כענין שאמר הכתוב ישראל אשר בך אנחנו

¹⁰⁹The phrase is mentioned in Nahmanides' commentary to Sefer Yezira, in G. Scholem, *Perakim le-Toledot Sifrut ha-Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1931), p. 102, and in Nahmanides' poem "Me-Rosh mi-Kadmei olamim," *Kitvei I*, p. 394.

¹¹⁰Sermon on Kohelet, pp. 184-187.

house the Shekinah among the "fleshly ones," the body must not be discarded even after its task had been discharged.¹¹¹

V

Our primary goal in this article has been to establish the *fact* of divergence between Rabbi Azriel and Nahmanides, two individuals whom we would have expected to exhibit more congruence. What remains to be done is to account briefly for the divergence. Several directions may be outlined for consideration.

One approach is to view Nahmanides' theoretical position as a conservative reaction to the extreme spiritualizing tendency of some Maimonidean¹¹² and kabbalistic¹¹³ (e.g. Rabbi Azriel) adherents in thirteenth-century Spain, a tendency reflected for example in their denial of physical resurrection. This spiritualizing tendency was latently antinomian, and constructing a system which exalts the body's status would endow practical observance with a binding significance.

Another approach is to consider Nahmanides' perspective on the Fall as reflecting an anti-Christian polemic. The Commentary on the Bible was completed shortly after the Disputation of Barcelona, which itself dealt in part with original sin.¹¹⁴ It would stand to reason, in any case, that the polemical "war of the verses" between Christians and Jews, begun already in the New Testament, would insinuate itself into Biblical exegesis, especially concerning the seminal Christian notion of the Fall.¹¹⁵

Whatever the historical uses of Nahmanides' position, however, it stems essentially from a coherent, consistent theory which systematically touches many areas of his thought.

¹¹¹Shaar ha-Gemul, p. 305

לא היתה הצורה ל זה הדמות הפקר בלא טעם רק לצורך גזל ולטעם נבדל העשו יתברך רצה בקדמו.

¹¹²On Sheshet Benveniste, for example, and his rejection of physical resurrection, see Alexander Marx, "Texts By and About Maimonides," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 25 (1935), pp. 417-426, and Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 47, 58, 112. Concerning the spiritualized messiansim of R. Isaac b. Yedaiah, a philosophical interpreter of aggadah writing around 1260, see Marc Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), pp. 112-120, 202-205.

¹¹³See the kabbalist R. Asher ben David's censure of contemporaries who reject physical resurrection on grounds similar to R. Azriel's, both in terms of the proof-text from Daniel 12 and the disdain for the body. *Ozar Nehmad* IV (Vienna, 1864).

¹¹⁴"Vekuah," pp. 309-310.

¹¹⁵This has recently been shown for the Rashbam. See Elazar Touitou, "Peshat ve-Apologética be-Feirush ha-Rashbam be-Sipurei Moshe sheba-Torah," *Tarbiz* 51 (1982), pp. 227-238.

Miracles and the Natural Order in Nahmanides

David Berger

THE CENTRALITY of miracles in Nahmanides' theology cannot escape the attention of even the most casual observer, and his doctrine of the hidden miracle exercised a particularly profound and abiding influence on subsequent Jewish thought. Nevertheless, his repeated emphasis on the miraculous—and particularly the unrestrained rhetoric of a few key passages—has served to obscure and distort his true position, which was far more moderate, nuanced and complex than both medieval and modern scholars have been led to believe.

I

To Nahmanides, miracles serve as the ultimate validation of all three central dogmas of Judaism: creation *ex nihilo*, divine knowledge, and providence (*hiddush, yedi'ah, hashgahah*).¹ In establishing the relationship between miracles and his first dogma, Nahmanides applies a philosophical argument in a particularly striking way. "According to the believer in the eternity of the world," he writes, "if God wished to shorten the wing of a fly or lengthen the leg of an ant he would be unable to do so."² Hence, miracles demonstrate creation.

The reverse contention that creation demonstrates the possibility of miracles is an assertion which goes back to Philo.³ In this case, however, Nahmanides is applying to miracles an argument that Saadya had used

Some of the issues analyzed in this article were discussed in a more rudimentary form in chapters one, three, and four of my master's essay, "Nahmanides' Attitude Toward Secular Learning and its Bearing upon his Stance in the Maimonidean Controversy" (Columbia University, 1965), which was directed by Prof. Gerson D. Cohen.

¹*Torat HaShem Temimah* (henceforth *THT*), in *Kirvei Ramban*, ed. by Ch. Chavel, I (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 150. On Nahmanides' dogmas and their connection with miracles, see S. Schechter, "Nachmanides," in *Studies in Judaism I* (Philadelphia, 1896), pp. 118-22, and Ch. Henoeh, *HaRamban KeHozer VekhiMequbbal* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 159-79.

²*THT*, p. 146. All translations from Nahmanides' works are mine.

³H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1948) I, pp. 298-99, 354; II, pp. 199-200. Cf. also the references in Wolfson's *Religious Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961), p. 223.

about the fundamental hypothesis of creation from primeval matter. Such creation, the Gaon had contended, would have been impossible, since "God would not have [had] the power to create things out of" pre-existent matter; "it would not have accepted his command nor allowed itself to be affected according to his wish and shaped according to his design."⁴ The direct source of Nahmanides' imagery, however, is not Saadya but Maimonides. In discussing the Aristotelian version of the eternity of the universe, Maimonides remarked that if the world operates through necessity and not through will, "very disgraceful conclusions will follow....Namely, it would follow that the deity, whom everyone intelligent recognizes to be perfect in every kind of perfection, could, as far as all the beings are concerned, produce nothing new in any of them; if He wished to lengthen a fly's wing or shorten a worm's foot, He would not be able to do it."⁵

The glaring anomaly in Nahmanides' borrowing of this vivid image is that Maimonides applied the argument not to any denial of *ex nihilo* creation but only to an Aristotelian universe governed by necessity; according to the "Platonic" version of eternity, miracles are possible.⁶ Maimonides, in fact, practically begins his discussion of the question of creation by describing how the Platonic approach can maintain both the eternity of matter and divine control over it by appealing to an analogy with the potter's relationship to his clay. Here is a case in which control is manifestly not dependent upon creation or even chronological priority.⁷

Since Nahmanides uses only the word *hiddush* (not creation *me'ayin*) in connection with this argument in his *Torat Ha-Shem Temimah* and since

⁴Translation from A. Altmann's selections in *Three Jewish Philosophers* (Cleveland, New York, and Philadelphia, 1960), p. 61 = *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, translated by S. Rosenblatt (New Haven, 1948), p. 48. Halevi (*Kuzari* I.91, and cf. V.14) also spoke of a connection between miracles and creation; he was, however, less dogmatic about the indispensability of the belief in creation *ex nihilo* since "a believer in the Torah" who accepted the reality of eternal hylic matter could nevertheless retain the conviction that "this world was renewed at a certain time and the beginning of humanity is Adam and Eve" (I.67; contrast, however, II.50). Apparently Halevi's characteristic skepticism about the decisive force of philosophical arguments—in this case the demonstration of a link between miracles and *ex nihilo* creation—ironically enables him to tolerate a radical philosophical position more readily than Saadya or Nahmanides. (On the other hand, he may have been thinking of a specific refutation of this link, perhaps along the lines of the argument that we shall be examining shortly.)

⁵Guide II. 22 (Pines' translation).

⁶Guide II. 25.

⁷Guide II. 13.

Maimonides at one point uses the word *hiddush* about the Platonic view of eternity,⁸ there is a fleeting temptation to suggest that Nahmanides was not pressing this particular argument, at least to the discerning reader, beyond the point where Maimonides had taken it. This temptation, however, must almost certainly be resisted, for we find Nahmanides using the same argument (though without the Maimonidean language) in his *Commentary to Exodus* explicitly about creation *ex nihilo*; miracles demonstrate *hiddush* by showing that everything is God's since he created it from nothing.⁹ Nahmanides nowhere addresses the "Platonic" analogy with the potter, and it must be said that, in the very same chapter of the *Guide* where he presents the analogy, Maimonides himself suggests that the Aristotelian and Platonic versions of creation do not differ significantly in the eyes of one who follows the Torah.¹⁰ Hence, it may well be that Nahmanides was disarmed by Maimonides' ambiguities and was not fully cognizant of the disparity between his use of the "fly's wing" image and the use of which it was put in his source.

In any event, we are left to speculate about Nahmanides' response to the potter analogy. He may have felt that the potter's control over his clay is far too restricted to serve as a paradigm for God's power over the world. Perhaps more significantly, he might have argued that this analogy begs the question since the control of a potter over his clay is ultimately derived from God (Genesis 1:28; Psalms 8:7), but God's own power must be called into question if matter is primeval. Miracles are possible only, to use Shem Tov's play on a talmudic phrase, because "the mouth which prohibited is the one which permitted."¹¹

However Nahmanides may have dealt with this question, the most telling aspect of his presentation involves the sharpening of another, related point made by Saadya. To the Gaon, the denial of creation *ex nihilo* is motivated by the excessive empiricism of people who believe only what their eyes see and what their senses perceive,¹² and Nahmanides

⁸*Guide* II. 25. The word appears in Al-Harizi's translation (II. 26), which was the one Nahmanides used, as well as in Ibn Tibbon's.

⁹To Exodus 13:16.

¹⁰*Guide* II. 13. Cf. also the end of n. 14 below. For some of the peculiarities in Maimonides' treatment of Platonic eternity, see H. Davidson, "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation," in I. Twersky, ed., *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1979), pp. 16-40.

¹¹*Commentary to Guide* II. 25.

¹²For example, *Beliefs and Opinions* I, Rosenblatt's translation, pp. 38-39, 61-62, 71, 76.

twice refers to Aristotle as a man who believed only what he could sense.¹³ In light of this perception, the argument from miracles can be sharpened into a remarkably effective polemical weapon: since miracles are an empirical datum, and they establish creation *ex nihilo* through a straightforward philosophical demonstration, the affirmation of eternity is a rejection of empiricism. "Hence you see the stubbornness of the leader of the philosophers, may his name be erased, for he denies a number of things that many have seen, whose truth we ourselves have witnessed, and which have become famous in the world."¹⁴ The arch-empiricist is revealed as a pseudo-empiricist.

In an important way, this argument exemplifies Nahmanides' fundamental philosophical stance. Because revelation—and hence the content of the revelation—is an empirical datum, there is hardly much point in wasting energy and ingenuity in demonstrating such things as God's existence or unity, and Nahmanides never bothers with such philosophical exercises. At the same time, the use of reason to understand God, creation, and other key theological issues is essential. Those who spurn an investigation into theodicy on the grounds that it will inevitably remain a mystery are "fools who despise wisdom. For we shall benefit ourselves in the above-mentioned study by becoming wise men who know God in the manner in which he acts and in his deeds; furthermore, we shall become believers endowed with a stronger faith in him than others."¹⁵

¹³*THT*, p. 147; *Comm. to Lev.* 16:18.

¹⁴*THT*, p. 147. Saadya's attack against the empiricism of believers in eternity usually took the form of arguing that they too end by believing in things that they have never experienced (cf. the references in n. 12). He does appeal to miracles as well (e.g. Rosenblatt's translation, pp. 40, 58, 73), but on at least one of those occasions (and probably the others too) he seems to have in mind the less direct argument that miracles validate Scripture, which in turn teaches the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. In any case, he never formulates the argument found in Nahmanides as clearly, sharply, or effectively.

In Maimonides' "fly's wing" passage, the argument was based not on the fact that God had demonstrated his control of the world but on the assertion that lack of such control would be a philosophically inadmissible imperfection in the deity. In the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, however (ed. by J. Finkel [New York, 1939], p. 32, #46), which was directed to a more popular audience, Maimonides did argue that miracles demonstrate *hiddush* "as we have explained in the *Guide*." Most readers were not likely to realize that this *hiddush* can include Platonic eternity.

¹⁵*Sha'ar HaGemul*, in *Kitvei Ramban* II, p. 281. The phrase "fools who despise wisdom" (הכסילים מאזים החכמה), though based, as Chavel remarks, on Proverbs 1:22 (הכסילים ישארו דעת), is borrowed from a similar discussion in Saadya: "Many people have erred and despised wisdom (מאסו בחכמה), some because they did not know the

In our case, the reality of miracles is taken for granted, and the connection with creation *ex nihilo* is made by a philosophical argument. Without denigrating the use of reason, Nahmanides has eliminated the boundary between revelation and reason by incorporating revealed information, openly and unselfconsciously, into what might be described as the data base for philosophical analysis. It is this approach which accounts for his discussing theological issues primarily in the context of a commentary to the revelation,¹⁶ and it is this, I think, which attracted him to kabbalah. Nahmanides' mysticism, after all, is essentially a revealed philosophical system, and the function of kabbalah as a harmonizing force subsuming both reason and revelation may well precede and transcend Nahmanides to account for the attractiveness of medieval Jewish mysticism in precisely the time and place where it first became a major force. It is no accident that late twelfth-century Provençal Jewry was the locus of both the rise of kabbalah and a confrontation with philosophy by a Jewish community without a philosophical tradition. Jewish mysticism provided an ideal solution for a mind captivated by the philosophic quest but committed only to authentic, revealed sources. The Talmud, it is true, spoke of the danger that esoteric investigation could lead to heresy; nonetheless, the perils posed by the study of esoteric doctrines revealed by God pale in comparison with the heresies awaiting a student of ultimate questions whose only guides are reason and Aristotle.¹⁷ Within the kabbalistic system, the boundary between revelation and philosophy was completely erased, so that Nahmanides and like-minded contemporaries could satisfy their yearning for what might best be termed not a religious philosophy but a philosophical religion.

way to it, while some knew and entered the path but did not complete it....Therefore, let not the contemptuous fool (הכסיל הקץ) blame God for his sin." My translation from Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew. See *Sefer HaEmunot VehaDe'ot* (Józefow, 1878) I, p. 41 = Rosenblatt's translation, p. 13. On the reading הַכְסִיל הַקֵּץ (אמרו), see M. Ventura, *La Philosophie de Saadia Gaon* (Paris, 1934), p. 311.

¹⁶Cf. Chavel, *Ramban: His Life and Teachings* (New York, 1960), pp. 67-68.

¹⁷Though he is referring to a later period, A. S. Halkin's remarks can be applied to the twelfth century as well: "Its [kabbalah's] concern with fundamental problems and its incorporation of philosophical concepts into a system which vaunted a purely Jewish ancestry and claimed that it represented the deepest understanding of the revealed books, qualified it both to satisfy the curiosity of those who sought answers to theological and cosmological questions and to challenge Aristotelianism and its Jewish exponents as alien plants within Jewry." "Yedaiah Bedersi's Apology," in A. Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), p. 183.

This commitment to kabbalah raises a crucial final question concerning the sincerity of the argument that we have been examining. Nahmanides demonstrates creation *ex nihilo* through an appeal to miracles—but did he really believe in creation *ex nihilo*? Scholem has shown that the mystical school in Gerona, of which Nahmanides was the most prominent representative, turned the naive understanding of the term on its head and understood *ayin* (= *nihil*) as a word for the hidden recesses of the Godhead itself; creation is a process of emanation from the divine Nothing, not the sudden appearance of matter from ordinary nothingness.¹⁸ Although there may be a certain disingenuousness in the kabbalist's use of this term to an uninitiated audience, Nahmanides' argument remains relatively unaffected and must almost certainly be regarded as sincere. The kabbalistic doctrine continues to assert—indeed, to insist—that the process of creation precludes the primeval existence of matter independent of God; even from a mystical perspective, then, the argument from miracles can be mobilized to deny the existence of such independent matter, and that is essentially what Nahmanides has done. Whether the alternative is creation from nothing or from Nothing depends on the reader's kabbalistic sophistication, but Nahmanides' appeal to miracles in support of his first dogma remains both ingenious and ingenious.¹⁹

¹⁸Scholem's most elaborate discussion is in *HaQabbalah BeGerona*, pp. 212-40.

¹⁹For the possibility that Nahmanides may have attempted somehow to salvage the straightforward understanding of creation *ex nihilo* within a mystical framework, see *HaQabbalah BeGerona*, pp. 255-65, esp. 261-65. On the subject of straightforward versus esoteric biblical exegesis (*peshat* vs. *sod*), A. Funkenstein has recently written that "*peshat* and *sod* correspond[or 'overlap'—*hofefim*] in only one place [in Nahmanides' exegesis]: kabbalah is the central dimension in understanding the reason for sacrifices (*Comm. to Lev. 1:9*). Everywhere else *peshat* and *sod* are different, and in Genesis 1:1 this reaches the point of syntactical contradiction: according to 'the way of genuine truth,' the word 'God' is not the subject of the verse but rather its object" ("Parshanuto HaTippologit shel HaRamban," *Zion* 45 [1980]:46-47). Cf. also H. H. Ben Sasson, "Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman: Ish BeSivkhei Tequfato," *Molad*, n.s. 1 (1967):360, 362-63.

In fact, however, Nahmanides displays a pronounced tendency to equate *peshat* and *sod* by finding that the plain meaning of Scripture can be explained satisfactorily—or most satisfactorily—only by resorting to kabbalistic doctrine. Thus, only the esoteric interpretation pointing to metempsychosis really "fits the verses" of Elihu's critical speech in Job (*Comm. to Job* 32:3), only according to the kabbalistic interpretation is the sin of Moses and Aaron "mentioned explicitly in the biblical text" (*Comm. to Numbers* 20:1), only a midrash requiring kabbalistic elaboration "fits the language of the verse best" in Genesis 6:4, only after understanding a

II

Nahmanides goes on to assert that miracles—or more precisely, manifest miracles—validate the remaining two dogmas of divine knowledge and providence.²⁰ The connection here is so obvious as to be scarcely interesting, but it is in this discussion of the nature of providence that Nahmanides cites his central, seminal doctrine of the hidden miracle—and that doctrine is exceptionally interesting. Although similar views had been expressed earlier by Bahya, Halevi, and even Maimonides,²¹ no previous Jewish thinker had laid equivalent emphasis on such a conception, applied it as widely, or made it as central to his world view. The hidden miracle, then, justly came to be regarded as a Nahmanidean doctrine *par excellence*, and the intellectual image of Nahmanides has often been drawn in significant measure with this doctrine in mind. Thus, to the extent that we have misunderstood the hidden miracle, we have misunderstood Nahmanides.

In at least two formulations of his position, Nahmanides permitted himself some rhetorical excesses that have inevitably fostered such misunderstanding. "A person has no portion in the Torah of Moses," he writes, "without believing that all things that happen to us are miracles; they have nothing to do with 'nature' or 'the customary order of the

mystical secret in connection with the second commandment will "the entire verse become clear in accordance with its simple, straightforward meaning" (*Comm. to Exodus* 20:3), and Exodus 6:2-3 will reveal its "simple, straightforward meaning" (*Comm. ad loc.*) "with nothing missing or superfluous" (*Sermon on Qohelet, Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 192) only through kabbalistic exegesis. Cf. also Scholem's remark about the *Commentary to Job, HaQabbalah BeGerona*, p. 75, specifically with respect to Job 28 (cf. too p. 230). It is particularly significant that although Nahmanides endorses the content of the kabbalistic doctrine read into that chapter by his source (R. Ezra's commentary to the Song of Songs), he expresses reservations (not noted by Scholem) about the validity of the exegesis (*Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 90). In a sense, this underlines the point; if Nahmanides were prepared to find *sod* through forced interpretation, he would have accepted such exegesis without resistance. On the importance of *peshat* to Nahmanides, see also J. Perles, "Ueber den Geist des Commentars des R. Moses ben Nachman zum Pentateuch und über sein Verhältniss zum Pentateuch-Commentar Raschi's," *MGWJ* 7 (1858):119-20, esp. n. 2.

²⁰*THT*, pp. 150, 155.

²¹See *HaQabbalah BeGerona*, pp. 305, 309. Nahmanides himself (*THT*, p. 154) noted that Maimonides' *Treatise on the Resurrection* contains a passage supporting his view; the passage he had in mind, which certainly influenced him, was without question the one pointed out by Scholem (Finkel's ed., pp. 33-36, #48-50), not the ones noted by Chavel in his edition of *THT* ad loc.

world'.²² More succinctly, "One who believes in the Torah may not believe in the existence of nature at all."²³ The analysis underlying these remarks appears almost as a refrain throughout Nahmanides' works: since the Torah promises rewards and punishments ranging from famine to plague to constant good health, and since there is nothing "natural" about the link between human behavior and such phenomena, providence must be realized through a series of hidden miracles disguised as part of an apparent natural order.²⁴

It is hardly surprising, then, that students of Nahmanides have perceived him as a thinker who denied, or virtually denied, the existence of natural law. Solomon Schechter, for example, argues that "We may...maintain that in Nachmanides' system there is hardly room left for such a thing as nature or 'the order of the world'....Miracles are raised to a place in the regular scheme of things, and the difficulty regarding the possibility of God's interference with nature disappears by their very multiplication. [There is] an unbroken chain of miracles."²⁵

To Gershom Scholem, Nahmanides tends

to turn what we call the laws of nature into a sort of optical illusion, since we regard what is really a continuum of miracles as a manifestation of natural law....These hidden miracles, which are the foundation of the entire Torah, are miracles which do not appear miraculous to us....The world and the behavior of nature and their relationship to man are not at all in the category of what we call nature; they are, rather, a constant and constantly renewed miracle, a continuous chain of miracles....²⁶

Nahmanides' position, Scholem says, is very close to occasionalism, a later philosophical school which denied natural law entirely, though there is one very significant exception: Nahmanides was a virtual occasionalist only with respect to Israel; other nations live in a world of nature.²⁷

In his recent book on Nahmanides, Chayim Henoch makes the same comparison between the "constant miraculous renewal" in Nahmanides' thought and both occasionalists and *mutakallimun*, while pointing out,

²²*Comm. to Exodus* 13:16; *THT*, p. 153.

²³*Sermon on Qohelet*, *Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 192.

²⁴*See Comm. to Gen.* 17:1, 46:15; *Exod.* 6:2; *Lev.* 18:29, 26:11.

²⁵"Nahmanides," pp. 119-20.

²⁶*HaQabbalah BeGerona*, pp. 306-07.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 309-10.

like Scholem, that this applies only to Israel.²⁸ Yitzhak Baer's classic *History* presents Nahmanides as an anti-rationalist who denied the natural order, Haim Hillel Ben Sasson's characterization is even more extreme and explicit, and a recent study by Amos Funkenstein refers somewhat more cautiously to "Nahmanides' tendency to blur the boundaries between the natural and the miraculous."²⁹

There can be no question that Nahmanides perceives the operation of providence as a phenomenon consisting of repeated miracles. Indeed, he has forced himself into a position where he denies that God enters the causal chain in any but the most direct way.

If we will stubbornly insist that the [non-priest] who eats of the heave-offering will not die through a change in nature, but that God will cause him to eat food that causes sickness or that he will go to war and die, the fact would remain that the astrological configuration of his constellation would have changed for ill through his sin or for good through his merit so that nature would in any event not prevail. Thus, if the alternative is that God would change this person's mind as a result of his sin so that he would eat harmful foods that he would not have eaten otherwise, it is easier to change the nature of the good food so that it will do him harm.³⁰

Since there is no conceptual difference to Nahmanides between indirect, "natural" providence and miraculous divine intervention, the work-

²⁸*HaRamban KeHoqer VekhiMequbbal*, p. 178. Henoah goes on to emphasize the kabbalistic character of Nahmanides' position, which we shall touch on briefly a bit later. In a much earlier footnote (p. 54, n. 162), he had proposed, as we shall see, a crucial additional qualification, but there is no echo of that note in his later discussion.

²⁹See Baer's *History of the Jews in Christian Spain I* (Philadelphia, 1971), p. 245; *Toledot HaYehudim BiSefarad HaNozrit* (Tel Aviv, 1959), p. 145; Ben Sasson in *Molad*, n.s. 1 (1967):360-61; Funkenstein in *Zion* 45 (1980):45. Ben Sasson's discussion clearly implies that Nahmanides did not recognize a natural realm even in areas that do not impinge on human affairs; thus, it is not only "all things that happen to us" that are miracles. According to Nahmanides, we are prohibited from mixing species because this would constitute unwarranted interference with creation; a sort of *hybris* reflecting the conviction that we can improve on the divine handiwork. To Ben Sasson, the motivation for this interpretation stems from Nahmanides' conviction that even such a "natural" phenomenon as the maintenance of species in their present form is an ongoing miraculous process; hence, human intervention would involve an unseemly attempt to compete not merely with God's creative acts in the distant past but with miracles that He is performing at this very moment.

³⁰Introduction to Job, *Kitvei Ramban I*, p. 19.

ings of providence are best understood as direct hidden miracles unmediated by natural forces. There is therefore hardly any point in asking why Nahmanides does not formally list the hidden miracle as one of his dogmas. He does list it—under the name “providence.”³¹

Nevertheless, Nahmanides was forced by the Bible, the halakhah, and intuitions influenced by philosophy or common sense or both, to recognize that natural law often does operate—even for Jews and probably even for the Jewish collective. Consequently, a careful examination of the totality of Nahmanides’ comments on this issue reveals nature in operation ninety-nine percent of the time, and it is perforce nature without providence, since “natural,” indirect providence is a contradiction in terms.³² Nahmanides’ world is therefore exceptionally—extraordinarily—naturalistic precisely because of his insistence on the miraculous nature of providence.

This is, to say the least, an unexpected conclusion, and we must now take a careful look at the texts which make it inescapable.

God’s knowledge, which is his providence in the lower world, is to guard species, and even individual human beings are left to accidents until their time of reckoning comes. With respect to people of special piety (*hasidav*), however, God turns his attention to such a person to know him as an individual and to see to it that divine

³¹In *THT*, p. 155, Nahmanides comes very close to saying this explicitly:

כבר נתברר כי הנסים המפורסמים מורים על החדוש ועל הידיעה שיש לו להקב"ה בפרטי העולם ועל ההשגחה והנסים הנסתרים. לדעת כל מאמין בעתש העבירות ובשכר המצוות, ולדעת כל מתפלל וכל נושא עניו לשמים, כלם מורים על החדוש ועל הידיעה וההשגחה והראיה אמיתית, אלא שהיא נסתרת, והם שלש מטרות התורה.

Henoch (p. 171) cites this passage, but I don’t think he takes it (as I do) as a virtual equation of hidden miracles and providence in particular. The references to *hashgahah* and *nissim nistarim* really merge into one another, and, despite the syntactical awkwardness which I must ascribe to Nahmanides, the phrase *ella shehi nisteret* seems to me to modify *hashgahah* (not *hoda’ah*) and to mean that providence takes the form of hidden miracles. (Henoch’s subsequent citation of the phrase “all the fundamentals of the Torah come through hidden miracles” from *Comm. to Gen. 46:15* as another assertion of the connection between miracles and dogmas is probably not germane; in that context, “fundamentals of the Torah” does not mean creation, knowledge and providence but reiterates Nahmanides’ standard assertion that all the Torah’s promises of reward and punishment [= “the fundamentals of the Torah”] come through hidden miracles.) Manifest miracles are not listed among the dogmas for the reason Henoch suggests: they are not a dogma in themselves but an expression of divine power and a means by which the fundamental dogmas are validated.

³²Contrast Maimonides, *Guide II. 48*.

protection cleaves to him always; knowledge and remembrance are never separated from him at all. This is the meaning of "He withdraws not his eyes from the righteous" (Job 36:4); indeed, many verses refer to this principle, as it is written, "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him" (Psalms 33:18), and others besides.³³

Since he is commenting on a verse which says that God "knew" Abraham, Nahmanides here understands the term knowledge in a strong sense as the equivalent of providence, but there is no reason to think that this passage limits divine knowledge in the ordinary sense of the word.³⁴ The limitation on providence itself, however, is significant enough; not many people are designated *hasidim* in Nahmanides' terminology, and the attribution of constant providence to precious few individuals is made even clearer by the phrase he uses in a later passage.

Know that miracles are performed for good or ill only for the absolutely righteous (*zaddiqim gemurim*) or the absolutely wicked. Those in the middle have good or ill occur to them according to the customary order of the world "in accordance with their way and their actions" (Ezekiel 36:17).³⁵

The assertion that miracles are performed only for the absolutely righteous or wicked is couched in general terms and appears to include every variety of miracles. Hence, ordinary people are excluded from the regular operation of hidden miracles and are left, as in the *Commentary to Genesis*, to the customary, natural order. The last phrase from Ezekiel, however, remains troublesome. It could mean that such people are left to some sort of indirect providence weaker than the one which works by hidden miracles, but this would directly contradict the introduction to the *Commentary to Job*, which virtually denies the existence of such providence, it would contradict the assertion in the *Commentary to Genesis* that non-*hasidim* are left to "accidents," and it would introduce a category or providence found nowhere else in Nahmanides. The most likely meaning, then, is that people left to accidents will be subjected to good or

³³*Comm. to Gen.* 18:19.

³⁴Cf. the passage from Bahya cited by Chavel ad loc., and contrast L. Stein's assertion cited in n. 37 below. Note too that, if we would not assume constant divine knowledge in the weak sense, we would need to resort to complex and obscure triggering mechanisms to account for the "time of reckoning" and perhaps even for God's recognition that so-and-so has become the sort of pious man deserving of constant divine protection. See the related discussion at nn. 38-42 below.

³⁵*Comm. to Deut.* 11:13.

evil according to "their way and their actions" in a purely naturalistic sense; those who are careful will be safer than those who are not. Just such a position, in fact, emerges from a passage in the *Commentary to Job* that we shall examine in a moment where Nahmanides maintains that people left to accidents are likely to stumble unless they are particularly cautious.

Reinforcing this conception that God may well decide to leave people to accidents is Nahmanides' celebrated discussion of medicine, where he maintains that in an ideal Jewish society even individuals would be dealt with miraculously so that medical treatment would be either unnecessary or futile. Regrettably, people began to consult doctors, and so God left them "to natural accidents."³⁶ In this case, the halakhic permissibility of consulting physicians, which Nahmanides goes on to cite, undoubtedly played a role in moderating his skepticism about his own profession; the Torah, he says, does not rest its laws on miracles. This halakhic principle is not especially congenial to an occasionalist, and, as we shall see, this is not the only instance in which it worked to mitigate Nahmanides' emphasis on the miraculous.

These passages leave no alternative to a thorough rethinking of the standard image of Nahmanides. Chayim Henoch, who studied Nahmanides' *oeuvre* with painstaking care, does confront them in a footnote, and he suggests that the passages about miraculous providence may refer to the Jewish collective and not to all Jewish individuals. Nevertheless, since we have seen that he later describes Nahmanides as maintaining a view close to that of the occasionalists and the *mutakallimun*, the enormity of this concession has apparently failed to make a sufficient impression.³⁷ Finally, even the sharply shrunken position which applies Nahmanides' denial of the natural order only to the Jewish collective (in addition to a handful of extraordinarily righteous and wicked individuals) must be shaken by a particularly striking passage in the *Commentary to Job*.

He withdraws not his eyes from the righteous (Job 36:7): This verse explains a great principle with respect to providence concerning which there are in fact many verses. For people of Torah and perfect faith believe in providence, i.e., that God watches over and

³⁶Comm. to Lev. 26:11.

³⁷See above, n. 28. One nineteenth-century scholar noticed the passage in Comm. to Gen. 18:19 and allowed it to make too great an impression, asserting in a brief passage that Nahmanides' view of both divine knowledge and providence is virtually identical with that of Gersonides. See L. Stein, *Die Willensfreiheit und ihr Verhältniss zur göttlichen Präscienz und Providenz bei den Jüdischen Philosophen des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1882), pp. 126-27. See above, n. 34.

protects the members of the human species....It is not said in the Torah or prophets that God watches over and protects the individuals of other groups of creatures that do not speak; rather, he guards only the species....The reason for this is clearly known, for since man recognizes his God, God in turn watches over him and protects him; this is not true of the other creatures, which do not speak and do not know their creator.

This, then, is why he protects the righteous, for just as their heart and eyes are always with him, so are the eyes of God on them from the beginning of the year until the end, to the point where the absolutely pious man (*hasid*) who cleaves to his God always and who never separates himself from him in his thoughts by paying attention to mundane matters will be guarded always from all accidents, even those that take place in the natural course of events; such a person will be protected from these accidents through a miracle occurring to him constantly, as if he were considered one of the supernal beings who are not subject to generation and corruption by accidents. To the extent that this individual comes close to God by cleaving to him, he will be guarded especially well, while one who is far from God in his thought and deeds, even if he does not deserve death because of his sin, will be forsaken and left to accidents.

Many verses make this point. David [*sic*] said, "He will guard the feet of his holy ones, but the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness" (I Samuel 2:9). He means by this that those who are close to God are under absolute protection, while those who are far from him are subject to accidents and have no one to protect them from harm, just as one who walks in the darkness is likely to fall unless he is cautious and walks slowly. David also said that "it is not with sword and spear that the Lord saves" (I Samuel 17:47), and it is written, "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who wait for his mercy" (Psalms 33:18); i.e., God's eyes are on them when they wait for him constantly and their souls cleave to him.

Since most of the world belongs to this intermediate group, the Torah commanded that warriors be mobilized, and that the priest anointed for war send back the fearful so that they will not sap the courage of the others. It is for this reason too that we find the preparation of the order of battle in the Torah and the prophets, for example, "And David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord said, 'Do not go up; circle around behind them...' (II Samuel 5:23), and 'Go and draw toward Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men' (Judges 4:6). Had they been meritorious, they would have gone out with a few people and achieved victory without

arms, and had they deserved defeat, no multitude would have helped them. In this case, however, they deserved to be treated in the manner of nature and accident. This is a matter which was explained well by Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed*.

As Nahmanides hints in his last sentence, much of this passage (until the final paragraph) is a paraphrase of Maimonides' discussion in *Guide* III. 18, and it is so striking in its naturalism and limitation of providence that we shall first have to devote some time to demonstrating that Nahmanides has not changed into a Maimonides in disguise. The truth is that he has introduced some subtle but crucial—and characteristic—changes into his paraphrase of the *Guide*, so that his final sentence, implying an identity of views with Maimonides, is profoundly misleading. First, despite Maimonides' use of the term pious (*hasidim* in both Ibn Tibbon and Al-Harizi) to describe people who attain the benefits of providence, the *Guide* repeatedly emphasizes the intellectual dimension as well; to put it moderately, providence is connected not only with righteousness but also with intellectual achievement. In Nahmanides, this central point of the *Guide* vanishes entirely; though even he could hardly have perceived his *hasid* as a pious fool, the emphasis on intellect is completely absent.

A second and for our purposes even more important divergence comes through Nahmanides' introduction of an apparently innocuous phrase into the final sentence of the second paragraph. Maimonides had asserted that pious intellectuals are close to God and hence attain providence while those who are far from him are likely to stumble because they remain unprotected. The absolutely wicked, who constitute an extreme example of the second category, are thus likely to fall because of an absence of protection; consequently, the citation of the verse "The wicked shall be put to silence in darkness" interpreted as blind, unguided groping in the dark is especially appropriate. Nahmanides, however, as we have seen in his commentary to Deuteronomy 11:13, believed that the absolutely wicked are punished by miraculous divine intervention, and so he slipped his crucial phrase into the Maimonidean discussion: "One who is far from God in his thoughts and deeds, *even if he does not deserve death for his sins*, will be forsaken and left to accidents." When Nahmanides then continues to paraphrase the *Guide* by citing "the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness" understood merely as absence of protection, the reference becomes forced and inappropriate. All of a sudden, "wicked" excludes the truly wicked and refers only to an intermediate category that plays no role in the Maimonidean passage. It is only because of this tampering with the analysis in the *Guide* that Nahmanides' final paragraph, which is not derived from Maimonides, can begin with a reference to "this intermediate group."

The introduction of the person who deserves death for his sins also undermines the essentially naturalistic character of Maimonides' analysis. To Maimonides, a person who reached the requisite level attained providence "by necessity" through his link with the divine overflow, and Nahmanides' discussion of his *hasid's* achieving providence through cleaving to God (*devequt*) could also be read in a relatively naturalistic, though mystical sense.³⁸ Later kabbalists, in fact, were uncomfortable with the entire concept of the hidden miracle because of their conviction that the process by which human actions affect both nature and the individual's fate is one of clearcut cause and effect involving the esoteric relationship between upper and lower worlds.³⁹

Nevertheless, it would almost certainly be a mistake to understand Nahmanides' miracles as entirely "naturalistic" mystical events. It is, first of all, overwhelmingly likely that Nahmanides understood sefirotic action as involving specific divine volition,⁴⁰ and so the providence attained by the *hasid* who cleaves to God does not have to be understood as coming "by necessity."⁴¹ Moreover, the miraculous punishment of the person deserving to die for his sins certainly does not come through any cleaving to God (just as it could not come through linkage to a Maimonidean overflow), and, while an alternative kabbalistic mechanism of a naturalistic sort is theoretically feasible, Nahmanides does not provide one. In particular, the search for a "naturalistic" mystical triggering mechanism to account for the "time of reckoning" of intermediate individuals who are normally ignored would be especially difficult.⁴² In

³⁸On the process of *devequt*, in which the *sefirah* of *tiferet* plays a special role, cf. Henoch, pp. 248-51. On the *hasid* who cleaves to God, cf. also *Comm. to Deut.* 5:23, 11:22; *Comm. to Lev.* 18:4; *Sermon on Qohelet*, *Kirvei Ramban* I, p. 192.

³⁹Meir ibn Gabbai, *Avodat HaQodesh* (Warsaw, 1894), II, 17, p. 36b (brought to my attention by Prof. Bernard Septimus); Isaiah Horowitz, *Shnei Luhot HaBerit* (Józefów, 1878), pp. 9b-10a, discussed by Chavel, *Ramban*, pp. 85-86, and Henoch, p. 56, n. 171. Prof. Septimus' *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England, 1982), which appeared after the completion of this article, contains a discussion of the argument in *Avodat HaQodesh* (pp. 110-11); the book also called my attention to a two-sentence passage in E. Gottlieb's *Mehqarim BeSifrut HaQabbalah* (Tel Aviv, 1976), p. 266, which comments on the central theme of this essay with real insight (Septimus, pp. 110, 170 n. 54).

⁴⁰See Henoch, p. 18, n. 21.

⁴¹Note that Nahmanides' remark that the *hasid* "will be protected from accidents through a miracle occurring to him constantly" is another elaboration on his Maimonidean source.

⁴²The systems of the later kabbalists did not generally assume the existence of a group of Jews usually left to accidents.

short, for all its limitation of providence, this passage in the *Commentary to Job* does not lead to naturalism of a Maimonidean or even mystical variety.

The fact remains, however, that it not only provides a vigorous reassertion of the largely accidental life of ordinary individuals, it calls into question the exclusively miraculous fate of even the Jewish collective. The final paragraph of this passage, which is Nahmanides' own, asserts unambiguously that miraculous providence did not always protect the Jewish people in its biblical wars. Ironically, Nahmanides is once again forced into a naturalistic posture precisely by his miraculous conception of providence. The verses that he cites include direct advice given to the Jewish army by God himself; for someone who believed that providence normally operates through nature, these battles would constitute classic examples of divine protection of Israel. Instead, Nahmanides explicitly cites them to show that when Jews are in the intermediate category, they are abandoned to accidents, with a clear analogy to the individual who is allowed to stumble in the darkness. We are apparently left to assume that in an age without prophecy, when no divine advice is proffered, such an army would have been left to accidents pure and simple. But if a Jewish army fighting under the judges of Israel is not the Jewish collective, it is hard to imagine what is. Hence, although Nahmanides could never consider the possibility that God would allow the Jewish people to be utterly destroyed through the accidents of nature, it seems clear that even the Jewish collective is not always governed by an unbroken chain of hidden miracles.⁴³

⁴³Needless to say, miraculous providence often does govern the wars of Israel; see the references in Henoch, pp. 60-61. On the suspension of such providence from the Jewish collective, cf. Rashba's responsum (I. 19) cited by Henoch, p. 57, n. 171, which asserts that, although Jews are generally excluded from astrological control, their sins can lower them to a position where this is no longer the case. Though Henoch apparently considers this inconsistent with Nahmanides' view, the passage from the *Comm. to Job* may suggest otherwise, since nature and the astrological order are pretty much synonymous. For Nahmanides' frequent denials that the Jewish people or the land of Israel are subject to the constellations, see *Sermon on Qohelet*, *Kitvei Ramban* I, pp. 200-01; *Sermon on Rosh HaShanah*, *Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 250; *Comm. to Gen.* 15:18; *Comm. to Lev.* 18:25; *Comm. to Deut.* 29:25; *THT*, p. 150. It was presumably the repeated assertions in these passages that Gentiles are subject to the constellations which persuaded Scholem and Henoch that Nahmanides' supposed denial of a natural order applied only to Jews. The belief that nature prevails in the absence of special merit was used by Solomon ibn Verga as a clever transition from religious to naturalistic explanation of Jewish exile and suffering (*Shevet Yehudah*, ed. A. Schochet [Jerusalem, 1947], p. 127).

Finally, a responsum by Nahmanides on astrology raises questions about the constancy of miraculous providence even for the remaining handful of extraordinarily righteous individuals. From a talmudic discussion, he says,

it follows that it is permissible to listen to [astrologers] and to believe them. This is clear from Abraham, who said, "I looked at astrological calculations," and from R. Akiba, who worried deeply about his daughter [who had been the subject of a dire astrological prediction] and concluded after she was saved that charity had rescued her literally from death....However, God *sometimes* [my emphasis] performs a miracle for those who fear him by nullifying the decree of the stars for them, and these are among the hidden miracles which occur in the ordinary manner of the world and upon which the entire Torah depends. Consequently, one should not consult astrologers but should rather go forth in simple faith, as it is written, "You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God" (Deut. 18-13). If someone *does see something undesirable* through astrology, he should perform good deeds and pray a great deal; at the same time, if he saw through astrology that a particular day is not auspicious for his work, he should avoid it and not depend on a miracle. It is my view that it is prohibited to go counter to the constellations while depending on a miracle.⁴⁴

A legal responsum requires a particularly strong measure of caution and responsibility, and it may therefore be dangerous to draw conclusions about Nahmanides' more general theological inclinations from this sort of source; even occasionalists do not walk off cliffs, and occasionalist halakhists do not advise others to do so. Nevertheless, the plain meaning of the passage appears to be that even "those who fear" God are not favored with continuous miracles, and methodological reservations cannot entirely neutralize the impact of such a remark. Thus, Nahmanides' denial of nature may not apply in undiluted form even to that final category of the absolutely righteous.⁴⁵

⁴⁴*Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 379. The talmudic discussion that Nahmanides cites is in *B. Shabbat* 156a-b.

⁴⁵It may be relevant to note Maimonides' sudden insight in *Guide* III. 51, where he explains that even the pious intellectual is likely to stop concentrating on the divine for a while, and during that time he remains unprotected. Even within a less naturalistic framework than that of Maimonides, a parallel analysis is not impossible. Cf. also the somewhat enigmatic passage in *Sermon on Qohelet*, *Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 192, which apparently speaks of occasional accident with respect to the righteous.

Moreover, even though Nahmanides complains that Maimonides "limits miracles and increases nature,"⁴⁶ his own exegesis is by no means free of such a tendency. The plain meaning of the biblical text indicates that the rainbow was first created after the flood, but Nahmanides is prepared to resort to reinterpretation under the pressure of scientific evidence. "Against our will, we must believe the words of the Greeks that the rainbow comes about as a result of the sun's burning in the moist air, for the rainbow appears in a vessel of water placed in the sun."⁴⁷ Thus, the Bible means only that the rainbow, which had appeared from the beginning of creation, would henceforth be invested with symbolic significance. Similarly, he reinterprets a Rabbinic statement that the land of Israel was not inundated by the waters of the flood, arguing that there was no fence around it to prevent the water from entering; all the Rabbis meant was that the rain did not actually fall in Israel nor were its subterranean waters let loose, but the water that originated elsewhere covered Israel as well.⁴⁸

With respect to the age of the antediluvians, there is a well-known dispute in which Nahmanides takes Maimonides to task for ascribing extreme longevity only to the figures explicitly mentioned in the Bible. There is an almost instinctive tendency to ascribe Maimonides' position to his desire to restrict miracles⁴⁹ and Nahmanides' to his tendency to multiply them. In fact, however, Nahmanides attacks Maimonides for precisely the opposite offense. The argument in the *Guide*, he reports, is that a few people lived such long lives either because of the way they took care of themselves or as a result of a miracle. But it is hardly plausible that people could quadruple their life span by following a particular regimen; as for miracles, "why should such a miracle be performed for them when they are neither prophets nor especially righteous men?" The real reason for this longevity was the superior air before the time of the flood combined with the excellent constitution with which their recent ancestor

⁴⁶*THT*, p. 154.

⁴⁷*Comm. to Gen.* 9:12, and cf. *THT*, p. 174.

⁴⁸*Comm. to Gen.* 8:11. As M. D. Eisenstadt pointed out in his comment ad loc. (*Perush HaRamban 'al HaTorah* (New York, 1958)), Nahmanides' exegesis ignores a Rabbinic statement that the inhabitants of the land of Israel died only from the vapors.

⁴⁹Maimonides wanted to leave the natural order intact, said Judah Alfakar at the height of the Maimonidean controversy, but what does it matter if someone tells you that he saw one camel or three flying in the air? See *Qovez Teshuvot HaRambam* (Leipzig, 1859), III, p. 2a.

Adam had been created, and these reasons, of course, apply to all antediluvians equally.⁵⁰

It is a matter of special interest that Ritba's defense of Maimonides on this point already reflects what was to become the standard misreading of Nahmanides' position on hidden miracles. Maimonides, Ritba argues, believed in the constancy of natural phenomena over the generations, and so Nahmanides' naturalistic explanation about superior air could not appeal to him. As for the objection that miracles would not be performed for ordinary people, this is a peculiar argument coming from Nahmanides. He himself, after all, "has taught us that there is a great difference between a miracle like longevity that comes to a certain extent in a natural way and a miracle that comes entirely outside the natural order."⁵¹ In other words, manifest miracles would happen only to the specially righteous, but hidden miracles happen to everyone. Whether Nahmanides would have considered the Maimonidean version of antediluvian longevity a hidden or manifest miracle is debatable,⁵² but the main point is that Ritba has misread his view of the ubiquity of the hidden miracle: such miracles too happen regularly only to "prophets or especially righteous men."

One place where Nahmanides introduces a miracle which is not in any of his sources is in the account of the flood, where he suggests that the ark miraculously contained more than its dimensions would normally allow. The problem here, however, is so acute, and the alternative solutions so implausible, that it is difficult to regard this as evidence of eagerness to multiply miracles, particularly since he makes a point of saying that the ark was made relatively large "for the purpose of minimizing the miracle."⁵³

⁵⁰*Comm. to Gen. 5:4.*

⁵¹*Sefer HaZikkaron*, ed. K. Kahana (Jerusalem, 1956), pp. 37-39.

⁵²As Kahana notes, Ritba was probably thinking of Nahmanides' assertion (*Comm. to Gen. 46:15*) that Jochebed's giving birth at the age of 130 is a hidden miracle. It is worth noting, however, that even though hidden and manifest miracles are performed through different divine names (e.g., *Comm. to Exodus 6:2*), the boundary line between them is not always hard and fast, if only because the constant repetition of certain hidden miracles can make them manifest (*Comm. to Lev. 26:11*).

⁵³*Comm. to Gen. 6:19.* Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that unless Nahmanides had in mind the miniaturization of the animals in the ark (and he does not say this), the miracle he is suggesting appears to involve the sort of logical contradiction that Jewish rationalists refrained from accepting even in miracles and which they ascribed only to their Christian adversaries. See D. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1977), *passim*, and

Nahmanides, then, was no occasionalist or near occasionalist. Except in the rarest of instances, the natural order governs the lives of non-Jews, both individually and collectively, as well as the overwhelming majority of Jews. The Jewish collective is often (usually?) guided by miraculous providence, but it too can find itself forsaken and left to accidents; and though the absolutely righteous and absolutely wicked also enjoy (or suffer) a chain of hidden miracles, the chain is apparently not unbroken. Moreover, Nahmanides' uncompromising insistence that providence is exclusively miraculous means that, although God is constantly aware of everyone, he does not exercise providence when nature prevails; since nature almost always prevails, the routine functioning of Nahmanides' world is, as we have already noted, extraordinarily naturalistic.

What, then, is the meaning of Nahmanides' assertions that "a person has no portion in the Torah of Moses without believing that all things that happen to us are miracles; they have nothing to do with 'nature' or 'the customary order of the world' " and that "one who believes in the Torah may not believe in the existence of nature at all"?⁵⁴

To resolve this question, we must look again at his standard argument for hidden miracles and the terms in which it is usually couched. As we have already seen, the essence of this argument is invariably the fact that the Torah promises rewards and punishments which cannot come naturally; hence, they are all miracles. This is true, he says, "of all the promises (*ye'udim*) in the Torah."⁵⁵ "The promises of the Torah (*ye'udei haTorah*) are all miracles."⁵⁶ Hidden miracles were performed for the patriarchs in the manner of "all the promises (*ye'udim*) of the Torah, for no good comes to a person as the reward of a good deed and no evil befalls him as a result of sin except through a miraculous act....The reward and punishment for the entire Torah in this world comes through miracles that are hidden."⁵⁷ "All the promises (*ye'udim*) in the Torah, favorable or unfavorable, are all miraculous and take the form of hidden miracles."⁵⁸ "All the blessings [in the Torah] are miracles."⁵⁹

esp. pp. 25-43, and cf. my *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 351-52, esp. n. 11, for a possible affirmation of this rationalist position by Nahmanides himself.

⁵⁴See notes 22-23.

⁵⁵*Comm. to Gen.* 17:1.

⁵⁶*Comm. to Gen.* 46:15.

⁵⁷*Comm. to Exod.* 6:2.

⁵⁸*Comm. to Lev.* 18:29.

⁵⁹*Comm. to Lev.* 26:11.

In all of these passages, Nahmanides' affirmation of miracles refers specifically to the realm of reward and punishment promised by the Torah. Similarly, when he makes the extreme assertion in his commentary that "all things that happen to us are miracles," he immediately continues, "If a person observes the commandments his reward will make him successful, and if he violates them his punishment will destroy him."⁶⁰ In his sermon *Torat HaShem Temimah*, where he repeats his strong statement about miracles, the evidence again comes from the "promises of the Torah" (*ye'udei haTorah*).⁶¹ Nahmanides' intention is that "all things that happen to us" in the context of reward and punishment "are miracles."

The passage in his sermon does appear to be arguing for a somewhat broader conclusion, but that conclusion is not the non-existence of nature. Nahmanides is concerned by Maimonides' tendency to limit miracles wherever possible, a tendency exemplified most disturbingly in his allegorical interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy that the nature of wild animals will be transformed at the end of days. Since Maimonides himself once demonstrated an understanding of ongoing miraculous providence, his apparent inclination to resist every extra miracle through the mobilization of all his considerable ingenuity appears pointless, inexplicable, and unwarranted.⁶² The religiously unavoidable belief in such providence must logically lead to a relaxation of inhibitions against the recognition of miracles. There is nothing achieved by the tendency of Maimonides and Ibn Ezra to approach every miracle stated or implied in Scripture with the hope that it can be made to disappear through some naturalistic explanation; we will still be left with a world punctuated by the regular appearance of miraculous providential acts. No denial of the natural order is either explicit or implicit in this argument. Aside from the fact that such a denial would contradict a number of Nahmanides' explicit statements, it would be an extravagant inference from the evidence of *ye'udei haTorah*. The Torah's promises of reward and punishment do not

⁶⁰*Comm. to Exod.* 13:16.

⁶¹*THT*, p. 153.

⁶²*THT*, p. 154 (cf. n. 21). The argument in *Comm. to Gen.* 46:15 is virtually the same, except that here the target is Ibn Ezra's refusal to recognize Jochebed's advanced age when she gave birth. Here too this unreasonable resistance stems from a failure to appreciate the fact that the Torah is replete with hidden miracles. Nahmanides' statement that the punishment of a woman suspected of infidelity is the only permanent miracle established by the Torah (*Comm. to Numbers* 5:20) refers, of course, only to manifest miracles (cf. *Henoch*, p. 55, n. 169).

demonstrate the non-existence of nature, and Nahmanides never meant to say that they do.⁶³

The Nahmanides that emerges from this discussion is a complex, multi-dimensional figure whose world view is shaped by an almost bewildering variety of intellectual forces. He must grapple with the pressures of profound religious faith, philosophical argument, halakhic doctrine, mystical belief, astrological science, and Scriptural teaching to forge a concept of the miraculous that will do justice to them all. On the one hand, his God retains the unrestricted right of intervention in the natural order; even ordinary individuals have their time of reckoning, not only the absolutely righteous or the absolutely wicked die from eating the heave-offering, non-Jewish collectives can surely be punished for sin⁶⁴—and Nahmanides' logic requires that all these divine acts be understood as miraculous. At the same time, such interventions remain very much the exception in a world which otherwise functions in an entirely naturalistic way. Nahmanides' position allows for untrammelled miracles within a fundamentally natural order and is a striking example of his effort to integrate an uncompromising religious position into a world view that recognizes the validity of much of the philosophical achievement of the medieval world.

⁶³The remark in the *Sermon on Qohelet* that "one who believes in the Torah may not believe in the existence of nature at all" (*Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 192) appears in an elliptical context with many of the same features as the other discussions of hidden miracles, and I am confident that it too refers to the realm of reward and punishment. See also the end of n. 45 above.

⁶⁴*Comm. to Gen.* 1:1.

Corrigenda

B. Safran, "Views of the Fall of Man"

- P. 76, n.9, l.4: On אֵימון and אָמון, אֵימון
P. 76, n.9, l.8: sephirot correspond to רוח, נפש, חיה, רוח
P. 77, n.14, ll.1-2:
וכדי להשוות רם ושפל כראו גוף ונשמה, גוף מן התחתונים ונשמה מן העליונים אחרי שנמחו תשע מאות ושבעים וארבע דורות שקמטו בעצמם להבראות קדם שנברא העולם
P. 78, n.14, ll.14-15: "Seridim, p. 213 השבע תמורות הם שבע מדות
P. 78, n.14, l.16: שהם יג' סדרי סליחה:
P. 78, n.14, ll.21-22: and of תשובה דרכי
P. 79, n.19, l.6: אור של משיח
P. 79, n.21, l.3: "Letter to Bourgos," p. 235, ה' וזכה אם ה' מכוין להשלמת האחדות
P. 80, n.24, l.7: יבא משיח
P. 80, n.24, l.19: כח המלכות
P. 83, n.43, l.2: לדבקה בו
P. 83, n.43, l.19: The climax (בסוף)
P. 85, n.45, l.3: צרור החיים
P. 85, n.45, l.9: צרור החיים. הוא חץ
P. 93, n.67, l.3: employs the word אזהרה
P. 93, n.68, l.3: The stress is on הכתובים
P. 93, n.69, ll.5-6: אחרי אכלו מן העץ
P. 94, n.70, l.7: לנפש חיה
P. 94, n.70, l.14: העולם הבא שבו ישוב הגוף כמו הנפש
P. 94, n.70, ll.14-15: נהפך לאיש אחר
P. 96, n.75, l.5: נענש הנחש
P. 96, n.75, l.38: והנה
P. 100, n.84, l.3: רק הענין כי ראויים להתנהג בדרך הטבע
P. 100, n.84, l.14: וגבורת הרוח להפיל הבית על הנערים כאלו החזקו בטבע, והוא ענין אחקי
P. 106, n.111, l.2: לא היתה הצורה על