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ʾAddīr Bammārōm:

Meṭāṭrōn, Jewish Mysticism, and The Limits of Maimonidean Monotheism

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To Boaz

"שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוּסַר אָבִיךָ וְאַל-תִּטֹּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמֶּךָ"

(מִשְׁלֵי א-ח)

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Preface.- Rethinking Divine Unity: Toward a *Uniplural* Ontology of the Biblical God of Israel

ʾAddīr bammārōm, tōleh peleg ʾElohīm[1]

Post-biblical Jewish theology,[2] especially in its medieval philosophical articulation, has often been framed in terms of divine simplicity.[3] This theological trajectory finds its most rigorous formulation in the Maimonidean conception of God as an absolute incorporeal, indivisible, and transcendent deity, who, as Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–1994) put it, is "wholly beyond human comprehension"[4]—often regarded as the apex of rabbinic monotheism. Yet the Jewish Bible[5] presents a more complex ontology of divine presence and revelation, replete with mediating figures, differentiated divine manifestations, and symbolic embodiments such as the *kavōd*, the Angel of YHVH, enthroned anthropomorphic theophanies, and the divine names themselves. These biblical features resist systematic rationalist reduction. From this multiform and dynamic scriptural imaginary, later mystical traditions drew inspiration to articulate divine presence within the post-Temple and rabbinic horizon. These motifs are not literary accidents; they serve as ontological indicators and epistemological vectors towards divine knowledge. They signal, albeit esoterically, a biblically grounded ontology of divine presence that is both complex and perceptible.

Rather than reducing this scriptural complexity to merely metaphors, Jewish mysticism reconfigures them as a symbolic exposé of divine plenitude. Especially in theosophic Kabbalah, this

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[1] ("The Mighty One in the heights, He suspends the streams of God"), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 653. Mahzor* (*Rite Ashkénaze*), Year: Fourteenth Century, f. 145r (In Hebrew).

[2] In this discussion, I adopt Jacob Neusner's definition of 'theology' as "the science of the reasoned knowledge of God," a formulation that presupposes an intrinsic relationship between knowledge, intellect, and faith. See Jacob Neusner, *The Theology of Rabbinic Judaism: Prolegomenon*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997, p. 71.

[3] Alexander R. Pruss, "Some Arguments for Divine Simplicity," in Jonathan Fuqua and Robert C. Koons (Eds.), *Classical Theism: New Essays on the Metaphysics of God*, New York: Routledge, 2023, pp. 53-65.

[4] Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State* (Trans. and Ed., Eliezer Goldman), Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. xiv.

[5] By "Jewish Bible" and "Scriptures," I refer to the Hebrew Bible, known in Jewish tradition as the *Tanakh*—a Hebrew acronym denoting its three canonical divisions: *Torah* (Pentateuch), *Nevīīm* (Prophets), and *Ketūvīm* (Writings). They constitute the scriptural canon recognized in Judaism, which is distinct from the Christian Bible. On this distinction, see Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible* (trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson), Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1998. By "Torah," this study refers not solely to the Pentateuch but to "the sum total of the teachings of Judaism." See Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Sources and Interpretations: Studies in Ancient Jewish History, Literature, and Religion*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2025, p. 85.

vision of divine ontology finds expression in the constructive metaphysics of the liminal figure of Meṭāṭrōn—the exalted servant and heavenly regent (*malākh*), whose name is traditionally understood to equal that of his Master (*Shadday*).[6] As Joseph Dan (1935–2022) observes, Meṭāṭrōn constitutes "the highest power in the celestial worlds besides God, and is one of the key figures in most texts that have reached us from the literature of the early Jewish mystics in the talmudic period."[7] Yet I argue that Meṭāṭrōn is neither a marginal angelic speculation nor a vestige of heterodoxy, but rather a structural articulation of a dynamic divine ontology, developed through substantial biblical interpretation. While not identical to what is found in Scripture, Jewish mysticism draws on its foundational elements to expand its own theological speculations. Thus, in Jewish mystical thought, Meṭāṭrōn is, as Alan Brill observes, "even the protagonist in biblical verses which seem to refer to God."[8] Through Meṭāṭrōn, Jewish mysticism preserves divine ontology while refusing abstract simplicity.

In the literature of early Jewish mysticism and its later reception in Ashkenazi Hasidism[9] and Sephardic Kabbalah, Meṭāṭrōn emerges as a liminal figure at the intersection of mystical insight and philosophical reasoning, complicating the boundaries of strict rabbinic theology,[10] particularly Maimonidean monotheism. His epithets in Jewish mystical literature—most notably his designation as *Sar Happānīm* ("Minister of divine countenance"), "the lesser Tetragrammaton,"[11] and his identification with biblical Ḥanōkh ben Yared[12]—blur the ontological distinctions among God, angel, and human. These titles reflect the manifold ways Jewish mystical literature understands him. As Joseph Dan noted, "there is no doubt that the authors of these texts were aware of the meaning and significance of this appellation."[13] Through these constructs, mystical literature reinscribes forms of mediation that echo biblical patterns without undermining Jewish Law or violating the principle of

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[6] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York: Schocken Books, 1995, p. 382.

[7] Joseph Dan, *Jewish Mysticism: Late Antiquity, Vol. 1*, Northvale, Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998, p. 229.

[8] Alan Brill, *Judaism and World Religions Encountering Christianity, Islam, and Eastern Traditions*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 140.

[9] See Joseph Dan, *Tōrat Hassōd shel Ḥasīdūt ʾAshkenaz*, Jerusalem: Mōsād Bīʾālīq, 1968 (In Hebrew).

[10] Dan (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 230.

[11] Andrei A. Orlov, *Yahoel and Metatron: Aural Apocalypticism and the Origins of Early Jewish Mysticism*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017, p. 157; and *Sēfer Yetzīrāh*, Mantova: Yaʿaqov Kohēn of Gazzuolo, 1562, f. 5v (In Hebrew).

[12] Yeshaʿyāhū ben ʾAvrāhām Hallēvī Horōvītz, *Sēfer Shnēy Lūḥōt Habrīt, Ḥēleq Shēnī*, Ostroh: Shmūʾēl Madpīs, 1802, f. 260v (In Hebrew).

[13] Dan (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 102n40.

divine unity. In doing so, Meṭāṭrōn both exposes and seeks to resolve a persistent tension within rabbinic monotheism: divine immanence. Yet Meṭāṭrōn, I argue, does not problematize the conventional binary between divine transcendence and immanence; he reconciles it.

From this perspective, the tension between scriptural divine ontology and its later rationalist and esoteric formulations invites inquiry into how the ineffable and "hidden God of Israel" (Isaiah 45:15) becomes manifest across Jewish traditions, particularly within mystical lore. Must divine unity be equated with ontological simplicity, or can it accommodate structured modes of internal differentiation without forfeiting the rabbinic idea of monotheism? Is the divine simplicity of rational rabbinic monotheism the only legitimate architecture of divine ontology? If so, where are its limits? Can the metaphysical grammar of Maimonidean monotheism adequately metabolize the symbolic and ontological representations of the Divine embedded in the Hebrew Bible? If not, do other currents of Jewish thought more adequately account for the symbolic and polyphonic texture of Scripture itself? How is the transcendent God of Israel articulated within esoteric currents of Jewish thought—from infinite transcendence to immanent glory? What is the place of Meṭāṭrōn in this equation: is he an independent center of being, a simple exalted angelic figure, or rather a divine manifestation grounded in God's unity?

These interrogations are not merely conceptual but socio-historical. They emerge from the recognition that the religious worldview of ancient Israel, as reflected in the Hebrew Bible, differs in decisive respects from the interpretive and theological architecture that later crystallized within rabbinic Judaism—particularly regarding mediation and revelation.[14] As David H. Aaron notes, "rabbinism's attitudes toward revelation differ from the conceptual structure of the biblical authors."[15] This divergence reflects a discernible transformation in Jewish religiosity, especially pronounced after the destruction of the Second Temple. As Aaron further observes, this cataclysm rendered "the instrumentality of everything within Torah pertaining to animal sacrifice and the priesthood nullified."[16] Deprived of its core instruments of divine presence and ritual mediation, Jewish religiosity faced a profound crisis: How could authority, mediation, revelation, worship, and redemption be meaningfully sustained in the absence of the institutions that had formerly enacted them?

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[14] Rabbinism is understood here as "a Jewish religious system founded upon the *Halākhāh*, that is, the formulation of the normative rabbinic law sent forth in the *Mishna* (ca. 200 CE), the *Tosefta* (ca. 300 CE), the *Yerushalmi* (ca. 400 CE), and the *Bavli* (ca. 600 CE)," see Jacob Neusner, *The Theology of Halakhah*, Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

[15] David H. Aaron, *Subversive Principles: Reflections on Mishnah Avot 1 & 2*, Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2024, p. 241.

[16] Ibid.

In response to this socio-historical crux, Jewish religiosity underwent a sustained process of conceptual and institutional reconfiguration. Core biblical categories were progressively reorganized within an emergent rabbinic framework that regulated the interpretation of a fixed canonical text under altered historical conditions. Thus, Rabbinism emerged, as Jacob Neusner (1932-2016) noted, as "the Judaic religious system established by the Hebrew Scriptures of ancient Israel, as interpreted through the rabbinic writings of the first six centuries of the Common Era."[17] This led to "the identification of Judaism with rabbinic Judaism, and the specification of rabbinic-Jewish law and mores as normative."[18] From then on, as Isaac Kalimi observes, "rabbinic religiosity has not primarily centered on the Hebrew Bible in its entirety but rather on its outgrowth: the Oral Law."[19] Within this framework, revelation and mediation, no longer primarily enacted through cultic theophany or priestly intervention, increasingly came to be located in textual exegesis and halakhic discourse. Eventually, as Avi Sagi notes, "the sage's autonomous reason" became "the 'organon' of revelation."[20]

In this transformation, the ontological and symbolic structures of divine mediating presence embedded in Scripture were progressively subordinated to rabbinic hermeneutics, establishing a rabbinically constructed theological vision that constitutes the core of Jewish life and thought. Thus, this shift inaugurated a paradigm through which Scripture and religious authority were rearticulated and lived amid the dislocations of exile. Medieval rabbinic thought continued to grapple with the biblical tension between divine transcendence and immanence, often privileging the former. A concern that, as Ehud Benor observes, shapes much of rabbinic theological reflection.[21] Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) similarly emphasized the centrality of divine transcendence in Rabbinism[22]—a pattern highlighted in Maimonides's theology. This prompted, as David H. Aaron notes, "a move toward an interpretative method that could transcend the obvious and literal meanings of both the biblical text and history itself."[23] Consequently, Rabbinism "had to fabricate an alternative conceptual

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[17] Jacob Neusner, *Early Rabbinic Judaism: Historical Studies in Religion, Literature and Art*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975, pp. 2-3.

[18] Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia III. From Shapur I to Shapur II*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968, p. x.

[19] Isaac Kalimi, *Fighting Over the Bible: Jewish Interpretation, Sectarianism and Polemic from Temple to Talmud and Beyond*, Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2017, p. 19.

[20] Avi Sagi, *The Open Canon: On the Meaning of Halakhic Discourse*, New York: Continuum, 2007, p. 77.

[21] Ehud Benor, *Ethical Monotheism: A Philosophy of Judaism*, New York: Routledge, 2018, p. 31.

[22] S. Daniel Breslauer, "Poetry, Allegory, and Myth in Saul Tchernichowsky," p. 32, in S. Daniel Breslauer (Ed.), *The Seductiveness of Jewish Myth: Challenge or Response?*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997, pp. 27-42.

[23] Aaron (2024), *op. cit.*, p. 214.

structure in which its claims would be inviolable,"[24] thus entailing significant theological reformulation, particularly in the ontological portrayal of the biblical deity.

In its effort to secure doctrinal consistency and safeguard divine unity, the rabbinic mainstream progressively privileged the systematization of abstract and transcendent modes of theological expression. One such mode within Jewish thought is what may be termed "divine simplicity." This theological expression finds its most philosophically rigorous articulation in the rationalized framework of Maimonidean theology. The latter, as Elliot R. Wolfson notes, advances "the purification of religious belief in two core phases, the first denies that God is a body; the second divests God of all attributes, the modes of corporeality, a notion that, if followed to its logical conclusion, would severely compromise the theistic fabric of Jewish practice and faith woven from the cataphatic depictions of God in Scripture."[25] From a strictly philosophical standpoint, Maimonidean theology remains compelling, particularly within Rabbinism. However, and in line with Wolfson's observation, when measured against the multiform and symbolically dense ontology of the biblical text it appears to lack the hermeneutical elasticity required to account for the full range of biblical depictions of the Divine. Thus, while Maimonidean theology remains internally coherent within its own philosophical premises, it proves comparatively limited when measured against the exegetical and ontological plurality of the Hebrew Bible. Accordingly, I sustain that the "divine simplicity" of Maimonidean theology does not exhaust the ontological possibilities embedded in the Jewish biblical corpus. While Maimonides' articulation of divine unity represents a philosophically rigorous and historically influential articulation within Jewish thought, its monotheistic convictions do not emerge seamlessly or uniformly from the Hebrew Bible. Rather, they reflect a historically situated and philosophically contingent articulation of divine unity. Its adequacy, therefore, must be assessed relative to the interpretive framework within which it operates. The critique advanced here is not a thorough rejection of Maimonidean theology per se, but a delineation of its limits, particularly when applied to the exegetical and ontological complexity of the Hebrew Bible.

This rationalization did not go uncontested. As Mordechai Z. Cohen notes, "Maimonides was aware of the Karaite critique of the Rabbis for disregarding what is stated explicitly in the Bible."[26] In

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Elliot R. Wolfson, "Via Negativa in Maimonides and Its Impact on Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," p. 393, in Arthur Hyman (Ed.), *Maimonidean Studies Vol. 5*, New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2008, pp. 393-442.

[26] Mordechai Z. Cohen, *Rashi, Biblical Interpretation and Latin Learning in Medieval Europe: A New Perspective on an Exegetical Revolution*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 128.

grappling with the paradoxical dimensions of the scriptural ontology of God, revelation, and the problem of biblical divine intermediaries, other Jewish traditions also articulated theological models that diverge from—and in some cases contest—Maimonidean monotheism. Most notably, Jewish mysticism, particularly as expressed in the *Hēichālōt* literature and theosophic Kabbalah—the latter, often regarded as "the mainstream in Kabbalistic thought, which includes both an elaborate anthropomorphically hierarchy and dynamic interrelationships among the components of the divine economy,"[27] introduced a complex structure of divine ontology and mediation while affirming divine unity. Rather than rejecting monotheism—since Kabbalah affirms that nothing exists outside of God and therefore denies the existence of any independent divine power—the Kabbalistic current of Jewish thought operates at the intersection of literary exegesis and theological reflection. It moves beyond the monolatrous implications of the biblical text while introducing complex metaphysical structures of mediation and revelation. In doing so, its mystical approach retrieves biblical dimensions of divine ontology that have been attenuated by philosophical abstraction. Consequently, certain mystical ideas around God's ontology appear to stand in clear tension with the Maimonidean commitment to divine simplicity and incorporeality

Within theosophic Kabbalah, divine unity encompasses an intricate interpretation of mediation and revelation. This tension partly arises from exegetical foundations of mystical theology in the biblical texts themselves. For example, the anthropomorphic imagery of Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7 has long provided a fertile framework for Jewish mystical reflection on God's complex, multifaceted nature. These prophetic accounts, rich in theophanic language, present a vivid panoply of ocular and corporeal motifs that both exalt the heavenly figures they depict and function as interpretive gateways for esoteric reflection of divine ontology. In this capacity, they operate as theological conduits for discerning the immanent dimensions of the Divine. As Ithamar Gruenwald notes, Kabbalah assimilates aspects of medieval Jewish philosophy, particularly its hermeneutic and metaphysical concerns, while simultaneously integrating mystical and even mythical elements.[28] From this perspective, Kabbalists were compelled both to interpret the intricacies of the biblical text and to respond to rabbinic positions—most notably Maimonides—while confronting the theological tension between divine transcendence and immanence. Through renarrativization as a method of meaning-

[27] Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1988, p. 112.

[28] Ithamar Gruenwald, "Aspects of the Jewish-Gnostic Controversy," in Bentley Layton (Ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, Vol. II, Sethian Gnosticism*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981, pp. 713-723.

making, Kabbalah reinterprets the Bible's *peshāt* (the literal meaning), thereby creating layers of symbolically encoded esoteric significance. In doing so, it addresses the ontological and epistemological challenges posed by the biblical narratives about the God of Israel while simultaneously remaining faithful to Jewish legal norms. This tension necessitates a mediating principle and foregrounds a central question: how can a perfect, immutable, and transcendent God interact with a mutable, finite, material world?

Biblical religion does not systematize this philosophically; God appears concretely present—first in the Tent, then in the Temple, where divine accessibility is spatially concentrated without being ontologically confined. In subsequent rabbinic discourse, Deuteronomy 12:11, *leshaken shemō shām* ("to cause His Name to dwell there"), is nominalized into the concept of the *Shekhīnāh*, the immanent divine presence.[29] Within this symbolic architecture of mediation, Meṭāṭrōn assumes prominence in Jewish mystical traditions. Thus, the Metatronic motifs function—albeit esoterically—as both a symbolic and hermeneutic medium that presses against the conceptual limits of Maimonidean rationalism, while remaining closely aligned with the scriptural tradition. Moreover, they articulate a multidimensional mystical register that enables divine manifestation without transgressing the bounds of human finitude, in keeping with the biblical principle: "No man can see God's face and live" (Ex. 33:20). Within this framework, Meṭāṭrōn emerges not as an anomaly but as a key to the architecture of biblical divine ontology. Through this figure, Jewish mysticism expands the ontology of God articulated in the Hebrew Bible, resolving certain theological intricacies even as it unsettles the strict conceptual constraints of Maimonidean theology. The Metatronic configuration discloses a biblically grounded ontological vision in which divine unity is internally articulated without being ontologically divided. Consequently, the interplay between rabbinic formulations of divine unity and the Metatronic motifs reveals a deeper contest over the conceptual architecture of Jewish monotheism. This, in turn, raises a fundamental question: must divine unity be conceived as absolute ontological simplicity, or can it accommodate differentiated epistemological modes of divine self-presence and manifestation within a rigorous biblical horizon?

The figure of Meṭāṭrōn enables Jewish mysticism to articulate a coherent metaphysical and theological vision that more closely resonates with the intricate and often ambiguous portrayals of the Divine in the biblical corpus. From this perspective, Meṭāṭrōn serves as a pivotal locus for probing both the epistemological and ontological dimensions of the biblical God of Israel, thereby

[29] Michael Fishbane, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarot*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002, p. 166.

underscoring his centrality within Kabbalistic discourse. In this capacity, he amplifies exegetical engagement while addressing persistent theological tensions surrounding the nature of the Israelite deity. Accordingly, he affords a more nuanced response to the scriptural complexity than is permitted within the strictures of Maimonidean monotheism. Rather than constraining divine unity within the boundaries of abstract philosophical simplicity, the Metatronic motifs articulate a more dynamic and textured ontological account of the Divine. In this sense, Meṭāṭrōn emerges as an epistemological vehicle that reflects the inherent fluidity of divine being and becoming as expressed in the biblical formulation *ʾEheyeh ʾasher ʾeheyeh* ("I will be/become/manifest as I will," Exodus 3:14).

From this perspective, the grammatical and ontological ambiguities surrounding the biblical God of Israel are neither minimized nor dissolved, but addressed through a robust epistemological model that seeks—however esoterically—to reconcile such tensions through the figure of Meṭāṭrōn. In doing so, Kabbalah, particularly in its theosophical register, interrogates and reconfigures the boundaries of Maimonidean monotheism, thereby breaching and redefining them. Within this framework, the Metatronic motif functions analogously to the mediatory role of the *sefīrōt* in Kabbalistic discourse; namely, it represents a primary mode through which Kabbalah describes, configures, and personifies divine immanence. If an ineffable deity must nevertheless remain accessible to His people, then Meṭāṭrōn emerges as the metaphysical vector through which the otherwise transcendent God becomes intelligible to the finite human intellect.

Thus, Meṭāṭrōn illuminates the internal complexities and external limits of rabbinic theology by articulating a distinctively Jewish epistemology of the Divine that remains anchored in scriptural imagination, halakhic consciousness, and Kabbalistic thought. The latter operates, as Joseph Dan repeatedly emphasized, "within the framework of Jewish orthodoxy."[30] The Metatronic motif, therefore, does not abandon rabbinic orthodoxy; it makes explicit what is structurally implicit in the biblical text, suggesting that the ontology of the God of Israel retains theological and scriptural intelligibility even when expressed through symbolic and esoteric forms. Such forms do not signal doctrinal obscurity; rather, they function as epistemic matrices through which scriptural complexity concerning divine ontology becomes intellectually meaningful. In this regard, Moshe Idel recalls the teaching of ʾAvrāhām ʾAbūlʿafīah (ca. 1240-1291), who identifies Meṭāṭrōn as "the central designation of

[30] Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History*, New York: New York University Press, 1987, pp. 164, 169.

the active intellect" (*lehazkīr ʾet Meṭāṭrōn kekinnūy hammerkāzī shel hassēkhel hapōʿēl*).[31] From this vantage point, "intellect" (*sēkhel*) and "faith" (*ʾemūnāh*) are not opposites but intrinsically linked. Their unification, according to ʾAbūlʿafīah, constitutes "the source of knowledge and religion" (*meqōr haddaʿat hūʾ gam meqōr haddāt*).[32] The pursuit of divine knowledge, particularly in theosophical Kabbalah, is thus a necessary criterion for a meaningful Jewish engagement with spiritual *truth.* As the prophet declared: "The knowledge of God (*vedaʿat ʾElohīm*) rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). In this regard, Wolfson notes that even "Maimonides insisted that the ultimate purpose of human existence was to acquire knowledge of God."[33] This pursuit, therefore, constitutes both a theological imperative and an ontologically necessary framework for engaging with ultimate divine reality.

Meṭāṭrōn also poses as a metaphysical paradigmatic mediator (*columna medietatis*): exalted yet subordinate, human yet bearing divine names. He opens channels of divine immanence legible to human intellect, thus standing as an epistemic medium through which divine knowledge may be more fully discerned—albeit esoterically—by the human intellect.[34] For Jewish mystics, knowledge of God is a perennial religious and epistemological obligation that leads to a spiritual and loving union with the Creator—one affirmed not only philosophically but also ritually expressed and liturgically enacted through the daily recitation of prayers and the invocation of divine names. This bond approaches the esoteric intimacy envisioned by Kabbalah, as Rabbī Yōsēf ben ʾAvrāhām Giḳaṭīlah (1248-1305) writes: *lemaʿan daʿat ʾōtō ūgvūrātō shemmettōch kākh yikānes ʾādām lemaʿālat ʾāhavātō.*[35] Building upon Giḳaṭīlah's epistemological framework, Rabbī Mosheh Ḥayyīm Lūtzāʾṭō (1707-1746) articulates this imperative as "a supreme religious obligation" (*kī mitzvāh hīʾ ʿelyōnāh*), which he characterizes as "a most important divine commandment."[36] He further maintains that a genuine understanding of God is attained "not solely through faith" (*lōʾ bederech ʾēmūnāh bilvad*), "but rather

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[31] Moshe Idel, "Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine," *Ph.D. Thesis*, Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976, p. 88 (In Hebrew).

[32] Ibid.

[33] Elliot R. Wolfson, *Apophasis and Envisioning the Invisible: Unveiling Veils of Infinity*, Leiden: Brill, 2026, pp. 58, 59.

[34] George Foot Moore, "Intermediaries in Jewish Theology," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (January 1922), pp. 41-86.

[35] ("For the sake of knowing Him and His power, so that through this a person may enter into the exaltation of his love"), Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Ms. Vat. Ebr. 228* (Yōsef ben Avraham Giḳaṭilah, "Kabbalistic Commentary on the Passover Haggadah"), f. 113v (In Hebrew).

[36] Mosheh Ḥayyīm Lūtzāʾṭō, *Derech Ḥokhmat Hāʾemet*, Jerusalem: Mākhōn Ramḥal, 1999, p. 17 (In Hebrew).

through knowledge" (*ʾēllʾā bederech yedīʿāh*), emphasizing that intellectual apprehension of the Divine constitutes a heightened mode of Jewish religious engagement.[37] Thus, as a figure through whom the Divine becomes effable and intelligible by way of immanent, personified form, Meṭāṭrōn offers a metaphysical alternative and represents a different epistemological configuration from the strictures of Maimonides' apophatic theology, which conceives God as radically transcendent, incorporeal, and unknowable except through negative attributes (*via negativa*).[38] Within this context, divine knowledge is, as Neusner rightly noted, grounded in divine self-manifestation within the Scriptures.[39]

This epistemic articulation demands sustained engagement with the multivalence and layered semantics of the biblical text, namely, its multiple interpretive levels and figurative dimensions—features that resist reduction to philosophical abstraction. Within this context, the Metatronic motifs offer a metaphysical framework through which a more inclusive and nuanced account of divine knowledge may be articulated, integrating diverse epistemological constituents into a coherent unity that preserves divine oneness while sustaining the complexity of the biblical text. In this way, the figure of Meṭāṭrōn advances a theological model marked by far-reaching ontological, epistemological, and hermeneutical differentiation without fragmentation. But what safeguards prevent the Metatronic model from collapsing into binitarianism? This concern necessitates a more precise account of how differentiation may be affirmed without compromising divine unity.

By "ontological differentiation within divine unity," I refer to a single, indivisible divine essence subsisting in relational modes of self-articulation. It expresses the ordered dynamism within the Godhead. Divine unity, on this account, is not an abstract, featureless singularity but an internally fecund plenitude capable of manifold self-expression. The multifaceted ontology disclosed in biblical theophany and mystical speculation thus concerns interrelated modes of divine presence, agency, mediation, and disclosure, rather than distinct centers of independent divinity. Within this framework, Meṭāṭrōn emerges not as a second divine entity, but as an interdependent mode of divine self-disclosure. At most, as Jeong Mun Heo notes, Meṭāṭrōn "functions as a God-like image of the hypostatic notions of Torah, as a mediating principle between the Divine and humanity."[40] Ontological

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Joseph A. Buijs, "The Negative Theology of Maimonides and Aquinas," *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Jun., 1988), pp. 723-738.

[39] Neusner (2001), *op. cit.*, p. xxxi.

[40] Jeong Mun Heo, *Images of Torah: From the Second-Temple Period to the Middle Ages*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2023, p. 263.

differentiation, therefore, neither fragments divine unity nor reduces it to philosophical abstraction; rather, it names the structured coherence through which the Divine manifests metaphysically. Hence, far from compromising divine oneness, the Metatronic configuration discloses an alternative theological grammar in which differentiation is internal, relational, and ordered rather than divisive.

Meṭāṭrōn thus exemplifies what I term *divine uniplurality*: a unified yet internally articulated oneness capable of integrating the diverse symbolic and theological registers of the biblical tradition. From this perspective, *uniplural* divine ontology is a conception of unity in which ontological differentiation does not entail multiplicity of gods but expresses structured modalities within a single divine reality. Thereby, the indivisible essence of God is preserved even as it manifests through differentiated yet interdependent modes of self-revelation. From anthropomorphic theophanies to dynamic divine attributes, these motifs converge in a mediating structure that preserves transcendence while articulating immanence. Here, differentiation concerns modes of presence and disclosure, not independent ontological centers of divinity. *Uniplurality* functions as a heuristic category describing the implicit ontological grammar of Jewish mystical thought: a model in which differentiation is intrinsic to the architecture of divine plenitude rather than arising externally to it. Divine unity, in this sense, is not abstract simplicity but structured coherence—in which transcendence and immanence coexist without rupture. The issue, therefore, is not whether the Jewish Bible affirms one God, but how that unity is metaphysically construed—as monolithic simplicity or as internally articulated plenitude.

In this respect, the concept resonates—analogically—with Carl Jung (1875–1961), who suggested that apparent dualities may be integrated into a higher, more differentiated unity rather than opposed as mutually exclusive principles. Likewise here, divine transcendence and immanence are not competing absolutes but coordinated polarities "within an overarching uniplurality."[41] As Aaron observes, "nothing is more dependent upon a binary conception of the world than monotheism."[42] *Uniplurality* responds to this binary pressure not by dissolving distinction, but by integratively grounding it within a more comprehensive unity that generates and sustains differentiation without forfeiting indivisibility. From this perspective, Meṭāṭrōn operates as a differentiated mode of divine self-disclosure, assuming distinct epistemological and metaphysical features and conspicuously revealed through multiple ontological modalities that remain anchored

[41] James P. Driscoll, *The Unfolding God of Jung and Milton*, Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993, p. 27.

[42] David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery*, Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001, p. 125.

within a single divine reality embedded in the broad Scriptural matrix of Jewish mysticism. The complexities of the biblical text not only help generate this theological and metaphysical concept but also further expose the limits of strictly rationalized models such as Maimonidean monotheism. These scriptural tensions call for a more adequate conceptual framework capable of accounting for the interplay between unity and differentiation within the biblical witness. The concept of *divine uniplurality* is proposed as a response to this need. Ultimately, as Sagi observes, "a dimension of multiplicity is inherent in the Torah."[43] Within this horizon, *divine uniplurality* emerges as a necessary interpretative lens through which Jewish mysticism accommodates divine unity and differentiation within the biblical conception of the God of Israel, thereby rendering intelligible the dynamic structure of divine self-revelation. In doing so, it enables a broader epistemological and theological exploration of the Divine than that afforded by Maimonidean theology. It is precisely within this framework that the Metatronic motifs acquire their full theological and epistemological significance.

As a metaphysical construct, Meṭāṭrōn—particularly within the context of theosophic Kabbalah—emerges as a conduit for a transformative epistemological process and as a mystical resolution to the enduring theological problem of divine ontology. It offers a progressive response—albeit esoteric—to the complexities posed by Scripture surrounding the nature of the Divine. In this capacity, the Metatronic structure surpasses the hermeneutic models whereby access to the Divine is restricted by the apophatic and rationalizing boundaries of Maimonidean theology. Interpreted under the lens of *uniplurality*, it discloses a more nuanced and mediated account of divine self-revelation, one that remains firmly rooted in the scriptural approach of mystical tradition. Within this framework, the Metatronic motifs may be understood as a sustained response to the hierological conundrum explored in this work. Within this paradigm, Meṭāṭrōn thus emerges as a unified and internally differentiated expression of divine manifestation.

It must be emphasized, however, that this framework does not entail any form of bitheism. Rather, it articulates a complex yet internally differentiated unity within a single divine reality. The apparent tension between rejecting a 'second power' and acknowledging differentiated modes of divine presence is resolved by distinguishing ontological independence from relational manifestation. Although forms of Jewish bitheism or proto-bitheistic speculation predate Maimonides and Spanish Kabbalah, the Metatronic motifs signal a movement beyond radical divine simplicity toward a more nuanced, multilayered conception of the biblical God of Israel. While this vision stands in clear

[43] Sagi (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 73.

tension with the Maimonidean model of uncompromising monotheism, it advances a more dynamic account of divine unified ontology—one that accommodates internal differentiation within the Godhead without veering into doctrinal heresy. From this perspective, Meṭāṭrōn prompts a profound reconsideration of the boundaries between transcendence and immanence within Jewish thought.

This reconfiguration of divine unity invites further reflection on the inner structure of the Godhead. As Jonathan Dauber suggests, the very notion of God's "internal unity" necessitates a sustained inquiry. Within Jewish mysticism, the esoteric and philosophical investigation into the ontology of God possesses crucial religious significance.[44] In Kabbalah, this inquiry is not a secondary abstraction but a central concern of mystical speculation, in which the Metatronic constellation plays a pivotal role. As Gershom Scholem observed, theosophic Kabbalah intensifies this enterprise by seeking to discern the inner dynamics of the divine economy and articulate the paradox of God's transcendence and immanence within creation. Such speculation, Scholem further noted, "occupies a large and conspicuous area in kabbalistic teaching, namely, this dual and apparently contradictory experience of the self-concealing and self-revealing God determines the essential sphere of mysticism."[45] If this paradox lies at the heart of mystical thought, then the figure through whom it is mediated demands systematic analysis. Within this framework, the figure of Meṭāṭrōn emerges as a key locus for understanding how Jewish mysticism, particularly Kabbalah, rearticulates divine reality.

The Metatronic motifs thus propose an alternative theological model of divine ontology that expands the biblical conception of the God of Israel while standing in tension with the monolithic simplicity of Maimonidean monotheism. At its most pronounced, the rationalist approach of Maimonides—privileging philosophical abstraction over the narrative and symbolic textures of Scripture—articulates ontological claims that the Hebrew Bible itself neither formulates, systematizes, nor presupposes, even as Maimonides elevates this Jewish canonical corpus as the exclusive repository of divine truth. This recalls, in a suggestive manner, the uncanny resonance of the words of Jeremiah 16:19: *Sheqer nākhlū ʾavotēynū*[46] ("our forefathers inherited lies")—for the Scriptures, in their ancient polyphonic voice, speak from a symbolic world untouched by later Maimonidean dogmatization. This tension evokes the idea of "mythical explanation" proposed by Paul

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[44] Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, pp. 65, 66, 98.

[45] Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, New York: Dorset Press, 1987, p. 4.

[46] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 32. Bible A.T.*, Year: Thirteenth-Fourteenth Century, f. 270v (In Hebrew).

Ricœur (1913-2005) in his *Finitude et Culpabilité*: "*L'explication mythique représente désormais le simulacre de la rationalité* [...] *une parole et qu'en lui le symbole prend la forme du récit*."[47] From this perspective, Maimonidean monotheism may be understood as a retrospective rationalization of the biblical corpus presented as an effort to render its polyphonic and figurative witness into a philosophically unified theological system. In a *Ricœurian* spirit, a "mythical simulacrum" of rational scriptural coherence. Jewish mysticism responds to this impasse through the figure of Meṭāṭrōn, which engages the enduring biblical dialectic between divine being and becoming; transcendence and manifestation. In this sense, the Metatronic motifs function as a mystical response to the theological complexity of the Scriptures and to the conceptual limits inherent in Maimonidean monotheism.

This dialectic calls for a more precise account of Meṭāṭrōn's ontological and epistemological function within Jewish mystical thought. Within this framework, he emerges as a mediating locus—an embodied mode of divine self-disclosure through which the otherwise transcendent God becomes symbolically manifest and epistemologically accessible. In this sense, Meṭāṭrōn may be understood as an expression of *rāzā' deyiḥūdā'* ("the mystery of divine unity"), insofar as he embodies the manifestative interface through which divine unity articulates, in Jewish mystical thought, the manifestative interface through which divine unity is disclosed within the created order without compromising its ontological integrity. Attending to Meṭāṭrōn's topology within its mystical framework—that is, his mystical spatial configuration and relational proximity vis-à-vis the Divine as articulated in Scriptures—is indispensable for discerning how Jewish mysticism, particularly theosophical Kabbalah, engages with the epistemological and ontological dilemmas concerning God in the Hebrew Bible. In this context, the Kabbalists, keenly attuned to rabbinic theological and philosophical discourse, navigate the limits of Maimonidean monotheism while simultaneously expanding its metaphysical possibilities through the figure of Meṭāṭrōn, offering thus an esoteric reframing of divine ontology that extends beyond the contours of rationalist dogma.

The analysis that follows offers a systematic examination of the principal typologies in which Meṭāṭrōn is depicted within Jewish mystical literature. These include four major typological configurations of Meṭāṭrōn in mystical literature. These esoteric taxonomies include Meṭāṭrōn as a "wise co-creator" (akin to *Ḥokhmāh*); as the "divine Word" (cognate to *Mēmr'ā*, *Logos*, *Dībbūrī'ēl*); as a

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[47] ("Mythical explanation henceforth represents the simulacrum of rationality [...] a discourse in which the symbol takes the form of a narrative"), Paul Ricœur, *Finitude et Culpabilité. II La Symbolique du Mal*, Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1960, pp. 156, 158.

supernal, apotheotic, anthropomorphic, and theophanic vector (in dialogue with *Ezekelian kāvōd* imagery); and as a servantly-angelic embodiment of the divine Name and hence object of worship and praise (*malākh, ʿeved, Shadday*). These diverse typologies reveal not only the range of Meṭāṭrōn's representations but also their underlying theological topology and epistemological function. Each designation represents a distinct mode through which the infinite and ineffable essence of the Creator is revealed and becomes accessible within the limits of finite human apprehension. Taken together, these modes disclose a cohesive and coherent divine architecture expressed through the mystical mechanics of fluid *uniplurality*, in which being and becoming coexist dynamically without independent division. Such configurations press beyond the limits of Maimonidean monotheism, not by rejecting divine unity, but by rearticulating it in more dynamic and structurally differentiated terms. It is precisely in this capacity that the Metatronic taxonomy unsettles the rigid and dogmatic paradigms of Maimonidean theology while opening a space for examining how Jewish mystical traditions negotiate and transform the conceptual boundaries of Maimonidean monotheism. From these perspectives, Meṭāṭrōn embodies, as Rachel Elior notes, "a unique combination of a threefold existence: divine, angelic, and human-priestly."[48] This organic extension of God's infinite *uniplural* self not only highlights the literary richness of Jewish mysticism and the spiritual depth that it embodies, but also allows for a more nuanced discussion that presupposes a breach of the limits of Maimonidean monotheism.

This framework ultimately presses a critical question: Is Meṭāṭrōn—the godlike supernal anthropos—a visible and apprehensible manifestation of the divine *demūt* (likeness), *tzelem* (image), and *marʾēh* (appearance) of an otherwise hidden and ineffable God? Should this be the case, it would not merely infringe upon Maimonides' third principle of faith (*ʾĒyn lō shūm dimyiōn klāl*—"He has no likeness whatsoever"), which insists upon the absolute incorporeality and incomparability of the Divine, but would decisively call into question the theological architecture of Maimonidean monotheism. Yet its implications extend further still, for it does not merely reinterpret the foundations of Jewish monotheism but holds the potential to redefine them altogether. Such a proposal, however, not only requires a radical re-evaluation of the conceptual categories through which monotheism has been defined in rabbinic theological discourse, but also calls for the recognition that unless the Metatronic dimensions explored here are acknowledged as integral to the

[48] Rachel Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism*, Oxford, Portland: Liverpool University Press, 2004, p. 239.

celestial order—namely, as intrinsic mechanical structures of divine self-manifestation and economy—the figure of Meṭāṭrōn will remain in tension with the rigid ontological simplicity attributed to the God of Israel by rabbinic monotheism, particularly in Maimonides' formulation of the thirteen principles of faith. The question that therefore persists is whether Jewish theology should be governed primarily by the biblical narratives, rabbinic rationalism, or mystical ontology. These questions crystallize the dynamics of the Metatronic complex, positioning Meṭāṭrōn as a response to the enduring problem of biblical divine ontology. At stake is whether Meṭāṭrōn may be understood as a concrete and immanent modality of the otherwise ineffable biblical God. Could Meṭāṭrōn represent not a rupture in divine unity but a polymorphic yet coherent manifestation thereof? Put differently, as Matthew V. Novenson provocatively asks: "What if another god is not actually another god, but one's own God under a different name [and manifestation]? The implications for sogenannte monotheism would be significant, to say the least."[49]

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Cincinnati, Ohio
March 24, 2026
ו׳ בְּנִיסָן תשפ״ו

[49] Matthew V. Novenson, "The Universal Polytheism and the Case of the Jews," p. 32, in Matthew V. Novenson (Ed.), *Monotheism and Christology in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2020, pp. 32-60.

Introduction and Methodology

The present study examines the interrelationship among the mystical figure of Meṭāṭrōn, Maimonidean monotheism, and the Hebrew Bible to elucidate how Jewish thought negotiates enduring scriptural epistemological and ontological questions on divine transcendence and immanence. By situating the ontology of the biblical God of Israel at the fraught intersection of Kabbalistic discourse and Maimonidean rationalism, the study advances a critical engagement with Jewish mysticism, rabbinic legal thought, and the Hebrew Bible. It contends that the tension between mystical symbolism and rabbinic rationalism is not merely an unresolved contradiction but a constitutive feature of Jewish theological reflection—thereby demonstrating that Jewish thought is inherently dynamic and continually evolving. Within this contested terrain, Meṭāṭrōn emerges as a pivotal figure through whom Jewish mysticism negotiates, destabilizes, and reconfigures Maimonidean conceptions of divine ontology. Within the metaphysical grammar through which Jewish mysticism articulates a model of divine ontology that differs fundamentally from the philosophical doctrine of divine simplicity associated with Maimonides, the Metatronic motifs are pivotal. Therefore, far from constituting a peripheral motif, the Metatronic constellation occupies a central place in Jewish mystical discourse, pressing against the conceptual limits of rabbinic monotheism—particularly as articulated by Maimonides—while remaining deeply anchored in scriptural symbolism, exegetical imagination, and halakhic tradition. In this sense, Meṭāṭrōn functions simultaneously as a theological challenge and a metaphysical counterpoint to rigid philosophical formulations of divine unity. Accordingly, this analysis questions the biblical adequacy of simplified Maimonidean monotheistic formulations and invites a rethinking of the dynamic interplay between divine unity and multiplicity at the heart of Jewish thought.

To illustrate its thesis, this study employs a constructive theological method grounded in historical-textual analysis of biblical, rabbinic, and mystical sources, engaging Maimonidean philosophy as a normative interlocutor rather than as a definitive doctrinal endpoint. It aims to demonstrate how the metaphysical articulation of the Metatronic motif preserves divine unity while accommodating structured modes of epistemological differentiation (modes of divine knowledge), thereby reflecting the ontological density of the Divine within the biblical text. It operates at the intersection of literary analysis and theological reflection, examining mystical ontologies critically in

dialogue with Maimonidean philosophy. By situating Meṭāṭrōn within this framework, the study highlights how mystical literary traditions navigate and negotiate the philosophical constraints of rabbinic monotheism while simultaneously reasserting biblical dimensions of divine mediation and relationality. In this sense, Meṭāṭrōn functions not as a marginal or anomalous figure but as a critical theological pressure point that simultaneously exposes and attempts to resolve biblical challenges within rabbinic monotheism, both unsettling the clear boundaries typically presupposed by strict doctrinal formulations and illuminating the dynamic evolution of Jewish thought and ongoing negotiation between abstraction, symbolism, and lived religiosity. In doing so, it recasts classical rabbinic conceptions of monotheism, most rigorously articulated in Maimonides' thirteen principles.

To pursue its objectives, this study undertakes a close textual and conceptual analysis of primary sources extracted from both the Jewish mystical tradition and rabbinic exegesis, with particular focus on *Hēichālōt* literature, classical rabbinic writings, Targumic and Midrashic literature, the *Zohar*, and a variety of Kabbalistic and Hasidic texts in which the figure of Meṭāṭrōn plays a central role. These sources are examined alongside relevant philosophical and halakhic works of Moses Maimonides and other codifiers of Jewish law (*pōsqīm*), to trace points of tension and divergence between Jewish mysticism and mainstream rabbinic paradigms of divine ontology. Through engagement with relevant primary sources and contemporary scholarship, this work creates space for a dialogue that incorporates a comparative theological approach—one that enables the interrogation of how the Metatronic figure both reflects and reconfigures ontological conceptions of divine unity, agency, mediation, and hierarchy within Jewish thought. Moreover, and not claiming to be exhaustive, this approach seeks to illuminate how mystical portrayals of Meṭāṭrōn complicate normative definitions of Maimonidean monotheism while creating space for a discussion on a reimagined Jewish theological anthropology.

The corpus of this study is divided into seven segments. Chapter One provides a compendious literary overview of the principal Metatronic traditions found in Jewish mystical and rabbinic literature. Its purpose is to acquaint the reader with the textual and historical background of the figure of Meṭāṭrōn by surveying the primary sources in which he appears. Rather than advancing a systematic theological argument, this chapter situates the Metatronic motif within its broader literary context, outlining the theological, symbolic, and exegetical frameworks that shaped Meṭāṭrōn's enigmatic role in the Jewish mystical imagination. By mapping the principal textual loci—from early

mystical traditions to later Kabbalistic developments—the chapter provides the necessary literary orientation for the analytical discussions that follow.

Chapter Two critically examines, through the linguistic structure of the divine names, the concept commonly described as "biblical monotheism," arguing that the theological landscape of the Hebrew Bible is more complex than the strict monotheistic formulation that later emerged in rabbinic and philosophical traditions. It argues that rather than presenting a fully systematized doctrine of divine unity, the biblical narratives often reflect theological patterns that have been described by scholars as henotheistic, monolatrous, or, in certain interpretive frameworks, even bitheistic. These patterns reveal an internal tension within the scriptural corpus itself—one that arises not from later philosophical critique but from the very linguistic and narrative texture of the Hebrew and Aramaic biblical texts. This chapter maintains that the challenge to later rabbinic monotheism is already embedded within the Scriptures, where the use of multiple divine names, attributes, and modes of expression suggests a complex theological landscape—one that intimates *uniplurality*. Such features point toward a conception of divine reality that is not strictly monolithic, but rather characterized by differentiated expressions of divine ontology. Following the approach of Amitai Baruchi-Unna,[50] this argument is further explored by an examination of the grammatical ambiguities surrounding the divine names *ʾAdonāy* and *ʾElohīm*. Both terms appear in plural morphological form, yet frequently function syntactically with singular verbs and adjectives. This linguistic phenomenon, which has long generated exegetical debate, raises important questions regarding the semantic and theological implications of biblical divine nomenclature. By analyzing the syntactic (structural) and semantic (meaning-related) dimensions of these appellations, this chapter highlights the pluriform character of biblical divine language and its interpretive consequences. Thus, the biblical language itself seems to refute the Maimonidean formulation of monotheism. Such observations do not necessarily negate later philosophical articulations of monotheism, but they do complicate the assumption that these formulations arise straightforwardly from the biblical text. Instead, the linguistic and theological features of Scripture invite renewed reflection on the ways in which divine unity has been conceptualized within the broader continuum of Jewish thought. Within this framework, the notion of divine *uniplurality* provides a heuristic lens through which the biblical data may be reconsidered.

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[50] Amitai Baruchi-Unna, "Plural Forms Referring to 'Elohim' and the Israelite Cultic Proclamation Recurring in the Cult of the Calf," *Shnaton. An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25 (2017), pp. 141-152 (in Hebrew).

Chapter Three examines the halakhic and philosophical articulation of Jewish monotheism within the rabbinic tradition, with particular attention to the systematic formulation developed in Maimonidean theology. The analysis approaches the subject through a close reading of key halakhic and philosophical sources that have decisively shaped the contours of Jewish theological discourse. Central to this discussion is Maimonides' formulation of divine unity, articulated most systematically in the *Mishneh Tōrāh* under the doctrine of *yiḥūd Hashshēm* ("Divine Oneness"), which he presents as a foundational axiom of Jewish belief and legal obligation. This doctrine is further elaborated in the *Sēfer ha-Miṣvōt*, where belief in the existence and unity of God is codified as a fundamental commandment within the structure of Jewish law. The enduring influence of Maimonides' formulation of monotheism is likewise evident in later halakhic codifications, particularly in Rabbī Yaʿaqov ben ʾAshshēr's *ʾArbāʿāh Ṭūrīm* and Rabbī Yōsēf Qāʾrō's *Shulḥān ʿĀrūkh*—both of which preserve and reinforce practical expressions of monotheistic devotion within normative Jewish practice. Taken together, these sources construct a comprehensive halakhic-philosophical framework that affirms the uncompromising unity and transcendence of God. By outlining this normative conception of divine ontology, the chapter establishes the theological baseline against which the metaphysical and symbolic innovations of Jewish mystical traditions—particularly those surrounding the figure of Meṭāṭrōn—can be critically evaluated.

Chapter Four situates Kabbalah and Jewish mystical sages within the broader framework of rabbinic Judaism, emphasizing their deep integration with halakhic observance, biblical study, and mystical theology. It argues that far from being a marginal or speculative enterprise, classical Kabbalah articulates a symbolic and theologically rigorous vision of divine unity, responding to the complexities of Scripture and the limits of rationalist monotheism. This chapter highlights how Kabbalistic thought —particularly the theosophic tradition—functions not only as an esoteric mode of religious cognition but also as a legitimate, orthodox expression of Jewish theological and spiritual life.

Chapter Five examines the biblical creation narratives in Proverbs 8 and Genesis 1–2, emphasizing the role of divine speech as the primary instrument through which creation is enacted. It explores how this creative speech, associated later with *Ḥōkhmāh* ("divine wisdom") and *Dibbūrʾēl* ("Word of God"), often operates in tandem with Meṭāṭrōn. Within this mystical framework, the divine voice embodies the Creator and functions not only as a mediating figure through whom divine will, utterance, and creative action converge, but also as an active architect of creation. By highlighting these portrayals, the chapter demonstrates how mystical approaches, alongside a creative reading of

the biblical text informed by its ambiguities, envision a more differentiated and collaborative model of divine agency, in which wisdom and speech emanate from the Divine and participate in the unfolding of the cosmos. Such interpretations stand in notable tension with Maimonides' philosophical insistence on divine unity and the exclusive agency of God, raising enduring questions about the interplay between mystical imagination and rational theology while advancing esoteric female aspects of divine ontology.

Chapter Six examines the theosophical dimensions of divine manifestation in the Hebrew Bible, focusing on two convergent cases: the anthropomorphic figure in Ezekiel's vision (Ez. 1:26–28) and the *mal'ākh* of Exodus 23:20–21, the exalted servant and bearer of the Divine Name, referred to later as "the minor YHVH." These manifestations converge in the esoteric personification of Meṭāṭrōn. Jewish mystical traditions—particularly *Hēichālōt* literature, Ashkenazic Ḥasidism, and later Kabbalistic currents—interpret the divine *kāvōd* ("glory") as a visible, perceptible manifestation of God, with Meṭāṭrōn functioning as a hypostatic supernal anthropos who mediates divine presence and will. In this capacity, Meṭāṭrōn blurs the boundaries between God and angel, rendering the unfathomable Divine symbolically approachable while retaining metaphysical depth in a clearly anthropomorphic form. The chapter thus illustrates the convergence of mediation, immanence, and mystical embodiment, while highlighting the tensions these interpretations introduce to Maimonides' principles of divine incorporeality, singular worship, and exclusive agency.

Ultimately, this dissertation argues that only by boldly—even perilously—asserting that Meṭāṭrōn may be understood as fully divine, indeed as part of God Himself, can one address the challenges to monotheism explored throughout this study. Conversely, such assertions risk veering toward a form of Jewish bitheism, thereby raising significant theological concerns. Viewed through this lens, Meṭāṭrōn may be appreciated as a divine and compassionate vector intimately bound to the Ineffable Name of God, embodying an aspect, image, and manifestation of the Divine. While Meṭāṭrōn is not the *imago Dei* ascribed to humanity, nor a mere incidental theophany, it is almost impossible not to see him, from this perspective, as a revealed dimension of the biblical God of Israel—a luminous *'aspaqlaryā' deme'īr'ā* that functions as "a metonym for God's power."[51]

[51] See David Howard Aaron, "Polemics and Mythology: A Commentary on Chapters 1 and 8 of Bereshit Rabba," *PhD Thesis*, Waltham: Brandeis University, 1991, p. 262.

1.- *Meṭāṭrōn*: A Compendious Literary Background

Among the many enigmatic figures that populate the landscape of Jewish literature, few have attracted as much theological reflection and interpretive complexity as Meṭāṭrōn. Appearing across a wide range of Jewish sources—from classical rabbinic literature and Talmudic traditions to the *Hēikhālōt* corpus, medieval Kabbalah, and later mystical writings—Meṭāṭrōn occupies a distinctive and often ambiguous position within the celestial hierarchy. At times portrayed as an exalted angel, at others as a heavenly scribe, divine vice-regent, or even bearer of the Divine Name, his figure has served as a focal point for Jewish speculation concerning divine mediation, revelation, and the structure of the heavenly world. Because of this multifaceted character, the Metatronic motif became a significant locus through which Jewish mystical traditions articulated complex reflections on divine presence, agency, and hierarchy.

In grappling with the paradoxical dimensions of the ontological multivalence of Scripture, various Jewish traditions have articulated theological models that diverge from—and in certain instances explicitly contest—the classical rabbinic construal of monotheism, without extinguishing older symbolic biblical grammars of divine presence. Most notably, Jewish mysticism—particularly as expressed in the *Hēichālōt* literature and theosophic Kabbalah—has demonstrated a profound and sustained interest in both the ontology and epistemology of the biblical God of Israel. Within the theosophic Kabbalistic tradition—often regarded as "the mainstream in Kabbalistic thought, which includes both an elaborate anthropomorphic hierarchy and dynamic interrelationships among the components of the divine hierarchy"[52]—this expansion of divine ontology becomes especially pronounced. Nowhere is this more evident than in the mystical exegesis of the divine names *ʾAdonāy and ʾElohīm*. Consequently, certain core ideas around these divine names in Jewish mystical literature appear to introduce conceptual tension with the classical rabbinic ontological conception of God, particularly vis-à-vis its commitment to divine unity and incorporeality. This tension may be attributed, at least in part, to the distinctive exegetical foundations of mystical theology in the biblical text itself. For instance, the uncanny anthropomorphic imagery found in Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7 has long provided a fertile framework for Jewish mystical reflection on the complex, uniplural nature of God advanced by the Scriptures. These prophetic accounts, rich in theophanic language, present a

[52] Idel (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 112.

vivid panoply of ocular and corporeal motifs that exalt the heavenly figures they depict while simultaneously functioning as interpretive gateways for esoteric contemplation of divine ontology. In this capacity, they operate as theological conduits for discerning the immanent dimensions of the Divine. From this interpretive methodology emerges a more elaborate conception of God—both epistemological and ontological in scope, culminating in the notion of a mystical *pleroma*: a central feature of theosophic Kabbalah by which is meant the structured fullness of divine emanations, namely, the Godhead, understood as a uniplural, emanational state of divine being.[53]

In light of the complexity surrounding this figure, the aim of the present chapter is less ambitious than its title may suggest, for it does not seek to examine every Jewish literary composition that references Meṭāṭrōn. Instead, it surveys his emergence across the foundational mystical texts that shaped his figure, thereby establishing a contextual and textual basis for understanding the core theological functions and symbolic valences attributed to him within the broader ethos of Jewish mysticism. These symbols must, however, be understood in conjunction with other symbolic structures of Judaism, for, as Neusner suggests, they reached us "not in tactile and graphic form, but in verbal and mythic form."[54] It becomes evident, then, that the symbolisms surrounding Meṭāṭrōn occupy a complex and often contested position within the expansive mystical corpus of Jewish literature. Meṭāṭrōn embodies profound theological tensions that generated ongoing exegetical and mystical elaboration, expressed through vivid mythic symbolism in late antiquity and sustained—frequently with increasing sophistication—throughout the medieval Jewish mystical tradition. Despite Meṭāṭrōn's prominence in medieval Jewish mystical symbolism, early rabbinic literature reveals a marked ambivalence toward his figure. While never wholly dismissed, Meṭāṭrōn occupies a precarious position—recognized as a powerful heavenly intermediary yet carefully distinguished from the Divine to avoid theological overreach. This cautious stance suggests that, although the rabbis of antiquity could not ignore Meṭāṭrōn's growing significance in apocalyptic and mystical circles, they sought to contain his symbolism within doctrinally acceptable boundaries. Accordingly, the present chapter endeavors to contribute to a much-needed reassessment of the place of Jewish mystical symbolism in general—and of the Metatronic motif in particular—within rabbinic literature. The assertion that such a reassessment is necessary may appear surprising to those familiar with the

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[53] See Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, New York: Schocken Books, 1991.

[54] Jacob Neusner, *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism*, Chico: Scholars Press, 1981, p. 145.

current state of scholarship on Jewish mysticism, which is more voluminous and confident than ever. Yet much of this academic discourse approaches the subject from a limited vantage point, particularly concerning the tensions that the Metatronic tradition introduces to Jewish monotheism.

Within Jewish literary traditions, the symbolism surrounding Meṭāṭrōn occupies a distinct place. Situated among an array of celestial figures, Meṭāṭrōn emerges as a central protagonist in many of their esoteric dramas. In this light, one may argue that Jewish mysticism represents one literary constellation within the larger *ʾārōn hassefārīm hayyehūdī*—the vast corpus of Jewish sacred texts; the sprawling annals of rabbinic literature. I do not, however, seek to trace the development of the textus receptus surrounding the Metatronic tradition, nor do I engage with the conflation implied in the equivalence "Ḥanōkh = Meṭāṭrōn," as excellent scholarship already exists on these topics.[55] On the latter, I will only maintain that Ḥanōkh and Meṭāṭrōn should be treated as overlapping yet distinct constructs, each requiring its own analytic framework and qualification. Accordingly, accepting *ipso facto* the prevailing homogeneous and organic identification of biblical Ḥanōkh ben Yared with Meṭāṭrōn is, I argue, a complex and problematic matter. Hence, I adopt a position consonant with that of Yakir Paz[56] and aligned with the French and German Tosafists in *Daʿat Zekēnīm*—a twelfth to thirteenth–century Torah commentary—which contends that equating Ḥanōkh with Meṭāṭrōn entails significant conceptual and interpretive difficulties.[57] If we equate Ḥanōkh with Meṭāṭrōn, then the latter may be understood as an incarnation of divine self in the sublunary abode of mankind.[58] Should this identification hold, the polymorphic nature of the Godhead emerges as an even more pronounced theological issue—one that challenges Maimonidean monotheism.

The Metatronic literary tradition does not constitute an ahistorical abstraction; instead, it emerges from concrete historical contexts, shaped by specific socio-political conditions and theological frameworks—particularly within Jewish mysticism—where the figure of Meṭāṭrōn functions as a symbol of divine mediation, cosmic hierarchy, and esoteric knowledge. Its development is inextricably linked to the cultural and intellectual milieux that shaped its articulation and

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[55] On the development of Ḥanōkh in rabbinic and mystical literature, see Lawrence A. Englander, "Enoch: The Development of a Biblical Patriarch in Apocalyptic, Mystical and Rabbinic Literature," *Rabbinical Thesis*, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1975.

[56] For a similar view, see Yakir Paz, "Metatron Is Not Enoch: Reevaluating The Evolution of An Archangel," *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, Vol. 50 (2019), pp. 52-100.

[57] *Sēfer Daʿat Zekēnīm Mērabōtēynū Baʿalēy Hattōsāfōt*, Ofen: Königliche Universitäts-Buchdruckerei, 1834, f. 1v (In Hebrew).

[58] See Appendix 1.

reception. The Meṭāṭrōn motif predates European medieval Kabbalah and was transmitted through diverse channels within Jewish literary and mystical traditions. Its earliest attestations appear in classical rabbinic sources and Byzantine-era texts, particularly within the corpus of *Hēichālōt*, Targumic, Talmudic, and Midrashic literature. One of the earliest references to Meṭāṭrōn in Palestinian sources may be his appearance in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, which, in its exposition of Genesis 5:24, refers to Meṭāṭrōn as *Safrā' Rabbā'* ("the great scribe"). Schäfer argues that this reference is "the only Palestinian source in which such an explicit identification of Enoch with Metatron is made."[59] Whether this literary piece belongs to an early ancient tradition is contestable, since *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* contains post-Talmudic materials, raising the possibility that this reference may belong to a later stratum of targumic traditions. Another reference to Meṭāṭrōn in Targumic literature appears in *Targum Jonathan* on Deuteronomy 34:6, where it states that God revealed Himself to Moses through His *Memrā'* ("word"). At the same time, Meṭāṭrōn served as a "witness" to Moses' death and the location of his burial.[60]

Meṭāṭrōn also appears in the Babylonian Talmud. In Ḥagigah 15a-16a, he appears as a heavenly scribe sitting on a throne.[61] There are a few problems with this interpretation. One is noted by Michael T. Miller, who observes that if Meṭāṭrōn is only an angel, his being seated on a throne creates tension with rabbinic tradition, which holds that angels have no knees.[62] Miller suggests that this particular Talmudic source is less concerned with an incorporeal and passionless heavenly realm and more with the ontological separation of Meṭāṭrōn from God: "the creation of divisions within the Godhead so that it is two and not one, reflected in the heretical pronouncement of Elisha ben Abuya: 'Perhaps, heaven forefend, there are two powers in heaven'."[63] An additional interesting Talmudic passage where Meṭāṭrōn appears is ʿAvōdāh Zārā 3b: *ūmeʿīqqārā maʾn havāh maygmar lehū? ʾĪbbāʿēyt ʾēymāʾ:*

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[59] Peter Schäfer, "Metatron in Babylonia," p. 31, in Raanan Boustan, Martha Himmelfarb, and Peter Schäfer (Eds.), *Hekhalot Literature in Context*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013, pp. 29-40.

[60] *Targgūm Haqqādōsh Yōnātān ben ʿUzzīʾēl ʿal Ḥamishshāh Ḥumshēy Tōrāh*, Basel: Waldkirch, 1607, ff. 65v-67v (In Aramaic, Henceforth: *Targgūm Haqqādōsh Yōnātān*).

[61] As Michael T. Miller notes, most scholarly treatments of this Talmudic source have utilised a single manuscript tradition, that of the Vilna printed edition. For a comparative analysis between this tradition in Vilna, Bomberg, Vatican's 134, and Munich 95, see Michael T. Miller, *The Name of God in Jewish Thought: A Philosophical Analysis of Mystical Traditions from Apocalyptic to Kabbalah*, New York: Routledge, 2016.

[62] Ibid., p. 70.

[63] Ibid., p. 72.

Meṭaṭrōn; veʾībbāʿēyt ʾēymāʾ: hāʾh vehāʾh ʿāvēyd.[64] This reflects a tradition in which Meṭāṭrōn functions as a heavenly instructor or mediator of divine knowledge, a role consistent with his portrayal as a celestial scribe or exalted angel. The formula "if you wish, say…" (*ʾībbāʿēyt ʾēymāʾ*) is a classic Talmudic device that offers multiple acceptable explanations without fully endorsing any one. Here, it allows the text to entertain a potentially theologically risky idea—that an angel teaches Torah—without committing to it outright. It controls the ambiguity of the text—to a certain extent—while preserving a dual attribution: *hāʾh vehāʾh ʿāvēyd*. Yet this passage raises a striking question: who originally transmitted or taught knowledge—especially knowledge that appears to transcend ordinary human instruction, God or an angel? Miller suggests an interesting point: "The text does not say it is either or both of them […] Metatron is just another way of talking about God, or to use the name of Metatron is to use one of the names of God, albeit one that specifies a particular function."[65] What is certain is that even within the Talmud itself, there exists a controlled but genuine openness to the idea of Meṭāṭrōn as a mediator of divine knowledge, a role that later mystical traditions would amplify. While the expression *Sar Happānīm* occurs once in the Babylonian Talmud (Ber. 51a), it refers to an angelical figure named *Sūrīʾēl*, with no mention of the name of Meṭāṭrōn.[66] B. Sanhedrin 38b associates Meṭāṭrōn with the Divine Name. In a discussion between Rav Naḥman and Rav ʾĪdīt on Exodus 24:1 ("And unto Moses He said: Come up unto YHVH"), the heavenly figure instructing Moses is identified as Meṭāṭrōn: "This is Meṭāṭrōn, whose name is like the name of his Master, as it is written (Exodus 23:21): 'for My name is within him.'" Here Meṭāṭrōn is the name of an angel who bears one of the Names of God. Ultimately, as Miller notes, "Metatron should not be separated from God, as an ontologically distinct being."[67] Thus, the Talmudic portrayal of Meṭāṭrōn preserves a deliberate tension between his identity and mediatory roles.

The name Meṭāṭrōn, however, is of obscure origin.[68] A wide range of theories has been proposed regarding the etymology of this name, drawing on Greek, Latin, and Hebrew linguistic

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[64] ("And originally, who was teaching them? If you wish, say: Meṭāṭrōn; and if you wish, say: both this one and that one did so,"), Lazarus Goldschmidt (Ed.), *Der Babylonische Talmud: Sanhedrin, Makkoth, Sebuôth, Âboda-Zara, Horajoth, ÊdiJoth, Aboth*, Berlin: Benjamin Harz Verlag, 1925, p. 802.

[65] Miller (2016), *op. cit.*, p. 72.

[66] Isidore Epstein (Ed.), *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Berakoth*, London: The Soncino Press, 1990, p. 101.

[67] Miller (2016), *op. cit.*, p. 73.

[68] See Andrei Orlov, "The Origin of the Name 'Metatron' and the Text of 2 (Slavonic) Enoch," *Scrinium*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (2007), pp. 390–396; and Matthew Black, "The Origin of the Name of Metatron," *Vetus Testamentum* 1, Vol. 1 (1951), pp. 217–219.

sources.[69] As Moshe Idel notes, "the meaning and the functions of Metatron in late antiquity and early Middle Ages attracted the attention of many scholars,"[70] a point reflected in the extensive material collected by Hugo Odeberg in his edition of *3 Enoch*.[71] Odeberg considered that the most plausible explanation is that Meṭāṭrōn represents a transcription of the Greek words μετά (*meta*, meaning "after") and θρόνος (*thronos*, meaning "throne"), thus suggesting "a celestial being who occupies the throne next to the Throne of Glory or the Throne next to the Throne of Glory."[72] In a different venue, Matthew Black points to the Hebraization of the Latin *mētator* ("measurer"), suggesting that the term entered Hebrew as a designation for the angel who showed Moses the land of Canaan.[73] Conversely, Saul Lieberman argued that "Meṭāṭrōn is better understood as a title than a personal name."[74] Similarly, Idel maintains that "Metatron is not, at least not always, a proper name but rather a term that refers to a title for a certain office, namely, that of servant, *'eved*."[75] If understood this way—as a functional designation—then Ḥanōkh, or any other entity identified with Meṭāṭrōn, may occupy this role.[76] Despite these varied hypotheses, as Andrei Orlov observes, "contemporary scholarship does not furnish a consensus concerning the origin of the name Metatron."[77] As Elliot Wolfson notes, the diversity of interpretations underscores the enduring ambiguity surrounding the term.[78] Among the most striking proposals, however, is that of Michael T. Miller, who suggests that the name Meṭāṭrōn "could mean either 'from the Tetragrammaton' or the one who is lesser Tetragrammaton."[79] The

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[69] George (1922), *op. cit.*, pp. 65-70, 80, 82.

[70] Moshe Idel, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism*, London, New York: Continuum, 2007, p. 124.

[71] Hugo Odeberg (Ed., and Trans.), *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928, pp. 125-142.

[72] Ibid., pp. 138, 142.

[73] Black (1951), *op. cit.*, p. 218.

[74] Saul Lieberman, "Metatron, the Meaning of His Name and His Functions," in Ithamar Gruenwald (Ed.), *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, Leiden: Brill, 1980, pp. 235–241.

[75] Idel (2007), *op. cit.*, pp. 125, 129.

[76] Ibid., p. 132.

[77] Andrei A. Orlov, *From Apocalypticism to Merkabah Mysticism: Studies in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, p. 226.

[78] See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Metatron and Shi'ur Qomah in the Writings of Haside Ashkenaz," in Karl Erich Grözinger, Joseph Dan (Eds.), *Mysticism, Magic, and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*, Berlin, New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1995, pp. 60-92.

[79] Michael T. Miller, "Folk-Etymology, and its Influence on Metatron Traditions," *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, Vol. 44 (2013), pp. 339-355 (see p. 345).

ambiguity surrounding the origin and etymology of the name *Meṭāṭrōn* represents a significant and illuminating dimension of his portrayal in Jewish mystical literature.

The ambiguity concerning the office of Meṭāṭrōn is vividly dramatized in early rabbinic literature. The tension is reflected in the *Parddēs* narrative in the Babylonian Talmud (Ḥagigah 15a-16a) —a mystical clairvoyance centered around a second-century Palestinian Rabbī, ʾElīshāʿ ben ʾAvūyāh, who is said to have delved into the deepest secrets of the Torah.[80] This Talmudic episode—one of the earliest accounts involving Meṭāṭrōn—recounts ʾElīshāʿ ben ʾAvūyāh's encounter with Meṭāṭrōn, the "Minister of Countenances," whom he saw enthroned in the highest heavens recording the merits of Israel.[81] Shocked by the vision, Rabbī ʾElīshʿa explained: "Has it not long been taught that in the heavenly realm there is no sitting, no rivalry of roles, no back, and no weariness—lest, God forbid, one assume there are two heavenly authorities?"[82] Despite the mystical and ethereal nature of the experience, Rabbī ʾElīshʿa is ultimately deemed blasphemous. From that moment on, he is labeled a heretic and referred to as *ʾAḥēr*—"The Other." In this particular tradition, the heresy of Rabbī ʾElīshʿa ben ʾAvūyāh is specified as claiming a heavenly enthronement for Meṭāṭrōn, i.e., a position co-equal to that of God, that is, bitheism. The Talmud quickly corrects this by asserting that Meṭāṭrōn was granted permission to sit only because he served as a heavenly scribe, not as a divine equal. Yet it does not spare him from punishment, despite his elevated heavenly status. Yet even this corrective gesture does not eliminate the underlying tension; rather, it anticipates its further development in later mystical traditions. For instance, Christopher Rowland observes that *3 Enoch* presents, more elaborately, a similar encounter between Rabbī Yishmāʿēʾl and Meṭāṭrōn, in which the latter "is sitting on a throne like the throne of God [...] he is a judge in the heavenly court, whereas in b. Ḥagigah, he is merely a heavenly scribe."[83] This development is not to be regarded as an isolated phenomenon but rather as indicative of an evolving and increasingly complex conceptualization of the Metatronic office.

Such narratives reflect a broader rabbinic concern with policing the boundaries between sanctioned angelology and potentially heterodox theology. The aforementioned Talmudic anecdote

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[80] An extensive treatment of this passage can be found in David J. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*, New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980, pp. 167-170.

[81] This Talmudic tale also found echoes in the sixteenth-century work of the Jewish mystic Shlomo Molkho, titled *Sēfer Hammefōʾār*, Amsterdam: Abraham Mendes, 1709.

[82] See Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977.

[83] Christopher Rowland and Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, p. 110.

would ultimately evolve into an unorthodox Jewish perspective on the ontological nature of the Divine—a notion that would later give rise to the Metatronic cluster of esoteric traditions. Gershom Scholem reintroduced into the discussion a series of texts known as the *Heīkhalōt* literature, which describes the heavenly realms envisioned as a series of palaces, halls, or, in Hebrew, *Heīkhalōt*.[84] While the *Heīkhalōt* texts claim the authority of Rabbī Yishmā'ē'l and Rabbī 'Aqīb'ā, this pseudepigraphic compendium is not considered by Scholem as Tannaitic, although he attributed its central thesis to the first and second centuries C.E.[85] It must be emphasized, however, that, as Gruenwald rightly observes, "there is nothing in *Sēfer Heīkhalōt* that betrays either the style or symbolism of Jewish medieval Kabbalah,"[86] which later emerged as a distinct development.

Meṭāṭrōn features prominently in the *Heīkhalōt Derabbī Yishmā'ē'l*, where the aforementioned Talmudic narrative is elaborated in detail. In this context, Meṭāṭrōn—referred to in abbreviated Hebrew form as *Maṭaṭ*—is identified as *Sar Happānīm*, that is, "The Minister of the [Divine] Face(s)," a motif associated with Meṭāṭrōn as a central figure in some of the texts that have come down to us from the early Jewish mystical literature of the Talmudic era, particularly in the *Heīkhalōt* literature and the Slavonic pseudepigraphic traditions.[87] The motif of the second power's *Panīm*—already traceable in early biblical theophanic narratives—figures prominently in the mystical lore surrounding Meṭāṭrōn, wherein a distinct secondary heavenly authority is envisioned as the hypostatic Face of God. This notion also finds resonance in Philo's works, where the *Logos* is treated as an intermediary, divine agent, and an aspect of God; and in the Christian Fourth Gospel (*John*), where Jesus is depicted as the incarnate *Logos*—the embodiment of the immanent aspect of God. Peter Schäfer contends that "we could ultimately argue that Metatron indeed adopts the role of Jesus Christ, whose 'savior quality,' so dominant in the New Testament, is no doubt also present in the Metatronic tradition."[88] This raises the question of whether, from the perspective of Christian theology, the reverse

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[84] See Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism: Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965.

[85] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Jerusalem: Schocken Publishing House, 1941, pp. 39-78.

[86] Gruenwald (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 192n2.

[87] See Andrei A. Orlov, *Selected Studies in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009; Daniel C. Olson, *Second Enoch: A Samaritan Apocalypse*, Leiden: Brill, 2025; Michael E. Stone (Ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

[88] Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other*, Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012, p. 147.

could also be argued—namely, that in certain Christian theologies, Jesus assumes a role analogous to that of Metatron within certain strands of Jewish mystical tradition. In both instances, the discourse ultimately concerns the immanence of the Divine and its theophanic representation within the dimensions of space and time.

What is evident from the historical record is that the theological and philosophical attributes associated with Jesus—as noted by Schäfer—were articulated by Jewish thinkers as conceptions of the Messiah. This conceptual framework predates Christianity and is rooted in the diverse and complex religious consciousness of Second Temple Judaism. Over time, these ideas evolved and branched out, forming part of the background from which the earliest followers of the historical Jesus would eventually emerge. It is hence unsurprising that some of his followers identified him with the *Logos*—an idea that circulated among Jews of antiquity and which was understood as the manifestation of the immanent dimension of the Divine.[89] Thus, themes of divine embodiment and physical-metaphysical heavenly mediation find parallel expression in some early Jewish theological engagements. This predates formal Trinitarian doctrine and, to some extent—much like certain aspects of later rabbinic Judaism—exhibits notable parallels to various Greco-Roman philosophical ideas.

Yet Meṭāṭrōn's role as a divine intermediary not only resonates with the *Memrā'* and *Logos*[90]—understood in different traditions as the primordial force that ordered the cosmos—but also echoes in the Greek Hermetic tradition, where Hermes functions as the messenger of the gods and the revealer of divine wisdom, conveying gnosis and heavenly secrets to humanity, thereby standing as a symbol of divine intellection. Moreover, both Meṭāṭrōn and Hermes tread the threshold between the *Parggōd*—"The heavenly curtains of the upper realms"—and the dust of the earth. Meṭāṭrōn, voice of the Ineffable, is robed in fire, seated on a throne of sapphire in the luminous halls of the *Mārōm*; Hermes, winged and whispering, bears the quill of the cosmos, inscribing secrets across the veil of worlds. One is crowned with divine names. The other is appointed herald of the gods. Yet, both bear the burden of marvelous *truths*, and through their luminous bridges, the natural and cosmic worlds find a path by which holy silence becomes divine voice and heavenly mystery takes earthly form. The Metatronic

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[89] See Daniel Boyarin, "The Quest of the Historical Metatron: Enoch or Jesus," in Dikla Rivlin Katz, Noah Hacham, Geoffrey Herman, and Lilach Sagiv (Eds.), *A Question of Identity: Social, Political, and Historical Aspects of Identity Dynamics in Jewish and Other Contexts*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019, pp. 153-162; and Sigurd Grindheim, *God's Equal: What Can We Know about Jesus' Self-Understanding in the Synoptic Gospels?*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2011, pp. 134-167.

[90] Mun Heo (2023), *op. cit.*, pp. 70, 80, 215.

figure also reflects Platonic philosophical notions. For instance, the 'world soul,' the archetypal cosmic architect, the *Anima Mundi*, who, like a heavenly artisan and designer (*Dēmiurgós* in Plato's *Timaeus*), is the "geometer god" who fashions and maintains both the cosmos and space-time, connecting, in this manner, the material world to higher realms of reality.[91] These philosophical parallels highlight the dynamic interplay between Jewish mystical thought and Hellenistic intellectual traditions, suggesting a complex process of philosophical and theological synthesis.

Meṭāṭrōn, albeit as a noun ("guide"), also appears in Midrashic literature. According to George F. Moore, "the oldest occurrence of this word is in *Sifrē* on Deuteronomy 32 (§338)."[92] *Sifrē* is a Tannaitic work dating to around the third century. Concerning this word, it records: *Rabbī ʾElīʿezer ʾōmer: ʾEtzbāʿō shel haqqādōsh bārūkh hūʾ hīʾ hāytāh lō Meṭāṭrōn leMosheh vehērāʾhū kol qerāʾēy ʾeretz Yisrāʾēl.*[93] In this context, however, *meṭāṭrōn* is neither a mere emissary nor angel, nor is it closely identified with the divine Word. Instead, it is an epithet for the finger of God acting as a *moreh derekh*[94]—"a guide on the way." Moore further noted that Naḥmanides explained the word *meṭāṭrōn* as meaning "a guide,"[95] while ʾEshtōrī Haparḥi (1280-1355) interpreted it as "one who shows the way" (*pērūsh Meṭāṭrōn marʾeh māqōm*).[96] A similar occurrence occurs in *Midrāsh Berʾēshīt Rabbāh* 5:4, where we read the word *meṭāṭrōn*. Although it likely does not refer to Meṭāṭrōn the angel, the word *meṭāṭrōn* nonetheless appears in its folios. For instance, some printed editions read: *Naʿasāh qōlō shel haqqādōsh bārūkh hūʾ meṭāṭrōn leMosheh* […] *naʿasāh qōlō shel haqqādōsh bārūkh hūʾ meṭāṭrōn ʿal*

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[91] See Bálint Veres, "A World is Born: Craftsmanship, Mediality, and the Somatic Implications of Plato's *Timaeus*," in Richard Shusterman, and Bálint Veres (Eds.), *Somaesthetics and Design Culture*, Leiden: Brill, 2023, pp. 23-49; *Plato: Timaeus and Critias* (Trans. by Robin Waterfield), New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. xxxv, xliii, xliv, xlix, lxv, 126, 142; Chad Jorgenson, Filip Karfík, and Štěpán Špinka (Eds.), *Plato's Timaeus: Proceedings on the Tenth Symposium Platonic Pragense*, Leiden: Brill, 2021; and Leonardo Tarán, *Collected Papers* (*1962-1999*), Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001, pp. 303-340.

[92] Moore (1922), *op. cit*., p. 62.

[93] ("Rabbi Eliezer says: The finger of the Holy One, blessed be He, was *meṭāṭrōn* [a guide] for Moses, and he showed him all the regions of the Land of Israel"), *Sifrē Devarīm*, § 338, in Eliezer Finkelstein (Ed.), *Sifrē ʿal Sēfer Devārīm ʿim Ḥillūfēy Girsāʾōt Vehʿeraōt*, Berlin: Kulturbund Deutscher Juden, 1939, p. 338 (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Sifrē Devārīm*). See also Jacob Neusner, *Sifre to Deuteronomy: An Analytical Translation. Vol. II: Pisqaot One Hundred Forty-Seven through Three Hundred Fifty-Seven*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987, p. 392.

[94] *Sifrē Devārīm* § 338.

[95] Moore (1922), *op. cit*., p. 63.

[96] ʾEshtōrī Haparḥi, *Sēfer Kaftōr Vaferaḥ*, Venezia: Parenzo, 1546, f. 49v (In Hebrew).

hammāyīm.[97] Other printed editions of this literary occurrence include the word *meṭāṭrōn* written with a *yod*,[98] while some manuscripts, such as *Ms. Hébreu 149*, read *maṭrōn* instead.[99] Yet, other manuscripts of *Ber'ēshīt Rabbāh*, such as the eleventh-century Vatican *Ms. Vat. Ebr. 30*, read *meṭāṭrōn*, just like the name of the angelical mystical figure.[100] The same reading also occurs in British Library *Ms. Or. 27169* (*Midrash Rabbah*).[101] Neusner, following these later manuscripts, renders the word *meṭāṭrōn* in his translation of *Ber'ēshīt Rabbāh* as "a guide."[102]

Another Midrash that incorporates the name Meṭāṭrōn into its narrative is *Midrāsh Tanḥum'ā Yelamdenū*, *Ve'ētḥannan* 6, which, in its exposition on Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11, presents a poignant and intimate dialogue between God and Moses as the latter approaches the end of his life.[103] In this dialogue, Moses, aware of his imminent departure, turns to the figure of the *Sar Happānīm* ("Prince of the Face") to intercede on his behalf before God. However, the *Sar Happānīm* refuses Moses' request, stating, "I have heard from behind the *pargōd* ("the celestial curtain") that Moses must die." This refusal underscores the irreversible nature of the divine decree and highlights the role of celestial intermediaries in the unfolding of God's will. Yet, in a later passage within this section, the narrative shifts to a profoundly emotional moment where God speaks with Meṭāṭrōn. God, overwhelmed by sorrow, explains why He is weeping—not for Himself, but for Moses and the people of Israel. Moses had, after all, pleaded with God countless times on behalf of the Israelites, averting their destruction and preventing the obliteration of their covenantal relationship with God. The Midrash thus paints a picture of a deeply compassionate God, who, despite His decrees, is moved by the loyalty and selflessness of Moses, as well as by the fragile state of the people of Israel. The significance of this

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[97] ("The voice of the Holy One, blessed be He, became a *meṭāṭrōn* for Moses […] The voice of the Holy One, blessed be He, became *meṭāṭrōn* upon the waters"), see Chanoch Albeck (Ed.), *Bereschit Rabba mit Kritischem Apparat und Kommentar von J. Theodor*, (Parascha I-XLVII), Berlin: Itzkowski, 1912, pp. 34.; *Midrāsh Rabbāh 'al Ḥamishsheh Ḥumshēy Tōrāh Veḥamēsh Megillōt*, Vilna: Ha'almānāh Vehā'aḥīm R'ōmm, 1886, p. 33 (In Hebrew); Moore (1922), *op. cit*., p. 80; and *Sēfer Midrāsh Rabbāh 'al Sēfer Ber'ēshīt*, Shklow: Horowitz, 1812, f. 6r (In Hebrew).

[98] *Midrāsh Ḥamēsh Megīllōt Rabbatā': Sēder Ber'ēshīt*, Amsterdam: 'Immānū'ēl Benvenisṭī: 1641, f. 7r (In Hebrew).

[99] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 149. Midrach rabba. Genèse, Lévitique, Nombres*, Year: 1291, f. 5r (In Hebrew).

[100] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Ms. Vat. Ebr. 30*, *Midrash Rabbah. Genesis,* f. 5v (In Hebrew).

[101] The British Library, *Ms. 27169 Midrash Rabah*, Year: 1060-1170, f. 11r (In Hebrew).

[102] Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis. A New American Translation* (Vol. 1, Parashiyyot One through Thirty-Three on Genesis 1:1 to 8:14), Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985, p. 48.

[103] *Midrāsh Tanḥūmā' Hanniqrā' Yelammedēnū Vehū' Midrāsh 'al Ḥamishshāh Ḥumshēy Tōrāh*, Amsterdam: Shlomo Proops, 1733, f. 70r (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Midrāsh Tanḥūmā' Yelammedēnū*).

narrative is heightened by the presence of both the *Sar Happānīm* and Meṭāṭrōn in the scene. These two apparent figures, while similar in rank and function, reflect different aspects of divine mediation. The former stands as a figure of obedience to divine law and the enforcer of God's will, while Meṭāṭrōn emerges as an intermediary who seems to bear witness to God's emotional turmoil. What is especially striking is that, as in the passage from *Midrash ʾEīkhah Rabbāh* discussed below, God's tears are central to the narrative. The idea that God is moved to tears by the death of Moses—whom He had chosen as His most faithful servant—is a powerful motif that underscores the complex and compassionate nature of the Divine. This portrayal invites us to consider the paradoxes within the divine realm: the tension between divine justice and mercy, between the implacable will of God and the vulnerability of the human condition. The *Sar Happānīm*, with his refusal to intercede, and Meṭāṭrōn, with his role as an emotional witness, together serve as intermediaries within this deeply human and divine interaction.

In *Midrash ʾEīkhah Rabbāh*, Meṭāṭrōn appears at a moment of divine grief over Jerusalem's fall.[104] He bows before God and offers to weep in His place. God refuses, warning that if Meṭāṭrōn does not permit Him to weep, He will go alone to a place beyond Meṭāṭrōn's reach and weep there. This powerful portrayal shows Meṭāṭrōn as a tender, compassionate intercessor—empathy personified—who honors, rather than supplants, God's unique position.[105] *Midrāsh Bammidbār Rabbāh* likewise incorporates Meṭāṭrōn into its literary corpus, albeit in an esoteric role, where Meṭāṭrōn functions as a heavenly tabernacle *himself* within a celestial cultic drama: the *mishkan hannaʿar* ("younger tabernacle"), whose name is Meṭāṭrōn and upon whom the souls of the *tzaddiqīm* ("righteous") are offered as sacrifices to atone for Israel (*Sēder Nāsoʾ*, *Pārāshah* 12)—reflecting thus the integration of earlier mystical motifs into mainstream rabbinic literature.[106] This tradition was preserved and further developed by later Kabbalistic sages. For example, Mosheh Ḥayyīm Lūtzāʾṭō, in his *Mishkanēy ʿElyōn*, tells that when the Israelites constructed the *mishkan* ("tabernacle"), a corresponding structure also arose in the supernal realms. From this perspective, the earthly *mishkan* mirrors an upper counterpart referred to as the "tabernacle of Meṭāṭrōn."[107]

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[104] It should be noted that manuscript history reveals that this section of *ʾEīkhah Rabbāh* is a later insert, likely medieval.

[105] Salomon Buber (Ed.), *Midrāsh ʾĒykhāh Rabbāh ʿim Mebōʾ Gādōl* (*Petīḥtāʾ* 24), Vilna: Haʾalmānāh Vehāʾaḥīm Rʾōmm, 1899, p. 25 (In Hebrew).

[106] *Sēfer Midrāsh Rabbāh ʿal Sēfer Bammidbār*, Shklow: Defūs Ḥādāsh, 1812, f. 42v (In Hebrew).

[107] Mosheh Ḥayyīm Lūtzāʾṭō, *Mishkaneī ʿĒliyōn*, Jerusalem: Machōn Ramḥal, 2019, p. 20 (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Mishkaneī ʿĒliyōn*).

Medieval Jewish literature also preserves traces of Metatronic motifs and reflects the evolution of his role in Jewish thought. For instance, *Yalkūṭ Shimʿōnī* (*Remez* 41:2) records a dialogue between God, Meṭāṭrōn, and Adam about the allocation of human lifespan. In this twelfth-thirteenth-century rabbinic anthology of classical midrashic literature, Meṭāṭrōn announces the impending deluge and foretells the partial destruction of creation (*Remez* 44:1).[108] These portrayals suggest continuity with earlier mystical traditions while also reflecting rabbinic preoccupation with divine justice, mercy, and cosmic order. In this context, the figure of Meṭāṭrōn emerges as a mediating presence, bridging apocalyptic, mystical, and midrashic discourses. Altogether, these early Jewish traditions and theological cosmovisions would eventually form the foundational background that developed the Meṭāṭrōn theme as this was received by medieval Jewish thinkers—particularly the medieval Sephardic Kabbalists, as well as the Ashkenazi Pietists (*Ḥasidēy ʾAshkenaz*) who flourished in the *Regnum Teutonicum*[109] during the latter half of the twelfth century. It is, thus, within the corpus of medieval Jewish exegesis and mystical thought that Meṭāṭrōn is accorded a particularly prominent role, especially in the context of scriptural interpretation and Zoharic traditions.

This growing prominence is further reflected in the expansion of Metatronic onomastic traditions within medieval mysticism, where we can observe that, in addition to his association with the Divine Name in earlier traditions, Meṭāṭrōn is further portrayed as bearing a multiplicity of names, most prominently a corpus of seventy appellations, many of which are obscure and shrouded in mystery. A record of these names was transmitted to medieval Jewish mystics—though often with modifications. One such record is believed to originate in the Talmudic period and survives today in two closely related sources. The first of such records appears in an anthology known as *ʾĀlfāʾ Bētōt Derabbī ʿAqīvāʾ*.[110] The second is found in the *Sēfer Heīchālōt*—introduced to the scholarly world through Odeberg's 1928 edition of *3 Enoch* (which included an English translation and commentary). Interesting, the figure of Meṭāṭrōn, so prominent in *Heīchālōt* mysticism, is almost absent from the *Sēfer Habbāhīr*—one of the earliest works of medieval Kabbalah (12th century, likely in Provence).[111]

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[108] *Sēfer Yalkūṭ Shimʿōnī* (Vol. 1), Vilna: Defūs Rabbī Yōsef Reʾūvēn bar Menaḥēm min Rʾōmm, 1863, pp. 34, 36 (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Yalkūṭ Shimʿōnī V. 1*).

[109] Host Fuhrmann, *Germany in the High Middle Ages, c. 1050-1200*, (Trans. Timothy Reuter), Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 19.

[110] See Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (Ed.), *Midrāsh ʾŌtīyōt Derabbī ʿAqīvāʾ Hashshālēm Bishttēy Nūsḥāʾōt ʿim Midrāsh ʾĀlfāʾ Bētōt*, Jerusalem: Yerīd Hassefārīm, 1999 (In Hebrew).

[111] Dan (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 189.

Yet perhaps the most widely cited compilation of these seventy appellations appears in the *Sēfer Haḥēsheq*. Few sources in this genre so clearly attest to the breadth of Ashkenazi esoteric practice or to its familiarity with the forms of mysticism reflected in this work, making it a rare and singular manuscript. Thus, *Sēfer Haḥēsheq* stands out as unparalleled within the Ashkenazic context. Printed as a booklet in Lemberg in 1864, it served as a treatise of theurgic Kabbalah.[112] Joseph Dan noted that, based on its terminological and ideological framework, this small compendium of esoteric formulae was most likely composed among the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz, the early German pietist, during the 12th or 13th century.[113] Rich in applied kabbalistic praxis, which includes esoteric techniques for conjuring upon Meṭāṭrōn, among other practical mystical curiosities, *Sēfer Haḥēsheq* claims to preserve the same list of names that Meṭāṭrōn is said to have transmitted to Rabbī Yishmāʿēʾl, who, according to early Jewish esoteric traditions, experienced a mystic ascent into the heavenly realms.[114]

Building on these esoteric and onomastic traditions, Meṭāṭrōn's role was gradually incorporated into broader, more authoritative strata of Jewish literature, where medieval exegetes and mystics elaborated on his function in cosmology and scriptural interpretation in an attempt to explain enigmatic biblical passages (e.g., Ezekiel 1:26-28). Meṭāṭrōn also found expression in Jewish theurgy and liturgy, particularly within select *piyyūṭīm* and prayers incorporated into certain Shabbat and Festival cycles. For instance, in the *Yōtzer* liturgical section for the holiday of Simḥat Tōrāh within the *Maḥzōr Leshālosh Regālīm*, we find a *piyyūṭ* attributed to *ʾAmītay happayyēṭān* titled *ʾEshnavēy Sheḥaqīm* ("Windows of heavens"), where Meṭāṭrōn appears as *sār hanehepakh leʾēsh mibbāsār* ("the minister who from flesh becomes fire").[115] Within the same prayerbook, in the *Yōtzer* for the last day of Passover, an eleventh-century *piyyūṭ* titled *Lebaʿal Hattifʾeret* ("To the Master of glory") by Rabbī Binyāmīn Ben-Zāraḥ, contains a mention of Meṭāṭrōn as "the one who seals (*pisqōn*), conceals (*ʾiṭmōn*), and shuts (*sigrōn*)."[116] Thus, in this long journey, Meṭāṭrōn became, except for God, the most powerful celestial figure in Jewish mystical and literary folklore, with his name becoming associated with God's *kāvōd*—although the Babylonian Talmud does not provide direct evidence for the

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[112] *Sēfer Haḥēsheq ʿal Shemōt Meṭāṭrōn Sar Happānīm Shemmāsar Lerabbī Yishmāʿēʾl*, Lemberg: J. M. Epstein, 1865 (In Hebrew).

[113] See Joseph Dan, "The Seventy Names of Metatron," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 8 (1981), pp. 19-23.

[114] Odeberg, (1928), *op. cit.*, (Part II) pp. 1-8.

[115] *Maḥzōr Leshālosh Regālīm*,Vilna: Haʾalmānāh Vehāʾaḥīm Rʾōmm, 1889, p. 116.

[116] Ibid., pp. 261-262.

existence of a Metatronic mystical praxis linked to Ezekiel 1:26-28[117]—*Shadday*, and the Tetragrammaton. This growing prominence set the stage for individual medieval exegetes to articulate Meṭāṭrōn's hierarchical status above other celestial beings, emphasizing his unique proximity to the Divine.

In a similar vein, Rabbī Nissīm ben Re'ūvēn of Gerona (ca. 1290-1376), in his *Derāshōt Hāran*—a 14th-century collection of twelve homilies that address foundational principles of Judaism alongside exegetical reflections on the Torah—emphasizes the unique status of Meṭāṭrōn above all celestial beings, underscoring the profound distinction between him and the rest of the angelic hosts. Notably, Nissīm of Gerona asserts that Meṭāṭrōn is designated by the Tetragrammaton, thereby highlighting his exceptional position within the divine hierarchy. Consequently, in the *Derāshōt Hāran*, he offers the following counsel: *Rā'ūy shenninhāg ʿimmō beqārōv me'od kemō shenninhag ʿim Hashshēm yitbārakh.*[118] Rabbī Nissīm further explains: *Velāzeh tzivvānū Hashshēm yitbārakh shenninhag ʿim zeh hammal'ākh kemo shenninhag ʿimmō.*[119]

Other medieval commentators further explored Meṭāṭrōn's intermediary role, associating him with specific divine names and revealing the diverse ways in which his office mediated between God and creation. For instance, Rabbī Yaʿaqov ben 'Ashshēr (ca. 1270-1340), in his commentary on *Pārāshat Ber'ēshīt* (Genesis 1:1-6:8) equates, albeit through *gematria*—a traditional Jewish method of interpreting Hebrew words by assigning numerical values to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet—one of the names of God with Meṭāṭrōn.[120] So does 'Avrāhām 'ibn 'Ezrā', who, in his *Yesōd Morā' Vesōd Tōrāh*, not only identifies Meṭāṭrōn as *Sar Happānīm*, but articulates his position as the central secret and fundamental principle of God's divine unity (√*'ē-ḥ-d*[121]). According to 'Ibn 'Ezrā', this assumption both underpins and transcends conventional mathematical and rational frameworks.[122] So, too, Rabbī

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[117] Halperin (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 179.

[118] ("We should relate to him with the utmost closeness, as we relate to *Hashshem*, blessed be He"), Nissīm ben Re'ūvēn, *Shnēym ʿĀsār Derāshōt Lehārav Rabbēnū Nissīm*, Warsaw: Defūs Rabbī Yitzḥāq Goldman, 1875, p. 26 (In Hebrew).

[119] (And for this reason, *Hashshēm*, blessed be He, commanded us to conduct ourselves with this angel just as we would conduct ourselves with Him), Ibid.

[120] Yaʿaqov ben 'Ashshēr, *Pīrūsh Hattōrāh Lerabbēnū Yaʿaqov Baʿal Haṭṭūrīm Ben Hārav Rabbēnū 'Ashshēr*, Venice: Giovanni de Ferri, 1544, 4v (In Hebrew).

[121] In this study, the symbol √ denotes the Hebrew root of a given noun, adjective, or verb.

[122] 'Avrāhām 'ibn 'Ezrā', *Sēfer Yesōd Morā' Vesōd Tōrāh Lehaḥākhām Hakōllēl Hafīlōsōf 'Elohī 'Avrāhām ben Mē'īr 'ibn 'Ezrā'*, Prague: M. I. Landau, 1833, ff. 42v, 43r (In Hebrew).

ʾAvrāhām ben Davīd (1125-1198), highlights Meṭāṭrōn as *ʾAdonāy haqqāṭān*, namely, "the lesser YHVH."[123] Similarly, Rabbī Menaḥēm ben Binyāmīn Reqaʾnāṭī (1223–1290), following the exposition of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* in his Torah commentary on Genesis, portrays Meṭāṭrōn as "the great scribe" (*Meṭāṭrōn safrāʾ rabbāʾ*).[124] According to Reqaʾnāṭī, Meṭāṭrōn "is called by the Ineffable Name of God and His glorious presence" (*zeh Meṭāṭrōn shenniqrāʾ bashshēm hameyuḥād shehāremez bō ʿal hashshekhīnāh hanniqrēʾt kākh*); it was the same *Meṭāṭrōn*-S*hekhīnāh* that revealed itself to Moses in the burning bush (*kī kevār niglētā lō basseneh*) and who "called Moses up unto the presence of the great divine Name" (*Meṭāṭrōn ʾamar leMosheh sheyyaʿaleh ʾel hashshēm haggādōl*) at the giving of the Torah.[125]This intermediary role, Reqaʾnāṭī explains, makes the otherwise mortal-to-humans presence of YHVH bearable, thereby attributing to Meṭāṭrōn a function of profound theological and mystical significance.

Following a similar line of reasoning, Yōsēf ben ʾAvrāhām Giḳaṭīlah, in his *Sēfer Ginnat ʾEggōz*, reflects on the name of Meṭāṭrōn in relation to the divine name *Shadday.* He proposes that Meṭāṭrōn testifies to the Tetragrammaton, being himself identified with the Ineffable Name of the LORD. Moreover, under the name *Shadday*—understood as the "all-sufficient" name—Meṭāṭrōn testifies to the One who created His world and declared *day lī* ("it is enough for me").[126] Rabbī Yitzḥāq ben Yehūdāh ʾAbravanʾēl (1437–1508) follows an analogous approach in his haggadic commentary *Zevaḥ Pesaḥ*, referring to Meṭāṭrōn as a divine *shālīaḥ*, as the head emissary of God's Name, the Minister of the Countenance, the *kavōd* ("glory") of God, and as a heavenly figure named after the Tetragrammaton.[127] Similarly, in *Sēfer Gevūrōt YHVH* (55:9) of the Maharal of Prague (Rabbī Yehūdāh Lōew ben Betzalʾēl, ca. 1520-1609), Meṭāṭrōn is referred to as *Shadday qāṭān* ("the lesser Almighty") and as *shālīaḥ* ("envoy") of YHVH—the latter functioning as a designation for the angel (*malʾākh*) of YHVH in Exodus 23:20-21.[128]

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[123] *Sēfer Yetzīrāh*, f. 5v.

[124] Menaḥēm ben Binyāmīn Reqaʾnāṭī, *Bīʾūr ʿal Hattōrāh ʿal Derekh ʾEmet*, Venice: Marco Antonio Giustinian, 1545, f. 35v (In Hebrew).

[125] Ibid., f. 106v.

[126] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 811. Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla (1248-1325?). Ginat ʾegwz*, Year: Fourteenth Century, f. 128r (In Hebrew); and Yōsēf ben ʾAvrāhām Giḳaṭīlah, *Sēfer Ginnat ʾEggōz*, Hanau: 1615, f. 17r (In Hebrew).

[127] Yitzḥāq Ben Yehūdāh ʾAbravanʾēl, *Sēfer Zevaḥ Pesaḥ*, Bistritz: Qalōnimūs ben Morddechaī Yāfeh, 1592, f. 36r (In Hebrew).

[128] Yehūdāh Lōew Ben Betzalʾēl, *Sēfer Gevūrōt YHVH*, Kraków: Defūs Yitzḥāq Ben ʾAhron Prostītz, 1582, f. 70v (In Hebrew).

Rabbī Mosheh Cordovero integrates Meṭāṭrōn into the *sefīrōt* system of Zoharic Kabbalah, which is another way of mediating divine transcendence and immanence through emanation, and also of dealing with the multiple aspects of deity through a dynamic unity. In his *Parddēs Rīmmōnīm* (Gate 1:5)—a systematic and comprehensive presentation of Kabbalah that organizes theological concepts in a logical, philosophical way—Cordovero alludes to Meṭāṭrōn in association with both *Sar Happānīm* and the aspect of the Divine known as the "Mother"—the *Sefīrah* of "understanding" (*bīnah*), who is the womb of creation, the supernal matrix from which the lower *sefīrōt* emerge.[129] Cordovero elaborately describes this idea as the womb of creation and the supernal mother who gives birth to the lower divine emanations. The Jewish mystical principle "like father, the son; like mother, the daughter," reflects a profound symbolic structure grounded in the configuration of the Tetragrammaton, wherein the *yōd* represents the "father" and the first *hēh* symbolizes the "mother." From this primordial divine union emerge the remaining letters—*vav* and final *hēh*—thereby constituting the whole shape of the Ineffable Name of God (YHVH). Within this schema, *bīnah*, the supernal mother, corresponds to the first *hēh*, positioning herself as the generative source of divine emanation. Meṭāṭrōn is thus recontextualized as an intrinsic component of the sefirotic system. Additionally, in his *ʾŌr Neʿerāv* (Sign 70)—a seminal mystical text examining the structure of the spiritual worlds, the *sefirōt*, divine attributes, and related metaphysical concepts—Cordovero identifies both the *sefirōt* of *malchūt* and *yesōd* with Meṭāṭrōn, characterizing him as *Sar Malchūt Meṭāṭrōn*, namely, Meṭāṭrōn, the governing principle overseeing the godly manifestation of *malchūt*, the divine feminine, and the attainment of humility, mobility, and kingship. [130]

Additionally, in Cordovero's *ʾŌr Yāqār*, specifically within his commentary on *Sēfer Raʿyāʾ Mehīmnāʾ*, Meṭāṭrōn is alluded to as *sōd maṭṭeh demarʿāh* ("the secret of the staff"), and described as the "Tree of knowledge of good" (Gate 1:4).[131] Rabbī ʾElīyāhū De Vidas (ca. 1518-1592), following the position of his teacher Mosheh Cordovero and alluding to the *Tiqqūnēy Zohar*, refers to Meṭāṭrōn in his *Rēʾshīt Ḥokhmāh* (*Shaʿar hayyirāʾh* 11)—esoterically hinting at the staff of Moses—as the "staff that turns into a snake" (*mimmaṭṭeh lenāḥāsh*) to strike the wicked and becomes a serpent against them

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[129] Yitzḥāq Ben Meshulām (Ed.), *Sēfer Parddēs Rīmmōnīm*, Kraków: Defūs Yitzḥāq Ben ʾĀhron Prostītz, 1592, f. 8r (In Hebrew).

[130] Mosheh Cordovero, *ʾŌr Neʿerāv*, Vilna: Defūs Rabbī ʾAvrāhām Tzvī, 1899, p. 74 (In Hebrew).

[131] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 789. Moise ben Jacob Cordovero* (*1522-1570*). אור יקר. Year: Sixteenth Century, f. 5r (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Ms. Hébreu 789*).

but for the righteous the same "serpent turns into a staff."[132] Through this interpretative lens, Meṭāṭrōn's name may be reframed as the "joyful (*rōn*) staff (*maṭṭeh*)" of God. However, in a more biblical and even eschatological context, the term *maṭṭeh*—as it appears in both biblical and rabbinic literature—is often associated with the phrase *maṭṭeh ʿuzzechā* ("the staff of Your might"), drawn from Psalm 110:2, a verse imbued with clear and strong Jewish messianic overtones.[133] This "staff," upon which the Ineffable Name of the LORD is said to be inscribed (e.g., *Numbers Rabbāh* 18:23),[134] represents an instrument of "authority invested with divinely ordained power."[135] Cordovero further develops the role of Meṭāṭrōn as a garmenting instrument for the faithful and as the eternal servant of God (Gate 1:4,7). He describes Meṭāṭrōn as endowed with *sonship*[136]—a kind of divine filial authority — possessing the capacity to receive or reject prayers (Gate 1:14), and serving as a blueprint for the creation of humanity's image (*tzelem*) and likeness (Gate 1:15).[137] It is within this framework that the tradition of Cordovero accords significant emphasis to Meṭāṭrōn.

The literary tradition of Lurianic Kabbalah, which reshaped Kabbalistic cosmology with concepts like *tzīmtzūm* ("divine contraction"), *shvīrat hakēlīm* ("the breaking of the vessels"), and *Tīqqūn* (cosmic rectification), also incorporates Meṭāṭrōn. Discussions of Meṭāṭrōn, which stem from pre-Lurianic Kabbalah, are infused into the Lurianic tradition primarily through the compositions and teachings of the foremost disciple of Yitzḥāq Lūryāʾ, Rabbī Ḥayyīm Viṭal (1542-1620), and other posthumous transmitters. For instance, in *Sēfer Shaʿarēy Haqqedūshshāh* by Viṭal, the world of *yetzīrāh* ("formation") is referred to as "the world of Meṭāṭrōn."[138] In his exegesis on the Book of Numbers within *Sēfer ʿĒtz Haddaʿat Ṭōv*, Viṭal describes Meṭāṭrōn as being in the likeness of *Zeʿīr ʾAnpīn* ("the

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[132] See ʾElīyāhū De Vidas, *Sēfer Rēʾshīt Ḥokhmāh*, Kraków: Defūs Yitzḥāq Ben ʾĀhron Prostītz, 1594, f. 35v (In Hebrew); and Hugo Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel Interpreted Its Relation to Contemporaneous Religious Currents in Palestine and the Hellenistic-Oriental World*, Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1929, p. 109.

[133] See Meir Friedmann (Ed.), *Sēfer Mekhīlātāʾ Derabbī Yishmāʿēʾl ʿal Sēfer Shemōt*, Vienna: Selbstverlag des Herausgebers, 1870, f. 39r (In Hebrew); Mosheh ʾAlshikh, *Sēfer Rōmemōt ʾĒl: Bīʿūr Sēfer Tehillīm*, Venice: Zuan di Gara, 1605, f. 246r (In Hebrew); Tūvīyah Bar ʾElīʿezer, *Midrāsh Leqaḥ Ṭōv Hammekhūnneh Pesīqttāʾ Zūṭarttāʾ ʿal Ḥamishshāh Ḥumshēy Tōrāh. Sēfer Berēʾshīt*, Vilna: Haʾalmānāh Vehāʾaḥīm Rʾōmm, 1880, p. 194 (In Hebrew); and *Sēfer Yalkūṭ Shimʿōnī V. 1*, p. 129.

[134] *Midrāsh Rabbāh ʿal Ḥamishshāh Ḥumshēy Tōrāh* (Vol. 2), Vilna: Haʾalmānāh Vehāʾaḥīm Rʾōmm, 1870, p. 154 (In Hebrew).

[135] Abraham Cohen (Ed.), *The Psalms: Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*, London, Jerusalem, New York: The Soncino Press, 1992, p. 371.

[136] See Idel (2007), *op. cit.*

[137] *Ms. Hébreu 789*, ff. 8v, 16v.

[138] Ḥayyīm Viṭal, *Sēfer Shaʿarēy Haqqedūshshāh*, Jerusalem: Defūs Y. A. Weiss, 1926, p. 56 (In Hebrew).

lesser countenance of the Divine). Thereby, Meṭāṭrōn is portrayed as both *melekh* ("king") over all the celestial hosts and as the *mishneh* ("deputy") to the Divine. Viṭal further identifies Meṭāṭrōn as the secret embedded in the biblical verse: "Let us make mankind in our likeness and image" (Genesis 1:26). In this interpretation, Meṭāṭrōn is a partner with the Almighty in the act of creation, which grants him the role of sovereign over time, existence, and eternity—alluded to in Viṭal's phrase: *Dān ʾet kol hāʿōlām*[139] ("judge of all the world," or "master of eternity").

Similarly, Rabbī Nafttālī Hērtz ben Yaʿaqov ʾĒlḥānān Bakārakh, in his *Sēfer ʿĒmeq Hammelekh* —a literary composition that comments on the secrets of the *ʿAttīqāʿ Yōmayyāʾ* ("the ancient of days") within the Zohar—asserts that *Shadday* ("God Almighty") is concealed within Meṭāṭrōn, and that the letters *yōd* and *hēh* of the Tetragrammaton dwell within him. In this way, "God builds His Name within Meṭāṭrōn" (*Shaʿar ʿŌlām Hattōhū*, 64), rendering him a vessel and embodiment of the Divine. Furthermore, Hērtz refers to Meṭāṭrōn as *rūaḥ pasqānīt* ("halakhic decisory spirit," *Shaʿar ʿŌlām Hattōhū*, 31), whose sovereignty corresponds to the celestial Kingdom of the House of David (*Shaʿar ʿŌlām Hattōhū*, 46). Elsewhere in *Sēfer ʿĒmeq Hammelekh*, Meṭāṭrōn is described as being clothed in *ḥashmal*, in accordance with the vision of Ezekiel 1:4 (*Shaʿar ʿŌlām Haberīʾāh*, 60),[140] thereby affirming his exalted status within the celestial hierarchy and his place in biblical prophetic tradition. These traditions are primarily rooted in the visionary passages of the Book of Ezekiel (1:26–28), which became a central theme for medieval Jewish mystics, particularly among the Ashkenazi circles of Eastern Europe and the Sephardic intellectual communities of the medieval and modern period. These literary works offer valuable insights into the Metatronic motifs embedded in the Lurianic Kabbalistic tradition. Collectively, these interpretations consolidate Meṭāṭrōn's role and identity as a pivotal intermediary figure, whose presence not only bridges the human and the divine but also embodies a central locus of mystical, exegetical, and theurgical significance within medieval Jewish thought.

Relating to traditions in which Meṭāṭrōn is identified with the *kāvōd* in the Book of Ezekiel, the commentary of Rabbī Yehūdāh Ḥayyāṭ on *Sēfer Maʿarekhet Hāʾelohūt* by Rabbī Peretz ben Yitzḥāk Hakohēn identifies Meṭāṭrōn as *gūfāʾ deshkhīnttāʾ*[141]—"The body of the *Shekhīnah* divine glory" (*Pereq*

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[139] Ḥayyīm Viṭal, *Sēfer ʿĒtz Haddaʿat Ṭōv*, Zalkova: Shmūʾēl Heller, Shmūʾēl Pinḥas, 1871, f. 10r (In Hebrew).

[140] Nafttālī Hērtz ben Yaʿaqov ʾĒlḥānān Bakārakh, *Sēfer ʿĒmeq Hammelekh*, Amsterdam: ʿImmānūʾēl Benvenisṭī, 1648, ff. 6v, 20v, 25v, 36r, 169v (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Sēfer ʿĒmeq Hammelekh*).

[141] Peretz Ben Yitzḥāk Hakohēn, *Sēfer Maʿarekhet Hāʾelohūt*, Mantua: Mēʾīr Ben ʾEfrayim MiPādūvāh, 1558, f. 124v (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Sēfer Maʿarekhet Hāʾelohūt*).

9, *Shaʿar Haharīsāh*). In this formulation, Meṭāṭrōn serves as the *shōmer Yisrāʾēl*[142] ("the guardian of Israel"), as referred to earlier in the text (*Pereq* 4, *Maʿarekhet Shemōt*). Ḥayyāṭ further distinguishes between two aspects of Meṭāṭrōn: The *Meṭāṭrōn haggādōl* ("greater Meṭāṭrōn") and the *Meṭāṭrōn haqqāṭān* ("lesser Meṭāṭrōn"). The greater Meṭāṭrōn is identified with the *gūfāʾ deshkhīnttāʾ* ("the body of the divine presence"), such that the *Shekhīnah* herself is called "Meṭāṭrōn." In this context (*Pereq* 10, *Shaʿar Hāʾādām*), Meṭāṭrōn is portrayed as the external structure, the corporeal vessel or form (*gūf*) of the *Shekhīnah*, which, like water, takes the form and shape of its container. By contrast, the lesser Meṭāṭrōn is found "above the four heavenly living creatures of the divine chariot" (*hūʾ ʿal roʾshēy hāʾarbaʿ ḥayyōt*). That is the created (*nivrāʾ*) Meṭāṭrōn,[143] through whom the embodiment of the *Shekhīnah* is manifested in the lower worlds.

Similarly, in *Sēfer Ḥesed Leʾavrāhām* (*Maʿayān* 1:13-14) by Rabbī ʾAvrāhām ʾAzūlaʾī (c. 1570–1643), the *mishkan* ("tabernacle") corresponds to the mystery of *naʿar Meṭāṭrōn* ("the youth Meṭāṭrōn"). ʾAzūlaʾī also explains that, while in the land of Israel, the Israelite Patriarchs were guided "in holiness by Meṭāṭrōn": *Beqedushshāh ʿal yādēy Meṭāṭrōn* (*Maʿayān 1, Nahar* 14); and further elaborates that in the days of King David, the guidance of the Israelites was through the *Shekhīnah*, who is "clothed within Meṭāṭrōn": *Shekhīnah mitlabēshet bemēṭāṭrōn* (*Maʿayān 1, Nahar 1*4)—the embodiment of the divine glory. ʾAzūlaʾī further maintained that, since Meṭāṭrōn is a vehicle of the *Shekhīnah* (*Maʿayān* 2, *Nahar* 45), he is also responsible for accepting or rejecting prayers (*Maʿayān* 2, *Nahar* 44); moreover, "his wages are the prayers" (*sekhārō hūʾ hattefillāh*), thereby functioning as "God's ultimate servant": *ʿabddāʾ deqaddōsh bārūkh hūʾ* (*Maʿayān* 2, *Nahar* 56).[144]

Meṭāṭrōn's mythical human origin—identified in the *Heīkhalōt* literature with *Ḥanōkh* (Enoch), who was transformed into Meṭāṭrōn after his ascension (cf. Gen. 5:24; 3 Enoch)—blurs the ontological boundaries between the physical and the metaphysical. This theological complexity is poignantly highlighted by Yishaʿyāhū Hōrovītz in his *Sēfer Shnēy Luḥōt Habrīt*,[145] through his commentary on the Talmudic passage (Shabbat 88b): "When Moses ascended to heaven, the ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, what is a human

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[142] Ibid., f. 87v.

[143] Ibid., f. 157v.

[144] ʾAvrāhām ʾAzūlaʾī, *Sēfer Ḥesed Leʾāvrāhām*, Amsterdam: ʿImmānūʾēl ʿAṭīʾas, 1685, ff. 3r, 20rv, 20r, 23v (In Hebrew).

[145] For an insightful study on the impact of Rabbī Hōrovītz on Jewish theology, see Joseph Citron, *Isaiah Horowitz's Shnei Luhot Ha-Brit and the Pietist Transformation of Jewish Theology: Revealing a Concealed Covenant*, Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2021.

being, born of a woman, doing among us?"[146] Hōrowītz draws further attention to the inherent irony of this angelic protest, noting that their own leader—Meṭāṭrōn—is himself *yelūd ʾīshshāh* ("born of a woman").[147] This reflection underscores the theological paradox at the heart of Meṭāṭrōn's identity: a liminal being who mediates between heaven and earth, mortality and immortality, and God's immanence and transcendence. Such portrayals provide fertile ground for examining how rabbinic and kabbalistic traditions navigated the porous boundaries between the human and divine, particularly through the embodiment of sacred attributes of the God of Israel in angelic anthropomorphic form.

Meṭāṭrōn has also found a place within Jewish liturgical tradition. Certain editions of the *Maḥzōr* for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur contain an enigmatic reference embedded in the section concerning the order of *shofar* blasts: Meṭāṭrōn. Similarly, in the *Yehī Rātzōn* prayer recited between the shofar blasts, a liturgical formulation that has long been viewed with suspicion reads:

> *Yehī rātzōn millefāneikhā ʾAdonāy ʾElohay veʾElohēy ʾavōtāy shetteqīʿōt tashat sheʾanū toqʿīm hayyōm tehēʾ merūqqemet ʿal hayerīʿāh ʿal-yad hamemunneh Ṭarṭīʾēl keshēm sheqqibbaltā ʿal-yad ʾElīyāhū zākhōr laṭṭōv viYēshūʿā*[148] *Sar Hapānīm veSar Meṭāṭrōn vehamlēʾ ʿalēynū meraḥamīm. Bārūkh ʾAttāh ʾAdonāy baʿal hāraḥamīm.*[149]

These complex liturgical formulae, as Yehuda Liebes rightly noted, have long been a source of perplexity. Particularly striking within it is the name *Yēshūʿā Sar Hapānīm*, about which Liebes asks:

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[146] Yishaʿyāhū Hōrovītz, *Sēfer Shnēy Luḥōt Habrīt*, Amsterdam: ʿImmānūʾēl Benvenisṭī, 1648, f. 46v (In Hebrew).

[147] Ibid.

[148] For a study on the name *Yēshūʿā* in this prayer, see Yehūdāh Līebes, "The Angels of the Shofar and Yeshua Sar ha-Panim/ Malʾakhēy Qōl Hashshōfār Vīshūʿā Sar Hapānīm," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1987), pp. 171-195 (In Hebrew); and Menachem M. Schneerson, *I Will Write It in Their Hearts: Letters from the Lubavitcher Rebbe—Selections from Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 1, Brooklyn: Sichos, 1999, p. 6.

[149] ("May it be your will before you, *ʾAdonāy* my God and God of my forefathers, that the sounding of the *Tashat* that we blow today be woven into the curtain by the hand of the minister *Tartīʾel*, like the name that was received by the hand of Elijah and *Yēshūʿā* the Minister of the Countenances and Minister *Meṭāṭrōn*. And may you be filled with mercy for us. Blessed are you, *ʾAdonāy*, Master of mercies"), Abraham Theodore Philips, *Prayer Book for the New Year With English Translation* (*Mahsor Philips. New Year*), New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1983, pp. 100-101; *Machzor Or Chodosz*, Warsaw: Sz. Szykora, I. Milner, n/d, p. 82 (In Hebrew); *Maḥzōr Leyōm Riʾshōn Veshēnī shel Roʾsh Hashshāhāh Keminhag Sefārad ʿim Perūshōt Hafṭārōt Veshīr Hayyiḥūd*, Budapest: Verlag von M. E. Löwy's Sohn Buchhandlung, 1981, p. 44 (In Hebrew); *Maḥzōr Roʾsh Hashshāhāh Veyōm Hakipūrīm Keminhag ʾAshkenazzīm im Pērūsh Maṭṭēh Levī*, New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1915, p. 71 (In Hebrew); *Sēder Hamaḥzōr Ḥēlek Shēnī Keminhag ʾAshkenazzīm*, Sulzbach: Zalman ben Aaron Fraenkel, 1734, f. 59r (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Sēder Hamaḥzōr*); Simeon Singer, Nathan Adler, and Abraham Philips (Eds.), *Mahzor Abodat Israel: Prayers for New Year*, (*Minhag Sefārad*), New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1931, p. 100.

"Could it be nothing other than Jesus of Nazareth?"[150] Despite its clearly mystical character—albeit not a product of Kabbalah—the recitation is here presented only verbatim, without any interpretive commentary, which makes the issue all the more puzzling. Rabbi Joseph Obadiah commented: "Yeshua, Minister of the Countenances, for which we have found no source, and which is a designation used by agitators for the well-known figure of Jesus of Christianity."[151] This may imply a later insertion into the liturgical composition. Liebes argues that the origin of this liturgical formula lies in the lands of medieval Ashkenaz, from which it spread to the broader Jewish world, including several Lurianic manuscripts of the order of the shofar blasts—among them *Hebrew Union College Library Ms. 421*, attributed by its colophon to the Lurianic school of mysticism.[152] Yet the very fact that these prayers were absorbed even into contexts so distant from their original beginnings, and within a short time of their first appearance in festival prayer books, attests to the strength of their roots.

However, if this liturgical formula was indeed the product of deliberate infiltration by agitators or heterodox influences, the failure of the rabbinical editorial establishment to excise so conspicuous an intrusive element at an early stage is nothing short of perplexing. Its uninterrupted survival within one of the most sacrosanct rituals and holiest days of the Jewish calendar raises a series of questions that resist facile resolution: Why did rabbinic authorities require centuries to discern the alleged penetration of "foreign" concepts, and on what grounds was such an element permitted not merely to endure but to be transmitted into modern times? These difficulties cannot be neutralized by appeal to rabbinic authority alone; they demand a rigorous historical and philological accounting. Conversely, Liebes advances an alternative explanatory framework rooted in the distinctive spiritual culture of medieval Ashkenaz, most notably as reflected in *Sēfer Haḥēsheq* ("Book of Desire")—a manuscript offering valuable insight into the diverse mystical traditions cultivated within the Hasidic circles of Eastern Europe. A salient characteristic of this corpus is its pronounced angelology, which accords angels a central ritual function as mediators who elevate the prayers of Israel before the divine throne. According to Liebes, it is precisely within this conceptual horizon that the association between *Sēfer Haḥēsheq* and the prayers accompanying the shofar blasts becomes intelligible.[153] From this

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[150] Liebes (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 171.

[151] Joseph Obadiah, *She'ēlōt Ūtshūvōt Yabīʿā ʾOmer ʿal ʾArbaʿat Ḥelkēy Hashshulḥān ʿĀrūkh*, Vol. 1, Jerusalem: Yeshivat Porat Yosef, Mossad Harav Kook, 1954, pp. 126-128 (In Hebrew).

[152] Hebrew Union College, Klau Library, Cincinnati, *Ms. 421, Sēder Teqīʿat Sōfār*, Modena, Italy, 1795, f. 22v (In Hebrew).

[153] Liebes (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173.

perspective, the appearance of the name *Yēshūʿā* within the liturgical formula cannot be dismissed as anomalous. Still, it must be understood as denoting a figure endowed with divine or celestial status. Such an understanding coheres with the theological self-conception of early Jewish adherents of Jesus, for whom exalted, heavenly predicates could be ascribed to him. It does not, however, extend to prophets or priests in general, despite later liturgical attempts to domesticate the formula through such reinterpretations.[154] Liebes concludes that the invocation of the name *Yēshūʿā* in this petitionary prayer represents neither a scribal aberration nor a missionary interpolation, but rather the authentic survival of an early Jewish stratum associated with the Jesus movement—one that rabbinic tradition neither fully absorbed nor successfully erased.

Drawing on Ashkenazic sources—particularly the *Sēfer Haḥēsheq*—Liebes illustrates that the triad *ʾElīyāhū-Yēshūʿā-Meṭāṭrōn* embodies ancient beliefs regarding exalted humans who attained angelic status. This perspective parallels early Jewish-Christian notions of Jesus as a celestial figure associated with Meṭāṭrōn. Subsequently, discomfort with the name Yēshūʿā resulted in internal rabbinic censorship and distortions. Liebes concludes that Jewish mystical literature demonstrated a unique capacity to preserve such heterodox remnants long after the complete separation of Judaism and Christianity.[155] If so, this raises an additional question: How did a Jewish-Christian concept from the early centuries CE come to be reflected in the writings of the Ashkenazic pietists during the Middle Ages, and subsequently in the *Maḥzōr* for Rosh Hashanah? Liebes proposes the following:

> *Yēshūʿā Sar Hapānīm hūʾ mūsāg yehūdī-nōtzrī shemmātzāʾ ʾet meqōmō bassifrūt hammisṭīt shel teqūfat hattannāʾīm ūmishshām nitggalggēl vehiggīʿā lesifrūt ḥūg Sēfer Haḥēsheq ūmishshām lesidrēy hatteqīʿōt shebemaḥzōrēy roʾsh hashshānāh.*[156]

Ḥayyim Liberman raises the question of whether the Sabbatians introduced the triad *ʾElīyāhū-Yēshūʿā-Meṭāṭrōn* into this petitionary formula in the *Maḥzōr*. He observes that the name or designation *Sar Hapānīm* is associated with Meṭāṭrōn, and the latter with Yēshūʿā, and concludes, apparently

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[154] See Nosson Scherman (Ed.), *Maḥzōr Zikārōn ʾAvrāhām*: *ArtScroll Transliterated Linear Machzor Rosh Hashanah. The Seif Edition, Nusach Ashkenaz*, Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, The Orthodox Union, 2000, p. 623 (Henceforth: *Maḥzōr Zikārōn ʾAvrāhām*).

[155] Liebes (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.

[156] ("*Yēshūʿā Sar Hapānīm* is a Jewish-Christian concept that found its place in the mystical literature of the Tannaitic period, and from there it rolled on and reached the literature of the circle of *Sēfer Haḥēsheq*, and from there to the sequences of blasts in the Rosh Hashanah prayer cycles"), Ibid., p. 179.

following the approach of Rabbi Yehuda Avida (1888-1962), that the name Yēshūʿā is a scribal and printing error.[157] Yet, considering Liebes' analysis, it appears more plausible to interpret it as a deliberate and cryptic expression within the liturgical context, which endured and was retained in some of the most traditional Jewish prayer books accessible to us today.[158]

An additional illustration of Meṭāṭrōn in Jewish liturgical corpora is found in the *Mussaf* for the first day of Rosh Hashanah section within the *Sēder Hamaḥzōr Ḥēlek Shēnī Keminhag ʾAshkenazzīm*, where we read: *Sar ʿal kol hāʿōlām vehūʾ Meṭāṭrōn hammanhīg ʾet kol hāʿōlām, hallēn besēter, betzēl Shadday. Haqqādōsh bārūkh Hūʾ lān veyōshēv besēter.*[159] The *Maḥzōr Kol Bō* for Rosh Hashanah presents similar intricacies. In its "Prayer before the main prayer" within the morning prayer section, a petitionary blessing before the liturgical section *Mah ṭovū*, states: *Tfillat kol Yisrāʾēl taʿaleh ūtenassēʾ lekheter ʿal roʾshekhā ʿal-yedēy Meṭāṭrōn Sar Hapānīm.*[160] The same benediction is found in *Maḥzōr Kol Bō* for Yom Kippur.[161] Furthermore, within the *Prayer of Awe* of Rabbī Yishmāʿēʾl Kohēn Haggādōl, preserved in the corpus of *Sēfer Shēm Ṭōv Qāṭān: Tīqqūnēy Tefilōt*, Meṭāṭrōn is invoked in a direct appeal: *Bevaqqāshāh mimmekhā Meṭāṭrōn Sar Hapānīm kī shimkhā keshēm rabekhā.*[162] These references suggest a multi-layered liturgical Jewish theology whereby angelic or hypostatic mediators are addressed in supplication within the framework of penitential and redemptive prayer. This approach is also found within Jewish literary compositions whose authenticity and theological orthodoxy have been subject to scholarly debate, such as *Sēfer Qōl Hattōr* —a purported esoteric treatise concerning the process of future redemption attributed to the teachings of the Vilna Gaon and ascribed to his disciple, Rabbi Hillel Rīvlīn of Shklow (1757–1838).[163]

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[157] Ḥayyim Liberman, *ʾOhel Rāḥel*, New York: Liberman, 1980, pp. 511-515 (In Hebrew).

[158] See, for instance, *Maḥzōr Zikārōn ʾAvrāhām*, p. 623.

[159] ("Ruler over the entire world, and he is *Meṭāṭrōn*, who leads the whole world; the one who lodges in secret, in the shadow of Shadday—The Holy One, blessed be He, lodges and dwells in secrecy"), *Sēder Hamaḥzōr*, f. 70r.

[160] ("May the prayer of all Israel ascend and be uplifted as a crown upon Your head [God's], through *Meṭāṭrōn*, the Minister of the Countenances"), *Maḥzōr Kol Bō ʿim Pērūsh ʿIvrī. Nūsaḥ Sefard. Roʾsh Hashshāhāh*, New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1977-1979, p. 5 (In Hebrew).

[161] *Maḥzōr Kol Bō ʿim Pērūsh ʿIvrī. Nūsaḥ ʾAshkenaz. Yōm Kippūr*, New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1977-1979, p. 6 (In Hebrew).

[162] ("Please, I implore you, Meṭāṭrōn, 'Minister of the Countenances,' for your name is akin to the Name of your Master."), Binyāmīn Ben Yehūdāh Līv (Ed.), *Sēfer Shēm Ṭōv Qāṭān: Tīqqūnēy Tefilōt*, Zolzbach: Lipmann, 1705, f. 3v (In Hebrew).

[163] On traditions ascribed to the Vilna Gaon, see Jonathan Meir, *Kabbalistic Circles in Jerusalem (1896-1948)*, Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Sēfer Qōl Hattōr evokes Meṭāṭrōn in ways that resonate with established Kabbalistic traditions, particularly Lurianic Kabbalah. It further presents Meṭāṭrōn as integral to the root of the *Zīhrāʾ ʿIllāʾāh* ("the supernal radiance")—a term derived from the Zoharic lexicon—and associates him with the spiritual root of biblical Joseph, in reference to *Māshīaḥ ben Yōsēf*.[164] According to *Sēfer Qōl Hattōr*, this association is alluded to in the prophetic verse in Isaiah 61:22: "The smallest will become a thousand (*ʾēlef*)"—interpreting *ʾēlef* not merely as a numeral but as a symbol of leadership, rulership, or primordial excellence (√*ʾ-l-f*). From this perspective, *Sēfer Qōl Hattōr* both intimates an exalted status of Meṭāṭrōn and designates the "Messiah son of Joseph" (*Māshīaḥ ben Yōsēf*) as a central figure in the redemptive process. Accordingly, Meṭāṭrōn and the spiritual root of Joseph form an essential element of the redemptive mosaic articulated within this tradition, thereby their messianic relation.[165] On this messianic relation, it is perhaps worth citing Augustino Giustiniani's *Psalterium, Hebraeum, Graecum, Arabicum et Chaldaeum cum tribus Latinis interpretationibus et Glossis*—often referred to as *Octaplum Psalterium.*[166] Giustiniani's objective was to compile a comprehensive polyglot Bible that applied "Jewish learning to the translation and understanding of the Psalms."[167] Notably, the work incorporates material that Moshe Idel identifies as "a short passage from Abulafia's Untitled Treatise" preserved in the gloss of Psalm 147 in the *Octaplum Psalterium.*[168] This gloss reads concerning Meṭāṭrōn: *Veyādūʿa kī beyad Meṭāṭrōn teḥiyyat hammētīm*.[169] As observed before, Meṭāṭrōn is integral to the liturgical order of the Shofar for Rosh Hashanah, and the Shofar reminds us, as Herman Kieval (1920–1991) rightly noted, of the resurrection of the dead—a Messianic emblem par excellence—and symbol of redemption.[170]

In Jewish folk tradition, belief in the resurrection of the dead constitutes a central eschatological doctrine, traditionally understood as a promise of messianic fulfillment. Closely related

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[164] *Sēfer Qōl Hattōr*, Jerusalem: Mefitzēy Qōl Hattōr, 1994, p. 51 (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Sēfer Qōl Hattōr*).

[165] Ibid., p. 63.

[166] Paul F. Grendler, *Humanism, Universities, and Jesuit Education in Late Renaissance Italy*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2022, pp. 65-66.

[167] Ibid., p. 67.

[168] Moshe Idel, *Abraham Abulafia's Esotericism*, Berlin, Boston: DeGruyter, 2020, p. 214.

[169] ("And it is known that in the hand of the Meṭāṭrōn is the resurrection of the dead"), Augustino Giustiniani, *Psalterium, Hebraeum, Graecum, Arabicum et Chaldaeum cum tribus Latinis interpretationibus et Glossis*, Genoa: Porrus, 1516, n/p.

[170] Herman Kieval, The High Holy Days: A Commentary on the Prayerbook of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Book One: Rosh Hashanah, New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1959, pp. 117, 130.

to this expectation is the concept of "redemption" (*ge'ūllāh*) in Judaism, which is frequently linked to the figure of the Messiah. Whether conceived as a "mythical redeemer" or "a saintly human being, mediating between heaven and earth," the Messiah is, as Yael Poyas notes, "expected to appear on earth one day to fulfill the longed-for cosmic and national redemption."[171] Taken together, these assertions illustrate the exceptional reverence accorded to Meṭāṭrōn within Jewish thought, portraying him as a distinguished intermediary whose proximity to the Divine warrants not only a degree of exaltation unparalleled among the angelic hosts but also bestows upon him a redemptive power that resembles that of God. Modern scholarship has drawn attention to the messianic and redemptive resonances that surround the metatronic motifs in early Jewish mysticism and later kabbalistic traditions. For instance, Moshe Idel has emphasized the fluidity of messianic symbolism in Jewish mystical thought, noting that redemptive functions are often distributed among intermediary figures, such as Meṭāṭrōn: "The redemptive nature of the angel Metatron is paramount for some developments in Jewish mysticism and messianism."[172] Within this framework, as Idel notes, Meṭāṭrōn emerges as an eschatological, redeeming figure, "because he serves as the redemptive level for human existence."[173] In this context, Idel argues: "Metatron has been eschatologized, as the archangel is equivalent to the messianic ben David."[174] This should not surprise us, since, as Idel notes, "already in pre-Christian forms of Judaism, it is possible to detect a hypostatic angelic power which was granted the name of God and sometimes plays an eschatological role."[175] Idel further explains Meṭāṭrōn's redeeming functions, noting that "these views are related to the redemptive role of God's leading angel, who possessed the divine name, in Exodus 23:20-21, or the expression 'the redemptive angel,' *ha-mal'akh ha-go'el*, in Genesis 48:16 or Isaiah 63:9."[176] Following ʾAbūlʿafīah's exegetical reasoning, Idel concludes why Meṭāṭrōn is portrayed as "the redeemer":

> This conclusion is corroborated by the eschatological implication of the figure of Elijah, as well as by the possibility of the occurrence of the phrase *Yeshu'a sar ha-panim*, "Yeshua, Prince of the Face,"

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[171] Yael Poyas, "Messiah and Redeemer," pp. 360-361, in Raphael Patai (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions*, Vol. 1-2, London, New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 360-362.

[172] Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, New Heaven, London: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 22.

[173] Ibid., p. 68.

[174] Ibid., p. 77.

[175] Ibid., p. 85.

[176] Ibid.

> which has been identified by Yehuda Liebes as a reference to Jesus Christ [...] If this conjecture is correct, than an early text treating Metatron as identical to *Yaho'el, Yeshu'a Sar ha-Panim*, *Ben*, *Go'el*, and the "high priest" was in existence before the extant versions but underwent at least two forms of censorship [...] If late, the Jewish-Christian nature of such a Hebrew text cannot be doubted.[177]

Joseph Dan has also traced the literary and mythic development of Meṭāṭrōn from early Jewish mystical traditions into medieval Kabbalah, highlighting how his transformation into the *Sar Hapānīm* and heavenly scribe facilitated the attribution of redemptive and quasi-messianic qualities. Taken together, these perspectives illuminate how Meṭāṭrōn could function as a mediating symbolic carrier of redemptive expectations, while remaining distinct from the explicitly human messianic figure central to normative Jewish eschatology. The redemption experience recalls *Yalkūṭ Re'ūvenī*, which recounts that at the outset of Moses' mission to liberate the Israelites from bondage, God revealed to him the greatness of Meṭāṭrōn.[178] In doing so, the narrative situates Meṭāṭrōn within the framework of Israel's deliverance, underscoring the growing tendency within Jewish literature to portray him as an active participant and guide in the unfolding of divine providence.

As demonstrated throughout this scholarly examination of the extensive collection of Jewish mystical and exegetical literature, the figure of Meṭāṭrōn significantly influences the theological and esoteric foundations of the *ʿōlām hannisttār* ("the hidden world") of Kabbalah through the *tōrat haḥēn* ("torah of grace").[179] It is consequently not unexpected that, as Rachel Elior notes, "after the expulsion from Spain, Kabbalism experienced a comprehensive transformation. It acquired a new orientation when it formed a conjunction with the contemporary messianic tendencies,"[180] many of which are linked to, or ascribe theological significance to Meṭāṭrōn. While the catalogue of Jewish literary compositions in which Meṭāṭrōn appears could indeed be extended indefinitely—as aptly stated in Ecclesiastes 12:12, "Of making many books there is no end"—this brief survey offers a representative selection of key sources that illuminate the rich spectrum of meaning embedded in the Metatronic tradition. It thereby reveals its enduring esoteric relevance and theological complexity. As a result, Meṭāṭrōn secured both a meaningful place within the corpus of rabbinic thought and a recurring presence in the fabric of mystical Jewish literary traditions.

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[177] Ibid., p. 87.

[178] *Yalkūṭ Re'ūvenī ʿal Hattōrāh*, Amsterdam: ʿImmānū'ēl ʿAṭī'as, 1700, f. 23r (In Hebrew, henceforth: *Yalkūṭ Re'ūvenī*).

[179] *Mishkaneī ʿĒliyōn*, p. 9.

[180] Rachel Elior, "Messianic Expectations and Spiritualization of Religious Life in the Sixteenth Century, *Revue des Études juives*, Vol. 145, No. 1-2 (Jan.-Jun., 1986), pp. 35-49.

2.- *ʾAdonāy-ʾElohīm* As a Syntactic-Semantic Biblical Challenge: "A Truth that Is In Plural."

Ṭōvīm hashshenāyim min hāʾeḥad,[181]

The Hebrew Bible has long functioned as the foundational theological authority within Jewish thought, shaping religious reflections across diverse historical and intellectual contexts. Its status as divinely inspired Scripture has provided the primary framework through which Jewish traditions have articulated their understanding of God, revelation, and divine unity. As Kalimi observes, the centrality and divine inspiration of the Scriptures have been foundational to Jewish religious consciousness.[182] This commitment persisted even among nineteenth-century Reform Jews, who continued to affirm the Bible's divine origin, thereby underscoring its enduring theological authority across diverse movements within Judaism. For instance, at the Cleveland Conference of 1855, this conviction was explicitly affirmed: "The Bible, as delivered to us by our fathers, and as now in our possession, is of immediate divine origin, and the standard of our religion."[183] Similarly, at the 1885 Conference of Reform Rabbis held at Temple Rodef Shalom in Pittsburgh—convened to address "all matters of the welfare of American Judaism"[184]—participants sought to articulate "the most succinct expression of the theology of the Reform movement,"[185] affirming the Scriptures "as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction,"[186] and declaring that "the Bible was accepted naturally as the all-important authority."[187] Within rabbinic theology, especially for Maimonidean monotheism, both the words of the Israelite prophets and the belief that the Torah was divinely revealed to Moses and remains textually identical to the version transmitted in Maimonides' time is a fundamental principle:

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[181] Ecclesiastes 4:9, in Karl Elliger, Wilhelm Rudolph, Adrian Schenker (Eds.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: A Reader's Edition*, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014, p. 1444 (Henceforth: *BHS*).

[182] Kalimi (2017), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[183] David Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1907, p. 488.

[184] American Jewish Archives, *Rare Documents: RD-904*, "Kohler Kaufman. Invitation to the Pittsburgh Conference of Reform Rabbis," New York, November 2, 1885.

[185] American Jewish Archives, *Nearprint Special Topics: Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference of 1885*. David Philipson, *The Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference*, The Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1935, p. 9.

[186] American Jewish Archives, *Nearprint Special Topics: Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference of 1885*, "*The Jewish Reformer*, January 15, 1886," p. 4

[187] Philipson (1907), *op. cit.*, p. 176.

Hī' Tōrāh min hashshāmayim vehū' shenna'amīn kī kol zo't hattōrāh hammetzūyāh beyadēynū ʿattāh hī' haketūvāh leMosheh Rabbēnu ʿālāv hashshālōm besīnaī vehī' kullāh mipī haggevūrāh hahaggāʿāh hanniqrā'āh dībbūr.[188] Implicit in this claim is the assertion that the Pentateuch, as preserved in the Aleppo and Leningrad Codices—the most precise and authoritative representatives of the Ben-Asher Masoretic tradition[189]—faithfully reflects the Torah handed down by Moses to Israel.

Examining the Masoretic text highlights not only its linguistic and theological precision but also how its depiction of divine practice and ritual reflects an evolving religious consciousness that later rabbinic interpretations would reconfigure and systematize. Thus, one can discern both that biblical cult practice differs significantly from mainstream rabbinic Judaism and that ancient Israelite religiosity has undergone substantial transformation throughout history. For instance, the division of the Israelite monarchy, the successive destructions and reconstructions of the Jewish Temples in Jerusalem, and the various exiles and external influences all contributed to this metamorphosis. One illustrative example is the concept of blood, which held a central place in Israelite cultic life and was foundational to Jewish sacrificial ritualism, as seen in both Leviticus 17:11, "*Kī nefesh habāsār baddām hī' ve'anī natattīv lākhem ʿal hammizbēaḥ lekhapēr ʿal nafshotēykhem, kī haddām hū' bannefesh yekhapēr*,"[190] and Leviticus 16:14-16,19—a verse that depicts sacrificial blood as a vehicle of atonement for "uncleanness" (*miṭṭum'ot*), and "transgressions" (*ūmipishʿēyhem*), "even all the sins" (*lekhol ḥaṭṭ'otām*) of the Israelites; and as a means of "purification" (√*ṭ-h-r*) from the spiritual impurity of the Israelites (*miṭṭum'ot benēy Yisrā'ēl*). This understanding persisted also among the early followers of Jesus, as Hebrews 9:22 states, and continued with the widespread use and authority of the Vulgate in medieval and early modern Christian exegesis: "*Et omnia pene in sanguine mundantur secundum legem, et sine sanguinis effusione non fit remissio peccatorum*."[191] This underscores the theological

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[188] ("It is a Torah from heaven, and it is incumbent upon us to believe that all of this Torah, which is now in our possession, is the one written for Moses our Teacher, peace be upon him, at Sinai, and it is entirely from the mouth of the Almighty, the revelation called 'speech'"), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 674. Recueil*, Year: Thirteenth Century, f. 57v (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Ms. Hébreu 674*).

[189] Emanuel Tov, *Hebrew Bible, Greek Bible, and Qumran*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, pp. 4, 176.

[190] ("For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life"), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 28. Bible. A.T.* (*hébreu*), Year: 1344, f. 61r (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Ms. Hébreu 28*).

[191] ("Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins"), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Latin 9380. Bible de Théodulfe*, Year, ca. 801-818, f. 304r (In Latin).

principle of sacrifice as a means of atonement, and as a prominent feature in the Torah and Rabbinic literature.[192] Eventually, this notion matured into a different theological understanding. As Mira Balberg notes, the notion of blood—central to Israelite cultic life, including as a means of atonement for sin (Leviticus 17:11)—evolved into a more reflective concern, transitioning from a literal cultic function to a more symbolic or conceptual role, a kind of "blood for thought" theme.[193] That is, the replacement of sacrificial rites with prayer as the central mode of Jewish religious expression.

A similar—perhaps even more striking—evolution can be observed in the rabbinic understanding of the Divine's ontology, particularly when contrasted with its portrayal in the Jewish Bible. What was once, in ancient Israelite religiosity, a seemingly *uniplural* divine figure around which cultic practice was organized eventually developed into a singular, indivisible deity of rabbinic monotheism—a notion that decisively rejected earlier biblical ambiguities. How, then, does the Masoretic text present this matter, especially vis-à-vis the divine names *ʾAdonāy* and *ʾElohīm*— both grammatically in plural? Does the biblical portrayal of God align with rabbinic thought in general, or with Maimonidean monotheism in particular, regarding divine ontology? The straightforward answer is: no, it does not. Yet this divergence is neither homogeneous nor organically developed. In its earlier strata, the biblical depiction of God presents a complex, frequently anthropomorphic, and *uniplural* conception of the Divine—a conception that was gradually systematized into the philosophically grounded monotheism of medieval Jewish thought exemplified by Maimonides.

As a conceptual structure, *divine uniplurality* not only finds linguistic and theological resonance within the Hebrew Bible itself but helps us understand divine ontology from a different perspective. From this perspective, one may discern that the divine names *ʾElohīm* and *ʾAdonāy*[194] are twin biblical truths that are in plural (often interpreted as a *pluralis maiestatis*). A suggestive biblical formulation appears in Ecclesiastes 4:9, which reads: *Ṭōvīm hashshenāyim min hāʾeḥad*[195] ("two are better than one"). While the verse speaks on the surface about human companionship, its language invites reflection on the theological question at the heart of Maimonidean monotheism: Is the Divine strictly singular, or does the biblical text occasionally gesture toward a form of unified plurality? I will

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[192] Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909, p. 295.

[193] See Mira Balberg, Blood for Thought: The Reinventing of Sacrifice in Early Rabbinic Literature, Oakland: University of California Press, 2017.

[194] Benjamin Davies (Ed. and Trans.), *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1880, pp. 274, 299.

[195] *BHS*, p. 1444.

argue that the plural morphology of the names *ʾElohīm* and *ʾAdonāy* illustrates how Scripture encodes a tension between singularity and multiplicity in divine expression within the very texture of biblical language. Namely, even at the level of nomenclature, singularity is articulated in plural form.

With respect to the Tetragrammaton per se, Jung similarly interpreted it as "a representation of the [biblical] God who is manifest in creation."[196] In a Jungian analogical sense, the Tetragrammaton can also be regarded as a symbolic "quaternity embodying wholeness."[197] Divine quaternity—which Jung considered "a stable uniplurality"—"can ensure freedom (plurality) along the order (unity) needed for freedom to endure."[198] Read in this heuristic sense, the divine Name itself gestures toward a plenitudinous coherence rather than abstract singularity. Such patterns are not confined to philology. The ontology of the Divine across Jewish sources displays a similarly layered complexity: from the *uniplural* Creator of Genesis to the quasi-distinct agent of creation personified in *Ḥokhmāh* of Proverbs; from Philo of Alexandria's *Logos* and the *Mēmrʾā* of YHVH in Targumic literature, to the Talmudic rejection of "two powers in heaven;" from the prophetic visions of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Isaiah, which portray the Divine through anthropomorphic and uniplural imagery, to the Kabbalistic speculations on the complex Godhead, including aspects of the Castilian Kabbalistic *trinity* metaphysical conundrum.[199] This trajectory continues through the rationalist formulations of medieval Jewish philosophy, culminating, in a radically reconfigured form, in Spinoza's metaphysical conception of the Divine as a form of substance monism.[200] Taken together, the ontology of God in Jewish thought proves diverse, intricate, dynamic, and richly layered.

Thus, the biblical text presents a remarkable degree of interpretive complexity that may be reconciled through the lens of *divine uniplurality*. Yet Scriptures are marked by a wide range of expressions and exegetical ambiguities, such that it is often possible to find support within for a wide variety of doctrinal positions. In this light, Philo discerned Neoplatonism; the rabbis identified the foundational principles later expressed in the Talmud; Christians found God in Jesus; and Maimonides

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[196] Crellin (2014), *op. cit.*, p. 189.

[197] Clare Crellin, *Jung's Theory of Personality: A Modern Reappraisal,* London, New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 189.

[198] Driscoll (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[199] See George Kohler, *Kabbalah Research in the Wissenschaft des Judentums (1820–1880)*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019; Jeremy Phillip Brown, "What Does the Messiah Know? A Prelude to Kabbalah's Trinity Complex," in Ze'ev Strauss and Isaac Slater (Eds.), *Maimonides Review of Philosophy and Religion* (Vol. 2, 2023), Leiden: Brill, 2023, pp. 1-49; and Nathaniel Berman, *Divine and Demonic in the Poetic Mythology of the Zohar: The "Other Side" of Kabbalah*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018, p. 10.

[200] Alan Hart, *Spinoza's Ethics, Part I and II: A Platonic Commentary*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983, pp. 2, 22, 22, 40.

developed versions of Aristotelian philosophy. In the *Guide for the Perplexed*, for instance, Maimonides argues that the subject matter of the Bible—*maʿasēh berēʾshīt* ("the account of creation") and *maʿasēh merkāvāh* ("the divine chariot in Ezekiel")—is essentially the same as what philosophers address under the categories of physics and metaphysics.[201] Within this gamut, Spinoza positions Maimonides as his primary philosophical "opponent," launching a devastating critique of Scripture and its defenders, particularly Maimonides.[202] Hence, the Jewish Bible constitutes a complex challenge across philosophical and theological domains, particularly when read through the lens of *omnisignificance*—the interpretive principle, prevalent in rabbinic tradition, that assumes every element of the text, down to the smallest linguistic detail, bears intentional meaning. This assumption amplifies the text's density and renders it perpetually open to reinterpretation across doctrinal frameworks.

Within this wide exegetical spectrum, Maimonidean philosophy represents a markedly different rationalist framework. For Maimonides, much of the biblical language—particularly anthropomorphism—is allegorical. While rabbinic omnisignificance tends toward expansive, and sometimes mystical readings, the Maimonidean approach seeks coherence, restraint, and philosophical clarity; it reveals yet another layer of interpretive tension when facing the ontology of the Divine in the *peshāt* of the Jewish Bible. This interpretive persistence underscores the Hebrew Bible's enduring role as the foundational substrate of Jewish theological reflection, particularly in ongoing debates concerning the nature and unity of the Divine. One of the most striking manifestations of this tension between linguistic uniplurality and theological unity appears in the very names used to designate the God of Israel—particularly *ʾElohīm* and *ʾAdonāy*.

The unity of God is a foundational tenet of rabbinic monotheism. Yet the language of the Hebrew Bible often complicates this notion. The textually and theologically complex biblical portrayal of the divine names resists such a neat categorization. An illustration appears in Exodus 32:8, which reads: *Sārū mahēr min hadderekh ʾasher tzivvītim, ʿāsū lahem ʿēgel massēkhā. Vayyishttaḥavū lō, vayyizbeḥū lō, vayyoʾmrū: ʾēlleh ʾeloheykhā Yisrāʾēl ʾasher heʿelūkhā mēʾeretz Mitzrayim*.[203] The

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[201] See Kenneth Seeskin, "What the Hebrew Bible Can/Cannot Teach Us about God," in Leonard Kaplan and Ken Koltun-Fromm (Eds.), *Imagining the Jewish God*, New York: Lexington Books, 2016, pp. 63-82.

[202] Steven Frankel, "Spinoza's Rejection of Maimonideanism," p. 79, in Steven Nadler (Ed.), *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 79-95.

[203] ("They [the Israelites] have quickly turned aside from the way that I commanded them; they have made for themselves a molten calf, and they have bowed down to it, and have offered sacrifices to it, saying: 'These are your *ʾElohīm*, O Israel, who brought [3rd person, masculine, plural] you up from the land of Egypt."), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 11*, *Burgos*, Year: 13th Century, f. 60v (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Ms. Hébreu 11*).

grammatical plurality embedded in this formulation raises a significant question: Does such language constitute merely a rare textual anomaly, or does it preserve traces of an earlier layer of Israelite religious consciousness that was subsequently reinterpreted and systematized within later rabbinic theology? From this perspective, the ancient Israelite cosmology may be understood as having undergone significant theological transformation over time, eventually giving way to the philosophically abstract, indivisible Israelite deity articulated within rabbinic monotheism. In this sense, the uniplural dimension of the noun *ʾElohīm*, as Adam Afterman observes, "is the deepest secret and, at times, even a mystery to be actively realized and experienced by the mystic."[204] Against this background, the phenomenon of apparent uniplurality in the biblical depiction of the Divine warrants careful exegetical and linguistic examination. In the broader discourse on the uniplurality of the divine name *ʾElohīm*, it is worth recalling the contribution of Selig Newman (1788-1871), a prominent Hebraist at Oxford University. Newman addressed the oft-cited verse in Genesis 1:26—"God said: Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness"—a passage that has long attracted theological scrutiny due to its grammatical plurality when referring to the Divine. In his philological assessment, Newman argued that misunderstandings of Hebrew grammar—particularly among certain Christian polemicists and translators—had contributed to misinterpretations of the ancient Israelite conception of God. As he observed:

> Some, in their ignorance of the Hebrew language, were determined to prove from this, 'Let us make man in our image,' a plurality in the Godhead, a Trinity; not knowing that *Elohim* as well as *Adonay* and *Baal*, being names denoting dominion, so that on account of the many powers combined in them they stand frequently in the plural number, though joined with and Adj. or Verb singular, and that they are also used for a singular even if joined to an Adj. or Verb plural.[205]

Similarly, within the Jewish exegetical tradition, medieval commentators addressed the grammatical complexity of this biblical notion. ʾAvrāhām ben Mēʾīr ʾibn ʿEzrāʾ (1092-1167), for instance, correlated Deuteronomy 32:39—"And there is no *ʾElohīm* besides me"—with the theological principle of divine unity. ʾIbn ʿEzrāʾ interpreted this verse as: *Kī ʾēyin ʿimmō pōʿēl*[206] ("for He has no co-worker"), thereby

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[204] Adam Afterman, *And They Shall Be One Flesh: On The Language of Mystical Union in Judaism*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016, p. 2.

[205] Selig Newman, *The Challenge Accepted: A Dialogue Between a Jew and a Christian. The Former Answering a Challenge Thrown out by the Latter*, New York: Isaac & Solomons, Trehern & Williamson, 1850, p. 8.

[206] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 182. Abraham ibn Ezra. Commentaire sur le Pentateuque*, Year: 1291, f. 199r (In Hebrew).

emphasizing the absolute singularity of God, particularly in relation to creation as described in Genesis 1. Yet in his commentary on the Torah, ʾIbn ʿEzrāʾ explicitly acknowledged the grammatical plurality of this divine name, noting: *ʾAḥar shemmātzāʾnū ʾElōhha yādaʿnū kī ʾElohīm lāshōn rabīm.*[207] Despite his philological observation, ʾIbn ʿEzrāʾ maintained that its theological reference to the God of Israel remains unequivocally singular, as indicated by the pairing, albeit not consistently, with singular verbs and adjectives throughout the biblical text. His interpretation reflects a broader effort within Jewish exegesis to distinguish between grammatical form and doctrinal content, particularly in the defense of strict monotheism. To account for this linguistic phenomenon, ʾIbn ʿEzrāʾ further suggested that the plural form *ʾElohīm* arises from honorific usage. According to this explanation, it was customary in ancient Hebrew to employ the plural titles when referring to figures of high status or dignity. ʾIbn ʿEzrāʾ referred to this linguistic phenomenon as *derekh kāvōd*[208] ("way of honor")—indicating grandeur or majesty rather than numerical plurality.

From this perspective, although *ʾElohīm* is morphologically plural, its semantic and theological function in reference to the God of Israel remains resolutely singular, consistent with the monotheistic core of biblical and rabbinic thought. Yet the biblical narrative complicates this picture: according to the account in the Book of Genesis, humanity is created in the image of God; thus, the angels—argues the Midrashic tradition in *Genesis Rabbah* (8:10.1)—could not distinguish God from man. Reflecting on this tradition, Neusner observes, "I cannot imagine a more daring affirmation of humanity."[209] Yet Cordovero describes Meṭāṭrōn as serving as a blueprint for the creation of humanity's image (*tzelem*) (Gate 1:15).[210] The biblical phrase 'in our image' may be interpreted in a resembling, even physical, manner, suggesting that humans manifest a reflection of the divine. Neusner further argues that "it yields the view that the complete image of man is attained in a divine union between man and woman."[211] From this perspective, *ʾElohīm*, as Creator, is not merely a collection of abstract theological attributes, but as Neusner notes, "God incarnate!"[212] Under this lens, humanity reflects the uniplurality

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[207] ("After we found the name *ʾElōhha*, we knew that *ʾElohīm* is a plural noun"), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 178. Recueil de textes exégétiques bibliques*, Year: 1431, f. 3v (In Hebrew).

[208] Ibid.

[209] Jacob Neusner, *Judaism's Story of Creation: Scripture, Halakhah, Aggadah*, Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2000, p. 225.

[210] *Ms. Hébreu 789*, ff. 8v, 16v.

[211] Neusner (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 231.

[212] Jacob Neusner, *The Incarnation of God: The Character of Divinity in Formative Judaism*, Binghamton: Global Publications, Binghamton University, 2001, p. 28.

of the name *ʾElohīm*, and in harmony with Neusner's thought, it can be said that, too, "man incarnates God."[213] Consequently, if Meṭāṭrōn serves as a blueprint for the creation of humanity, we are thereby confronted with an anthropomorphic dimension of the Divine, manifested in the bipartite nature of humanity. This represents a complex assertion within Jewish theology.

Such observations reveal that the linguistic structure of the divine name *ʾElohīm* already contains an inherent tension between plurality and unity—a phenomenon that warrants closer examination of how biblical language articulates the uniplural character of this divine nomenclature. Rabbī David Kimḥi (1160–1235), one of the most distinguished Sephardic Hebrew grammarians, addressed this issue in his grammatical treatise *Sēfer Hammikhlōl*, an *ouvrage* divided into two principal sections—*Ḥēlek Haddiqddūq* and *Ḥēlek Hāʿinyān*—later associated with *Sēfer Hashshorāshīm*[214] ("the book of roots"). In this work, Kimḥi explains that the word *ʾElohīm* is a plural form derived from the Hebrew noun *ʾElōhha*, a position similar to that articulated by ʾIbn ʿezrāʾ. In his *Sēfer Hashshorāshīm*, Kimḥi further elaborates on the Hebrew name *ʾElohīm* and notes that although *it* is grammatically plural, it frequently governs singular verbs and adjectives when referring to the God of Israel, thereby indicating its theological singularity. Kimḥi nevertheless emphasizes that its grammatical plural form is an immutable constant: *ʾElohīm qedōshīm hūʾ* [...] *belāshōn rabīm leʿōlām*[215] ("ʾElohīm, the Holy Ones, is [expressed] in the plural language always"). While the phrase points out the grammatical plurality of the word *ʾElohīm*, the term *qedōshīm* is plural (Lit. "Holy ones"), while *hūʾ* ("He") is 3p. masculine, singular. For Kimḥi, the preservation of this plural formulation is essential, and it reflects the linguistic tension that lies at the heart of much theological and exegetical discussion. Kimḥi further comments on Habakkuk 3:3, which states: *ʾElōhha mittēymān yāvōʾ* ("God cometh from Teiman"), linking the name *ʾElōhha* with the Tetragrammaton: *ʾElōhha mittēymān yāvōʾ kemō sheʾāmar*

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[213] Jacob Neusner, *Theology of Normative Judaism. A Source Book*, New York: University Press of America, 2005, p. 92.

[214] Kimḥi composed the *Sēfer Hammikhlōl* with the intention to encompass all essential elements of Hebrew grammar, correct vocalization, and punctuation of words in the Hebrew Bible. The work gained significant popularity among grammarians and biblical commentators, serving as a foundational linguistic resource for comprehensive exegetical efforts. In conjunction with this, his lexical companion, the *Sēfer Hashshorāshīm*, was printed at least twice before 1500, and approximately five times during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

[215] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 1234, Kimhi, David. Seper hašwrašiym*, Year: 1292, f. 11r (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Ms. Hébreu 1234*).

battōrāh: YHVH missīnay bāʾ vezāraḥ misēʿīr lāmō. Kī Tēymān hūʾ Sēʿīr.[216] In this interpretation, *ʾElōhha* and *YHVH* represent two expressions of a single divine reality, with *ʾElōhha* functioning as the singular form of the grammatically plural divine name *ʾElohīm.* This conceptual pairing suggests a dynamic unity of God expressed through linguistic singularity and theological grandeur, reflected—albeit in his linguistic understanding—through a dynamic fluid uniplural form, in which multiplicity and unity are held together within the divine economy.

The philological insights of Kimḥi did not remain confined to medieval Jewish exegesis. They continued to shape the work of later Hebraists who sought to analyze the semantic range of the divine names within the Hebrew Bible. Johann Habermann, known by his Latinized name Johannes Avenarius (1516–1590), was a German Lutheran theologian and Hebraist who, in the sixteenth century, composed a Latin version of Kimḥi's *Sēfer Hashshorāshīm*. Avenarius interpreted the name *ʾElōhha* as a noun derived from the Hebrew name *ʾĒl*,[217] tracing its meaning to the Hebrew root √*ʾ-y-l*, which Kimḥi defined as "force, strength, power"—*pērūsh koaḥ.*[218] Avenarius also linked the name *ʾElōhha* to the divine attribute of mercy: "*Misericordia, Nam proprium Dei est misereri*"[219] ("Mercy, the proper name of God is Merciful"). Likewise, Selig Newman produced an English rendition of Kimḥi's *Sēfer Hashshorāshīm*, wherein he interpreted both the Hebrew nouns *ʾĒl* and *ʾĒyil* as vocables primarily applied to God, rendering their meanings as "strength, force, and power." Newman further observed that the name *ʾĒl* occasionally appears in the Masoretic Text with the definite article when preceded by a noun—for example, in Genesis 19:8 and Genesis 26:4, both rendering *Hāʾēl*[220] ("The God"). Newman also proposed that the name *ʾElōhha* be understood as a title of dignity, whose primary and most proper application belongs to God. On this point, Newman noted:

> It is doubtful whether this noun has the same derivation as *ʾĒyil* or *ʾĒl* or whether it corresponds with the verb *Ālah* [√*ʾ-l-h*], which in Arabic denotes 'to fear, to reverence.' Some who slighted the *mappik* in

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[216] ("God came from *Tēymān* as He said in the Torah: YHVH came from Sinai and rose from Seʿīr." Because *Tēymān* is *Seʿīr*"), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 196, David Kimhi. Recueil de commentaires sur la Bible*, Year: 1439, f. 242v (In Hebrew).

[217] Johanne Avenario Egrano, *Sēfer Hashshorāshīm: Hoc Est, Liber Radicvm Sev Lexicon Ebraicvm*, Vvitebergæ: Johannes Crato, 1568, p. 28.

[218] *Ms. Hébreu 1234*, f. 8r.

[219] Egrano (1568), *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[220] *BHS*, pp. 30, 45.

> the *heh* together with the *vav* before it, observing that this noun is mostly *ʾElohīm,* which has a plural termination, and which, they say, signifies the persons engaged in an oath to perform a covenant.[221]

From these perspectives, *ʾĒl*, *ʾElōhha*, and *ʾElohīm* appear as interrelated Hebrew nouns used to designate the God of Israel. Their linguistic interplay suggests, and in some readings even presupposes, a uniplural character of the Divine: a unity expressed through grammatically plural forms yet understood theologically as singular. Such occurrences challenge the conventional explanation of the Hebrew name *ʾElohīm* as merely a plural of majesty or an instance of *derekh kāvōd*, as proposed by ʾIbn ʿEzrā', and invite deeper inquiry into the uniplural character of the Divine in biblical Hebrew—particularly when this noun appears in apposition with plural adjectives or verbs. Illustrations of this phenomenon may be observed in several biblical passages: 1 Samuel 27:26, *ʾElohīm ḥayyīm*[222] ("Living Gods"); Joshua 24:19, *ʾElohīm qedōshīm hūʾ*[223] ("Holy Gods is He"); 2 Samuel 7:23, *ʾAsher hālkhū ʾElohīm*[224] ("whom *ʾElohīm* went [3p. masc. pl.]); Psalm 58:12, *ʾElohīm shoftīm*[225] ("Gods is judging" [3p. masc. pl.]); Exodus 32:1, *ʾElohīm ʾasher yelkhū*[226] ("Gods who shall go [3p. masc. pl.]); Exodus 32:8, *ʾĒlleh ʾeloheykhā Yisrāʾēl ʾasher heʿelūkhā mēʾeretz Mitzrayim*[227] ("These are your gods, Israel, who brought you out [3p. masc. pl.] of the land of Egypt"). Do such biblical constructions represent merely grammatical phenomena within the Masoretic corpus, or do they preserve traces of an earlier Israelite conception of the Divine as a uniplural reality?

Among these biblical passages, the narrative of Exodus 32:1-11 provides a particularly compelling case study of this linguistic phenomenon. As a foundational episode in the biblical account of the Israelites' wilderness journey, this passage narrates the moment of apostasy at the foot of Mount Sinai, where the Israelites fashioned and worshipped a golden calf, thereby departing from the divine commands they had just received. The infamous event is likewise described in

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[221] Selig Newman, *Sēfer Hashshorāshīm: A Hebrew and English Lexicon Containing All the Words of the Old Testament with the Chaldee Words in Daniel, Ezra and the Targums, and also the Talmudical and Rabbinical Words Derived from Them*, London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1834, pp. 21, 26-27.

[222] *BHS*, p. 546.

[223] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 20, Tudèle*, Year: 1301, f. 143v (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Ms. Hébreu 20*).

[224] *BHS*, p. 546.

[225] *Ms. Hébreu 28*, f. 315r.

[226] *Ms. Hébreu 11*, f. 60v.

[227] Ibid.

Deuteronomy 9-10. Whereas the narrative in Exodus is presented in the third person, the Deuteronomic account is delivered in the first-person voice. Both, however, have drawn considerable attention from biblical exegetes and modern scholars alike because of their narrative tension and the significant theological implications of their verses.[228] An additional reference to a golden calf fashioned by the Israelites and associated with the Hebrew noun *ʾElohīm* appears in 1 Kings 12:28, which reads: *Hinnēh ʾĒloheykhā Yisrāʾēl ʾasher heʿelūkhā mēʾeretz Mitzrayim.*[229] In contrast to the narrative in Exodus 32, this account describes two molten images, which are likewise referred to as the *ʾElohīm* of Israel, thereby explicitly echoing the plural form and language in Exodus 32.

Within this Exodus narrative itself, verse 5 is highlighted, since it equates the *ʾElohīm* referring to the molten calf with YHVH: *ḥag la-YHVH māḥār*[230] ("Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD"). Equally striking is Aaron proclaiming a feast to YHVH (Ex. 32:5) and ultimately surviving the episode. Verse 1 records the petition that the Israelites addressed to Aaron: *Qūm ʿasēh lānū ʾElohīm ʾasher yēlkhū lefānēynū*[231] ("Rise, make us an *ʾElohīm* that *they* will go before us"). Grammatically, the request is formulated as a jussive construction beginning with the verbal command *ʿasēh* ("To do, to fashion, to make," *Qal* imperative), whose object is *ʾElohīm*, a masculine, plural noun. This is followed by the conjunction particle *ʾasher*, which may be rendered as the relative "who," introducing the clause *yēlkhū*, a *Qal* imperfect (*yiqṭol*) 3rd person, masculine, plural verb. This verbal form functions as a predicate and corresponds syntactically with *ʾElohīm*, which therefore may be regarded as the subject of the clause. The expected agreement in number between subject and predicate—both masculine plural—reinforces the grammatical plurality of the term. Hence, exposing the Divine as a plural entity. This dynamic is further emphasized in verse 4, which is composed of two clauses: *Vayyiqqaḥ miyyādām vayyātzar ʾotō baḥereṭ vayyaʿasēhū ʿegel massēkhāh. Vayyʾomrū ʾēlleh ʾeloheykhā Yisrāʾēl ʾasher heʿelūkhā mēʾeretz Mitzrayim.*[232] Here again, the Masoretic text declares: "And he [Aaron] took it from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it a molten calf; and they said: This is your

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[228] Christine E. Hayes, "Golden Calf Stories: The Relationship of Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 9–10," *The Journal for the Study of Judaism*, Vol. 83 (2004), pp. 45-93.

[229] ("Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt"), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 7. Perpignan*, Year: 1299, f. 218r (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Ms. Hébreu 7*).

[230] *Ms. Hébreu 11*, f. 60v.

[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid.

ʾElohīm, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt"—employing plural grammatical forms that appear to attribute the act of the Exodus to a plural subject.

A closer examination of the verbal structure of Exodus 32:4 further clarifies how the biblical narrative develops this linguistic tension. The first verbal clause begins with a *vayyiqṭol* form (3rd person, masculine, singular) of the verb (√*l-q-ḥ*) "to take, seize, receive" (*vayyiqqaḥ*). In this clause, the verb functions as the predicate, with Aaron implicitly serving as the subject. When the imperfect verbal form is prefixed with the conjunction *vav*, it acquires a narrative value and may therefore be translated with the force of the perfect. Accordingly, *vayyiqqaḥ* may be rendered as: "and he took," or "and he seized," or "and he received." In terms of basic function, these distinctive forms are used primarily to denote sequences of consecutive actions in Hebrew narrative. A subsequent *vayyiqṭol* form follows the Hebrew noun *yād* ("hand"), which appears with a possessive suffix (3rd person, masculine, plural), indicating that Aaron took the object "from their [the Israelites] hands." It functions as a predicate, providing an opening for the direct object (DO) through the Hebrew particle *ʾotō*, whose declension is identified by the *vav* acting as a pronominal suffix that denotes 3rd person, masculine, singular. Notably, this singular reference corresponds to the golden object fashioned by Aaron, even though the Israelites had requested an *ʾElohīm*, a grammatically plural noun. The engraving instrument *ḥereṭ* appears with the spatial preposition *b*, functioning instrumentally and therefore best translated as "with an engraving tool." This is followed by an additional *vayyiqṭol* form (*vayyaʿasēhū*), which sustains the sequential flow of the account. The attached pronominal suffix (3rd person, masculine, singular) indicates the object of the verb and may be translated as "and he made it," referring to the molten calf. The Israelites' original request—"Make us a *ʾElohīm* who shall go [3rd person, masculine, plural] before us"—is ultimately realized in a single material entity, the molten calf. Notwithstanding, the Israelites subsequently refer to this object in plural terms in the second clause of the verse. The narrative here juxtaposes a singular physical representation with plural divine language, illustrating the scriptural tension that surrounds the divine name *ʾElohīm* and pointing toward the possibility of a uniplural dimension within ancient Israelite religious consciousness.

This tension becomes even more evident in the second clause of verse 4, where the Israelites' declaration further amplifies the plural language applied to the divine figure. The second verbal clause of the verse begins with a *vayyiqṭol* form in 3rd person, masculine, plural: *vayyʾomrū* ("and they said"), whose subject is the Israelites. Since the verb appears in the plural, Aaron—who presides over the episode—may also be implicitly included among those speaking. The relative particle *ʾēlleh* functions

here as a demonstrative pronoun, a plural deictic element, "these." The plural noun *ʾElohīm* follows, acting as a predicate complement, whose declension + pronominal suffix *khā* (2nd person, masculine, singular) renders it as "your gods." In this construction, the divine title appears explicitly in the plural. The vocative *Yisrāʾēl* follows in direct speech and points to whom *these Gods* belong. The relative particle *ʾasher*, which may be translated as "who," introduces the following clause and refers back to the plural subject: the *Gods* of Israel, pointing directly to the molten calf. The verb *heʿelūkhā*, a *Hifʿil* perfect form (3rd person, masculine, plural) with a pronominal suffix, functions as the predicate of the clause and denotes the action attributed to these gods: "who brought you [*Yisrāʾēl*] up from the land of Egypt." This verse thus exemplifies the uniplural tension inherent in the Hebrew noun *ʾElohīm*.

This plural-singular interplay in Exodus 32 naturally raises the broader question of how the noun *ʾElohīm* functions as a uniplural divine name throughout the Hebrew Bible. From this perspective, the apparent disparity between the singular molten calf and the plural declaration (Ex. 32:4) remains a subject of significant scholarly and theological attention. Scholars have long noted literary and thematic parallels between this narrative and the account in 1 Kings 12, where Jeroboam establishes cultic calves at Bethel and Dan. These calves have been interpreted as polemical echoes of the Exodus episodes, ritual symbols representing fertility deities or serving as divine war standards.[233] Whatever their historical function, the linguistic form in which the Masoretic text refers to them is conspicuous. This tension has prompted comparisons between the roles of Aaron and Jeroboam in the crafting of golden calves as representations of YHVH, the Israelite deity.[234] Thus, these passages offer a compelling case study within the Hebrew Bible, highlighting both the complexity of Israelite religious practice and the linguistic dynamics surrounding the divine name *ʾElohīm* in the Masoretic text, particularly in relation to the emerging monotheist theology.[235] The remaining question, therefore, concerns the precise linguistic relationship between the plural form *ʾElohīm* in Exodus 32 and the broader phenomenon of divine uniplurality within the Hebrew Bible.

Yet this linguistic and theological tension in *ʾElohīm* also invites a socio-historical reading, where social and cultic practices in ancient Israel help explain the plural forms observed in the

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[233] See J. Gerald Janzen, "The Character of the Calf and Its Cult in Exodus 32," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (October 1990), pp. 597-607.; and Patrick D. Miller Jr., "El the Warrior," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Oct., 1967), pp. 411-431.

[234] Moses Aberbach and Levy Smolar, "Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (1967), pp. 129-140.

[235] Lloyd R. Bailey, "The Golden Calf," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 42 (1971), pp. 97-115.

biblical text. Samuel L. Boyd explored the linguistic interplay between ancient Israel and Judah, framing the issue in sociolinguistic rather than purely linguistic terms: "Linguistic interference is conditioned in the first instance by social factors, not linguistic ones [...] linguistic analysis does not fully integrate the sociolinguistic history and context of the ancient Israelites into their studies."[236] From this perspective, the plural use of the Hebrew name *ʾElohīm* can be re-evaluated and understood as a socio-historical factor, not merely as a linguistic phenomenon. In this light, the elucidation of ʾIbn ʿEzrāʾ—that plural forms were customary in the sociolinguistic milieu of ancient Israel—gains renewed significance. Similarly, Amitai Baruchi-Unna offers a study on the plural uses of the Israelite God, addressing the authenticity of plural adjectives and verbs that agree with the noun *ʾElohīm*. He contextualizes the episode in Exodus 32 within a linguistic pattern characteristic of the First Temple period, potentially associated with the Northern kingdom of Israel and its ritual practices. Baruchi-Unna further analyzes Exodus 32:4, 8, and 1 Kings 12:28, contending that in these instances *ʾElohīm* appears as a plural noun followed by a plural verb. According to Baruchi-Unna, these instances embody remnants of an ancient linguistic convention that has gradually become less discernible; thus, plural forms in Israelite ritual recitations reflect this complex historical-linguistic tradition.[237]

This interplay between plural and singular forms in Exodus 32 and related narratives extends to other critical biblical passages, where the divine name *ʾElohīm* interacts with YHVH, further complicating the question of uniplurality in the Hebrew Bible. The Masoretic text also presents instances where *ʾElohīm* speaks in first person reflexively, as in Genesis 1:26, which reads: *Vayyoʾmer ʾElohīm naʿasēh ʾādām betzalmēnū kidmūtēnū.*[238] Genesis 3:22 presents a similar complexity: *Vayyoʾmer YHVH ʾElohīm hēn hāʾādām hāyāh keʾaḥad mimmennū.*[239] In this verse, a direct interplay between YHVH and *ʾElohīm* occurs, equating them as a uniplural entity, since both subject and predicate appear in plural form. Are we facing a uniplural protagonist deity who represents the Israelite God? One may argue that, since we have a double-fold subject in this verse, namely, the Tetragrammaton and *ʾElohīm* speaking, the verbal number in the clause is consequently plural. However, in Genesis

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[236] Samuel L. Boyd, *Language Contact, Colonial Administration, and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Israel*, Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2021, pp. 48-49.

[237] Baruchi-Unna (2017), *op. cit.*, pp. 141-152.

[238] ("And God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"), *Ms. Hébreu 7*, ff. 14v-15r.

[239] ("And YHVH *ʾElohīm* said: Behold, man is to become as one of us"), *Ms. Hébreu 11*, f. 3r.

11:6-7, we read: *Vayyoʾmer YHVH* […] *hāvāh nērdāh venāvelāh shām sefātām.*[240] In this verse, YHVH, acting as a singular subject, is followed by a plural predicate. *Targūm ʾŌnqēlōs* on Genesis 11:7 renders this as *havū nitggelēy*[241] ("let us manifest") rather than "let us descend," preserving the reflexive plural nuance. David Kimḥī argued that "such verses must be interpreted allegorically": *Vehakol derekh māshāl.*[242] Echoing *Genesis Rabbah* 8, ʾIbn ʿezrāʾ contended that God consulted "with the angels": *ʿim hammalʾakhīm*[243]—a potential defensive interpretive strategy aimed at safeguarding the monotheistic integrity.

Yet if these Hebrew biblical complexities are mirrored vis-à-vis its Greek counterpart—the *Septuagint*—the matter becomes more intricate. As Bruce J. Harvey observes, "most books in the Septuagint contain designations for God that are not lexically equivalent to their Hebrew counterparts in the Masoretic Text."[244] Some scholars argue that in certain instances, *ʾElohīm* was replaced or supplemented by *YHVH* in the biblical text.[245] This underscores the importance of consulting the *Septuagint*, which often preserves older textual traditions capable of illuminating the literary history of divine names in the Hebrew Bible, as Gilles Dorival notes: "*On peut penser qu'elle est susceptible de fournir des informations sur l'histoire du texte prémassorétique* […] *partiellement différent du TM.*"[246] Thus, the *Septuagint* offers insights that both complement and challenge the Masoretic Text.

Genesis 20:13 provides an additional illustration of the multifaceted dynamics surrounding the name *ʾElohīm*: *Vayehī kaʾasher hitʿū ʾotī ʾElohīm mibēyt ʾāvī.*[247] In this verse, both the Hebrew verb √*t-ʿ-h*, which is in *Hifʿīl*, perfect 3rd person, masculine, and its subject are in plural.[248] In this biblical account, ʾAvrāhām, the narrator, uses *ʾElohīm* along with a verb in plural form: *hitʿū* ("they caused"). Though

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[240] ("And YHVH said […] come, let us descend and confound their language"), *Ms. Hébreu 28*, f. 6r.

[241] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 55*, Year: 14th Century, f. 14v (In Hebrew).

[242] *Pērūsh Radaq ʿal Hattōrāh. Sēfer Berēʾshīt*, Presburg: A. Ginzburg, 1842, f. 34v (In Hebrew).

[243] *Ms. Hébreu 182*, f. 5r.

[244] Bruce J. Harvey, *YHVH Elohim: A Survey of Occurrences in the Leningrad Codex and Their Corresponding Septuagint Renderings*, New York: T&T Clark, 2011, p. 1.

[245] Ibid., p. 2.

[246] ("It can be assumed that it is likely to provide information about the history of the pre-Masoretic text […] partially different from the Masoretic text"), Gilles Dorival, "Septante et Texte Massorétique. Le cas des Psaumes," p. 139, in André Lemaire (Ed.), *Congress Volume Basel 2001*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp. 139–161.

[247] ("And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house"), *Ms. Hébreu 28*, f. 10v.

[248] *BHS*, p. 33.

ʾElohīm is traditionally understood as the singular God of Israel, the verb in this biblical verse is not in the singular, thereby underlining the predicate as an action performed by *ʾElohīm*, the Israelite deity. Genesis 35:7 further illustrates the uniplural linguistic aspects around the Hebrew name *ʾElohīm*: *Shām nigelū ʾēlāv hāʾelohīm.*[249] The Hebrew verb √*g-l-h* in this verse is in *Nifʿal* perfect 3rd person, masculine, plural. While this could be interpreted as indicative of the *pluralis majestatis*, the *peshāt* of this verse renders the singularity of God a complex matter. Comparable examples appear in both 1 Samuel 17:26 and Jeremiah 23:36, which read: *ʾElohīm ḥayyīm*[250] ("living Gods"). In 1 Samuel 28:13, the narrative tells when the witch of *ʿĒyn Dōr* saw *ʾElohīm* […] *ʿolīm min hāʾāretz.*[251] These passages collectively highlight the intricate balance between plurality and singularity in references to *ʾElohīm*, illustrating how the Jewish Bible conveys the multifaceted nature of this Hebrew term. Yet perhaps the most profound biblical expression of divine uniplurality and enigmatic celestial incarnation unfolds beneath the silent shade of the terebinths of Mamre, where the Divine unveils in a threefold form, drawing near to ʾAvrāhām in a sublime visitation clothed in wonder—as Genesis 18 narrates:

> *Vayyērāʾ ʾēlāv YHVH beʾēlonēy mamrēʾ vehūʾ yoshēv petaḥ hāʾohel keḥom hayyōm. Vayyissāʾ ʿēynāv vayyareʾ vehinnēh sheloshāh ʾanāshīm nitztzāvīm ʿālāv, vayyareʾ vayyārātz liqrāʾtām mipetaḥ hāʾohel vayyishttaḥū ʾārtzāh vayyʾomar: ʾAdonāy ʾim nāʾ mātzāʾti ḥēn beʿēyneykhā ʾal nāʾ taʿavor mēʿal ʿavaddekhā. Yuqqaḥ nāʾ meʿaṭ mayim veraḥatzū raglēykhem vehishshāʿanū taḥat hāʿētz veʾeqḥāh pat leḥem vesaʿadū libekhem, ʾaḥar taʿavorū, kī ʿal kēn ʿavarttem ʿal ʿavddekhem. Vayyʾomrū kēn taʿaseh kaʾasher dibarttā* […] *Vayyiqqaḥ ḥemʾāh veḥālāv ūben-habāqār ʾasher ʿāsāh vayyittēn lifnēyhem vehūʾ ʿomēd ʿalēyhem taḥat hāʿētz vayyokhēlū. Vayyʾomrū ʾēlāv: ʾayyēh Sārāh ʾishttekhā? Vayyʾomer hinnēh bāʾohel. Vayyʾomer shov ʾāshūv ʾēleykhā kāʿēt ḥayyāh vehinnēh bēn leSārāh ʾishttekhā. VeSārāh shomaʿat petaḥ hāʾohel vehūʾ ʾaḥarāv* […] *Vayyʾomer YHVH ʾel ʾAvrāhām: Lāmmāh zeh tzāḥaqāh Sārāh* […] *Hayipālēʾ mēYHVH dāvār? Lammōʿēd ʾāshūv ʾēleykhā* […] *Vayyāqumū mishshām hāʾanāshīm vayyashqifū ʿal-penēy Sdom, veʾAvrāhām holēkh ʿimmām leshalleḥām. VaYHVH ʾāmār: Hamekhasseh ʾAnī mēʾAvrāhām ʾasher ʾAnī ʿoseh?* […] *Vayyʾomer YHVH: Zaʿaqat Sdom vaʿAmorāh kī rābāh, veḥaṭṭāʾtam kī khāvdāh meʾod. ʾĒrdā-nnāʾ veʾerʾeh* […] *Vayyifnū mishshām hāʾanāshīm vayyēlkhū Sdomāh veʾAvrāhām ʿōdennū ʿomēd lifnēy YHVH* […] *Vayyaʿan ʾAvrāhām*

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[249] ("There, the God[s] *were* revealed unto him"), *Ms. Hébreu 11*, f. 25r.

[250] *BHS*, p. 506.

[251] ("Gods […] ascending from the earth"), *BHS*, p. 529.

vayy'omer: Hinnēh-nā' hō'alttī ledabēr 'el [YHVH[252]] *'Adonāy* [...] *Vayyēlekh YHVH ka'asher killāh ledabēr 'el 'Avrāhām, ve'Avrāhām shāv limqomō.*[253]

The encounter at Mamre in Genesis 18 epitomizes the uniplural character of the biblical deity, this time through the name YHVH, where singularity and plurality converge in a tangible, narrative manifestation of the Divine. This episode is both linguistically and theologically rich. A syntactic analysis highlights the interplay between singular and plural forms related to the Divine embedded in this narrative, which may support our observation regarding the biblical uniplurality of the Israelite deity, that is, YHVH manifests—albeit in its plain meaning (*peshāt*)—through three incarnated men in the narrative. Within this passage, the Tetragrammaton appears ten times, while the name *'Adonāy* appears on six occasions; both referring to the same subject. The former appears in verse one in the singular, masculine form, with YHVH functioning as the grammatical subject. Hebrew syntax thus indicates that the subject of the appearance is indeed YHVH. The narrative, however, reveals three figures, marking a syntactic transition from the singular, transcendent subject—YHVH—to a plural, immanent divine manifestation in human form. This shift introduces a profound syntactic tension: the narrative subject remains YHVH, yet the visual referent consists of three physical, humanlike

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[252] In *Ms. Hébreu 7*, f. 23v, the Tetragrammaton appears instead of the divine name *'Adonāy*.

[253] ("And YHVH appeared to him ['Avrāhām] by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three people were standing before him. When he saw them, he ran towards them from the entrance of the tent and bowed himself to the ground, saying: "My Lords, if now I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash [2nd person, plural, masculine] your feet [2nd person, possessive, plural, masculine], and rest yourselves under the tree; and let me bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts [2nd person, possessive, plural, masculine]. After that, you may pass on [2nd person, plural, masculine], since you have come [2nd person, plural, masculine] to your servant [2nd person, possessive, plural, masculine]." And they said, "Do as you have said" [...], and he took butter and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set them before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. And they said to him: "Where is Sarah, your wife?" And he said: "Here, in the tent." And He said [the three people speaking in direct speech, *vav* consecutive, *Qal*, 3rd person, singular, masculine]: "I will surely return to you at this time next year, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, for He is behind it [...] and YHVH said to 'Avrāhām: "Why did Sarah laugh?" [...] Is anything too extraordinary for YHVH? At the appointed time, I will return to you [...] Then they [the three peoples] arose from there and looked out [*vav* Cons., *Hif.*, 3rd person, plural, masculine] toward Sodom, and 'Avrāhām went with them to send them on their way. And YHVH said: "Shall I hide from 'Avrāhām what I am about to do? [...] And YHVH said: "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is very grievous. I will go down now and get to know [...], and the men turned from there and went [*vav* consecutive, *Qal*, 3rd person, plural, masculine] toward Sodom. Yet 'Avrāhām was still standing before YHVH [...] Then 'Avrāhām testified saying: "Now that I have dared to speak to [some manuscripts, such as *Ms. Hébreu 7* read YHVH] *'Adonāy* [...] And YHVH went [*vav* consecutive, *Qal*, 3rd person, singular, masculine] His way when He had finished [*Pi'ēl* 3rd person, singular, masculine] speaking [*Pi'ēl, infinitive cons.*] with 'Avrāhām, and 'Avrāhām returned to his place"), *Ms. Hébreu 7*, ff. 22v-23v; *Ms. Hébreu 11*, ff. 11r-12r; *Ms. Hébreu 20*, ff. 18r-18v; *Ms. Hébreu 28*, ff. 8v-9v; *BHS*, pp. 27-29.

beings who eat, have their feet washed, and are addressed by ʾAvrāhām with the very title the Hebrew Bible uses for the Israelite deity—*ʾAdonāy*, a designation that refers both to the Tetragrammaton and *ʾElohīm* (Gen. 20:3–6). Yet in v. 3, *ʾAdonāy* functions as a singular vocative, not as a "plural of majesty." Grammatically, therefore, ʾAvrāhām speaks to one being, even though three persons stand before him. Later in the chapter, YHVH continues speaking in the singular, even as the three men who first appeared to ʾAvrāhām are occasionally referenced collectively—an uniplural voice that refuses to be silenced. In this way, the narrative preserves the theological unity of the biblical *peshāt*: YHVH manifests through uniplural presence. These syntactic dynamics are already evident in the opening verse of the chapter: YHVH is the singular divine subject of the appearance (v. 1), yet three men constitute the manifested figures (v. 2), and ʾAvrāhām's speech contains both singular and plural vocatives (v. 3):

[Clause 1, v. 1] ("And YHVH appeared to ʾAvrāhām by the terebinths of Mamre…")
- ├── Subject: "YHVH" (3rd person, singular, masculine)
- ├── Verb: "appeared" [√*r-ʾ-h*] (*Vav* Consec., *Nifʿal* 3rd person, singular, masculine)
- ├── Indirect object: "to him" [*ʾēlāv*] (ʾAvrāhām)
  - └── Locative phrase: "by the terebinths of Mamre" [*beʾēlonēy mamrēʾ*]

[Clause 2, v. 2] ("He lifted his eyes and saw three men standing before him…")
- ├── Subject: "He" (ʾAvrāhām)
- ├── Verb 1: "Lifted" [√*n-s-ʾ*] (*Vav* Consec., *Qal*, 3rd person, singular, masculine)
- ├── Verb 2: "Saw" [√*r-ʾ-h*] (Vav Consec., *Qal*, 3rd person, singular, masculine)
  - └── Object: "Three human beings" [*sheloshāh ʾanāshīm*] (3rd person, plural, masculine)
  - └── Participial clause: "Standing" [√*n-tz-v*] (*Nifʿal*, 3rd person, plural, masculine)
- ├── Complement: "Opposite to him" [*ʿālāv*] (vis-à-vis ʾAvrāhām)
- ├── Verb 3: "Saw" [√*r-ʾ-h*] (*Vav* Consec., *Qal*, 3rd person, singular, masculine)
- ├── Verb 4: "Run" [√*r-v-tz*] (*Vav* Consec., *Qal*, 3rd person, singular, masculine)
  - └── Predicate+Object Suffix: "To encounter them" [√*q-r-ʾ*] (3rd person, plural, masculine)

├── Verb 5: "Postrated," [√*sh-ḥh*/√*ḥ-v-h*[254]] (*Vav* Consec., *Hof.*, 3rd person, singular, masculine)

[Clause 3, v. 3] ("He said: *ʾAdonāy*, if now I have found favor in your eyes…")

├── Subject: "He" (ʾAvrāhām)

├── Verb 1: said [√*ʾ-m-r*] (*Vav* Cons., *Qal*, 3rd person, singular, masculine) Direct speech

├── Vocative: "My Lords" [*ʾAdonāy*, pl. noun] (singular address)

├── Conditional clause: "If I have found favor in your eyes" [*ʾIm nāʾ mātzāʾti ḥēn beʿēyneykhā*]

└── Imperative: "Do not pass by" [√*ʿ-b-r*] (2nd person, singular, masculine)

├── Complement: "Your servant" [*ʿavaddekhā*] (noun, singular, masculine, + possessive, suffix 2nd person, singular, masculine)

This syntactic configuration reveals a striking narrative pattern in which a singular divine subject is manifested through a plurality of embodied figures. Its grammatical structure establishes a paradoxical narrative framework: one divine subject revealed through three visible figures. Three physical manifestations, one divine unity. It is important to note that Genesis 18:31 in *Ms. Hébreu 7*—manuscript following the scribal tradition of Perpignan, France (1299)—reads: *Hinnēh-nāʾ hōʾalttī ledabēr ʾel YHVH-ʾAdonāy*.[255] Thus, *Ms. Hébreu 7* appears to echo a textual tradition in which YHVH is recognized as the figure behind the enigmatic manifestation of Genesis 18. This phrasing, however, does not appear in other manuscripts, such as *Ms. Hébreu 20* (dated 1301, from Tudela, Spain), nor in *Ms. Hébreu 28* or *Ms. Hébreu 11* from Burgos, Spain. Whether this represents a scribal error or an editorial addition, the biblical narrative of Genesis 18 embeds within itself a story of divine manifestation and incarnation that is characterized by one of the most enigmatic examples of uniplurality in the Hebrew Bible.

Genesis 18 thus reveals an ontological tension within the text itself—a uniplural manifestation that resists easy categorization within conventional rabbinic theological frameworks. Rabbinic tradition has long wrestled with this chapter, for its *peshāt* challenges the strict monotheistic vision upheld by mainstream Judaism, particularly Maimonidean theology. The most common rabbinic

[254] See *BHS*, p. 27n2.

[255] ("I have taken upon me to speak unto *YHVH-ʾAdonāy*"), *Ms. Hébreu 7*, f. 23v.

explanation proposes that the "three men"—rendered by the Targumic tradition of ʾŌnqelōs as *telātā' gavrīn*[256]—who appeared to ʾAvrāhām were "three angels in the likeness of men," as the Targumic tradition of Yōnātān ben ʿUzzīʾēl suggests: *Telātā' malʾākhīn bidmūt gūvrīn*.[257] Yet the textual interplay between these passages complicates a straightforward *peshāt* reading that identifies all figures as angels. In chapter 19, which continues this narrative, the term "angels" is explicitly employed; however, only two of these celestial beings are mentioned, in contrast to the three anthropomorphic figures depicted in chapter 18. Consequently, from a plain-sense exegetical standpoint, it becomes a nuanced and challenging task to discern whether all these manifestations represent angelic beings *per se*, or whether this designation applies solely to the figures in chapter 19. What remains incontrovertible is that both chapters portray encounters with the Divine that are marked by protagonists who are corporeal and humanlike in appearance, thereby inviting deeper reflection on the nature of divine manifestations and their ontological status within the scriptural narrative. Notably, the twelfth-century French tosafist and biblical commentator, Rabbī Yōsēf ben Yitzḥāq Bekhōr Shōr of Orléans, cautions against interpreting these three figures as angels: *ʾAsūr lehorōt* [*lifnēy hammīnīm*[258]] *shehāyū malʾākhīm.*[259] This is, "it is forbidden to teach [to heretics] that they were angels. Interestingly, the printed edition of Bekhōr Shōr's commentary omits the Hebrew phrase *lifnēy hammīnīm* ("before the heretics"), which appears in *Ms. Cod. Hebr. 52* (1549) of the Bavarian State Library, in Munich.

Yet the tension between divine unity and plurality of manifestation extends beyond the narrative framework of the Torah, finding further articulation in the prophetic writings and later becoming a subject of reflection within Jewish mystical tradition. For instance, the seeming division of the Tetragrammaton into distinct expressions and cohesive manifestations—conceived as branches, aspects, or emanations (*sefirōt*) of the same unified divine essence—and their eventual reunification, is intrinsic to Jewish mysticism, particularly under a Kabbalistic-theosophic framework. This notion finds scriptural resonance in Zechariah 14:9, which states: *Vehāyāh YHVH lemelekh ʿal kol*

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[256] Alexander Sperber (Ed.), *The Bible in Aramaic Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts. Vol. 1, The Pentateuch According to Targum Onkelos*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959, p. 24.

[257] See *Targgūm Haqqādōsh Yōnātān*, f. 6v; and Florentino Garcia Martinez, *Between Philology and Theology: Contributions to the Study of Ancient Jewish Interpretation*, Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2013, p. 123.

[258] The Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, *Ms. Cod. Hebr. 52*, Year: 1549, f. 15v (In Hebrew).

[259] *Sēfer Rabēnū Yōsēf Bekhōr Shōr Pērūsh ʿal Hattōrāh. Ḥēleq ʾAlef Berēʾshīt Shemōt*, Jerusalem: Harav Ḥayyīm ʾIsser, 1956, p. 19.

hā'āretz. Bayyōm hahū' yihyeh YHVH 'eḥād ūshemō 'eḥād.[260] At first sight, the future tense formulation *bayyōm hahū'* ("in that day") may suggest, according to its *peshāt*, that the unification of both the Divine and the Tetragrammaton is a future event, not yet fully realized in the present condition. As David L. Petersen argues, "Zechariah does not affirm some present reality, as does Deut. 6:4, but instead points to a future reality, namely, what will happen on that day [...] Zechariah 14:9 does not claim that the deity presently is *'eḥād*; rather, the verse projects such a claim into the future."[261] Similarly, Ḥayyīm Lūtzā'ṭō, in his *Sēfer Da'at Tevūnōt*, identifies this verse as a reference to "the future redemption" (*hagge'ūllāh hā'atīdāh*).[262] In a similar spirit, Rabbī Peretz ben Yitzḥāk Hakohēn expands on Zechariah 14:9 in his *Sēfer Ma'arekhet Hā'elohūt*, describing this verse as an eschatological time in which Israel will be in peace in her Land, with a Temple in Jerusalem, and a Messiah.[263] Similarly, *Sēfer Megalleh 'Amūqōt* interprets Zechariah 14:9 as a metaphysical and eschatological event in which not only the Tetragrammaton will be universally invoked, but in which "in the future (*sheyyihyeh lā'atīd*) the divine name *Havayah* will be *Yehiyeh*—a double fold of the divine name *Yah* (*shehashshēm yihyeh be'ōtō pa'am Yah - Yah*).[264] In this transformation, *Sēfer Megalleh 'Amūqōt* further informs that the *vav* of the Tetragrammaton will contract itself and become a *yod* (*la'asōt min havvāv yōd*), thus fulfilling Isaiah 30:26, where "the light of the moon shall become like the light of the sun," a symbolic reference to the double-fold *Yah*.[265] In this interpretation, the designation "one" signifies the equally elevated status of the letters that composed the Tetragrammaton and the fulfillment of the prophetic visions of Zachariah and Isaiah. From this perspective, the verse, therefore, points to a future event that is at once social-physical (universal) in scope and metaphysical-eschatological in nature.

Building on the eschatological and uniplural literary framework of Zechariah 14:9, the Jewish mystical tradition expands this vision into an esoteric-theosophic schema, in which divine unity, cosmic order, and messianic fulfillment converge through symbolic and metaphysical intermediaries, including Metatronic motifs. Thus, the Zoharic reading of Zechariah 14:9 envisions a future in which

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[260] ("On that day YHVH shall be one and His name One"), *Ms. Hébreu 28*, f. 269v.

[261] David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi: A Commentary*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, pp. 148-149.

[262] Ḥayyīm Lūtzā'ṭō, *Sēfer Da'at Tevūnōt*, Jerusalem: Goldblatt, 2001, p. 219 (In Hebrew).

[263] *Sēfer Ma'arekhet Hā'elohūt*, f. 153v.

[264] Nātān Naṭ'ā Shapīrā', *Sēfer Megalleh 'Amūqōt*, Kraków: Menaḥēm Naḥūm Meyīzles, 1637, ff. 97rv (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Sēfer Megalleh 'Amūqōt*).

[265] Ibid.

prophetic fulfillment, eschatological renewal, redemption, divine sovereignty, and cosmic order are fully realized.[266] Melila Hellner-Eshed highlights that in the *ʾIdrʾā Rabbʾā*—"The Great Assembly" (*Zohar* 3:127b-145a)—it is convened to address the disconnection between *Zeʿīr ʾAnpīn* ("the lesser countenance of the Divine") and the *ʾArīkh ʾAnpīn* ("the *ʿAttīqāʿ Qaddīshāʾ*, the Ancient Holy One"), about which Rabbī Shimʿōn Bar Yoḥʾāī declared: "Time to act for YHVH" (Psalm 119:126).[267] From this perspective, Hellner-Eshed further notes, human intervention seems necessary to actualize the possibility of redirecting *Zeʿīr ʾAnpīn*'s gaze back to its source; namely, "a return to God as an infinite ocean of love and oneness."[268] Philosophically, this presupposes that God's current manifestation is encountered in a state of fragmentation or differentiation—an incomplete expression of a unified totality awaiting ultimate reintegration in an eschatological consummation. Noting that Meṭāṭrōn is identified in certain strands of Jewish mysticism with the ineffable Name of God—namely as the "lesser YHVH"—and that Rabbī Ḥayyim Vital, in his commentary on the Book of Numbers within his *Sefer ʿĒtz Haddaʿat Ṭōv*, associates Meṭāṭrōn with *Zeʿīr ʾAnpīn*, one could argue that the unification described in Zechariah 14:9 implies an even further elevation of Meṭāṭrōn's status. In this interpretive framework, the eschatological transformation—wherein the moon's light (*ʾōr hallevānāh*) becomes as radiant as the sun's (Isaiah 30:26)—might be understood as symbolizing a corresponding augmentation in Meṭāṭrōn's luminosity or spiritual stature. Such imagery naturally evokes the biblical references to the dual thrones in the Book of Daniel, among other examples. In simpler terms, from a mystical perspective, the Metatronic motif appears destined for an exalted realm of glory, reflecting the ultimate reintegration and unification of divine presence.

While the *Zohar* alludes to this prophetic verse as expressing a divine dual-fold union, rabbinic literature and Jewish liturgical tradition interpret Zechariah 14:9 as a profound affirmation of Jewish monotheistic theology and universalism. Yet, the Jewish tradition (Pes. 50a) poses the question: *ʾAttū hāʾīdnāʾ lʾeū ʾeḥād hūʾ?* ("Is He [God] not one now?"). A broader answer to this question is not merely a matter of orthography, phonology, or phonetics but rather concerns the mystical and eschatological reunification of God's essence. Midrashic anthologies, such as *Yalkūt Shimʿōnī* (section 585), also assign eschatological significance to this prophetic declaration, anticipating a future

[266] Antti Laato, *Monotheism, the Trinity, and Mysticism: A Semiotic Approach to Jewish-Christian Encounter*, Berlin, New York: Peter Lang, 1999, pp. 63-64.

[267] Melila Hellner-Eshed, *Seekers of the Face: Secrets of the Idra Rabba* (*The Great Assembly*) *of the Zohar*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021, p. 21.

[268] Ibid., p. 70.

reunification of the Divine quintessence through a redemptive process.[269] The Targumic tradition likewise underscores the eschatological orientation of this verse: *Vetitggelēy malkhūtāʾ daʾAdonāy ʿal kol yatvēy ʾarʿāʾ*,[270] expressing a universal hope in a forthcoming time. The Babylonian Talmud (Pes. 50a), in a discussion on Zechariah 14:9, hints at the concealing of the divine Name, and Rabbēnū Baḥyē asserts that this divine reunification will occur once the *yētzer hāraʿ* ("evil inclination") is eradicated from the world.[271] Accordingly, the two levels of holiness—representing divine essence and divine manifestation—remain separated until the moral and metaphysical repair of creation (*Tīqqūn*) is fulfilled. It is important to clarify that *Tīqqūn* is not to be understood in, albeit noble, postmodern or ideologically driven notions of "social justice," but rather as a redemptive return to humanity's original state of sanctity and wholeness, as enjoyed in the primordial order of creation before the fracturing of divine harmony. In Jewish thought, it is conceived that, in an eschatological future, all apparent multiplicity within the divine will be resolved into unity—both in God's essence and in how the Divine is referred to. This hope is succinctly expressed in the *ʿĀrūkh Hashshulḥān* (*ʾŌraḥ Ḥayīm* 61:4) on Zechariah 14:9, which reads: *Vezeh kol tiqvātēnū* ("and this is all our hope").

Building on the rabbinic and mystical reflections on divine reunification, a closer syntactic and verbal analysis of Zechariah 14:9 illuminates how the verse's future-oriented clauses linguistically encode the anticipated revelation of God's unified sovereignty. Zechariah 14:9 consists of two verbal clauses that function together as a unified theological proclamation. The first, ending by the *ʾētnaḥttaʾ* under the Hebrew word *hāʾāretz* in the Masoretic text, may be understood as a sentence describing an anticipated announced action, thereby implying future tense. This clause begins with a *Qal veqāṭal* 3rd person, masculine, singular verbal form, indicating the future imperfect and denoting an action that precedes another anticipated event.[272] The Targumic tradition on Zechariah 14:9 expands the *peshāt* of the biblical script, rendering the verse as: *Vetitgelēy malkhūtāʾ daYHVH*.[273] This is to say, "and the

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[269] *Sēfer Yalkūṭ Shimʿōnī* (Vol. 2), Vilna: Defūs Rabbī Yōsēf Reʾūvēn bar Menaḥēm min Rʾōmm, 1864, pp. 88, 873 (In Hebrew.).

[270] ("And the kingdom of the LORD will ultimately be made manifest/revealed, to all the inhabitants of the earth"), Alexander Sperber (Ed.), *The Bible in Aramaic Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts, Vol. III The Latter Prophets According to Targum Jonathan*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962, p. 498.

[271] Rabbēnū Baḥyē, *Bīʾūr ʿal Hattōrāh*, Jerusalem: Mōssād Hārav Qūq, 1981, pp. 243, 244 (In Hebrew).

[272] Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (2nd. Edition), Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 70.

[273] *Kitvēy Qodesh min ʿEsrīm Veʾarbāʿāh. Ḥēleq Revīʿī. Nevīʾīm ʾAḥarōnīm*, Vilna: Menaḥēm ben R. Bārūkh, 1843, p. 467 (In Hebrew and Aramaic. Henceforth: *Kitvēy Qodesh min ʿEsrīm Veʾarbāʿāh*).

kingdom of YHVH will be revealed"—an explicitly future action In English, the verb "to reveal" conveys the act of making known, disclosing, or displaying, often by divine or supernatural agency.[274] It implies something not yet manifested but which may eventually become thus. A similar understanding emerges from the *Qal* perfect 3rd person, masculine, singular (√*g-l-h.*), which composes the Hebrew verb *legallōt* ("to discover, to reveal, to uncover") found in Zechariah 14:9, whose meaning aligns closely with the Targumic rendering of this biblical verse. In a similar vein, the translation of the second clause of Zechariah 14:9 conveys an idea embedded in the future tense: *Bayyōm hahū'* ("in that upcoming day"). The Hebrew definite article (*ha*) designates a unique referent, conferring intrinsic definiteness.[275] Here, it takes a *pattaḥ* (a short vowel *a*) because, as Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor explain, it precedes a word beginning with the Hebrew letter *heh*.[276] The definite article is followed by a 3rd person, masculine, singular personal pronoun, structuring the phrase "on that day," and emphasizing an action yet to occur. In the Targumic tradition, this phrase is rendered in Aramaic as *be'idānā' hahī'*[277] ("in an upcoming era, in a future eon, in a distant time"), thus highlighting the rhetorical future. This sense of futurity is further reinforced by the *Qal* imperfect 3rd person, masculine, singular *yihyeh* ("shall be, become") that follows. The Gemara (Pesaḥīm 50a:19) raises a question regarding this verse: "Does this mean that now He [YHVH and His name] is not one today?" Whereas the Talmud interprets Zechariah 14:9 as follows:

> Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak said: The World-to-Come is not like this world. In this world, God's name is written with the letters *Yod* and *Heh* and is read as *Adonai*, which begins with the letters *Alef* and *Dalet*. God's name is not pronounced in the same way as it is written. In the World-to-Come, it will all be one, as God's name will be read with the letters *Yod* and *Heh* and written with the letters *Yod* and *Heh*.[278]

This understanding of futurity in Zechariah 14:9 sets the stage for interpretations that view the chapter as both a present reflection and a prophetic vision—a perspective further developed by scholars such as George Livingstone Robinson. Robinson argues that, altogether, the prophecies of Zechariah are

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[274] H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler (Eds.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, Fourth Edition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951, p. 1047.

[275] Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990, pp. 241-242.

[276] Ibid., p. 237.

[277] *Kitvēy Qodesh min 'Esrīm Ve'arbā'āh*, p. 467.

[278] *Pesaḥīm* 50a:19-21.

divided into two parts: From chapters 1 to 8, and from chapters 9 to 14, two sections that describe the present and look forward to the future.[279] Concerning chapter 14, he contends that it contains an apocalyptic vision of judgment and redemption.[280] This perspective aligns with the Targumic tradition and the scriptural *peshāt*, suggesting that the essence of YHVH, as read in verse 9, denotes a future time. It is an eschatological sense, the verse hints at a current state of division or fragmentation destined to be unified again: *Yihyeh YHVH ʾeḥād.* ("will be one"). The Zōhar renders this biblical verse as "two unifications."[281]

Building on the notion of a uniplural structure within the divine essence, this idea finds further elaboration in interpretations of Deuteronomic tradition and in mystical literature, where the interplay of unity and plurality within the Divine is explored in both linguistic and esoteric terms. The Tetragrammaton corresponds to the name *ʾAdonāy*, whose voweled spelling denotes a plural noun—"my Lords." From this vantage point, the quintessential Deuteronomic declaration of divine unity opens itself to a more nuanced philosophical exegesis and a theologically sophisticated reading—one that accommodates the possibility of a uniplural structure within the oneness of the Divine. Such a reading transcends reductive notions of singularity by contemplating a unified plurality within the divine essence embedded in the auditory phonetics of Deuteronomy 6:4: "Listen ["Reflect on this"], O Israel, YHVH is [are] our God[s], YHVH is [are a unified unique oneness-unity] one [√*ʾē-ḥ-d*]"—whereas the *peshāt* of Deut 6:4, in context, is a declaration of monolatry: "YHVH is our God," namely, YHVH alone. The Zohar, in its exposition of *Pārāshat Bʾō* (Ex. 10:1-13:16), alludes to this Deuteronomic affirmation: "Behold—all of them are one, and therefore He is called *ʾeḥād* ("one")." It proceeds: *Hērēy hēm shloshāh shēmōt* ("indeed, they are three names"), and then it poses a profound question: *Hēkh ʾīnnūn ḥad*? ("How are they one?"). Even though we call them "one," how are they truly one?" The Zohar offers a response to this apparent divine paradox, unveiling a mystical resolution: *Beḥezyōnʾā derūaḥ qudshāʾ* ("through the vision of the Holy Spirit") *ʾītyyēdʿā* ("this is known")—a *sōd* ("secret") accessible through spiritual insight and divine revelation. It concludes: "YHVH our God *are* one—three aspects (*sheloshāh gevānīm*), yet they are one."[282]

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[279] George Livingstone Robinson, "The Prophecies of Zechariah with Special Reference to the Origin and Date of Chapters 9-14," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, Vol. 12, No. 1/2 (Oct., 1895 - Jan., 1896), pp. 1-92.

[280] Ibid., p. 13.

[281] Daniel C. Matt (Ed.), *The Zohar* (Pritzker Edition, Vol. 1), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 138.

[282] *Sēfer Hazzohar ʿāl Ḥamishah Ḥummsheī Tōrāh. Sēfer Shemōt*, Vilna: Haʾalmānāh Vehāʾaḥīm Rʾōmm, 1881, p. 86 (In Aramaic and Hebrew).

The daily recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4 in this interpretation is not only a response to the eschatological vision of Zechariah 14:9, but also an affirmation of continual divine "unification" (*yīḥūd*) of God's uniplurality—"a divine secret mysteriously revealed by the Holy Spirit": *Ved'a 'īhū yīḥūdā' dekhol yōm'ā, de'ītggelēy berāzā' derūaḥ qudshā'*.[283] Thus, "Listen, O Israel, YHVH is our God[s] (*'Eloheīnū*)"—for "they" are one in the mystery of the divine voice. In the zoharic language, "three manifestations—and they are one."[284] However, this threefold manifestation of divine unity should not be understood in the Christian sense of multiple persons, but rather three divine manifestations or emanations within a single, indivisible reality. This is to say, God manifests in different ways—as source, sustainer, and presence—yet all are one and indivisible. According to this Zoharic thought, the three instances where the divine name is mentioned in Deut. 6:4 corresponds to three of the upper *sefirōt*—divine attributes through which God interacts with creation—thereby embedding a threefold manifestation of the Divine within this Deuteronomic verse. From this perspective, the Zoharic spirit presents a complex, emanational unity, in which multiple aspects of the Divine remain mystically unified.

This exploration of divine uniplurality in mystical and scriptural contexts leads to a closer examination of the biblical usage of divine names and the linguistic underpinnings of Israelite ontological conceptions of the Divine. The Hebrew term *'Adonāy* appears about four hundred and thirty-seven times in the Hebrew Bible. In every instance, its usage refers exclusively to the God of Israel. The name *'Elohīm* appears two thousand six hundred times, with the Book of Psalms containing the highest concentration of these occurrences. Within this biblical corpus, YHVH is frequently equated to *'Elohīm*, "the God of Israel" (cf. Psalm 41:14). At the same time, the Tetragrammaton also appears without the plural title of majesty (*'Adonāy*) in the Hebrew Bible; instead, it occurs with a singular designation referring to the God of Israel: *Hā'adon YHVH 'Elohēy Yisrā'ēl* ("The Lord YHVH, God of Israel"; both in Ex. 23:17 and 34:23). This suggests that the *derekh kāvōd*—"way of honor," understood as a *pluralis majestatis* by 'Ibn 'Ezrā'—is not a uniform syntactic phenomenon within the Hebrew Bible. From this perspective, the uniplurality of *'Adonāy*, YHVH, and *'Elohīm*, as conceptualized hypothetically in ancient Israelite cultic practice, finds expression throughout the *peshāt* of the Scriptures. Such textual reality has long compelled Rabbinic tradition to articulate increasingly persuasive formulations of its conception of God and divine unity. Whether the biblical

[283] ("And this is the daily unification of the Divine, which was revealed through the mystery of the Holy Spirit"), Ibid.

[284] Ibid.

uniplurality associated with the Divine is best understood as a function of Hebrew linguistic convention or as a product of socio-historical and theological development, the concept of monotheism—as it is understood today—appears, in the context of ancient Israelite religion, to have been a fluid and evolving construct. Hence, rather than a fully articulated biblical doctrine, monotheism emerges as an ongoing ideal within Rabbinism—a theological aspiration continually pursued, yet never fully resolved or systematically defined in the Scriptures. Consequently, Maimonidean monotheism may be understood less as a theologically established certainty grounded in the biblical corpus and more as a conceptual framework that struggles to withstand biblical linguistic scrutiny.

Before concluding, it is worth recalling the thought of Martin Buber, who claimed: "To man, the world is twofold, in accordance with his attitudes. Man's attitudes are manifold. Some live in a strange world bounded by a path from which countless ways lead inside. If there were road signs, all of them might bear the same inscription."[285] Buber's reflection underscores the plurality of human perception and, from a similar perspective, the inherently diverse pathways by which the Divine is conceptualized. Yet, while caution is warranted in approaching our subject, textual documentation—particularly the Scriptures—and their linguistic analysis, rather than theologically predetermined conclusions, often yield results that diverge significantly from those maintained by Rabbinism. Thus, this exercise demonstrates that the theological landscape reflected in the biblical text is ultimately far more complex than the systematic formulations of monotheism that later emerged in rabbinic and philosophical traditions. As Andrew Louth observes, "taken as a whole, the religion of the Hebrew Bible cannot really be regarded as monotheistic."[286] While Maimonidean monotheism establishes a powerful theological grammar, its apophatic constraints and insistence upon ontological singularity render certain biblical symbolic densities resistant to full philosophical assimilation. Rabbinism, as Aaron rightly observes, is "quite aware of the paradox implicit in the biblical worldview."[287] The Rabbinic establishment did not require "Judaizing" the Hebrew Bible, for the Scriptures themselves constitute, by definition, an intrinsically Jewish corpus. Rather, selected portions of the Hebrew Bible required what might be called a process of "rabbinization" in order to be rendered conceptually

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[285] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, New York: Touchstone, 1970, p. 11.

[286] Andrew Louth, "The Unity of God: Christians and the Trinity," p. 24, in Nicholas de Lange, Elena Narinskaya, and Sybil Sheridan (Eds.), *Elonei Mamre: The Encounter of Judaism and Orthodox Christianity*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2023, pp. 23-32.

[287] Aaron (2024), *op. cit.*, p. 208.

coherent within the evolving Rabbinic intellectual horizon. Maimonides exhibits a particular sensitivity in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, where he confronts the tension between philosophical conceptions of the Divine and the anthropomorphic—and often theologically ambiguous—language of Scripture. In doing so, he seeks to rationalize the exegetically challenging dynamics that such biblical representations presuppose.[288]

In light of these considerations, the recurring biblical usage of the divine appellations *ʾAdonāy* and *ʾElohīm* reveals a syntactic and semantic tension that resists reduction to a strictly singular conception of the Divine. Within the linguistic fabric of the Hebrew Bible itself, these plural forms function not merely as stylistic conventions but as markers of a theological complexity embedded in the scriptural tradition of ancient Israel. The language of Scripture thus preserves a conceptual horizon in which divine unity is articulated through forms that simultaneously gesture toward plurality, at least at the level of the *peshāt*. In this sense, the biblical portrayal of *ʾAdonāy–ʾElohīm* discloses a uniplural expression of divine substantiality in which the oneness of the God of Israel is affirmed without erasing the layered biblical linguistic and theological structures through which it is revealed. From this perspective, Maimonides' ontological conception of the Divine reveals a profound theological tension, as the literary strata of the Scriptures often diverge from his articulation of monotheism. The Hebrew Bible neither presupposes nor demonstrates awareness of this later theological formulation. Thus, it may be argued that both the Hebrew Bible and Talmud present a God who "can be encountered, but cannot be described"[289]—echoing Maimonides' *via negativa*. Yet, as observed, the biblical language frequently includes syntactic and semantic markers that allude to *gūf hāʾēl* ("the physicality of God") through vivid, and immanent anthropomorphic imagery, alongside non-singular designations of the Divine. These features pose significant exegetical challenges, particularly for those committed to a strictly rationalist reading, thus complicating any attempt to reconcile the biblical portrayal of the Divine with either Menachem Kellner's position or Maimonides' theology. Ultimately, the terms *ʾElohīm* and *ʾAdonāy* remain two "strange biblical truths that are in plural," presenting a theologically intricate and multifaceted depiction of the God that resists the strict parameters of Maimonidean theology. The enduring challenge of articulating rabbinic monotheism thus resides primarily in the biblical text, which presents either a peculiar form of monotheism or a

[288] Abraham Cronbach, "Divine Help as a Social Phenomenon," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 5, (1928), pp. 583-620.

[289] Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 4.

framework that does not conform to classical monotheistic definitions. In this respect, the Hebrew Bible constitutes an obstacle that both challenges and ultimately undermines the ontological conception of the Divine advanced by Maimonidean monotheism.

The above, however, begs the same question Benjamin D. Sommer insightfully asks: "What role then—if any—can the Hebrew Bible have for modern Jewish theology?"[290] While the Scriptures articulate distinctive features of ancient Israelite belief and practice, their primary concern is the exclusivity of cultus directed solely to YHVH. This ascribes to the biblical Israelite deity an emphasis on exclusive cultic loyalty, which may thus be regarded as the foundational element of what would later develop into a seemingly normative biblical monotheism: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2). However, this monotheism does not focus on the ontological unity or oneness of the Divine per se but on exclusive worship of a single deity, YHVH, with all other gods regarded as false idols.[291] From this perspective, the term 'monotheism' denotes belief in or worship of a single god;[292] this is, "one God governs all."[293] In the biblical dictum, this god is YHVH. Within the hierarchy of deities, *ʾAdonāy-YHVH* is the supreme and only God of Israel and the sole creator and ruler of the universe. No other deity equals His greatness: *ʾEin kāmōkhā bāʾelohīm ʾAdonāy*[294] (Psalm 86:8). Even the Gospels reflect this understanding. For instance, Jesus uses the word "only" (John 17:3) to refer to YHVH as the sole true God. Therein, Jesus also states that eternal life depends on recognizing that the God of Israel is the "sole true" deity. This understanding was transmitted even into medieval Christian theological reflection through the authority of the Vulgate: *Hæc est autem vita æterna: ut cognoscant te solum verum Deum.*[295] Moreover, belief in YHVH, who is the one and true God among all deities, is the greatest commandment not only in the Jewish Bible (Deut. 6:4), but also in the Gospels, as Jesus further affirmed in Matthew 12:29. In this manner, one can discern that YHVH symbolizes the supreme God of the Israelite faith, with an exclusive claim to worship and allegiance. From this perspective, it is

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[290] Benjamin D. Sommer, "The Bible as Torah: How J, E, P, and D Can Teach us about God," p. 83 in Leonard Kaplan and Ken Koltun-Fromm (Eds.), *Imagining the Jewish God*, New York: Lexington Books, 2016, pp. 83-102.

[291] Larry W. Hurtado, "Ancient Jewish Monotheism in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods," *Journal of Ancient Judaism*, No. 4, Vol. 3 (2013), pp. 379-400.

[292] Kenneth Seeskin, *Searching for a Distant God: The Legacy of Maimonides*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 23.

[293] Jacob Neusner, *Rabbinic Judaism: The Theological System*, Boston, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002, p. ix.

[294] ("There is none like unto Thee among the gods, O *ʾAdonāy*"), *BHS*, p. 1232.

[295] ("Now, this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God"), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Latin 93. Bible de Saint-Riquier*, Year, ca. 820-840, f. 200r (In Latin. Henceforth: *Ms. Latin 93*)

possible to infer that the monotheism promoted by Rabbinic Judaism, particularly by Maimonides, is not exhaustively biblical; instead, as Kellner notes, "biblical Judaism surely can appear as monolatry."[296]

[296] Kellner (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 14.

3.- Some Aspects of Rabbinic Monotheism and the Limits of Maimonidean Theology

The Abrahamic traditions articulate monotheism as the belief in a single, supreme deity who is also the Creator.[297] Rabbinic Judaism situates itself within this framework, and, as Neusner insightfully notes, it "insists upon norms of beliefs as much as norms of behaviors," thus articulating a monotheism that "affirms the justice of God."[298] Yet the rabbinic tradition approaches the biblical text through a distinct hermeneutical lens. Rather than subordinating Scripture to a predetermined metaphysical schema, rabbinic exegesis seeks to navigate and reconcile the apparent tensions between the multiplicity of divine references in the Hebrew Bible and the demand for a coherent theological conception of God. In doing so, Rabbinism demonstrates both a critical sensitivity to rational philosophical claims and an enduring commitment to preserving the textual, ritual, and narrative integrity of the biblical corpus, albeit through its own interpretive frameworks and philosophical accommodations. Yet when speaking of monotheism, the principal concern of Rabbinism centers on the tension between divine transcendence and immanence. As Ehud Benor notes, this concern shapes much of rabbinic theological reflection.[299] Scholem similarly emphasized this pivotal concern in this tradition[300]—a pattern that Maimonidean theology also follows. Yet for Rabbinism, this represents a significant theological, epistemological, and even ideological challenge, which calls, as David Aaron rightly notes, for "a move toward an interpretative method that could transcend the obvious and literal meanings of both the biblical text and history itself."[301] Thus, as Aaron further notes, Rabbinism "had to fabricate an alternative conceptual structure in which its claims would be inviolable."[302] Maimonides' principles of faith are a philosophical development of this conceptual alternative. Among their theological convictions are the absolute oneness and incorporeality of God and the truth of the Hebrew Bible. These convictions constitute part of the

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[297] Yehudah Tzvi Langermann (Ed.), *Monotheism and Ethics: Historical and Contemporary Intersections among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2012, p. 4.

[298] Neusner (2005), *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[299] Benor (2018), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[300] Breslauer (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

[301] Aaron (2024), *op. cit.*, p. 214.

[302] Ibid.

textual and theological foundation upon which this form of systematized monotheism rests, even as the Scriptures retain an ontological complexity that, upon scrutiny, resists full philosophical abstraction.

Within this theological horizon, the pinnacle of Jewish monotheism finds its biblical articulation in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one." This declaration occupies a central place in rabbinic theology and has become a foundational element of Jewish liturgy. Its profound significance is reflected in its incorporation into daily prayer and its recitation even on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. So deeply embedded is this affirmation in the spiritual consciousness of Judaism that it is emphatically repeated in virtually every act of Jewish worship. Arthur Marmorstein (1882–1946) noted that it became necessary to underscore this concept in the liturgy, since the doctrine of God's unity faced greater opposition from outside the Synagogue and was more susceptible to misinterpretation within it than any other tenet of Judaism.[303] Over time, the recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4 became dogmatic and organically embedded within virtually all expressions of Jewish religiosity, as it conveys a collective affirmation of God's unity. Yet it is not until the medieval period—most precisely during the twelfth century—that we encounter the first comprehensive formulation of the dogmas of Judaism.[304] Eventually, rabbinic monotheism was not only affirmed as a theological principle but also institutionalized as a binding legal and devotional norm, as Neusner observes, "the law, Halakhah, forms Judaism's principal medium of theology and translates details of law into a theological system expressed in patterns of deeds."[305] Thus, rabbinic monotheism emerged both as a conceptual foundation of theological axioms and as a practical halakhic imperative. Maimonides exemplified this dual character in both *Mishneh Tōrāh* and *Sēfer Hammitzvōt*, which articulate the core principles of his monotheistic view.

Later halakhic codifications—less philosophical in nature but more practically oriented—such as Yaʿaqov ben ʾAshshēr's *ʾArbāʿāh Ṭūrīm* and Qāʾrō's *Shulḥān ʿĀrūkh*, continued and complemented this theological endeavor. Yet as a rabbinic legal code rather than a philosophical treatise, Ben ʾAshshēr's *ʾArbāʿāh Ṭūrīm* did not address monotheism in a systematic theological manner. Nevertheless, the idea of monotheism remains foundational and became implicitly woven throughout the *ʾArbāʿāh Ṭūrīm*, particularly in halakhic rulings that affirm God's unity and reject

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[303] Arthur Marmorstein, *Studies in Jewish Theology*, London, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950, p. 73.

[304] Kellner (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[305] Neusner (2005), *op. cit.*, p. 150.

idolatry. For instance, in its ruling on the recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4, the *Ṭūr ʾŌraḥ Ḥayyīm 62* exhorts individuals "to recite" (*veyiqraʾēnnah*) this biblical verse with "awe" (*ʾēymāh*), "with fearful reverence" (*beīrʾāh*), "and utmost intention" (*ūvikhvvānāh*), while "reflecting in one's heart" (*sheyyaḥshov belibō*) "that the Holy One, blessed be He" (*shehaqqadōsh bārūkh hūʾ*), "is One/unique" (*hūʾ yeḥīd*) in His world (*beʿōlāmō*)—both "above" (*lemaʿlāh*) "and below" (*ūlemaṭṭāh*); this is to say, "God is One" (*hūʾ yeḥīd*) both "in heaven" (*bashshāmayim*) "and on earth" (*ūvāʾāretz*).[306] In a similar vein, Rabbī Mosheh ben Yaʿāqov of Coucy (d. 1260), who took part in the defense of the Talmud during the 1240 disputation in Paris, affirms in his *Sēfer Mitzvōt Gadōl*—a work enumerating the 613 commandments—that Moses received the Torah from *ʾAdōn hāʿōlām* ("Master of eternity") at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua ben Nūn, who in turn transmitted it to the Elders, who passed it to the Prophets. The Prophets then conveyed it to the members of the *Bēit Keneset Haggedōlāh* ("the great assembly"). Rabbī Mosheh ben Yaʿaqov emphasized that the wisdom of the Torah has thus been faithfully transmitted from generation to generation up to his own time. This unbroken chain of biblical transmission includes a presumed "revealed truth" that God directly handed to Moses.[307] It is through this transmission that the following commandments are adjured:

> *Lehʾāmīn kī ʾōtō shennātan lānū ʾet Hattōrāh behar Sinaī ʿal-yedeī Mosheh Hūʾ ʾAdonāy ʾElohēynū shehōtzīʾānū mimmitzrayim* [...] *Lehʾāmīn ūlishmōʿā hūʾ haqqabbālāh she Hūʾ ʾeḥād bashshāmayim ūvāʾāretz* [...] *Līrāʾh ʾet Hashshēm hannikhbād vehannōrāʾ* [...] *Leqaddēsh ʾet Shemō haggādōl* [...] *Liqrōʾ qrīʾat Shemaʿ paʿāmayim bekhol yōm.*[308]

These statements emphasize a core principle of Jewish faith: the belief that the one God who redeemed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt is the one who gave them the Torah at Mount Sinai through Moses. They further affirm the continuity between God's role as both liberator and lawgiver, underscoring that the authority of the Torah is rooted not merely in divine command but also in a historical relationship marked by redemption. By linking the Exodus to the revelation at Sinai, this

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[306] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 423. Jacob ben Ašer. Ṭwr* (*ʾwraḥ hayyim*), Year: Fourteenth-Fifteenth Century, ff. 30v, 31r (In Hebrew).

[307] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 370. Moïse ben Jacob de Coucy. Seper miṣwwt gadwl*, Year: 1290, f. 1v (In Hebrew)..

[308] ("To believe that the One who gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai through Moses is the LORD our God who brought us out of Egypt [...] To believe and to listen is the acceptance that He is One in the heavens and on the earth [...] To fear the Honorable and Awesome Name of God [...] To sanctify His Great Name [...] To recite the Shema twice every day"), Ibid., f. 168v.

approach highlights that accepting the Torah likewise constitutes an expression of gratitude and covenantal loyalty to the God who delivered Israel from bondage. To this God, a Jew must sanctify, fear, and bear witness through a twice-daily recitation of His unity, as articulated in Deuteronomy 6:4. *Sēfer Mitzvōt Gadōl* of Mosheh ben Yaʿāqov of Coucy thus represents a composition that marks a significant moment in the integration of halakhic Sephardic thought into the corpus of Ashkenazic legal literature.

In a similar spirit, Joseph Qāʾrō's *Shulḥān ʿĀrūkh* emphatically affirms the unity of God. This principle applies not only to native-born Israelites but also to those who voluntarily join the Jewish people. In discussing the proper halakhic procedure for conversion, Qāʾrō instructs that the prospective convert must be taught the foundational principles of the Jewish faith, as stated in *Yōreh Deʿāh* 268:2: *Ūmōdīʿīn ʾōtō ʿīqqārēy haddāt, shehēm: Yīḥūd YHVH veʾīssūr ʿavōdat kōkhāvīm.*[309] Likewise, *Shulḥān ʿĀrūkh* (*ʾŌraḥ Ḥayyīm* 25:4-5), in its discussion of the halakhic rulings concerning phylacteries, states that one should have in mind, when donning them, that God commanded us to place these four passages (derived from Deut. 6:4), "which contain the unity of His Name" (*sheyyēsh bāhem yīḥūd shemō*), "on the arm opposite the heart" (*ʿal hazzerōʿa keneged hallēv*) "and on the head opposite the brain" (*veʿal hāroʾsh keneged hammōaḥ*), so that we may remember the miracles and wonders that He performed for us in Egypt, "which indicate His unity" (*shehēm mōrīm ʿal yīḥūdō*)"[310]—the very core of rabbinic monotheism.

These halakhic formulations demonstrate that the affirmation of divine unity was not merely a philosophical claim but a normative principle embedded in Jewish legal and devotional life. The most systematic attempt to articulate the doctrinal foundations of this monotheism emerged in the philosophical theology of Rabbī Mosheh ben Maīmōn (1138–1204), known in English as Maimonides and in Hebrew as *Rambam*. Few figures have exerted as enduring an influence on rabbinic monotheism as he. As Menachem Kellner observes, "in terms of his contribution to the Jewish tradition, Maimonides may be fairly characterized as one of the most influential Jews who ever lived,"[311] further noting that he "played a pivotal role in effecting change in the history of the Jewish

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[309] ("The prospective convert must be instructed in the core tenets of the faith: specifically, the oneness of God and the absolute prohibition of idolatry"), *Shulḥān ʿĀrūkh Miṭṭūr Yōreh Deʿah Hanniqrāʾ Bēyt Yōsēf*, Venice: Alvise Bragadin, 1565, f. 88v (In Hebrew).

[310] *Shulḥān ʿĀrūkh Mehāʾarbāʿāh Ṭūrīm Hanniqrāʾ Bēyt Yōsēf*, Venice: Zuan di Gara, 1598, f. 4r (In Hebrew).

[311] Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism*, Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006. p. 1.

tradition."[312] Maimonides stands thus as the preeminent medieval Jewish philosopher and legal scholar who systematized divine unity within a rational, philosophically rigorous framework. His articulation of monotheism represents the paradigmatic expression of rabbinic theological abstraction, presenting a highly systematic account of divine unity grounded in apophatic reasoning and strict ontological singularity. He further cemented his authority as one of the most eminent Jewish scholars of the medieval era through his magnum opus, *Mishneh Tōrāh*—a comprehensive codification of Jewish law, whose "plain, immediate purpose is to portray a historical account of *Halākhāh*."[313] As George Y. Kohler emphasizes, Maimonides' intellectual legacy has profoundly shaped not only classical rabbinic theology but also modern Jewish thought, with even the ethical monotheism espoused by Reform Judaism bearing traces of Maimonidean influence. The enduring centrality of the Maimonidean conception of divine unity, Kohler further notes, attests to the extraordinary scope and lasting authority of his monotheism within Judaism.[314]

Maimonides commences his enumeration of the commandments with the imperatives to "believe"[315] in God and to love Him.[316] The centrality of divine existence is affirmed in his *Mishneh Tōrāh* (*Sēfer Hammaddāʿ*, *Hilchōt Yesōdeī Hattōrāh*) as a formal commandment: *lēdāʿ sheyyēsh shām ʾElōhha* ("To know that there is a God").[317] He grounds this theological imperative in what is traditionally regarded as the First Commandment of Exodus 20:2, "I the LORD am your God." For Maimonides, the "foundation of all foundations" (*yesōd hayyesōdōt*) and "the pillar of all wisdom" (*ʿāmūd haḥokhmōt*) is "to know" (*lēdāʿ*) that "there is a primary being" (*matzūy riʾshōn*) "who brought into existence all that exists" (*mamtzīʾ kol nimtzaʾ*), and that everything found within both the physical and metaphysical realms has derived its existence "from the truth of His being" (*meʾamittat*

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[312] Menachem Kellner, "Maimonides' 'True Religion': For Jews or All Humanity?, p. 96 in Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Aaron W. Hughes (Eds.), *Jewish Universalism*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015, pp. 77-106.

[313] Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides: Life and Thought*, Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 168.

[314] See George Y. Kohler, "Maimonides and Ethical Monotheism: The Influence of the Guide of the Perplexed on German Reform Judaism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century," in James T. Robinson (Ed.), *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, pp. 309-334.

[315] Some translations render this commandment as "to acquire knowledge." See Berel Bell (Trans.), *Sefer haMitzvos of the Rambam: A New Translation Following the Study Schedule* (Vol. 1), Brooklyn: Sichos in English,2013, p. 23.

[316] Joseph Tabory, "The Structure of Mishneh Torah," p. 59, in Carlos Fraenkel (Ed.), *Traditions of Maimonideanism*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, pp. 51-72.

[317] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 339. Moïse Maïmonide (1138-1204). Mišneh twrah. Seper madaʿ-hapla'ah*, Year: Thirteenth Century, f. 7r (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Ms. Hébreu 339*).

himmatzʾō).[318] Maimonides further emphasizes the exclusivity of divine worship by warning against "entertaining the thought that there exists another deity besides God" (*shellʾō yaʿaleh bammaḥshāvāh sheyyēsh shām ʾelōhha ʾaḥēr*), and prohibits "testing God" (*shellʾō lenassōttō*). In contrast to these prohibitions, he commands a series of affirmative theological and devotional acts: "to ascribe unity and absolute oneness to God" (*leyaḥadō*), "to fear Him" (*leyirʾāh mimmenū*), "to sanctify His Name" (*leqaddēsh shemō*), and "to heed the words of the prophet who speaks in His Name (*lishmōʿa min hannāvīʾ hammedabēr bishmō*).[319] These rabbinic precepts, articulated in the *Mishneh Tōrāh*, reflect Maimonides' systematic approach to the theological foundations of Judaism and his insistence on a rigorous monotheistic framework—a doctrine of faith and action that has profoundly shaped the contours of normative Jewish theology.

For Maimonides, the most fundamental principle in Judaism is the acknowledgment of God's unity. In the *Mishneh Tōrāh*, this concept is introduced in the foundational section, the *Sēfer Hammaddāʿ* ("Book of knowledge"), and is expounded at the very beginning of the first treatise, *Hilchōt yesōdēy hattōrāh* ("Laws concerning the foundations of the Torah"). According to Harry A. Wolfson, this opening chapter serves as "a sort of commentary on the following three commandments: "I am the Lord thy God" (Exodus 20:2); "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3); "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4)."[320] Maimonides' interpretation of these biblical verses forms the basis of his doctrine concerning the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God—topics he addresses more systematically in his *Guide of the Perplexed*. For Maimonides, the unity of God's Name (*yīḥūd shemō*) and the singularity of the Divine constitute the greatest fundamental principle of the Law of Moses (*ʿiqqar dat Mosheh*), upon which every other commandment depends (*shehakol tālūy bō*)[321]. God, Maimonides insists, is an absolute one: *ʾElōhha zeh ʾeḥād hūʾ veʾēynō shnayim velʾō yeter ʿal shnayim, ʾellāʾ ʾeḥād*.[322] From this perspective, God is one in the sense that "there is no other among existent deities whose oneness is like His oneness" (*sheʾēyn*

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[318] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 340. Moïse Maïmonide (1138-1204). Mišneh twrah. Seper madaʿ-haplaʾah*, Year: Fifteenth Century, f. 20v (In Hebrew).

[319] Ibid. f. 20r.

[320] Harry A. Wolfson, "Maimonides on the Unity and Incorporeality of God," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Oct., 1965), pp. 112-136.

[321] *Ms. Hébreu 339*, f. 6r.

[322] ("God is one, not two nor more than two, but one"), Ibid., f. 14r.

beyiḥūdō ʾeḥād min hāʾaḥērīm hannimtzāʾīm bāʿōlām).[323] By "oneness," however, Maimonides does not mean "one" within a class of divine beings, but rather an indivisibility that entirely precludes the kind of quantitative composition characteristic of physical bodies.[324] In other words, the declaration "YHVH is one" signifies, for Maimonides, not merely numerical singularity or "oneness" within a species, but the absolute denial of any plurality or division within God, and the rejection of the very possibility that other deities might share in His divinity. Maimonides returns to this obligation in the opening chapter of the *Mishneh Tōrāh*, where he discusses the doctrine of divine unity and writes: *Vīdīʿat dāvār zeh mitzvat ʿasēh*[325] ("And knowing this matter constitutes an affirmative command").

Just as Maimonides sought to systematize the principles of divine unity in response to the intellectual and theological challenges of his own time, earlier thinkers similarly articulated foundational doctrines to safeguard the integrity of Jewish faith within their historical and cultural contexts. For instance, Philo of Alexandria's articulation of seminal principles of reality[326]—likely formulated in response to contemporary views he perceived as contrary to the spirit of the Jewish faith[327]—sets an important precedent for the development of Jewish dogmatic formulations. In *De Opificio Mundi*, focused on the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, Philo insists that there is only one God: a deity that is and has been from eternity, the Creator of the world, who, through His providence, sustains the creation.[328] This approach must be interpreted against the broader socio-historical and intellectual backdrop of Philo's era. As Jacobs argues in his *Principles of the Jewish Faith*, what a Jew should believe has been "conditioned by the special denials of his age, which require to be combated."[329] Hence, historically, it has been a matter of highlighting the ideas and convictions that needed affirmation as core principles of faith in a particular era, rather than being organically Scriptural *per se*—precisely because it was in these contested domains that the Jewish spirit felt most profoundly challenged. Thus, the formulation of dogma was rarely the result of a purely objective

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[323] Ibid.

[324] Wolfson (1965), *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

[325] *Ms. Hébreu 339*, f. 15v.

[326] Gregory E. Sterling (Ed.), *Philo of Alexandria: On the Creation of the Cosmos According to Moses* (Trans. by David T. Runia), Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001, p. 115.

[327] Louis Jacobs, *Principles of the Jewish Faith,* London: Jason Aronson, 1988, p. 9

[328] Francis Henry Colson and George Herbert Whitaker (Ed. and Trans.), *Philo I,* (Loeb Classical Library), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949, pp. 135-137.

[329] Jacobs (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

investigation into classical sources of Judaism aimed at systematically uncovering the theological foundations of the Mosaic tradition.[330]

Maimonides' monotheistic approach, however, did not emerge in a vacuum; it developed within the broader intellectual milieu of his time, influenced by Muslim, Christian, and Karaite thought. Living in medieval Christian Iberia and under Islamic rule in parts of Hispania, Maimonides was influenced by the inter-religious and philosophical environment surrounding him. This context significantly influenced his theological and intellectual approach, particularly in his formulation of Jewish dogma and his engagement with rationalist philosophy. Thus, the development of Jewish dogma was often conditioned by socio-historical pressures, prevailing philosophical currents, and the need to respond to theological challenges both within and outside the Jewish community. In this manner, Maimonides exemplifies how creed formation functioned as both a means of preservation and as a dynamic engagement with the intellectual climate of his era. His emphasis, as Louis Jacobs highlighted, was "on faith," on correct Jewish belief."[331] As Kellner observed, "Maimonides was the first non-Karaite Jewish author systematically, self-consciously, and explicitly to posit specific beliefs which all Jews *qua* Jews had to accept."[332]

For Maimonides, the rabbis constitute the maxim of Jewish authority. The supreme *Sanhedrīn*, he asserts, is "the great court in Jerusalem and principal foundation of rabbinic law, pillars of instruction from whom statutes and judgements issue forth for the entire Jewish people": *Bēt dīn haggādōl shebīrūshālayim hēm ʿiqqar Tōrāh shebeʿal peh vehēm ʿammūdēy hahorāʾāh ūmēhem ḥoq ūmishpāṭ yotzēʾ lekhol Yisrāʾēl.*[333] In other words, the Rabbis are the mediators of Jewish instruction; anyone who believes in Moses and his law is commanded to follow their directives—the core of which is the belief in God's unity as Deut. 6:4 instructs. This tenet is also found in the Gospels (Mark 12:29): "And Jesus answered: The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; YHVH is our God, YHVH is one." Similarly, recognition of the authority of the rabbis and adherence to their teaching is underscored in the Gospel of Matthew (23:1-3): "*Tóte ho Iēsoûs elálēsen tois óchlois kai tois mathētaîs autoû. Légōn: Epì tês Mōyséōs kathédras ekáthisan hoi grammateîs kai hoi Pharisaîoi. Pánta oun hosa*

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[330] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[331] Jacobs (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[332] Kellner (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[333] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 347. Moïse Maïmonide. Mishneh Torah. פר עבודה-שופטים*, Year: 1323, f. 268r (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Ms. Hébreu 347*).

[*a*]*eàn eípōsin hymin poiḗsate kai tēreîte*."[334] Here, Jesus charges both Jews and his disciples with observing the words of the masters and scribes of the Mosaic Law.[335] In this regard, Maimonides further warns in *Mishneh Tōrāh* (*Sēfer Shōfṭīm* 1): *Kol mī she'ēynō ʿōseh kehōrā'ātān ʿōvēr bel'ō taʿaseh*.[336] Thus, Maimonides insists that taking faith in the words of the rabbis is compulsory. Yet, for him, ultimate belief is "to know that faith is not only that which we utter with the lips, but that which is apprehended by the soul," as expressed in his *Guide of the Perplexed* (Part I 50:1): *Daʿ 'attāh hammaʿayēn bema'amār zeh kī hā'emunāh 'eynāh hāʿinyān hanne'emār bapeh 'avāl hāʿinyān hammetzūyār bannefesh*.[337] Hence, Maimonides further warns:

> Those who believe that God is One yet has many attributes declare His unity with their lips while conceiving plurality in their thoughts. This is similar to the doctrine of Christians, who believe that God is one but also three, and that the three are One. The same applies to those who claim that God is One but has many attributes, and that with His attributes He is One.[338]

This cautionary observation serves as a warning, particularly for Jewish mystics, for whom the Divine is revealed to creation through His attributes and manifestations—the *sefirōt*. Such theological complexity of mediation challenges the strict limits of Maimonidean thought, whose culmination is expressed in Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith, which translate philosophical monotheism into the doctrinal and liturgical core of Judaism. From this vantage point, his fifth principle (the imperative to worship God exclusively[339]) articulates the foundational tenets of his monotheistic theology. Maimonides's principles of faith were initially articulated in his first major work, the *Commentary on*

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[334] ("Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying: The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do"), Alan Hugh M'neile (Ed.), *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1915, pp. 329-330.

[335] Donald A. McKenzie, *Otfrid von Weissenburg: Narrator of Commentator? A Comparative Study*, Stanford and London: Stanford University Press, Oxford University Press, 1946, p. 40.

[336] ("Any person who does not carry out their directives transgresses a negative commandment"), *Ms Hébreu 347*, f. 268v.

[337] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 688. Moïse Maïmonide. Dalālaï al-ḥā'rīn* (*hébreu*), Year: Fourteenth Century, f. 27v (In Hebrew).

[338] Michael Friedlaender (Ed.), *The Guide for the Perplexed by Moses Maimonides. Translated from the Original Arabic Text* (2nd Edition), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1904, p. 67

[339] For an insightful analysis on Maimonides' fifth principle of faith, see Marc B. Shapiro, *The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised*, London: Liverpool University Press, 2004, pp. 78-86.

the Mishnah.[340] Originally composed in Arabic under the title *Kitāb al-Sirāj* ("The Book of Illumination") and later translated into Hebrew by Samuel Ibn Tibbon (ca. 1160-1230), this work presents Maimonides' most systematic doctrinal formulation.[341] Maimonides' principles emerged, at least in part, from his effort to correlate theological doctrine with the structural framework of *Mishnāh Sanhedrīn*, specifically the section known as *Pereq Ḥeleq*, upon which he was originally commenting.[342] As Daniel J. Silver notes, this is the "locus of the often debated and more often venerated 'thirteen articles of faith'."[343] In advancing them, Maimonides became, as Kellner notes, "the first non-Karaite Jewish author systematically, self-consciously, and explicitly to posit specific beliefs which all Jews *qua* Jews had to accept."[344] Hence, Maimonides' thirteen principles function as perhaps the closest equivalent to a "Jewish catechism"[345]—a kind of doctrinal summa within Rabbinism—and, as Marc B. Shapiro observes, "a foundational articulation of Orthodox Jewish dogma."[346] Thus, Maimonides' principles mark a pivotal consolidation of rabbinic theology, setting enduring boundaries for orthodoxy.

Over time, Maimonides' principles transcended their strictly philosophical context, entering broader Jewish religious life and appearing in "folk songs and liturgical poems that have been incorporated into daily prayers,"[347] most notably serving as the foundation for the well-known synagogue hymn *Yigdal*, thereby embedding Maimonides' theological vision into the very fabric of Jewish liturgical life.[348] Yet the authority and eventual widespread reception of these principles did not bring theological debate to a close. Just as Maimonides' *Mishneh Tōrāh* did not bring an end to traditional Talmudic dialectics but instead deepened the halakhic dialogue, so too the formulation of his principles propelled Jewish thought into new theological, spiritual, and intellectual horizons that

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[340] Ibid., p. 6.

[341] *Ms. Hébreu 674*, ff. 74v-102v.

[342] Ibid., ff. 46r-59v.

[343] Daniel Jeremy Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180-1240*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965, p. 32.

[344] Kellner (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[345] Shapiro (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[346] Ibid., pp. 2, 26.

[347] Michal Aziza Ohana, "Rabbi Raphael Berdugo's Reshaping of Maimonides's Thirteen Principles of Faith, p. 36, in Michaela Torbidoni (Ed.), *Maimonides Review of Philosophy and Religion* (Vol. 4), Leiden: Brill, 2025, pp. 26-63.

[348] Aryeh Kaplan, *Maimonides' Principles: The Fundamentals of Jewish Faith,* New York: Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, 1984, p. 3; Shapiro (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

remain central to ongoing Jewish discourse. The theological significance of these principles is such that Jewish thinkers were compelled either to continue engaging with them or to confront them.[349]

Although many of Maimonides' principles are not found explicitly in the Torah,[350] they can also be understood as a systematic theological response to the themes of reward, punishment, and eschatology addressed in the Mishnah—particularly the stark declaration that "all Israel has a share in the World to Come [...], but these have no share."[351] This list of exceptions includes various heretics and transgressors, some of whom are condemned with severe spiritual consequences. Maimonides thus seizes an opportunity not only to comment on the legal and moral implications of such matters but also to articulate a clear framework of what constitutes the "correct" belief in Judaism. In this context, Maimonides strongly rejected mystical interpretations of the Torah and the Hebrew Bible, to such an extent that, as Shapiro notes, "he might have been tempted to agree with the late Yeshayahu Leibowitz and condemn as heretics all Kabbalists."[352] For Maimonides, any interpretation of the ontology of the God of Israel that implies potential multiplicity—and any denial of his principles—is classified as heretical and a deviation from Jewish authentic belief and theological understanding. As far as Rabbinism is concerned, heresy is also defined by Maimonides' principles; namely, "one who does not acknowledge the language of Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith is deemed a heretic."[353]

The problem of divine multiplicity was already addressed in earlier rabbinic sources. In the Mishnah, for instance, one finds one of the earliest rabbinic prescriptions for potential Jewish challenges to rabbinic monotheism. In *Seder Zerāʿīm, Massekhet Brākhōt* 5:3, the Mishnah offers a polemical response against both Gnostic and dualistic worldviews: *hāʾōmēr ʿal qan tzipōr yaggīʿū raḥamēkhā, veʿal ṭōv yizzākher shemekhā, mōdīm modīm, mashtteqīn ʾōtō.*[354] This early rabbinic passage engages directly with the theological tension between divine immanence and transcendence. Since the Hebrew Bible itself does not present a fully systematized monotheism, it leaves room for a range

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[349] Shapiro (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[350] Ibid., p. 33.

[351] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 328. Michnah* (*hébreu*) *accompagnée du commentaire de Maïmonide*, Year: 1399, f. 277r (Henceforth *Ms. Hébreu 328*. In Hebrew).

[352] Shapiro (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[353] Ibid.

[354] (One who says, 'May Your mercies extend to the bird's nest,' and 'May Your Name be remembered for the good,' or who repeats 'We give thanks, we give thanks'—we silence him), National Library of Israel, Department of Manuscripts, *Ms. 1435, Krupp Michael, Seder Zerāʿīm*, Year: Eighteenth Century, f. 3r (In Hebrew).

of interpretations, including dualistic ones. Consequently, the Mishnaic sages were compelled to confront such possibilities, particularly given that during the late Second Temple and early rabbinic periods, Gnostic and dualistic worldviews formed part of the broader intellectual and religious milieu in which the Mishnah was compiled. Within this context, the framers of the Mishnaic ruling in *Brākhōt* 5:3 mandated the silencing of anyone who makes seemingly benign theological statements—such as double-fold expressions of gratitude to God—that could be interpreted, whether explicitly or implicitly, as suggesting cosmic dualism. This rationale underlines the logic of *birkat hamminīm*, the so-called "blessing against heretics," through which those who espouse or imply dualistic theological views are first silenced and ultimately excluded. Yet, however noble these efforts were to safeguard monotheism, the presence of seemingly non-monotheistic elements within the biblical text has remained a complex and enduring challenge that no liturgical formulation can yet silence.

Our monotheistic question becomes significantly more intricate when we consider not only the linguistic challenges of the Scriptures but also the role of heavenly intermediaries in both the Hebrew Bible and Jewish mystical traditions. At this point, a new and significant challenge emerges—one that presses forcefully against the foundations of Maimonidean monotheism: the problem of Jewish binitarianism.[355] By binitarianism, however, I refer not only to the belief in two opposing cosmic forces but also to the implication of dual divine agency and binary modes of divine manifestation, namely, the tension between God's immanence and transcendence—a theological dilemma with which Rabbinism has grappled since its birth. Rabbinic monotheism, nevertheless, has been shaped in such a way that biblical words and expressions gradually acquired new meanings, emerging through semantic and socio-historical developments, and the theological innovations of rabbinic interpretation. The Maimonidean insistence on the fixed meaning of nomenclatures designating divine ontology in Scripture may also be understood as a matter of rabbinic lexical semantics and linguistic analysis. Concerning this phenomenon, Paul Ricœur argued:

> *Une sémantique lexicale est possible, parce qu'on peut comprendre le sens d'un mot isolé* [...] *Il faut donc admettre que, quelle que soit l'importance des divers contextes, les mots ont une signification permanente par laquelle ils désignent certains référents et non d'autres.*[356]

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[355] Daniel Boyarin, "The Gospel of the *Memra*: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue of John," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 94, No. 3 (Jul., 2001), pp. 243-284.

[356] ("A lexical semantics is possible because one can understand the meaning of an isolated word [...] It must therefore be admitted that, whatever the importance of various contexts, words have a permanent meaning through which they refer to certain referents and not to others"), Paul Ricœur, *La Métaphore Vive*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975, pp. 143-144.

From this perspective, one may discern that the uniplural Hebrew appellations of the Divine in Scripture have come to function as enduring rabbinic designations whose permanent semantic significance refers to the absolute singularity and incorporeality of God, despite the grammatical dynamism present in the Jewish Bible. This theological development illustrates how the scriptural conception of the God of Israel was ontologically redefined through rabbinic semantics. As Louth observes, "the traditions of the Hebrew Bible were interpreted through the writings of the Mishnah and the Talmud."[357] Thus, rabbinic interpretation of biblical divine ontology and the theological reconfiguration it entails—however *bona fide* in its intentions—tends to attenuate the complex and multifold presentation of the Divine found in the biblical text. In this sense, heresy is not attributed solely to those who challenge the theological coherence of Maimonidean doctrine but may also be directed against those who adhere strictly to the *peshāt* of Scripture. As Aaron notes, "the power of language to stigmatize certain behaviors as warranting the death of a perpetrator shapes the social reality at both a cognitive and hermeneutic level."[358]

Consequently, the denial of Maimonides' principles within Judaism came to be regarded as a threat to the socio-religious and moral fabric of Rabbinism. One who rejects their doctrinal language is therefore categorized as a heretic, whose fate corresponds to that which Maimonides, in his youth, prescribed for the Karaites—those Jews who do not derive their theological authority from the Talmud but ground it instead in Scripture—namely, capital punishment and exclusion from the world to come.[359] Yet Maimonides' vision in *Pereq Ḥeleq* raises a theological question: on what basis is one deemed worthy or unworthy of the world to come? In response, Maimonides articulates his thirteen principles as the doctrinal boundary lines of what he regards as authentic Jewish faith. They delineate who may be considered a "true believer" and, by extension, who merits inclusion in the "world to come." By establishing these dogmas—including belief in God's unity and incorporeality, the divine origin and immutability of the Mosaic Law, the belief in the Messiah and resurrection—Maimonides offers a rational and systematic response to the Mishnah's seemingly categorical judgments. In doing so, he reorients the discussion from religious behavior to the centrality of belief, positioning correct theology as a prerequisite for eschatological reward.

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[357] Louth (2023), *op. cit.*, p. 24.

[358] Aaron (2024), *op. cit.*, p. 264.

[359] Daniel J. Lasker, *From Judah Hadassi to Elijah Bashyatchi: Studies in Late Medieval Karaite Philosophy*, Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 159.

Building upon Maimonides' systematic articulation of Jewish belief, subsequent thinkers in the Iberian Jewish intellectual world sought to interpret, adapt, and transmit the Maimonidean theological vision for new audiences and contexts—most notably Shēm-Ṭōv ben Yōsēf Falaqerah (1225-1290), a prominent 13th-century Spanish-Jewish philosopher, poet, and translator. Deeply persuaded by Maimonides' thought, particularly *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Falaqerah regarded it as a cornerstone of Jewish philosophy. In an effort to make Maimonides' complex ideas accessible, he authored summaries, translations, commentaries, and adaptations—most notably in his work *Mōreh Hamōreh* ("Guide to the Guide"), a philosophical commentary and summary of *The Guide for the Perplexed*.[360] He also sought to bridge the gap between philosophy and traditional Judaism, defending the legitimacy of intellectual inquiry within a religious framework. In his pursuit of comprehensive Jewish truth (*mōfēt ʾamittī*), Falaqerah, influenced by Maimonides, encourages the consideration of three fundamental aspects of divine reality, and argues: *Klōmar, metzīʾat habōrʾē yitbārakh, veyiḥūdō, veshe'ēynō gūf.*[361] According to Falaqerah, these theological principles can be affirmed independently of the longstanding metaphysical debate regarding whether the world is eternal (as Aristotle argued) or created *ex nihilo* (as maintained by Maimonides). This approach reflects a Maimonidean-influenced position, namely, that the acknowledgment of God's existence, oneness, and incorporeality holds greater theological and spiritual significance than questions of cosmology. In other words, for Falaqerah—as for Maimonides—the essential truths of Jewish theology are not contingent upon the metaphysical status of creation, but rather lie in the proper understanding of the nature of God. In the socio-historical context of Christian absolutism across much of Hispania and the ongoing Islamic occupation of Iberia (711-1492), Falaqerah's chief objective was to enlighten his fellow Jews. Falaqerah's approach thus supports the affirmation of foundational theological principles within the broader framework of Jewish orthodoxy, as structured by Maimonides, whose theological emphasis rests on faith. Namely, the correct Jewish belief is grounded on his monotheistic view, which constitutes, in the words of Louis Jacobs (1920-2006), "a supreme value."[362] Eventually, as Solomon Schechter (1847-1915) argued, it was "history which furnished the details."[363] Today, Jewish Orthodoxy is largely identified

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[360] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 704. Shem Tov ben Joseph Falaquera. Commentaire du Guide des Égarés*, Year: 1391, f. 21r (In Hebrew).

[361] ("The existence of the Creator, may He be blessed, His unity, and incorporeality"), Ibid., f. 21r.

[362] Jacobs (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[363] Schechter (1909), *op. cit.*, p. xi.

with Maimonides' principles, which, as Shapiro notes, represent "the last word in Rabbinic theology."[364]

Originally written in Arabic, Maimonides' principles appear in his commentary on the tenth chapter of Mishnah Tractate Sanhedrīn (*Pereq Ḥeleq*), which, as Bracha Elitzur notes, "deals with the practical aspects of beliefs and opinions that are put to the test of interfaith polemics."[365] Eventually, they became what Abraham Melamed describes as "the standard for Jewish orthodoxy."[366] Among the translators of this work into Hebrew was Rabbī Yehūdāh ben Shlomoh ʾAlḥarīzī (1170-1235), who styled himself *hasfārddī hayyādūʿa* ("the renowned Spaniard").[367] ʾAlḥarīzī, who was part of the broader movement of translators who rendered several of Maimonides' works into Hebrew—a literary and intellectual enterprise that flourished in Provence during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and played a decisive role in transmitting Maimonidean philosophy to the Hebrew-reading Jewish communities of medieval Iberia[368]—recounts that, for the purpose of translating Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah, "he was summoned to a *bēyt ketīvōt* ("house of writing") in the city of Marseille, France, which sits upon the gateways of the sea."[369] It is during this effort that he described Maimonides' principles as *ʿiqqārīm gedōlīm min hāʾemūnōt, yaqārīm ūnikhbādīm*[370]—that is, "great principles of the faith, precious and honorable." A copy of his translation is preserved in manuscript *Ms. Hébreu 328*, at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, in Paris. This manuscript includes ʾAlḥarīzī's presentation of Maimonides' thirteenth principles of faith, which he calls *yesōdōt*[371] ("foundations"). Those pertaining to God's unity, incorporeality, and the divine nature of the Torah (principles 1, 2, 3, and 5) are outlined as follows:

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[364] Shapiro (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[365] Bracha Elitzur, "All Israel Have a Share in the World to Come" - Except for Whom? The Criteria for Selecting the Exceptions in the Mishnah and the Tosefta," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 95 (2025), pp. 1-38.

[366] Abraham Melamed, "Maimonides' Thirteen Principles: From Elite to Popular Culture," p. 176, in James T. Robinson (Ed.), N*ew Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, pp. 171-190.

[367] *Ms. Hébreu 328*, f. 1r.

[368] See Mordechai Z. Cohen, *Opening the Gates of Interpretation: Maimonides' Biblical Hermeneutics in Light of His Geonic-Andalusian Heritage and Muslim Milieu*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011, p. 18; and Ram Ben-Shalom, *The Jews of Provence and Languedoc*, London, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017.

[369] *Ms. Hébreu 328*, f. 1r.

[370] *Ms. Hébreu 674*, f. 46r.

[371] *Ms. Hébreu 328*, f. 280r.

1.- *Hāriʾshōn. Lehaʾamīn bametzīʾūt Habōrʾē yitbārakh. Vehūʾ sheyēsh shām nimtzāʾ shālem bekhol darkhēy hammetzīʾūt. Hūʾ ʿillat metzīʾūt hannimtzāʾīm kūllām, ūbō qīūm metzīʾūtān, ūmimmennū qīūmām. Veʾillū yaʿaleh ʿal hallēv heʿeddēr metzīʾūtō, nitbaṭṭēl metzīʾūt kol hannimtzāʾīm, velʾō nishʾar nimtzāʾ sheyyitqayyēm metzīʾūtō. Veʾim naʿeleh ʿal libēnū heʿeddēr hannimtzāʾīm kūllām zūlātō lʾō yibaṭṭēl metzīʾūt Hashshēm yitbārakh, velʾō yigraʿ. Veʾēyn hāʾaḥdūt ʾellāʾ lō levaddō, yitbārakh Shemō, kī Hūʾ misttapēq bemetzīʾūtō veday lō beʿatzmō, veʾēyn tzarīkh bemtzīʾūtō lezulātō. Vekhol mah shezūlātō min hammalʾākhīm ūgūfēy haggalggallīm ūmah sheyyēsh betōkhan ūmah shellemaṭṭāh mēhen hakol tzrīkhīn bemtzīʾūtām ʾēlāv. Vezeh hayyesōd hāriʾshōn, mōreh ʿālāv dibūr: ʾĀnokhī YYY ʾEloheīkhā.*

2.- *Hayyesōd hashshēynī. Yiḥūdō yitbārakh, klōmar, shennaʾamīn shezzeh Hūʾ sibat hakol ʾeḥād veʾēynō keʾeḥād hazzūg, velʾō keʾeḥād hammīn, velʾō keʾīsh hāʾeḥād shehūʾ neḥlaq laʾaḥādīm rabīm, velʾō ʾeḥād kmō haggūf hapāshūṭ hāʾeḥād bamminyān shemmeqabēl haḥīllūq leʾēyn sōf. ʾAvāl Hūʾ yitbārakh ʾeḥād beʾaḥdūt sheʾēyn kemōtāh ʾaḥdūt, vezeh hayyesōd hashshēynī mōreh ʿālāv mah shenneʾemar: Shemaʿ Yisrāʾēl YYY ʾEloheīnū, YYY ʾeḥād.*

3.- *Hayyesōd hashshelīshī. Shelīlat haggashmūt mimmennū. Vezeh shennaʾamīn kī hāʾeḥād hazzeh shezzākharnū ʾēynō gūf velʾō koaḥ bagūf, velʾō yassīguhū meʾōrʿūt haggufīm kegōn hattnūʿāh vehannūḥōt vehashshīkhūn, lʾō mitzad ʿatzmūt velʾō bemiqreh* […] *ʾIllū hāyā gūf hāyāh dōmeh laggūfīm, vekhol mah bikhtvēy haqqodesh shemmetāʾarīm ʾōtō bitʾārēy haggūfōt – hakol derekh hasheʾēlāh* […] *Vehayyesōd hashshelīshī hazzeh hūʾ mōreh ʿālāv mah shenneʾemar: Kī lʾō reʾītem kol-t-temūnāh. Klōmar, lʾō hissegettem ʾōtō baʿal temūnāh, lefī shehūʾ, kmō shezzākharnū, ʾēynō gūf velʾō koaḥ bagūf.*

5.- *Hayyesōd haḥamīshī. Shehūʾ yitbārakh, hūʾ hārāʾūy laʿavādō ūlegaddlō ūlehōdīʿō gedūllātō velaʿasōt mitzvōtāv. Veshellʾō yāʿāsū kāzeh lemī shehūʾ taḥttāv bammetzīʾūt min hammalʾākhīm, vehakōkhāvīm vehaggalggallīm, vehayyesōdōt ūmah shehūrkav mēhem. Lefī shekullām mūṭbāʿīm ʿal peʿūlātām ʾēyn mishpāṭ velʾō beḥīrāh, ʾellāʾ lō levaddō yitbārakh* […] *ʾĒlāv bilvad yekhavnū hammaḥshāvōt veyannīḥū kol mah shezūlātō. Vezeh hayyesōd haḥamīshī, hūʾ shehizhīr ʿal ʿavōdāh zārāh, verōv hattōrāh mazheret ʿālāv.*[372]

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[372] (1. First Principle: To believe in the existence of the Creator, blessed be He. That is: that there is a Being who is perfect in every aspect of existence. He is the cause of the existence of all that exists, and in Him is the sustaining of their existence, and from Him is their continuance. And if the absence of His existence could be conceived in the heart, the existence of all that exists would be nullified, and no being would remain whose existence could be sustained. But if we imagine the absence of all beings other than Him, His existence would not be nullified or diminished. For unity and sovereignty belong only to Him, blessed be His Name, for He suffices in His existence, and is self-sufficient in Himself; and He does not need anything else to exist. And everything apart from Him—the angels, the celestial spheres, the stars, the elements, and all that is composed of them—all of them require Him for their existence. This is the first principle, and it is expressed in the divine utterance: "I am YHVH your God" (Ex. 20:2). 2. Second Principle: The unity of the Creator, blessed be He. That is, we believe that God, who is the cause of everything, is One, and not like one in a pair, or one of a species, or like a human individual who can be divided into many parts. Nor is He one like a simple body counted as a unit but divisible *ad infinitum*. Rather, He is One in a unity that has no comparison—a unique oneness unlike any other. This second principle is expressed in the verse: "Hear, O Israel: YHVH is our God, YHVH is One" (Deut. 6:4). 3. Third Principle: The negation of corporeality in relation to God. This means that we believe that the One whom we mentioned is not a body, nor a power within a body, and that He is not subject to physical properties such as motion, rest, or location, not essentially and not incidentally […] For if He were similar to a body, He would resemble other bodies. And everything that appears in the Holy Scriptures describing Him with bodily attributes—such as walking, standing, sitting, speaking, etc.—all of it is metaphorical language […] This third principle is based on what is said in the Law: "For you saw no image" (Deut. 4:15). Meaning, you did not perceive Him as having a form—because, as we said, He is not a body nor a force within a body. 5. Fifth Principle: That He, blessed be He, alone is worthy of being worshipped, exalted, and made known for His greatness, and that His commandments alone are to be fulfilled. And that such honor or service must not be given to anyone beneath Him in the order of existence—not to angels, nor to stars, celestial spheres, elements, or anything composed of them. For all of them are governed by natural laws, and over their actions they have no judgment or choice—only He alone, blessed be He, does […] The thoughts must be directed only to Him, and all else must be set aside. And this fifth principle is the basis of the warnings of the Law of Moses against idolatry, and indeed, the majority of the Torah's commandments warn against it"), Ibid., f. 28ov.

Thus, for Maimonides, belief in his principles is essential to being a Jew.[373] Yet the dogmatic weight of these theological postulations reflects the power of language embedded within a rigid structure of quasi-pontifical principles that present themselves as ultimate truths—even when certain aspects diverge from the Hebrew Bible. Despite the sophistication of Maimonides' philosophical and theological system, his rigorous conclusions, shaped by medieval rationalist commitments, do not fully accord with the more nuanced, relational ontology of God found in the Masoretic corpus. As Shapiro notes, some of Maimonides' principles do not align seamlessly with the biblical text; that is, they are not explicitly grounded in Scripture or, at best, rest on a weaker biblical foundation.[374] For instance, the ontological notion of "God's absolute unity" (*hūʾ yāḥīd*—second principle), or the conception of God's nature as "incorporeal and with no form or likeness" (*ʾēynō gūf veʾēyn lō shūm dimiyōn klāl*—third principle), which becomes problematic when examined through a biblical prism. This tension suggests a process of doctrinal development and reinterpretation that transcends the *peshāt* of the Hebrew Bible. Conversely, other Maimonidean dogmas, such as the ontological characterization of the Divine as "the Creator and primary cause of all that exists" (*hūʾ bōrʾē*—first principle), or the expectation and belief with perfect faith in the coming of a personal and national redeemer or Messiah (*gōʾēl*—"twelfth principle), and even a cosmic role of the Messiah, are grounded in scriptural principle, and represent prophetic assumptions without which Judaism would be difficult to conceive.[375] As Neusner contends, any theological account of Judaism's epistemological understanding of God's personhood must begin with the affirmation of God as the sole Creator of the world, the giver of the Torah, and the redeemer of Israel.[376] Yet other Maimonidean principles are challenged not only by the language of the Hebrew Bible but by mystical strains of Jewish thought as well, most notably, but not exclusively, God's status as the only legitimate object of worship and praise (*lō levaddō rʾāūy lehitpallēl*—"to Him alone is it proper to pray," fifth principle), and the oneness and incorporeality of the Divine. These themes became pivotal in medieval Jewish exegesis and mystical literatures, particularly among the sages of Iberia and the Ashkenazi pietist circles of central and, later, eastern Europe.

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[373] Shapiro (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[374] Shapiro (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[375] Moshe Idel, "Multiple Forms of Redemption in Kabbalah and Hasidism," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (Winter, 2011), pp. 27-70.

[376] Jacob Neusner, Bruce Chilton, and William Graham, *Three Faiths, One God: The Formative Faith and Practice of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Boston, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002, p. 59.

While biblical materials may be reinterpreted as pedagogical accommodations, Maimonidean monotheism risks attenuating their theological surplus and flattening the richness of their symbolic worlds. This arises from Maimonides' strict ontological claims regarding divine oneness: he admits no internal differentiation, insisting that God is free of any composition—whether of essence, existence, form, or matter. Consequently, all divine profusion is excluded at the level of being. Divine unity functions thus as a doctrinal boundary, effectively excluding ontological alternatives, since any divine multiplicity of being and becoming threatens rabbinic monotheism itself. The claims eventually acquired normative status in Rabbinic theology. From this perspective, any attempt to reopen the question of ontological complexity within divine unity—whether through hypostatic structures, sefirotic configurations, or exalted angelic mediators—inevitably challenges the normative authority of Maimonides' monotheistic framework and risks charges of heresy. The issue is then, as Noson Gurary notes, how to "draw a distinction between God's essence and God's manifestation; since, of God as He is in Himself, as the Neo-Platonists say, nothing can be said."[377] In this light, God's nature remains unfathomable to humanity. Maimonides, hence, grasps the Divine through *via negativa:*

> The doctrine that no affirmative or positive attributes of any kind are predicable of God, that God is completely unknown and unknowable, that we can meaningfully say about God only what He is not; the doctrine that man's highest knowledge of God is to know that we are unable to know Him[378].

Conversely, Kabbalistic theology reframes the question of divine unknowability by transforming negation into a mystical mode of cognition. As Elliot R. Wolfson writes:

> The ladder of knowledge culminates with gnosis rather than ignorance [...] the ultimate knowledge of God consists of knowing that one does not know [...] a not-knowing understood as a form of knowing [...] Alternatively expressed, the negation of affirmation implied in the Maimonidean via negativa is transposed through the kabbalistic ideal of contemplative vision into an affirmation of negation."[379]

Thus, whereas Maimonides resolves the problem of divine unknowability through apophatic restraint, Kabbalistic thought transforms that very negation into a pathway toward mystical cognition and

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[377] Louis Jacobs, *Judaism and Theology: Essays on the Jewish Religion*, London, Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005, p. 1.

[378] See Isaac Franck, "Maimonides and Aquinas on Man's Knowledge of God: A Twentieth Century Perspective," *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 38 (March 1985), pp. 591-615; and Buijs (1988), *op. cit.*

[379] Wolfson (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 442.

experiential knowledge of the Divine. These differing approaches to divine knowledge highlight the broader challenge of articulating a coherent theological account of God within Judaism.

On God's incorporeality, Maimonides argues that physical substance inherently contains plurality; every material entity is divisible, and therefore plural. Since the Divine cannot be divided, God must be, ipso facto, incorporeal: "If there were many gods they would have a body and a form" (*'illū hāyū 'elohūt harbēh hāyū gūfīn ūgvīyōt*), for "it is impossible to have a body and have no end" (*she'ī 'efshār lihyōt gūf she'ēyn lō qētz*), since "everything that has a limit and end to its body also has a limit and end to its strength" (*vekhol sheyyēsh legūfō qētz vetakhlīt yēsh lekoḥō qētz vāsōf*). By contrast, "our God [...] since His power has no limit and does not cease" (*hō'īl vekoḥō 'ēyn lō qētz ve'eynō pōsēq*).[380] Hence, for Maimonides, God cannot possess a body, because corporeality implies finitude and limitation—conditions incompatible with the nature of the Divine. Maimonides also maintains that "since a body cannot be at the same time in two different places" (*vehaggūf l'ō yihyeh bishnēy meqōmōt*), God likewise cannot be corporeal.[381]

Such reasoning invites analogical reconsideration when viewed through modern conceptual frameworks. For instance, in quantum mechanics, the theory of quantum superposition dictates that it is impossible to know every property of a particle with absolute certainty. According to the principles of quantum superposition, a particle may exist in a state of superposition, namely, occupying multiple potential states or locations simultaneously—a notion "completely opposed to classical ideas, according to which the result of any observation is certain and for any two states there exists an observation that will certainly lead to two different results."[382] Only observation collapses this superposition into a determinate state: "The act of observation itself is the nonlinear mechanism causative of state reduction."[383] Consequently, within a quantum system, a particle remains in a continuum of superposed possibilities—"a statistical mixture of states"[384]—until it interacts with an external environment. This is one of the most enigmatic features of quantum theory. While these

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[380] *Ms. Hébreu 339*, ff. 14r, 15v.

[381] Ibid., 15v.

[382] Paul Adrien Maurice Dirac, *The Principles of Quantum Mechanics*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1930, pp. 15-16.

[383] Michael Epperson, *Quantum Mechanics and the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2012, p. 51.

[384] Christof Wunderlich and Christoph Balzer, "Quantum Measurements and New Concepts for Experiments with Trapped Ions," p. 295, in Benjamin Bederson and Herbert Walther (Eds.), *Advances in Atomic, Molecular, and Optical Physics*, Amsterdam, London, Oxford, San Diego: Elsevier, 2003, pp. 293-372.

concepts belong to modern physics rather than medieval metaphysics, they nonetheless provide a suggestive analogy for thinking about divine presence and its potential corporeality.

A biblical conception of God—described in both the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 60:10) and the New Testament (1 John 1:5) as "light"—lends itself to further theological reflection that resonates, at least metaphorically, with aspects of quantum theory. This resonance becomes particularly evocative when one considers the creation of light in the Book of Genesis alongside the quantum notion of light as a fundamental constituent of the universe. Yet the infinite, transcendent God cannot be observed or measured directly. The Divine becomes intelligible only insofar as He manifests within space-time through written language or revelation—analogous, one might say, to a quantum entity collapsing into a single state—thereby rendering God perceptible through the symbolic language and narratives of the Hebrew Bible. Within this framework, divine transcendence, which Maimonides emphasizes, paves the way to divine immanence, making the Divine accessible, observable, and relational within creation. Thus, the *Deus omniscient*—the omnipresent and eternal "quantum light," so to speak—transitions from superposition to state reduction within written space-time, manifesting in uniplural ways once inscrutable but now tangible—even predictable—in accordance with its biblical ontological essence. Just as quantum mechanics—a highly successful discipline of physics that builds upon and transcends classical Newtonian conceptualizations—came to challenge the conventional understanding of physical reality,[385] so did Jewish mysticism similarly challenge the rigid monotheistic notion advanced by Maimonides.

This tension between divine transcendence and the humanly apprehensible manifestation of God naturally extends to questions of corporeality, form, and the origins of creation, highlighting the differing solutions offered by rationalist and mystical approaches within Judaism. While Maimonides firmly asserts that God has no physical body, it is arguably more difficult to maintain that the Divine has no form. The question then is how to reconcile doctrinal monotheism with the rich, often anthropomorphic depictions of God in Scripture—a central concern for both mystical and modern Jewish thinkers. Likewise, the Maimonidean idea that creation came about *ex nihilo*—that is, from absolute nothingness—raises further philosophical difficulties: how could the finite emerge from the infinite, the material from the immaterial, and how can creation itself be reconciled with the oneness

[385] Raphael Afilalo and Hyman Schipper, "The Kabbalistic Radla and Quantum Physics: Analogies and Differences," *The Torah U-Madda Journal*, Vol. 15 (2102-2013), pp. 134-152.

and incorporeality of God?[386] For the Kabbalists, the resolution to this dilemma lies in the notion that, to create a finite and limited world, God contracted and concealed His infinite self, thus allowing His immanent reality to emerge within creation.[387] This vision resonates more closely with scriptural exegesis than with the strictures of rational philosophy.

The tension between doctrinal monotheism and the language of the Hebrew Bible has also drawn the attention of contemporary Jewish theologians. Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972), for instance, offered an anthropological observation on this matter. He contended that "monotheism is at variance with vulgar thinking," as "something against which popular instinct continues to rebel."[388] For Heschel, "polytheism seems to be more compatible with emotional moods and imagination than uncompromising monotheism."[389] Yet if the Hebrew Bible is the literary spiritual epicenter of Rabbinism, such a claim may presuppose that the religion of biblical Israel was monotheistic. Textual evidence, however, indicates that the Hebrew Bible—regarded within Rabbinism as divinely inspired and wholly truthful—significantly complicates this assumption. Its richly anthropomorphic and uniplural depictions of divine agency are not merely concessions to primitive imagination or popular vulgarities but rather faithful portrayals of divine reality experienced, albeit within the cognitive horizon of the biblical authors, in deep resonance with human affectivity. Human cognition tends to engage with these portrayals, which may help explain why rabbinic monotheism often appears to stand in tension with "popular instinct," particularly when approached through the lens of the *peshāt* of the Scriptures.

From this perspective, the biblical textual evidence suggests that Heschel's dichotomy between monotheism and emotional or imaginative compatibility may be overstated. Indeed, the narrative richness of the biblical text reconciles human sensibilities with the worship of a scriptural God who is simultaneously transcendent and immanent. Such a portrayal demonstrates that the form of argued "monotheism" grounded in the Hebrew Bible does not hold the monotheistic ideal later articulated within Rabbinism. It is therefore unsurprising that the *instinctus popularis*—particularly among the *populus* who is well-versed in the Hebrew tongue and acquainted with the texture of the

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[386] Noson Gurary, *The Thirteen Principles of Faith: A Chasidic Viewpoint*, New York: Menachem Education Foundation, 2017, pp. 47-48.

[387] Ibid., p. 38.

[388] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion*, New York: Harper Torchbook, 1966, p. 111.

[389] Ibid.

biblical corpus—might resist theological formulations that appear to impose a rigid doctrinal framework upon the fluid symbolic world of the Scriptures. Viewed in this light, the apparent incompatibility identified by Heschel is significantly mitigated, if not entirely dissolved—more so if the Hebrew Bible is regarded as a divinely inspired and truthful tradition. What emerges instead is a theological landscape in which the worldview of biblical Israel stands in marked contrast to the later doctrinal construction of Maimonidean monotheism.

This state of affairs calls into question the internal coherence of Maimonides' quintessential articulation of monotheism—the very epitome of the Rabbinic monotheistic ideal. I therefore argue that the claim that the biblical God of Israel is numerically one, incorporeal, and devoid of any uniplural self-manifestation—whether theologically, philosophically, or even grammatically—merely because Rabbinism asserts it, is not only simplistic and biblically unsustainable but also transforms such an inference into an obdurate, non-scriptural religious dogma, one that anyone who affirms the divinity of the Scriptures is naturally compelled to reject. Yet, as noble as the rabbinic effort may have been—for Jewish theology surely needed, after the destruction of the Second Temple, to develop a system of exegesis to resolve the complexities of the biblical canon vis-à-vis the existential crisis caused by the Roman exile—it does not thereby constitute an organic biblical truth nor does it represent a homogeneous monotheistic understanding within Judaism. If anything, such a well-intentioned effort produced a set of dogmatic rabbinic principles that are, as Aaron rightly noted, "utterly foreign to their antecedent biblical literature."[390] But how did this happen?

Ricœur may offer a potential answer: "*La sémantique du discours est irréductible à la sémiotique des entités lexicales.*"[391] In other words, the meaning of the Scriptures—as it emerges within actual speech, textual expression, or communicative context, and as it develops dynamically across socio-historical and theological settings—cannot be reduced to the lexical or sign-based meanings of isolated words within the biblical text. Put simply, discourse meaning transcends lexical meaning. Consequently, the articulation of rabbinic monotheism depends not merely on the reinterpretation of uniplural and isolated lexical entities from the Hebrew Bible but also on context, structure, speaker intent, socio-historical interaction, philosophical approach, and theological development. Invoking Émile Benveniste (1902-1976), Ricœur distinguishes the epistemological difference between *discours* ("discourse") and *la parole* ("word") within the broader architecture of language. In this light, the

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[390] Aaron (2024), *op. cit.*, p. 214.

[391] ("The semantics of discourse cannot be reduced to the semiotics of lexical entities"), Ricœur (1975), *op. cit.*, p. 88.

semiotics of the Hebrew statement *YHVH ʾeḥad* ("YHVH is one") became, in rabbinic discourse, the bearer of a monotheistic sign embedded in the lexical code of Rabbinism. It is in this sense that Maimonides—paraphrasing Benveniste—"*tend à faire de la parole un simple résidu de ses analyses.*"[392] That is, within Maimonides' thought, *la parole*—the written word, verbal expression, or even revelation articulated in language—ultimately becomes secondary, almost residual, compared to the philosophical and theological analyses through which he sought to harmonize the ambiguities and challenges of the biblical text. From this perspective, it becomes possible to discern how Maimonides—seemingly deliberately and systematically—bypasses the uniplural essence of biblical divine ontology, reconfiguring the semantic possibilities of the biblical *paroles* and fixing upon them a singular meaning through rabbinical *discours*. In this process, practical lexis becomes rhetoric—albeit under the rabbinic presupposition that such rhetoric derives from the divine and truthful nature of the Scriptures. Through this mechanism, Maimonidean theology constructs its value system and even mythologizes both narratives and symbolic representations of biblical accounts. This re-narrativization produces shared meaning, legitimizes cultural norms, and establishes theological dogma. Ultimately, the emergence of a strictly singular, incorporeal God within the interpretive world of Rabbinism—shaped through historical activity, cultural negotiation, and intense socio-religious pressures—becomes discernible alongside the equally evident reality that the multi-authored corpus we call the Hebrew Bible reflects a far more complex and non-uniform theological landscape.

While Deuteronomy 6:4 may indeed be read as affirming the numerical unity of God through the plain meaning of the Hebrew term *ʾeḥād*—thus appearing to support Maimonides' doctrine of divine unity—the Maimonidean insistence on absolute divine incorporeality proves far more difficult to sustain when measured against the richly symbolic and descriptive *peshāt* of the Hebrew Bible. Yet one may still claim that the numerical *oneness* of God constitutes a defining biblical criterion of Maimonides' theology, and that in discussions of divine unity the Scriptures provide a formula in the biblical proclamation that issues from this verse: "Hear, O Israel: YHVH is our God, YHVH is *ʾeḥād*"—standing as rabbinic monotheism's prooftext *par excellence*, namely, the ultimate monotheistic statement. However, this interpretation seems to reflect a later theological reading rather than an ancient Israelite ontological conception of the Divine. From the standpoint of the *peshāt*, this verse emphasized monolatry rather than monotheism: YHVH is to be Israel's sole deity, calling for exclusive cultic loyalty. While this does not resolve the philosophical question of ontological simplicity, the

[392] ("Tends to make the speech or word a mere residue of his analyses"), Ibid., p. 89.

verse has long served as the quintessential declaration of Jewish faith. Even Jesus invoked it in precisely this sense, as recorded in the Gospels (Mark 12:29). Despite its apparent clarity and simplicity, this biblical assertion has proved historically, linguistically, and doctrinally complex, and at times theologically complex and even contentious. As Yeshayahu Leibowitz suggested: "The reading of all three parts of the *Shema* poses difficult questions [...] the opening verse (v. 4) is a slogan of faith [...] which penetrates to the very depths of religious faith."[393] What, then, does this "formula" or "slogan" truly convey? What does it truly signify? As Neusner rightly noted and asked: "The unity of God implies several things [...] but the concept of unity is compelling. So what are the dimensions of the concept of unity?"[394] I would contend that this verse invites a reading that transcends a mere assertion of numerical singularity.

One common understanding of the noun "one," both in Hebrew (*ʾeḥād*) and English, refers to the mathematical notion of singularity: the digit one as a non-fractioned, singular whole representing a single entity and its quality of being one and singular in number—e.g., the first positive integer (1); the cardinal number one (1). This perspective can be distinguished from the broader concept of unity (√ʾ-*ḥ*-*d*), which encompasses not only the mathematical singularity of the first positive integer but also the state of being united, unified, or joined as a whole—suggesting unification, amalgamation, or the integration of distinct parts into a harmonious totality. The latter presents two possibilities: 1.- A fractured, fragmented, or divided element that has been consolidated or amalgamated into a single, larger whole—an integrated and coherent mosaic composed of unified parts, items, or terms; 2.- Two or more complete entities that have coalesced into an even greater unified totality. The Hebrew root √ʾ-*ḥ*-*d* in Deut. 6:4 accommodates these semantic nuances. Its derivatives indicate not only the mathematical singularity expressed by the first cardinal number but also the processes of unifying distinct elements into a single, integrated whole and the merging of multiple complete entities into a broader federative unity. Within this framework, the idea of monotheism functions both as a doctrinal principle and as a hermeneutical mode, with *ʾeḥād* constituting the adaptable linguistic and exegetical instrument through which its interpretation is articulated. However, this Deuteronomic "monotheistic formula"—precisely because of the dynamic grammatical properties of the Hebrew root √ʾ-*ḥ*-*d*—deepens and amplifies the Scriptures' own ontological portrayal of God. In other words, the Hebrew of the biblical text intensifies the ontological complexities of scriptural divine unity, and Deut. 6:4 lies at

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[393] Leibowitz (1992), *op. cit*., pp. 38-41.

[394] Jacob Neusner (Ed.), *Understanding Jewish Theology: Classical Issues and Modern Perspectives*, New York: Ktav, 1973, p. 13.

the core of this tension. Thus, rather than closing the ontological question, this verse widens it. Its resolution either undergirds the foundations of Maimonides' monotheism or exposes the epicenter of its crisis. I contend that the latter is the case, on both linguistic grounds and because the Hebrew Bible cannot be accurately characterized as a strictly organic monotheistic literary corpus. As Bob Becking notes: "The Hebrew Bible is not an unambiguously monotheistic book."[395] Thus, the term 'monotheism' emerges not merely as a significant concept but also as a problematic theological label.

The semantic elasticity of the Hebrew root √*ʾ-ḥ-d* (*ʾeḥād*), therefore, becomes crucial for interpreting the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4). Yet Maimonides reads this Deuteronomic verse as a declaration of the indivisible singularity and absolute oneness of the Divine, anchoring upon it a dogma which, under rigorous biblical scrutiny, might be regarded either as a "*Ricœurian* theological myth" or, at best, as a metaphor in the sense proposed by Ricœur: "*La métaphore figure parmi les changements de signification* [...] *La métaphore met donc en jeu l'aptitude de la linguistique synchronique à rendre compte des phénomènes de changement de sens*."[396] From this perspective, Maimonides' monotheistic reinterpretations of the biblical text regarding the ontology of the God of Israel are not merely linguistic innovations; rather, they reflect profound transformations in the understanding of the Divine and in accordance with Rabbinic cosmovision. However, semantic shifts rarely occur abruptly. Instead, they develop gradually through processes of reinterpretation within evolving historical, linguistic, cultural, social, and theological frameworks. This dynamic is particularly evident in the evolution of the Hebrew names *ʾAdonāy* and *ʾElohīm*, uniplural nomenclatures whose ontological meanings became singular absolutes with the consolidation of rabbinic monotheistic belief.

Notwithstanding, Maimonides faced opposition from both Kabbalists and certain rabbinic authorities who resisted his rationale. In an effort to explain the theological vision of Maimonides' principles, ʾAbravanʾēl—a critic of Jewish Aristotelians—argued in his *Sēfer Roʾsh ʾAmānāh*, which he wrote in 1494, just two years after he had been expelled from Spain,[397] the following: *Hannaḥāt hāʿiqqārīm mityaḥeset ʾel hehāmōn velammatḥīlīm bilīmmūd hammishnāyōt, lʾō layyeḥīdīm*

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[395] Bob Becking, "The Boundaries of Israelite Monotheism," p. 12, in Anne-Marie Korte and Maaike de Haardt (Eds.), *The Boundaries of Monotheism: Interdisciplinary Explorations into the Foundations of Western Monotheism*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, pp. 9-27.

[396] ("Metaphor figures among the changes of meaning [...] Metaphor brings into play the capacity of synchronic linguistics to account for phenomena of semantic change"), Ricœur (1975), *op. cit.*, p. 143.

[397] Isaac Abravanel, *Principles of Faith. Rosh Amanah* (Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Menachem Marc Kellner), London, Toronto: Associated University Press, 1982, p. 11 (Henceforth: *Rosh Amanah*).

hammaʿamīqīm beyedīʿat hāʾamittīyōt ʾasher lāhem ḥūbar Sēfer Mōreh Hannevukhīm.[398] This statement reflects a distinction in medieval Jewish philosophy between teachings intended for the masses and those for philosophical elites. According to ʾAbravanʾēl, simplified principles were meant for basic education among the general Jewish public, while deeper metaphysical truths were reserved for advanced thinkers. For him, Judaism did not possess dogmas in the strict sense proposed by Maimonides, nor did it have principles as formal logical axioms, as Rabbī Yōsēf ʾAlbō (1380-1444) also argued. Instead, Maimonides' principles of faith were more heuristic than dogmatic, thus serving as "pedagogical guides for the unlearned."[399]

ʾAlbō was also critical of the rigidity of Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith, yet he did not reject Maimonidean theology.[400] Notwithstanding, he considered—in his *Sēfer Hāʿiqqārīm*—the foundational tenets of Moses' religion to be three: *Metzīʿūt Hashshēm, Vetōrāh min hashshāmayim, vesākhār veʿōnesh.*[401] Without these, ʾAlbō argued, "we cannot conceive of a divine law."[402] Although he considered Maimonides' principles as *hekhrēḥīyim lattōrāh ʾelohīt*,[403] that is, "essential to the very notion of a divine Torah," he claims that they are ultimately derived from the three fundamentals that he himself proposes. In this manner, ʾAlbō positions Maimonides' thirteen principles not as independent foundations, but as specific expressions derived from the broader, overarching tenets he outlines; further enumerating them in his *Sēfer Hāʿiqqārīm*:

> *Vehinnēh Hārambam, z"l, sām ʾōtām shlōshāh-ʿāsār ʿiqqārīm shehēm: Metzīʿūt Hashshēm vehāʾaḥdūt, ūharḥāqat haggashmūt, veshehūʾ qadmōn, vesherāʾūy laʿavādō velʾō lezūlātō, vehannevūʾāh, ūnevūʾat Mosheh rabēnū ʿālāv hashshālōm, vetōrāh min hashshāmayim, veshellʾō tishttanneh hattōrāh, vīdīʿat*

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[398] ("The formulation of Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith relates to the general populace and to beginners in the study of the Mishnah, but not for individuals who delve deeply into the knowledge of truths—for them was written *The Guide for the Perplexed*"), *Sēfer Roʾsh ʾAmānāh Bō Shorshēy Verāʾshēy Hāʾemūnōt*, Cremona: Vicenzo Conti, 1557, f. 30v (In Hebrew).

[399] *Rosh Amanah*, p. 28.

[400] Michael Friedländer, *The Jewish Religion*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1891, pp. 173, 174, 219.

[401] ("Belief in the existence of God; that Moses received the *Tōrāh* from heaven; and divine reward and punishment"), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 742. Joseph Albo. ספר העקרים*, Year: 1474, f. 6r (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Ms. Hébreu 742*).

[402] Isaac Husik (Ed., and trans.), *Sefer Ha-ʿIkkarim. Book of Principles, Vol. 1*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1929, p. 199.

[403] *Ms. Hébreu 742*, f. 7v.

Hashshēm, vesākhār veʿōnesh, ūmāshiaḥ, ūtḥīyat hammētim. ʾĒllū hēm hāʿiqqārīm shemmānāh Hārav, zikhrōnō livrākhāh, befereq Ḥeleq mipērūsh hammishnāh shellō.[404]

Yet regarding God's unity, incorporeality, and exclusivity of worship, ʾAlbō raises a fundamental question: *Lāmmāh yimneh hāʾaḥdūt veharḥāqat haggashmūt bāʿiqqārīm?*[405] For "even if these are indeed true beliefs" (*sheʾaf ʾim hēm ʾemūnōt ʾamittīyōt*)—doctrines that every adherent of the Mosaic Law ought to accept—it could still be argued that they do not rise to the level of foundational principles. ʾAlbō further insists that the Torah would not collapse if one believed otherwise, or even if one believes in God and His Torah but introduces a mediator between himself and God. While this may count as a violation of a commandment, it does not render it a fundamental principle on which the entire Law depends.[406] ʾAlbō also contends that while Maimonides' principles are important theological truths, their denial does not necessarily undermine the Torah. Even if a person believes in God and the authenticity of His Law, yet invokes an intermediary in worship, this does not amount to denying a principle upon which the entire Torah would fall. Thus, ʾAlbō's essential critique is that Maimonides expands the category of fundamental principles to include important doctrines that are not structurally essential to the truth of the Mosaic Law. The Kabbalists seem to follow a similar rationale. Yet if one were to deny the truth of the Torah, ʾAlbō warns that eternal punishment awaits.[407]

According to this view, invoking divine intermediaries or attributing anthropomorphic qualities to God does not constitute the heresy as defined by Maimonides. Finally, when cogitating on the question of monotheism, it may be propitious to adopt the perspective of Adolphe Lods (1867–1948). Lods, a French biblical scholar and historian, attributes to ancient Israel a cultural and intellectual significance comparable to that of Greece and Rome in shaping the foundations of Western civilization. Just as the West inherited its philosophy and science from Greece and its legal traditions from Rome, Lods contends that it owes its monotheism to Israel:

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[404] ("And behold, Maimonides, of blessed memory, listed these thirteen principles, which are: the existence of God, His unity, the rejection of corporeality, that He is eternal, that it is proper to worship Him and no other, prophecy, the prophecy of Moses our teacher—peace be upon him—the divine origin of the Torah, that the Torah will not be changed, God's knowledge, reward and punishment, the coming of the Messiah, and the resurrection of the dead. These are the principles that the Rabbī, of blessed memory, enumerated in section *Ḥeleq* of his commentary on the Mishnah"), Ibid.

[405] ("Why should the unity of God and His incorporeality be counted among the fundamental principles of faith?"), Ibid., ff. 7v-8r.

[406] Husik (1929), *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

[407] Isaac Husik (Ed., and trans.), *Sefer Ha-ʿIkkarim. Book of Principles, Vol. 4, Part 2*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946, p. 336

> *Ce qui confère au peuple d'Israël une place unique, égale en importance à celles de la Grèce et de Rome dans l'histoire de l'humanité, c'est sa religion, mère du christianisme, du judaïsme et de l'islamisme* [...] *C'est aux prophètes du VIIIe siècle et des temps qui suivirent que le judaïsme doit ce qu'il a de profondément original, d'unique même dans l'histoire de l'humanité: son monothéisme moral.*[408]

In a similar spirit, Valentin Nikiprowetzky (1919-1983) observes: "neither the religion of Babylonia nor that of Egypt offers anything that is truly comparable to Israel's monotheism."[409] This may be considered the greatest contribution of Israel's monotheistic views. Ultimately, the rabbis grounded their theology primarily in their literature, rather than in the biblical corpus itself. As Solomon Schechter famously asserted: "Rabbinic literature as a source of theology,"[410] allowing the rabbis to "depart from the letter of the Scripture for the sake of the spirit."[411] It is through this body of literature that Rabbinism articulates its theological vision, particularly in its endeavor to realize the "Kingdom of Heaven"—an expression that first appears in the rabbinic texts.[412] This invisible, spiritual kingdom, characterized by its individual and inward nature, is attainable through a specific approach:

> Communion with God by means of prayer through the removal of all intruding elements between man and his Maker, and through the implicit acceptance of God's unity as well as an unconditional surrender of mind and heart to his holy will, which the love of God expressed in the *Shema* implies, this is what is understood by the receiving of the kingdom of God.[413]

This theological vision finds a systematic expression in the theology of Maimonides, whose thirteen principles of faith sought to codify the essential doctrines of Judaism, establishing the absolute unity, incorporeality, and transcendence of God as non-negotiable foundations. Maimonides' emphasis on divine oneness and the rejection of any intermediary between humanity and God eventually shaped Jewish understandings of prayer, devotion, and the internalization of the "Kingdom of Heaven." In this

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[408] ("What gives the people of Israel a unique place—equal in importance to that of Greece and Rome in the history of humanity—is its religion, the mother of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam [...] It is to the prophets of the 8th century BCE and the times that followed that Judaism owes what is profoundly original about it, even unique in the history of humanity: its moral monotheism"), Adolphe Lods, *Israël: Des origines au milieu du VIIIe siècle avant notre ère*, Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1969, pp. 9, 11.

[409] Valentin Nikiprowetzky, "Ethical Monotheism," *Daedalus*, Vol. 104, No. 2 (1975), pp. 69–89.

[410] Schechter (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[411] Ibid., p. 163.

[412] Ibid., p. 65.

[413] Ibid., p. 66.

sense, the acceptance of divine rule and unity—as expressed in the daily recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4—becomes both a personal act of piety and a theological affirmation of the rabbinic monotheistic vision, in which the individual's acceptance of God's unity represents the ultimate realization of Israel's spiritual mission. For Maimonides, this constitutes true Jewish belief and the core of monotheism. The biblical text, however, resists full absorption into these theological frameworks—much like Newton's first law of motion (*inertia*), it generates friction and complexity, challenging the boundaries of Maimonides' doctrinal constructions of monotheism and underscoring the dynamic tension between scripture, interpretation, and theological codification.

4.- Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Jewish Mysticism: Symbolic Theology within Rabbinic Orthodoxy

Jewish mysticism, particularly theosophic Kabbalah, articulates divine unity as a structured emanational complexity: the one God unfolds through differentiated sefirotic modalities that express an internally dynamic life.[414] From this perspective, Kabbalah emerges—particularly in its Iberian context—not merely as an alternative exegetical method, but as a pointed engagement with the rational–philosophical rabbinic theology that dominated medieval Judaism, particularly Maimonidean monotheism. Yet as Jonathan Dauber observes, there is no kabbalistic stance on Maimonides' thought; rather, different Kabbalists adopted markedly divergent approaches to his philosophy.[415] Moshe Idel, conversely, identifies a subset of these figures "as taking an anti-Maimonidean stance"[416]—thus illustrating the tensions and dialogue between mystical and rationalist currents. In any case, Maimonidean thought can be seen as a catalyst for the emergence and self-definition of Kabbalah, prompting mystical responses—albeit esoterically—to biblical and theological complexities and prevailing monotheistic paradigms. Kabbalah articulates an alternative Jewish theological vision, addressing both the limitations of rationalist monotheism and the broader intellectual challenges posed by medieval Christianity, which wielded both intellectual and ecclesial authority in medieval Europe and with which Judaism was engaged in sustained theological conflict.[417]

Notwithstanding, there is a widespread assumption that Jewish mysticism constitutes a socio-theological current confined to a distinct subgroup within the broader Jewish religious mosaic—markedly separate from the rest of the Jewish community. This view is not without merit, yet I will argue that it is misleading. To make such a claim accurately, one must first acknowledge that both antiquity and the medieval era witnessed the emergence of numerous Jewish groups—each ontologically unique, theologically diverse, and, in many respects, inherently different from one

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[414] For a detailed explanation of kabbalistic symbolism and the designations of the ten *Sefirōt*, see Joseph ben Shlomo (Ed.), *Shaʿarēy ʾŌrāh*, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1970; and Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 819. Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla. Šaʿarey ʾwrah*, Year: 1401-1500 (In Hebrew).

[415] Jonathan Dauber, "Competing Approaches to Maimonides in Early Kabbalah," p. 57, in James T. Robinson (Ed.), *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, pp. 57-88.

[416] Idel (1988), *op. cit.*, pp. 250-253.

[417] On Kabbalah as a response to Christianity, see Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 229-235; and Robert Sagerman, *The Serpent Kills or the Serpent Gives Life: The Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia's Response to Christianity*, Leiden: Brill, 2011.

another. To a certain extent, this observation is valid, reflecting the ongoing diversity of Jewish literary culture.[418] Yet, within the broader framework of rabbinic Judaism, these seemingly disparate factions were unified by a common denominator: Scriptural Jewish law. The question, then, is not whether the literary productions of Jewish mysticism were unique—undeniably, they were—but rather how this uniqueness was expressed, to what degree it set them apart, and in what ways it diverged from or intersected with mainstream rabbinic impulses.

This integrated perspective also challenges certain tendencies that posit a rigid dichotomy between Jewish law and mysticism and resists approaches that relegate the Jewish *mystica theologia* to the realm of popular superstition, thus dismissing Kabbalah as a relic of fallacious rationality associated with an allegedly ignorant, naïve, and unrefined social stratum. Some liturgical reflections —such as those attributed to Paula Ackerman (1893–1989)—rightly observed that while "we need Jews more conversant with the thought and teachings of Judaism," simultaneously maintained that what is truly needed are "leaders for whom Hebrew learning is not a matter of mystical ignorance."[419] By equating linguistic modes of Jewish spiritual engagement with ignorance, these critiques risk obscuring the extent to which the Hebrew language, as a historical liturgical functionality, has served as a vehicle for divine understanding and communal continuity. I will argue instead that a more consequential form of ignorance lies in disregarding the mystical essence of Hebrew, the Scriptures, and their profound significance in Jewish liturgy altogether. As has been noted, "those who are fortunate enough to be able to read the lines of the *Siddur* should realize that we are ignorant of the inner code and its mystical combination."[420] Yet as Jean Baumgarten accurately demonstrates, even "a bilingual prayer book or *siddur* contains many references to the mystical implications of prayer."[421] Jewish mysticism and its esoteric approach to the Hebrew language profoundly inform both Jewish religiosity and the *Siddur* itself, whose prayers echo the theological currents found in the *Zoharic*

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[418] Raanan Boustan, "Rabbinization and the Making of Early Jewish Mysticism," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 101, No. 4 (Fall 2011), pp. 482-501.

[419] Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*, New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis Press, 2007, p. 45.

[420] Avrohom Chaim Feuer, *Shemoneh Esrei: The Amidah/The Eighteen Blessings. Inspirational Exposition and Interpretations of the Weekday Shemoneh Esrei*, New York: Mesorah Publications, 1990, p. 32.

[421] Jean Baumgarten, "Azoy shraybn di khokhme kabole": Kabbala in the Old Yiddish Tikkunei ha-Moadim," p. 51, in Jean Baumgarten, Ruth von Bernuth, and Moshe Lavee (Eds.), *Bridges of Knowledge: Jewish Language in Cultural Context*, Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2025, pp. 47-72.

literature.[422] Such deriding attitudes within modern Jewish thought invite renewed engagement with the critique articulated by the late Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903-1994), who, as Haim O. Rechnitzer notes, famously regarded Reform Judaism as an emblematic distortion of Judaism:[423]

> Reform Judaism is the second historical distortion of the Jewish religion. For the service of God through Torah and Mitzvot as the end of religion, the Reform movement substitutes an end that the Jewish people are destined to attain. And, paradoxically, in this respect, Reform resembles the Kabbalah, except that the Kabbalah assigns to the Jewish people and Judaism a cosmic-metaphysical vocation, namely the rehabilitation of the world, the rectification, as it were, of a breach in the divine realm itself. Moreover, the Kabbalah endeavors to maintain the halakhic system as it is, ascribing to the practice of Mitzvoth a magical efficacy toward fulfilling this religious function. Reform, by contrast, assigns to Judaism a human-mundane vocation [...] Reform Judaism empties Judaism of its religious content and reduces it to ethical humanism.[424]

Whether or not one accepts Leibowitz's assessment, his critique underscores the enduring difficulty of negotiating the relationship between halakhah, mysticism, the Hebrew language, and theology within a larger Jewish discourse. This challenge renders conceptual clarification necessary.

Yet this tension is not limited to intra-Jewish theological and philosophical discourse; it also appears within certain modern academic approaches that seek to interpret Jewish mysticism through reductive methodological frameworks. In some instances, methodological commitments to strict empirical sociological analysis—often presented under the banner of scholarly rigor and cloaked in the veneer of "intellectual sophistication"—often conceal a profound estrangement from what Jewish mysticism itself regards as sacred, theologically meaningful, and experientially real. Such approaches may entail a tacit yet willful rupture from the inner spiritual pulse of the Jewish mystical tradition, betraying a subtle disdain—or, at best, a posture of skepticism and methodological suspicion—toward anything that transcends empirical reductionism or resists the sterile constraints of their ideological paradigms. Consequently, aspects of the academic study of Jewish mysticism have at times been shaped—and constrained—by interpretive frameworks that prioritize postmodern sociological or cultural explanation, de-emphasizing and oftentimes dismissing the theological and metaphysical

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[422] Jonathan Sacks, *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth* (4th Edition), London: Collins, 2007; and Joshua Abelson, *Jewish Mysticism*, London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1913, p. 153.

[423] Haim O. Rechnitzer, "Redemptive Theology in the Thought of Yeshayahu Leibowitz," *Israel Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Fall, 2008), pp. 137-159 (see note 34).

[424] Leibowitz (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114. For the Hebrew version, see Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *'Emūnāh, Hīsṭōrīyāh Ve'arākhīm*, Jerusalem: 'Aqademōn, 1982, p. 126.

essence at the heart of this riveting Jewish tradition. Moreover, when Jewish mysticism is approached primarily through postmodernist lenses that bracket questions of divine encounter, ontology, and transcendence, its core theological claims risk being marginalized or dismissed altogether. Inevitably, such postures may lead to a reductionist reading of Jewish mysticism, particularly Kabbalah and Ḥasidūt, treating both as mere cultural phenomena rather than as authentic expressions of divine encounter, Jewish religious experience, and spiritual reality. The result is a scholarly apparatus that may fail to apprehend the inner coherence, symbolic depth, and spiritual vitality of the Jewish mystical *Weltanschauung* as it has been experienced, practiced, and transmitted by those for whom these traditions function not as abstractions, but as meaningful modes of spiritual life—thereby confining its insights to insular erudite secular circles.

In light of these interpretive challenges, it becomes necessary to clarify the conceptual and normative framework within which Kabbalah—and the figure of Meṭāṭrōn in particular—must be situated. Classical Kabbalah—unlike the diluted, commodified forms of esotericism often popularized by celebrity culture and postmodern spiritual consumerism—operates, as Joseph Dan has repeatedly emphasized, within a Jewish orthodox framework.[425] Authentic Kabbalah is deeply embedded in the intellectual, theological, linguistic, and legal structures of rabbinic Judaism. In the area of Jewish law, Scholem noted that although the influence of Kabbalah was limited, it was by no means unimportant: "As early as the 13th century, there began a tendency to interpret the halakhah in kabbalistic terms without actually seeking to effect halakhic rulings or discussion by this means."[426] Far from constituting a marginal phenomenon, Kabbalah presupposes covenantal commitment and sustained halakhic observance as essential conditions for genuine mystical engagement. As Gruenwald notes, "Halakhah and [Jewish] mysticism cannot so easily be separated from one another."[427] Indeed, the historical and theological interweaving of Jewish law and Kabbalah firmly resides within the frameworks of both Jewish orthodoxy and the Hebrew language—both integral to the formation and transmission of Jewish mystical meaning. As Scholem observed, "the influence of the Kabbalah was particularly felt in connection with observances involving prayer, the Sabbath, and holidays."[428]

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[425] Dan (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 164, 169.

[426] Scholem (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[427] Itamar Gruenwald, "Major Issues in the Study of Understanding of Jewish Mysticism," p. 4, in Jacob Neusner (Ed.), *Judaism in Late Antiquity* (Part II, Historical Syntheses), Leiden, New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995, pp. 1-52.

[428] Scholem (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 192.

Nowhere is this integration of halakhah and mysticism more visible than in the lives and authority of the leading Kabbalistic sages (*meqūbbālīm*), who are far removed from being pseudo-esoteric gurus or spiritual enthusiasts. Nor are they merely mundane celebrities promoting diluted forms of Jewish spirituality or engaged in theocultural appropriation through an adulterated esotericism—phenomena that stand in stark contrast to the vast, profound, and richly layered tradition of Jewish mystical "hidden wisdom," which the *meqūbbālīm* designate themselves as *ḥokhmāh nistterah.*[429] Rather, the *meqūbbālīm* are highly esteemed halakhic authorities.[430] They are also prominent Talmudists, and codifiers of Jewish law (*pōsqīm*): rabbinic figures for whom the performance of divine commandments (*mitzvōt*) was not mere liturgical choreography or futile ritual socialization, but covenantal enactment of divine will—an embodied expression of profound theology and an essential component of their theological cosmic vision and spiritual *raison d'être*. The *meqūbbālīm* seek precisely to integrate mystical knowledge and the lived religious experience. These sages inhabited the full spectrum of Jewish religious life, wherein mysticism, Mosaic Law, and ethical conduct are profoundly intertwined. The *meqūbbālīm* are genuine rabbinic sages whose *modus vivendi* stands in marked contrast to certain postmodern approaches that reduce Jewish religious practice to universal expressions of ethical humanism divorced from the biblical and halakhic depth of Jewish theology. Here is worth noting that *Shulḥān ʿĀrūkh*—the definitive codification of Jewish law—was authored by Rabbī Yōsēf Qāʾrō (1488–1575), who was a towering halakhic jurist and a deeply rooted mystical Jewish sage. Similarly, some of the early *Tannāʾīm*—the foundational sages of the *Mishnāh*—were significantly engaged in mystical speculations, indicating that Jewish mysticism has been interwoven with rabbinic discourse from the formative stages of Jewish legal and theological tradition.

The intellectual and spiritual profile of the *meqūbbālīm* becomes particularly evident in the teachings of the great medieval Kabbalistic masters. For instance, Rabbī Mosheh Cordovero (1522-1570) and Rabbī Yitzḥāq Lūryāʾ (1534-1572) developed mystical systems that were not only intellectually profound but deeply embedded in halakhic observance and communal life. As Joseph Citron accurately noted, "Halakhah became an important conduit for kabbalistic ideals."[431] The Kabbalistic sages are the foremost symbolists of Jewish orthodoxy, for whom Judaism, in all its dimensions, constitutes an integrated system of mystical symbols reflecting the ineffable mystery of

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[429] Yitzḥāq Bʿēr Levinson, *Bēyt Yehūdāh, Vol. 1*, Warsaw: S. I. Halter & Partner, 1901, p. 74 (In Hebrew).

[430] Scholem (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 192.

[431] Citron (2021), *op. cit.*, p. 166.

God. The *meqūbbālīm* are, in the words attributed to Rabbī Mosheh ben Naḥmān (1194–c.1270), *yōdʿēy ḥēn*[432] ("knowers of grace"), of whom he "evidently considered himself one."[433] For Mosheh ben Naḥmān, *ḥēn* is not only "grace," but "the highest form of wisdom:" *Kī haḥokhmāh ʿelyōnāh niqrēʾt ḥēn.*[434] They are *baʿalēy hassōd*[435] ("masters of divine mystery") and *baʿalēy hāraz*[436] ("possessors of heavenly secrets"). As Abraham J. Heschel (1907–1972) noted, they are Jewish authorities "for whom God is as real as life; and biblical savants who would rather be overwhelmed by the symbols of the inconceivable than wield the definitions of the superficial."[437] Both the *meqūbbālīm* and Jewish *res mysticae* occupy a central and indispensable place within the multifaceted tapestry of Judaism.

These observations allow for a broader assessment of the theological function of Kabbalah within rabbinic Judaism. From this perspective, it is reasonable to argue that Jewish mystical teachings do not operate outside the rabbinic religious system but rather articulate its deepest symbolic and theological meanings. It is precisely the integration of symbolic theology, interior linguistic meaning, cognition, and divine ontology—all anchored in halakhic observance and mystical intention—that positions Kabbalah as a uniquely Jewish mode of religious cognition capable of expanding epistemological access to the biblical God of Israel. Seen in this light, Kabbalah emerges not as a marginal or speculative appendix to Jewish orthodoxy, but as its most symbolically charged and theologically interior mode of religious expression and ratiocinative commitment. At its core, the intellectual and spiritual heritage of Kabbalah is not a detached conceptual enterprise foreign to Orthodox Judaism, but a living Jewish theology—a dynamic spiritual and philosophical framework through which the believer may encounter the Divine, interpret existence, acquire knowledge of God, and infuse daily commandments with cosmic meaning. Kabbalah seeks precisely to uncover and comprehend the symbolic structures that underlie Scripture, ritual, and religious life.[438] Thus,

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[432] See Jacob Newman (Trans.), *The Commentary of Nahmanides on Genesis Chapters 1-6*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960, p. 28; and Levinson (1901), *op. cit.*, p. 74.

[433] Newman (1960), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[434] Menachem Tzvi Eizenstat (Ed.), *Pērūsh Harambān ʿal Hattōrāh, Vol. 2*, New York: Zichron Joseph, 1961, p. 366 (in Hebrew).

[435] See Joseph Dan, *Ḥasīdūṯ ʾAshkenaz Betōledōt Hammaḥshāvāh Hayyehūdīt, Vol. 1*, Tel-Aviv: Hāʾūnīversīṭāh Haptūḥāh, 1990, p. 56 (in Hebrew); and Samuel A. Horodezky, *Haḥasīdūt Vehaḥasīdīm*, Vol. 1, Tel-Aviv: Dvīr, 1928, p. 53 (in Hebrew).

[436] Scholem (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

[437] Abraham J. Heschel, *The Mystical Element in Judaism*, Skokie: Varda Books, 2017, p. 3.

[438] Scholem (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

Kabbalah opens, as Dan insightfully observes, "new vistas of mystical symbolic expression,"[439] thereby responding to the exegetical and theological challenges of Scripture while also extending beyond the epistemological boundaries of Maimonides' monotheism.

Taken together, these observations illuminate the broader theological significance of Kabbalah and prepare the ground for understanding its symbolic figures within the framework of Jewish orthodoxy. From this perspective, Kabbalah emerges neither as a marginal nor as a speculative enterprise, but as a deeply integrated Jewish mystical theology that expands the epistemological and symbolic horizons of rabbinic orthodoxy. By embedding mystical insight within halakhic practice, linguistic engagement, and biblical exegesis, Kabbalah offers an alternative mode of theological cognition that both complements and challenges the rationalist monotheism of Maimonides. Within this framework, figures such as Meṭāṭrōn emerge as pivotal symbols, mediating the encounter between the finite human intellect and the ineffable Divine, thereby highlighting the enduring richness and plurality of Jewish approaches to understanding the biblical God of Israel.

[439] Joseph Dan, "The Language of the Mystics in Medieval Germany," p. 26, in Karl Erich Grözinger and Joseph Dan (Eds.), *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995, pp. 6-27.

5.-*Ḥōkhmāh-Dībbūrʾēl-Meṭāṭrōn*: A Wise Co-Creator in the Enterprise of Creation

"*Dōmeh lāʾādām shennōtzar baḤōkhmāh.*"[440]

In the biblical texts of Genesis and the wisdom literature of Proverbs, creation is depicted not merely as a unilateral act of God but as a dynamic process involving intermediaries—agents who both witness and participate in the ordering, structuring, and sustaining of the cosmos. The books of Job and Ecclesiastes, along with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, are likewise classified by scholars as "wisdom literature," since their primary concern focuses on wisdom (*Ḥōkhmah*) and its relationship to the Divine. Within these texts, the personification of wisdom—particularly in Proverbs—is dramatic, exalted, and multivalent. This literary portrayal has led scholars to draw correlations to ancient Near Eastern goddesses and to the roles and literary portrayals of women of the time.[441] In Proverbs 8, the voice of Wisdom poetically recounts her presence before and during the cosmic process of creation. Her participation in the unfolding of creation echoes the story of the creation in the Book of Genesis, where the Creator appears either to consult with another actor or to engage in a form of self-reflexive creative deliberation at the moment humankind is fashioned. In Proverbs, however, *Ḥōkhmah* not only witnesses the creation but also acts as a divine agent in the cosmic design and fashioning of space-time, and is described as having been brought forth before the beginning of time as the very first of God's actions. There she functioned as a playful child, a nursling, a tutor, a wise architect—"covered, hidden, and great"—*ʾāmōn*[442] (Prov. 8:30). In the artful ambiguity of biblical poetry, *Ḥōkhmah* takes a dramatic turn as a female voice of wisdom's self-description in Proverbs 8:22-36. Ultimately, it is this primordial relationship that authorizes her claim in Proverbs 8:35-36: "Whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favor from YHVH. But he that misses me does violence against his own soul; all they that hate me love death." Attempts to understand her significance in ancient Israelite life and the canonical and deuterocanonical traditions underscore her deep ambiguity in theological, spiritual, historical, social, and mystical

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[440] ("*It* resembles mankind who was created by means of *Ḥōkhmāh*), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 802. Recueil de traités kabbalistiques. Sefer Ha-Bahir*, Year: Fourteenth Century, f. 60v (In Hebrew. Henceforth *Ms. Hébreu 802*).

[441] Moshe Idel, *The Privileged Divine Feminine in Kabbalah*, Berlin, Boston: DeGruyter, 2020, p. 6 (Henceforth: *The Privileged Divine Feminine*).

[442] Harry Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis, Vol. 1*, London, New York: The Soncino Press, 1983, p. 1.

thought. Understanding *her* place in the divine economy is part of comprehending the ontology of the Divine and the manner through which Jewish thought articulates it. What is particularly notable, however, is the author-editor of the Book of Proverbs's decision to open and close this biblical composition with female imagery and feminine voice. Whatever one might make of this literary framing, the book of Proverbs is certainly structured around the utterances of a female voice that exhorts men: "Unto you, o men I call!" (Prov. 8:4). What is this calling? Who utters this speech? Why is a female voice? What is her relation to Meṭāṭrōn?

The plethora of possible answers is as broad as imagination and interpretation allow. One such answer, however—offered through an esoteric reading of the biblical creation narratives in Proverbs and Genesis—invites us to contemplate the amalgam *ʾāmōn-Ḥōkhmah-Meṭāṭrōn* as integral to *Vox Dei—Dībbūrīʾēl*—the creative divine Word and active intellect. As Elliot Wolfson notes, Abulafia alludes to this gnosis as "the secret of time," which is "the confidant," *ʾāmōn*, "whose secret is *nivra*," for the matter is created without doubt, for *Sar Happānīm* is "in the image of matter before the Torah." Thus, in a single reflecting image, *ʾāmōn, malʾākh* ("angel")*,* and "the tree" (*ʾĪlān*), are "the wise one who speaks" (*Ḥākhām medabbēr*)[443]—and creates. In Midrashic tradition, following the biblical account of creation, humanity is fashioned in the image and likeness of the Divine; consequently, the angels were unable to distinguish between the human and God (*Genesis Rabbāh* 8:10.1). This is, as Neusner observed, a "daring affirmation of humanity."[444] This narrative of creation is recorded in the opening chapters of the Jewish Bible, where the Divine is introduced in the third-person, masculine-plural form *ʾElohīm* as the sole protagonist and ultimate cause of creation: Genesis 1-2. In this account, *ʾElohīm*—an ontologically uniplural deity who, while grammatically rendered as a masculine, singular entity, also assumes a more fluid identity within the Hebrew Scriptures—is portrayed as the central architect of creation. Yet the complexity is especially evident at the moment He determines to bring the created world into existence—both metaphysically and within space-time. In doing so, *ʾElohīm* engages in an introspective consultation within the active intellect, and, through the creative power of His Word, all existence emerges—revealed from inconspicuous infinity into the visible universe, as Psalm 33:6 states: *Bidvar YHVH shāmayim naʿasū ūverūaḥ pīv kol tzevāʾām*,[445] namely, "by the Word of

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[443] Elliot R. Wolfson, *Suffering Time: Philosophical, Kabbalistic, and Ḥasidic Reflections on Temporality*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2021, p. 329.

[444] Ibid., p. 92.

[445] *Ms. Hébreu 7*, f. 372r.

YHVH the heavens were made, and by the utterance of His mouth all their host." In this light, the creative divine Word emerges as the locus wherein divine speech and manifestation converge, situating Meṭāṭrōn within a broader metaphysical framework of mediated creation.

From this perspective, *Dībbūrīʾēl*—"the Word of God," and one of the seventy names of Meṭāṭrōn in mystical tradition[446]—may be understood as the active intellectual principle underlying the creative enterprise, an internal voice of the Divine will. Accordingly, the Genesis account of creation unfolds through two complementary modalities: on the one hand, the performative efficacy of divine speech: *Vayʾōmer ʾElohīm yehī* ("And God said, let there be…"); and on the other, the active collective expression of divine agency: *Naʿāseh ʾādām* ("Let us make mankind"). As Idel observes, "then God created two humans in his likeness, first the male and then the female, and in her were enclosed and consummated all the wisdom and power of the Creator."[447] In this light, Neusner notes, "in our image" yields the view that the fullness image of humanity is attained in a divine union between man and woman.[448] From this perspective, and in harmony with Neusner's thought, it can be said that "Man incarnates God."[449] Yet if one recalls that, according to Cordovero, one of the functions of Meṭāṭrōn in Jewish mysticism is to serve as a blueprint for the creation of humanity's "image" (*tzelem*) (Gate 1:15),[45o] the theological implications become considerably more complex. We are thus confronted with a multilayered anthropomorphic paradigm: the Divine as Creator[s] reflected in the male-female intrinsic structure of human likeness; and Meṭāṭrōn as a complementary modality of creation through his analogous association with the name *Dībbūrīʾēl.* Such a configuration introduces significant tension within Jewish theology, insofar as it presses against the boundaries of rabbinic conceptions of divine unity and transcendence, particularly those promoted by Maimonidean monotheism.

Against this background of fluid gender symbolism, albeit not in the post-modernist sense, the female–male duality as an intrinsic component of the divine mosaic in both biblical and Jewish

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[446] See George Herbert Box, "The Idea of Intermediation in Jewish Theology. A Note on Memra and Shekinah," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1932), pp. 103-119; Odeberg (1928), *op. cit.*, p. 173; Sagerman (2011), *op. cit.*, p. 125n51; and Wolfgang Fauth, "Ṭaṭrosjah-Ṭoṭrosjah und Meṭāṭrōn in der Jüdischen Merkabah-Mystik," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (June 1991), pp. 40-87 (at p. 81).

[447] *The Privileged Divine Feminine*, p. 73.

[448] Neusner (2005), *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[449] Ibid., p. 92.

[45o] *Ms. Hébreu 789*, ff. 8v, 16v.

thought can be better understood through an examination of the figure of *Ḥōkhmah* in the Book of Proverbs and her literary personification therein, as well as through the analysis of the narratives of creation found in the Book of Genesis. The account in Proverbs furnishes us with stories that have perhaps exercised more influence on women's lives, identities, and voices than any others in the biblical corpus.[451] As Tikva Frymer-Kensky observes, the feminine voices that appear in biblical narratives are often striking characters who have transcended the confines of the stories in which they appear to become enduring figures in our cultural memory. At the same time, these female voices are not fleshed-out individuals; yet they "actively participate in the destiny that they are privileged to know and pronounce."[452] In this sense, *Ḥōkhmah*—who witnesses and co-participates in creation—may be understood as an image of God.[453] From this perspective, she becomes the personification of the *Vox Dei*, the feminine procreative power of the Divine. This dynamic recalls the well-known ambiguity between "the angel of the Lord" (*mal'ākh YHVH*)—often related to Meṭāṭrōn in Jewish mysticism—and God in biblical narratives, where it is often difficult to distinguish between the voice and actions of the former and those of the latter, producing in the reader's cognitive horizon the impression that the two may, at times, be functionally equivalent. A similar parallelism appears in the relationship between God and *Ḥōkhmah* in the wisdom literature.[454] Recognizing these features is essential for grasping a more inclusive and dynamic Jewish theology—one in which the sanctity of the voices of the Creator and of creation, both feminine and masculine, is preserved. This uniplural ontology and feminine aspect of the Divine stand in sharp tension with Maimonidean theology and challenge male ontological conceptions within Judeo-Christian monotheism.

This Jewish feminist-theological approach has, in some instances, been neglected by the religious establishment and is frequently overlooked by academic circles. Yet, when observed in detail, one can realize that this theme fractures our conventional perception of Judeo-Christian phallocentric monotheism. Moreover, I will claim it necessary since, as Melila Hellner-Eshed notes, "concepts of the Divine as a feminine being are resurfacing in contemporary Jewish cultural

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[451] Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (Eds.), *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, New York: URJ Press, Women of Reform Judaism, 2008, p. 1.

[452] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, New York: Schocken Books, 2002. pp. 328, 333.

[453] Silvia Schroer, *Wisdom Has Built Her House: Studies on the Figure of Sophia in the Bible*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1989, p. 6.

[454] Camilla Hélena von Heijne, *The Messenger of the Lord in Early Jewish Interpretations of Genesis*, Berlin, New York: DeGruyter, 2010, p. 142

consciousness, which is gradually rediscovering the figure of the *Shekhīnah*, the divine presence understood as a feminine aspect of God."[455] In the mystical tradition, *Shekhīnah* is a feminine hypostasis, an independent emanation within the Godhead.[456] Building upon this interpretive framework, the passage in Proverbs 8:22–31 offers one of the most compelling biblical foundations for understanding Wisdom as a personified divine presence (*Ḥōkhmah*), akin to the internal divine voice depicted in the Genesis creation narratives. Therein, she declares herself a coauthor in God's creational design. Some scholars interpret this passage as poetic imagery, while others understand these verses as identifying Wisdom as a divine—or at least personified—figure.[457] While there are numerous references to the *Shekhīnah* in the Talmud, as Scholem noted, there is no hint that it represents a feminine element in God.[458] Conversely, in Jewish mysticism, there exists a view that the *Shekhīnah* ("divine dwelling glory") constitutes the intrinsic feminine aspect of the divine. Her nature as both passive and active divine power is richly represented in Jewish mystical sources and forms part of the polychromatic, polysemic character of the esoteric tradition. She is variously depicted as a force, a body, and a voice; in all cases, she functions as a recipient and mediator of supernal power.[459] Jewish mysticism, which advances a much more dynamic understanding of the Divine, often portrays this presence graphically as a female, particularly in the theosophical views of Kabbalah. The latter, as Idel explains, is concerned with providing complex blueprints of divine realism, which include:

> Descriptions of the increasingly complex hypostatic powers—what is called theosophy. The Female refers not only to a certain entity, or many entities on the theosophic map, in certain fixed locations; it also, quite eminently, encompasses Her functions and interactions with other divine powers and with extra-divine entities [...] the "words of Wisdom," in Prov. 8:22-31, reflects some form of hypostatic figure [...] in theosophical Kabbalah, one of the highest hypostases in the second sefirah is called *Ḥōkhmah*.[460]

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[455] Hellner-Eshed (2021), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[456] Luke Devine, "How Shekhina Became the God(dess) of Jewish Feminism," *Feminist Theology*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2014), pp. 71-91.

[457] Judith M. Hadley, "From Goddess to Literary Construct: The Transformation of Ashera into Ḥokmah," p. 396, in Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods, and Strategies*, Chicago, London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997, pp. 360-399.

[458] Scholem (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 229.

[459] Moshe Idel, *Male and Female: Equality, Female Theurgy, and Procreation. R. Moshe Cordovero's Dual Ontology, Vol. 2*, New York: Ktav Publishing House, 2023, pp. 799-800.

[460] *The Privileged Divine Feminine*, pp. 16-17.

Within this theosophical framework, the figure of *Ḥōkhmah* acquires additional symbolic dimensions. As Idel notes, in Kabbalistic thought, she is sometimes conceived within the symbolic vision of the divine Feminine, as a daughter, reflecting her special relation with the divine Father. In a mystical account of the creation, it is by means of *Ḥōkhmah* that the Creator founded the earth. According to Idel, drawing on *Tiqqūnēy Zohar* (fol. 26b), the foundation of the Daughter is indubitably the reason for Her later ascent to the Father.[461] In the Zoharic tradition, *Ḥōkhmah* is also the divine "supernal thought" (*Maḥashāvāh ʻalāʾāh*),[462] thereby attaining her exalted status and relevance in the celestial realm. From this perspective, we may grasp the intertextual resonance within the wisdom corpus, which presents the voice of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs as an alloy character composed of both the created order (ch. 8) and an excellent woman (ch. 31:10). This voice is personified in the figure of *Ḥōkhmah*. Representing the entire created order, the latter functions as a synecdoche for one of the most important and most difficult components of wisdom: an excellent woman. Idel notes a Zoharic tradition that expands this matter: "The Daughter ascends higher than all the supernal ranks, as it is written: many daughters are valorous, but you surpassed them all, and Her ascendance will be to the Father."[463] In this manner, the composite nature of Wisdom becomes apparent through a lexical and thematic study of *Ḥōkhmah* in Proverbs, where she is personified as "the excellent woman." Ironically, the Israelite mythological character to whom the authorship of the Book of Proverbs is traditionally attributed is said in the biblical narratives to have had a thousand women. Yet, none of them corresponds to *Ḥōkhmah*—certainly not *Ḥūkhmetāʾ min qadam*, the "primordial divine wisdom" which, according to Targumic tradition in its exposition of 1 Kings 3:28, King Solomon possessed "within him" (*beqirbō*).[464] It is she who proclaims: "Unto you, O men, I call!" (Prov. 8:4) […] "Give ye ear, and hear my voice; attend, and hear my speech (Isaiah 28:23)." Yet one must ask: from whence derives the authority of her voice?

The first discourse of *Ḥōkhmah* in Prov. 1:20-33 exhibits literary features, vocabulary, theological postures, compositional style, and editorial characteristics similar to those found in Psalms 1 and 2, which have been described as either "wisdom" or "Torah" psalms, namely, idiomatic to wisdom

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[461] Ibid., p. 61.

[462] Ibid., p. 63n255.

[463] Ibid., p. 61, 61n245.

[464] Abba Zvi Naiman, Avrohom Biderman (Eds.), *The Early Prophets with the Teachings of the Talmud: Melachim/Kings* (*Milstein Edition*), Rahway: Artscroll, Mesorah Publications, 2025, p. 38.

literature.[465] Just as these two Psalms serve as the introduction 13 to the Psalter, so Proverbs 1:8-19 and 1:20-33 serve the same purpose, albeit for the Book of Proverbs. Psalm 2 presents additional interesting resemblances of speech analysis that resonate with Proverbs 8. In both, speech is activated by the voice uttering the Hebrew root (√*n-s-kh*). In the former, this is presented in *Qal* Perf. 1s: "I that have established or installed (*nāsakhttī*) my king (Psalm 2:6); whereas in the Prov. 8:23, this reverberates in *Nif*. Perf. 1s: "I was set up (*nissakhttī*) from everlasting." This verbal root may be rendered in Hebrew as "to pour out, to make an offering, to be consecrated, to bestow, to be made leader with a libation, to be offered as a libation, libation of blood;" whereas in Aramaic its connotation is that of "sovereignty, chieftaincy, greatness, reign"[466]—thus serving as a metonymic translation in the Hebrew script and giving agency and personification to the direct object in both biblical accounts. It is, hence, the Divine who directly confers authority upon both her voice and self.

The images associated with *Ḥōkhmah* in the Book of Proverbs have raised several interrogations concerning her origins. The approach from the history of religions suggests that she embodies features associated with several foreign and Semitic goddesses. This vision assumes that *Ḥōkhmah* developed under the influence of female deities around Near Eastern cultures and somehow entered the Israelite cosmological space. It has also been claimed that the figure of *Ḥōkhmah* developed as a literary device that served the socio-theological needs of the Israelite community during the Persian period. Neither approach is absolute. Other scholars have claimed, however, that "there is no direct link between any one goddess and the biblical *Ḥōkhmah*."[467] As a female potency, *Ḥōkhmah* emerged for the first time in a twelfth-century book in Provence, France, called *Sēfer Habbāhīr,* which claims that "humankind were created by means of *Ḥōkhmah.*"[468] The concept of this feminine element of the divine and its manifestation in both the metaphysical and physical realms naturally creates several philosophical and theological interrogations. This idea, which manifests itself in the canonical books of Job and Proverbs, did not brew in Medieval Europe. The non-canonical books of Sirach and *Sapientia Salomonis* also bear witness to this conception. Except

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[465] Gerald Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientalizing of the Old Testament*, Berlin, New York: DeGruyter, 1980, p. 137.

[466] Aaron Dotan (Ed.), *Biblical Aramaic: A Reader Handbook*, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016, p. 61; and William L. Holladay (Ed.), *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of The Old Testament*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988, p. 239.

[467] Christopher Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad: An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs*, Berlin: DeGruyter, 2011, pp. 54-55.

[468] *Ms. Hébreu 802*, f. 60v.

for the Book of Job, their common denominator is the connection of Wisdom as a female persona and her involvement in the intrinsic structure of the created world. This feminine figure embodies God's voice and, through it, divine revelation on earth. Philo of Alexandria, perhaps influenced by the biblical Wisdom tradition and Greek philosophy, also included this concept in his thinking. Gnostic Jewish groups at the beginning of the Christian era also claimed that within the Godhead, there is a feminine power that plays a prominent role in the Proverbial narrative of creation.[469]

This relational symbolism resonates with the intimate connection between the *ʾāmōn* of Proverbs 8 and the Creator, from where the manifestation of the *Shekhīnah* is also understood to stem. Similarly, Elliot Wolfson observes that the name Meṭāṭrōn, occasionally attributed to the *Shekhīnah*, is also understood as the body of the latter.[470] It should be noted, however, that *Ḥōkhmah*, "a paramount feminine noun, which refers to feminine entity in some texts in ancient Jewish literature, has become a term for a *sefirah* that functions as masculine,"[471] highlighting the fluidity of gendered conceptualizations in Kabbalah. This recalls Mary Daly's phrase, "if God is male, then the male is God,"[472] which should awaken intellectual and theological curiosity concerning the ontology of the Divine. True, the God of the Bible cannot simply be replaced by "goddess," as Daly highlighted. Neither are we facing an issue of semantics only. The issue is deeper on a social, cognitive, and theological level. As Frymer-Kensky claims: "There is no essential difference between men and women,"[473] and while yes, gender matters, neither humanity nor Israel revolves essentially or ontologically on a sexual axis. The dualisms that count here are between the Divine and the human (male and female) and between Israel and the other nations."[474] From this perspective, *Ḥōkhmah* is the sole recognized female divine image in Israel, although she is not immediately apparent from the biblical script to be revered in place of YHVH or as a primary religious symbol in place of the Israelite deity.[475] Instead, she is the feminine pro-creative power of God, and her voice speaks to and on behalf of the creation. As Frymer-

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[469] Schäfer (2002), *op. cit.*, pp. 4-8.

[470] Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 261, 313.

[471] *The Privileged Divine Feminine*, p. 65.

[472] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1973, p. 19.

[473] Frymer-Kensky (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 337.

[474] Ibid., p. 338.

[475] Schroer (1989), *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

Kensky claims, invoking *Ḥōkhmah* as intrinsically a part of the Divine brings the most histrionic theological and socio-religious recasting of all.[476] Under this optic, both feminist biblical hermeneutics [and Jewish mystical thought] have the task of challenging and reframing the interpretation of the stories in Scripture.[477]

But what are biblical stories? I will say, artfully crafted documents written in both Hebrew and Aramaic that, after careful study and from a close reading perspective in the language of the primary source, reveal deep levels of social, historical, cognitive, spiritual, and theological meaning of ancient Israelite religiosity. Among them, those stories we can call *voices* convey an important message, and those in which female voices act as agents of divine utterances are a significant window into the spirit of Israel. When we read them, although it is common wisdom that we all read with presuppositions, close reading is necessary. Close reading is not merely esoteric, although Jewish esoteric and mystical works can and should be read with a close reading methodology, too. In this close reading, however, the reader should carefully check traditional interpretations and personal presuppositions with the written text. Under this optic, this work does not intend to reflect on the contested nature of the Wisdom Literature category but takes advantage of the opportunities it presents for reconsidering the concept of *wisdom* as a personified heavenly feminine voice and agent intrinsically inherent to the mosaic that forms the creative power of the Divine, thus as an example in Jewish thought discrepant to Maimonidean theology, particularly his principles of faith. Observing the above is a key component for a better theological understanding of what I call the *uniplurality* of God as an inclusive concept that embraces both gender and number within it. Such an approach toward the ontology of the Divine promotes a more inclusive and flexible understanding and accommodates new-ancient feminine esoteric formulations in the architecture of creation and, consequently, as integral to the study of biblical divine ontology.

In this regard, Robert Alter notes that "all the indicators of nuanced individuality to which the Western literary tradition has accustomed us—preeminently in the novel—would appear absent from the Bible."[478] Biblical writers are aware that inward speech provides a door to the realm of relative certainty about the character in the narratives they present. The narrator is, therefore, intentionally

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[476] Frymer-Kensky (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 347.

[477] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, New York: Orbis Books, 2001, p. 89.

[478] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York: Basic Books, 1981, p. 143.

allowing ambiguity, thus permitting the readers to conjecture about the narrated situation for themselves. It is this malleability of the biblical text that permits us to go beyond its literal or plain meaning, helping us thus in "promoting new ethical awareness and moral sensitivity [as] a major aim of studying the Bible."[479] Against this background, biblical stories should encourage us today to read them not only in a way that sanctifies the Scriptures,[480] but in a manner that provides a different view than the Judeo-Christian monotheistic masculine ontology of God. It is precisely this creative power of biblical ambiguity that allows the text to be read from multiple angles, inviting diverse conjectures and insights, and opening a space in which readers can engage with the Scriptures in ways that transcend fixed interpretations, ultimately revealing layers of divine expression, wisdom, and relationality that might otherwise remain concealed.

The text as a medium of interpretation should then be included in the analytical repertoire, and at least a basic command of the language in which the primary source is written is an intellectual and even theological obligation, for it is the script that informs the concerns of the author of the text. As Idel notes, "the fact that the vast majority of literature written by Jews over two millennia is in Hebrew or Aramaic demonstrates that expertise in these languages played a central role in developing different ways of thought through the preservation of the languages in which the canonic writings were inscribed."[481] From this perspective, let us observe through a linguistic exercise how in Proverbs 8:31, *Ḥōkhmāh*, akin to understanding (*tevūnāh*), interacts with humanity (*ʾet benēy ʾādām*). In the view of ʾĪben ʿĒzrāʾ, she does so "in the created world of the Divine" (*betebbēl ʾartzō*), after the Creator completed His creation.[482] Other commentaries express, however, that previous to that, *Ḥōkhmāh* was faithfully reared by the Divine as a nursling one (*yōnēq*).[483] From this perspective, *Ḥōkhmāh* emerges as the first of all of YHVH's manifestations:

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[479] Frymer-Kensky (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 351.

[480] Ibid., p. 349.

[481] Idel (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 110.

[482] *Pīrūsh Mishlēy Lerabbēnū ʾAvrāhām ʾĪben* ʿĒzrāʾ, Oxford: Clarendon, 1880, p. 10 (In Hebrew).

[483] *Miqrāʾōt Gedōlōt ʿim 32 Pīrūshīm*, Warsaw: N. Shriftgisser, 1874, p. 202 (In Hebrew).

Proverbs 8:22-23	משלי ח:כב-כג
“**YHVH, in the very beginning of his ways, he brought me forth, gave birth* to me [and/or] transferred ownership** to me** (***qānānī***).” (*Fritz Stolz, in *Strukturen und Figuren im Kult von Jerusalem* 132, accepts as the general meaning of the root *√q-n-h* several semantic variations, including: to possess, to acquire, to gain possession, to give birth, and to create. See Johann Jakob Stamm, Ludwig Köehler, Walter Baumgartner (Eds.), *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (Lief. III), Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983, p. 1038. **Ludwig Köehler and Walter Baumgartner (Eds.), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (III), Leiden, New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1996, pp. 1111-1112. The term *qedem* (“preceding”), understood here as a temporal construct, is rendered as “before His most ancient deeds”. In historical narratives, the temporal particle adv. *ʾaz* functions as a stylistic device introducing a stressed statement; accordingly, I translated it here as “before or most ancient.” The Zohar names Meṭāṭrōn “the firstborn,” see S. F. Dunlap, *The Son of Man*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1861, p. xxix.	יְהוָה קָנָנִי רֵאשִׁית דַּרְכּוֹ קֶדֶם מִפְעָלָיו מֵאָז
“**From before eternity* I was anointed** [and/or] enthroned*** with a libation of blood**** even preceding the earth’s existence.**” (*I rendered this expression as “before eternity” in accordance with the Aramaic Targumic tradition. **See Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Ed.), *Gesenius’s Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1889, p. 552. ***I followed the exegesis of Rashi, who interpreted the Hebrew root *√n-s-kh* as “enthroned.” ****See Ludwig Koehler (Ed.), *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953, p. 620. This interpretation follows the exegesis of the *Malbim*, who in his *Bʾēūr Hamīlōt* on Proverbs argues that *nāsakhttī* signifies “to install,” in the sense of dominion or rulership, analogous to Psalm 2:6. Likewise, ʾĪben ʾĒzrāʾ, in his *Pērūsh Mishleī*, links *Wisdom* with the verse: “Since the day was I am Him” (Isaiah 43:13). A similar interpretation is offered by *Metzudat David* (Prov. 8:23): “From before eternity (*miyemōt ʿōlām*) I am crown (*ʾanī nesūkhāh*) and reign (*ūmoshelet*), preceding the earth.”	מֵעוֹלָם נִסַּכְתִּי מֵרֹאשׁ מִקַּדְמֵי- אָרֶץ

Building on her primordial installation and anointing—as one might read in parallel with the enthronement motif of Psalm 2:7, *Ḥōkhmāh's* personification extends beyond mere precedence to active participation in the cosmic order, functioning as both co-sovereign and architect alongside YHVH. Her cosmic embodiment is, consequently, instrumental in both the process of creation and the divine economy. With her, through her, for her the creation was made: "YHVH *by means of* wisdom founded the earth; *by means of* understanding, YHVH established the heavens" (Prov. 3:19). According to the Malbim, the worlds and all creation were planned and made in accordance with her ruling: *Haḥokhmāh hī' tzūrat kol hāʿolāmōt; kullām naʿāsū venitkenū, nimddedū vehūkhnū lefī ḥuqqēy haḥokhmāh, ūbāh weʿal-yādāh, ūkhemiddātāh ūkhetavnītāh nitzṭayyerū venisttakhlelū kol hāʿolāmōt mērō'sh veʿad-sōf.*[484] Thus, through a feasting libation, *Ḥōkhmāh's* and YHVH established a covenant before eternity at the moment of her coronation, an oath through which YHVH brought her forth and, through her, the entire creation came into existence:

Proverbs 8:24	**משלי ח:כד**
"**At the time when there were no primeval depths, I was brought forth through the parturient labors of a whirling dance.**" (I opted to provide this metaphorical and extended translation to illustrate more vividly the apotheosis narrated in the Hebrew verse. My rendering is informed by an intertextual comparative analysis—cf. Psalm 51:7, הֵן-בְּעָוֹן חוֹלָלְתִּי—and by Gesenius's lexicon, *op. cit.*, pp. 265, 275. Other lexica, such as *HALOT*, support a similar interpretation.)	בְּאֵין־תְּהֹמוֹת חוֹלָלְתִּי

This vivid image of Wisdom's birth—emerging from primordial depths in a whirling, parturient dance—resonates closely with Bialik's: "These words came into the world only after difficult and prolonged birth pangs. They flashed like sudden lightning to illuminate, with one leap, the entire world."[485]

Similarly, *Wisdom* was brought forth from within the divine creative power, and through her, the worlds came into being. Just like an algebraic polynomial equation, in essence, words concealing numerical values whose geometrical manifestations appear in the Cartesian space, so did the power of

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[484] ("Wisdom is the archetypal form of all worlds; by her laws they were made, ordered, measured, and prepared. In her, through her, and according to her measure and pattern, all the worlds were fashioned and brought to perfection, from beginning to end"), Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, *Nevī'īm Ūktūvīm, Vol. 10 Mishleī*, Vilna: Romm Publishing House 1891, p. 26 (In Hebrew).

[485] H. N. Bialik, "Revealment and Concealment in Language (1915)," in Robert Alter (Ed.), *Modern Hebrew Literature*, West Orange: Behrman House Publishers, 1975, p. 130.

God's spoken voice, the *Word* (*dāvar*), cause the creation to manifest from the metaphysical into the physical, from the eternal into the temporal, from the concealed into the visible. Thereafter, space-time provided a locus and duration, addressing the where and a when of the personification of the Creator and their creation: "And YHVH-ʾĒlohīm planted (וַיִּטַּע) a garden from *Qedem*, in Eden; and there *They* put the humans whom *They* had formed" (Gen. 2:8). The Hebrew verb *Qal* + *Vav* Consecutive 3rd person, masculine, singular (נטע), is cognate with the action of transplanting and replanting, indicating moving an object from one place to a different space. In this very space, where humans were transplanted, occurs the first personification of voice in the biblical narratives: "And they heard (וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ) the voice of YHVH-ʾĒlohīm walking (*mithallēkh*) in the garden" (Genesis 3:8). The Hebrew direct object marker את signals that what they heard was the personified voice of YHVH-ʾĒlohīm perambulating in the garden—echoing the view of ʾĪben ʿĒzrāʾ. *Targūm Neofitī* renders this verse as: "And they heard the sound of the *Mēmrʾā* of YHVH-ʾĒlohīm walking within the garden."[486] Whatever the precise meaning of *Mēmrā*, it denotes a subject distinct from *YHVH-ʾĒlohīm* yet belonging to and emanating from the Divine.

Targūm Onkelos offers a similar insight: ושמעו ית קל מימרא דיי[487]—namely, they heard the voice of the personified *Mēmrʾā* of YHVH walking in the garden. Beyond Targumic literature, rabbinic sources, and several Jewish medieval exegetes identify the Divine voice as the subject in the aforementioned verse from Genesis. The voice walking in the garden is often associated with the materialized voice of the divine glory.[488] Other rabbinic interpretations view the voice anthropomorphically. For example, Rabbi Abū al-Walīd Marwān Ibn Janāḥ,[489] evoked by ʾĪben ʾĒzrāʾ in his *Pīrūsh haʾTōrah*, arguably expressed: "The Spanish grammarian, Rabbī Ibn Janāḥ, says that this verse is to be interpreted as 'and they heard the voice of God as if this was a person walking in the garden."[490] The Maharal of Prague also offers noteworthy reflections on the walking voice of the

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[486] Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, Martin McNamara (Eds.), *The Aramaic Bible. The Targums. Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992, p. 60.

[487] *Targum Onkelos* (Herausgegeben und erläutert von Dr. A. Berliner), Berlin: Gorzelanczyk, 1884, p. 3 (In Hebrew).

[488] See *Pirqēy de-Rabbī ʾĒlīʿezer*; *Pērūsh Abarbanel ʿal Hattōrah*; and *Sēfer Hadar Zekenīm.*

[489] On Rabbī Ibn Janāḥ and the history of the study of Hebrew grammar, see Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor (Eds.), *An Introduction to Biblical Syntax*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990, pp. 34-37.

[490] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 176. Abraham ibn Ezra. Commentaire du Pentateuque*, Year: 1284, f. 11r (In Hebrew).

Divine: "*Mithallēkh baggān. Pērūsh kī YHVH hāyā mithallēkh baggān*"[491]—illustrating thus an embodiment of the divine word.

The *peshāt* in Gen. 3:8 does not include the verbal component (*hāyāh*) suggested by the Maharal. Notwithstanding, as insightful and creative as his proposal may be, we cannot add to the *peshāt* of Scripture what the text does not provide. What Rabbi Judah Löew ben Bezalel (the Maharal) considers is merely a supposition to make *YHVH-ʾĒlohīm* the subject walking in the garden. However, under Maharal's perspective, the subject that walks in the garden is a living voice—a persona with agency, will, and self-identity—albeit one that participates in the Divine. Similarly, Rabbi Umberto Cassuto observed regarding this verse: "It is an example of biblical anthropomorphism."[492] With this in mind, we may infer that the concept of *voice* is personified here, alongside the personification of *Ḥōkhmah* in the Book of Proverbs, yet both belong to the divine unity of the Creator. The ambiguity of the biblical text permits this interpretation, thereby paving the way for an Israelite deity who is both masculine and feminine in *its* uniplural ontological composition. In this light, *Ḥōkhmāh* becomes the personification of *Vox Dei* and the feminine pro-creative power of God. Thus, "the voice of God was made a Meṭāṭrōn."[493]

Thus, divine Word and action operated in concert to summon the created universe into existence, presenting the cosmos as a material reflection of the higher metaphysical realms. At the center of this creative process lies the generative power of divine speech (√*d-b-r*), functioning as a multidimensional instrument of creation through which both ethereal and material domains are brought into being. In later Jewish mystical traditions, this creative speech becomes personified and conceptualized as an active principle within the divine economy. Within this framework emerges *Dibbūrīʾēl* ("Word of God")—a key creative figure who, by virtue of his name, is intimately associated with the generative potency of divine speech and proverbial Wisdom. Jewish mystical literature

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[491] ("Walking in the garden. The interpretation is that God, the Blessed One, was walking in the garden, but if we do not add the verbal form "was" (*hāyāh*), it would mean that the voice is the one who was walking, and "walking" (*mithalekh*) in the verbal construct of the *P'shat* does not apply to the voice, as the subject. Only the verbal form "walking" (*hōlekh*), as in "and the sound of the shofar goes louder and louder" (Exodus 19:19), would apply, but "walking" (*mithalekh*), which is in *Binyan Hitpa'el*, does not apply only but only to one who walks of his own accord and own will, and with the voice, it is not possible to say so—[unless it is personified]. Therefore, "was" (*hāyāh*) has to be added"), Yehūdāh Lōew ben Betzalʾēl, *Sefer Gūr ʾArīeh*, Bene Beraḳ: Yahadūt, 1972, p. 34 (In Hebrew)

[492] Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part 1: From Adam to Noah: Genesis I-VI 8*, Jerusalem: The Magness Press, Hebrew University, 1961, p. 150.

[493] Moore (1922), *op. cit.*, p. 80.

portrays *Dibbūrīʾēl* as a hidden creative "artisan," comparable in certain respects to the figure of *ʾāmōn* described in both the *Book of Proverbs* and *Berʾēshīt Rabbāh* 1, who stands alongside the Divine as a mediating instrument of creation.

On this basis, as George Herbert Box observed, certain mystical traditions identify *Dibbūrīʾēl* among the names ascribed to Meṭāṭrōn.[494] Through this association, *Dibbūrīʾel-Meṭāṭrōn* becomes the locus in which divine will, utterance, and creative action converge, thus mirroring the creative agency of *Ḥōkhmāh* directly. Consequently, he is depicted not merely as a celestial messenger (*malʾākh*), but as a mediating manifestation of divine creative energy, occupying the liminal space between speech and substance while functioning as the conduit through which the upper and lower realms remain aligned. In this sense, through *Ḥōkhmah-Dībbūrīʾēl-Meṭāṭrōn*, the ethereal divine Word becomes manifest, as divine speech assumes operative form within the structures of the divine economy. His portrayal as a wise co-creator within the divine creative enterprise thus situates him as an integral component of the cosmic architecture akin to Wisdom. In this regard, Peter Hayman observes: "Most varieties of Judaism are marked by a dualistic pattern in which two divine entities are presupposed: one, the supreme creator God, the other his vizier or some other spiritual agency, who really runs the show, or at least provides the point of contact between God and humanity."[495]

From the standpoint of Maimonidean theology, however, such portrayals introduce significant tension. Maimonides' first principle of faith affirms that "God alone is the sole Creator of all existence" (*Hūʾ levaddō ʿāsāh kol hammaʿasīm*[496]) and "the sustaining power of creation" (*Koaḥ haqqīyūm*).[497] Consequently, attributing any role in creation to *Ḥōkhmāh–Dibbūrīʾel–Meṭāṭrōn* suggests not merely delegated agency but a more expansive conception of divine creative ontology. Namely, such a model implies an ontological integration within the Divine in which differentiated modes of divine manifestation participate in the process of creation, thereby its uniplural nature. Notwithstanding, this cosmogonic vision stands in marked tension with Maimonides' first and second principles of faith, particularly his doctrine of absolute divine unity (*Yiḥūd Hashshēm*), according to which God is

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494 Box (1932), *op. cit.*, p. 115.

495 Peter Hayman, "Monotheism–A Missed Word in Jewish Studies?," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (1991), pp. 1-15.

496 *Siddūr Kol Bō: Sēder Tefillōt mikōl Hashshānāh ʿim Targūm ʾAngglīt. Complete Daily Prayers with a Revised Translation According to the Custom of Ashkenazim*, New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1906, p. 180.

497 *Ms. Hébreu 674*, f. 55r.

an absolute and indivisible one (*Hū' yāḥīd*).[498] In this respect, the mystical portrayal of the motifs *Ḥōkhmāh*, *Dibbūrīʾēl*, *Meṭāṭrōn* introduces an alternative Jewish vision of creation—one that reflects a more internally differentiated understanding of divine creative activity. Thus, these figures, sometimes hidden in metaphor or embedded in angelic hierarchies, function as co-creators or channels through which divine will and wisdom manifest in the world. The enigmatic roles of *Ḥōkhmāh*, *Dibbūrīʾēl*, and *Meṭāṭrōn* will continue to invite us to see the biblical narratives of creation as a dynamic interplay of divine wisdom and agency, challenging the boundaries of monotheistic understanding while enriching the spiritual imagination of Jewish thought.

[498] Ibid., f. 55v.

6.- *Kāvōd-Malʾāch-Meṭāṭrōn*: The *Demūt Kemarʾēh ʾĀdām* Enthroned in the High Places

On the first day of Shavuot, it is customary to recite Ezekiel 1:1-28 as the Haftarah reading. This passage recounts Ezekiel's vision of the divine glory or presence (*Kāvōd*) of the Israelite deity along the Chebar River in Babylon in the year 593 B.C.E., shortly after the deportation of the Israelites from the Land of Judah, situating the theophany within a specific historical spatial context (Ezek. 1:1-3). Rabbinic tradition concludes the aforementioned Haftarah with the verse "Blessed is *Kāvōd YHVH* from His place" (Ezek. 3:12), which became a liturgical formula of praise and the culminating section of the aforesaid Haftarah reading. At the epicenter of this aphorism, the Glory of God is revealed through a striking anthropomorphic manifestation of the divine body, a motif that subsequently became central to *Merkabah* mysticism. The emergence of Jewish mystical thought, including its Metatronic motifs, is greatly linked to speculations concerning this chapter of the Book of Ezekiel,[499] from where it is derived that "it is in Meṭāṭrōn that YHVH is revealed through His glory to Ezekiel."[500] For instance, Meṭāṭrōn is often described with a rainbow-like body, reminiscent of Ezekiel 1:28.[501] This angelic figure is also seen in medieval Jewish literature as "the redeeming angel" of YHVH (*hammalʾākh haggōʾēl*)[502]—who bears the Name of the Divine, an esoteric exegesis derived from Exodus 23:20-21. The issue concerns not only whether the Israelite deity manifests to humans directly or through the agency of a divine or created intermediary, but also how such angelic figures transcend their function as a merely literary device and come to represent or embody the divine "form" (*demūt*) within Jewish thought, thus functioning simultaneously as an epistemological channel and an angelic bearer of the Divine Name, while rendering the anthropomorphic manifestation of *Kāvōd* both perceptible and ultimately illegible. What does this dual role reveal about the mediation of divine presence and authority in Jewish thought, and how does it illuminate the limits of Maimonidean monotheism?

I will begin by arguing that the theosophical dimensions that Jewish mystical traditions attribute to the celestial, anthropomorphic figure enthroned in Ezekiel's vision—the *demūt kemarʾēh*

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[499] Scholem (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[500] Moore (1922), *op. cit.*, p. 85h84.

[501] See Orlov (2017), *op. cit.*, p. 83; and Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah Mysticism*, Leiden: Brill, 1995, p. 115.

[502] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 225. Recueil de commentaires exégétiques*, Year: Fourteenth Century, ff. 23v (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Ms. Hébreu 225*).

ʾādām (Ez. 1:26-28)—demonstrate how this theophanic image of the divine *kāvōd* ("glory") becomes esoterically personified in the figure of Meṭāṭrōn.

The personification of God's glory (*kāvōd*), particularly as depicted in Ezekiel 1, is, as Wolfson observes, frequently reconfigured in Jewish mystical literature through the figure of Meṭāṭrōn.[503] Saʿadyāh ben Yosēf (ca. 882-942) also understood the *Kāvōd* as the immanent aspect of God and, under his influence, the motif *Kāvōd-Meṭāṭrōn* figured prominently in Ḥasidūt Ashkenaz. In this regard, Joseph Dan notes that "while the shekhīnah and the divine glory (*Kāvōd*) were terms denoting divine powers in the texts of the early Jewish mystics of antiquity, medieval philosophy tried to deprive them of their status as divine attributes and described them instead as created, angelic powers."[504] Yet both terms designate the same divine entity.[505] Within Jewish mysticism, particularly in medieval Kabbalah, Meṭāṭrōn emerges as a permutation of these divine glories (*kāvōd* and *shekhīnah*). From this metaphysical economy, Meṭāṭrōn, the supernal anthropoid, emanates as a divine extension from the Godhead, thus serving as a living conduit of the divine glory and *hitpashshṭūt* ("emanative unfolding") of the divine essence. As Numbers 12:8 reads: *ūtmunat YHVH yabbīṭ* ("And the similitude of YHVH he shall behold").

This esoteric approach—steeped in spiritual gravitas and philosophical subtlety—engages the persistent tension between divine transcendence and immanence that permeates Jewish scriptural interpretation and mystical speculation. Within Jewish mystical traditions—particularly the *Hēichālōt* literature, the writings of the *Ḥasidīm* of Ashkenaz, and later theosophic currents of Kabbalah—Ez. 1:26-28 provides a conceptual framework for understanding Meṭāṭrōn both as a manifestation of the divine body and a visual emanation of God's essence. From this vantage point, Meṭāṭrōn represents the visible and perceptible dimension of an otherwise incomprehensible God, forming what Rachel Elior describes as a multifaceted, mythical, mystical, and cosmic dimension of theological substantiality and metaphysical reality.[506]

While classical Jewish exegesis generally emphasizes that Ezekiel's vision reveals not God Himself but His *kāvōd*, this chapter examines mystical interpretations that blur this distinction by

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[503] Elliot R. Wolfson, "Jewish Mysticism: A Philosophical Overview," p. 398, in Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (Eds.), *History of Jewish Philosophy*, London, New York: Routledge, 1997, pp. 389-437.

[504] Dan (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 107.

[505] Ibid.

[506] Elior (2004) *op. cit.*, p. 74.

treating the *kāvōd* as an inseparable expression of the divine presence. In this framework, Meṭāṭrōn emerges as a hypostatic celestial figure intimately connected to the uniplural divine ontology. As a supernal anthropos, he renders the transcendent God symbolically approachable and visually apprehensible, thereby mediating the revelation of divine presence in ways that challenge the strict doctrine of divine incorporeality articulated in Maimonides' third principle of faith (*ʾēynō gūf*).[507] Similarly, Meṭāṭrōn, as the angelic vice-regent whose mediating role embodies a convergence of divine and angelic authority, both enhances this tension and channels divine interposition. As Nathaniel Deutsch observes, "the angelic vice regent, in the theologies and cosmologies of Late Antiquity, teaches us much about what it meant to be divine [and] embodies the logic of mediation."[508]

The sages of the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods seem to exhibit an ambivalent attitude toward the prophet Ezekiel, particularly concerning the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel. Yet they do speak in a riveting manner about Meṭāṭrōn, the most illustrious episode being found in the Babylonian Talmud (Ḥagigah 15a). This Talmudic episode is one of the earliest descriptions of Meṭāṭrōn in rabbinic literature and tells of the heavenly enthronement of Meṭāṭrōn—a notion that would develop into Meṭāṭrōn's cluster of esoteric traditions, often derived from esoteric exegesis of Ezekiel 1:26-28. This motif would become a central theme within Ḥasidut Ashkenaz and, to a notable extent, within the Sephardic medieval Jewish milieu as well. References to Meṭāṭrōn and its resonance with Ezekiel 1 are multiple and multifaceted in the writings of the German Pietists, who, as Wolfson notes, "were preserving and elaborating older motifs found in the sources they copied and studied."[509] However, concerning the theophany in the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel, rabbinic tradition argues that "all that Ezekiel saw, Isaiah saw" (Ḥagigah 13b), suggesting both continuity and tension in prophetic vision. Within this framework, as Meira Polliack argues, "there is good reason to believe that important elements of the Jewish mystical tradition go back to esoteric circles of the Mishnaic period, in particular to the group of pupils associated with Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai,"[510] to whom numerous mystical teachings and texts are attributed, often in a pseudoepigraphical manner.

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[507] *Ms. Hébreu 674*, f. 55v.

[508] Nathaniel Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity*, Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1999, p. 1.

[509] Wolfson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 64.

[510] Meira Polliack, "Ezekiel 1 and Its Role in Subsequent Jewish Mystical Thought and Tradition," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (1999), pp. 70-78.

The Metatronic motif in *Hēchalōt* and classic rabbinic traditions adds further complexity to both our question on Rabbinic monotheism and Polliack's proposition. For instance, Rabbī ʿĀqīvāʾ and Rabbī Yishmʿaʾēl are portrayed in this literary corpus as claiming that "Meṭāṭrōn is the Messiah of YHVH, born to the house of David"[511]—from whom ultimate redemption will unfold.[512] The rabbinic phrase "two powers in heaven"[513] emanates from these early rabbinic conceptions. Similarly, Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa argues that an unambiguous testimony exists about the probable existence of a strikingly similar conception of a divine archangelic hypostasis in first-century Judaism:

> We know from the reports about the sect of the Maghāriya[514] and their doctrines (one of Qirqisāni in the name of el-Muqāmmis and another by Shahrastāni) that, in opposition to Sadduccean anthropomorphism, Maghāriya theology, "four hundred years before Arius," referred all anthropomorphic biblical verses to an angel, whom it considered to be the creator of the world. This angel, moreover, was said to bear God's name, while his appearance among men was presented as God's own appearance.[515]

This view echoes across the constellation of Metatronic motifs. Who influenced whom is not the question; rather, the importance rests on acknowledging that differentiated divine ontologies existed among distinct Jewish circles of antiquity. From this perspective, Polliac's position is difficult to sustain, particularly if we further observe that, in Talmudic literature (b. *Sanhedrin* 38b) and *Hēikhālōt* texts, Meṭāṭrōn is identified with the *malʾākh* ("angel") of Exodus 23:20–21 (*kī shmī beqirbō*—"for My Name is in him"), making him bearer of the Divine Name. This notion causes this angelic being to be referred to as *YHVH haqqāṭṭān* ("the minor YHVH")[516] or "The Name-Bearer"—titles signaling his exalted, quasi-divine status.[517] These traditions, while they did not find the same theological echo as

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[511] "Hēchalōt Rabbatī 32:5," in: Shlomo Aaron Wertheimer (Ed.), *Shʾneī Sfarīm Niftaḥīm: Sēfer Pirkēy Hēchalōt Rabbatī Mi-Hāttannaīm Rabbī Yishmʿaʾēl Hacohen Hāggadōl Verabbī ʿĀqīvʾā, Yachīl ʾĀrbʿaīm Perakīm*, Jerusalem: 1889, f. 10r (In Hebrew).

[512] Abba Hillel Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel: From the First through the Seventh Centuries*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927, See p. 127.

[513] See Peter Schäfer, *Two Gods in Heaven: Jewish Concepts of God in Antiquity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.

[514] On the Maghârîya and their theology, see N. Golb, "Who Were the Magäriya?," *JAOS*, Vol. 80 (1960), pp. 347-359.

[515] Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *HTR*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (1983), pp. 269-288.

[516] Abraham Berliner (Ed.), *Rashī ʿal Hattōrāh. Hūʾ Pērūsh Rabbēnū Shlomoh Bar Yitzḥāk*, Berlin, 1866, p. 145 (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Pērūsh Rabbēnū Shlomoh Bar Yitzḥāk*).

[517] Jody A. Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012, pp. 158, 168; and Joseph Dan, *Studies in Ashkenazi-Hasidic Literature*, Ramat Gan: Mesada, 1975, p. 120.

they did in the Middle Ages, succeeded in influencing Jewish medieval exegetes, such as Rabbī Moshe ben Naḥman (1194-1270), who interpreted Meṭāṭrōn as the angel (*malʾākh*) of Exodus 23:20-21, whose name and voice are equal to those of his Master:

> *Veʿal derekh hāʾemet hammalʾākh hazzeh hūʾ hammalʾākh haggōʾēl ʾasher Hashshēm haggādōl beqirvō, kī beYāh tzevaʾot tzur ʿōlāmīm* […] *verabbōtay ʾāmrū shehūʾ Meṭāṭrōn* […] *kī shemō keshēm rabō, vehinnēh qōlō hūʾ qōl ʾElōhīm ḥayyīm, vehammitzvāh lishmoaʿ beqōlō mipī hannevīʾīm* […] *veqōlō hūʾ qōl ʾĒl ʿElyōn.*[518]

In the medieval period, this conception already circulated in diverse Jewish spaces. As Yōsef Bechōr Shōr (1145-1195) commented on Exodus 23:20-23: "Because whatsoever he says I (God) do speak, for from my mouth (God's) does he (Meṭāṭrōn) say, and thus if you hear him (Meṭāṭrōn) indeed you do hear me (God)."[519] Other medieval exegetes, such as Rashī, also identified the messenger of God in Exodus 23:20 with Meṭāṭrōn, albeit through Gematria: "Meṭāṭrōn in Gematria is *Shadday*."[520] Viewed through this interpretative lens, the *Malʾākh-Meṭāṭrōn* motif is no longer merely an angel of YHVH at Mount Sinai or along the Chebar River, nor does it function solely as a subordinated celestial envoy. Rather, it emerges as a manifest, integral, and immanent aspect of the Divine self, evocative of the Names *YāH* and *Shadday.* Moreover, in Rabbēnu Baḥīya bar Asher's commentary on Exodus 24:1, the name Meṭāṭrōn combines two meanings: Lord and envoy:

> *Veʾel-Mosheh ʾāmar ʿalēh ʾel YHVH* […] *veʿal derekh haqqabbālāh veʾel-Mosheh ʾāmar Hashshēm Hammeyuḥād ʿālēh ʾel Hashshēm, zehū Mṭaṭrōn, shmō keshshēm Ribbō; vekhēn dirshū Rabbotēynū, veniqrāʾ beshēm hazzēh lefī shebbeshēm hazzeh nikhlālīm shttēy leshōnōt hammōrīm ʿal ʿinyānō, vehūʾ ʾadon veshāliyaḥ.*[521]

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[518] ("And according to the path of truth, this angel is the redeeming angel, in whom the Great Name resides, for within *Yāh* of hosts is the Rock of the Ages […] And my masters said that he is Meṭāṭrōn […] for his name is as the name of his Master, and behold, his voice is the voice of the living God, and it is a commandment [Deut. 11:13] to listen to his voice from the mouths of the prophets […] and his voice is the voice of the Most High"), *Ms. Hébreu 225*, ff. 23v-24r.

[519] Yehōshaphat Nevō (Ed.), *Pērūsh Rabbī Yōsef Bekhōr Shōr ʿal Hattōrah*, Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1994, p. 153 (In Hebrew).

[520] *Pērūsh Rabbēnū Shlomoh Bar Yitzḥāk*, p. 145.

[521] ("And to Moses He said, 'Ascend to YHVH […]' And according to the Kabbalistic tradition, He said to Moses the unique Name, 'Ascend to the Name.' This is *Meṭāṭrōn*, whose name is like the name of his Master, and so our sages of blessed memory explained. And he is called by this Name because in this Name are included two expressions indicating his function, and he is Master and Messenger"), Baḥīya bar Asher, *Pīrūsh Ūbīʾūr ʿal Hattōrah*, "Mishpatīm," Riva di Trento: Cardinal Christophoro Madruz, 1558, f. 122v (In Hebrew).

Other medieval sources saw Meṭāṭrōn as evocative of the divine Name *YāH,* which adds further ontological complexity to the structure and figure of the Israelite deity. For instance, *Sēfer Razīʾēl* illustrates this matter as follows: "Because your name Sar Meṭāṭrōn, Prince of Countenances, is in the Tetragrammaton, which sits over the wheels of the Merkabah (*galggalēy hammerkāvāh*), for in *YāH* is His Name (*beYāh shemō*)."[522] Two references in the Jewish biblical corpus hint at the authority of *YHVH-ʾElohīm* being placed over the Name *YāH*. The first is Isaiah 26:4 (For in *YāH* is YHVH); the second is Psalm 68:5: "Sing to *ʾElohīm* [...] for in *YāH* is His name). However, Isaiah 43:10 provides a compelling biblical reference in which YHVH makes mention, in direct speech (*neʾum YHVH*), of a "servant" (*ʿavddī*) to whom the Israelite deity has chosen (*ʾasher bāḥārttī*), for a special purpose: "So the Israelites know and believe in YHVH" (*lemaʿan tēdʿū vetaʾamīnū lī*) and "understand that YHVH is that envoy Himself" (*vetāvīnū kī ʾAnī hūʾ*—lit., "so you understand that I am he"). Some pieces in the extended corpus of Rabbinic literature have interpreted "my servant" (*ʿavddī*) as Israel. However, if the biblical script explicitly expresses that YHVH is the servant (*kī ʾAnī hūʾ*), how could Israel, as a collectivity, be taken as the protagonist of this biblical narrative if God's servant is sent on a mission for the sake of Israel? Some rabbinic interpretations allude that the servant is Jacob, such as Rashi's,[523] or "the prophet" (*hannāvīʾ*) the Israelites witness, such as David Qimḥi's.[524] ʾIbn ʿEzrāʾ argued that the servant is both Israel and "the prophet" they witnessed,[525] while the phrase *kī ʾAnī hūʾ* is the sublimest expression of the unity of God; for every other being is different from its real form.[526] *Targūm Yōnatan* and *Miqrʾā Mefōrash* on Isaiah 43:10 provide a riveting proposal linked to the aforementioned servant: "Declaration of YHVH: And my servant is the Messiah, in whom my delight is."[527] More perplexing still if we take into account the proposal that Meṭaṭrōn *is* the Messiah, as Rabbī ʿĀqīvāʾ and Rabbī Yishmʿaʾēl claimed,[528] and if ultimate redemption (*geʾullāh*) comes through him, the idea may fit the

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[522] *Sēfer Razīʾēl,* Amsterdam: 1701, f. 40v (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Sēfer Razīʾēl*).

[523] *Miqrāʾōt Gedōlōt: Sēfer Yeshaʿyāhū*, Warsaw: The Levin-Epstein Brothers, 1902, p. 359 (In Hebrew).

[524] Ibid.

[525] *Pīrūsh Rabbēnū ʾAvrāhām ʾIbn ʿEzrāʾ ʿal Yeshaʿyāhū ʿal-pī Ketāvēy Yād,* London: Michael Friedlander, 1876, pp. 68, 73 (In Hebrew).

[526] Ibid., p. 73.

[527] I. Heinemann (Ed.), *Der Prophet Jesaia* (Hebräische Ausgabe), Berlin: Heymann, 1842, f. 167v.

[528] Wertheimer (1889), *op. cit.*, f. 10r.

context of exile in the prophetic hopes of redemption in Ezekiel's visions upon which these esoteric speculations were built.

This proposal, which situates Meṭāṭrōn as the eschatological agent of *geʾullāh*, finds a textual echoing and mystical elaboration in *Sēfer Razīʾēl*, where his role as *Sar hapānīm* and guardian of the two divine faces not only reinforces his mediatory authority but also concretizes his function as the heavenly executor of God's will. According to *Sēfer Razīʾēl*, Meṭāṭrōn is referred to as *Sar hapānīm* since two divine faces—fire and water (*shnēy fānīm*, *kelōmar ʾēsh ūmayīm*)—are given into his hands (*vehēm nimsārīm beyad Meṭāṭrōn*),[529] thus endowing him with the fire dynamics of the celestial throne and the powers of mercy and judgement. The residing tabernacle of Meṭāṭrōn (*Mishkān Meṭāṭrōn*) is the throne of glory (*vezeh kissʾē hakāvōd*).[53o] He rides the Merkabah, for he is the commander of the heavenly hosts (*Meṭaṭrōn, Sar hapānīm, Sar Tzevāʾōt*) and the "superior Adam" (*Haʾādām hāʿelyōn*), the heavenly Prince in charge of humanity (*Hassar Meṭāṭrōn hammemunneh bāʾādām*).[531] This idea developed esoterically from the imagery in Ezekiel 1:26: "Upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above," making this mystical portrayal look like an integral component of the divine economy. This tradition even attributed to Meṭāṭrōn redemptive powers, akin to *malʾākh gōʾēl*, and access to him through prayer—an apotheotic elevation that approaches deification, as these adjurations show:

> I adjure you, *Sar Meṭāṭrōn*, in the Name of the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who set the angels who stand in front of the Great God (*ʾĒlohʾā Rabbʾā*) [...] upon your name and your truth, your name is compassionate (*Ḥanūn*). Merciful is your name (*Raḥūm*), Blessed is the Name of His *Kavōd Glory* forever and ever (בשכמל״ו) [...] I adjure you, *Hassar Meṭāṭrōn*, in the Holy Name and His blessed Name, and lifted overall blessings and praises in your Name (*beshimkhā*), because your name is within you (*kī shimkhā bekhā*) and within you is your name (*ūbekhā shimkhā*), because before all that is established (*kī lifnēy kol nākhōn*) is your name, and forever and ever your name will stand (*leʿōlmēy ʿōlāmīm yaʿamod shimkhā*); and from your name, the supreme heavenly hosts will tremble (*ūmīshshimkhā yirʿadū gedūdēy ʿelyōnīm*), and the lower regiments glorify (*mefāʾarīm*) your name, and all the upper regiments beautify your name, yet your name they have not seen (*veshimkhā loʾ ḥāzū*). On account of your name, everything will tremble, the sea fled behind (*hayyām yānūs leʾāḥōr*) at the awe of your name (*mirʾat shimkhā*) [...] the earth will shake at looking upon you (*behibīṭkhā*), and from eternity your name is above all (*veʿal kol shimkhā mēʿōlām*) [...] and I am dust and ashes, I supplicated before you, to seek your mercy before you and before the throne of your *Kavōd-Glory* (*kissēʾ kevōdekhā*),

[529] *Sēfer Razīʾēl*, f. 33r.

[53o] Ibid., f. 38v.

[531] Ibid., f. 33r.

> because you are near to all those who call you, and found by those who seek you. Now, please willingly fulfill my request before you, for I speedily requested your mercy, and do my desire, because you created me (*kī ʾattāh yātzarttānī*).[532]

Thus, the medieval and early modern periods constitute the chronological framework in which these mystical speculations flourished. This study does not focus on their literary reception, but on how their internal articulation reveals versatile and nuanced dimensions of Jewish divine ontology. As Stroumsa notes, the structural parallelism and the relationship between the Metatronic motifs and God in these Jewish sources are salient.[533] Observing their internal articulation, especially concerning Meṭāṭrōn, who embodies aspects of divine authority, wisdom, and knowledge, while maintaining the ontological distinction between the humanly apprehensible angel and the transcendent, incorporeal God, allows us to discern better the boundaries of Maimonidean monotheism.

Some of the features of the Metatronic motif can be further observed in *Ms. Hébreu 974*, a 1525 manuscript kept at the National Library of France, which contains a compendium of Kabbalistic treatises.[534] This source echoes the above in the following manner: "And his name (Meṭāṭrōn) is like the Name of his Master: Lesser YHVH [...] and He is the righteous one (*tzaddīk*), the eternal foundation (*yesōd ʿōlām*) [...] He is the Minister of Countenances (*Sar happanīm*) who transforms from judgment to mercy and from mercy to judgment."[535] Earlier sources, such as *Hēchalōt Rabbatī* (28:2), speak similarly: "Meṭāṭrōn servant of YHVH, slow to anger, and great in grace, Lord of lords and Lord of the hidden."[536] These inferences are rather perplexing because while the adjectives "slow to anger" and "great in grace" are found in the biblical corpus in diverse instances,[537] these address YHVH directly (Ex. 34:6), and are God's attributes of mercy: "YHVH-YHVH, merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and great in grace and truth." In other strands of the tradition, the matter becomes even more intricate, as Meṭāṭrōn is portrayed not merely as an intermediary but, as Andrei Orlov notes, as the remover of human sins,[538] thereby assuming a distinctly soteriological function. However, what these

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[532] Ibid., f. 40v.

[533] Stroumsa (1983), *op. cit.*, pp. 269-288.

[534] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 974*, Year: 1525 (In Hebrew).

[535] Ibid., f. 181v.

[536] Adolph Jellinek (Ed.), *Bet ha-Midrasch* (Vol. 2), Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wehrmann, 1938, p. 104.

[537] See Psalms 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Numbers 14:18; Joel 2:13; Nahum 1:3; Proverbs 14:29, 16:32; Jonah 4:2.

[538] Orlov (2017), *op. cit.*, p. 192.

sources illustrate is the historical echo of the Metatronic motif and its place in the divine ontological architecture, thus demonstrating that in certain mystical traditions the distinction between Meṭāṭrōn as an angelic intermediary and as a divine envoy—or, more radically, as God Himself—becomes difficult to discern. Consequently, as Peter Schäfer observes, "the near-indistinguishability of God and Meṭāṭrōn is highlighted in Jewish mystical thought."[539]

What this suggests is that, from an esoteric understanding, Meṭāṭrōn functions as a component of the Godhead, namely, as an indivisible part of the uniplural unity of the Divine. Thus, if the revolution wrought by biblical monotheism in the history of religion is tied to the imageless worship of a unique God, the concept of an angelic intermediator who is part of a divine pleroma and is one-on-one with the God of Israel challenges Rabbinic monotheism and underlines the key component that the Book of Ezekiel plays in this enthralling mosaic of Jewish mystic and esoteric traditions at whose core is found the secrets of the unity of the divine Name. Thus, if the revolution effected by biblical monotheism lies in the imageless worship of a unique God, the notion of an angelic intermediary who participates in the divine pleroma and stands in one-to-one correspondence with the God of Israel challenges traditional Rabbinic monotheism. It further underscores the pivotal role that the Book of Ezekiel and certain passages from the Torah play in this intricate mosaic of Jewish mystical and esoteric traditions.

A unifying feature of these sources is then the system of pleromatic powers described in ways that suggest participation in the divine essence itself. In this context, Meṭāṭrōn functions not merely as an angelic intermediary but as a locus in which the anthropomorphic manifestation of *Kāvōd* is rendered perceptible and simultaneously transcendent, reflecting the indwelling of the Divine within the angelic hierarchy of the Metatronic motif. Furthermore, the concept that God is present within the Divine Name—illustrated in Isaiah 26:4 (*kī beYāh YHVH*)—underscores the centrality of the Name in mystical thought, linking angelic activity, divine authority, and creation.[540] In a Zoharic reading, it is through the letters *Yod* and *Heh* that the Creator fashioned the worlds (*YHVH tzūr ʿōlāmīm*).[541] This convergence of the theology of the Divine Name, angelic mediation, and the perceptible yet transcendent manifestation of the *Kāvōd* in the figure of Meṭāṭrōn establishes the conceptual

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[539] Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 116.

[540] See Esther J. Hamori, "Divine Embodiment in the Hebrew Bible and Some Implications for Jewish and Christian Incarnational Theologies," in S. Tamar Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim (Eds.), *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New York and London: T&T Clark, 2010, pp. 161-183.

[541] Idel (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 61.

foundation upon which later mystical traditions articulate the Godhead as a unified yet internally differentiated pleroma. This concept serves as a unique locus for expressing some of the most profound dimensions of Jewish mystical thought, particularly within the framework of medieval spirituality.[542] As Michael Fishbane has noted, the *Kāvōd*—or divine Glory—has often been regarded in mystical Jewish thought as an extension or emanation of the Godhead itself.[543] Thus, biblical narratives that are frequently accompanied by anthropomorphic descriptions of the Israelite deity have served to mediate divine presence in mystical imagination. For example, as Joseph Dan has observed, the verses in Song of Songs 5:11–16 have provided the basis for the anthropomorphic imagery in the *Shiʿūr Qōmāh* and are listed as the most secret Name of God.[544]

The *Shiʿūr Qōmāh*, literally "the measure of the divine body," is a literary source that purports to record—through highly anthropomorphic language—the secret names and precise dimensions of God's corporeal ontology. It constitutes an esoteric doctrine that emerged during the Tannaitic period and came to be regarded as one of the most concealed components of *Merkabah* mysticism. Drawing in part on Ezekiel 1:16, this tradition maintains that when Ezekiel attained his vision of the supernal realm and stood before the heavenly throne, he was granted a revelation of the *Shiʿūr Qōmāh* in the form of a "figure in the likeness of a man" (*demūt kemarʾēh ʾādām*). This doctrine aligns with the broader tendency toward anthropomorphic descriptions of the divine glory and body in various biblical passages and was further reinforced by interpretations of the Song of Songs as an allegory of the relationship between God and Israel. In this context, the description of the beloved in Song of Songs 5:11–16 provides a scriptural foundation for the imagery of the *Shiʿūr Qōmāh*, lending legitimacy to its symbolic framework. The tradition was subsequently elaborated through detailed depictions of the *ḥālūq*—the "robe of glory" in which this mystical divine body is clothed. Fragments of this doctrine have been preserved in texts bearing the title *Shiʿūr Qōmāh*, as well as in numerous allusions throughout midrashic literature. Medieval Kabbalists hailed it as a profound, symbolic expression of their purely spiritual world. Thus, the esoteric doctrine concerning the manifestation of God in bodily form finds its most systematic expression in the *Shiʿūr Qōmāh*, which, according to Joseph Dan, constitutes the earliest Jewish text devoted entirely to describing the Israelite deity and marks the

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[542] Joseph Dan, *The Revelation of the World: The Beginning of Jewish Mysticism in Late Antiquity*, Providence: Brown University Press, 1992, 13-20.

[543] Fishbane (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 319.

[544] Joseph Dan, "The Chambers of the Chariot," *Tarbiz*, Vol. 47 (1979), pp. 49-55.

beginning of a sustained inquiry into the nature of divinity in Jewish thought.[545] In this respect, Gilles Quispel notes, "everywhere in the Jewish Bible, the *Kavōd-Glory* has the distinctive features of a human form, though of divine majesty."[546] Consequently, the pursuit of knowledge of God assumes paramount religious significance, emerging as a central spiritual imperative. As Dan further emphasizes, while traditional rabbinic ideals—such as Torah study and the observance of the commandments—are not negated by this mystical orientation, they no longer occupy the highest position. Rather, the supreme religious aim becomes the attainment of knowledge of the divine ontology concealed within these esoteric traditions, with the Book of Ezekiel and its *kāvōd-malʾākh* motifs standing at the very core of this inquiry.[547]

In the Torah, the Hebrew noun for "angel" is *malʾākh*. Yaacov Azuelos highlights that, unlike the Masoretic text, the Targumic tradition on the Pentateuch refers to two types of angels when the word *malʾākh* is translated: those of "blood and flesh" and those of "celestial matter."[548] The former is rendered in the Aramaic Targums as either *ʾīzggāddʾā* ("authority, strength") or *shelīḥīn* ("envoy, emissary"); the latter as *malʾākhʾā* or *malʾākh* ("messenger"). From the ancient Bible translations, only the Vulgate seems to follow this tradition. Yet, the angel mentioned in Exodus 23:20 (*Hinnēh ʾānōkhī sholeaḥ malʾākh lefāneykhā*) is referred to by the Aramaic Targums in a very distinctive manner. For instance, *Targūm Neōfītī* poses a particular complexity, and while it translates it as a "non-blood and flesh angel" type, it renders it as *malʾākh deraḥamīn* ("angel of mercy"), who is identified in this source as Meṭāṭrōn.[549] The Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 38b; Hagigah 15a; and Aboda Zarah 3b) echoes this tradition in its references to Meṭāṭrōn, according to which he is the angel of whom is spoken in Exodus 23:20-22. Yet for a special circle of Jewish mystics in Ashkenaz, the *malʾākh* motif, particularly the *malʾākh YHVH* constellation, was more than a simple literary device.

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[545] See Joseph Dan, "The Concept of Knowledge in the Shiʿur Qomah," in Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe (Eds.), *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1979, pp. 67-73.

[546] Gilles Quispel, "Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis," *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1980), pp. 1-13.

[547] Dauber (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 119.

[548] Yaakov Azuelos, "A Flesh and Blood Angel and One Who Is Not Flesh and Blood in the Aramaic Targums on the Pentateuch. A Study of the Targums," *Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible and Its World*, Vol. 4 (2004), pp. 201-217. (In Hebrew)

[549] Ibid., pp. 211-212; and Martin McNamara (Dir.), *The Aramaic Bible. Targum Neofiti 1: Exodus. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994, p, 101.

Moore argued that Kabbalistic speculation made this servant-angel "the prince who is the Presence," alluding to both Exodus 33:14, "My countenance shall go with you" (*pānay yēlēkhū*), and Isaiah 63:9, "the angel of His Countenance delivered them" (*ūmalʾakh pānāv hōshīʿām*)—the angel who is God's Presence.[550] These ideas may have influenced mystic Jewish circles across Europe. Its polymorphy, however, is a major aspect of the Meṭāṭrōn figure in the *Shiʿūr Qōmah* fragments and Merkabah texts. This epistemological elevation of divine embodiment—wherein knowledge of the anthropomorphic *Kāvōd* becomes the highest religious pursuit—naturally gives rise to a conceptual framework in which the divine attributes (*middōt*) themselves assume hypostatic form, thereby opening the way for angelic figures, such as Meṭāṭrōn, to be understood as manifest extensions of the Godhead. As Fishbane notes, God's *middōt* not only play a role in the interaction between the Divine and humanity but are also found in rabbinic midrashic literature as a hypostatic view of divine anthropomorphism.[551] The idea that Meṭāṭrōn is a manifestation or extension of God is found, then, at the core of this mystic Jewish idea.[552] Hence, if the mythic description of the attributes of the Israelite deity may suggest nothing more than a complex metaphor, Meṭāṭrōn, as an extension or manifestation of God and ipso facto an intrinsic part of the divinity, points to the rabbinic acceptance of hypostatic powers in the Godhead.[553]

In medieval Ashkenazi mysticism, the anthropomorphically described celestial being of Ezekiel 1 emerges as a pivotal motif that assumes a central role within the divine economy, since he is the final destination of praise and prayers,[554] particularly in pseudepigraphical compositions, thereby being part of the divine plurality in the Godhead.[555] Within the spectrum of these traditions, emanates the *Beraīt'ā of Joseph ben ʿŪzzīʾēl*, which, along with the *Pseudo-Saadia Commentary*, served as the basis for esoteric and mystical speculations. Pseudepigraphy, however, aided mystical articulation, particularly in the medieval period, to argue their new esoteric insights as part of the old revelation. In

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[550] Moore (1922), *op. cit.*, pp. 41-85.

[551] Michael Fishbane, "The Measures of God's Glory in the Ancient Midrash," in Ithamar Grunwald (Ed.), *Messiah and Christos: Studies in Jewish Origins of Christianity Presented by David Flusser*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992, pp. 53-74.

[552] See Moshe Idel, "Metatron–Comments on the Development of Jewish Myth," in Haviva Pediah (Ed.), *Myth in Jewish Thought*, Beer Sheva: Beer Sheva University Press, 1996 (In Hebrew).

[553] Abrams (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 287.

[554] Ibid., p. 304.

[555] Thomas A. Keiser, "The Divine Plural: A Literary-Contextual Argument for Plurality in the Godhead," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2009), pp. 131-146.

other words, by authoring works on relevant biblical figures, these sources gave authority to their mystical exegesis. This paradox is reflected in rabbinic views that attributed to Moses and Sinai the foreknowledge of all ideas later articulated by the Rabbis—a notion further emphasized by Kabbalistic and Hassidic circles.[556] While certain literary traditions, such as *Shorshēy Hashshēmōt*[557] by Rabbī Mosheh ben Morddechaī Zacūto (ca. 1625–1697), preserve modes of mystical praxis more characteristic of the Sephardic tradition—particularly the Spanish Kabbalists—it is the Ashkenazi mystics of medieval Europe, who flourished in Germany in the second half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth century, who constituted a distinct group of Jewish mystical sages. As Joseph Dan notes, they were probably the first in medieval Jewry to present a theology that postulated a view of the divine realm as a series of divine emanations, in which several deific powers have distinct functions on the celestial and material worlds, including the *mal'ākh YHVH* motif, which, at the same time, are part of a greater unified divine whole. These Jewish mystics were known as the "unique cherub circle."[558] Such appellation derives from the *Kheruv hammīūḥad*, a celestial figure that resides on the throne of glory and receives divine emanation from the *Shekhīnah*. This special *mal'ākh* is understood to have originated in the Divine and to have attained the status of a "special cherub" through a process of divine emanations that ultimately came to reside within him. Dan further observes that it was precisely this group that challenged the widespread acceptance of Maimonidean thought among medieval Jewish thinkers, particularly regarding the doctrines of divine incorporeality and absolute unity. The "special cherub circle" postulated the existence of a divine pleroma of one kind or another, through a theological view that did not break the essential unity of the divine figure described in the Torah (Deut. 6:4).[559] Eventually, the idea of this divine pleroma, the Godhead, became a central aspect of the theological repertoire of the medieval Ashkenazi Hasidic circles. This special angelical being emanated directly from the divine glory (*kāvōd*), thus reflecting part of the mosaic of the divine pleroma. Therefore, for these mystics, the Name of the God of Israel is said to reside within *him*. This special cherub is Meṭāṭrōn, who, for the medieval Ashkenazi mystics, is also the *mal'ākh* seated on the throne of glory depicted in Ezekiel 1:

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[556] Dan (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[557] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 1380. Moïse ben Mardochée Zacouto (1620-1697). Šoršey hašemwt*, Year: Eighteenth Century (In Hebrew).

[558] See Joseph Dan, *The Unique Cherub Circle: A School of Mystics and Esoterics in Medieval Germany*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999.

[559] Ibid., p. 2.

> God's ineffable Name is given to the angel Meṭāṭrōn, who is called "Lesser YHVH." He sits on a throne "like the throne of glory," adorned with God's crown and draped with a royal cloak. He also knows "the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of the world to come," like the Creator himself.[560]

From this view, Meṭāṭrōn functions as the celestial manifestation and embodiment of *Ḥokhmāh*, and parallels the *malʾākh* of Ezekiel's vision, whose radiant, multi-wheeled form conveys both the mediation of God's presence and the transmission of cosmic knowledge from the Creator to creation. As Scholem highlighted that the author(s) of the Book of Ezekiel become somewhat reticent when they reached the point of speaking about the figure who appears on the throne itself (v. 26), since for Ezekiel, what seems important is not so much the theophany itself as the voice that emerges and strikes his ear.[561] This inference evokes Naḥmanides' elucidation, claiming that hearing this voice is a divine command.[562] In this regard, Ezekiel 1:24, 25, 28, which reports a powerful voice emanating from the throne that Ezekiel saw in his vision, is linked in *Sēfer Razīʾēl* to Psalm 29. From this approach, Meṭāṭrōn emerges as the interlocutor guiding the angelical hosts into praising God, who is upon mighty waters surrounding the throne upon which the divine anthropos sits, whose name is *Kavōd* (*Kevōd shemō*), and whose voice is upon the waters, from where He hews out blades of fire.[563]

This convergence of auditory revelation and visionary symbolism not only foregrounds the primacy of the divine voice within the prophetic experience but also prepares the exegetical ground for later medieval interpretations, such as that of Rabbī Éliézer de Beaugency, a twelfth-century French Jewish exegete and pupil of Samuel ben Meïr—the eminent grandson of Rashī—who reconfigured these elements through a more rationalized framework of mirroring and likenesses of the divine. Éliézer de Beaugency compares the setting of Ezekiel 1 with the theophany in the Book of Daniel, and argues that what Ezekiel saw was the "mirroring[s] of God" (*marʾōt ʾElōhīm*) and "image of the throne" (*demūt kissʾē*) upon which was found a semblance as the mirroring of a man (*demūt kemarʾēh ʾādām*). Éliézer de Beaugency further argued that the celestial being depicted in Ezekiel 1 is the likeness of the mirroring of God's *Kavōd* (*hūʾ marʾēh demūt kevōd-YHVH*), but not YHVH.[564] In this

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[560] Vita Daphna Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets: Mysticism and Myth in the Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2003, p. 119.

[561] Scholem (1991), *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 45.

[562] *Ms. Hébreu 225*, ff. 23v-24r.

[563] *Sēfer Razīʾēl*, f. 38v.

[564] *Pīrūsh ʿal Yeḥezkʾel ʿasher leʾRabbī ʾElīʿezer Mi-Bolgentsī*, Warsaw: Makītseī Nirdamīm, 1909, pp. 1-6 (In Hebrew).

view, Meṭāṭrōn emerges as an enthroned figure that mirrors God. However, perhaps the most perplexing biblical instance in which a seemingly additional figure with whom YHVH shares His throne-space is found in the Book of Daniel (7:13-14).[565] On this passage, which provides a theophanic enthronement, Rabbī Levī ben Gershōm (1288-1344) elucidated on the celestial image *bar ʾēnōsh* ("son of man"), as one who is to come in the clouds, whose appearance is that of a "human being" (*keben ʾādām*), and onto whom YHVH deposited "government" (*memshal*), "glory" (*kavōd*), and "kingship" (*malkūt*), consequently, all peoples and nations shall serve *him*.[566] Rashī's exegesis on these verses is even more compelling, for he equated the *bar ʾēnōsh* figure in the Book of Daniel with the Messiah himself: "*Bar ʾēnōsh* is the King Messiah."[567] Similarly, the *Hēchalōt Rabbatī* (38:2) exposes the human-like figure of the Book of Daniel and argues: "And you need to teach about the Messiah when he reveals as flesh and blood, he reveals himself, or as an angel, he reveals himself as *bar*, as interpreted by Daniel."[568] Similarly, the thirteenth-century Italian Jewish commentator and Talmudist, Isaiah ben Elijah di Trani, commented on these biblical passages: "A likeness as the appearance of a man upon the throne is the *Shekīnah* glory."[569] These traditions all understand that two divine figures are portrayed in both Ezekiel and Daniel, illustrating, as Daniel Boyarin noted, how these seemingly non-rabbinic ideas appear more than occasionally in the heart of rabbinic literature.[570] These esoteric ideas, however, triggered a Jewish insurgency against anthropomorphism that climaxed with Maimonidean theology.[571]

To conclude, let us observe briefly that the role of Meṭāṭrōn in the *yiḥūdīm*—the combinatory invocation of divine names central to Lurianic Kabbalah—further illuminates the interplay of mediation, immanence, and mystical practice in Jewish mystical thought. Alongside the

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[565] (I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heavens came one like unto a son of man [*Ke'Bar 'Ēnosh*], and he came even to the Ancient of days [*ʿĀtīk Yōmayʾā*], and he was brought near before him). And he was given dominion, and glory, and kingdom [...]), Daniel 7:13-14.

[566] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 107. Bible. A.T. Hagiographes*, Year: 1338, f. 205v (In Hebrew).

[567] *Nevīīm Ūketūvīm ʾīm Pērūsh Rashī. Miqreī Kōdesh. Danīʾēl, ʾĒzrā veʾNeḥamīah* (Vol. 12), Varsovie, 1873, f. 31v (In Hebrew).

[568] Wertheimer (1889), *op. cit.*, f. 11r.

[569] Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits, *Ms. Hébreu 217. Isaïe ben Elie de Trani. Commentaire sur les Prophètes et sur les Hagiographes*, Year: 1297, f. 75r (In Hebrew).

[570] Daniel Boyarin, "Two Powers in Heaven; or the Making of a Heresy," p. 354, in Hindy Najma and Judith Newman (Eds.), *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004, pp. 331-370.

[571] See Cronbach (1928), *op. cit.*, pp. 583-620.

anthropomorphic depictions of the divine manifestation in the Hebrew Bible, this approach introduces notable complexity into Maimonides' second (*hū' levaddō 'elohēynū*—"He only is our God") and fifth principles of faith (*lō levaddō rā'ūy lehitpallēl*—"To Him alone is it proper to pray"). The subject of *yiḥūdīm*, namely, the combination of Divine names, constitutes an important element of Jewish mysticism, particularly in Lurianic Kabbalah. However, Mark Verman explains that of all the various constructs, the merging of *YHVH* with *'Adonāy*, thereby yielding יאהדונהי, is the most prominent, and argues that these theosophical works did not originate within the Lurianic school per se, but were a probable product of mid-13th century Castilian Jewish circles.[572] Most of the expositions in *Tīqquneī Zohar* concerning יאהדונהי are based on its numerical value (91).[573] The Hebrew noun *mal'ākh* yields in Gematria the number 91, the sum of the two Names of God together: יאהדונהי. The first and the last *Yod* of יאהדונהי correspond, as an acronym, to the Ineffable Name of God (י״י). In between, six letters (אהדונה) allude to the six-lettered angel Meṭāṭrōn (מטטרו״ן), who, in *Sēfer Razīēl*, is the recipient of both the divine name and force of *Shadday*.[574] Both in *Tīqqūneī Zohar* and *Raʿya Mehemana*, this is associated with the *yiḥūd Hashshēm*.[575] In this way, the *yiḥūdīm* not only ritualize the convergence of divine names but also position Meṭāṭrōn as a pivotal mediating locus within the divine economy, thereby further complicating the boundaries of Maimonidean monotheism by integrating, through the Metatronic constellation of motifs, mystical praxis, angelology, and the dynamic unity of the divine Name.

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[572] Mark Verman, "The Development of Yiḥudim in Spanish Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*. (Proceedings of the Third International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism: The Age of the Zohar), 1988, pp. 25-41.

[573] Ibid., p. 35.

[574] *Sēfer Razīēl*, f. 32r.

[575] Ibid., p. 36.

Conclusion:

ʾAspaqlaryā'-Meṭāṭrōn: The Supernal Anthropos *Demūt-Tzelem-Marʾēh* of the Hidden and Ineffable God of Israel?

This study has sought to reassess the theological and conceptual boundaries of Maimonidean monotheism through the prism of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish mysticism, particularly through Meṭāṭrōn and the broader constellation of mystical traditions in which he is embedded. By tracing the literary, exegetical, and symbolic trajectories from the Scriptures through rabbinic literature and into Kabbalistic speculation, it has become evident that Meṭāṭrōn occupies a uniquely liminal position within Jewish thought: at once an angelic intermediary, a bearer of the divine Name, and a symbolic locus of divine manifestation. Moshe Idel argues that while the post-biblical Jewish world lost its geographical center with the destruction of the Temple, it was left with a textual center—the Holy Book. As a result, Judaism became a text-oriented religion that produced language-centered forms of mysticism to amplify the content and essence of the Scriptures. In this manner, the biblical text becomes a primary realm for contemplation, and its interpretation through esoteric lenses frequently becomes an encounter with the deepest realms of spiritual reality.[576] Idel delineates the hermeneutical approaches characteristic of Jewish mysticism, examines the progressive saturation of the text with hidden meanings, and analyzes the interpretative strategies required to decode its arcane biblical dimensions. From this perspective, Meṭāṭrōn's constellation of motifs serves as a vehicle for exploring the ontology of the divine in Jewish mystical thought. This theme is transmitted through multiple channels of Jewish literary and mystical traditions, linked to what I have termed God's "uniplurality," as well as to anthropomorphic representations of the Divine. From this vantage point, one may observe—as Andrei Orlov argues—that the motif of a "second power" associated with the divine Panīm is already discernible in early biblical theophanies and later becomes central in Metatronic lore, where this figure is envisioned as a hypostatic "face" of God. His celestial posture is thus reminiscent of the divine Kavōd, which, in various biblical and extra-biblical materials, functions as a normative manifestation of the divine "body" and as an extension of the Israelite deity.[577]

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[576] See Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2002.

[577] Andrei Orlov, *The Glory of the Invisible God: Two Powers in Heaven Traditions and Early Christology*, Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2019, pp. 2, 24.

This analysis has illustrated that neither biblical nor post-biblical traditions present divine unity—nor what might be termed a Metatronic theology—as static or purely abstract. Rather, they depict it as a dynamic and internally articulated reality. From the uniplural resonances of the *peshāt*—especially in names such as *ʾAdonāy-ʾElohīm*—to anthropomorphic depictions of the Divine, from the enthroned *demūt kemarʾēh ʾādām* to the embodiment of the divine Word and the intricate theosophical constructions of Kabbalah, Jewish sources consistently negotiate the tension between transcendence and immanence. Within this framework, Meṭāṭrōn emerges not merely as a secondary being, but as a hermeneutical key: a mediating, symbolic-hypostatic figure through whom the multiplicity of divine operations may be apprehended without dissolving the principle of unity. In this light, the Maimonidean insistence on absolute divine simplicity and incorporeality—while foundational for philosophical theology—appears as one among several competing strategies for articulating monotheism. Yet the mystical traditions examined here reject this framework, extending and refracting it, while allowing for a more complex articulation of divine ontology in which mediation, emanation, redemption, creation, and symbolic embodiment play constitutive roles. The practices of *yiḥūdīm*, particularly the combinatory invocation of divine Names, further exemplify this dynamic by ritualizing the convergence of divine attributes and situating Meṭāṭrōn within the operative structure of divine unity itself.

Thus, the notion of a "uniplural" ontology—a unity that encompasses and sustains multiplicity—offers a more adequate conceptual lens through which to understand the diversity of Jewish theological expression concerning the ontology of the biblical God of Israel. Within such a framework, Meṭāṭrōn, as *ʾaspaqlaryāʾ*—the luminous speculum or mediating mirror—reflects the hidden and ineffable Israelite deity in forms accessible to human cognition and mystical experience. He is not declared explicitly God, yet neither is he wholly separable from the divine economy. Rather, Meṭāṭrōn inhabits the threshold at which transcendence becomes manifest, the hidden visualized, and the ineffable assumes symbolic form. Consequently, the limits of Maimonidean monotheism are best understood not as failures but as productive tensions that have generated a rich spectrum of theological reflection within Judaism. By attending to these tensions—and to the figures, such as Meṭāṭrōn, that inhabit them—we gain a deeper appreciation of how Jewish thought articulates the paradox of a God who is at once absolutely one and yet dynamically present in creation through the manifold divine structure of His self, which, undoubtedly, presupposes a challenge for Maimonidean theology—the pinnacle of Jewish orthodox monotheism.

As Moshe Idel reminds us, the influential expression of what may be called orthodoxy in Judaism is often associated with Maimonides at the end of the twelfth century, when principles of faith were formulated and disseminated. These principles, however, were articulated in Egypt, a context not dominated by Christianity. In Maimonides' system, the name of Meṭāṭrōn is notably absent. Yet this absence, as Idel observes, is neither accidental nor simply dictated by the Rabbinism of Maimonides. The latter is primarily concerned with reconciling Scripture with the natural order of the universe; only through such reconciliation can revelation yield genuine knowledge of God. In this view, revelation and reason converge upon the same truth. Scripture, however, must be read as figurative language requiring philosophical interpretation. For Maimonides, intellectual error—not merely ritual transgression—is the gravest danger. His rejection of esoteric articulations of divine ontology may thus help explain the absence of Meṭāṭrōn from both his principles and the *Guide*.

Notwithstanding, the figure of Meṭāṭrōn exerted influence even among the ardent followers of Maimonides, particularly in the thought of Abulafia.[578] While Maimonides sought to minimize the morph-nominal content of Scripture, Abulafia—like Maimonides—interpreted *tzelem* as intellect and *demūt* as imagination.[579] Yet passages such as Exodus 23:20–24, Ezekiel 1, and sections of Daniel and the Psalms, became points of departure for mystical developments that both challenged Maimonidean thought and expanded the horizons of biblical *peshāt*.[580] One of the most striking articulations depicts Meṭāṭrōn as a "tabernacle" (*mishkan*), functioning in a cultic capacity analogous to a high priest performing sacrificial service.[581] Despite the multifold motifs that depict his roles, academic circles still struggle to define Meṭāṭrōn either as a proper name or as a term that refers to a title for a certain office.[582] What is certain is that the Metatronic motifs embody divine ontology in unique ways.

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[578] Idel comments on this regard that Abulafia's recurring *Son* as an intellectual eschatological entity in Ecstatic Kabbalah assumes the term Ben as an intellectual operation related to understanding, and he connects this term to the words *Binah* and *Havanah*, namely, with the human actualized intellect. In Abulafia's *Sitrēy Tōrah*, written in 1279 or 1280 in Capua or in Rome, we find an interesting attempt to bring together the different ideas related to Metatron in the various Jewish traditions, and the concept of *Ben* as a supernal entity. See Idel (2007), *op. cit*., pp. 279, 331, 593.

[579] Ibid,. pp. 293-294

[580] Ibid., p. 16.

[581] Ibid., pp. 88, 124.

[582] Ibid., p. 129.

The Book of Proverbs likewise introduces a complex theological dimension through the figure of Wisdom, which, as we observed, is akin to Meṭāṭrōn. The text invokes maternal authority alongside paternal instruction (Prov. 1:8; 6:20), and its pedagogical voice is marked by a distinctive feminine articulation. Wisdom appears as an autonomous yet paradoxical figure, extending reflection into communal and cosmic domains.[583] The fact that the book of Proverbs not only describes wisdom but also critically questions it reflects a thematic development that ultimately results in a theological definition of wisdom, as the book of Proverbs leads to a form of sapiential reflection.[584] As noted by Jérôme Moreau, this figure embodies a tension between "personification and effacement."[585] While Stéphanie Anthonioz interprets such personification as a literary device—thereby avoiding identification with a divine agent—this conclusion remains open to debate when considered within broader Jewish exegetical and mystical traditions. In these contexts, Wisdom may be understood as participating in the divine economy, and, in certain interpretations, as converging conceptually with Meṭāṭrōn as an embodiment of divine epistemological mediation. Anthonioz defines this personification as a literary utensil only. This is to avoid identifying proverbial wisdom with a divine agent.[586] This inference may be correct in the Maimonidean spectrum. Yet, it is debatable if we approach the Masoretic text and the embodiment of the divine word in Jewish thought. Both the Book of Genesis and Proverbs present a narrative that helps us personify the female voice of Wisdom and the Divine voice in the garden as a cosmic persona with agency and will, albeit as an inherent component of what the Kabbalists call the Godhead, an intrinsic Jewish concept.

Biblical narratives of theophany further reinforce this dynamic. In Genesis 32:25, the enigmatic episode of the angelic figure with whom Jacob wrestles (*mal'ākh*) culminates in the biblical cryptic phrase: *Vayyē'āvēk 'īsh 'immō.*[587] *'Īsh* ("man") is a Hebrew word rendered in the Targumic

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[583] Ansberry (2011), *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

[584] Schipper (2019), *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[585] (Her personification and effacing), Jérôme Moreau, "Personnification et effacement: la paradoze du livre de la Sagesse," p. 17, in Stéphane Anthonioz et Cécile Dogniez (Eds.), *Représentations et personnification de la Sagesse dans l'antiquité et au-delà*, Leuven, Paris, Bristol: Peeters, 2021, pp. 259-272.

[586] Stéphane Anthonioz, "De la personnification de la sagesse en Pr. 1-9 et 31: contexte, définition et fonction," p. 80, in Stéphane Anthonioz et Cécile Dogniez (Eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 79-106.

[587] ("And a *man* wrestled with him [Jacob]"), *Ms. Hébreu 7*, f. 33v.

tradition as *gabr'ā*, namely, "man."[588] *Midrāsh Tanḥūmā' Yelammedēnū* uses a similar Hebrew root (√*g-b-r*) when it states that Moses received the Law: *Yādayim sheqqiblū 'et hattōrāh mipī haggevūrāh*.[589] The latter is an epithet for God. Traditional rabbinic interpretations have long grappled with the identity of this *'īsh*, who appears in diverse biblical accounts. Yet, the *peshāt* of Genesis 32:31 explicitly declares that Jacob—himself a mortal—saw God face to face and survived the encounter: *Kī rā'ītī 'Elohīm pānīm 'el pānīm vattinnātzēl nafshī*.[590] Mānōaḥ and his wife, in Judges 13:22, feared for their lives upon encountering the Divine, exclaiming: *Mōt nāmūt kī 'Elohīm rā'īnū* ("We shall surely die, for we have seen God"). As elucidated both by the plain sense of Scripture and the Targumic tradition, what Jacob, Mānōaḥ, and his wife beheld was the divine anthropos revealed in the form of what the biblical and targumic tradition coin 'godly envoy' (*mal'ākh'ā da'Adonāy*)—an immanent theophany through which God made Himself manifest to His creation without breaking the biblical principle in Exodus 33:20. However, perhaps the most striking biblical encounter between God and mortals is illustrated in Exodus 24:9-11: "Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadav, and Avihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel (*Vayyīr'ū 'et 'Eloheī Yisrā'ēl*) […] and they beheld God (*Vayyeḥezū 'et Ha'elohīm*)." The verse further recounts that they not only saw God, but also ate and drank—and lived. Exodus 33:11 presents an additional riveting illustration: "And YHVH spoke unto Moses *pānīm 'el-panīm* ("face to face"), as a man speaks unto his close friend (*rē'ēhū*)." These biblical portrayals shimmer with compassionate theophany in which the Infinite Divine cloaks Himself in human semblance or elemental natural form, softening the radiance of His presence so that the mortal being might apprehend and withstand Him.

These are biblical narratives of creating divine encounters that preserve life and render the experience of the sacred survivable for mortal perception. Thus, in the luminous landscape of Jewish mysticism, Meṭāṭrōn emerges not only as an angel but as the embodiment of this divine mercy: a mediating aspect of God, who makes the unknowable known and the unendurable bearable, who withholds death and preserves life, a channel through which the attributes of the Divine are poured onto His creation. Therefore, rather than constituting a literal doctrine of incarnation, such passages may be understood as expressions of radical divine immanence—moments in which the

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[588] Martin McNamara (Dir.), *The Aramaic Bible. The Targums. Vol. 1A, Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992, p. 158.

[589] ("Hands that received the Torah from the mouth of the "Mighty One"), *Midrāsh Tanḥūmā' Yelammedēnū*, f. 70r.

[590] ("For I have seen God face to face, and my life was preserved"), *BHS*, p. 61.

transcendent God becomes perceptible through anthropomorphic manifestation. Similar dynamics appear in Judges 13:22 and Exodus 24:9–11, where human beings encounter the Divine and yet survive. These narratives suggest a mediated theophany: a divine self-disclosure calibrated to human perception. Thus, within Jewish mystical thought, Meṭāṭrōn becomes emblematic of this mediation—a figure through whom the unknowable becomes knowable and the unendurable becomes bearable.

The apotheosis of Meṭāṭrōn in certain mystical traditions further expands this framework. As Moshe Idel has shown, the notion of divine "sonship" (*bēn*) and its convergence with messianic motifs situates Meṭāṭrōn within a redemptive horizon. In this context, "son" does not carry Christian theological connotations but denotes a metaphysical and hypostatic relation—an isomorphic correspondence between God and Meṭāṭrōn, by which Meṭāṭrōn embodies a proportionate reflection of divine redemptive force. Through this conceptual framework, Meṭāṭrōn is portrayed not merely as an angelic intermediary but as a hypostatic manifestation of the Divine, intricately bound to the creation enterprise and the unfolding of the redemptive realm. In certain Jewish mystical texts, Meṭāṭrōn resonates with the "son of man" of the Book of Daniel, a parallel that amplifies his apotheosis. This association, however, arises from conceptual convergence rather than scriptural theology. Namely, there is no explicit biblical Metatronic theology; instead, this is a product of mystical textual configuration and esoteric imagination. Yet such an interpretive framework contributed significantly to Meṭāṭrōn's elevation within Jewish thought. Although neither doctrinal nor universally accepted, the figure of Meṭāṭrōn—and the constellation of motifs surrounding him—reveals the remarkable theological creativity of Jewish mystics, who sought to articulate divine arbitration, relational presence, and redemptive power through a celestial mediator intimately connected to both the divine and human realms. While mainstream Jewish theology consistently maintains a clear distinction between God and angelic beings, esoteric traditions often blur these boundaries, thereby enabling a profound symbolic and theological convergence among Meṭāṭrōn, divine presence, mediation, and even messianic function. Within Jewish mysticism, the possible identification of Meṭāṭrōn with the Messiah represents a riveting esoteric attempt to reconcile the paradox of a transcendent God who nevertheless acts redemptively in history. Consequently inviting a deeper reflection into the modes of revelation, mediation, and divine manifestation actualized through Meṭāṭrōn in Jewish thought.

These constructs, altogether, challenge, complement, or even reconfigure the foundational tenets of biblical theology and Jewish monotheism, particularly Maimonidean theology. While such

interpretations are neither doctrinal nor universally accepted, they reflect the theological creativity of Jewish mystics in articulating divine mediation and redemption. Moreover, as a mediating figure aligned with the dynamics of transcendence and immanence, Meṭāṭrōn functions as a symbolic and ontological bridge between the divine and the human—a revelatory *ʾaspaqlaryā*ʾ of the Divine. Thus, his roles should be understood not as an independent entity but as coordinated expressions of a single mediating function within the divine economy. In this sense, Meṭāṭrōn represents a structured interface through which divine presence becomes accessible without compromising divine unity.

As noted, the interpretive tensions that Maimonides sought to resolve through philosophical rationalization underscore the broader complexity of the biblical tradition itself. Within his rationalist framework, the biblical text is often stripped of its literary symbolism to conform to a philosophically defined conception of divine ontology. By contrast, Jewish mystical traditions tend to regard the narratives and symbolic language of Scripture not as obstacles, but as invitations to deeper metaphysical reflection. From this perspective, Scripture functions not as a theological problem to be resolved, but as a privileged medium through which knowledge of the Divine is disclosed. Accordingly, knowledge of God is understood not merely as an intellectual acquisition, but as a transformative engagement with the symbolic depth of the biblical text, often pursued through forms of mystical exegesis aimed at illuminating the apparent ambiguities of scriptural language, as expressed in the verse: "In your light we shall see light" (Psalm 36:9). Within this interpretive horizon, Meṭāṭrōn comes to be understood in mystical traditions as an ontological paradigm of epistemic mediation.

Testing the boundaries of Maimonidean monotheism is pivotal to demonstrating how Jewish thought engages with the biblical, theological, and linguistic issues around Rabbinic theology. This study concludes that Meṭaṭrōn, within Jewish mysticism, is a visual supernal anthropos that embodies the highest form of divine presence and representation, a divine vector that reflects the likeness (*dmūt*), image (*tzelem*), and appearance (*marʾeh*) of an otherwise invisible, hidden, ineffable, and transcendent God of Israel. Through this mediating figure, the abstract and formless God becomes experientially accessible, not by compromising divine transcendence, but by providing a symbolic and spiritual mode of apprehension. In this sense, Meṭaṭrōn simultaneously reflects the human and manifests the Divine, enabling a form of encounter that can be grasped spiritually, though never fully comprehended. In this light, Meṭaṭrōn operates as the divine *ʾaspaqlaryā*ʾ—an ontological mirror that affords mediated access to divine insight. In this capacity, he is conceived as preexistent (*miqqedem*)

"son-daughter" (akin to proverbial *ʾamōn* and Wisdom), originating in a primordial eternity that precedes space and time, and serving as a dynamic, anthropoid, and emblematic visual expression of the otherwise unimaginable God.

Ultimately, *ʿAttīq Yōmayyāʾ* ("the Ancient of Days") and *Zeʿīr ʾAnpīn* ("the Lesser Countenance") constitute a complex uniplurality in which all is intrinsically one.[591] Accordingly, this is the supreme mystery that sustains the *oneness* of God and crowns biblical divine ontology, echoed twice daily through the prayers of Israel like a hidden flame drawn from the heart of eternity: "Hear, O Israel: YHVH—both the Greater and Lesser YHVH—are our *ʾElohīm*; YHVH—both the Greater and Lesser YHVH—are one!" (Deut. 6:4). For the Jewish mystics, this is a divine *sōd* ("mystery, secret") reserved for those who revere YHVH, as the Psalmist wrote: *Sōd YEHVAH līreʾāv* ("The secret, mystery of YHVH is for those who reverentially fear Him," Psalm 25:14). As explained in in *Sēfer ʿĒmeq ha-Melekh*—a kabbalistic work that expounds upon the mysteries of *ʿAttīqāʾ Yōmayyāʾ* within the *Zohar*—for the Jewish mystical sages, the divine name *Shadday* ("God Almighty") is concealed within Meṭāṭrōn, and the letters *Yōd* and *Hēh* of the Tetragrammaton dwell within him, hence his designation as the "Lesser Tetragrammaton."[592] Yet the sages of Israel also issued sober warnings concerning the perils inherent in mystical inquiry: "One should not involve oneself with hidden things," cautions *Berʾēshīt Rabbāh* 8:2, lest the pursuit of the concealed transgress the limits of what may be revealed. As Mishnah Chagigah 2:1 teaches: "Anyone who lacks proper regard for God's honor would have been better off never having been created." Thus, the Jewish mystical tradition bravely walks on a razor's edge, sustaining a delicate and deliberate tension between the yearning for divine knowledge and the reverent restraint from probing too deeply into the most hidden mysteries of Scripture. Although this work indeed presses against the boundaries of Maimonidean monotheism through Jewish mystical insights, and grapples with the tension surrounding the layered complexities of the biblical text, it is composed with the utmost reverence for the Name of the Divine, while aiming to deepen our understanding of the ontological uniplurality of the God of Israel—blessed be He—and of His indwelling glory as apprehended by the Jewish mystical sages: *Leshēm yīḥūd qūdshāʾ berīkh hūʾ ūshkhīnttēh.*[593] It is, therefore, undertaken both within the parameters of academic rigor and in the spirit of the Jewish mystics who, with pious devotion, heavenly awe, and boundless love for their Creator, taught that even

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[591] Hellner-Eshed (2021), *op. cit.*, pp. 300-301.

[592] *Sēfer ʿĒmeq Hammelekh*, ff. 6v, 20v, 25v, 36r, 169v.

[593] On this liturgical formula, see Scholem (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 249–252; and Idel (1988), *op. cit.*, pp. 135–139.

the most audacious theological speculation and the boldest spiritual inquiry must ultimately remain tethered to a singular sacred purpose: the sanctification and unification of the Divine Name.

Appendix 1

This interpretation finds support in the writings of Rabbī Yeshaʿyāhū ben ʾAvrāhām Halēvī Hōrovītz (ca. 1565–1630), who asserted that Meṭāṭrōn is *yelūd ʾīshshāh* ("Brought forth, born of a woman").[594] This interpretation finds a parallel in *Yalkūṭ Reʾūvenī*, a seventeenth-century Jewish anthology of Midrashic, mystical, and Kabbalistic Lurianic teachings compiled by Rabbī Reʾūvēn Hakohēn of Prague (died 1673), which includes the following: *Hassar hannehefākh leʾēsh mibāsār*[595] ("The prince or minister who turned into fire from flesh"). In a resembling manner, in his *Sēfer Megalleh ʿAmūqōt*,[596] Rabbī Nātān Naṭʿā Shapīrāʾ of Kraków (1585-1633)—associated with the Lurianic school of Kabbalah—wrote: "Meṭāṭrōn is also human."[597] While the myth concerning the human origin of Meṭāṭrōn and his identification as Ḥanōkh ben Yared might be a later tradition,[598] such statements position Meṭāṭrōn not merely as a celestial being but as one grounded in human experience, thereby embodying a liminal figure who bridges the divine and the earthly. This approach echoes in both *Sēfer Megalleh ʿAmūqōt*, which claims that "Meṭāṭrōn is the "secret" (*sōd*) of Ḥanōkh,"[599] and *Sēfer Galiyāʾ Razāʾ* on Genesis 5:24—attributed to Rabbī ʾAvrāhām, a student of Yitzḥāq Lūryāʾ[600]—which states: *VeḤanōkh ʾēynennū rōtzeh lōmar ʾēynō kākh*[601] ("And 'Ḥanōkh was not' signifies that Ḥanōkh is not what he appears to mean"), signaling thus that the text should not be understood according to its surface, plain meaning (*peshāt*). In this interpretive framework, Meṭāṭrōn—veiled under the cipher of *Ḥanōkh*—emerges as the embodiment of an aspect of the Divine. Esoterically, this aspect incarnated through

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[594] Yeshaʿyāhū ben ʾAvrāhām Halēvī Hōrovītz, *Sēfer Shnēy Lūḥōt Habrīt*, Amsterdam: ʿImmānūʾēl Benvenistī, 1648, f. 46v (In Hebrew).

[595] *Yalkūṭ Reʾūvenī*, f. 23r.

[596] For an insightful study on *Sēfer Megalleh ʿAmūqōt*, see Agata Paluch, *Megalleh ʿAmuqot: The Enoch-Meṭaṭrōn Tradition in the Kabbalah of Nathan Neṭa Shapira of Kraków (1585-1633)*, Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2014.

[597] Nātān Naṭʿā Shapīrāʾ, *Sēfer Megalleh ʿAmūqōt*, Kraków: Menaḥēm Naḥūm Meyīzles, 1637, f. 12v (In Hebrew. Henceforth: *Sēfer Megalleh ʿAmūqōt*).

[598] Dan (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

[599] *Sēfer Megalleh ʿAmūqōt*, f. 64r.

[600] For an insightful study on *Sēfer Galiyāʾ Razāʾ*, see Rachel Elior, *Galiyāʾ Razāʾ: Hōtzāʾāh Biqōrttīt ʾal-pī Ketāvēy Yad ʿim Mavōʾ, Ḥilūfēy Nūsḥōt, Ūmarʾēy Meqōmōt*, Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1981 (In Hebrew).

[601] *Sēfer Galiyāʾ Razāʾ*, Jerusalem: Yerīd Hassefārīm, 2000, p. 108.

Ḥanōkh ben Yared—Meṭāṭrōn—operates as a cipher, a living conduit of the ineffable God, rendering the transcendent wisdom of the celestial realms perceptible within the temporal world. From this perspective, and provided that Ḥanōkh ben Yared is identified as the 'Son of Man' figure in the *Book of Daniel* and its related traditions, a further plausible case may then be made for his organic identification with Meṭāṭrōn.[602]

[602] Daniel Boyarin, "Beyond Judaisms: Meṭaṭron and the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism," *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, Vol. 41 (2010), pp. 323–365.

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