# From "God of the World" to "God of Heaven" – from *Mishneh Torah* to *the Guide of the Perplexed*[[1]](#footnote-1)\*

Maimonides opened "almost all his books" with in the verse "In the Name of Lord the God of World" (Gen. 21:33).[[2]](#footnote-2) This verse describes the nature of Abraham's calling, which Maimonides interprets, both in the *Mishna Torah* and in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, as an effort to persuade people to abandon their idolatrous perceptions and affirm the uniqueness of God. The use of this opening seems to indicate that he saw himself as continuing Avraham's calling in all his books.[[3]](#footnote-3) There is, however, a difference in Maimonides' description of Abraham and his calling in the *Mishneh Torah* and in the *Guide of the Perplexed*: In the *Mishneh Torah* he is described as an Aristotelian philosopher and in the *Guide of the Perplexed* he is described as a Biblical prophet. In the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides focuses on the verse "God of the World" (*El Olam*) and in the *Guide of the Perplexed* he adds the verses in which Abraham mentions the "heaven." In the following remarks I shall examine these differences and suggest that they express a development in Maimonides' own position.[[4]](#footnote-4)

## Abraham in Mishneh Torah

Maimonides' famous account of the process of the fall of humanity from the recognition of one God to idolatry appears at the beginning of the laws of idolatry. Following this description, Maimonides presents Abraham as having realized the error of his contemporaries and feels compelled to change their erroneous positions. A careful analysis of Maimonides' words leads to a distinction between what Avraham comprehended and what he taught to others. This is how Maimonides describes the process of Abraham's development when he was weaned from his mother's milk until the age of forty.

After Abraham was weaned, while still an infant, his mind began to reflect. By day and by night he was thinking and wondering: "How is it possible that this [celestial] sphere should continuously be guiding the world have no one to guide it and cause it to turn round; for it cannot be that it turns round of itself." He had no teacher, no one to instruct him in aught. He was submerged in Ur of the Chaldees, among silly idolaters. His father and mother and the entire population worshiped idols, and he worshiped with them. But his mind was busily working and reflecting until he has attained the way of truth, apprehended the correct line of thought,

1. and knew that there is **One** God,
2. that He **guides** the celestial sphere,
3. and **created** everything,
4. and that among all that exist, there is no god besides Him.

He realized that men everywhere were in error, and that what had occasioned their error was that they worshiped the stars and the images, so that the truth perished from their minds. Abraham was **forty years old** when he recognized his **Creator** (Maimonides, *H. Avodat KoKhavim*, 1:3).[[5]](#footnote-5)

It seems that there are stages in the development of Avraham's understanding. In his youth, he is described as an Aristotelian philosopher who questions the pagan view because of the Aristotelian proof of the spheres` constant rotation. Underlying this proof is the assumption of the eternity of the world.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, it seems that the sentence that concludes the passage ("Abraham was **forty years old** when he recognized his **Creator**."), includes a deeper attainment of Abraham. In the middle are four perceptions about God and one conclusion regarding the reason for the mistake of his contemporaries. The third perception ("and created everything") goes beyond Aristotelian perception and presupposes the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, minimally its creation from the eternity matter.[[7]](#footnote-7) This recognition is called "the way of truth" and "the correct line of thought."

Abraham's attempts to change the views of his contemporaries are also described in two stages. In the first stage, he describes his quarrel with the sons of Ur of Chaldees, and in the second stage he describes the campaign he conducts on his way from Haran to the land of Canaan. In Ur of Chaldees, he is described as a Jewish Socrates who undermines the rule of the king by his philosophical arguments and his call for the destruction of pagan statues.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Having attained this knowledge, he began to refute the inhabitants of Ur of the Chaldees, arguing with them and saying to them, "The course you are following is not the way of truth. he broke the images, and commenced preaching to instruct the people

1. that it is not right to serve any one but **the God of the world**, to whom alone it was proper to bow down, offer up sacrifices, and make libations, **so that all human creatures might, in the future know Him**;
2. and that it was proper to destroy and shatter all the images, **so that the whole people might not err like these who thought that there was no god but these images**.

When he had prevailed over them with his arguments, the king (of the country) sought to slay him. He was miraculously saved and emigrated to Haran (Ibid.).[[9]](#footnote-9)

Abraham recognized the connection between man's practices and his beliefs.[[10]](#footnote-10) Therefore, beyond the philosophical discussion, he calls for redirecting the common cult rituals to the "God of the world" in order to bring about His recognition. At the same time, he called for breaking the statues so that the people will not be misled.

In the second stage, Abraham's journey from Haran to Canaan is described, which ends with the creation of "the house of Abraham."

He then began to proclaim to the whole world with great power and instruct the people

1. that the entire universe [world] had but One God
2. and Him it was right to worship.

He went from city to city and from kingdom to kingdom, calling and gathering together the inhabitants till he arrived in the land of Canaan. There, too, he proclaimed his message, as it is said: "**And he called there on the name of the Lord, God of the world**" (Gen. 21.33). When the people flocked to him and questioned him regarding his assertions, he would instruct each one according to his capacity till he had brought him to the way of truth, and thus thousands and tens of thousands joined him. These were the persons referred to in the phrase, "men of the house of **Abraham."** Abraham implanted in their hearts this great doctrine, composed books on it, and taught it to Isaac, his son (Ibid.).[[11]](#footnote-11)

"The house of Abraham" consists of those who "hold his opinion and hold his religion." (Responsa of Maimonides, 164) These were individuals who were convinced of his words and accepted his call "in the name of the Lord, the God of the world," which included the "great principle" that "there is one God for the whole world" and the conclusion derived from it that "unto Him it is proper to render service." It is possible that at the second stage, Abraham moderates his calling and does not demand that the idols be shattered, but rather he prefers to preach and generate a positive call to worship the "God of the Universe." The expression "*El Olam*" according to this paragraph refers only to the fact that there is only one God of the world. It seems that Maimonides interprets the word "*Olam*" here as connoting the sense of place, and not time, as it is used in the Bible.[[12]](#footnote-12)

It is striking that in both stages of Abraham's mission described by Maimonides, it is not mentioned that he preached the recognition of the creation of the world or the recognition of God as the governor (*manhig*) of the sphere. Abraham was satisfied with calling for recognition of one God and that He is exclusively deserving of worship. If so, Abraham taught others the correct relationship of God to the world, but not the version according to the Aristotelian conception and not the one that corresponds to the biblical conception.

## Abraham in the Guide of the Perplexed

The description of Abraham in the Guide of the Perplexed is different than the one noted above. Throughout the book, Maimonides states consistently that Abraham grasped the idea of God's creation of the world, and he also taught it to his contemporaries.

He who received a great overflow, as *Abraham*, assembled the people and called them by the way of teaching and instruction to adhere to the truth that he had grasped. Thus Abraham taught the people and explained to them by means of **speculative proofs**

1. that the world has but one deity,
2. that **He has created all the things** that are other then Himself,
3. and that none of the forms and no created thing in general ought to be worshipped.

This is what he instructed the people in, attracting them by means of eloquent speeches and by means of the benefits he conferred upon them (*Guide* 2:39).[[13]](#footnote-13)

In the *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:29 Maimonides presents a parallel to Abraham's description of the beginning of the laws of idolatry. The story of Abraham's arguments with his contemporaries is described twice: Maimonides describes this story as it was presented in "The Nabatean Agriculture" from the point of view of the Sabians, and then he tells it according to his own understanding.

… and they say literally what follows: When Ibrahim, who was brought up in Kutha, disagreed with the community and asserted that there was an agent other than the sun, various arguments were brought forward against him. In these arguments they set forth the clear and manifest activities of the sun in what exists. Thereupon he, they mean *Abraham*, told them: You are right; **it is like an axe in the hands of carpenter**. Then they mention a part of his argumentation, peace be on him, against them. At the conclusion of the story they mention that the **king** put *Abraham* our father, may peace be upon him, into prison, and that, being in prison, he persevered for days and days in arguing against them. Thereupon the king became afraid that **he would ruin his polity** and turn the people away from their religions and banished him toward Syria after having confiscated all his property. This is what they relate. You will find this story set forth in this manner in "The Nabatean Agriculture." (*Guide* 3:29).

This story describes only one claim of Abraham against his contemporaries. The sun is not a god, but rather a vessel in the hands of God "like an ax in the hand of the carpenter." In this story too, Abraham is described as a type of Socrates persecuted by the king because his claims undermined his rule. Although the king exiled him to Canaan, a miracle performed on his behalf did not precede his departure.

In Maimonides’ second description, Abraham is not described as an Aristotelian philosopher, but as in the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides distinguishes between the content of Abraham's attainment and the content of his preaching.

However, when the pillar of the world grew up and it became clear to him

1. that there is a separate deity
2. that is neither a body nor a force in a body
3. and that all the stars and the spheres were made by Him [מצנועאתה, *masnu`atihi*],

and he understood that the fables upon which he was brought up were absurd, he began to refute their doctrine and to show up their opinion as false; he publicly manifested his disagreement with them and called *in the name of the Lord, God of the world* [Gen. 21:23] – both

1. the existence of the deity
2. and the creation of the world in time by that deity

being comprised in that call (Guide 3:29).

In this account Abraham comprehends God's separateness and non-physicality. God is not, however, described as the governor (*manhig*) of the spheres, but rather as the creator of the stars and spheres. It should be noted that it refers to the stars, not just the spheres. It seems to me that in this addition, Maimonides hints that the basis for Abraham's comprehension is not the Aristotelian proof, but Maimonides' own evidence of the creation of the world.

## Maimonides` evidence of the creation of the world

Maimonides describes his evidence against the concept of the eternity of the world in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:19 and 2:22. In the Guide 2:19, His purpose is to explain "by means of arguments that come close to being demonstration, that what exists indicates to us of necessarily that it exists in virtue of the purpose of One who purposed" (*Guide* 2:19). This evidence negates Aristotle's position, but not the position of Plato. In Guide 2:22, he begins to set forth "**my** proofs and **my** preference in favor of the world`s having been produced in time" (End of *Guide* 2:21). These proofs also negate Plato's conception.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The evidence in the *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:19 is taken from the accidental aspects of heaven. The concept of the creation of the world that attributes intention to God, explains these random aspects more plausibly than Aristotle's view. After Maimonides bases his claim on randomness in the direction and speed of the spheres, he argues that the existence of the stars is a "fact that makes even more clear than what has been said" (*Guide* 2:19).

Maimonides attributes to Aristotle the claim that the matter that composes heaven and earth are different,[[15]](#footnote-15) and establishes the distinction between them on the difference in their motions. Since the motion in the heaven is rotational and in the earth the motion is straight, it indicates that they are two different types of matter. In the continuation of this chapter, he concludes that according to this principle, the matter of the spheres must be distinguished from the matter of the stars. The spheres move around and the stars stand within them. This difference leads to the conclusion that they are "very different" (2:19) types of matter.[[16]](#footnote-16) The connection between the star and the sphere, despite the great difference between the matters of which they are composed, supports the claim that they were connected by the purpose of One who intended and not by necessity.

Maimonides points out two more random aspects of the existence of the stars, which are difficult to explain by way of necessity. The density of the stars in heaven is uneven; there are celestial regions without stars and there are areas where there is a great density of them. It is also difficult to explain why the star is connected to a sphere at any specific, although there is no difference between this point and any other point in the sphere. The assumption that God has purposely designated a place explains clearly these celestial phenomena and it is difficult to see how they were created by necessity.

In the *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:22, Maimonides, as stated, brings evidence of the creation *ex nihilo* of the world, and not only "in virtue of the purpose of One who purposed." His evidence is based on the weaknesses of the method of emanation. Because everyone agrees "that anything but a single simple thing should proceed from a simple thing" (*Guide* 2:22) and "that what first proceeded from God was constituted by single simple intellect only" (*Guide* 2:22), the method of emanation was required to explain how the multifaceted reality was emanated. The main argument was that the first intellect that overflowed from God is composed because he intellectualizes God and intellectualizes itself. That is why two things overflowed from him; from his intellectualizing of God, another intellect overflowed, and from its intellectualizing itself a sphere was overflowed.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The main difficulty that Maimonides finds in this conception is the argument that matter is created from intellect by virtue of an emanation. "…how can the intellects be a cause for the procession of the spheres from them? And what relation can there be between matter and that which being separate has no matter at all?" (*Guide* 2:22). Since the spheres are material beings, it is not clear how they were created from an intellect that is separate from matter. Moreover, because there are two different matters in the sphere - the sphere matter and the permanent star matter - how these two matters were produced is also a challenge. "Now if this comes about in virtue of a procession, we cannot but require for this compound a composite cause, the procession of the body of the sphere being occasioned by one of its parts and that of the body of the star by the other" (*Guide* 2:22). It is also possible to distinguish between the matter of the illuminating stars and the matter of the dim stars and this multiplicity of matters contrasts with Aristotle's method. Since according to Plato God is the cause the existence of of matter (*Guide* 2:13), all these questions apply to him as well.

It follows, therefore, that the randomness in the heaven shows "purpose of One who purposed" and the different matter composing the spheres and stars indicate that the world was created *ex nihilo*. It seems, therefore, that Maimonides established the creation of the world from nothing, wherever the **heavens** are mentioned in the verses that describe the relationship of God to the world. Having found the evidence for the concept of the creation of the world from heaven, he saw these verses as sources of evidence.[[18]](#footnote-18)

## God of heaven

Maimonides attributes this understanding to the prophets and to *Abraham* as the first.

For this reason you will find that all the prophets used the stars and the spheres as proofs for the deity`s existing necessarily. Thus in the traditional story of Abraham, there occurs the tale, which is generally known, about his contemplation of the stars. Again *Isaiah*, calling attention to the conclusions to be drawn from the stars, says: *Lift up your eyes on high, and see: who hath created these? and so on* [Isa. 40:26]. *Jeremiah* says similarly: *He made the heavens*. *Abraham* says: *The Lord, the God of the heavens* [Gen. 24:7]. And the chief of the prophets says: *Who rideth upon the heaven* [Deut. 33:26], an expression we have explained (*Guide* 2:19).

Although Maimonides rooted his words about Abraham in "tradition," he anchored them in a verse from the *Torah* spoken by Abraham, but this time he did not mention his call "in the name of the Lord, God of the world" but rather in the words, "the God of the heavens."[[19]](#footnote-19) This verse was not mentioned at all in the *Mishneh Torah* and it is clear that it was chosen because of its unique connection to heaven and not to the world as a whole.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Therefore, in the Guide of the Perplexed, as opposed to the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides uses another verse from Abraham to establish the claim of creation. He mentions the verse "Maker [*Qoneh*] of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:22), and through it he establishes his claim that Abraham believed that the world was created. After stating that the idea of creation is one of the bases of the Law of Moses our master, he is faithful to his position in the Guide of the Perplexed that Abraham took this view and made it public.

It was *Abraham our father, peace be on him*, who began to proclaim in public this opinion to which speculation had led him. For this reason, he made his proclamation *in the name of the Lord, God of the world* [Gen. 21:23]; he has also explicitly stated this opinion in saying: *Maker of heaven and earth* [Gen. 14:22] (*Guide* 2:13).

Maimonides noted the different degrees of clarity regarding this issue in the language of the verses. The verse "in the name of the Lord, God of the world" testifies in general to the fact that Avraham published the idea of creation. The verse, "Maker of heaven and earth," however, points to the creation "**explicitly**." It seems that the mention of heaven in the verse serves as a basis for this distinction. "Heaven" alludes to the evidence from the random nature of the heaven that indicates "purpose of One who purposed." Maimonides apparently believed that calling "in the name of the Lord, God of the world" includes a reference to the idea of creation, because the verse "Maker heaven and earth" preceded it. After Abraham realized that the heavens were indicative of deliberate intention, he "called *in the name of the Lord, God of the world* [Gen. 21:23] – both the existence of the deity and the creation of the world in time by that deity being comprised in that call" (*Guide* 3:29).

Maimonides refers to these verses once again in the *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:30, as part of his discussion of the four expressions – *baro* [to create], *assoh* [to make], *qanoh* [to acquire, possess] and *El* [God] - In which the Torah attributes the heavens to God. The first two expressions are taken from the prophecy of Moses and the last two phrases are taken from Abraham's words.

Among the things you ought to reflect upon are the four words that occur with reference to the relation between the heaven and God. These words are *baro* [to create] and *assoh* [to make] and *qanoh* [to acquire, possess] and *El* [God]. It says: *God* [*Elohim*] *created* [*bara*] *the* *heaven and the earth* [Gen. 1:1]. And it says: *In the day that the Lord God made* [*assoth*] *earth and heaven* [Gen. 2:4]. It says also: *Possessor* [*qoneh*] *of heaven and earth* [Gen. 14:19; 22]. And it says: *God* [*El*] *of the world* [Gen. 21:33]. And: *The God* [*Elohe*] *of the heaven, and the God* [*Elohe*] *of the earth* [Gen. 24:3] (*Guide* 2:30).

It seems that here also Maimonides hints that the proofs for creation are found in the Torah in the unique characteristics of heaven. Although he demonstrates each phrase with one verse, in the illustration of the expression "El" he mentions two verses spoken by Abraham; *God* [*El*] *of the world* [Gen. 21:33]. And: *The God* [*Elohe*] *of the heaven, and the God* [*Elohe*] *of the earth* [Gen. 24:3]. It seems that in this he wishes to emphasize that the word "world" in this verse includes within it the special relationship of God to heaven. The expression "God of the world" must be understood as a shortening of the more explicit expression, "the God of heaven and the God of the earth," and therefore it also points to intended purpose.

In the continuation of the chapter, when Maimonides deals with the exact meaning of these expressions, he mentions the two verses and this time makes do with a partial quote of the second verse, which relates only to heaven.

As for the expressions, *the God* [*Elohe*] *of the heaven* and also *God of the World* [*El olam*],they are used with respect to His perfection, may He be exalted, and theirs. He is *Elohim* – that is, He who governs – and thay are those governed by Him [חאכם והי מחכומה, *hakim wahiya mahkumah*], not in the sense of domination – for that is the meaning of *qoneh* [*possessor*] – but with respect to His rank, may He be exalted, in being and in relation to theirs. For He is the deity and not they – I mean heaven. Know this (*Guid* 2:30).

The expression "God" referring to the world points to a certain aspect that is evident from the world regarding God. Maimonides calls this the "relationship between governor and governed," but immediately qualifies this not by dealing with the relationship of control in the ordinary sense, "but with respect to His rank, may He be exalted, in being and in relation to theirs". That is to say, this expression indicates the absolute dependence of the contingent existence of the world on the Necessary existence of God. However, this expression also negates the relationship between God and the world because of the unbridgeable gap between them. The existence of God is not "an accident attaching to what exists" (*Guide* 1:57) to Him, but is identical to His essence. Maimonides rejects this description of the relationship between God and the world, because even existence cannot serve as a common denominator on which the relationship will be defined.[[21]](#footnote-21) The expression "*El Olam*" therefore expresses the constant "relationship" between God and the world even after its creation. It expresses the absolute separation of God from the world on the one hand, and the absolute dependence of the world on God on the other.

If so, this attribute is completely neutral regarding the question of the creation or eternity of the world. The fact that these verses describe this aspect of the relationship (or lack of relation) between God and the world does not negate the conception of creation that Maimonides attributes to these verses, but only serves to note that this aspect also exists in the concept of creation. Maimonides explicitly states in the Guide of the Perplexed 2:25 that the verses of the Torah allow for different interpretations. The considerations of interpretive decision regarding their meaning do not derive solely from the scriptures. Nevertheless, the addition of the verse "the God of heaven," with the Maimonides` understanding of God's will and not only his wisdom, leads to the conception of creation as the basis of Avraham's position.

In my opinion, a similar interpretive approach should be applied to the term "possessor" [*qoneh*] which describes God's relationship to the world.

With reference to them, it says *qanoh* [*acquire, possess*], because He, may he be exalted, has dominion over them just as a master has over his slaves. For this reason He is also called *the Lord* [*adon*] *of all the earth* [Josh. 3:11 and 13] and *the Lord* [*ha-adon*]. However, as there is no *Lord* [*adon*] without there being something *possessed* [*qinyan*] by Him, and this tends toward the road of belief in the eternity of a certain matter, the term *baro* [*create*] and *assoh* [*make*] are used with reference to them (*Guide* 2:30)

Here, too, the expression *qoneh* points to a certain aspect that is evident from the world regarding God's relationship to it. This attitude of God to the world is neutral and does not express creation or eternity, because it describes God's constant relationship to the world even after its creation. It seems that this expression expresses the fact that God is the governor (*manhig*) of the world, ie, the first efficient cause behind the sphere`s motion. The phrase *qoneh* in its primary order "tends toward the road of belief in the eternity of a certain matter," since it assumes the existence of the heavens and describes God only as their governor.

Because it is possible to error and ascribe to the verb *qanoh* the connotation of the eternity of the world, the Torah added the terms "create" and "make" relating to heaven to emphasize the creation *ex nihilo* of the world. Here too, the use of verbs "create" and "make" does not contradict the verb "possess" but is intended to explain it. Indeed, the verse in its entirety "*Possessor* [*qoneh*] *of heaven and earth*" (Gen. 14:19; 22). also hints at the unique characteristics of the heavens that indicate intention and materiality of the heavens. Both of these attest to the creation of the world. This interpretive assertion is already stated in the Guide of the Perplexed 2:13 and it is not in contradiction to the Guide of the Perplexed 2:30. At most it can be seen as a contradiction of the fifth cause (Guide, introduction), which precedes the general statement of the detailed statement.

## 13 principles of faith

The differences between the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide of the Perplexed* reflect, therefore, a process that Maimonides himself has undergone regarding the proofs of the reality of God. When he wrote the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides did not find convincing philosophical proof for the creation of the world. The Aristotelian proof was the solid foundation of God's unity and incorporeality, but it used the concept of the eternity of the world as its foundation. Therefore Maimonides described Abraham as an Aristotelian philosopher who teaches others the recognition of the One God, but refrains from demanding that they recognize the creation of the world. Apparently, from this philosophical weakness, Maimonides did not include the recognition of the creation of the world within the principles of the *Torah* in *Mishneh Torah*.[[22]](#footnote-22)

When he wrote the Guide of the Perplexed, Maimonides established the philosophical evidence of the random nature of the heavens that strengthened the claim of the creation of the world. Having found this evidence, he described Abraham as a prophet who had discovered the concept of creation and added that he had taught it to mankind. He found a basis for this conception in all the verses in which Abraham explicitly mentioned the relationship between God and heaven. Therefore, in the Guide of the Perplexed Maimonides added that the creation of the world is one of the main principles of the Torah of Moses and therefore, after writing the Guide of the Perplexed, he returned to the *Commentary on the Mishnah* and added the principle of the creation *ex nihilo* as an attached note to the fourth principle.[[23]](#footnote-23)

## Appendix: The verbs "baro" [to create] and "assoh" [to make]

Sarah Klein-Breslevi analyzed Maimonides' interpretation of the verbs "create" and "make" and concluded that they are ambiguous. In her opinion, Maimonides believed that the verb "*baro*" [to create] can contain in its meaning the three methods presented in the *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:13 (creation of the world from nothing, the eternity of matter as Plato and the eternity of the world as Aristotle). This does not mean that the verb "*baro*" in the story of creation in Genesis 1 is ambiguous. But in her opinion Maimonides hints at this ambiguousness in his commentary to the first verse of the story of creation, and therefore he did not decide on this issue.[[24]](#footnote-24)

In the *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:13, Maimonides made sure to define the opinion of "the Law *Moses our Master*" as a bringing into existence "**after** having been [**the**] **purely** and **absolutely** nonexistent" [בעד **אל**עדם אלמחץ' אלמטלק, *ba`da al-`adam al-mahd al-mutlaq*]. In contrast, in the *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:30, which refers to the verse of creation in Genesis, he defines the verb as "bringing into existence **out of** nonexistence" [איג'אד מן עדם, *`ijad min `adam*] (not "after" but "out of", not "**the** nonexistent" but "nonexistent" and without the "**purely** and **absolutely**"). These changes indicate, in her opinion, that Maimonides intentionally chose a multi-meaning expression to imply that the verb "created" in this verse is ambiguous and he himself is skeptical of the question of the creation of the world or its eternity.[[25]](#footnote-25)

But she did not notice the fact that Maimonides concludes the *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:13 in clarifying the opinion of "the Law of *Moses and Abraham our Father*" in exactly the same words.

For the purpose of every follower of the Law of *Moses and Abraham our Father* or those who go the way of these two is to believe that there is nothing eternal in any way at all existing simultaneously with God; to believe also that the bringing into existence of a being out of nonexistence [איג'אד אלמוג'וד מן עדם, `*ijad al-mawjud min `adam*] is for the deity not an impossibility [מן קביל אלממתנע, *min qabila al-mumtana`*].[[26]](#footnote-26)

It is clear from the context that the expression "out of nonexistence" (Not "after", without "the" and without "**purely** and **absolutely**") is not from matter but from the very creation of nothing, because "there is nothing eternal in any way at all existing simultaneously with God" and because he needed to determine that it is not "an impossibility". Therefore, it seems that Maimonides did not distinguish between the phrase "**after** having been [**the**] **purely** and **absolutely** nonexistent" and its various abbreviations "after nonexistence", "**out of** the nonexistence" and "**out of** nonexistence." All express the creation *ex nihilo*.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Another interpretive argument stems from its understanding of the verb "*assoh*" [to make].[[28]](#footnote-28) Maimonides explained that the verb does refer to "the specific forms that were given to them [to heaven and earth] – I mean their natures" (*Guide* 2: 30). In her opinion, the verb *"assoh*" does indeed indicate the giving of natural forms, but because all creation was done in one action, all verbs in the story of Creation must be interpreted as the same action. Therefore, just as "*amor*" [to say] and "*assoh*" denote the same action (*Guide* 1:12) of giving form in matter, so too "*baroh*" and "*assoh*" are the same action. In her opinion, this identification reinforces the claim that "*baroh*" is not from nothing but the giving of forms.[[29]](#footnote-29)

It seems to me that this argument assumes what is desired, because it denies in advance the attribution of more than one outcome to God's one act. Maimonides' perception of creation identifies expressions of wisdom and will in the world, although both are clearly identical in the unity of God. Therefore, from the argument that the entire world is done in one action, it does not follow that this action does not include various aspects. In the *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:52, Maimonides explains the attributes of action as the description of the world. His words indicate that despite the multitude of actions that are evident from the world, all of them must be understood as results of the same reason, since the essence of God is one and has no complexity. What is reflected in the world as various actions is hidden in the simple unity of God. Therefore, "create" and "make," even though they are based exactly on the same "relationship" of God's to the world, express various aspects. "*Baroh*" refers to creation *ex nihilo* and "*assoh*" indicates the giving of forms.

Moreover, Maimonides identifies between "*ammor*" [to say] and "*assoh*" [to make] in the story of Creation. He interprets that the words "saying" [*ammira*] in the description of creation are used to denote "will or volition" (*guide* 1:65; 67). If "said" and "made" are the same, then "made" means will too. The more precise identification between the verse "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (*Psalm* 33:6) and "the work of Thy fingers" (*Psalm* 8:4) (in *Guide* 2:66) relating to heaven and the stars leads directly to our chapter relating to this verse.

Regarding the dicta: [*When I consider thy* ***heavens****,* *the work of Thy fingers, the* ***moon*** *and the* ***stars***] *which Thou hast established* [*konanta*] [Ps. 8:4]; *hath spread out* [*tipphah*] *the* ***heavens*** [Isa. 48:13]; *who stretchest out the* ***heavens*** [Ps. 104:2], the terms used therein are included in the verb to make [*assoh*] (*Guide* 2:30).

The making of the moon and the stars, which are the greater evidence of intentional intent, is therefore concealed in the description of the making of the heavens, and is an expression of God's will in the verse "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (*Psalm* 33:6).

1. \* I would like to thank Prof. W. Zev Harvey, Dr. Esti Eisenman, Dr. Hanoch Gamliel and Dr. Shalom Tzadik for their comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Shaul Lieberman, ed., *The Laws of the Yerushalmi of the Rambam* [Hebrew] (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1947), 5, note 7. Zev Harvey also adds the opening to *Maimonides Arabic Treatise on Logic*, which according to one manuscript begins with the Arabic expression "*Bismillah Rab al-Alamin*." See W. Zev Harvey, "Liebes` Sefer Yesira: Between Parmenides, Nietzsche, and Maimonides," Maren R. niehoff, Ronit Meroz, Jonathan Garb (eds.), *And This for Yehuda* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2012), 24, note 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Yosef Kafih [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1987), III note 1; Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought: Studies in Ethics, Law, and the Human Ideal* (State University of New York Press, 1999) 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Masha Turner devoted two articles to the description of Avraham in the writings of Maimonides. In her opinion, Maimonides presents him as a philosopher who evolved from Aristotle to Plato. In this he laid the foundation for the prophecy of Moses, which renews the belief in the creation of the world. See Masha Turner, "The Portrayal of Abraham the Patriarch in the *Guide of the Perplexed*" [Hebrew], *Daat* 57 (1996): 181-92; Masha Turner, "Avraham Our Father in the Thought of Maimonides," [Hebrew] in *The Faith of Abraham: In the Light of Interpretation throughout the Ages*, eds. Moshe Halamish, Hanna Kasher and John Silman, (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University), 143-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*, (New York: Behrman House, 1972), 73. All translations from *Mishna Torah* were taken from this book with minor changes. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See W. Z. Harvey, "The Mishneh Torah as a Key to the Secrets of the Guide," in *Me`ah She`arim - Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memorry of Isadore Twersky*, eds. Ezra Fleischer, Gerald Blidstein, Carmi Horowitz, Bernard Septimus, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), 18-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Warren Zev Harvey believes that this stage in Avraham's development hints at the metaphysical proof of Ibn Sina, as Maimonides puts it in *H. Yesodei HaTorah* 1: 4. See Warren Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1998), 47-8, 60-5; idem, "Maimonides, Crescas, and the Parable of the Castle," in *Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Thought*, ed. Racheli Haliva, (Hamburg: De Gruyter, 2018), 167-72. Sara Klein-Braslavy believes that the verb "bara" includes in its meaning the three opinions cited in the Guide of the Perplexed, 2:13. In my humble opinion, her words are unconvincing. See Appendix at the end of this article. See Sara Klein-Braslavy, *Maimonides Interpretation of the Story of Creation* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1988), 89-90; idem, "Maimonides' Interpretation of the Verb 'Bara' and the Creation of the World" [Hebrew], *Daat* 16 (1986): 40-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The story of Abraham parallels the story of Socrates. Abraham raises doubts about the fundamental beliefs of society, which undermines the authority of the regime and is therefore persecuted. But unlike Socrates, he was saved. See Leo Strauss, "Persecution and the Art of Writing," *Social Research* 8, no. 4 (1941): 488-504. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Eliezer Hadad, "Act as a Designer of Consciousness – Wittgensteinian Comments on Maimonides` Philosophy," in *The Halakhah as an Event*, ed. Avinoam Rosenak (Jerusalem: Magness and Van Leer, 2016), 256-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*, 73-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Joel Kraemer and Josef Stern, "Shlomo Pines on the Translation of Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1998): 13-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. All translations from *the Guide of the Perplexed* are taken from the Pines edition. Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, trans. Shlomo Pines, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). The Arab source was taken from ed. Shelomo Munk with additions of Isaskhar Joel (Jerusalem 1930-31). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides` Secret Position on Creation," *Stadies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University, 1979), 27-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Aristotle, *De Caelo* 1, 2-3, 268a-270b; 3, 270b, 20-24. About the description of Aristotle's few comments on the subject and the various possibilities that his commentators faced, see R. Glasner, "The Question of Celestial Matter in the Hebrew Encyclopedias," S. Harvey (ed.), *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy: Proceedings of the Bar-Ilan University Conference* (*Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought* 7), (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 313-15. Al-Farabi used two different terms to indicate the matter of the earth (مادة, *maddah*) and the matter of heaven (موضوع, *mawdu`*), because the matter of heaven is not potential. He attributed matter and form to the spheres as opposed to Aristotle, but in some of his writings he notes that this is only one form which is the spirit of the sphere in contrast to the matter of the earth that can replace forms. See J. Damien, *Method, Structure, and Development in Al-Farabi's Cosmology: Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science, Texts and Studies*, (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2012), 206-10. Maimonides, in the wake of Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, believed that despite the essential difference between the matter of heavens and the matter of the earth, the spheres also contain matter and form. In his opinion, the different directions of movement of the spheres reflect the differences in forms between them. Maimonides believed that the round movement of the spheres indicates that they are living beings with a soul, in contrast to the straight movement of the elements, which indicates that nature is the foundation of movement, not the soul (*Guide of the Perplexed* 2:4), but this does not negate the existence of forms in the spheres. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Maimonides rejects Al-Farabi's claim that the difference between the matter of the spheres and the stars matter is small and is only about the fact that the spheres are transparent and the stars are not transparent. He criticizes him for referring only to the difference in transparency between the stars and the spheres and not to the difference in movements. Falaquera finds a contradiction between Maimonides' argument that one must distinguish between the matter of the spheres and the star matter, and his words in the *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:26. In this chapter he seemingly accepts the words of R. Eliezer that the matter of heavens and what is within them is one matter. See Shem Tov ben Joseph Ibn Falaquera, *Moreh ha-Moreh*, Yair Shiffman (ed.) [Hebrew], (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2001), 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Arthur Hyman, "From What is One and Simple only What is One and Simple Can Come to Be," *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, Lenn E. Goodman (ed.), (New York: Suny Press, 1992), 111-35 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Charles H. Manekin, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Maimonides: Earlier vs. Later Writings", *Maimonides: Conservatism, Originality, Revolution*, Aviezer Ravitzki (ed.), (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2008), 297-316; Charles Manekin, "Divine Will in Maimonides' Later Writtings", *Maimonidean Studies*, vol. 5 (2008), 189-222. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This expression appears twice in Abraham's words; Gen. 24:3 and Gen. 24:7. It seems that Maimonides quotes the verse that mentions only the heaven without the earth. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Similarly, he chooses the verse "Who rideth upon the **heaven**" from the words of Moses as the basis for his proof of creation from the structure of heaven. In The Guide of the Perplexed 1:70, Maimonides interprets this verse as pointing mainly to the separateness of God, but he also incorporates the rotation of the sphere through **will**. This interpretation may refer mainly to differences in the direction of the spheres` rotations and velocities, rather than the location of the stars. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Guide* 1:52; 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See *H. Yesodei Ha-Torah* 1:1-7; *H. Teshuva* 3:7; Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 54-61. He rejects various explanations regarding why Maimonides did not include the creation in the thirteen principles. He finally suggests that Maimonides wanted to include only principles that do not require a complete understanding of God and are absolutely necessary. Creation is included in the secrets of Torah and is not necessary for the observance of commandments, and therefore it was not included in the principles. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. "Know that a foundation of the great Torah of Moses is that the world is created: God formed it and created it after its absolute non-existence. That you see me circling around the idea of the eternity of the world is [only] so that the proof of His existence will be absolute as I explained and made clear in the Guide." (*Maimonides` Commentary on* *Mishna*, *Perek* *Helek*. Translated by Kellner, *Dogma*, 54). This note appears on the margins of the original manuscript of Maimonides (Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. Ms. Poc. 295: <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/Discover/Search/#/?p=c+0,t+,rsrs+0,rsps+10,fa+,so+ox%3Asort%5Easc,scids+,pid+b7e0b998-0a85-4a30-851f-58d67be5247d,vi+a77b5292-7188-46bb-84c5-f4ebb43b26fd>). See Kellner, *Dogma*, 240, note 211, regarding the identification of the manuscript of the note. One wonders why Maimonides did not see fit to add a similar note in the *Mishna Torah*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Klein-Braslavy, *The Story of Creation*, 86-90. It seems to me that her proof from Maimonides' interpretation of the verse "who forms the light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates evil" (Isa. 45: 7), convincing. But the additional way of learning about the meaning of the Hebrew verb "*baro*" from Maimonides` use of the Arab verb "כ'לק" [*khalaka*] seems to me to be forced. In my opinion, Maimonides did indeed think that the verb create includes only two meanings, not three. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Klein-Braslavy, *The Story of Creation*, 81-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This conclusion, I believe, also stems from other sources. The contrast between "generated from some being" and "created **from** nothing" [אלמבתדע מן עדם, *al-mubtada` min `adam*] (*Guide* 2:17, Pines 297) proves that this is a creation *ex nihilo*. The same is true of the expressions: "according to our opinion and our doctrine of the production in time of the world as whole **after** [**the**] nonexistence" [בעד **אל**עדם, *ba`da al-`adam*] (*Guide* 3:13, Pines 450-451) and "according to our opinion – produces all the things that are other than itself **after** they have been nonexistent" [בעד **אל**עדם, *ba`da al-`adam*] (*Guide* 3:20, Pines 428). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. I found no place in the *Guide of the Perplexed* where the expression "nonexistence" (עדם, *`adam*) is interpreted as meaning of matter, although of course it is attached to the matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Klein-Braslavy, *The Story of Creation*, 96-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. She mentions the *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:30, in order to prove that "*baro*" [to create] and "*assoh*" [to make] are identical verbs. Maimonides argues that since "the Lord [*adon*] of all the earth" (Josh. 3:11; 13) has the meaning of eternal matter, so too were said "create" and "make" in the *Torah*. So both have one meaning. But it should be said that their common meaning is the negation of eternal matter and not a completely identical meaning. See Klein-Braslavy, *The Story of Creation*, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)