**Ṣufi Features in Jacob’s Visions**

**In Abraham Maimuni’s Commentary on Genesis**

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**Introduction**

Rabbi Abraham Maimuni (1186-1237), the renowned leader of the Cairo Jewish community in the first third of the 13th century, was greatly influenced by Ṣufis, the Muslim mystics, and expressed this clearly and prominently in his writings.[[1]](#footnote-1) Among other works, he wrote a commentary in Judeo-Arabic on Genesis and Exodus, which survived in one manuscript, and was published in an exemplary edition by Ephraim Yehuda Weisenberg more than sixty years ago.[[2]](#footnote-2) One can assume that Maimuni meant to write a commentary on the entire Pentateuch, but did not manage to complete this task. Alongside a declared and systematic approach to the plain meaning of the text, Maimuni also frequently expressed Ṣufi ideas in his commentaries, some of which have been discussed in previous studies.[[3]](#footnote-3) In the present study, I seek to discuss in detail Maimuni’s commentary on the eight occasions on which God appears to Jacob.[[4]](#footnote-4) These revelations differ in language, location, timing, content and apparently also in quality. This examination will clarify the classic Ṣufi features in Maimuni’s depiction of Jacob.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**1. Jacob’s Ladder**

He had a dream; there was a ladder set on the ground and its top reached the sky, and there were angels of God going up and down on it. And the Lord was standing beside him and He said, “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I did not know it!” Shaken, he said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God and that is the gateway to heaven” (Genesis 28:12-17).[[6]](#footnote-6)

Rabbi Abraham Maimuni commented on verse 12 as follows:

There was a ladder etc. and there were angels etc. – one who has attained[[7]](#footnote-7) the end of the ladder has reached His place,[[8]](#footnote-8) may He be exalted, and one who has seen[[9]](#footnote-9) the ladder from its beginning to its end and has seen[[10]](#footnote-10) the angels who descend to the earth in order to speak with the prophets, whose home it [the earth] is, and who ascend to the top of the ladder, which is their [the angels’] dwelling place, and has seen from the bottom of the ladder to its end, this one has already reached a fitting attainment, which is not like the attainment of one who has seen from afar, as he said, “From afar the Lord revealed himself to me” (Jeremiah 31:2), and He revealed himself to him and he heard the speech through the angels descending on the ladder, who are intermediaries[[11]](#footnote-11) between Him and he who attains [the One] who is at the top of the ladder, who is exalted over corporeality, who is exalted over all imagination.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The word ‘ladder’ (Hebrew *sullam*) is a *hapax legomenon* in the Bible and therefore its meaning is unclear.[[13]](#footnote-13) Kaddari categorically defines it in his dictionary as “an apparatus with levels to ascend on,” and supports his definition not only with the verse discussed here but also with parallels in Phoenician, Judeo-Aramaic, Mandaic and Akkadian.[[14]](#footnote-14) R. Abraham Maimuni believes that this dream expressed the quality of the height of prophesy attained by Jacob .[[15]](#footnote-15) Jacob saw all rungs of the ladder, and this meant that he achieved an inclusive and comprehensive attainment of the metaphysical realm, much more than Jeremiah, who by comparison required angelic mediation. The closeness also expresses quality, in contrast to the distance noted by Jeremiah.

Two principal Ṣufi terms here are *wuṣūl*’ and *sullam,* accompanied by the verb *adraka* and the gerund *idrāk*. *Wuṣūl* means arrival, and in a Ṣufi context the arrival refers not to distance covered but rather to awareness achieved, and therefore it is often translated as ‘attainment.’ This is the meaning I prefer to assign to *idrāk*.[[16]](#footnote-16) R. Avraham Maimuni characterized Jacob’s “arrival/attainment” on this occasion as a “proper attainment,” and by comparing it to Jeremiah’s partial and limited “attainment,” we can hypothesize that he means that Jacob’s was the ultimate attainment.[[17]](#footnote-17) This occasion was one of two in which, in Maimuni’s opinion, Jacob reached the peak of his prophetic power and by implication also the peak of his mystical experience. The second was in the struggle with the “man” before his meeting with Esau; this will be discussed below.

A ladder connecting heaven and earth is mentioned in the Quran several times,[[18]](#footnote-18) and this kind of ladder raises an immediate association in a Muslim context – the wondrous ascent of the Prophet Muhammad to heaven, known in Arabic as the *Mi῾rāj*. This episode is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran and the tradition about it relies on one verse in the Night Journey Sura (17:1). While the meaning of the verse was debated by Muslim commentators, the tradition itself enjoys a solid status in Muslim culture. [[19]](#footnote-19) The verse has three main interpretive traditions.[[20]](#footnote-20) The first is that the journey described is vertical: from the Ka’ba in Mecca to the heavenly Ka῾ba. The second is that the journey had a horizontal component: the Prophet travelled from Mecca to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (the al-Aqsa mosque), whence he began his vertical journey to the heavens,[[21]](#footnote-21) and the third is that the journey was imagined rather than real. In three collections of traditions it is noted that Muhammad was assisted by a ladder, and according to Schrieke-Horovitz, this ladder was apparently identical to Jacob’s.[[22]](#footnote-22) Alexander Altmann discussed the link between the *Mi’rāj* and Jacob’s ladder in an inspiring article written more than fifty years ago. At the beginning of the article, he discussed possible Jewish sources for Muhammad’s vision, including the ladder dream; as part of this discussion he also addressed the issue of Ṣufi sources.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Careful scrutiny of Abraham Maimuni’s writings shows that the similarity to the Prophet Muhammad’s wondrous ascent according to the first two interpretive traditions is merely external, and that these are basically two different models of religious experience. According to these traditions, the Prophet changed locations, and in order to experience a sublime spiritual experience, he required external forces (the angel Gabriel and a heavenly steed) that would take him to a place with special qualities – the Temple Mount, and further on to heaven, within which was also set a hierarchy of seven firmaments. In contrast, according to Maimuni, the experience is not dependent on an external, geographical location, but rather is dependent on the readiness of the one having the experience, and therefore the journey can take place anywhere. Maimuni’s is a clearly Ṣufi approach, in which the essence of the journey is one of inner consciousness, as Sarah Sviri clearly elucidated in her writing about progress on the ladder as a Ṣufi image:

Progress is not only horizontally coming closer to the objective, but rather also ascending to new high points, each of which symbolizes a change in consciousness and recognition of the wayfarer – a change through which, from every angle and from every level, the view is revealed in different and changing ways. From this perspective, there are those who compare the ascent on spiritual rungs to the Prophet Muhammad’s ascent to heaven (*mi῾rāj*) – an ascent that ends in his coming close to the Divine at a distance of only a bowshot.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Indeed there were some Ṣufis scholars who reported that they too had experienced heavenly ascents,[[25]](#footnote-25) and it is reasonable to hypothesize that by this they were referring to internal experiences (the third Muslim interpretive tradition), as Abraham Maimuni understood it.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Abraham Maimuni may also have absorbed abstract ideas about the ladder and a basic approach to it from his father, Maimonides who addressed this topic both in the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide for the Perplexed*, as already discussed by Alexander Altmann and Sara Klein-Braslavy.[[27]](#footnote-27) Following them, Esty Eisenmann showed that when that ladder is mentioned at the beginning of the *Guide* *for the Perplexed* as an example of an allegory whose details must be scrutinized, there are three meanings which are not mutually exclusive: the ladder indicates that study of wisdom must be gradual; the ladder reflects Maimonides’ consciousness as a teacher who approaches each student according to his abilities, talents and needs; the ladder reflects Maimonides’ consciousness regarding his historical role: he must advance humanity on the ladder of enlightened knowledge.[[28]](#footnote-28)

It thus becomes clear that unlike the educational and intellectual meaning that Maimonides found in the ladder dream, his son found in it a symbol of a total mystical experience. In this, he is distinct from his father and from Islamic traditions that emphasized the processive dimension, both of the prophet and of later scholars.

**2. The Revelation in Haran**

The Lord said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your fathers where you were born, and I will be with you” (Genesis 31:3).[[29]](#footnote-29)

Rabbi Abraham Maimuni commented here briefly:

The Lord said to Jacob… – This prophecy mentioned (here), the intent[[30]](#footnote-30) is that he will explain in detail it later on, after he retells it to his wives.[[31]](#footnote-31)

And a few verses further on is Jacob’s conversation with Rachel and Leah[[32]](#footnote-32) in the field:

An angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob!’ ‘Here,’ I answered. And he said, ‘Note well that all the he-goats which are mating with the flock are streaked, speckled and mottled; for I have noted all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Beth-el where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now, arise and leave this land and return to your native land’ (31:11-13).

On this passage, Abraham Maimuni wrote:

I am the God – A hint from the angel to the One who sent him, may He be glorified and exalted, and this is the purpose[[33]](#footnote-33) of the prophecy, and what He said previously ‘I will be with you’ (verse 3). He shortened here in the repetition [of the story],[[34]](#footnote-34) for it is understood in the statement ‘Now arise and leave’.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Rabbi Abraham Maimuni made several comments here that derive from a plain, literary reading of the biblical text, but he did not write anything about the nature of the revelation itself and certainly did not add a Ṣufi dimension. In his theoretical composition, *Kitāb Kifāyat al-῾Ābidīn: The Book of Sufficiency for Worshippers of the Lord*, Maimuni found in these verses an expression of Jacob’s ability to attain internal solitude in the field which led to attainment of God.[[36]](#footnote-36) His father, Maimonides, cited verse 11 as a characteristic example of the fact that a prophet hears an angel speaking to him.[[37]](#footnote-37) In the following chapter he enumerated eleven levels of prophecy, the sixth of which is a dream, and he even demonstrated this through a this particular verse.[[38]](#footnote-38) It appears therefore that the son’s areas of interest and focus on biblical verses were quite different from the father’s.

**3. Mahanaim**

When Jacob separated from Laban, it is stated:

Jacob went on his way, and angels of God encountered him. When he saw them, Jacob said, “This is God’s camp.” So he named that place Mahanaim (32:2-3).[[39]](#footnote-39)

On these verses Maimuni wrote:

It seems to me, even though I did not receive this from another, that this is a revelation,[[40]](#footnote-40) and that he saw in his vision the angels whose forms he had seen in the revelation at Beit El, and therefore he said, “This is God’s camp,” that is, this is what I saw in the past. According to my father and teacher, of blessed memory, in the “Guide,” this is a hint of the revelation that will be mentioned in the following portion in his struggle with the angel. It is difficult for me to accept this,[[41]](#footnote-41) especially because explicitly plural language is mentioned here[[42]](#footnote-42) – “angels of God,” and there singular language – “a man” [verse 24] and “your name” [verse 29]. The place of that revelation was called “Penuel” [verses 31-32] and this is called “Mahanaim.” […][[43]](#footnote-43) The double form of “Mahanaim” [means] his camp that is with him – his colleagues and students who are at the level of sons of the prophets – and the camp of the angels he saw in his vision, for when they were revealed to him he saw the angels as if they were inside his camp, even though his heart and his ecstasy[[44]](#footnote-44) are different[[45]](#footnote-45) from them.[[46]](#footnote-46)

Rabbi Abraham Maimuni identified the spiritual experience as the two camps’ common denominator. His last sentence reflects a profound awareness of the essential differences between Jacob and the angels. However, he holds that the decisive factor in shaping the religious experience is not reality and the world around a person, but rather one’s consciousness. Therefore these external differences do not affect the intensity of the spiritual experience of the person who is granted revelation; rather, this is dependent onone’s internal powers. Jacob, according to Maimuni, saw the angels’ camp as if it had been absorbed into his own camp. Here, Maimuni boldly and explicitly expressed one of the possibilities of religious experience, according to which the divine intermingles with the human. The other, more widespread alternative is that the human is consumed by the divine.

Maimuni proposed a position that was inherently different from that adopted by the Midrash and other biblical commentators (Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Nachmanides): The angels’ camp appeared within Jacob’s camp, and more precisely – within his internal world. This interpretation fits nicely with Maimuni’s explicit tendency toward mystical spiritual experiences inspired by Muslim Ṣufis.

**4. The Night Struggle**

Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob’s hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for dawn is breaking.” But he answered, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” Said the other, “What is your name?” He replied, “Jacob.” Said he, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human and have prevailed.” Jacob asked, “Pray tell me your name.” But he said, “You must not ask my name!” And he took leave of him there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, “I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved.” The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip (32:25-32).

Abraham Maimuni commented here at length and wrote:

Was left alone etc. – When [Jacob], peace be upon him, was left alone in external[[47]](#footnote-47) solitude and no servant[[48]](#footnote-48) and no property were left with him,[[49]](#footnote-49) he took off[[50]](#footnote-50) this external solitude and ‘put on’ his internal solitude and in the end attained prophetic attainment, [a revelation] that God[[51]](#footnote-51) revealed[[52]](#footnote-52) to him, [in which it was] as if a man was wrestling with him, and he was an angel, as is written of Gabriel, “the man Gabriel” [Daniel 9:21]. The meaning of “he wrestled” – he struggled with, derived from dust, that he became dusty,[[53]](#footnote-53) for from struggling, dust from the earth becomes attached to those who struggle. […] And do not wonder how [the sprain] happened in a situation that was not real but rather imagined, for a person sees in a dream as if he were walking [also possible: traveling] in the night and wakes up tired, and as if he were beaten and wakes up in pain, for the limbs are operated through the power of imagination, and if it is thus under the influence of a common dream, how much more so under the influence of a prophetic vision. Then he said, “Let me go…” – this shows, as the ancients of blessed memory explained, that Jacob, peace be upon him, remained [in his special spiritual state][[54]](#footnote-54) also after what happened to him with his thigh, and this was because of the force of Jacob, peace be upon him, in his wondrous vision, which announced to him his tremendous power when he is in an awakened state.[[55]](#footnote-55) The fact that he gave the reason [for the demand] “let me go” by saying “for the dawn is breaking” – revealed to him that he is not really a man but rather an angel who seemed like a man in the vision.[[56]](#footnote-56) […]

In Jacob’s asking about the name (of the angel) who speaks to him, there is a hint that he sought to know the divine secrets to which he had not previously been exposed. In his response “why do you ask this,” he hinted that the sought-after end result was impossible[[57]](#footnote-57) in the reality of bodily dependence,[[58]](#footnote-58) similar to “for man shall not see me and live” (Exodus 33:20). “And he blessed him there” – a hint of his ascension in secrets and knowledge,[[59]](#footnote-59) greater than the situation he had been in then.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Rabbi Abraham Maimuni began his commentary with a distinction between external and internal solitude ( *khalwa*כ'לוה), important concepts in the Ṣufi lexicon since they are necessary conditions for the mystical experience.[[61]](#footnote-61) Internal solitude is a significant process that leads to prophecy, as he explained also in his commentary to Exodus 19, in his description of how the Israelites were required to prepare for the event of revelation at Mount Sinai.[[62]](#footnote-62) Maimuni devoted a long section in his theoretical work *Kitāb Kifāyat al-῾Ābidīn: The Book of Sufficiency for Worshippers of the Lord* to these two kinds of solitude[[63]](#footnote-63) in chapter 23 that spans 11 leaves in the manuscript (a107-b117)[[64]](#footnote-64). At the beginning of the chapter, he distinguished between these two kinds of solitude and established that the purpose of external solitude is the attainment of internal solitude,

which is the last rung of the rungs of the ladder (leading) to the union (with God) – nay it constitutes (such) a union. Let us, then, say in reference thereto that internal solitude – and (by) it is (meant) the complete sincerity ( also possible: devotion)[[65]](#footnote-65) of the heart, to attain which David prayed, saying: "Create me a clean heart, O God,," and (which) Asaph attained, according to his statement: "My flesh and my heart faileth; but the rock of my heart and my portion is God" – consists of clearing the heart and the mind of everything except Him, exalted be He, and of their being filled with and inhabited by Him.[[66]](#footnote-66)

Here there is a long discussion in which Maimuni explained that the prophets used music in order to achieve internal solitude, described the nature of external and internal solitude and how the patriarchs, Moses and Joshua, Samuel, Elijah and Elisha strove for these states. He wrote, *inter alia*, that perfect solitude ('אלכ'לוה אלתאמה' *al-khalwa al-tama*) occurs outside of cities, in open spaces and in the wilderness, and therefore the patriarchs and Moses preferred the occupation of shepherding in order to spend their time mainly outside settled areas. This, explains Maimuni, is the reason why when Laban proposed to Jacob, “Name the wages due from me and I will pay you” (Genesis 30:28), Jacob did not choose silver and gold but rather preferred to return to shepherding despite the suffering involved – “Often scorching heat ravaged me by day and frost by night; and sleep fled from my eyes” (Ibid., 31:40).[[67]](#footnote-67) Maimuni also added that Jacob was the first to find solitude at home, in places of worship and in open spaces. He produced texts to prove this in sequential order, from the verse “Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents” (Ibid., 25:27), from the dream of the ladder and from his conversation with Leah and Rachel in the field before they fled from Haran (Ibid., 31: 4-15).[[68]](#footnote-68)

Further on, he discussed at length different expressions by David in which he yearned for internal solitude or testified to it, that is, he experienced a mystical experience. To sum up, he analyzed various experiences of this kind among the Tannaitic rabbis, first among them Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai. Previously, in chapter 18, which discusses faith[[69]](#footnote-69) ((אִתִּכַּאל*ittikal*),[[70]](#footnote-70) Maimuni noted that the meeting with the angel (sic!) was “*waḥy*”[[71]](#footnote-71) in “the vision of prophecy.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

In this context, Moshe Idel’s words are instructive. He believed that

We should see in the appearance of the first discussions about the virtue of solitude in Jewish texts from the Middle Ages a clear instance of external influence. This is clearly evident in the initial discussions of this subject in Rabbi Bahya Ibn Paquda’s *Duties of the Heart*, where the Sufi influence is prominent, and this phenomenon recurs in the group of pietists who were connected to Rabbi Abraham Maimuni.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Here Maimuni twice adopted the term vision (*ru῾ya*) to describe what Jacob experienced. The vision is different from a regular dream in that the dream takes place in one’s imagination , while prophetic vision is a true internal vision.[[74]](#footnote-74) It is therefore no wonder that Maimuni described it as miraculous ( `ajibi ע'גיב'), for the essence of prophecy is miraculous, in contrast to Maimonides, who does his best to describe prophecy as a natural, non-miraculous phenomenon.

The commentary concludes with this passage:

In Jacob’s asking about the name [of the angel] who speaks to him, there is a hint that he sought to know the divine secrets to which he had not previously been exposed. In his response “why do you ask this,” he hinted that the sought-after end result was impossible in the reality of bodily dependence, similar to “for man shall not see me and live” (Exodus 33:20). “And he blessed him there” – a hint of his ascension in secrets and knowledge, greater than the situation he had been in then.

The two key concepts here are divine secrets and knowledge, and there is a deep link between the two. I have shown elsewhere that Maimuni attributed at least three meanings to the word “secret.”[[75]](#footnote-75) From the context of his words here, it seems that he is speaking about hidden knowledge, at least part of which can be attained in the process of the Ṣufi’s development. When he returned to the land of Canaan, Jacob was at a more developed stage than at the time he fled to Haran. Therefore he “sought to know divine secrets to which he had not been previously exposed.” The night struggle is therefore more exalted than the dream of the ladder, not because of its content but rather because of Jacob’s more developed spiritual capabilities.

**5. On His Return to Canaan**

God said to Jacob: “Arise and go up to Bethel and remain there, and build an altar to the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.” (35:1)

In his commentary, Maimuni writes:

God said to Jacob – He revealed to him in a prophetic vision that he should make haste to fulfill his vow in his statement “and this stone” (Genesis 28:22).[[76]](#footnote-76)

Here the reading is clearly literary and there is no mention of Ṣufi dimensions.

**6. Confirmation of the Name Change**

God appeared again to Jacob on his arrival from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. God said to him, “You whose name is Jacob, you shall be called Jacob no more, but Israel shall be your name.” Thus He named him Israel. And God said to him, “I am El Shaddai. Be fertile and increase; a nation, yea an assembly of nations, shall descend from you. Kings shall issue from your loins. The land that I assigned to Abraham and Isaac I assign to you; and to your offspring to come will I assign the land.” God parted from him at the spot where He had spoken to him; and Jacob set up a pillar on the site where He had spoken to him, a pillar of stone, and he offered a libation on it and poured oil upon it. Jacob gave the site where God had spoken to him the name of Bethel (35:9-15).

And God appeared etc. – This prophecy [was] in a vision[[77]](#footnote-77) as noted above, and it came upon him in Bethel, the place of establishing the altar, as it becomes clear to me.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Maimuni diverges here from his usual method and adopts a Hebrew word “מראה – vision” to characterize the revelation. It seems to me this is to emphasize that this revelation, which is a kind of reflection of the ladder dream in its content, was also of high quality from Jacob’s perspective because it took place in a vision and not in his imagination.

**7. Before the Descent to Egypt**

God called to Israel in visions by night: “Jacob! Jacob!” He answered, “Here.” And He said, “I am God, the God of your father. Fear not to go down to Egypt, for I will make you there into a great nation. I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself will also bring you back; and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes” (46:2-4).[[79]](#footnote-79)

The statement “in visions” is a clarification that this prophecy was in a vision, not in a dream, but in a night vision, and as if it were[[80]](#footnote-80) of a status between what is spoken about as merely a “vision” and merely a “dream”.[[81]](#footnote-81)

Maimuni’s only note in this context is that this is not a dream but rather a prophetic vision, but the language is opaque for it is not clear what the word “as if it were” ('כאנהא' *ka-anaha* in the original) is meant to qualify. Maimonides also emphasized that this revelation was a prophecy which is different from a dream.[[82]](#footnote-82)

**8. Taking Leave of His Sons**

And Jacob called to his sons and said, “Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in the days to come. Assemble and hearken, O sons of Jacob; hearken to Israel your father. (49:1-2)

And Jacob called – The text opened[[83]](#footnote-83) here with the term “calling” because many instances of the expression calling are connected with rebukes. The expressions “come together” (verse 1) and “assemble” (verse 2) in order to speak with each one of them in the presence of them all, as exemplified by the statement “I proclaimed (Your) righteousness in a great congregation” (Psalm 40:10).[[84]](#footnote-84) The expression “is to befall you” (verse 1) – because the blessing that he will bless them with is in the holy spirit which enveloped him and emanated upon his heart that which he expressed with his tongue[[85]](#footnote-85) to each of them. This is therefore not a prayer that might possibly be accepted and come to pass[[86]](#footnote-86) or that might not be accepted and might be rejected,[[87]](#footnote-87) rather it is a matter that is necessary like all[[88]](#footnote-88) the prophetic messages which were in a situation of prophetic emanation in the holy spirit, even if they were not in the form of a vision[[89]](#footnote-89) of an angel and hearing speech in a vision or dream.[[90]](#footnote-90)

Rabbi Abraham Maimuni began his commentary on Jacob’s parting from his sons with three comments. First he made two stylistic notes that emphasize the plain meaning (*peshat*) dimension in his commentary. One comments on the opening word of Jacob’s speech and clarifies the link between form and content in the expressions of “calling” which are linked to rebukes, for Jacob’s words to his sons in the plain sense also contain rebukes, especially at the beginning of his statements to Reuven, Shimon and Levi. The second comment relates to the public nature of the event, expressed in at least two words, one in the first verse and one in the following verse. The third note discusses the genre of Jacob’s speech, and Maimuni is at pains to clarify that this was a prophetic occasion – though in appearance it was different from the usual form of such occasions – rather than a prayer or a wish.[[91]](#footnote-91)

In this vein he also interprets the verse that closes the occasion:

When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his people. (49:33)

He passed away[[92]](#footnote-92) from the end[[93]](#footnote-93) of the holy spirit upon this exalted occasion[[94]](#footnote-94) of the saints.[[95]](#footnote-95)

It seems that Maimuni wanted to emphasize that from quality prophecy (the purpose of the holy spirit, or secret wisdom) in his last moments, with his death Jacob passed into a status of saint, and if so, “his ancestors” here signifies not only common biological origins but rather primarily common spiritual attainment, for Maimuni also described Isaac as a great Ṣufi.[[96]](#footnote-96)

**Conclusions**

Rabbi Abraham Maimuni’s commentary on the eight biblical units discussed above shows that he took a consistent, two-fold approach: he saw in each of these incidents a personal spiritual attainment on Jacob’s part and from them all he drew a picture of Jacob as a mature Ṣufi.[[97]](#footnote-97) There is nothing surprising in this finding, for this was Maimuni’s way in his commentary, not only in this issue. This finding thus confirms and validates a recognized trend.

A few years ago, Nathan Hofer analyzed the popularity of Sufism in Egypt in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods on the basis of post-modernist theories and especially that of Homi Bhabha, and suggested that the flowering of Muslim Sufism in Egypt at the beginning of the 13th century was in large measure a result of political and social circumstances in other, less stable areas (Iran, Iraq, Spain and Morocco). The state had an interest in allowing public Ṣufi activity, and thus Sufism in all its varieties became widespread at this time in Egypt.[[98]](#footnote-98) In Hofer’s opinion, Jewish Sufism in Egypt during this same period was a ‘subaltern Sufism’ and was adopted for political and eschatological goals.[[99]](#footnote-99) Hofer is correct that Sufism must be examined in its social, institutional and political contexts;[[100]](#footnote-100) however, it takes a great deal of hubris to dare to characterize Maimuni’s Sufism without reading his writings, which the writer himself admitted he did not.[[101]](#footnote-101) The attempt to apply post-modern views based in social sciences to theoretical texts (of philosophy and commentary) is an awkward, ill-founded and hazardous undertaking that risks removing the writings entirely from their authors’ original contexts and intentions.

The examination of Maimuni’s commentary on Jacob’s visions shows the degree to which Maimuni had internalized the Ṣufi conceptual vocabulary and how much he saw the mystical experience as a personal and internal one,[[102]](#footnote-102) which was not dependent on defined social and political conditions and went far beyond them. The main innovation in Maimuni’s writings discussed here is that the center of gravity is found in the the individual’s soul (in this case Jacob) and quality of the experience is determined by the individual rather than by the content of the divine statement or its visual expression. Maimuni is consistent in his outlook and poses a great challenge to all who seek to investigate the nature of religious experience.

1. \* A shorter version of this paper was presented at the international conference for Studies Bible and Interpretation in honor of Prof. Uriel Simon which took place at Bar Ilan University, June 12-13, 2019, and at the 19th Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies, which took place in Antwerp, Belgium, July 1-4, 2019. I am grateful to Prof. Mordechai Akiva Friedman and Prof. Diana Lobel for reading a draft of this article; their comments assisted me in improving it.

 Reuven Margaliot, Abraham Maimuni, *Wars of the Lord*, Jerusalem 1953; *The Book of Sufficiency for Worshippers of the Lord*, Edited by Nissim Dana. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1989; *Chapters of Ethics and Qualities from the Great Book Called The Book of Sufficiency for Worshippers of the Lord [Kitāb Kifāyat al-῾Ābidīn]* composed in Arabic by Our Rabbi Avraham Maimuni of righteous blessed memory, translated to Hebrew by Yosef Dory, Jerusalem 1965; *The High Ways to Perfection* of Abraham Maimonides, Vol. 2, by Samuel Rosenblatt, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1938 (hereinafter Rosenblatt); Gershon D. Cohen, “The Soteriology of R. Abraham Maimuni”, *PAAJR* XXXV (1967), pp. 75-98; XXXVI (1968), pp. 33-56, reprinted in his *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures*, New York 1991, pp. 209-242; Paul B. Fenton, “The Post-Maimonidean Schools of Exegesis in the East: Abraham Maimonides, the Pietists, Tanhûm ha-Yerušalmi and the Yemenite School”, *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, I/2, Göttingen 2000, pp. 433-55; Idem, “Abraham Maimonides (1186-1237): Founding a Mystical Dynasty”, in: Moshe Idel and Mortimer Ostow (eds.), *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the 13th Century*, New Jersey 1998, pp. 127-154; Shlomo Dov Goitein, “Abraham Maimonides and his Pietist Circle”, Alexander Altmann (ed.), *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Cambridge, Mass. 1967, pp. 145-164; Idem, “Islamic and Jewish Mysticism”, *Jews and Arabs; Their Contacts through the Ages*, New York 1974, pp. 150-152; Many scholarly studies of his life history and halakhic works are found in articles by Mordechai Akiva Friedman. See his recent article “Criticism of the Pious – the criticism by the followers of Rabbi Abraham Maimuni of their colleagues,” in Yoram Erder, Elinoar Bareket and Meira Polliack [eds.], *Yad Moshe: Studies in the History of the Jews in Muslim Lands in memory of Moshe Gil* (*=Teuda* 29), Tel Aviv University, 2018, p. 253-285 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Commentary of Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam of blessed memory on Genesis and Exodus*, edition of Ephraim Yehuda Weisenberg, London 1958 (hereinafter Weisenberg) [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Nahem Ilan, “Hagar and Ishmael in the commentary of Abraham Maimuni and in Midrash ‘Meor HaAfela’: Two Positive Approaches toward Muslims,” In *Jewish Culture in the Eye of the Storm: Jubilee Volume in honor of Yosef Ahituv*, edited by Avi Sagi and Nahem Ilan, 308-320. Ein Tzurim: Hakibbutz Hameuḥad, 2002 [Hebrew]; Idem, “Theological Assumptions and Interpretive Principles: The Nature and Uniqueness of the Commentary of R. Abraham Maimuni on the Torah”. In *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an Presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai*, edited by Me'ir M. Bar-Asher, et al., 31-70. Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2007 (hereinafter Ilan, Assumptions) [Hebrew]; Idem, “Secrets and Their Meaning in R. Abraham Maimuni's Commentary on the Torah,” *Bein ῾Ever la῾Arav* 5 (2012), 76-93 (hereinafter Ilan, Secrets) [Hebrew]; Idem, “Aspects of Abraham Maimuni’s Attitude towards Christians in His Commentary on Genesis 36,” Miriam Lindgren Hjälm (Ed.), *Senses of Scriptures, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims* (*Biblia Arabica* V), Leiden 2017, pp. 252–279 (reprinted as: “Echoes of Rabbi Abraham Maimuni’s treatment of Christians in his Commentary on Genesis 36,” in Yoram Erder, Elinoar Bareket and Meira Polliack [eds], *Yad Moshe: Studies in the History of the Jews in Muslim Lands in memory of Moshe Gil*, (=*Teuda* 29), Tel Aviv University, 2018, p. 121-146. [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Diana Lipton, *Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 288, Sheffield Academic Press 1999 (hereinafter Lipton); Ruth Fiedler, *The Revelatory Dream in the Bible: Its Place in the History of Biblical Literature and the History of Israelite Belief*, Doctoral Dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1996 [Hebrew] (hereinafter Fiedler); Yaakov Rand, “The Dream – in the Book of Genesis,” *Sefer Hamichlalot: Offering for the Jubilee Year of the State of Israel*, edited by Dov Landau, Jerusalem, 1999, pp. 155-164 [Hebrew] (hereinafter Rand(. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As he did for other biblical characters. See: Nahem Ilan, “Between Mount Sinai and the Cleft in the Rock: Moses as a Perfect Ṣufi in the Commentary of R. Abraham Maimuni on the Torah.” In *Studies in Judeo-Arabic Culture: Proceedings of the Fourteenth Congress of the Society for the Study of Medieval Judeo-Arabic Culture*, edited by Yoram Erder et al., 133-153. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2014 (hereinafter Ilan, Moses as Ṣufi); Ilan, Assumptions (note 3 above), pp. 42-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Translations throughout the text are based on the JPS 1985 translation, with emendations when such are necessary for understanding Maimuni’s commentary. A detailed analysis of the structure of this literary unit and its meaning is found in Fiedler (note 4 above), pp. 152-188; Lipton (note 4 above), pp. 63-114, thoroughly analyzed the dream of the ladder through fascinating comparisons with other cultures in the region. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Literally: arrived at, and thus also in the rest of this passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *A Dictionary of Judeo-Arabic based on India Book Letters and other Texts from the Geniza and Additional Sources*. Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute and the Rabbi David Moshe and Amalia Rosen Foundation, 2016 (hereinafter Friedman, *Dictionary*), p. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Fiedler (note 4 above), pp. 26-27, distinguished etymologically between dream and concepts from the roots resh-aleph-heh (רא"ה) and ḥet-zayin-heh (חז"ה). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In the original: שאהד, and it is possible that this word expresses the experiential dimension more clearly – see Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 882. I thank Professor Friedman for calling my attention to this possibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Literally: intermediate link ]in a chain] ; see Joshua Blau, *Dictionary of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic Texts*. Jerusalem: The Academy for Hebrew Language, 2006 (hereinafter Blau), p. 762; Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 199, translated: intermediary. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Weisenberg (note 2 above). In the original:

והנה סלם וג' והנה מלאכי וג' – מן וצל לנהאיה אלסלם וצל למקאמה תע' ומן ראי אלסלם מן אולה לאכ'רה ושאהד אלמלאכים אלנאזלין אלי אלארץ' למכ'אטבה אלאנביא אלתי הי דארהם וטאלעין לאעלי אלסלם אלד'י הו מחלהם ושאהד מן אספל אלסלם נהאיתה פקד וצל וצולא בחסבה ליס כוצול מן שאהד מן בעד כמא קאל מרחוק יוי נראה לי ואוחי אליה וסמע אלכטאב בואסטה אלמלאכים אלנאזלין פי אלסלם אלד'ין הם וסאיט בינה ובין מן ידרך מן פי אעלי אלסלם אלמתעאלי ען אלג'סמאניה אלמנזה אלשבהיה (p. 85). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Yitzhak (Itzik) Peleg, “What was the ‘sullam’ that Jacob saw in his dream?” *Annual for Bible Research in the Ancient East* 14 (2004) pp. 7-26 [Hebrew]; Yitzhak (Itzik) Peleg, "What Do Jacob's Ladder, the Tower of Babel, and the Babylonian Ziggurat Have in Common?", J. Harold Ellens (Ed.), *Bethsaida in Archaeology, History and Ancient Culture; A Festschrift in Honor of John T. Greene*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, pp. 330-359. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Menaḥem-Zevi Kaddari, *A Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew*, Bar-Ilan, Ramat Gan, 2006, p. 757. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Rand (note 4 above), p. 159, noted that Jacob perceived the dream as a prophetic dream. On the status of dreams among Ṣufis, see Sarah Sviri, *The Sufis*, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press and Mapa Press 2008 (hereinafter Sviri), pp. 502-516. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. I think "apprehends" would be incorrect for *yudrik* here; compare his use of *idrak* in the *Kifaya*, p. 382, top paragraph. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. R. Avraham Maimuni also wrote words to this effect in his theoretical work – see Rosenblatt (note 1 above), p. 392 (original), p. 393 (English translation). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See for example: “And if their turning away is distressful for thee, why, if thou canst seek out a hole in the earth, or a ladder in heaven, to bring them some sign” (Cattle Sura [6:35], Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran interpreted*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, pp, 152-153); “Or have they a ladder whereon they listen” (The Mount Sura [52:38], p. 242). Schrieke-Horovitz (following note, p. 98) erroneously notes this in Sura 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Bertram Schrieke-[Josef Horovitz], ‟Mi‛rādj”, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*2, Vol. 7, Brill, Leiden– New York 1993, pp. 97-100 (hereinafter Schrieke-Horovitz). The subtitle of their entry is ‟In Islamic exegesis and in the popular and mystical tradition of the Arab world.” The following section entitled ‟In Arabic literature” is authored by Jamel Eddine Bencheikh (hereinafter Bencheikh), pp. 100-103. See also Michael Sells, ‟Ascension”, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʼān*, Vol. 1, Brill, Leiden–Boston–Köln 2001, pp. 176-181 (hereinafter Sells, Ascension). Sells’ precise analysis focuses on different verses in the Quran, in accordance with the nature of the work in which his study is published. He made no comment whatsoever regarding the typological link and possibly also literary links to Jacob’s dream. At the end of the entry he mentions in one sentence a possible link to *merkavah* literature. See also Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, New York, Paulist Press 1996 (hereinafter Sells, Mysticism), pp. 47-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Schrieke-Horovitz (note 18 above), pp. 97-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Sells, Ascension (note 18 above), p. 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. P. 99, and there he refers to the traditional collections of Ibn Hishām, Al-Tabari and Ibn Sa’d. See also سعاد الحكيم, المعجم الصوفي: الحكمة في حدود الكلمة, بيروت 1987, pp. 571-579 (hereinafter Al-Ḥakīm). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Alexander Altmann, “The Ladder of Ascension”, *Studies in Mysticism and Religion, Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on His Seventieth Birthday*, Edited by Ephraim Elimelech Urbach, Raphael Joseph Zvi Werblowsky, Chaim Wirszubski, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967, pp. 1-32 (hereinafter Altmann). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Sviri (note 15 above), p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Abu Yazid Al-Bistāmi (d. 234/848 or 261/875), as documented in the book of Abu Sa῾d al-Malik al-Khargūshi (d. 407/1016) (Sviri, note 15 above), pp. 393-394; “The night people,” in the words of Ibn ‘Arabi (560/1165–638/1240; ibid p. 497); Abu al-Ḥasan Ali Ibn Ga῾far (d. 425/1033) as documented by Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 618/1221; ibid, p. 500-501). On Al-Bistāmi’s experiences see also Sells, Mysticism (note 18 above), pp. 212-250. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Compare also Alexander Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism*, Princeton 2017 (hereinafter Knysh, New History), p. 133, where he notes that in the unforgettable allegory of Bonaventure, the physical world is identified with Jacob’s ladder, which the aspiring contemplative tries to climb. On page 295, note 98, he refers to: Gavin Flood, *The Truth Within: A History of Inwardness in Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism*, Oxford 2013, pp. 74, 76-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed*, translated from the Arabic with notes, appendices and keys, Michael Schwartz, edited by David Zory, Tel Aviv 2003 (Hebrew) (hereinafter Schwartz, Guide), 2:10 (pp. 288-289), 2:45 (p. 412). See further: Altmann (note 22 above); Sara Klein-Braslavy, “Maimonides’ interpretation of Jacob’s ladder dream,” *Bar-Ilan* 22-23 (1988), pp. 329-349 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Esty Eisenmann, “A ladder was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky: Jacob’s dream and Maimonides’ self-image,” *Akdamut* 6 (1999) (Hebrew), pp. 47-58, and especially the conclusion on the last page. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. A literary analysis of this unit can be found in Fiedler (note 4 above), pp. 135-152; Lipton (note 4 above), pp. 115-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Weisenberg (note 2 above), p. 98, added ‘(the main point only),’ and I do not know what he relied on or what his consideration was. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. In the original, “"ויאמר יוי אל יעקב וג' – הד'ה אלנבוה אלמד'כורה אלגרץ' סוף יפצלהא בעד ד'לך בעד אעאדתהא עלי נסאה (p. 99). Weisenberg, p. 98, translated: "After he (Jacob) retold it to his wives", and he was not precise in his translation; See Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 623. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. In this order! See verses 4, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. May be also: high point, aim, goal. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Even here Weisenberg translated (note 2 above), p. 98, ‘in the return (of the dream)’; see my reservations in note 29 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. In the original: אנכי האל – אשארה מן אלמלאך למרסלה ג'ל ועלא והד'א הו נהאיה אלנבוה וקולה פי מא תקדם ואהיה עמך אכ'תצרה הנא פי אלאעאדה אד' והו מפהום מן קולה עתה קום צא (p. 99). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Rosenblatt (note 1 above), p. 392 (original), 393 (translation to English). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *Guide for the Perplexed*, Schwartz (note 26 above), 2:44, pp. 407-408. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., 2:45, p. 413. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Fiedler (note 4 above), pp. 209-252, saw in the stories of Mahanaim and Penuel a mixture of two ancient traditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See note 47 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Weisenberg, p. 104, translated ‘to say this’ and was not precise – see Blau (note 11 above), p. 569, who noted the meaning ‘held an opinion, believed in it,” which is better suited to the context here, and I have translated accordingly. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Blau (note 11 above), p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. I left out the sentence that appears here because it is not important in the context in which I am discussing Maimuni’s writing. See further Weisenberg’s fundamental reservations to this sentence and his correct opinion that the sentence was not written by Maimuni (pp. 105-106, note 11). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Blau (note 11 above), pp. 499-500; Weisenberg, p. 106, translated separate, and his translation is possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. In the original: יבדו לי ואן לם אנקלה ען גירי אן ד'לך וחי ואנה ראי פי וחיה אלמלאכים אלד'י[ן] כאן ראי צורהם פי וחיה פי בית אל פקאל מחנה אלהים זה יעני הד'א הו אלד'י ראיתה פי מא תקדם. ולאבא מרי ז'ל' פי אלדלאלה אן ד'לך אשארה ללוחי אלד'י סיד'כרה פי פרשת וישלח פי מצארעתה אלמלאך והד'א יעסר עלי אלקול בה לא סימא בכונה בין הנא ג'מע מלאכי אלהים ות'ם פראד איש ושמך וסמי מוצ'ע ד'אך אלוחי פנואל וסמי הד'א מחנים [...] ואלתת'ניה פי מחנים ען עסכרה אלד'י מעה מן אצחאבה ותאבעיה אלד'ין הם פי דרג'ה בני הנביאים וען עסכר אלמלאיכה אלד'י ראי [פי] וחיה לאנה ענד מא אוחי אליה וראי אלמלאכים כאנהם פי וסט עסכרה ואן כאן קלבה וחאלה מפארק[א] להם (pp. 105-107). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Weisenberg (note 11 above), p. 108, translated “corporeal,” but see Blau (note 9 above), p. 419, and he even noted that it is the opposite of “באטנה”. I discuss these two modifiers immediately below. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Also possible: accompaniment. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Weisenberg (note 2 above), p. 108, translated twice in plural form “servants and possessions” and was not precise. Both from the perspective of the Arabic and because of the context it is better to translate in the singular, and I translated thus. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See Reinhart Pieter Anne Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionaires arabes*, I-II, Leiden 1927, p. 676, where he notes that the root “סלך” has a mystical meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See note 8 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Weisenberg, ibid., translated “that seemed,” however the main point here is not the imagination but rather the revelation. Maimonides here also adopted language *waḥy* (revelation) to describe what Jacob experienced – see *the Guide*, Schwartz (note 26 above), 2:42, p. 404. On “=*waḥy* in Maimonides’ approach, see Avraham Nuriel, *Concealed and Revealed in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 2000 [Hebrew], pp. 147-150. His conclusion is that *waḥy* is the revelation itself, whose content is direct speech – with no visual mediation, and that “*nubuwwa* (prophecy) includes the role of the prophet as a leader (p. 149). And further on, “The prophecy of all the prophets, except Moses, must be based on *waḥy* and if it is not so, it is false prophecy; in contrast, the prophecy of Moses did not need to be based on *waḥy*, and it is still true prophecy” (p. 150). A detailed discussion of the different aspects of the *waḥy* in the Quran and in Ṣufi thought is found in Al-Ḥakīm (note 21 above), p. 1182-1190. The concept is not discussed in *Kitāb al-Ta’rifāt* of Jurjāni (below note 59). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Weisenberg, ibid., translated “the fine dirt,” and this is a possible translation. However, “גבאר” connotes actual dust or powder – see Blau (note 11 above), p. 474; Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Cambridge 1984, p. 2224 (hereinafter Lane). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Literally: cleaved to his cleaving, as Weisenberg (note 2 above) translated, p. 108. My translation here is inspired by Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 20 above), pp. 446-447. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. See the text marked with note 42 above and the note itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. In the original: ויותר וג' – למא כ'לא עליה אלסלאם בנפסה כ'לוה ט'אהרה ולא יבק מעה תבע ולא נשב סלך פי תלך אלכ'לוה אלט'אהרה בכ'לוה באטנה ווצל פי אכ'רהא וצולא נבויא אוחי פיה אליה כאן איש יאבק עמו והו מלאך כמא קיל פי גבריאל והאיש גבריאל ושרח ויאבק – ותצארע משתק מן אבק אלד'י הו אלגבאר לכון אלמתצארעון יטלע מן תצארעהמא גבאר אלארץ' אליהמא. [...] ולא תסתגרב כיף יג'רי פי חאל ליסת וג'ודיה בל תכ'יליה ד'לך לאן אלאנסאן ירי פי מנאמה כאנה סרי פינתבה תעבאן וכאנה צ'רב פינתבה מוג'וע לאן אלאעצ'א תנפעל ען אלקוה אלוהמיה ואד'א כאן ד'לך פי תאת'יר אלמנאם אלמעתאד פמא עסאה יכון פי תאת'יר רויה נבויה. ויאמר שלחני וג' הד'א ידל כמא בין אלמתקדמון ז'ל' אן יעקב ע'ה' לזם מלאזמתה ולו בעד מא ערץ' לה פי כף ירכו והד'א מן תאייד יעקב ע'ה' פי רויאה אלעג'יב אלמבשר לה בתאיידה אלעט'ים פי חאל יקט'תה. ותעלילה שלחני בקולה כי עלה השחר כשף לה באנה ליס איש חקיקה בל מלאך תשכל פי צורה איש פי אלרויה (עמ' קט).

His father wrote something similar; see Schwartz, *Guide* (note 26 above), 2:42, p. 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 619. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Connection or cleaving are other possible translations. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. In the original, תעריפאת. On this concept, see Saeed Sheikh, *A Dictionary of Muslim Philosophy*, Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore 1981, p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. In the original: ופי שאלת יעקב ען שם [אלמלאך] אלמכ'אטב לה אשארה אלי אלתמאסה אסרארא רבאניה לם יסבק להא ופי ג'ואבה בלמה זה תשאל אשארה אלי [אן] אלגאיה אלמלתמסה תתעד'ר מע וג'וד אלתעלק אלגסמאני שביה בכי [לא] יראני האדם וחי ופי ויברך אתו שם אשארה אלי תרקיה זיאדה עלי מא כאן עליה חיניד' מן אסראר ותעריפאת (p. 111). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See Al-Ḥakīm (note 21 above), pp. 433-437; Knysh, *New History* (note 16 above), p. 161; رفيق العجم، موسوعة مصطلحات التصوف الإسلامي، بيروت 1999, pp. 331-334; علي بن محمد الشريف الجرجاني، كتاب التعريفات، تحقيق عبد المنعم الحفني،, Cairo 1999, p. 113 (hereinafter al-Jurjāni). Solitude is also a necessary condition for prophecy, and aside from the meaning of separation from society it has another meaning of spiritual or intellectual concentration. On this, see: Moshe Idel, “Solitude as concentration in ecstatic kabbalah and its incarnations, *Da'at* 14 (1995), pp. 35-82 (hereinafter Idel, Solitude as concentration in kabbalah); idem, “Solitude as ‘concentration’ in Jewish philosophy,” *Jubilee Volume in honor of Shlomo Pines at 80*, A (=Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 7), Jerusalem 1998, pp. 39-60; Gitit Holtzman, “Solitude, enlightenment and devekut in the thought of R. Moshe Narboni,” *Kabbalah* 7 (2002), pp. 111-173. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. See Ilan, *Moses as Ṣufi* (note 4 above), pp. 134-136. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Rosenblatt (note 1 above), p. 383, translated the chapter title “A Chapter on Solitude” in the singular, but in the original, p. 382, the word is in the plural form, 'פצל פי אלכ'לואת' , that is, a chapter on the topic of solitudes. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Oxford-Bodleian Library MS Hunt. 439 (= Catalogue Neubauer Oxford England 1276=OX Uri 336). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. See Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 417. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Rosenblatt (see note 1 above), English translation, pp. 383-385. He translates here as “union” the word I have translated as “attainment.” In the original: אכ'ר דרג'ה מן דרג' סלם אלוצול, בל הי וצול. פלנקל פי ד'לך אן אלכ'לוה אלבאטנה והי אלאכ'לאץ אלתאם אלקלבי אלד'י דעא דוד בחצולה לה ,קאילא] לב טהור ברא לי אלהים וחצל לאסף פי קולה כלה שארי ולבבי צור לבבי וחלקי אלהים הי כ'לו אלקלב ואללפכר ממא סואה תע' ואמתלאוה ותעמרה בה' (Ibid., pp. 382-384). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Rosenblatt (see note 1), pp. 386-390 (original), 387-391 (translation). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ibid., p. 392 (original), 392 (translation). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Or: trust, reliance. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. On this concept, see note 50 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Thus the original in Arabic; Rosenblatt (note 1 above), p. 98 (original), p. 99 (translation). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Idel, Solitude as concentration in kabbalah (Note 61 above), p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Rav Saadya Gaon, who is not suspected of Ṣufi tendencies, distinguished between a dream and a prophetic vision in his translation of Genesis 37. In every instance of treatment of Joseph the dreamer (verses 5, 7, 9 [twice], 10 [in Jacob’s speech]), Saadya adopted the term 'רֻוְٔיַא', but when expressing the way the brothers treated the dreams, he adopted the term “חֻלְם” (verses 8, 19 [twice]). The truthfulness of the vision is also expressed in the two ways that Knysh translated the word 'רֻאְיַה': veridical vision; insight (*New History* [note 25 above], p. 384), an approach already expressed in the writings of Ibn Barrajan (ibid., p. 85), Ibn Al-῾Arabi (ibid., p. 146-147) and Ibn Khaldūn (ibid., p. 155) and echoed in the writings of Sheikh Hishām Kabāni, among the leaders of the Ḥakāni Ṣufi order in Michigan at the end of the 20th century (ibid., p. 110). See also: Al-Ḥakīm (note 16 above) in the entry مراة pp. 499-500; Al-Jurjāni (note 59 above), p. 123, Sells, *Mysticism* (note 18 above), p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. See Ilan, *Secrets* (note 3 above). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. In the original: ויאמר אלהים אל יעקב – אוחי אליה אן יעג'ל בתת'בית נדרה פי קולה והאבן הזאת וג'... (p. 119). [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Here and in the subsequent revelation Maimuni used the Hebrew word. See further note 48 above and the discussion directly following. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. In the original: וירא אלהים אל יעקב וג' – הד'ה אלנבוה במראה כמא קדמנא וחלת עליה פי בית אל את'ר אקאמה אלמזבח פי מא יט'הר לי... (p. 121), and see note 36 there. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. A literary analysis of this unit is found in Fielder (note 4 above), pp. 188-203. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Weisenberg, p. 177, translated “it” and if so, the word refers to “vision”, but this seems to me not precise enough, and the word refers to prophecy. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. #  In the original: קולה במראות תבין לאן הד'ה אלנבוה במראה לא בחלום לכן אלמראה בלילה וכאנהא מרתבה בין מא יקאל פיה מראה מטלקא וחלום מטלקא (p. 177)/ Weisenberg translated מטלקא as mere (סתם), however I did not find any testimony in support of this meaning. Prof. Mordechai Akiva Friedman informed me that the word is used in this sense by Rabbi Yosef ben Yehuda ben Yaakov Ibn Aknin, *Hitgalut ha-sodot ṿe-hofaʻat ha-meʼorot : perush Shir ha-Shirim,* translated [into Hebrew] and edited by Avraham Shlomo Halkin, Jerusalem, Mekitse Nirdamim, 1964, p. 334: 'אדא אזוג'הא מטלקא ולא ישתרט עליהא שי' (which Halkin translated, p. 335: when he bears those who are completely carried…) p. 336: ‘Just as there is written a quantity that is merely carried,’ and from there is apparently the proof of the meaning of ‘merely’. As well as “completely,” it is possible to translate this word in this context here also as “generally,” and the difference between these two suggested translations is minor.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. *Guide*, Schwartz (note 26 above), 2:41 (p. 402), 2:45 (p. 412). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. See Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Rav Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon wrote something similar in his commentary ad loc. Weisenberg hints at this on p, 194, note 2; compare: Nahem Ilan, “Come Together, Assemble and Hearken,” *Shabbat Shalom* 783 (Parshat Vayehi 2012), pp. 2-3 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Can also be translated: explicitly expressed, see Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 457 at the bottom. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Literally: reality would suit it. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Also possible: would be refused. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Weisenberg translated “the rest of” (שאר), but see Blau (note 11 above), p. 283; and the important addition in Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 555. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Also possible: dream. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. In the original: ויקרא יעקב – [אבתדאה הנא בלפט'ה אלקריאה לאן כת'יר מן אלפאט' אלקריאה יכ'תץ באלתוכחות וקולה האספו הקבצו חתי יכ'אטב כל ואחד מנהם פי אג'תמאע כלהם מת'ל קולה בשרתי צדק בקהל רב] וקולה אשר יקרא אתכם לאן אלברכה אלתי יבארכהם בהא ברוח הקדש [אלתי] לאבסתה ואפאצ'ת עלי קלבה מא עבר בהא לסאנה לכל מנהם פליס הו דעא מחתמל אן יג'אב ויטאבקה אלוג'וד או לא יג'אב ויכ'יב בל הו אמר לא בד מן כונה כסאיר אלאכ'באראת אלנבויה אד' כאן פי חאל פיץ' נבוי ברוח הקדש ואן לם יכון בצורה רויה מלאך וסמאע כ'טאב במראה או בחלום (p. 195). [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. See Mordecai Akiva Friedman’s article, "Rabbi Avraham ben Maimonides and Al-Qirqisani," *Peʽamim* 154-155 (2011), pp. 71-103, and especially p. 72 note 2 and p. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Also possible: passed. I preferred to open with “passed away” because this word is in place of “breathed his last.” See further Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 543. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Weisenberg, p. 216, at the top of the page, translated “terminus” (מסוף), and this is correct from a literal point of view, however the meaning of the expression as a whole is not clearly understood. Blau (note 11 above), p. 720, suggested with doubt the meaning of “wisdom” in the context of a secret, and Friedman also made a note about this, in the meaning of purpose, in his Dictionary (note 8 above), p. 500. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Weisenberg, p. 216 at the top of the page, translated מעונת, and it seems to me he was not precise; see Blau (note 11 above), p. 142; Friedman, *Dictionary* (note 8 above), p. 277 at the bottom, and he placed a question mark after the entry to indicate doubt. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. In the original: ואנתקל מן נהאיה רוח הקדש אלי מחל אלקדושים, (p. 217). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. See above, in the body of the text, between note 64 and note 65; Ilan, *Assumptions* (note 3 above), pp. 42-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. It is interesting that a Muslim scholar saw Jacob as a mature Ṣufi, in contrast to Abraham who was perceived as a Ṣufi in training. See Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, Leiden,Boston and Köln 2000, p. 306, where he notes, apparently following Al-Hujwīri, that “it was said that Jacob was a master of *waq*t while Abraham was a master of *ḥal* (see note 42 above). Similarly, *ḥal* relates to the object of the search, *murād*, and *waqt* is defined by the spiritual maturity and wholeness of the seeker, *murīd*. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Nathan Hofer, *The Popularization of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173-1325*, Edinburgh University Press 2015, pp. 250–252. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Ibid., p. 253 [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Ibid., p. 255, the concluding sentence of his book. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Ibid., p. 252, at the bottom of the page. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. I have already shown how he outlined the figure of Moses as a perfect Ṣufi – see Ilan, Moses as Ṣufi (note 5 above). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)