**1.**

**The Unity of God: Towards a Talmudic Approach**

**2. Brief Description**

A classic question of metaphysics and faith revolves around Deuteronomy 6:4, the Jewish proclamation of divine unity: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD is your God, the LORD is One.” The standard interpretation of this verse is that YHVH is the only God; however, beginning with Philo, the unity of God has been understood in Platonic terms, a trend that gained strength under the influence of concepts from Plotinus. This synthesis created an ambivalent situation for the Jew who would remain faithful to his tradition: it presented itself on the one hand as a clarification of his ancestral faith and on the other as a foreign intrusion into the fundamental declaration of faith in divine unity, threatening to transform the Torah into a mere peg for the hanging of Greek ideas.

This tension, the likes of which can also be found in Christian and Muslim theology, took on special significance within Judaism, which had already developed a rich discourse of its own before encountering Greek philosophy – that is, the Talmud. While the Talmud does not contain philosophy *per se*, it is replete with theoretical positions and value statements and, no less importantly, brings its own dialogical culture and forms of discourse. The current work proposes a systematic clarification of understandings of divine unity within the canonical sources, followed by an examination of Neoplatonic interpretations of oneness. Such a dialogue between the Talmud and metaphysics will likely be able to place the ambivalence bequeathed to us by the tradition within a dialogical context that remains faithful to the Jewish heritage. The result is a relatively coherent picture of the meaning of “the LORD is one” and a call for greater integration of the Talmudic discourse with the metaphysical one.

3. Full Description

This study is part of a growing trend of rereading religious texts from the early monotheistic tradition that forms an affinity with Western philosophy. On the whole, the philosophical discourse gave pride of place to ethics, following a Kantian approach that avoids any form of ontology, pursuing instead a reading of the sources that is attuned to their ethical dimension (*Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*). In the Jewish context, it was Hermann Cohen who opened the lively debate that drew in such thinkers as Rosenzweig and Buber and expanded to include contemporary readings of Talmud by Levinas and many other thinkers after him. Upon taking a more comprehensive look at the history of Judaism, it appears that these modern and post-modern trends, which reject metaphysical-ontological inquiry (sometimes dubbed “onto-theological”), joined with certain trends in Jewish thought dating back to the Middle Ages. We can identify important points in this development in the controversy surrounding the teachings of Maimonides, in the rejection by philosophers such as Spinoza of any metaphysical reading of Scripture, and in the opposition of rabbinic leaders, responding to the threat of the Haskalah movement, to any connection between the Torah and philosophy.

This situation presents the Jewish believer with a dilemma. On the one hand, the metaphysical elements penetrated into the very heart of the Jewish tradition: they are represented by central figures within the Jewish world such as Bachya ibn Paquda and Maimonides and appear in all forms of theoretical literature, including well-known Kabbalistic texts. On the other hand, as I wrote above, there occurred a rejection of and sweeping reaction against this invasion of metaphysics. In this study I intend to clarify and evaluate the congruence of metaphysical ideas with certain positions latent within canonical Jewish texts. This clarification itself will not assume any particular metaphysical stance – such a process would be ineffective, since it would pursue a foregone conclusion. The accompanying discussion will be attuned to insights and distinctions from analytic philosophy while developing organically out of the Jewish texts themselves.

Such an endeavor calls for a broader line of inquiry focusing on the *Shema*. Throughout Jewish history, the central place of the declaration “Hear, O Israel” in the Jewish consciousness irresistibly drew unto itself thinkers who expressed their worldviews through their relationship to the *Shema*. By converging around a common focal point, they have provided a natural entry into the study of Jewish beliefs about divine unity, beliefs that were later integrated into the canonical texts of the Jewish religion: the Bible, the Talmud, midrash and halakhah.

The book’s first part lays the foundation, explaining the meanings given by the Talmudic sages to the verse “Hear, O Israel” as well as the three central Neoplatonic understandings of “one” – as indivisible, as the source of unity, and as uniquely separate. These various interpretations are also relevant to Jewish law and prayer, as well as to various understandings of the concept of “accepting the yoke of heaven” included within the commandment to recite the *Shema*. The second part examines each of the various Neoplatonic meanings and their integration into the religious practices of the Jewish tradition. The third part summarizes the findings of the preceding sections and addresses their possible applications.

The conclusion that arises from the analysis to follow illuminates the congruence of various interpretations of the unity of God. I will provide an example of this through an examination of Leibowitz and Levinas, who suggested limiting the theological discourse to a discussion of normative concepts: ethics in Levinas and the acceptance of the yoke of Torah and commandments in Leibowitz. An additional contribution of the analysis is that the point-by-point inquiry into various sub-topics produces a single and rather coherent picture. Given the inherently open-ended nature of the discussion, I have no pretensions to certainty nor to a single and final picture; the very possibility of deriving from the diversity of sources a single image of “Hear, O Israel” is a humble achievement but an important one. Moreover, we find here a discourse with an interesting affinity with the Talmud. This examination suggests that the sense of confusion left to us by the tradition will not be resolved by any existential or faith-based decision to choose one side or another but rather by conducting an open and reasoned deliberation based on the religious sources and attuned to philosophical concerns.

**4. Proposed Chapter Outline**

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Summary of the Book

Part I provides the necessary foundation for an investigation of the *Shema* as an expression of Jewish monotheism, articulating the fundamental questions of such an inquiry.

The first chapter presents rabbinic interpretations of Deuteronomy 6:4. The first, which we might call the cosmological interpretation, understands the *Shema* to declare the singularity of YHVH; this claim, which highlights the use of a proper name to refer to God, is more specific than the basic monotheistic claim that there is only one God. The second understanding, the universalist one, reads the *Shema* as a claim that YHVH is currently “our God” but will at a future time be the God of all peoples. The third interpretation is similar to the first, but it stresses the uniqueness of God: YHVH is the only God and there is no other like Him. These three positions are rooted in Jewish prayer, midrash, and halakhah. In presenting each position, I will illustrate some of the connections of each to the Jewish tradition.

The second chapter lists some Neoplatonic interpretations of “one” that arose in Medieval thought. The first is the common position that God is a simple unity that cannot be divided. The second and less common position, clearly articulated by ibn Paquda and evoked in the writings of Maimonides, distinguishes between the absolute one and the sequential one; in this understanding, which I will explain further, the “one” is the source of unity in everything. The third position claims that God, like the Platonic “one,” is separate from Creation. These understandings, bound up with Platonic interpretations of oneness, go far beyond a rejection of any corporeality within God. They were generally accepted by Jewish thinkers, who interpreted “the LORD is One” in Platonic terms.

The third chapter examines the recital of the *Shema* or, more accurately, the acceptance of the yoke of heaven required by Deuteronomy 6:4 through the commandment to recite the verse evening and morning. Maimonides formulated a system to that effect: the acceptance of the yoke of heaven, presented by R. Yehoshua ben Korchah in Masechet Berachot, receives a conceptual-emotional dimension. In general, Torah study establishes deep affinities with the metaphysical positions addressed in the previous chapter and to the *Shema*’s command to love God.

Rabbi Yosef Karo returns to the safe territory of the Talmudic understandings. His position can be seen as the summation of an anti-philosophical stance prompted by the Maimonidean controversy, beginning with R. Yonah Gerondi and continuing through R. Shlomo ben Aderet (Rashba) and R. Asher ben Yechiel (the Rosh), who understood the *Shema* as declaring God to be the ruler of the universe. To the best of my understanding, this trend carried the day in the popular consciousness until being rejected in post-Holocaust theology, as I explain in the third section of the book.

The first part of the book, which lays the foundation for an analysis of the Jewish belief in divine unity, also allows us to articulate three fundamental questions regarding this tradition: How are the three Talmudic understandings of the *Shema* connected to the metaphysical elements which, while Greek in provenance, were adopted by mainstream Jewish thinkers? Can we address the ambivalence around said metaphysical elements in such a way that we do not presuppose an answer? How do these elements connect to the command to love God that appears in the continuation of Deuteronomy 6 and that takes on special significance in the recitation of the *Shema*?

The second part addresses the questions left unanswered by the previous section through the development of a methodological mechanism, one which complements the content under discussion. The fourth chapter (appended below) investigates the meanings of the term אחד in the Bible, including some that may be applicable to the expression “the LORD is one.” This investigation will allow us to judge statements of Maimonides to the effect that the “one” under discussion has a different meaning than in the usual use of the word (*Guide for the Perplexed* I, 57). In total, eight possible meanings of the word “one” will be enumerated.

The fifth chapter addresses conservative positions that resisted the Neoplatonic trend evoked in “The Gate of Unity,” the opening chapter of Bachya ibn Paquda’s *Hovot HaLevavot*. That work earned many admirers among pious Jews, though its first chapter was received with some ambivalence; some authorities (such as the Vilna Gaon) even suggested that readers skip it entirely, though others found nothing objectionable. Instead of assuming an anti-philosophical position of suspicion or an enthusiastic adoption of the Neoplatonic discourse (like that of R. Elijah Benamozegh, who identified Plotinus with Ablat, the colleague of the Amora Shmuel mentioned in TB Shabbat 129a), I suggest we judge ibn Paquda’s position by its suitability to the canonical sources and its inner consistency. In the first round, the judgment is ultimately favorable. On the one hand, true unity is not in fact required for the remaining chapters of *Hovot HaLevavot*; what’s more, the coherence of the idea that the one is the source of all unity is questionable and especially glaring against the background of the principles of analytic philosophy. However, this can be emended by understanding the degree of unity as the degree of perfection, which is in fact supported by the understanding of “one” from the previous chapter and by other sources early and late.

The question of the relation between oneness and infinity in the Kabbalah arises naturally, and has not been granted proper attention. Without making any claims to a thorough description of this relationship, I have chosen the systematic but brief presentation of Rabbi Azriel of Gerona in his book *Explanation of the Ten Sefirot*. It stands to reason that my description of the attempt to reconcile the position of ibn Paquda and Maimonides with the Jewish tradition will find parallels in the thought of Rabbi Azriel, who is considered one of the first systematic Kabbalists. More specifically, the juxtaposition of Rabbi Azriel’s reading of infinity reveals a deep conceptual link to, if not complete identity with, the concept of perfection. This is the matter under discussion in the seventh chapter, which further confirms claims made in preceding chapters.

The seventh chapter addresses the common understanding of “the LORD is one” as declaring God’s uniqueness. If everything is in fact unique in its own way, how are we to understand the uniqueness of God? Maimonides is representative of those thinkers who see this uniqueness as separating God from the world, but the radical nature of his demand poses an obstacle to any emotional connection with God, including the possibility of loving him. Rudolf Otto suggests the opposite tact, beginning with the feeling of awe and progressing to holiness. An investigation of the source of Maimonides’ position reveals that God’s separateness is derived from his attribute of Necessary Existence. There is an analogous process in the thought of ibn Paquda: that which possesses Necessary Existence is truly existent and all other things derive their existence from it. We can address Maimonides’ position in a similar way to that in which we addressed ibn Paquda’s. On this point we will rely on the Biblical understanding of divine uniqueness, which is close in meaning to preference, as we find in the expression “Only one is my dove, my perfect one, the only one of her mother, the delight of her who bore her” (So. 6:9). So we move from a description of separateness in neutral ontological terms to one replete with emotion. Again. In this context we can see that the juxtaposition of the command to love God with the declaration that “the LORD is One” is not coincidental. While I have tried not to force any harmonization upon the material beyond what arises naturally from a close reading, the question in the previous chapters of the extent to which uniqueness parallels perfection arises of its own accord, and is addressed here in brief. A short appendix to this chapter compares the matter to the stance of Jean-Luc Marion, who rejects onto-theological positions and so avoids any metaphysical discussion of God, trying instead to understand God in terms of love.

The eighth chapter addresses the understanding of oneness as indivisibility, continuing the conversation of the second chapter. This can be understood according to a weak definition, in which God lacks component parts, or a strong one, repeated in a profound debate within contemporary Christian theology, which addresses the essential nature of the relationship of God to his attributes. The question of the similarity between this and the Neoplatonic understanding of oneness outlined in the previous chapters raises the intriguing possibility that, even if there is a Biblical meaning to “one” that is close to indivisibility (“Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh” [Gen. 2:24]), we still lack all clarity on the relationship between the strong definition of indivisibility to the sources. I will argue that even the strong definition is insufficient, as evidenced by the uses of the term “living.”

By the end of the second section we will possess a reasonable answer to the questions remaining from the first, which answer will close Part II of the book.

The third section examines the ramifications of contemporary theological positions, and in the process we will return to certain characteristics that we found in the rabbinic sources. Post-Holocaust thinkers critiqued the validity of the cosmological meaning of the *Shema*, rejecting the possibility of divine providence. Some reached this conclusion through deductive means, beginning with the Holocaust as axiomatic; Hans Jonas, who is an example of such thinkers, also expresses his position through his reading of the *Shema*. Others drew no conclusions about God from the events of the Holocaust, but proposed a formula in which our relationship to God is understood not in theoretical categories but through the acceptance of obligations. Two Jewish Orthodox thinkers, Levinas and Leibowitz, expressed their respective variations on this position. What they have in common, which led me to include them within the same chapter, is that a faith-based relationship with God is identified as acceptance of an obligation: in the case of Levinas that obligation is defined as humanism, while Leibowitz defines it as the 613 commandments. For the former, “monotheism is humanism,” and “only fools turn it [monotheism] into theological arithmetic” ( , in *Cahiers de Alliance israélite universelle* 103 [Nov. 1956]), while for Leibowitz “the verse ‘Hear, O Israel…’ holds no content, but rather serves as a watchword and a hallmark – and its essential meaning is the negation of idolatry.” This shared limitation if not nullification of the cosmological meaning raises the question of the limits of interpretation for one who sees himself as faithful to the tradition. This chapter addresses similar objections to the cosmological meaning of the *Shema* and examines the limits of what I have dubbed “Talmud *Shema*.”

The tenth chapter is an attempt to sketch a picture that includes multiple opinions that arose over the course of the book. A consideration of the sources and their accompanying interpretations and extrapolations results in a rather coherent image. I have focused here on the universalist meaning of the *Shema*, rarely expressed in the previous portions of the book, which serves as a suitable conclusion to it. The resulting image and its coherence do not imply that there is one single and final position on matters of faith and their foundations, but it does reveal that in our study of the Jewish sources we need not resign ourselves to an eclectic and amorphous conversation. This is itself a humble but important conclusion.

The eleventh chapter is a reflection on the methodology proposed here. I will argue that what is presented here is not philosophy in a Jewish key but rather the opening up of an underground stream within the Jewish tradition. To the extent that it is conducted according to Talmudic norms – providing a unique place to Scripture, midrash, and the major voices of the Jewish tradition, while remaining an open and reasoned disucssion – can we identify such a theological inquiry as an extension of and expansion upon traditional study of Torah – which, in contrast to the Mishnah, is not finally decided but rather remains an ongoing activity. If such a conclusion is defensible, then this extension is not external to the *Shema* or its recitation but rather an actualization of the interpretive possibilities, as tradition would define them, of the *Shema* and the reading of “Hear” as a demand to understand. As such, we can strengthen Maimonides’ demand to include Aristotelian metaphysics within the realm of Torah study, a claim that otherwise could be seen as the secularization of Torah study and not an extension of it.

**5. Author Information**

Dr. Meir Buzaglo, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the Hebrew University

Publications:

*Solomon Maimon: Monism, Skepticism and Mathematics* is a critique of Solomon Maimon’s own critique of Kant’s logic. Thanks to the fact that the philosophy of mathematics was quite advanced in his time, Maimon succeeded in critiquing Kant’s system. While Kant sought a third way between rationalism and empiricism, Maimon tried to prove the possibility of metaphysics, at the same time arguing that Kant’s system left room for too radical a form of skepticism. Writing on Maimon’s work brought me in turn to the work of Maimonides, who influenced Maimon, and to an effort to present the fundamentals of Maimonidean thought in a post-Kantian context.

Maimon, the gifted Talmudist, dubbed his system an “anti-system.” This paper addresses his critique of the Geometrical Method in philosophy, from which came the idea that metaphysics is by nature an open-ended activity with local achievements, prefiguring the critique of the major post-Kantian philosophical systems. The paper is called “Solomon Maimon and the Talmudization of Philosophy”; the term “Talmudization” is taken from the formal characteristics of the Talmudic genre (openness and multiplicity of opinions) and applied here to metaphysics as a whole. In the book, where I present my critique more gently, the connection to midrash, halakhah and prayer raises the intriguing possibility that what we encounter here is an expansion of the Talmud. The challenge here is limited to the study of “the unity of God” and not metaphysics in general.

Another of my books, *The Logic of Concept Expansion* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), deals with the philosophy of logic, specifically the expansion of concepts, a widespread phenomenon in mathematics and in the sciences in general. Frege reasoned that logic cannot recognize concepts with variable scopes and so rejected the essential idea, Wittgenstein recognized the importance of conceptual change, and saw no proof in logic in its Fregian understanding, Lakatos recognized the importance of conceptual change and rejected the demands of logic. In my book, I begin with the logic of concept expansion, which is itself first-order logic, and go on to illustrate the ramifications of this possibility for semantics. The matter is related to the question of the possibility of metaphysics. Using this logic, we can examine and critique the common claim that antinomianism in metaphysics follows from an excessive expansion of concepts.

In a lecture I delivered following the publication of this book, I tried to open a metaphysical conversation on being and nothingness which had been entirely rejected by the Carnap-Quine tradition in terms of expansion. Ladders to “nothingness.” This has no bearing on the previous project, since here we are dealing with natural language, but it does assist in the evaluation of the baseless Continental positions (Hegel and Heideger).

My book *A Language for the Faithful* (Keter-Mandel, 2009; 230 pages [Hebrew]) is intended to offer a response to the Israeli tendency to view Judaism as a nationality or as identical with halakhah. In this way I have come to be a spokesperson for the tradition of Mizrachi Jews. In this book I tried to present traditions and a way of life with a Wittgensteinian anti-metaphysical element. With time, following a revised reading of Maimonides, I underwent a “second disillusionment,” summarized by the current project.

A critique of Leibowitz’s position minimizing the place of inquiry in Judaism, understood by him as a religion of active commandments, can be found in my article “The Soup Fallacy” (*Iyyun* 45 [October, 1996]: 413-18). Another article, “Maimonides and the Incorporeality of God” (*Iyyun* 59 [July-October, 2010]: 133-49 [Hebrew]), describes the perplexity of Maimonides in the context of the possibility of speaking about God as a body unlike other bodies. I show the surprising extent to which the critiques of Maimonides derive from his position on the incorporeality of God with which he is identified. I attempt to offer an escape from this confusion.

Regarding those topics that are particularly close to the current project, I will note that I delivered a series of lectures through Israel Army Radio’s *Universitah HaMeshuderet* (Broadcast University), which also appeared in print as “Maimonides: An Israeli Reading.” In addition to giving lectures on these topics in universities and research centers, I served as a consultant for a series of films on Maimonides in Hebrew known as “The Great Eagle” and I have recently founded a semi-academic discussion group for the study and deepening of Muslim-Jewish heritage.

For a number of years I taught courses at the Hebrew University in Talmud, philosophy, and Jewish thought. The current work was written after I taught a series of courses at the Hebrew University on faith and metaphysics, three of which were on the topic of divine oneness.

**6 Readership**

I believe this work will attract the attention of anyone interested in monotheism, including Muslims as well as Christians, for whom Deuteronomy 6:4 has a special meaning. While those familiar with the figures under discussion, such as Maimonides and Plotinus, will most enjoy and benefit from the book, the introduction is meant to bring the reader into the heart of the matter, and a generally educated layman is likely to find something in it of interest. Scholars of Jewish studies, especially scholars of Maimonides, are particularly likely to find it of interest. Though I do not aspire to interpret Maimonides’ writings in this book, it does offer a discussion of the central difficulties in Maimonidean thought on logic and Scripture. Theologians, I assume, will also find the book especially engaging. It should interest philosophers and metaphysicians dealing with questions of theological language, particularly the possibility of a synthesis between religious faith and a pure metaphysical discourse. As the product of courses I taught over several years at the Hebrew University, this book could serve as a textbook for a course dedicated to the topic as well as supplementary reading for those on related topics.

**7. Comparable Books**

This book joins the modern theological discourse in the broad sense of the term, which includes philosophers and scholars of religion and Jewish studies. Philosophically speaking, most of the writers join the post-Kantian line begun by Hermann Cohen in his book *The Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*. I began with a critique of the limitation of the place of theoretical inquiry in Leibowitz, who stressed the active element in Judaism, and gradually took interest in Levinas, Soloveitchik, Siskin, Stern, Halbertal, and Hartman. Below I will suggest how my book parallels their work as well as how it differs, and will ultimately compare two trends in the contemporary Christian theological discourse – Jean-Luc Marion and Plantinga.

1. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s book *Worship of the Heart* shares many goals with my proposed project; particularly noteworthy is the fact that in his book Soloveitchik did not limit the conversation around faith to a discussion of ethics, turning away from ontological concerns, as Hermann Cohen had done. Unlike Soloveitchik, however, I aim to present, in as detailed a manner as possible, the meeting of Neoplatonism with the Jewish sources, and to justify a dialogue the very possibility of which many refute. This being so, I will illustrate the situation as I see it based on my inquiry in the book, without presuming it to be the final word on Judaism. What’s more, Soloveitchik took a particular stance on halakhah, which I find intriguing and moving, but I do not claim to speak for halakhah in my work. Lastly, I will note that some of Soloveitchik’s writings are more inspirational than theoretical, while my work is meant to be more discursive (though, I hope, not lacking inspiration).
2. In one of the chapters of his book *Between Torah and Wisdom: R. Menahem HaMeiri and the Maimonidean Halakhists of Provence*, Moshe Halbertal describes the controversy surrounding the teachings of Maimonides, including the bans on the study of philosophy. Halbertal’s goal is to discern the historical-philosophical dynamic underlying the events; he takes no personal position as the author. In a certain way, I see myself trying to promote through personal example the Maimonidean Orthodox approach, which was cut short.
3. Eugene B. Borowitz’s *The Talmud’s Theological Language-game: A Philosophical Discourse Analysis*, analyzes the principles of discourse in the Talmud, focusing on the concept of midrash. The book discusses the Talmud among other works, but Borowitz has no special interest in the *Shema*. On the other hand, *Echad: The Many Meanings of God is One* is a collection of short essays (2-3 pages) edited by Borowitz, who more than any other brought the *Shema* to the center of the Jewish consciousness by founding the monthly journal *Shema*. This anthology brings a variety of opinions from first-class thinkers, and is rich in observations and insights. The essays are for the most part inspirational, and do not presume to present any systematic treatment of the *Shema*, nor do they address the meeting of Greek and Jewish thought.
4. David Hartman raised the idea that Maimonides’ conception was founded primarily on Talmudic sources while R. Yehudah HaLevi’s were essentially informed by Biblical ones. Hartman’s idea evokes the work of R. Yosef Karo on the *Mishneh Torah*, in which he sought out the rabbinic sources supporting Maimonides’ teachings. Unfortunately, Hartman was brief in his treatment of the matter, and he discusses the Talmud primarily as a foil for revelation, arguing that the Talmud brought us from a God who reveals himself in history to a God who reveals himself in Torah. His book raises the question of the connection between the Talmud and Neoplatonic positions, including those adopted by Maimonides, a connection that is difficult to find in Maimonides’ own discussions (as in the indivisibility of God). I make no assumption that the Talmudic conception replaces the God of events with the study of Torah, but I do strengthen the argument that the question of God’s role in history does fall under the rubric of Talmudic discourse as I broadly define it.
5. There is an affinity between the current work and recent publications in Jewish and Maimonidean studies. The metaphysical discourse on the foundations of faith can be found in research in Jewish studies in the form of interpretation. Though I refrain from interpretations of Maimonides in my book, the images of him drawn by his interpreters pose a particular theological challenge. The latest work by Joseph Stern serves as an example; in “Stern shows how, in order to reconcile the conflicting demands of the intellect and the body, Maimonides creates a repertoire of spiritual exercises, reconceiving the Mosaic commandments as training for the life of the embodied mind.” I make similar arguments here, with two important distinctions: first, instead of seeing the theoretical dimension as a spiritual exercise connected to Greek notions of the philosophical life, as Stern understands it (p. ), I imagine the discussion here as an expansion of traditional Torah study; secondly, I am ready to defend the value of the product of this theorizing, to a greater extent than is Stern in his skeptical interpretation of Maimonides.
6. Kenneth Seeskin’s *Searching for a Distant God: The Legacy of Maimonides* (West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, : http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzE2OTIxMl9fQU41?sid=6c2482fb-da46-4168-b73c-96599a802865@pdc-v-sessmgr02&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp\_ix&rid=0) constructs a Jewish worldview through a dialogue with the positions of Maimonides. While I am in full favor of the dialogue and its conclusions, in my work Maimonides serves only as a source of inspiration. In order to protect him from the vengeful voices that demand separation of metaphysics and faith, certain Maimonidean positions cannot be maintained, while others must be updated, emended, or defended. In this sense, I would like to think of the current project as Neo-Maimonidean, and not as philosophy inspired by Maimonides. It goes without saying that I focus on the *Shema* and do not touch on the variety of issues addressed by Siskin. For such issues, Siskin’s book is a clear point of reference.
7. Another of Seeskin’s books, *Thinking About the Torah: A Philosopher Reads the Bible* (JPS 2016), presents an approach to reading Biblical passages similar to the one I model in the current project. Seeskin does not limit himself to the Maimonidean corpus, though Maimonides does hold pride of place in this book. Seeskin writes on a variety of topics, but the unity of God is not among them, though he does address the love of God in the verse immediately following the *Shema*. The type of interaction he sets up is based on philosophical insights, as is my own, but unlike Seeskin my concern is with the ambivalence bequeathed us by the tradition regarding the philosophical discourse on God.
8. I will close by mentioning two interesting occurrences in Christian theology, which can serve as a helpful comparison. The first is the influential work by Jean-Luc Marion, which is entirely rooted in Christian theology. The argument for separating the metaphysical discourse on Being from the theological one parallels in important ways the attempt to separate the Neoplatonic dimensions of oneness from the statement “the LORD is one,” which sets up the challenge of the current work. Marion expands upon the idea of the idol, and at the end of the analysis concludes that metaphysics, including Spinoza’s concept of divine self-causation, borders on idolatry. Marion sharpens the distinction between Christian theology and other forms of theology by stressing that the very idea of meaning is different in each one; so, for him, Jesus is the word Logos, in terms similar to ours – that is, not only does Jesus fill the role fulfilled by the Torah for Jews, but that he is the word of God, and from here Marion moves to identifying God with love.

The difference between my book and Marion’s work is not only in the role of Jesus, nor the question of which sources are included in Scripture, nor even Marion’s phenomenological method as opposed to my own analytical one, but rather in the nature of the connection between metaphysical characteristics and emotions and our obligations vis-à-vis God. I hope to go into further detail in the appendix, but in short the love of God does not replace ontological elements as Marion contends, though it does aid in their illumination.

1. The second is the current discussion within Christian discourse that raises anew the question of divine simplicity. Following Platinga, a new understanding of this term has arisen within a purely metaphysical and analytical discussion limited to divine simplicity. The current reopening of discussion on this topic acts as a fresh breeze in analytical philosophy. While I have joined in said discussion, it does differ from my current book in both topic and method, since there is no direct relation to Scripture. Nevertheless, the conclusion I draw is similar, although I differ in my central argument, according to which, even if the claim of God’s simplicity according to its strong definition is correct, it has no expression in the practical Jewish world. Therefore, even if this simplicity were to be deemed incoherent, it would have no bearing on my position as developed in the current work.

Other names of the book, if I have understood correctly: *The Philosophy of Hear, O Israel*

**8. Additional Information of Specs**

The Hebrew edition runs about 180 pages, and the English edition about 53,000 words.

There are no illustrations.

The Hebrew draft should take about three more months to complete, though the English translation has already begun on the more finished portions; this translation should take about six months to complete.

**9.** **Other Materials to Include**

I have included below an introduction, which appears before the chapter summary included above, as well as the opening chapter of Part II of the book.

Introduction

Before parting from his readers, after hundreds of pages of discussion that include an allegorical interpretation of anthropomorphic expressions, an explanation of prophetic metaphor, analyses of prophecy, esotericism and the revelation of divine secrets, and more, Maimonides imparted guidance for one seeking to begin his spiritual journey:

From this point forward I wish to guide you regarding your spiritual practice, so that you may accomplish this great end.[[1]](#footnote--1) The first thing you must strive to do is to empty your mind of all things when you recite the *Shema* and pray. Do not be satisfied with achieving focus in the first verse of the *Shema* or the first blessing of the *Amidah*.[[2]](#footnote-0) (*Guide for the Perplexed* III, 51).

Such deep and intensive focus during the recitation of the *Shema* and the *Amidah* provides a key for the deciphering of Biblical verses.[[3]](#footnote-1) The method of emptying one’s mind of all other thoughts is here applied to the recitation of the *Shema* and the *Amidah* but later expanded to apply to all the words of the prophets, all blessings recited, and finally to “whatever you hear and read”:

When you have successfully established such a practice over the years, try then, when reading or listening to any word in the Torah, to focus all your attention and all your thoughts on contemplation of what you read or hear. When after some time you have mastered this, too, try to free your mind of all other thoughts when you read any words of the prophets. Even in saying a blessing, focus your attention on contemplation of what you utter and understanding its meaning. (Ibid.)

This stance of Maimonides on the importance of focus in prayer is also known from his legal writings,[[4]](#footnote-2) and is encapsulated in his statement, “any prayer that is not said with focus is not considered a prayer at all” (*Laws of Prayer*, 7:15). This position was already expressed by R. Shimon in *Pirkei Avot*, where he instructs, “Be attentive in the recitation of the *Shema* and the *Amidah*” (2:13). There is a certain simplicity and humility in the fact that in his spiritual guidance Maimonides does not invent anything new, instead simply repeating the existing law.[[5]](#footnote-3) However, alongside such statements, it is worth noting the intensification of this principle in the strict demand for focus in the recitation of the *Shema*, a demand that is later applied to all words of Torah and prayer and not limited to the morning and evening liturgy.

Maimonides does not elaborate on how exactly to achieve this. It is reasonable to assume that it is not achieved through routine study of the Talmud nor intensive contemplation of Aristotelian metaphysics, which is all we are able to say at this point. Maimonides’ interpreters have made multiple attempts to explain this passage, one of which is worthy of special attention: the recent suggestion by Joseph Stern to understand Maimonides’ instructions in light of his overall approach.[[6]](#footnote-4)

At this point it is worth mentioning Soloveitchik’s book, which bears a deep affinity to this passage of the *Guide* but which also goes beyond interpretation of it. Soloveitchik asks: “What is the proper way to focus our attention on the experience of reciting the *Shema* and analyzing its meaning, its content, and its ideas? What is the yardstick by which we may measure our progress in deepening and developing this topic?”[[7]](#footnote-5) In response to his own question, Soloveitchik suggests a tripartite approach. He notes first the halakhah that “the principles of the halakhah contain the inner meaning of the experience”; second, the Aggadic material; and third, “the order of the prayers themselves.” What follows are three enlightening chapters addressing the ethical and ontological dimension of the *Shema* through a clear allusion to Hermann Cohen, who, in his emphasis on the ethical foundation of Judaism, minimized the ontological foundation (Chapter 8). In the process, Soloveitchik goes beyond interpretation of Maimonides, adding certain constraints to the understanding of the experience of reciting the *Shema*, constraints which Maimonides would have appreciated, but which Soloveitchik understands according to the parameters of his own system.

In the attempt to understand Maimonides’ words we encounter the possibility of understanding the belief in divine unity in light of the Jewish texts themselves. This was Hermann Cohen’s method in *The Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, and one we also encounter in Soloveitchik; in fact, such an idea had already been proposed in Jewish history, as in the book by Jacob Emden, which provides an ideal example of such an approach.

The most important advantage of a reading from within the textual tradition itself is the stance against suspicion of philosophy represented by influential streams within contemporary Judaism. In such a reading, not only is investigation of the fundamentals of faith legitimized; it is transformed into an act of *Talmud Torah*, the traditional form of study that stands at the center of the Jewish world. In other words, it is not only tolerated but viewed as a religious obligation of supreme importance. In this respect, we can understand this process as complementing or perhaps reversing that of Maimonides in his *Mishneh Torah*. In that book, he advocates for the inclusion of physics and metaphysics (in his language, “the acts of Creation” and “the acts of the Chariot”) within the paradigm of *Talmud Torah*; here, he includes Talmud Torah within the contemplation of the *Shema* and the unity of God expressed by its words. The importance of this passage lies in its inherent promise to stand firm against criticisms of Maimonides, leveled over the course of the generations, which claimed that Maimonides’ affinity for “outside” bodies of wisdom, especially Greek philosophy, had compromised his work or that, in the words of the Vilna Gaon, “cursed philosophy had led him astray.”[[8]](#footnote-6)

Soloveitchik’s treatment of the passage, while important, does not exhaust the possibilities of interpretation of Maimonides’ instructions. The rich allusions and insights reveal that what we have here are the outlines of a project that was never realized. In this book I attempt to focus my inquiry on the *Shema*, the liturgy, and other sources within a detailed treatment of the Neoplatonic sources. While I have no pretense of completing an exhaustive treatment within the bounds of a single book, I have striven to ensure that my treatment of the relationship between the Jewish sources and the Neoplatonic views be as systematic as possible. My hope is that this systematic methodology may be expanded and applied in other contexts.

**Part II**

**Chapter 4**

**“One” in its Contextual Meaning**

The question of the different meanings of “one” in the Bible arises naturally, since every possible understanding of “one” brings with it at least one possible interpretation of “the LORD is one.” This is not to say that every such possible understanding of divine unity is necessarily a coherent one, and the question of whether or not a fitting interpretation lies hidden in a given case is complicated and open to debate. At the same time, these meanings can suggest a preliminary list of the variety of possible interpretations of the *Shema*. An additional reason for an investigation of the meanings of “one” is the claim made by both Maimonides and Plotinus that “one” in our case does not have the usual meaning of the word.[[9]](#footnote-7) Below I will list six different meanings of the word “one.” The proposal is to try to extract the meaning of “one” from its context. We have clearly not exhausted the conversation, since each instance of the word can itself be interpreted in a number of ways. Similarly, I have not explored the connections between the various meanings, which would require a more systematic and comprehensive form of linguistic analysis. At the end of the chapter I have included a brief note, relevant to our present concerns, on the use of “one” in the lexicon of the Mishnah.

1. The Six Understandings of “One”

The term “one” first appears in the fifth verse of Genesis: “God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.” The meaning of “one” here can be understood in a number of ways, including in the sense of one day as opposed to two,[[10]](#footnote-8) or alternatively as first.[[11]](#footnote-9) This latter interpretation particularly matches the language used to describe the following days (“second day,” “third day,” etc.). In this context, the question is often raised why the verses uses the language of “one” and not “first” and then answered by explaining that there was as yet no second day, and only when there exist two can there be made a distinction between first and second.[[12]](#footnote-10) In this interpretation, then, “one” is not understood as synonymous with “first” but rather as making an additional statement about the absence of any other. However, an even simpler answer exists to the question of why “first day” is not written in Genesis 5: included among the meanings of the Hebrew word אחד is “first.” So, later in the passage we read:

A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first (האחד) is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where the gold is. (The gold of that land is good; bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli.) The name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. (Gen. 2:10-14)

The expression האחד, as used here, means simply “the first,” as can be seen from the remainder of the passage (“the second river,” “the third river,” etc.). The interpretation above of one in the absence of two may still stand, or the meaning may be more subtle; in either case, it is clear that אחד can mean both “first” and “one.”

Implicit within this discussion is a general lesson for the entire attempt to understand the various meanings of אחד: in order to understand the meaning of the term in any given verse, it is worth learning its uses in other verses. The picture is not so simple, but we can still confidently make the statement that we can be aided in understanding the meaning of “one” in the *Shema* by isolating meanings of the word אחד from its other contexts.

A third possible interpretation of the expression “And there was evening and there was morning, one day” is that the combination of evening and morning created a single and complete entity, a meaning that is also supported by the continuation of the passage:

So the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken.” Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh. The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame. (Gen. 2:21-25)

This meaning is noteworthy in and of itself, and demands clarification. What is meant by their becoming “one flesh,” if they remained two separate people even after clinging to each other? We can consider their sexual union itself as their transformation into one flesh, but if so it seems that we are speaking of a profound level of meaning that bears within it the fact that the woman was formed from one of the ribs of the man, as well as the fact that this clinging occurs after leaving one’s father and mother.[[13]](#footnote-11) The idea of love presents itself here naturally; “clinging” is the love between a man and his wife, as all other possible interpretations and expansions only support this reading. I will not elaborate here but only emphasize the meaning of becoming one as the completion of a connection and the transformation into a new whole. See, for example, Ezekiel 37:15-19:

The word of the LORD came to me:

And you, O mortal, take a (אחד) stick and write on it, “Of Judah and the Israelites associated with him”; and take another (אחד) stick and write on it, “Of Joseph—the stick of Ephraim—and all the House of Israel associated with him.” Bring them close to each other (אחד אל אחד), so that they become one (אחד) stick, joined together in your hand. And when any of your people ask you, “Won’t you tell us what these actions of yours mean?” answer them, “Thus said the Lord GOD: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in the hand of Ephraim—and of the tribes of Israel associated with him, and I will place the stick of Judah upon it and make them into one (אחד) stick; they shall be joined (אחד) in My hand.”

The continuation of the passage is interesting in its own right:

You shall hold up before their eyes the sticks which you have inscribed, and you shall declare to them: Thus said the Lord GOD: I am going to take the Israelite people from among the nations they have gone to, and gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. I will make them a single (אחד) nation in the land, on the hills of Israel, and one (אחד) king shall be king of them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms.

In such a way can we extract from the first use of the term אחד a number of meanings.[[14]](#footnote-12) As noted, it is worth emphasizing the fact that at times more than one meaning is fitting; moreover, with each new meaning that we reveal, we are welcome to read them within the context of the meanings that preceded them, and we can expect the same regarding Deuteronomy 6:4.

The next verse to use the term אחד is v. 9: “God said, ‘Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear.’” That is, from all the different places, the waters gathered together into one place. Here, too, we encounter a subtle double meaning: according to the first, the waters gathered into one place and not two, but that place remained one of many, while according to the second, that “one” place receives special emphasis. While the denotation of the word “one” is the same in each, the connotation differs. The verse expresses more than the fact that there was one place in which all the waters were gathered; in addition, the focus is on this “one” place.

Here is an additional example:

Everyone on earth had the same (אחת) language and the same (אחדים) words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard.” —Brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar.— And they said, “Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world.” The LORD came down to look at the city and tower that man had built, and the LORD said, “If, as one (אחד) people with one (אחת) language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach. (Gen. 11:1-6)

The implicit meaning is that they spoke one language. Here is another example of the same meaning: “both of them—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—dreamed in the same (אחד) night, each his own dream and each dream with its own meaning” (Gen. 40:5). And again, “But they said to him, ‘No, my lord! Truly, your servants have come to procure food. We are all of us sons of the same (אחד) man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies!’” (Gen. 42:10-11). Here the term אחד has been translated, correctly in my view, as “the same.” To my knowledge, there is no term in Biblical Hebrew to express sameness except the word אחד. Joseph’s brothers are telling him that “We are the sons of the same man.”[[15]](#footnote-13) An additional and interesting meaning of אחד that will play a central role in the next chapter appears in the following verses describing the Tabernacle:

They made cloths of goats’ hair for a tent over the Tabernacle; they made the cloths eleven in number. The length of each cloth was thirty cubits, and the width of each cloth was four cubits, the eleven cloths having the same measurements. They joined five of the cloths by themselves, and the other six cloths by themselves. They made fifty loops on the edge of the outermost cloth of the one set, and they made fifty loops on the edge of the end cloth of the other set. They made fifty copper clasps to couple the Tent together so that it might become one whole (אחד). (Ex. 36:14-18)

And previously, in 26:11, we read, “Make fifty copper clasps, and fit the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together so that it becomes one whole” (אחד). The assembly of the Tent was intended to create “one whole.” This should not be understood as meaning “single” but rather as “whole,” as we learn from a verse with similar meaning which uses the term שלם, “whole”: “When all the work that King Solomon had done in the House of the LORD was completed (ותשלם), Solomon brought in the sacred donations of his father David—the silver, the gold, and the vessels—and deposited them in the treasury of the House of the LORD” (I Kings 7:51). This also corresponds with the following passage:

Then all the skilled among those engaged in the work made the Tabernacle of ten strips of cloth, which they made of fine twisted linen, blue, purple, and crimson yarns; into these they worked a design of cherubim. The length of each cloth was twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each cloth was four cubits, all cloths having the same measurements. They joined five of the cloths to one another, and they joined the other five cloths to one another. They made loops of blue wool on the edge of the outermost cloth of the one set, and did the same on the edge of the outermost cloth of the other set: they made fifty loops on the one cloth, and they made fifty loops on the edge of the end cloth of the other set, the loops being opposite one another. And they made fifty gold clasps and coupled the units to one another with the clasps, so that the Tabernacle became one whole (אחד). (Ex. 36:8-13)

And another unique example:

Listen to Me, you who pursue justice, you who seek the LORD: Look to the rock you were hewn from, to the quarry you were dug from. Look back to Abraham your father and to Sarah who brought you forth. For he was only one (אחד) when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. Truly the LORD has comforted Zion, comforted all her ruins; He has made her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD. Gladness and joy shall abide there, thanksgiving and the sound of music. (Isa. 51:1-3)

Abraham is here called “one” in the sense of “one and only,” “unique,” as well as, perhaps, in another sense. “One” in the sense of “unique” also appears in Song of Songs 6:9: “Only one is my dove, My perfect one, the only one of her mother, the delight of her who bore her. Maidens see and acclaim her; queens and concubines, and praise her.” We are not speaking here of connection or clinging, nor of being first nor the same. The phrase “only one when I called him” could mean “unique” and, at the same time, could bear a different meaning. It is not entirely clear, and this characteristic lack of clarity is itself worth remembering.

I believe I have included the essential possible meanings of the Biblical אחד that may be relevant to our interpretation of the phrase “the LORD is one.”[[16]](#footnote-14) I will list them and add additional clear meanings:

1. One and not two or more, referred to as “cardinal one.”
2. First, referred to as “ordinal one.”
3. A composite that becomes a single entity: “and they became one flesh.”
4. The same: “We are sons of the same man.”
5. Unique: “Only one is my dove,” “only one when I called him.”
6. There is also a meaning that will hold an especially important place in the chapters to come, and that is “one” as “complete,” “whole”: “so that the Tabernacle became one whole.”

As mentioned above, any attempt to understand anew the *Shema* should be undertaken in consideration of the meanings of the term אחד as it appears in the Bible. There we can find the basis of the meanings enumerated above. The cosmological reading of “one” as the single ruler of the world matches the first entry. According to this interpretation we would translate the *Shema* as “the LORD is our God, the LORD is the only god.” The position of Plotinus is closer to the second entry, but as we will see below, it bears an interesting connection to the fifth and sixth. The universalist reading, meanwhile, befits the fourth entry.

The question was raised whether or not other possible meanings exist as extensions of what we have identified here. The answer is in the affirmative. There is an additional hidden meaning here that has eluded our attention, one that arises from a rereading of the meaning concealed within the third entry – it is the meaning of “one” that we encounter in Kabbalistic literature, that of the unity of God as unification and even sexual coupling. I will not address such a meaning in this book.

In order to prepare the ground for the ensuing discussion, I will briefly note here that the Neoplatonic understanding is not found among the meanings listed above; Maimonides’ claim that “We have learned that there is no other being like God, and therefore when we say that ‘He is One,’ it expresses the negation of any plurality” (*Guide* I, 58) is not one of the interpretations enumerated here.

“One” as a Noun in the Mishnah

So far in this chapter I have limited myself to the Bible, for obvious reasons. It is worth noting, though, that there are additional meanings of the term אחד in the Mishnah. One that is particularly interesting is the understanding of the term as a noun, which some interpret as an allusion to the Platonic understanding of “one.” So we read in M. Avot 4:8, “He would say: Do not judge alone, for there is no lone judge aside from one (אחד). And do not say, ‘Accept my opinion,’ for they are permitted and not you.” The expression אחד can be interpreted here to mean single, in which case there is no innovation here; however, אחד can also be seen as a noun.

Take for example the following midrash:

It is written, *And the LORD God said, “Now that the man has become like one of us…”*(Gen. 3:23). And it is written, *Then I heard a holy one (אחד) speaking, and a holy one said to whoever it was who was speaking*… (Dan. 8:13). “Then I heard a holy one” – this refers to the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4). “Holy” – because all say before Him, “Holy…”.

The Book of Daniel appears to use אחד as a pronoun; however, the interpretation brought here, which refers to the *Shema*, understands the term as “one” and not only as an “individual,” and can be seen as an allusion to “one” as a noun. This is not the only instance in which אחד can be interpreted as a noun: in a better-known passage in Avot 4:8 we read, “He would say: Do not judge alone, for there is no lone judge aside from one (אחד). And do not say, ‘Accept my opinion,’ for they are permitted and not you.” Here, too, we see אחד serving as a noun that naturally evokes the language of the *Shema*. It seems that the “individual” ?? was detached from the verse and began to serve as a noun, being transformed in the process from an adjective into a noun.

Another midrash that appears repeatedly in the Talmud, and which Maimonides made use of, mentions אחד in explaining the custom of whispering the phrase “Blessed be His glorious Name and His kingdom for now and forever” following the *Shema*. Here is the version as it appears in BT Pesachim:

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: *And Jacob called to his sons, saying, “Gather around and I will tell you”* – Jacob wished to reveal to his sons the End of Days, but the Divine Presence was withdrawn from him. He said, “Perhaps, heaven forbid, there is something unfit about my bed, as in the case of Abraham, from whom came Ishmael, and my father Isaac, from whom came Esau.” His sons said to him, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one. Just as you have only one in your heart, we have only one in ours.” At that moment, Jacob the Patriarch replied, “Blessed be His glorious Name and His kingdom for now and forever.” (BT Pesachim 56a)

The term “one” here could be interpreted as “single” or “only,” but it appears here as a noun. According to the first meaning, the intention is that the LORD is the one and only god, while in the second, One becomes a Name of God. This point invites additional consideration, but in this chapter I have limited myself to the meanings of אחד. It is important to note that אחד appears in the Mishnah as a noun, a phenomenon that does not occur explicitly in the Bible.[[17]](#footnote-15)

**Summary**

The stock of meanings implicit within the terms אחד and אחת in the Bible can aid us in understanding the phrase “the LORD is one.” We now have a base from which we can approach interpretations of the *Shema*, which themselves can aid in the construction of new interpretations of divine unity.

1. “This great end” refers to the passage in Deuteronomy 6 that follows the *Shema*:

   The Torah has made it clear that the type of service we have addressed in this chapter can only be performed after proper comprehension. It stated, “love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and soul” (Deut. 11:13), and we have already explained multiple times that one’s love of God is according to one’s comprehension of Him. After love comes that service of which the sages of blessed memory spoke, saying, “This is service of the heart,” which is, in my opinion, the concentration of one’s thoughts on the First Intellect and the seclusion of oneself to this end to the greatest extent possible. (*Guide* III, 51)

   It is also worth noting the halakhot according to which one is only obligated to focus on the first verse of the *Shema* during its twice-daily recitation and the first blessing of the *Amidah*. Maimonides’ advice is to go beyond the minimum required by the law. [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
3. The centrality of the *Shema* is not intended as a diminution of the value of other verses; however, not all verses have made equal contributions to religious life. See [??] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
4. Maimonides’ statements in *Guide for the Perplexed* III, 51 are consistent with his elaboration on the reasons for the commandments in III, 44 and closely related to the Book of Love in his great *halakhic* work, the *Mishneh Torah*:

   The commandments included in the ninth category are those that we listed in the Book of Love. The reason for all of them is clear and the purpose explicit, that is, the goal of these ritual acts is to remember God always; to love Him, to fear Him and to accept upon yourself and keep the commandments as a whole, and to believe regarding Him what I have proven every Torah-learned Jew must believe. Included here are the prayers, recitation of the *Shema*, the blessing after meals, and those things related to them, as well as the priestly blessing, tefillin, mezuzah, and acquiring a Torah scroll as well as reading it at the prescribed times. All of these are acts that aid in the acquisition of supernal knowledge. This is plain and clear and needs no further explanation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
5. It is interesting to note David Hartman’s comments in the Postscript [of his book *Maimonides: Torah and the Philosophic Quest* - ??] where he tells of a mistake he made in his first [draft? edition?]:

   My original contention was that Maimonides proposed that the student of the Guide approach Halakhah by practicing more rigorous observance with more conscientious *kavvanah* (intention), thus adopting a stricter, more demanding standard of legal obligation. My claim that the philosophic Jew’s religious state of mind (*kavvanah*) was essentially halakhic supported my rejection of a dichotomous view of Maimonides in favor of an integrative one. In contrast to this interpretation, I now contend that the object of the kavvanah Maimonides described was not legal authority and obligation but rather the ritual acts of worship themselves and/or God, the ultimate object of religious worship. (p. 301) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
6. The latest version known to me is in the eighth chapter of Joseph Stern’s book, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides’ Guide* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2013), p. ?? [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
7. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
8. *Hagahot haGR’’A leShulhan Arukh*, *Yoreh Deah*, 179:6 (§13). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
9. Maimonides writes:

   The investigation of this subject, which is almost too subtle for our understanding, must not be based on current expressions employed in describing it, for these are the great source of error. It would be extremely difficult for us to find, in any language whatsoever, words adequate to this subject, and we can only employ inadequate language. In our endeavour to show that God does not include a plurality, we can only say "He is one," although "one" and "many" are both terms which serve to distinguish quantity. We therefore make the subject clearer, and show to the understanding the way of truth by saying He is one but does not possess the attribute of unity.

   The same is the case when we say God is the First (Kadmon), to express that He has not been created. (*Guide for the Perplexed* I, 57, M. Friedlander, trans. [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.,1904]) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
10. So the American Standard Version translates the passage in the following way:

    1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

    2 And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

    3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

    4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

    5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
11. So the 21st Century King James Version (KJ21) reads:

    1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

    2 And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

    3 And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

    4 And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.

    5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

    Luther translated Gen. 1:5 into German as “und nannte das Licht Tag und die Finsternis Nacht. Da ward aus Abend und Morgen der erste Tag.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
12. Gen. 8:5 reads, “The waters went on diminishing until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first (באחד) of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
13. Rashi interpreted the phrase to mean they became one “in their children.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
14. The term אחד in the phrase “one king” can also be understood in terms of identity. See below. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
15. Eliezer Zilberfenig (זילבפרניג = type-o?) notes here that sometimes the Torah uses the term הוא in a very similar way, as in Ester 1:1: “It happened in the days of Ahasuerus—that (הוא) Ahasuerus who reigned over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia”; that is to say, the same Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
16. There is an additional meaning, as we see in Gen. 21:15: “When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one (אחד) of the bushes”; and 3:22: “And the LORD God said, ‘Now that the man has become like one (אחד) of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!’” These verses invite interpretation but are not truly relevant to the understanding of “the LORD is one.” See also Gen. 19:9: “But they said, ‘Stand back! The fellow (האחד) came here as an alien, and already he acts the ruler!”; and Ex. 16:22: “On the sixth day they gathered double the amount of food, two omers for each (לאחד).” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
17. While I emphasize here the fact that we do not find the explicit use of אחד as a noun, we can read the well-known verse from Zech. 14:9 as an allusion to “One” as God’s name: “And the LORD shall be king over all the earth; on that day the LORD shall be one and His name shall be one.” The extensive interpretation of this verse on BT Pesachim 50a understands “one” as meaning “the same.” I will return to “the LORD shall be one” in the body of the proposed book. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)