

Maimonides: The Yochid (יְחִיד) & the Simplex

vs. the God of Torah

2nd principle of the 13.

I believe with perfect faith that God is One.
There is no unity that is in any way like His.
He alone is our God He was, He is, and He will be.



ב
אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שהבורא
יתברך שמו הוא יחיד
ואין יחידות כמוהו בשום פנים
והוא לבדו אלהינו הנה הנה ויהיה:

2

I believe with perfect faith that the Creator,
blessed be his name, is a Unity [one],
and that there is no unity in any way manner like unto his,
and that he alone is our God, who was, is, and will be.

A page from Maimonides' Commentary to the Mishneh Torah

Two samples of Moses Ben Maimon's doctrine

'There cannot be any belief in the unity of God except by admitting that He is one simple substance*, without any composition or plurality of elements: one from whatever side you view it, and by whatever test you examine it: not divisible into two parts in any way and by any cause, nor capable of any form of plurality either objectively or subjectively, as will be proved in this treatise.' [Moreh Nebuchim 1.51](#)

* 'Belief in Unity cannot mean essentially anything but the belief in one single homogenous uncompounded essence; not in a plurality of ideas but in a single idea. Whichever way you look at it, and however you examine it, you must find it to be one, not dividing itself in any manner or for any reason into two ideas'

(Chaim Rabin's translation)

ولا وحدانية أصلا ، إلا

باعتماد ذات واحدة بسيطة ، لا تركيب فيها ، ولا تكثير معاني ، بل معنى واحد من أي الجهات لحظته وبأي الاعتبارات اعتبرته ، تجده واحدا لا ينقسم لمعنيين بوجه ، ولا بسبب ، ولا توجد فيه كثرة ، لا خارج الذهن ، ولا في الذهن ، كما سيبرهن في هذه المقالة .

The extreme consequences of Rambam's doctrine of Divine Simplicity brings him to the very edge of denying God's actual being and even His unity.

(Paraphrases in round parentheses from Chaim Rabin's translation, my comments are in square parentheses)

It is known that existence is an accident appertaining to all things, and therefore an element superadded to their essence. This must evidently be the case as regards everything the existence of which is due to some cause: its existence is an element superadded to its essence. But as regards a being whose existence is not due to any cause - God alone is that being (such alone is God), for His existence, as we have said, is absolute - existence and essence are perfectly identical; He is not a substance to which existence is joined as an accident, as an additional element.

His existence is always absolute, and has never been a new element or an accident in Him. Consequently God exists without possessing the attribute of existence. Similarly He lives, without possessing the attribute of life; knows, without possessing the attribute of knowledge; is omnipotent without possessing the attribute of omnipotence; is wise, without possessing the attribute of wisdom: all this reduces itself to one and the same entity; there is no plurality in Him, as will be shown. It is further necessary to consider that unity and plurality are accidents supervening to an object according as it consists of many elements or of one. This is fully explained in the book called Metaphysics. [Pagan Aristotle's handiwork]

To that being, however, which has truly simple, absolute existence, and in which composition is inconceivable, the accident of unity is as inadmissible as the accident of plurality; that is to say, God's unity is not an element superadded, but He is One without possessing the attribute of unity (but He is one without unity).

Moreh Nebuchim 1.57

معلوم ان الوجود عارض للموجود ،
 فلذلك هو معنى زائد على ماهية الموجود ، هذا هو الامر البيّن الواجب
 في كل ما لوجوده سبب . فان وجوده معنى زائد على ماهيته وأما ما
 لا سبب بوجوده وهو الله عز وجل وحده ، لأن هذا هو معنى قولنا عنه
 تعالى إنه واجب الوجود، فان وجوده ذاته وحقيقته ، وذاته وجوده ،
 وليست هي ذات عرض لها أن وجدت ، فيكون وجودها معنى زائدا
 عليها ، اذ هو واجب الوجود، دائما ، لا طارئا عليه ، ولا عارضا عرض له .
 فاذن هو موجود لا بوجود . وكذلك حتى لا بجمية ، وقادرا لا بقدرة ، وعالم
 ليس بعلم ، بل الكل راجع لمعنى واحد لا تكثير فيه كما سيبين .

ومما يجب ان يُعلم ايضا ان الوحدة والكثرة عوارض عرضت
 للموجود من حيث هو كثير او واحد قد بيّن ذلك في ما بعد الطبيعة .

اما الواجب الوجود البسيط بالحقيقة
الذى لا يلحقه تركيب اصلا ، فكما يستحيل عليه عرض الكثرة .
كذلك ، يستحيل عليه عرض الوحدة ، اعنى أن ليس الوحدة معنى
زائدا على ذاته ، بل هو واحد لا بوحدة

The source of this [foreign altar](#)

'Above all, unity is The First: but Intellectual Principle, Ideas and Being, cannot be so; for any member of the realm of Forms is an aggregation, a compound, and therefore since components must precede their compound is a later.' Plotinus Enneads 1.7.2

'Generative of all, The Unity is none of all; neither thing nor quantity nor quality nor intellect nor soul; not in motion, not at rest, not in place, not in time: it is the self-defined, unique in form or, better, formless, existing before Form was, or Movement or Rest, all of which are attachments of Being and make Being the manifold it is.' Plotinus Enneads 1.7.3

'It [the First Cause] cannot be a compound, it must be a simplex, one distinct thing in its nature; only so can it be void of all quality.' Plotinus Enneads 2.4.8

7 Reasons why Maimonides' Simplex is wholly inconsistent with Torah

1. The Sacred Name revealed

The cornerstone of Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt was the revelation of the Divine Name. From a situation of despair and apparent hopelessness, HaShem reveals to Moses that He appeared to the patriarchs 'by the name of God Almighty, but by my name [the sacred Name] was I not known to them.' This evidently does not mean that the sacred Name was not known at all to Abraham, Isaac or Jacob, for they swore by it, worshipped and approached God by it, praying to Him employing it.

This most significant of revelations took place at Sinai. In a desolate place, a man who was almost dead, even by his own reckoning (Ps.90.10), sees a thornbush (הַסִּבְיָה) apparently being consumed with fire. However to his astonishment, this symbol of the curse is unconsumed, and immediately he senses something deeply supernatural. As he draws near, the Angel of the Lord appears to Moses out of the midst (מִתּוֹךְ) of the bush. Let's be clear, it is not true to say, 'God manifests physically as a ... bush', for God is evidently distinct to Moses from the burning plant, but God speaks to Moses out of the midst of the bush. He makes the most direct and comforting assertions, 'I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 'I have surely seen the affliction of My people...I know their pains...I am come down to deliver them... and to bring them up. ...unto a good land and a large..the cry of the children of Israel is come unto Me; moreover I have seen the oppression...' He then gives Moses the most important single charge ever given to a son of Adam in the whole of scripture, 'I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people'. When Moses trembles, God's firm assurance is, 'Certainly I will be with thee'. 9 times in His first statement, and 3 times in his

second statement, either by pronoun, or first person singular does the speaker identify Himself as God. In his third statement, three times the Speaker reveals His sacred essence, 'I AM who I AM' or 'I will Be Who I will Be.

Did God entrust a mere creature to reveal this most sacred of all truths to His deliverer in Egypt. Was this most glorious of insights about God's very own Being spoken through another's mouth despite claiming it were God's own? Where if at anytime is the saying more appropriate that God spoke to Moses 'face to face', as it were, and 'mouth to mouth' (Ex 33:11, De 34:10)?

When Daniel was honoured to receive glorious and amazing truths from Gabriel, but not of the order of this glory, the angel was most careful to distinguish himself from the Master who sent him as one sent forth and under commandment (Dan.9.22,23). When a similar angel comes though speaking on God's behalf, he is most careful three times to distinguish himself from his Master (Dan.11.32,36,37) in contrast to the Wicked One who arrogates such title to himself (v.37).

Whose manifestation then did Moses actually see in the Bush, the Angel of the Lord or the Lord GOD? The text leaves no ambiguity, when Moses discusses with the flaming Manifestation, 'Moses said unto God' not to an intermediary (v.11,13). When the Manifestation speaks, unlike the prophets or the angels, the text does not once say, the speaker said, 'thus says the Lord' to avoid dangerous confusion, but simply 'God said', two times directly, once indirectly or 'the LORD said' five times directly and twice indirectly.

Moses fears that Israel will doubt him and say, 'The LORD has not appeared unto thee', for which end the Lord gives Moses strong signs to convince them otherwise. God's own words give Moses the most direct and emphatic assurances, that 'they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, ***hath appeared unto thee***'. Is this assertion not both direct and clear even for unbelievers?

Now why then would you doubt that the LORD did indeed appear to Moses in the person of His Messenger for this the most significant of all revelations?

2. The Image of God

Maimonides carefully describes the Image of God. He absolutely and properly rejects any notion of outward physical appearance. He defines the Divine image as residing in the 'essential feature of a thing by which it become what it is, which constitutes its true character in so far as it is that particular thing' (MN 1.1). He properly cites Ps.73.20 to prove this, the godless are despised for their 'Image' - the contemptible state of their spirit and its imaginations. The Hebrew term is drawn from the sense of a shadow or form being applied not to a physical similarity but one of constitution, an essential not a superficial or outward parallel. On the basis of this exalted human image-bearing of God Himself, that the death penalty is sanctioned for murder (Ge 9:6). It is most significant then that at man's creation, this term is applied in the most unexpected way.

If God created man in His own image, why does He doubly emphasise that His own essence is represented best not by one individual by both sexes in communion, 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.' Clearly the mere physical characteristics of the sexes and their distinctions are not primarily in focus, because the animals do not bear this image, and yet share these. Is it not transparently clear that the depth and essence of the resemblance lies in the profound and most intimate emotional relationship, the intended mutuality between man and woman?

When we examine the mechanics of this creation in greater detail in chapter two, the details are revealing. Man is fashioned from the dust and uniquely brought to life with Divine breath. After he names and obtains dominion

over all other physical creatures, the Divine image still remains incomplete and imperfect. 'It is not good that the man should be alone'. Does the Solitary God then recognise the danger of solitude? The Divine Image is only made perfect by taking from one and making two who complement each other, who in turn are made one in union (תִּדְּבָר). However Rambam chooses to confine the image of God to an intellectual, cerebral similarity (MN 1.1), which does not explain the necessity of this image being reflected in two distinct and compatible human genders. Who has more accurately reflected the essence of God's being?

3. The Likeness of God

Again Maimonides explains that the term likeness does not refer to a shallow physical anthropomorphism (MN 1.1). Here is not a simple outward physical comparison, Solomon's picture of the beloved as a palm tree, or a company of horses or the Lover as a young hart would scarcely be flattering if it were so. An analogy of properties is intended. Hence the poison of the godless works analogously to the poison of a serpent (Ps.58.4) and David's state of desolation seems like an unclean bird in a wilderness experience (Ps 102:6). Indeed who would dare make any likeness of God, except the Evil One (Isa 14:14)? For He is beyond proper comparison (Ps 89:6), only a fool would think otherwise (Ps 50:21, Isa 40:18). The verb from which the word is taken sometimes denotes a deep and concealed meditation (2Sa 21:5, Isa 10:7, Es 4:13, Jud 20:5), suggesting a functional analogy as distinct from a mental image.

So again it is with considerable interest we see that the same term is applied to the creation of man not as a single individual, but as male *and female!*

The expression is repeated, but isolated and subtly distinguished from the Image of God, in Genesis 5.1, 'In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him.' There is a most remarkable and singular parallel which elucidates the nature of this likeness further. What is even more striking is that this Divine analogy is there also reflected backwards. The parallel language is unmistakable, 'And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son ***in his own likeness, after his image;*** and called his name Seth'. Not merely is the strong and mutual affection between a man and his wife reflective of the Divine essence, but the begetting of a firstborn child enable a deeply mysterious entrance into the Divinely appointed analogy of Being. Seth bore Adam's likeness and his image, as Adam bore God's image and likeness, the terms are reversed from Gen.1.26, which seems to emphasise the functional analogy of begetting to who God is. God is *not* our analogy, we are His.

Again Maimonides and all the derivative branches of scholastic theology, embracing a Greek philosophy of simplicity have no foothold at all here.

4. The Divine Council

The creation of man is depicted as the crown of Creation, that which transform a good creation into a very good creation. Here is the apple of the eye, the focus of God's intent. It is particularly striking that the most distinctive terms are used to describe this act. 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' This Divine Council is a Council of Creation, it could not include angels, 'Let Us make man', created Angels could have no part in creating, or else they too are Creators. Job tells the Sons of God rejoiced to watch, but mentions no participation (Job 38.7). Again the Creator speaks of man in Our Image and Our Likeness. These words are not a casual plural, where do Kings draw their majestic plural from if not from Deity? Why would a jealously righteous Deity encourage the impression of communion and relationship within His own Being in the highest of His acts, if He were indeed but Rambam's and Plotinus' Simplex?

To whom then belongs the idol - those who deny this or those who affirm it? Who then is guilty of eisegesis here?

5. Theophanies and inescapable distinctions of Being

There are six occasions in Genesis alone, excluding dreams or visions, when God appears visibly to the naked eye of the Patriarchs (Gen.12.7, Gen.17, Gen.18, Gen.26.24, Gen.32.30, Gen.35.9-15) and speaks with them. On some such occasions after finishing His communion, a literal expression of physical presence is used, 'the LORD went His way' (Gen.18.33), or 'God went up'(17.22) or 'God went up from him in the place where He spoke with him' (35.13). There are many other such occasions in the Tenach as a whole. I don't here intend to address this large subject in any fullness, except to highlight the direct problem it poses for Maimonides' view of God's being. For even for Moses, there is an absolute aspect of God which in our sinful state cannot be seen, 'Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live'. Yet there is also an aspect of God which we are repeatedly and explicitly told the Patriarchs and Moses and others *did physically see*, commune with and pray to, even to the extent of the use of exactly the same expression, 'I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved'.

Let's be very clear, we are *not* here dealing with a metaphor or a simile, as when Jacob saw God's just anger assuaged in the mercy of his brother Esau, 'I have seen thy face, *as though* (כִּרְאֵת) I had seen the face of God'. Nor does the appearance of God in the manifestation of His law to the whole nation in the fire at Sinai, Deut.5.4, at which time the people cry makes clear that they had not actually physically seen anything but the manifestation of fire, but heard what terrified them, 'Behold, the LORD our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth. Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die.' (Deut.5.23-24) Nor the passage where the passive God is seen (נִרְאָה) 'eye to eye' on behalf of the nation, where the identity of viewer is not explicit.

These passages which literally speak of a direct sight of God must either be allegorised or sanitised in order to be made consistent with Maimonides' view of God's absolute simplicity.

There is a more appropriate route, one more consistent with natural to the text, that God's unique Messenger or Word or Memra is literally manifest to the eye, not a creature, but His own direct emanation, whilst His absolute Being is withheld. This as Yisroel Blumenthal knows, and as Michael Brown elaborates on at length (3.1) has been a common rabbinic position.

No such distinction is possible to Maimonides without allegory. So either Rambam must violate his view of God's essence, the Yochid/Simplex, which he will not do, or else the explicit *and* natural reading of the text.

6. Worship - legitimate and illegitimate - life and death

This matter is the kernel to [Dina's](#) third point, which deserves separate treatment, so I focus only on its immediate relevance to the Divine nature. It is an absolute violation of Divine law to worship any Being other than God Himself, to this end Dina properly cites Exodus 34:14, Jeremiah 25:6,7, and Deuteronomy 31:16-18, and to which we must add the very first commandment Exodus 20.2.

Yet explicit adoration and prayer *is indeed* offered to these Manifestations of God out from (not as of) the flaming thorns, and in the single central visitor to Abraham and Sarah at Mamre (only one of the three being intreated, though addressed as אֲדֹנָי, 'If now I have found favour in **thy** sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from **Thy** servant').

In the most important promise of Abraham's entire posterity, the impossibility of a conception is referred to *HaShem* - הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, דְּבָר - but the actual realisation of His promise referred to *the Speaker* (18.14) - לְמוֹעֵד אֲשׁוּב - אֲלֵיךָ this would be tremendous and dangerous blasphemy were the speaker a mere creature.

Moreover when the LORD is left alone with Abraham, after the departure of the two angels,

Abraham addresses Him directly as the Judge of the whole Earth, הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל-הָאָרֶץ, לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט. What is this if not the most hideous idolatry, if the Manifestation is not Himself, the Essence of Deity? However Abraham compounds his crime, by directly addressing this Person before him, with the honorific plural title, אֲדֹנָי, usually reserved for Deity, and repeats the expression 3 more times in his earnest intreaty for the life of his nephew. When the pleading and praying is complete, the identity of Abraham's interlocutor is made absolutely explicit, יְיָ יְהוָה (v.33).

HaShem has been physically present, not through a created intermediary who could never be bowed to or worshipped or prayed to, let alone addressed as Deity without the most treacherous disloyalty to his Master.

Maimonides's Simplex cannot explain this, the Divine Manifestation of the Memra, God's Word, alone can.

7. Meaning of the Sacred Name

This is a deep and a particularly sacred theme and these are waters in which we will quickly sink in contemplation. The meaning of the Holy Name is plainly not the third person singular of the verb to be, although the disclosure of the term 'I AM', unlocked the longstanding mystery for Moses (Exod.3 v.13).

The Name has commonly and properly been asserted to be in Hiphil, causative of a lamed heh conjugation. 'He Who causes to Be'. If it is thus, the Name was false before Creation began, unless aspects of God's own Being are in some sense dependent upon Himself.

This would make Creator's own Essence contingent on His creation. Yet His Wisdom begotten before the Ages, delighting before Him (Prov.8.22-24), His Word is exalted over all His Name (Ps.138.2), His own uncreated Light, the fountain of all Life (Ps 36:9), His Own with Him, yet distinct from Him, yet of His own essence.

This is a profound problem for Maimonides' and the philosophers' sterile Singularity, with as we have seen no real attributes other than a simple, uncompounded essence.

Theology
An introduction to the doctrine of Simplicity
Scriptural preemption and reproof of the error.
Ministry of God's Word
7 species of error
