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# THE PROPHET AND THE ENCHANTED MIRROR REFLECTIVE IMAGINATION IN MAIMONIDES' *GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED*

*Open ye the gates, that the righteous  
nation that keepeth faithfulness may enter  
in. (Isa. 26, 2)*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Imagination is introduced in the treatise as a bodily faculty/power.<sup>2</sup> Both humans and animals are endowed with ordinary imagination.<sup>3</sup> Only the prophetic imagination represents a special gift bestowed on rational entities.

Even though a bodily faculty, imagination is in fact a bridge, an intermediary between the body/the senses (*sensibilia*) and the intellect (*intelligibilia*).

One thing is clear: regarded in its common/natural relation to matter/body, the faculty of imagination produces images/representations via senses (I have called them “sensible representations” to distinguish them methodologically from “intelligible representations”<sup>4</sup>). It functions as a mirror for the sensible world; regarded in its special/uncommon relation to intellect, the same faculty of imagination (this time “prophetic imagination”) produces images/representations via intellect<sup>5</sup> (the “intelligible representations”). It functions as an enchanted mirror reflecting the intelligible world.

In the mechanism of the prophecy, imagination *acts* differently. In fact, it becomes an “active faculty” (though this may be considered oxymoronic). Every bodily faculty/power<sup>6</sup> is by definition a passive faculty as far as it pertains to matter (matter is a receptacle of the form, it is *impressed* by it – the passive voice being significant in this context). However, when connected to the intellect *sub specie prophetiae*,

imagination is active (it participates in the act of in-forming). To use a rather poetic description, it is a *shadow* of the senses when it functions ordinarily, but at the same time a *shadow* of the intellect when it represents the final stage in the fulfillment of the prophetic movement (Maimonides would say that “shadow” in this particular case has a figurative meaning being used as a homonym). Maimonides presents the definition of the prophecy in chapter 36 of part II of *The Guide of the Perplexed* (hereafter *GP*<sup>7</sup>) as:

Know that the true reality and quiddity of prophecy consist in its being an overflow overflowing from God, may He be cherished and honored, through the intermediation of the Active Intellect, toward the rational faculty in the first place and thereafter toward the imaginative faculty. This is the highest degree of man and the ultimate term of perfection that can exist for his species; and this state is the ultimate term of perfection for the imaginative faculty.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that imagination plays a redemptive role when regarded as *sub specie prophetiae*. At first sight we might conclude that there is no prophecy without imagination since the final goal of the prophet is to translate the invisible impulse into a visible message at the level of the imagination (such that it be communicated to others). This is true when dealing with “common” prophets, i.e., all prophets except Moses. Strangely, Moses, the greatest prophet of all times (as recognized by rabbinic tradition and also Maimonides<sup>9</sup>) simply had no need of the faculty of imagination.

José Faur, in trying to “solve” this problem, explains that:

[...] the rabbis conceived of the human mind as a kind of a mirror. They used the Latin *speculum* (in the form *speclaria*) from which *speculation* derives, to explain how Moses was able to glance at the *temuna* of God. [...] The difference between Moses and other prophets is that Moses beheld the Divine Presence from ‘a *speclaria* that illuminates’, whereas all other prophets beheld it, from ‘a *speclaria* that does not illuminate’. The *temuna* is not the image of God but the *impression* projected by God onto the *speclaria-mirror*. The rabbis meant to say, that whereas all other prophets glanced at the impression of God as reflected in the mirror of their imaginations, Moses glanced at the image of God as reflected in his reason.<sup>10</sup>

The mystery remains (and so it should): it has simply been reformulated at a higher level, the level of the intellect. What is the significance of “reflected in his reason”? How could the reason/intellect<sup>11</sup> “reflect” if separated from the imagination? Once again Maimonides says that “reflected” is used here homonymously. On the other hand, Adam and Eve, before having sinned, possessed no faculty of imagination at all (or seem not to have). What happened between Adam and Eve and Moses? Maimonides allows us to view what I call a “hidden history” of the imagination as a faculty. The description of this faculty and its role in the mechanism of the prophecy is but one aspect of our study of imagination. The other aspect raises the problem of interpretation in respect of the intelligible representations. Is *GP* also a hermeneutical treatise? How are we to recognize and interpret the parables/allegories and what faculty/faculties are responsible for such an important task?

Having made these introductory remarks intended establish the layout for a critical approach, we may now outline the structure of the present study. From the very beginning it will not be my intention to prove *some thing* with regard to Maimonides’ “doctrine” in *GP*. Rather, as an auroral fertile and renewing movement and under the guise of cartographer, the intention will be to draw the map of the different<sup>12</sup> ways of the imagination as reflected in the treatise. Special attention will be given to *fragile* (cross)roads. Where possible, the right questions will be raised and, as necessary, the suppositions and implications of Maimonides’ approach will be identified. The principal problems of the map I intend to draw are:

- I. Imagination as (enchanted) mirror;
- II. Terms related to imagination;
- III. The hidden history of the imagination as a faculty;
- IV. Is imagination a key word in understanding *GP*?

### **I. Imagination as (enchanted) mirror**

In chapter 36 of part II, Maimonides provides the treatise’s largest description of the functioning of the faculty of imagination:

You also know the actions of the imaginative faculty that are in its nature, such as retaining things perceived by the senses, combining these things, and imitating them. And you know that its greatest and noblest action takes place only when the senses rest and do not perform their actions. It is then that a certain overflow overflows to this faculty according to its disposition, and it is the cause of the veridical dreams. This same overflow is the cause of the prophecy. There is only a difference in degree, not in kind.<sup>13</sup>

A larger description of this faculty is given in Maimonides' smaller treatise *Eight Chapters* where he analyses in detail all the faculties<sup>14</sup> of the soul:

The imaginative part is the power that preserves the impressions of sensibly perceived objects after they vanish from the immediacy of the senses that perceived them. Some impressions are combined with others, and some are separated from others. Therefore, from things it has perceived, this power puts together things it has not perceived at all and which are not possible for it to perceive. For example, a man imagines an iron ship floating in the air, or an individual whose head is in the heavens and whose feet are on the earth, or an animal with a thousand eyes. The imaginative power puts together many such impossible things and makes them exist in the imagination. On this point the dialectical theologians<sup>6</sup> committed a great, repulsive error, which they made the foundation of their erroneous view concerning the division of the necessary, the admissible, and the impossible. They thought, or made people fancy, that everything that can be imagined is possible. They did not know that this power combines things whose existence is impossible, as we have mentioned.<sup>15</sup>

Different terms, referring or relating to imagination (terms which will be analyzed in the second section of this study), appear throughout the treatise every time Maimonides makes an important distinction to illuminate the perplexed one. Following this, the perplexity arises either by always remaining ("stuck") at the level of the ordinary imagination and the consideration of the sensible representations as the final adequate representations of the divine<sup>16</sup> (thus reducing the Scriptures to their literal meaning), which Maimonides says is the source of idolatry;<sup>17</sup> or by separating the imagination from the intellect and not recognizing the intelligible representations, i.e., the figurative/allegorical meaning of the prophetic books.

Undoubtedly it has become clear and manifest that the greater part of the prophecies of the prophets proceeds by means of parables; for that is the action of the instrument for this [i.e., prophecy], I mean the imagination.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, there are three kinds of perplexity that can be identified from this very point of view:

1) There are no intelligible representations. The divine is adequately communicated through sensible representations. This idolatrous position has as direct consequence the idea of the corporeality/visibility of God;

You know their dictum that refers in inclusive fashion to all the kinds of interpretation connected with this subject, namely, their saying: *The Torah speaketh in the language of the sons of man*. The meaning of this is that everything that all men are capable of understanding and representing to themselves at first thought has been ascribed to Him as necessarily belonging to God, may He be exalted. Hence attributes indicating corporeality have been predicated of Him in order to indicate that He, may He be exalted, exists, inasmuch as the multitude cannot at first conceive of any existence save that of a body alone; thus that which is neither a body nor existent in a body does not exist in their opinion.<sup>19</sup>

2) There are no intelligible representations, but God is incorporeal/invisible. Supposition: imagination can never express the invisible; there is a gap between God and His creatures.

My speech in the present Treatise is directed, as I have mentioned, to one who has philosophized and has knowledge of the true sciences, but believes at the same time in the matters pertaining to the Law and is perplexed as to their meaning because of the uncertain terms and the parables.<sup>20</sup>

3) There are intelligible representations, but one has to know how to differentiate between sensible representations and intelligible representations and not to mistake one for another. In other words: when is there a parable/allegory (Heb. *masha*) in the prophetic book and when is there a simple sensible representation?

The first purpose of this Treatise is to explain the meanings of certain terms occurring in books of prophecy. Some of these terms are equivocal; hence the ignorant attribute to them only one or some of the meanings in which

the term in question is used. Others are derivative terms; hence they attribute to them only the original meaning from which the other meaning is derived. Others are amphibolous terms, so that at times they are believed to be univocal and at other times equivocal.

[...] This Treatise also has a second purpose: namely, the explanation of very obscure parables<sup>21</sup> occurring in the books of the prophets, but not explicitly identified there as such. Hence an ignorant or heedless individual might think that they possess only an external sense, but no internal one. However, even when one who truly possesses knowledge considers these parables and interprets them according to their external meaning, he too is overtaken by great perplexity. But if we explain these parables to him or if we draw his attention to their being parables, he will take the right road and be delivered from this perplexity. That is why I have called this Treatise "The Guide of the Perplexed".<sup>22</sup>

In order to properly describe the imagination as presented in *GP* the first question to be asked has to deal with the specific functions of this faculty. Taking into consideration all the occurrences of the terms denoting or related to imagination throughout the treatise, I distinguish between three different functions of the imaginative faculty:

1) The common, ordinary function - encountered whenever speaking about imagination in general with regard to rational or irrational beings endowed with this faculty and responsible for the emergence of the sensible representations (i.e., for "retaining things perceived by the senses, combining these things, and imitating them"<sup>23</sup>); this is the *passive* aspect of the imagination;

2) The uncommon, extra-ordinary function – encountered whenever speaking of prophetic imagination (all prophecy implies the use of this very specific imaginative function responsible for the emergence of the intelligible representations); this is the *partly active* aspect of the imagination. Maimonides repeatedly speaks of the *action* of the imaginative faculty.<sup>24</sup>

3) The exceptional function – encountered whenever speaking of Moses (or possibly of Adam and Eve having sinned); this is, as strange as might appear the *active*, transfigured<sup>25</sup> imagination<sup>26</sup> which equals, if we adopt the two other points of view, i.e., 1) and 2) positioned at the same level, the *lack* of imagination.

*Moses our Master, on the other hand, heard Him from above the ark-cover, from between the two cherubim,<sup>27</sup> without action on the part of the imaginative faculty.<sup>28</sup>*

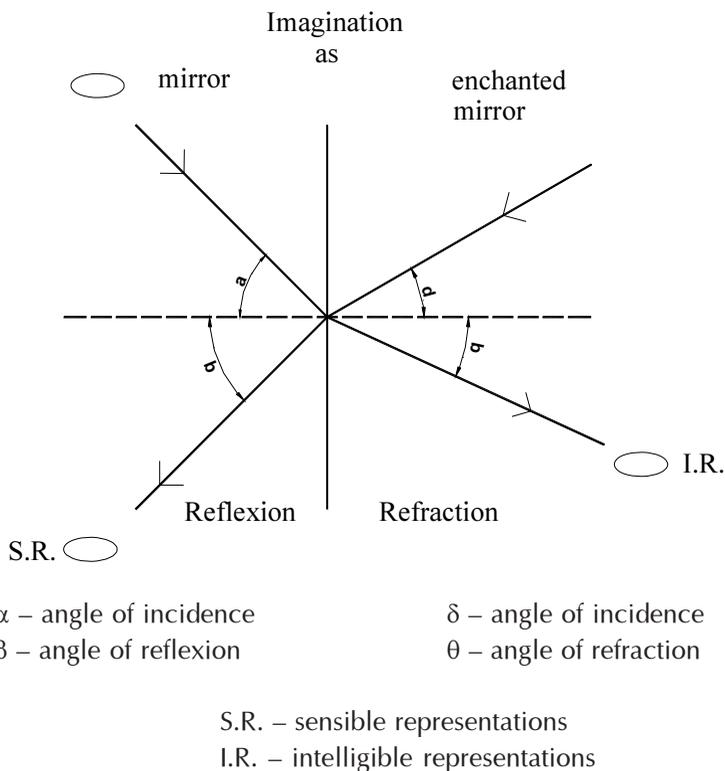
As an intermediary faculty bridging the gap between matter and intellect, the imaginative faculty confounds itself at the level of its lowest extremity with matter (the matter of the brain<sup>29</sup>) and at the level of its uppermost extremity with the intellect. The *sublime*<sup>30</sup> imagination of the prophet is partly active and thus borrowing essential determinations of the intellect. I would even dare to advance the hypothesis of the identity between imagination and intellect when speaking of prophetic imagination and especially when speaking about Moses whose faculty of imagination had probably turned into an *active* faculty. It follows that active imagination is in fact intellect.<sup>31</sup>

The (complete) detachment from the delusive senses when approaching God means, in the first instance, detachment from the sensible representations that cannot express the divine. As we have seen, the prophetic imagination is manifest “only when the senses rest and do not perform their actions”.<sup>32</sup>

Accordingly you will find that the prophecy of the prophets ceases when they are sad or angry, or in a mood similar to one of these two.<sup>33</sup>

This detachment makes place for the intelligible representations that reflect the divine as an enchanted mirror. They use the images produced by the imaginative faculty while being impressed by the senses and re-orientate them in order to point to the invisible divine. The active imagination uses its own images/representations as a *speculum*, which does not reflect the sensible world, but, through transfigured matter (i.e., intelligible representations) it mysteriously reflects the intelligible realm.<sup>34</sup>

When imagination functions as a common mirror, the *reflected* representations are already interpreted as sensible representations. When imagination functions as an enchanted mirror the angle of *reflexion* is replaced by/doubled by an angle of *refraction*, which also expresses the dislocation (i.e., the emergence of the intelligible representations) and the strength of the connection to the Active Intellect.



The intelligible figurative representations are the mirror of a non-figurative reality. They point to the existence of God by orientating all the faculties of the soul towards Him. This is also the reward for those trying to properly understand the prophetic parables (*mesalim*). The intelligible representations are signposts that do not point to the sensible realm or an imaginary world. Rather they point always to the incorporeal invisible God/angels. Only by realizing that He is totally different, can the key to the intelligible representations be found and they be used as a means for an adequate orientation.

This second detachment from the matter of the intelligible representations in order to properly understand their message is followed in Moses' case by a third detachment: the detachment from all representations when *facing* God.<sup>35</sup> Having oriented all his powers/

faculties toward God (this is the deep meaning of the Hebrew expression *panim el-panim*, “face to face”) Moses has no need to use the ladder of the imagination.<sup>36</sup> Totally detached from matter (while still in the body) he is no longer enlightened, but he himself lightens/shines:

[...] And he came out, and spoke to the children of Yisrael that which he was commanded. And the children of Yisrael saw the face of Moshe, that the skin of Moshe's face shone (*qaran or penei Moshe*): and Moshe put the veil (*ha-masve*) upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.<sup>37</sup>

The shining face of Moses stands for his being in the presence of (and even partly becoming) the *source* that flows/emanates and is not influenced. In the same way, the active imagination identifies itself at a certain level with the intellect. Orienting all the powers/faculties of the soul toward God is also the guiding message of Maimonides' treatise. Thus, a hierarchy of the faculties of the soul can be traced following the suggestive image of the hierarchy in the universe. The analogy is eloquent and justified given that of all earthly creatures only man is a microcosm:

Know that it was not because of all that we have mentioned in comparing the world as a whole to a human individual that it has been said about man that he is a small world. For this whole comparison can be consistently applied to every individual animal that has perfect limbs; but you never hear that one of the ancients has said that an ass or a horse is a small world. This has been said only about man. This is because of that which is a proprium of man only, namely, the rational faculty – I mean the intellect, which is the hylic intellect; something that is not to be found in any of the species of living beings other than man.<sup>38</sup>

When the soul has a good orientation every lower faculty is ennobled through its being governed by the immediate higher faculty in the same way in which every Intelligence governs its sphere and everything below it.

[...] governance overflows from the deity, may He be exalted, to the intellects according to their rank; that from the benefits received by the intellects, good things and lights overflow to the bodies of the spheres; and that from the spheres – because of the greatness of the benefits they have received from their principles – forces and good things overflow to this body subject to generation and corruption.<sup>39</sup>

In this sense, the faculty of imagination was called *angel* with good reason: not only for being an intermediary, but especially for being God-oriented.

For every force charged by God, may He be exalted, with some business is *an angel put in charge of that thing*. Accordingly, *Midrash Qoheleth* contains the following text: *When man sleeps, his soul speaks to the angel, and the angel to the cherub*. Thereby they have stated plainly to him who understands and cognizes intellectually that the imaginative faculty is likewise called an *angel* and that the intellect is called a *cherub*.<sup>40</sup>

[...] our principle states that all prophets hear speech only through the intermediary of an *angel*, the sole exception being *Moses our Master*, of whom it is said<sup>41</sup>: *With him do I speak mouth to mouth*. Know then that this is in fact so, and that in these cases the intermediary is the imaginative faculty.<sup>42</sup>

Maimonides describes the “evil imagination” using the old traditional expression *yetzer ha-ra*, usually translated as “evil impulse/inclination” or “imagination(s)”,<sup>43</sup>

They also imagined that the angels were bodies. Some<sup>6</sup> of them believe that He, may He be exalted, gives a command to a particular thing by means of speech similar to our speech – I mean through the instrumentality of letters and sounds – and that in consequence that thing is affected. All this follows imagination, which is also in true reality the *evil impulse*. For every deficiency of reason or character is due to the action of the imagination or consequent upon its action.<sup>44</sup>

This imagination acting as if independent from the other faculties (whence the impression that it comes from the exterior) as an evil impulse was compared in the Jewish tradition to a demon or to the Angel of Death. Turning the face from God (and thus no longer God-oriented) is the essential description of Maimonides himself when speaking about Satan:

It is their [Sages’] dictum in the *Talmud*: *Rabbi Simon ben Laqish said: Satan, the evil inclination, and the angel of death are one and the same*.<sup>45</sup> [...] Thereupon it is made clear in the following dictum how far [Satan] is from Him, may He be exalted: *The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan, yea, the Lord*

*that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee.*<sup>46</sup> [...] Know that the word *Satan* derives from [the verb “satah”, to turn away, figuring for in-stance in the verse]: *Steh [turn away] from it and pass on;*<sup>47</sup> I mean to say that it derives from the notion of turning-away and going-away. For it is he who indubitably turns people away from the ways of truth and makes them perish in the ways of error. The same notion is expressed in the dic-tum: *For the inclination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.*<sup>48</sup> You know how well known this notion is in our Law, I mean the notion of *good inclin-ation and evil inclination*; and you know their dictum: *With both your inclinations.*<sup>49</sup> They also say that *the evil inclination* is produced in the human individual at his birth: *Sin coucheth at the door;*<sup>50</sup> as the Torah states literally: *From his youth.*<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, *good inclination* is only found in man when his intellect is perfected.<sup>52</sup> [...] Now as they have explained to us that *the evil inclination* is *Satan*, who indubitably is an angel - I mean that he too is called an *angel* inasmuch as he is found in the crowd of *the sons of God - good inclination* must consequently also be truly an *angel*. Consequently that well-known opinion figuring in the sayings of the *Sages*,<sup>53</sup> *may their memory be blessed*, according to which every man is accompanied by *two angels*, one to his right and the other to his left, identifies these two with *good inclination* and *evil inclination*. In the *Gemara Shabbath*, they, *may their memory be blessed*, say clearly with regard to these *two angels* that *one is good and the other evil.*<sup>54</sup> See how many marvels are revealed to us by this dictum and how many incorrect imaginings it abolishes.<sup>55</sup>

“The war of the inclinations” [*Milhemet ha-Yetzarim*] is the topic and the significant title of Moshe Idel’ study on psychomachia in Judaism with precise reference to Abraham Abulafia:

The occurrence of the phrase “war of inclinations” points plausibly, though not necessarily, to the impact of R. Bahya ibn Paqudah on Abulafia. However, unlike the way in which Bahya and many other sources resort to the term *Milhemet ha-Yetzer*, as the war of man with the inclination, with passion or desire, Abulafia is much more interested in a dual war taking place all the time between two inclinations, namely the imagination and the intellect. This is the reason why he resorts to the plural form: *Milhemet ha-yetzarim.*<sup>56</sup>

The “internalization of the war”<sup>57</sup> is already present in *GP*. Later, with Abulafia, this process is continued:

This transposition on the inner key triggered a process of demythologization of Satan. As representing the power of imagination that is perpetually lying

in wait for the noetic fall, Satan requires from the mystic, to conduct an unending war against his own thoughts, which is a common theme in hesychasm.<sup>58</sup>

Later we find:

So, for example, we read in Abulafia's *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, a rather detailed description of the inner battle:

"[...] And a man possesses these two forms, called inclinations [*yetzarim*] or powers or angels or thoughts or comprehensions or however you wish to call them because their meaning refers to one thing [...]"

Part of a commentary on the secrets allegedly found in Maimonides' *GP*, this seminal passage deals exclusively with the inner battle.<sup>59</sup>

Imagination, in its natural functioning, is a good faculty and what is incriminated is not the act of producing representations,<sup>60</sup> but the way these representations are interpreted afterwards, which is actually the source of every human error. Angel or demon, imagination behaves differently according to man's orientation/inclination (?).

"[...] And you should understand from here that Satan is the angel of death and he is the evil inclination, as adduced by the author of the Guide in part III when discussing the words of Job, in the name of R. Shimeon, and no one disagrees. And you should understand from this that the two thoughts that man finds in himself are the effects of the two inclinations."

Abulafia strives to attenuate any dualistic understanding of the two inclinations. In some statements in this passage, and elsewhere in his writings, the same thought may become angelic or demonic. This unified and dialectical understanding of the two faculties within the human spirit has much to do with Maimonides' Neo-Aristotelian approach. Indeed, as it may be discerned in the passage from Abulafia's *Sitrei Torah* adduced above in this section, the two entities are conceived of as being one. What is important from our point of view is the refusal to attribute any hypostatic status of the angel of death. [...] Philosophers and some Kabbalists were much more inclined to ignore the hypostatic aspect and stress the importance of the psychological aspect. Maimonides contributed much in this direction and Abulafia reiterated here and elsewhere the philosopher's stand. He adopted the main contribution of Maimonides as a philosopher: the identification of the two elements in the rabbinic statement to the Aristotelian faculty of imagination.<sup>61</sup>

In order to overpass the perplexity expressed by the dilemma in front of the two coherent, authoritative and equally justified systems (the philosophical system and the traditional system) we must grasp the figurative meaning of the Scriptures (if any) from beyond the literal meaning.<sup>62</sup> This is also key to bridging Greek/Arabic philosophy and Jewish thought/theology.<sup>63</sup> The act of interpreting the biblical verses in a philosophical manner (thus establishing the correspondences between the two aforementioned apparently contradictory systems) supposes a first dislocation: the text as a mirror. Maimonides *guides* the perplexed by awakening in him/her the capacity of: 1) recognizing the intelligible representations in the specific places where they appear,<sup>64</sup> and 2) of interpreting them adequately (as always pointing to the divine).<sup>65</sup>

Maimonides himself raises the problem of the faculty responsible for the interpretation of the intelligible representations once detected in the prophetic books:

And by what can one differentiate between that which is imagined and that which is cognized by the intellect? [...] Is there accordingly something that permits differentiation between the imaginative faculty and the intellect? And is that thing something altogether outside both the intellect and the imagination, or is it by the intellect itself that one distinguishes between that which is cognized by the intellect and that which is imagined?<sup>66</sup>

The dislocation culminates in a specific vision/orientation as an expression of a more intellectualized approach (we could speak of another level of consciousness). In fact, the dislocation makes place for a trans-mutation as far as the significance is concerned. From precisely this point of view, the initiated looks as through an enchanted mirror and grasps the divine, not only within the framework of a text, but in any other “place” where such an approach is required. If the creation in its entirety is a Maimonides of the Creator, then, in descending order, every materialization of the divine impulse recalls the first/original movement. From the invisible to the visible, every movement is the *analogon* of the first *seter*, “mystery”.<sup>67</sup> The ascending movement is in the same way mysterious. *Maaseh bereshith* (*The Account of the Beginnings*) and *Maaseh mercavah* (*The Account of the Chariot/Divine Throne*) correspond to the descending (more from a cosmological perspective) and the ascending ladder (more from an experiential perspective) respectively, the mystery deriving from the paradoxical identity of the interstice.

For someone always having as a guide the divine, the enchanted mirrors are to be found everywhere: (as with a common mirror) all the sensible representations that reflect the material world are transfigured and thus turned into intelligible representations reflecting (as through an enchanted mirror) the invisible divine.

The consequence of this is that intelligible representations appear (by means of imagination and by overpassing it via recognition/interpretation) in two different ways:

- 1) The way of prophecy;
- 2) The way of reinterpretation/transfiguration of the sensible representations (whenever they are to be reinterpreted/transfigured by the initiated reader). As a result the question arises as to whether there are any techniques implied/alluded to in *GP*?

The initiated person will know how to recognize and interpret any manifestation perceived via senses or produced via intellect. Thus, except for the biblical text, which has a privileged authoritative status, enchanted mirrors, are also:

- the visible world in its entirety and its different elements;
- different objects from the visible world having a special (divinatory) utilization; e.g. the precious stones (*Urim ve-Thummim*) from the priestly garments;
- the very body of the prophet (his gesture and behavior);
- the imagination;
- the intellect.

The mirror, in order to reflect, requires a material substratum/a screen, the obstacle that constitutes the cause/the precondition of the reflection.<sup>68</sup> The faculty of imagination plays in this respect the most important role: it offers the substratum for any reflection and it consists of sensible representations. The interpretation does not occur at the level of the imagination alone or exclusively at the level of the intellect, but always happens in between (whether the representations are produced through the senses or intellect).

Moses' case is special: the obstacle is not represented by the imagination, but as José Faur has underlined,<sup>69</sup> by the intellect. Nevertheless, how could the intellect (which is invisible, incorporeal, immaterial) *reflect* the divine? Is the intellect itself another veil, the ultimate and most transparent veil, but still a veil?

The intelligible representations (intended for interpretation since they are meant to transmit an invisible message by means of particular images) are modulated (their relativity/imperfection residing in materialization and therefore modulation) by at least three factors, as mentioned explicitly by Maimonides:<sup>70</sup>

- 1) The power/intensity of the invisible impulse;
- 2) The disposition of the prophet; I would distinguish between a *general disposition* given by the perfection/imperfection of the prophet's bodily powers and faculties<sup>71</sup> – with special stress on imagination and intellect<sup>72</sup> – and a *particular disposition* with reference to the precise state of the prophet in the precise moment of the supervening of the prophecy;<sup>73</sup> and
- 3) The intended auditory; the problem Maimonides raises is whether or not the prophet modulates his discourse in order to be understood adequately by his public. Reference is made in the treatise to a famous rabbinic discussion:

The *Sages* have explained all this to us and have called our attention to this subject. They said that the apprehension grasped by *Ezekiel* was identical with that grasped by *Isaiah*. They made of it a comparison with two men who saw the ruler while the latter was riding: one of them belonged to the settled population and the other to the desert nomads. Because the former knew that city people know in what state the ruler rides, he did not describe that state, but said only: I saw the ruler. The latter, however, wishing to describe this to the desert nomads, who have no knowledge at all regarding the state in which the ruler rides, described to them in detail this state and the characteristic of the ruler's troops, his servants, and those who execute his orders.<sup>74</sup>

We can easily recognize the different patterns of modulation alluded to.

If the prophet is a rhetor then we may ask whether (or not) the effective transmission of the received message is a second (deforming) move of materializing the intelligible representations through words. From this point of view, the stylistic part of the text and the specific mode of narration are highly significant. When interpreting the prophetic texts, Maimonides pays great attention to the narrative devices used by the prophets to suggest that there is a figurative meaning intended in their descriptions of the vision.

Every prophet uses a specific type of discourse and imagery depending, as we have already seen, on the factors enumerated above.

This is the so-called “political” dimension of the imagination.

There is another problem accompanying the many others listed above: is there a sacred/primordial/perfect language? Does God *speak* to the prophet using this language? what does the prophet hear/see/touch/smell?

Maimonides’ answer is clear: language is conventional.<sup>75</sup>

Among the things you ought to know and have your attention drawn to is the dictum: *And the man gave names, and so on.*<sup>76</sup> It informs us that languages are conventional and not natural, as has sometimes been thought.<sup>77</sup>

When rejecting the corporeality of God and all the affirmative attributes applied to Him, Maimonides implicitly rejects the attribute of speaking in reference to God. The divine overflow/impulse is completely immaterial and this is a characteristic of the prophecy: the descending emanation does not represent a common type of motion (from one object to another object), but a special type, which does not involve/pertain to matter:

Considering that the effects produced by the separate intellect are clear and manifest in that which exists - being everything that is produced anew, but does not result solely from the mixture of elements itself - it is necessarily known that this agent does not act either through immediate contact or at some particular distance, for it is not a body. Hence the action of the separate intellect is always designated as an overflow, being likened to a source of water that overflows in all directions and does not have one particular direction from which it draws while giving its bounty to others. For it springs forth from all directions and constantly irrigates all the directions nearby and afar. [...] In the same way it is said that He caused His knowledge to overflow to the prophets. The meaning of all this is that these actions are the action of one who is not a body. And it is His action that is called overflow.

This term, I mean “overflow”, is sometimes also applied in Hebrew to God, may He be exalted, with a view to likening Him to an overflowing spring of water, as we have mentioned. For nothing is more fitting as a simile to the action of one that is separate from matter than this expression, I mean “overflow”.<sup>78</sup>

When this impulse touches the faculty of imagination through intellect, it is “translated” into different representations (images, words, odors, behavior), according to the disposition and intimate bodily and spiritual

structure of the prophet at a given moment. The very act of “translation” has two distinct aspects: the esoteric aspect (pertaining to the divine purpose of concealing<sup>79</sup>) and the political aspect (pertaining to the human imperfection and deforming effect when transmitting the divine message). And it is from their mixture that the text of the prophecy derives.

Consequently, the language heard by the prophet is already a reflection of the original impulse in his particular mirror.

Maimonides makes no attempt to approach the problem of the memory (as *distance* in time) as usually approached in Aristotelian milieus, for example. He merely mentions the common function of the imagination of *retaining* the sensible representations and reusing/recombining them when necessary. But is there a memory of the intelligible representations? Or even a memory of the very state of receiving the message, i.e. a part memory of the “invisible experience” of the prophet? When the prophet is (re)counting his visions does he use the already (in)formed intelligible representations, or does he “goes back” in the very moment<sup>80</sup> of the emerging of these representations and re-inform/re-enforce them by trying to reiterate the original framework and thus re-connect to the source of the intelligible representations once grasped?

In different parts of the treatise Maimonides makes reference (though sometimes secondarily) to (precious) stones and even to the mirror as a parable for different spiritual stages in order to express better a specific state of consciousness at a specific level. Terms from the spectrum of light and vision/sight play a special role in creating these analogous images. Light is the precondition of vision and vision is used allegorically with regard to intellectual perception:

Know that the three words *to see* [*ra'oh*], *to look at* [*habbit*], and *to vision* [*hazoh*] are applied to the sight of the eye and that all three of them are also used figuratively to denote the grasp of the intellect. As for the verb *to see*, this is generally admitted by the multitude. Thus it says: *And he saw, and beheld a well in the field*. This refers to the sight of the eye. But it also says: *Yea, my heart hath seen much of wisdom and knowledge*; and this refers to intellectual apprehension.<sup>81</sup>

Following the attentive analysis of these many passages, I intend now to draw the image of an alluded ladder whose steps point to different states/levels of knowledge/consciousness.

Firstly, I wish to introduce some of these passages important to our discussion:

- You should not think that these great *secrets* are fully and completely known to anyone among us. They are not. But sometimes truth flashes out to us so that we think that it is day, and then matter and habit in their various forms conceal it so that we find ourselves again in an obscure night, almost as we were at first. We are like someone in a very dark night over whom lightning flashes time and time again. Among us there is one for whom the lightning flashes time and time again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light. Thus night appears to him as day. [...] There are others between whose lightning flashes there are greater or shorter intervals. Thereafter comes he who does not attain a degree in which his darkness is illumined by any lightning flash. It is illumined, however, by a polished body or something of that kind, stones or something else that give light in the darkness of the night. And even this small light that shines over us is not always there, but flashes and is hidden again, as if it were *the flaming sword which turned every way*.<sup>15</sup> It is in accord with these states that the degrees of the perfect vary. As for those who never even once see a light, but grope about in their night, of them it is said: *They know not, neither do they understand; They go about in darkness*. The truth, in spite of the strength of its manifestation, is entirely hidden from them, as is said of them [...]. They are the vulgar among the people. There is then no occasion to mention them here in this Treatise.<sup>82</sup>
- [...] he who has no intellectual cognition at all of God is like one who is in darkness and has never seen light [...].<sup>83</sup>
- With regard to the fact that that which is above the *firmament* is called water in name only and that it is not the specific water known to us, a statement setting this forth has also been made by the *Sages, may their memory be blessed*. They made it in the following passage:<sup>84</sup> *Four entered the Paradise, and so on. Rabbi Aqiba said to them: When you come to the stones of pure marble, do not say, Water, Water, for it is written:*<sup>85</sup> *He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes.*<sup>86</sup>
- With regard to his saying of them, *like unto beryl*,<sup>87</sup> he interprets this also in the second description, saying with regard to the *wheels [ophanim]: And the appearance of the wheels was as the color of a beryl stone.*<sup>88</sup> *Jonathan ben Uziel, peace be on him, translated this as:*

like unto a precious stone. Now you know already that *Onqelos* used this very expression to translate: *As it were, a work of the whiteness of sapphire stone*;<sup>89</sup> he says: *As the work of a precious stone*. There is consequently no difference between its saying, *As the color of a beryl stone*, and its saying, *As it were, a work of the whiteness of sapphire stone*. Understand this.<sup>90</sup>

- In the *Midrash* and the *Haggada* as well as in the *Talmud*, it is often found that some of the prophets saw God from behind many veils [*mehitzot*], while others saw Him from behind a few veils, depending upon their closeness to God and their level of prophecy. They [the sages] said that *Moses our master* saw God from behind one diaphanous veil [*mehitza behira*], I mean, a transparent one [*mazhira*]. This is what they said [*B.T., Yevamot 49b*]: *He looked through a transparent glass [ba-aspeklaria ha-meira]. Aspeklaria* is the name of a looking glass (*shem ha-mar'a*) made from a transparent body, such as beryl or glass, as we shall explain at the end of [the tractate] *Kelim*.<sup>91</sup>
- If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known (*etvade*) to him in a vision (*ba-mar'ah*),<sup>92</sup> and speak (*adaber*) to him in a dream (*ba-halom*). My servant Moshe is not so, for he is the trusted one in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth (*pe el-pe*), manifestly, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord (*temunat Adonai*) does he behold (*yabit*).<sup>93</sup>

As strange as it might seem, all these different “horizons” of understanding are related to the different functions of the imagination and especially to the different connected modes of interpreting the representations. At a certain point, the prophet and the initiated interpreter of the prophetic books are one.<sup>94</sup>

<b>True Prophet</b>	<b>False Prophet</b>
S. → S.R.	S. → I.R.
I. → I.R.	(I. → S.R.)
<b>Initiated Reader</b>	<b>Uninitiated Reader</b>
S.R. = S.R.	(S.R. = I.R.)
I.R. = I.R.	I.R. = S.R.

- S. – the sensible (realm)
- I. – the intelligible (realm)
- S.R. – sensible representations
- I.R. – intelligible representations
- is/are translated into
- = is/are interpreted as

The distinction between the true and the false prophet in fact relates to their adequate interpretation of the received message. On the other hand, the initiated reader, by grasping the intelligible is touched by the divine overflow. Moreover, by reconstructing the ways of the prophecy (in an ascending line, but having the same direction) and exercising them as a “trained person”, the initiated reader may have an even stronger relation with the invisible realm, i.e. the Active Intellect:

We have already made it clear to you that that intellect which overflowed from Him, may He be exalted, toward us is the bond between us and Him. You have the choice: if you wish to strengthen and to fortify this bond, you can do so; if, however, you wish gradually to make it weaker and feebler until you cut it, you can also do that. You can only strengthen this bond by employing it in loving Him<sup>95</sup> and in progressing toward this, just as we have explained. And it is made weaker and feebler if you busy your thought with what is other than He.<sup>96</sup>

I would distinguish methodologically between three modes of perceiving/understanding (the number is not important), as grasped in Maimonides’ use of the (precious) stones and of the mirror as belonging to the prophetic texts themselves or as metaphors in his own interpretative approach:

1) The first mode corresponds to the amorphous stone, i.e. the world is opaque, everything is reduced to sensible representations, there is no “beyond”, the invisible is non-existent. It is the stage of the **dark ignorance** (“those who never even once see a light, but grope about in their night, or “he who has no intellectual cognition at all of God is like one who is in darkness and has never seen light”).

2) The second mode corresponds to the polished stone (luster, glitter, *exterior* brilliance), i.e. the common mirror – the intelligible representations are mistaken for sensible representations, the invisible is

reduced to the visible; here we have the narcissiac approach of the idolater/anthropolater who projects *his* most valuable *human* attributes onto the divine and identifies the latter with them. It is the stage of the **mirror** ("Thereafter comes he who does not attain a degree in which his darkness is illumined by any lightning flash. It is illumined, however, by a polished body or something of that kind, stones or something else that give light in the darkness of the night")

3) The third mode corresponds to the precious stone (polished/refined at the interior as well) which is translucent (pointing to the common prophets) or transparent (pointing to Moses). It is the stage of the **enchanted mirror** ("Among us there is one for whom the lightning flashes time and time again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light. Thus night appears to him as day."): the intelligible representations indicate univocally the invisible divine.

[...] prophecy involves a semiotic relationship between the vision reflected in the imagination and the intellect of the prophet: prophecy-imagination is the *interpreted* system; the *pirush-reason* is the *interpreter* system.

There are two movements to the reflective consciousness of the prophet: a movement *away* from the prophetic vision and then a directing of attention *toward* it. A precondition for reflective consciousness and the type of analysis required of the prophet is to shatter the illusion of immanence present in the *temuna*. As it were, the mirror/mind/imagination reduces the absolute reality of God to a two-dimensional entity. Thus the prophet must perceive the revelation of the divine as a *reflection*, not as the actual divine [...].

The model for the reflective consciousness of the prophet is the burning bush. Upon realizing that it was a prophetic vision, Moses covered his face and refused to glance (*me-habbit*) at the *elohim* (angel/God) producing the vision (see *Ex. 3, 6*). In this fashion Moses ruptured the link between the burning bush, which he 'turned to see', and *elohim* of which the bush was the sign but which he refused to look at.<sup>97</sup>

This also explains the frequent use of the precious crystallized stones in the Scriptures whenever referring to strong intellectual perceptions or describing the intelligible realm. Maimonides remembers the divination through *Urim ve-Tumim*<sup>98</sup> as a second degree on the prophetic ladder:

[...] every High Priest who was questioned through the *Urim* and *Thummim* also belongs to this group.<sup>99</sup>

The prophetic imagination functions as *Urim ve-Tumim*.

The translucent stone nevertheless implies a specific color (the transparency is not perfect). But light can be grasped beyond that transparent color. This explains the many veils mentioned by the doctors of the Talmud (and quoted by Maimonides) when referring to the common prophets. From a strictly physical point of view, many veils, even if transparent, become translucent or opaque if their number is great. Moses saw God through one transparent veil ("*ba-aspeklaria ha-meira*"). The materiality<sup>100</sup> of the imagination is non-existent: there is no color, no specific nuance. The veil is that of the intellect<sup>101</sup> and the intellect is invisible/transparent.



Sculpture by George Weil of Aaron the high priest, wearing the priestly vestments and the *Urim* and *Thummim* oracle.

Interestingly, Maimonides explains the term *aspaklaria* in the treatise *Kelim*<sup>102</sup> as follows: “*aspaklaria* is the screen/covering/curtain/veil [*ha-masakh*] made in order to see [*me-ahorav*] the forms [*ha-tzuroth*] beyond it, and it is, from my point of view [*lephi daati*] a compound word [*milah murkeveth*]: *sapheq-lere’yah* [doubt (as) to/for/concerning the seeing/sight] – doubting/ambiguous and altered/deformed sight [*re’yah mesupeqeth u-meshubesheth*]”. He later mentions that *aspaklaria* is a Latin word designating “the transparent stone” [*even shequphah*], as well as the “windowpanes” [*zegugyyoth le-halanoth*] or the “glass”/“window” [*zekhukhith*]. For the initiated there is always a sign/clue (Heb. *remez*) indicating that the representation is not merely sensible, but ambiguous: the hidden face is the intelligible. From this moment on, the delusive mirror is transfigured and mysteriously turns into an enchanted mirror. This is also the way someone must interpret the prophetic parables/allegories (*meshalim*). The next section of this study is dedicated to special terms related to imagination present in *GP*, including the key term *mashal*.

## II. Terms related to imagination

Imagination is approached in *GP* whenever this term or specific related terms appear. As this faculty is responsible for every representation reflecting both the sensible realm and the intelligible realm, the main problem that arises is to distinguish between the sensible and the intelligible representations. Thus, any time a word referring to God occurs in the Scriptures we should ask whether or not it has a proper/literal meaning. As God is incorporeal, all the terms pointing (inevitably) to a particular (material/visible) object, part of the body or shape, are to be understood figuratively:

*Foot* [*regel*] is an equivocal term. It is a term denoting a foot. Thus: *Foot for foot*. It also occurs with the meaning of following. Thus: *Go thee out and all the people that are in thy feet* - the meaning of which is, that follow thee. It is likewise used in the sense of causation. Thus: *And the Lord hath blessed thee for my foot* - I being the cause, that is to say, for my sake. For when a thing exists for the sake of some other thing, the latter is the cause of the former. This meaning is frequently employed.<sup>103</sup>

I wish now to analyze the two ways of reaching the figurative meaning in the Scriptures, as described by Maimonides in different parts of the treatise. The two goals of the treatise mentioned in the *Introduction* make reference to these specific ways of interpretation:

This Treatise also has a second purpose: namely, the explanation of very obscure parables<sup>104</sup> occurring in the books of the prophets, but not explicitly identified there as such. Hence an ignorant or heedless individual might think that they possess only an external sense, but no internal one. However, even when one who truly possesses knowledge considers these parables and interprets them according to their external meaning, he too is overtaken by great perplexity. But if we explain these parables to him or if we draw his attention to their being parables, he will take the right road and be delivered from this perplexity. That is why I have called this Treatise *The Guide of the Perplexed*.<sup>105</sup>

The two subjects I want to approach are: 1) the homonymy, and 2) the allegoresis, which in the treatise tend to become real techniques of interpreting the prophetic books. I will concentrate on the biblical terms related to image, figure, and shape when applied to God in order to see how Maimonides uses these very specific techniques in *GP*.

#### 1) The homonymy

Maimonides uses the Aristotelian term *homonym* whenever trying to explain that a biblical term regarding God does not point to sensible determinations, but has a figurative meaning. Thus from a sensible representation Maimonides obtains an intelligible representation simply by changing the way of interpreting the biblical term. Except for the proper/literal meaning, which is adequate when referring to *sensibilia*, all the biblical terms applied to God are used *homonymously* since they point to a totally different realm that refuses any visible/material determinations. Maimonides also attempts to explain those biblical terms most difficult to grasp, even in their sensible determinations. The refined analysis of such terms is significant for our approach for they cover the spectrum of *form, figure, face, shape, and image*.

Maimonides distinguishes between *toar, tzelem, demuth*,<sup>106</sup> *tavnith* and *temunah*:

*Image [tzelem]* and *likeness [demuth]*. People have thought that in the Hebrew language *image* denotes the shape and configuration of a thing. This supposition led them to the pure doctrine of the corporeality of God, on account of His saying: *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness [...]*.<sup>107</sup>

Now I say that in the Hebrew language the proper term designating the form that is well known among the multitude, namely, that form which is the shape and configuration of a thing, is *toar* [...]. The term *image*, on the other hand, is applied to the natural form, I mean to the notion in virtue of which a thing is constituted as a substance and becomes what it is. It is the true reality of the thing in so far as the latter is that particular being. In man that notion is that from which human apprehension derives. It is on account of this intellectual apprehension that it is said of man: *In the image of God created He him [...]*.<sup>108</sup> That which was meant in the scriptural dictum, *let us make man in our image*,<sup>109</sup> was the specific form, which is intellectual apprehension, not the shape and configuration. We have explained to you the difference between *image* and *form*, and have explained the meaning of *image*.

As for the term *likeness [demuth]*, it is a noun derived from the verb *damoh [to be like]*, and it too signifies likeness in respect of a notion. For the scriptural dictum, *I am like a pelican in the wilderness*,<sup>110</sup> does not signify that its author resembled the pelican with regard to its wings and feathers, but that his sadness was like that of the bird.<sup>111</sup>

It is thought that in the Hebrew language the meanings of the words *figure [temunah]* and *shape [tavnith]* are identical. This is not the case. For *tavnith* is a term deriving from the verb *banoh [to build]*, and it signifies the build and aspect of a thing; I mean to say its shape, for instance, its being a square, a circle, a triangle, or some other shape [...].

As for the term *figure*, it is used amphibolously in three different senses. It is used to designate the form of a thing outside the mind that is apprehended by the senses, I mean the shape and configuration of the thing [...]. It is also used to designate the imaginary form of an individual object existing in the imagination after the object of which it is the form is no longer manifest to the senses. Thus it says, *In thoughts from the visions of the night, and so on*,<sup>112</sup> the conclusion of the dictum being, *It stood still, but I could not discern the appearance thereof, a figure was before mine eyes*. He means: a phantasm of the imagination<sup>113</sup> that is before my eyes while in sleep. The term is also used to designate the true notion grasped by the intellect. It is with a view to this third meaning that the word *figure* is used with reference to God, may He be exalted. Thus it says: *And the figure of the Lord shall he look upon*.<sup>114</sup> The meaning and interpretation of this verse are: he grasps the truth of God.<sup>115</sup>

Maimonides chooses to translate the biblical terms *more philosophico*<sup>116</sup> thus creating a highly interesting explanatory dictionary meant to bridge the gap between the Greek/Arabic philosophy and traditional Jewish theology.

The homonymy as a technique of interpretation is to be used when singular terms applied to God need to be adequately understood.

## 2) The allegoresis

[...] for once you know it is a parable, it will immediately become clear to you of what it is parable. My remarking that it is a parable will be like someone's removing a screen from between the eye and a visible thing.<sup>117</sup>

The second technique of interpretation, allegoresis, applies to larger phraseological constructions. The syntax becomes extremely important and the meaning derives from connecting/combining two or more biblical terms/verses:

Know that the prophetic parables are of two kinds. In some of these parables each word has a meaning, while in others the parable as a whole indicates the whole of the intended meaning. In such a parable very many words are to be found, not every one of which adds something to the intended meaning. They serve rather to embellish the parable and to render it more coherent or to conceal further the intended meaning; hence the speech proceeds in such a way as to accord with everything required by the parable's external meaning. Understand this well.<sup>118</sup>

In order to guide the perplexed and clarify how this technique of interpretation functions, Maimonides uses an ingenious device: the allegoresis is alluded to as a technique in the authoritative allegory from *Proverbs 25, 11*.<sup>119</sup> This allegory explains in fact the allegoresis as a technique of interpretation:

The Sage has said: *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings [maækiyyoth] of silver.* [...] Now see how marvelously this dictum describes a well-constructed parable. For he says that in a saying that has two meanings - he means an external and an internal one - the external meaning ought to be as beautiful as silver, while its internal meaning ought to be more beautiful than the external one, the former being in comparison to the latter as gold is to silver.<sup>120</sup>

The term used by Maimonides for what was most often translated as “parable” or “allegory” is *mashal* (Heb.)/ *mathal* (Ar.), a term having a Semitic radical and different meanings: “parable”, “allegory”, “proverb”/ “proverbial saying”, “example”, “illustration”, “analogy”, “correspondence”, “similitude”, “comparison” etc. Maimonides uses the term whenever a figurative meaning is hidden/alluded to beyond the literal meaning of the biblical text; generally speaking, *mashal* designates the prophetic figurative discourse.

Here I wish to draw attention to the image of the *maʿekiyoth*. This “filigree-work having very small holes” (see fragment quoted below) strongly resembles the “windowpanes” [*zegugyyoth le-halonoth*] or the “glass”/“window” [*zekhukhith*] present in Maimonides’ explanation of *aspaklaria* in *Kelim*. Moreover, the term *masakh*, used in the same text (“*aspaklaria* is the screen/covering/curtain/veil [*ha-masakh*] made in order to see beyond [*me-ahorav*] the forms [*ha-tzuroth*]”), most probably has the same root as *maʿekiyoth*, i.e. *s/ʿ. kh. kh.* (“to cover”, “to screen”, “to lay over”, “to overshadow”, “to weave” etc.).<sup>121</sup> Thus, the image of the enchanted mirror becomes even more suggestive when speaking of intellectual apprehension while in the body.

It is clear in *GP* (even the title is an argument) that Maimonides is indicating a specific technique of interpretation. He is not only interpreting, but, as a *hermeneus*, he masters many different techniques and teaches the allegoresis, i.e. allegorical interpretation, to the prepared reader. How do we recognize the *mithal/mashal*? Maimonides answers that there are some signs, some important clues intended for the attentive eye:

Its external meaning also ought to contain in it something that indicates to the person considering it what is to be found in its internal meaning, as happens in the case of an apple of gold overlaid with silver filigree-work having very small holes. When looked at from a distance or with imperfect attention, it is deemed to be an apple of silver; but when a keen-sighted observer looks at it with full attention, its interior becomes clear to him and he knows that it is of gold. The parables of the prophets, peace be on them, are similar.<sup>122</sup>

At the level of the syntax such a clue is offered in the prophetic books by special particles and terms, which, once considered, make room for the dislocation necessary in order to grasp the figurative meaning. Such

an example is offered by the particle *k-*, “as (if)”, “(the) like (of)”, which at the same time facilitates the comparison and resemblance, thus distinguishing between the two different realms: the sensible and the intelligible. The term *demuth*, often preceded by the particle *k-* (*ki-demuth*) performs the same function (i.e. re-orientating) and is usually translated by “resemblance”, “likeness”, “similitude”:

For when he speaks of the *living creatures*, he says, *The likeness of four living creatures*, and does not only say *Four living creatures*.<sup>123</sup> Similarly he says: *And the likeness of the firmament was upon the heads of the living creature*;<sup>124</sup> and: *The likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone*;<sup>125</sup> and: *The likeness as the appearance of a man*.<sup>126</sup> With regard to all this he uses the expression: *likeness*. With regard to the *wheels*, however, he by no means says concerning them *the likeness of a wheel* or *the likeness of wheels*, but makes absolute statements regarding what they really are in a form expressive of that which really exists [...].

He also says: *And the appearance of the rainbow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord*.<sup>127</sup> The matter, the true reality, and the essence of the *rainbow* that is described are known. This is the most extraordinary comparison possible, as far as parables and similitudes are concerned; and it is indubitably due to a prophetic force. Understand this.<sup>128</sup>

In both cases, homonymy and allegoresis, the sensible representations are transfigured and the proper/literal meaning makes room for the hidden/figurative meaning. The *matter* of the intelligible representations is unimportant once left behind and may constitute, precisely from this point of view, the subject of undoubtedly interesting research into the prophetic *imaginaire*.

### III. The hidden history of the imagination as a faculty

Some relevant fragments of *GP*, if connected by a pure chronological logic, help us to trace a “history of imagination” according to Maimonides’ view of the development and different functions of this faculty in different times.

1) The first significant moment of this history is represented by Adam and Eve *before* their disobedience. When Maimonides explains the term

*tzelem* in the specific context of Gen. 1, 26, he asserts, as we have already seen, that the term signifies “intellectual apprehension, not the shape and configuration”.<sup>129</sup> At this level, there is no need for imagination. Man only distinguishes between *true* and *false*:

For the intellect that God made overflow unto man and that is the latter’s ultimate perfection, was that which *Adam* had been provided with before he disobeyed. It was because of this that it was said of him that he was created *in the image of God and in His likeness*. It was likewise on account of it that he was addressed by God and given commandments, as it says: *And the Lord God commanded, and so on*.<sup>130</sup> For commandments are not given to beasts and beings devoid of intellect. Through the intellect one distinguishes between truth and falsehood, and that was found in [*Adam*] in its perfection and integrity.<sup>131</sup>

Interestingly, Maimonides mentions that “on account of” his intellect, man received the divine commandments. This detail will be significant in this third section.

Well oriented, *Adam* had no need to translate (for himself or others) the divine messages since they were clearly and instantly understood by everyone. The transparency of the intellect pertains to its perfection. *Adam* was not a prophet, but a perfect man. Prophecy always implies the relationship with the others who represent the intended auditory. That is why there is no prophecy without imagination – the only faculty that makes possible the transmission of a message, of any kind, in the visible realm.

After this, you should know that the case in which the intellectual overflow overflows only toward the rational faculty and does not overflow at all toward the imaginative faculty - either because of the scantiness of what overflows or because of some deficiency existing in the imaginative faculty in its natural disposition, a deficiency that makes it impossible for it to receive the overflow of the intellect - is characteristic of the class of men of science engaged in speculation. If, on the other hand, this overflow reaches both faculties - I mean both the rational and the imaginative - as we and others among the philosophers have explained, and if the imaginative faculty is in a state of ultimate perfection owing to its natural disposition, this is characteristic of the class of prophets. If again the overflow only reaches the imaginative faculty, the defect of the rational faculty deriving either from its original natural disposition or from insufficiency of training, this is characteristic of the class of those who govern cities, while being the

legislators, the soothsayers, the augurs, and the dreamers of veridical dreams.<sup>132</sup>

2) The second moment is represented by the disobedience of Adam and Eve:

[...] However, when he disobeyed and inclined toward his desires of the imagination and the pleasures of his corporeal senses - inasmuch as it is said: *that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes*<sup>133</sup> - he was punished by being deprived of that intellectual apprehension. He therefore disobeyed the commandment that was imposed upon him on account of his intellect and, becoming endowed with the faculty of apprehending generally accepted things, he became absorbed in judging things to be bad or fine.<sup>134</sup>

After sin, man lost his God-orientation. Imagination (as *yetzer ha-ra*) appears for the first time and part of the intellectual transparency disappears. It is clear, not only from this fragment, that there is a tight, organic relationship between imagination and intellect. Complete transparency implies lack of imagination and, *vice versa*, whenever imagination is present the intellect loses part of its powers.

At this level, man distinguishes more often between *good* and *evil* and this distinction pertains to the imagination:<sup>135</sup>

Hence it is said: *And ye shall be like Elohim knowing good and evil*;<sup>136</sup> and not: *knowing the false and the true, or apprehending the false and the true*. With regard to what is of necessity, there is no *good* and *evil* at all, but only the *false* and the *true*. Reflect on the dictum: *And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked*.<sup>137</sup> It is not said: *And the eyes of them both were opened, and they saw*. For what was seen previously was exactly that which was seen after-wards. There had been no membrane over the eye that was now re-moved, but rather he entered upon another state in which he considered as bad things that he had not seen in that light before. Know moreover that this expression, I mean, *to open*, refers only to uncovering mental vision and in no respect is applied to the circumstance that the sense of sight has been newly acquired.<sup>138</sup>

Adam turned his face from God and this re-orientation produced the disharmony which led to the appearance of the faculty of imagination. It appears with the "altered" orientation and continues its delusive play as *yetzer ha-ra*:

[...] Now concerning its dictum with regard to *Adam - He changes his face and Thou sendest him forth*<sup>139</sup> - the interpretation and explanation of the verse are as follows; when the direction toward which man tended<sup>140</sup> changed, he was driven forth. For *panim* [face] is a term deriving from the verb *panoh* [to turn], since man turns his face toward the thing he wishes to take as his objective. The verse states accordingly that when man changed the direction toward which he tended and took as his objective the very thing a previous commandment had bidden him not to aim at, he was driven out of the *Garden of Eden*. This was the punishment corresponding to his disobedience [...].<sup>141</sup>

The important term here is *panim*.

3) If the appearance of evil is related to imagination, the regaining of the intellectual perfection is also related to the same faculty. It proves to be both the gate of evil and the gate of redemption. The prophetic imagination is a *mal'akh*, "angel". The delusive sensible representations, once transfigured, re-orientate all the faculties of the soul toward God. It is the level of the prophecy. Man is prepared to receive the divine message.

4) The climax of the history of imagination is represented by Moses, the prophet of the prophets.

[...] to every prophet except *Moses our Master* prophetic revelation comes through an *angel*. Know this.<sup>142</sup>

The God-orientation in Moses' case was total. This explains the vanishing of the faculty of imagination and the perfect transparency of his intellect.

And there arose not a prophet since in Yisrael like Moshe, whom the Lord knew face to face (*panim el-panim*) [...].<sup>143</sup>

The term *panim* is to be understood here in a more powerful light. It is the sign of human perfection derived from perfect orientation having the divine alone as its final supreme guide.<sup>144</sup>

The circle is evident. However, one question remains: is Moses' perfection identical to Adam's perfection? Is there any difference at this level between Moses and Adam?

Unlike the other prophets, Moses receives the commandments in the same manner as did Adam (but of course, without using his faculty of imagination). At the level of the intellect alone there is no place for figurative speech. This is an implicit answer to the problematic difference in the Scriptures between Moses' type of discourse and that of all the other prophets:

For, as we have mentioned several times, he did not prophesy like the other prophets by means of parables.<sup>145</sup>

#### **IV. Is imagination a key word in understanding *GP*?**

Our answer is clearly "yes". Maimonides' purpose in this treatise was to offer a *guide* to the perplexed. A guide is needed only when there is misunderstanding and the danger of the wrong path is imminent. In Maimonides' view, matter and bad orientation are the sources of opacity/darkness.<sup>146</sup> The most important play in the human soul is the play between imagination and intellect. After reading the treatise carefully, the strong reader is supposed to be able easily to handle any prophetic text, i.e. to find the proper place for the imagination and to thoroughly understand its every function.

Even if the problem of the imagination is not the only gate by which to open the treatise, the uncovering of the *guide* has surely resulted in the clearing up of the status of the imagination.

The prophetic imagination is a unique phenomenon that distinguishes between humans and both the angelic and earthly beings (whether rational or not).

This, then, will be a key permitting one to enter places to which the gates were locked. And when these gates are opened and these places are entered, the souls will find rest therein, the eyes will be delighted, and the bodies will be eased of their toil and of their labor.<sup>147</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 This is also the motto opening the first chapter of Maimonides' treatise.
- 2 "Now the imaginative faculty is indubitably a bodily faculty." (II, 36, p. 372)  
The term *quwwa* (Ar.)/*koah* (Heb.) has many (related) meanings: "faculty", "force", "power", "potentiality".
- 3 Cf. I, 73, p. 209.
- 4 See Madeea Săsână, "Moise Maimonide: despre imaginație în *Călăuza rătăciților*" ["Moses Maimonides: On Imagination in *The Guide of the Perplexed*"], in *Origini. Revistă de studii culturale* [*Origins. Journal of Cultural Studies*], no. 1/2002, *Caiete Silvane Press*, Zalău, pp. 113-115.
- 5 "How then can the imaginative faculty be perfected in so great a measure as to apprehend what does not come to it from the senses?" (II, 38, p. 377).
- 6 See note 2.
- 7 All the quotations from the treatise follow the English version of Shlomo Pines, *Moses Maimonides. The Guide of the Perplexed*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963.
- 8 II, 36, p. 369.
- 9 Cf. II, 35, pp. 367-369.
- 10 José Faur, *Homo Mysticus. A Guide to Maimonides's Guide for the Perplexed*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1999, p. 75.
- 11 Is reason a possible intermediary between imagination and intellect?
- 12 And apparently contradictory: "The esoteric sense of *GP* should not be defined as the "true" or "real" *opinions* of Maimonides, but as secret *arguments* that are present in *GP*, although they are not formulated explicitly. After all, it cannot be doubted that Maimonides explicitly claimed that *intentional inconsistencies* had been inserted into the text of *GP*: that is, arguments proceeding from premises contradicting each other (see the text quoted above). Now it can be taken for granted that Maimonides was not satisfied with any inconsistent argumentation. Therefore we must assume that an inconsistent argument is meant to be exoteric by him, and that an esoteric, *consistent* argument corresponds to every inconsistent argument. The task of the interpreter is to detect the inconsistencies of the arguments presented in *GP*, and to find hints in the text on the basis of which the esoteric argument can be reconstructed." (Tamás Visi, "Maimonides' Proof for the Existence of God: A Concealed Inconsistency", in *Annual of Medieval Studies at C.E.U.*, v. 9, 2003, p. 33).
- 13 II, 36, p. 370.
- 14 "These are some-times called powers and parts, so that one speaks of the parts of the soul. This terminology is frequently used by the philosophers. By saying "parts" they do not mean that the soul is divided into parts as bodies are divided into parts. Indeed, they regard the different actions of the totality of the soul as parts of a whole composed of those parts. [...] Therefore

I say that there are five parts of the soul: nutritive, sentient, imaginative, appetitive, and rational." (Moses Maimonides, "Eight Chapters", 7, in *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, Edited by Raymond L. Weiss with Charles E. Butterworth, New York University, 1975, p. 61).

15 *Ibid.* p. 63.

16 "As for one who affirms an attribute of Him without knowing a thing about it except the mere term, it may be considered that the object to which he imagines the term applies is a nonexistent notion - an invention that is false; for he has, as it were, applied this term to a notion lacking existence, as nothing in existence is like that notion. An example is that of a man who has heard the term elephant and knows that it is an animal and demands to know its shape and true reality. Thereupon one who is himself mistaken or who misleads others tells him that it is an animal possessing one leg and three wings, inhabiting the depths of the sea, having a transparent body and a broad face like that of man in its form and shape, talking like a man, and sometimes flying in the air, while at other times swimming like a fish. I will not say that this representation of the elephant differs from what the latter really is, nor that the man in question falls short in his apprehension of the elephant. But I shall say that the thing that he has imagined as having these attributes<sup>7</sup> is merely an invention and is false and that there is nothing in existence like that, but that it is a thing lacking existence to which a term signifying an existent thing has been applied [...]" (*I*, 60, p. 146).

17 "[...] If, however, you should say that the external sense of the biblical text causes men to fall into this doubt, you ought to know that an *idolater* is similarly impelled to his idolatry by imaginings and defective representations." (*I*, 37, p. 85).

18 *II*, 47, p. 407.

19 *I*, 26, p. 56.

20 *I*, Introduction, p. 10.

21 Heb. *meshalim* – the plural form from *mashal*.

22 *I*, Introduction, p. 6.

23 *II*, 36, p. 370.

24 See *II*, 36, pp. 370-372, or *II*, 38, p. 377.

25 And *trans*-figured, i.e. beyond figure, beyond any representation.

26 I will not use the term "aspect" in connection with this function since it marks a *totally* different status of the imaginative faculty that transgresses its usual identity.

27 *Ex.* 25, 22.

28 *II*, 46, p. 403.

29 Cf. *II*, 36, p. 371.

30 Etym. *sub limen*, "situated high up", "elevated", "raised or situated above some surface or other", "noble", "eminent" (cf. The Oxford Latin Dictionary, Edited by P.G.W. Glare, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997, p. 1843), i.e. pointing beyond the superior/highest extremity/limit.

31 When Maimonides and Spinoza each talk of the differences between intellect and imagination and of the importance of distinguishing between them, they make no mention of any third cognitive faculty, thereby drawing a clear picture of a struggle between two faculties which exist in an either-or relationship.

Maimonides and Spinoza are thus in agreement insofar as they define imagination negatively, as the cognitive faculty that is not intellect. (Warren Zev Harvey, "Maimonides and Spinoza on the Knowledge of Good and Evil", in *Binah. Studies in Jewish Thought*, v. 2, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1989, p. 140).

32 *II*, 36, p. 370.

33 *II*, 36, p. 372.

34 The angels as separated Intelligences ("The angels too are not endowed with bodies, but are intellects separate from matter", *I*, 49, p. 108) are also perceived through the enchanted mirror: "For according to our opinion angels have no bodies, as I shall make clear. [...] in all cases in which *wing* occurs with reference to the angels, it signifies that which conceals. Will you not consider the dictum of Scripture: *With twain* [i.e. two wings] *he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet?* [*Isa. 6, 2*] This means that the cause of his existence, I mean that of the angel, is most hidden and concealed, that cause being indicated by the expression *his face*." (*I*, 43, p. 94)

35 "And there arose not a prophet since in Yisrael like Moshe, whom the Lord knew face to face (*panim el-panim*) [...]" (*Deut. 34, 10-12*)

36 "Face [*panim*] is an equivocal term, its equivocality coming mostly in respect of its figurative use. It is the term designating the face of all living beings. [...] It is also a term denoting the presence and station of an individual. [...] In this sense it is said: *And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face* [*Ex. 33, 11*] - which means, as a presence to another presence without an intermediary, as is said: *Come, let us look one another in the face* [*II Kings 14, 8*]. Thus Scripture says: *The Lord spoke with you face to face* [*Deut. 5, 4*]. In another passage it explains, saying: *Ye heard the voice of words, but ye saw no figure, only a voice* [*Deut. 4, 12*]. Hence this kind of speaking and hearing are described as being *face to face*. Similarly the words, *And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face*, describe His speaking as being in the form of an address [to Moses]. Accordingly it is said: *Then he heard the voice speaking to him* [*Num. 7, 89*]. It has accordingly been made clear to you that the hearing of a speech without the intermediary of an angel is described as being *face to face*. In this sense it is also said: *But My face shall not be seen* [*Ex. 33, 23*], meaning that the true reality of My existence as it veritably is cannot be grasped." (*I*, 37, pp. 85-86). See later (section III in our study) the etymological sense of *panim* as explained by Maimonides in part *I*, ch. 2. of *GP*.

37 *Ex. 34, 34-35*. Maimonides refers to this verse in part *I*, *Introduction*, p. 7.

38 I, 72, p. 190.

39 II, 11, p. 275.

40 II, 6, pp. 264-265.

41 Num. 12, 8.

42 II, 46, p. 403.

43 "The impulses which prompt a man to do or say or think things contrary to the revealed will of God are comprehensively named *yetzer ha-ra*. The phrase comes from *Gen. 8, 21*, 'The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth,' and *6, 5*, 'Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.' In this familiar translation 'imagination' has the sense of 'device, scheme,' and includes not only the conception but a purpose to realize it; while 'heart,' as generally in Hebrew, is the organ of mind and will, rather than the seat of the affec-tions. [...] Personified as the tempter, evil impulse may be identified with Satan; and since by their arts they cause the death of the sinner, they can by a further association become the angel of death." (G.F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era. The Age of the Tannaim*, v. I, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1927, pp.479-480, 492) "The names applied to the *Evil Yetzer* are various and indicative both of his nature and his function. R. Avira, according to others R. Joshua b. Levi, said: "The *Evil Yezer* has seven names. The Holy One, blessed be he, called him *Evil (Gen. 8, 21)*; Moses called him *uncircumcised (Deut. 10, 16)*; David called him *unclean (Ps. 51, 12)*; Solomon called him *fiend (or enemy) (Prov. 15, 31)*; Isaiah called him *stumbling-block (Isa. 57, 14)*; Ezekiel called him *stone (Ezek. 36 26)*; Joel called him the *hidden-one* in the heart of man (*Joel 2 20*).

Other names applied to this *Yetzer* are: the *foolish old king* who accompanies man from his earliest youth to his old age, and to whom all the organs of man show obedience; the *spoiler* who spares none, bring-ing man to fall even at the advanced age of seventy or eighty; and the *malady*. He is also called the *strange god*, to obey whom is as much as to worship idols, and against whom Scripture warns, "There shall be no strange god in thee" (*Ps. 81, 10*), whilst the words, "Neither shalt thou prostrate thyself before a strange god" (*Ps., ibid.*), are taken to mean "appoint not the strange god to rule over thee."

The activity of the *Evil Yezer* is summed up by R. Simon b. Lakish, who said, "Satan and *Yezer* and the Angel of Death are one" [*Baba Bathra, 16 a.*]" (S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, Schocken Books, New York, pp. 243-244).

44 II, 12, p. 280.

45 B.T., *Baba Bathra, 16a.*

46 Zech. 3, 2.

47 Prov. 4, 15.

48 Gen. 8, 21.

- 49 *Mishnah, Berakhoth, IX 5.* "The Mishnah passage interprets *thy heart* in *Deut. 6:5 (And thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart)*, as referring both to the good and the evil inclination." (Shlomo Pines, n. 25, p. 489).
- 50 *Gen. 4, 7.*
- 51 *Gen. 8, 21.* "The whole biblical phrase may be translated (if one renders *yetzer* by "in-clination"): *For the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth.*" (Shlomo Pines, n. 27, p. 489).
- 52 Shlomo Pines, n. 28, p. 490: Cf. *Midrash Qoheleth, 9:14; B.T., Sanhedrin, 91b; Genesis Rabbah, XXXIV.*
- 53 Shlomo Pines, n. 32, p. 490: Cf. *B.T., Hagigah, 16a. Cf. B.T., Berakhoth, 60b,* and *Rashi's* commentary.
- 54 Shlomo Pines, n. 33, p. 490: *B.T., Shabbath, 119b.*
- 55 *III, 22, pp. 489-490.*
- 56 Moshe Idel, *Milhemet ha-Yetzarim: Psychomachia in Abraham Abulafia's Ecstatic Kabbalah* (forthcoming).
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 "Know that disobedience and obedience of the Law are found only in two parts of the soul, namely, the sentient part and the appetitive part. All the transgressions and the command-ments involve these two parts. There is no obedience or disobe-dience in the nutritive or imaginative parts, since thought and choice do not act upon them at all. By his thought man is not a - I mean the nutritive and the imaginative - are active during sleep unlike the other pow-ers of the soul?" (Moses Maimonides, *Eight Chapters, 7, p. 64*).
- 61 Moshe Idel, *ibid.*
- 62 "[...] the allegorist exegete is able to save the embarrassing canonic text from the semi-mythological story and confer on it an aura of philosophical content. Allegory saves the text from its meaning by assuming that another meaning should be imposed which stems from a type of nomenclature alien to the original text. This extratextuality, unlike midrashic intertextuality, finds the solution to the canonical text by exchanging the archaic or antiquated meaning for another meaning, which often violates the original one." (Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2002, p. 330).
- 63 "My speech in the present Treatise is directed, as I have mentioned, to one who has philosophized and has knowledge of the true sciences, but believes at the same time in the matters pertaining to the Law and is perplexed as to their meaning because of the uncertain terms and the parables." (*I, Introduction, p. 10*) Or: "It is not the purpose of this Treatise to make its totality understandable to the vulgar or to beginners in speculation, nor to teach those who have not engaged in any study other than the science of the

Law - I mean the legalistic study of the Law. For the purpose of this Treatise and of all those like it is the science of Law in its true sense. Or rather its purpose is to give indications to a religious man for whom the validity of our Law has become established in his soul and has become actual in his belief - such a man being perfect in his religion and character, and having studied the sciences of the philosophers and come to know what they signify." (*I, Introduction*, p. 5).

64 "This figurative use of language is exceedingly frequent in the books of prophecy. With regard to some of them the multi-tude are aware that the expressions are figurative, whereas with regard to others they think that they are not figurative." (*II, 47*, p. 408).

65 "[...] the aim is not 'to prove' or 'to demonstrate' or 'to establish some ultimate truth', but to point out as a 'signpost', which is the accurate meaning of *Guide* (Arabic: *Dalala*)." (José Faur, *ibid.*, p. XI). The first verse of the motto (Cf. *Isa. 35, 8*) Maimonides places at the beginning of the guide is: "My knowledge goes forth *to point out* [Heb. *le-nahot* from *nahah*, "to lead", "to guide", "to go in direction of", "to turn eyes toward"] the way."

66 *III, 15*, pp 460-461.

67 For the distinction between *mystery* and *secret*, see Madeea Axinciuc, "Folds of love (t)issue in Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed*", in *Romano-Arabica*, II/2002, Bucharest University Press, Bucharest, pp. 23-24.

68 "[...] the apprehension of their intellects becomes stronger at the separation [i.e., death], just as it is said: *And thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be at thy rear.* [*Isa. 58, 8*] After having reached this condition of enduring permanence, that intellect remains in one and the same state, the impediment that sometimes screened him off having been removed." (*III, 51*, p. 628).

69 See note 10.

70 See *II, 37*, pp. 373-375.

71 "*Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou earnest forth from the womb I sanctified thee.* [*Jer. 1, 5*] For this is the state of every prophet: he must have a natural pre-paredness in his original natural disposition, as shall be explained." (*II, 32*, p. 362).

72 "This is something that cannot by any means exist in every man. And it is not something that may be attained solely through perfection in the speculative sciences and through improvement of moral habits, even if all of them have become as fine and good as can be. There still is needed in addition the highest possible degree of perfection of the imaginative faculty in respect of its original natural disposition. Now you know that the perfection of the bodily faculties, to which the imaginative faculty belongs, is consequent upon the best possible temperament, the best possible size, and the purest possible matter, of the part of the part of the body that is the substratum for the faculty in question. It is not a thing whose lack could be made good or

- whose deficiency could be remedied in any way by means of a regimen." (II, 36, p. 369) See also II, 36, p. 371.
- 73 "It is then that a certain overflow overflows to this faculty *according to its disposition* [...]. [...] the imaginative faculty acts while he is asleep when receiving an overflow of the intellect *corresponding to its disposition.*" (II, 36, p. 370).
- 74 III, 6, p. 427.
- 75 Moshe Idel also concentrates on this topic in his study "Abulafia's Secrets of the Guide: A Linguistic Turn" (in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, Proceedings of the International Conference held by the Institute of Jewish Studies, University College London, 1994): "Maimonides' view on language, including Hebrew, is that it is a conventional phenomenon. [...] for Maimonides, language has a communicative function, but can serve neither as a domain of contemplation nor as a catalyst for intellection" (pp. 298-300).
- 76 *Gen. 2, 20.*
- 77 II, 30, pp. 357-358.
- 78 II, 12, p. 279.
- 79 Cf. I, *Introduction*, pp. 6-7.
- 80 "Moment" is not used here with regard to time, but to the specific state of receiving the prophecy.
- 81 I, 4, p. 27.
- 82 I, *Introduction*, pp. 7-8.
- 83 III, 51, p. 625.
- 84 *B.T., Hagigah, 14b.*
- 85 *Ps. 101, 7.*
- 86 II, 30, p. 353.
- 87 Cf. *Ezek. 1, 16.*
- 88 *Ezek. 10, 9.*
- 89 *Ex. 24, 10.*
- 90 III, 4, p. 424.
- 91 Moses Maimonides, *Eight Chapters, 7*, pp. 80-81.
- 92 Heb. "vision", but also "mirror". Maimonides repeatedly refers to this verse throughout the treatise (see, for example, II, 36, p. 370; II, 41, p. 385-386; II, 42, p. 390; II, 43, p. 391; II, 44, p. 395; II, 45, p. 399 etc.)
- 93 *Num. 12, 6-8.* All the biblical verses follow *The Jerusalem Bible*, Koren Publishers Jerusalem LTD., Jerusalem, 1997.
- 94 If we are entitled to consider Aristotle a prophet, then Maimonides is also a prophet.
- 95 "Now we have made it clear several times that love is proportionate to [intellectual] apprehension." (III, 51, p. 621).
- 96 III, 51, p. 621.
- 97 José Faur, *ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

- 98 "A priestly device for obtaining oracles. On the high priest's *ephod* (an apron-like garment) lay a breastpiece - a pouch inlaid with 12 precious stones engraved with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel - that held the *Urim* and *Thummim* (*Ex. 28:15-30; Lev. 8:8*). By means of the *Urim*, the priest inquired of YHWH on behalf of the ruler (*Num. 27:21*; cf. *Yoma 7:5*, "only for the king, the high court, or someone serving a need of the community"); they were one of the three legitimate means of obtaining oracles in early Israel (*Urim*, dreams, prophets; *I Sam. 28:6*). Owing to the oracular character of the *Urim*, the breastpiece is called "the breastpiece of decision". (The concept evokes "the Tablets of Destiny" in Babylonian mythology - the symbol of supreme authority that lay on the breast of the chief god; *Pritchard, Texts, 63, 67, 111*.) The right to work this oracle was reserved for the levitical priests." (*Deut. 33:8*)" (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, v. 16, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, Israel, 1996, p. 8).
- 99 *II, 45, p. 398.*
- 100 "Matter is a strong veil preventing the apprehension of that which is separate from matter as it truly is. It does this even if it is the noblest and purest matter, I mean to say even if it is the matter of the heavenly spheres. All the more is this true for the dark and turbid matter that is ours." (*III, 9, p. 436*).
- 101 See note 10.
- 102 *C.M., Kelim, XXX, 2.*
- 103 *I, 28, p. 59.*
- 104 Heb. *meshalim* - the plural form from *mashal*.
- 105 *I, Introduction, p. 6.*
- 106 Special attention is given by Maimonides to this term when speaking about *Maaseh mercavah*. See the following section on allegoresis.
- 107 *Gen. 1, 26.*
- 108 *Gen. 1, 27.*
- 109 *Gen. 1, 26.*
- 110 *Ps. 102, 7.*
- 111 *I, 1, pp. 21-22.*
- 112 *Job 4, 13.*
- 113 Shlomo Pines mentions: "Literally: he means an imagination." (p. 27, n. 11).
- 114 *Num. 12, 8.*
- 115 *I, 3, pp. 26-27.*
- 116 "One word on the plain level is understood as a code for a concept found on the symbolic or allegorical level, and thus one narrative is exchanged for another narrative. To a certain extent this exegetical development takes extratextual information as the clue to fathoming the hidden and sublime meanings of the canonical text. Thus, one semantic unit, usually a word, is deemed by the interpreter to point to a concept, often stemming from other cultural or intellectual layers than the interpreted text. We may describe this interpretation as intercorporeal, which means that bodies of literature are

- understood to correspond to each other." (Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*, p. 255).
- 117 *I, Introduction*, p. 14.
- 118 *I, Introduction*, p. 12.
- 119 Maimonides usually follows this path: How should we interpret the Scriptures? The Scriptures themselves tell us how to do it properly.
- 120 *I, Introduction*, pp. 11-12.
- 121 See F. Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, U.S.A., 2000, pp.696-697, 967-968.
- 122 *I, Introduction*, p. 12.
- 123 *Ezek. 1, 28*.
- 124 *Ezek. 1, 22*.
- 125 *Ezek. 1, 26*.
- 126 *Ezek. 1, 26*.
- 127 *Ezek. 1, 28*.
- 128 *III, 7*, pp. 428-429.
- 129 *I, 1*, p. 22.
- 130 *Gen. 2, 16*.
- 131 *I, 2*, p. 24.
- 132 *II, 37*, p. 374.
- 133 *Gen. 3, 6*.
- 134 *I, 2*, p. 25.
- 135 "In short, according to Maimonides, the imagination invents the concepts of good and evil, but the intellect is capable of distinguishing between these imaginary concepts and judging according to them. The knowledge of good and evil, therefore, is characteristic of imagination, but when man follows his imagination, his intellect is compelled to function in this field as well, not as a free agent but serving the imagination." (Warren Zev Harvey, "Maimonides and Spinoza on the Knowledge of Good and Evil", in *Binah. Studies in Jewish Thought*, v. 2, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1989, p. 143).
- 136 *Gen. 3, 5*.
- 137 *Gen. 3, 7*.
- 138 *I, 2*, p. 25.
- 139 *Job 14, 20*.
- 140 Shlomo Pines mentions: "The Arabic word derives from a root from which the usual word for "face" is likewise derived." (p. 26, n. 19).
- 141 *I, 2*, p. 26.
- 142 *II, 34*, p. 367.
- 143 *Deut. 34, 10*.
- 144 "The immediate problem facing Spinoza and Maimonides was not how to invent a purely intelligent language to serve those hypothetical people guided

solely by their intelligence, but rather how to guide real people to the intellectual purpose of knowledge of God, that is, how to persuade them to choose that particular purpose, rather than any of the many possible kinds of purpose, suggested to them by their imaginations." (Warren Zev Harvey, "Maimonides and Spinoza on the Knowledge of Good and Evil", in *Binah. Studies in Jewish Thought*, v. 2, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1989, p. 136).

<sup>145</sup> *II*, 37, p. 373.

<sup>146</sup> "For all the hindrances keeping man from his ultimate perfection, every deficiency affecting him and every disobedience, come to him from his matter alone, as we shall explain in this Treatise." (*I*, *Introduction*, p. 13). Or: "All man's acts of disobedience and sins are consequent upon his matter and not upon his form, whereas all his virtues are consequent upon his form." (*III*, 8, p. 431).

<sup>147</sup> *I*, *Introduction*, p. 20.

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