

## GUIDE 1:43 ANGEL WINGS / CONCEALMENT

By turning to the divine science, the student brings himself under the wings of divine providence.

Providence is the subject of *Maaseh Merkava*, one of the concealed subjects of Jewish lore. Its key is the relationship between God, man and the mediators between them. These mediating presences are angels, *malakhim*.

### OVERVIEW

Any incorporeal causative force apart from God is an angel. That definition includes the Platonic forms and the Aristotelian formal causes. They are the *pamalia* that God “consults” before acting (Guide 2:6, Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 38b). This definition of angel includes the “separate intellects,” *sikhlim ha-nivdalim*, the minds moving the cosmic spheres. It also includes all natural forces. Nature is the divine stamp, *teva*, which God places on His creation. These natural forces are all “good,” that is, they are fit for their intended purposes and *permanent*. The active intellect is a very special angel, the “Prince of the world,” *sar ha-olam* (Guide 2:6). The prophets meet this force in their visions. It actualizes potentials and in-forms matter. It is our true form. We seek to achieve the active intellect in our capacity as potential intellects.

The *wing* biblically associated with angels serves several metaphorical functions, concealed by our chapter but revealed in Guide 1:49. The wing represents praise and immediateness. Men dream of flight, and therefore desire wings: such positive, desired attributes become metaphors of *praise*. We praise angels by attributing wings to them. Man sometimes praises God with positive corporeal attributes. Maimonides gives limited approval to those homonyms that express our praise. Winged flight is a positive corporeal quality metaphorically projected on incorporeal angels in praise of their *speed* (Guide 1:49). What we really praise is their *immediateness*. The angels cause effects immediately, i.e., non-temporally and without any mediating entity. We may not praise God with “wings” because they are too material for His praise. However, since the angelic forces are beneath Him, we may attribute wings to them.

The wing also symbolizes *concealment*. The angelic forces are the unobservable truth concealed behind all appearance. Because of their concealment, the student needs great training to perceive them. Winged beings flit in and out of sight. Similarly, the angelic forces never completely reveal themselves to consciousness. We are too corporeal to grasp the true nature of these incorporeal forces. Our perception is too weak to take in their great light. The prophets sometimes briefly recognize these forces. Nonetheless, they immediately conceal them beneath wings of metaphor and verbal devices, like anagrams and puns (On all of this: Guide 1:49, 2:5, 2:6, and 2:29, and the Ibn Janāḥ reference in our chapter). It is necessary to conceal the apparent contradictions of divine science from those ill prepared to resolve them.

Maimonides wants us to meditate on the metaphorical extension of *wing* to *garment*, then to the furthestmost concealed *ends* of the world, subsequently to *concealment* itself, and, ultimately, to the concealed acts of divine providence in the world.

He employs several strategies of concealment in this chapter, particularly the concealment of *Targum*'s interpretation of several of his proof-texts. *Targum* consistently interprets “wing” as a symbol of providence in the mediating form of the Shekhina, the Temple, or mystical matrimony. Maimonides takes two proof-texts from Isaiah, apparently chosen at random, to illustrate his Definitions 3 and 4. However, in my essay below, “Isaiah’s Two Secrets,” I show that *Targum* grasped these two prophecies as a secret prognostication of doom for the Assyrian host. The well prepared student of divine science would know this. He would recognize that the Jews, by aligning their will with God’s will in prayer, receive this special miraculous providence.

This is a lexical chapter. See the explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

### **KANAF (WING) Homonym**

1. The wing of a flying creature.
2. The corners of garments, especially garments to which *tzitzit* are attached.
3. The farthest ends of the inhabited part of the earth.
4. Concealment.

#### Instance of Definition 1, *The wing of a flying creature*, Contextualized:

“Lest ye corrupt [yourselves], and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female. The likeness of any beast that [is] on the earth, the *likeness* of any winged (*kanaf*) fowl that flieth in the air... And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, [even] all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.”  
(Deuteronomy 4:16-17, 19)

This is not the first use of *kanaf* in the Torah. That would be Genesis 1:21, which tells of the creation of birds. Maimonides has no interest in birds as birds. The concern in this passage is the deification of intermediary powers. Maimonides quotes “(the likeness of) any winged fowl” not for the fowl but for the *likeness: tavnit*. The root letters of *tavnit* connote construction and imagination. The imagination builds structures of false belief. It causes us to trust images thought to channel power. In Mishneh Torah, *Avoda Zara* 1:1, he explains that the idolators did not really worship the idols of birds or stars. These were just channels by which they imagined they could influence the incorporeal powers serving God. They honored the Master by praising His servants. This is precisely the false consciousness that is *bad*, i.e., unfit. The fit or proper use of consciousness is its devotion to the true divine cause of all things. In Guide 2:5, he explains that:

“The opinion of Aristotle, that the spheres are capable of comprehension and conception, is in accordance with the words of our prophets and our theologians or Sages. The philosophers further agree that this world below is governed by influences emanating from the spheres, and that the latter comprehend and have knowledge of the things which they influence. This theory is also met with in Scripture: comp. ‘The stars, even all the host of heaven which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations’ (4:19), that is to say, the stars, which God appointed to be the means of governing His creatures, *are not the objects of man’s worship*. It has therefore been stated clearly: ‘And to rule over the day and over the night’ (Genesis 1:18). The term ‘ruling’ here refers to the power which the spheres possess of governing the earth, in addition to the property of giving light and darkness. The latter property is the direct cause of genesis and destruction; it is described in the words, ‘And to divide the light from the darkness’ (*ibid.*). It is impossible to assume that those who rule a thing are ignorant of that very thing which they rule, if we take ‘to rule’ in its proper sense.”

In other words, the incorporeal causative powers are real rulers, but God nonetheless forbids our worship of any intermediary.

#### Instance of Definition 2, *The corners of garments*, Contextualized:

“Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four *quarters (kanfot)* of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest [thyself].” (Deuteronomy 22:12)

This particular iteration of the law of *tzitzit* interests commentators because it comes after the law of *sha’atnez*, which is the prohibition of linsey-woolsey garb. Maimonides considers *sha’atnez* a prohibition stemming from the historical idolatry of the pagans (Guide 3:35). He explains many otherwise inexplicable laws of the Torah this way. His special theory of inexplicable laws (*khukim*) holds that they prohibit ancient idolatrous practices. This links the prior proof-text prohibiting idolatry. He only mentions *tzitzit* specifically in Guide 3:32, the important

chapter about the continuing role of sacrifice in Jewish law. Sacrifice was an idolatrous practice employing physical objects. Judaism retained it in a very restricted way so that we can come to intellectual worship. *Tzitzit* are also physical objects retained for meditation, although they do not stem from idolatry. He contrasts *tzitzit* with animal sacrifices, in Guide 3:32:

“All these restrictions served to limit this (sacrificial) kind of worship, and keep it within those bounds within which God did not think it necessary to abolish sacrificial service altogether. *But* prayer and supplication can be offered everywhere and by every person. The *same* is the case with the commandment of *zizit* (Num. 15:38); *mezuzah* (Deut. 4:9; 9:20); *tefillin* (Exod. 13:9, 16); and similar kinds of divine service.”

These latter are entirely kosher and unrestricted. Talmud, *Khullin* 89a explains the meditational use of *tzitzit*: its *blue* thread causes us to meditate on the *blue* sky, and from thence ultimately to the *sapphire* throne of glory, the seat of the *merkava*. Similarly, *kanaf*, wing, extends metaphorically to the four corners of a *tzitzit*-bearing garment, from thence to the *garment* itself, and ultimately to what the garment *conceals*. Maimonides says that most of the meanings of *kanaf* are metaphorical extensions, suggesting that metaphorical extension is the means of concealing topics of divine science. The wing as *garment* also recalls the Midrash, *Pirke d'R. Eliezer* 3, “He covereth Himself with light as a garment, He stretches the heavens like a curtain,” quoted in Guide 2:27, where Maimonides relates this garment to the sapphire throne and to unformed hyllic matter.

#### Instances of Definition 3, *Ends of the earth*, Contextualized:

“Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; [and] caused the dayspring to know his place; that it might take hold of the *ends* (*b'kanfot*) of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it?” (Job 38:12-13)

This is the metaphorical extension of wing/corner/garment to the terrestrial “garment.” God asks Job if he could grasp the “wings” of the earth and shake as God did, when He drowned the wicked in Noah’s flood. Job learns from this that God’s providential intervention in history continues, which Job’s Aristotelianism had denied.

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Maimonides uses the next two parallel Isaiah proof-texts (despite that they are made to stand for two different definitions of *kanaf*), and the first Ruth proof-text, in a concealing fashion. He does this by emphasizing the *pshat*, surface meaning, at the expense of the real meaning. He thus suits his means to his end. Since he wants us to use *kanaf* to mean “conceal,” he employs a methodology of concealment. In these cases, the *pshat* is different from the explanation given by the Aramaic *Targum* to these passages. He is unquestionably aware of this difference since, in a parallel case, he commends the *Targum*’s interpretation (Guide 2:29, and, see essay below, “Isaiah’s Two Secrets”). In each case, the concealed *Targum* is about the mystical marriage of the Jews and the Shekhina in the holy Temple. They are thus really concealing the subject of providence, the *Maaseh Merkava*.

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“From the *uttermost part* (wing: *mi'knaf*) of the earth have we heard songs, [even] glory to the righteous. But I said, *My leanness, my leanness, (razi li razi li)* woe unto me! The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.” (Isaiah 24:16)

Maimonides wants the un-inquiring to take this quote-shard on its face this as a song of universal praise to God, heard from the farthest corners of the inhabited earth. But see essay below, “Isaiah’s Two Secrets.”

#### Instances of Definition 4, *Concealment*, Contextualized:

“And [though] the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, *yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner* (lit.: be winged) any more (*v'lo ykanaf od morekh*), but thine eyes shall see thy teachers” (Isaiah 30:20)

Once again, Maimonides’ seems to interpret the passage on its face: no longer will your teacher be concealed. However, see essay below, “Isaiah’s Two Secrets.”

“A man shall not take his father’s wife, nor discover his father’s *skirt (kanaf)*.” (Deuteronomy 23:1: but JPS 1917 and most others have Deuteronomy 22:30)

This is a classic metaphorical extension from *wing to skirt to concealment*. Father’s skirt reveals what is concealed beneath, his genitals, and by further metaphorical understanding, his marital relationship. The Talmud explains the verse as a law of Levirate marriage (marriage of a widow to the husband’s brother). A man may not marry the widow of his father’s brother who died childless, since the law intends the man’s father to marry her (Talmud, *Yevamot* 49a). This relates thematically to the next two passages from Ruth.

“And it came to pass at midnight, that the man [Boaz] was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his *feet (marglotav)*. And he said, Who [art] thou? And she answered, I [am] Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy *skirt (kh’nafekha)* over thine handmaid; for thou [art] a near kinsman.” (Ruth 3:8-9)

Critically, Ruth reveals Boaz’ feet. *Feet*, Maimonides explicitly reminds us in our chapter (but in connection with his final proof-text, Isaiah 6:2), are the incorporeal *causes*. That is because they point out, like the male organ, which *causes* the production of children. Procreation is the only metaphor in the human language for divine creation (Guide 1:28). Thus, the *kanaf* conceals the incorporeal causes. But here, again, he conceals that *Targum* takes *kanaf* differently. While Maimonides emphasizes the surface meaning (that Boaz is to conceal her with his garment), *Targum*, by contrast, translates this quote-shard “call thy name over thine maidservant, to take me to wife,” *v’yitkarei shemekha al amatekha l’misvei l’intosh*. Rashi explains: “*spread therefore thy skirt*: the skirt of your garments to cover me with your cloak, and this is a term connoting marriage.” What Rashi means is that Boaz’ *tallit*, which he spreads over Ruth, is like a marriage canopy. The *tallit* is the *tzitzit*-bearing cape that forms a marriage canopy (*khupa*), symbolizing the *Shekhina*’s marriage to the Jews. It also symbolizes creation’s marriage of form and matter.

“(11) And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and [how] thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. (12) The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings (knafav) thou art come to trust (*l’khasot*: for protection).” (Ruth 2:11-12)

This is from Ruth’s first meeting with Boaz in his field. Here Maimonides aligns his interpretation with *Targum*’s general approach to *kanaf*. *Targum* expansively translates line 12:

“May you receive full recompense from the Lord, the God of Israel, in the world to come, because you have come to be a proselyte and to seek shelter under the shadow of His glorious Presence (*shekhinat yakria*). Through that merit you will be saved from the punishment of *Gehinom*, so that your portion will be with Sarah and Rebecca and Rachel and Leah.” (Trans. Samson H. Levey)

Maimonides says, in our chapter:

“In this sense, I think, the word (*kanaf*) is figuratively applied to God (as in our proof-text) and to angels, for angels are not corporeal, according to my opinion, as I shall explain. Ruth 2:12 must therefore be translated ‘Under whose concealment (*knafav*) thou art come to trust’; and wherever the word occurs in reference to angels, it means concealment.”

Not that she came under the “wings” of God, for He has no wings, but under His concealing protection. That is, as a proselyte, she comes under the “concealment” of the providence of the divine *Shekhina*, no longer subject to natural fate. Ruth, David’s ancestress, is a special heroine of Maimonides because of his interest in proselytes. Since they choose Torah, they are closer to it intellectually than those merely born to it, a position directly contrary to that of Yehuda Ha-Levy (c.1075–1141) in his *Kuzari* (*Letter to Obadiah the Proselyte*, P. 475, *A Maimonides Reader*, ed. I. Twersky, Behrman House, 1975).

## TWAIN

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the *seraphims*: each one had six wings (*shesh knafaim shesh knafaim l'ekhad*); with twain he covered his face (*panav*), and with twain he covered his feet (*raglav*), and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, [is] the Lord of hosts: the whole earth [is] full of his glory.” (Isaiah 6:1-3)

This passage is the Isaiah version of the *Maaseh Merkava* vision found in the first chapter of Ezekiel.

A form of the term *kanaf* appears just *before* the quote-shard, but not *in* it. That is because Maimonides' emphasis here is on the terms “face” and “feet” (See Guide 1:37 and 1:28), not on “wings.” The “face” hidden by “wings” means concealment of the *origin* of mediating causes. The “feet” hidden by “wings” means the concealment of the *effect* of mediating causes. “Face” means the separate intellects, *ha-sikhlim ha-nivdalim* (*Targum Onkelos* to Exodus 33:23, interpreted in Guide 1:37).

Thus, when God tells Moses that He will hide him in a cleft, so that he will see what God does (“My back parts”), but “My face shall not be seen,” *Targum* translates: “Those *before* Me shall not be seen,” and those “*before* Me” are the separate intellects. We see the action of the spheres but the incorporeal intelligences animating them “shall not be seen.” The “face,” these separate intellects, are the hidden causes that turn the spheres. The turning spheres *cause* the mixing of the elements that creates all physical bodies. By *causing* the mixing, the “souls of the spheres” are the hidden “feet.” Both because of our material limitations and the subtlety of the incorporeal essences we do not get to see the causative power (the *face* hidden by the *wing*). Similarly, the effects (the *feet* hidden by the *wing*), we barely comprehend.

Yehuda Even-Shmuel (*ad loc.*) explains this slightly differently, but well:

“*The cause of his existence (that of the angel) is hidden and concealed*: The first concealment is the relation of the incorporeal entity's (the angel's) existence to the Source of that existence, which relation is symbolized as ‘face’ (*panav*) in the sense of that which came before (*l'fanav*) His face. The second concealment is the relation of the entity to the things necessarily caused from it, which the proof-text calls ‘feet,’ meaning the effects brought forth by this entity. The first concealment is more hidden, but not completely beyond the comprehension of men possessing the highest powers of apprehension. The second concealment is overcome through intellectual investigation (‘*after long study*’). ‘*The actions of the intelligences are not...understood, for two reasons*’: We are unable to apprehend the ways of their action from the appearances of the surface of things, as, for example, the ways the active intellect introduces form into matter, and how it actualizes man's potential intellect. This is due to two reasons, one from their standpoint, and one from ours. From ours, because our intellectual apprehension does not employ all its powers. From the vantage of the incorporeal intellects, man cannot grasp their essence until he has overcome the barriers to his intellectual apprehension. These two secrets are the two wings concealing each of the two concealments [those of the *face* and those of the *feet*].” (My trans.)

Maimonides' doubling rationale of the actions of providence leads us back to reconsider the previous two passages from Isaiah and the doubled secret they conceal. See essay below.

Note that Maimonides says here that the sense of concealment is the only sense of *kanaf* applicable both “to God and to angels.” This is due to their status as concealed entities. Still, he never gives an instance of it applied to God *directly* in the form of visible *wings*. Here, the wings adorn the *seraphim*, not God. In the previous proof-text, it was clear that God's “wing,” which providentially concealed Ruth, was a mere metaphorical wing, not a wing visible to either sight or to prophecy. That is because, as he explains in Guide 1:49, we do not apply to God imagery drawn from species below man.

The choice of the account of the *merkava* vision from Isaiah rather than the vision from Ezekiel, requires explanation. The Ezekiel version reads: “And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings,” where, in the Isaiah version it says: “each one had six wings.” Why was Ezekiel two wings short? Talmud *Hagigah* 13b, suggests that those missing wings hid the seraphim’s feet, i.e., the effects of the causes, but also cleverly conveying the sense that the feet represent the male sexual organ:

“One verse says: *Each one had six wings*; and another verse says: *And every one had four faces, and every one of them had four wings!* — There is no contradiction: the one refers to the time when the Temple was no longer standing, [when] as it were, the wings of the living creatures were diminished. Which of them were taken away? —....our Rabbis said: Those with which they cover their feet, for it is said: *And their feet were straight feet* (Ezek. I, 7), and if [these wings] had not been taken away, whence could he have known! (i.e., that their feet were straight)— Perhaps, [the feet] were exposed and he saw them. For if you do not say so, [then from the words], *As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of man*, [one might infer] likewise that [the wings covering them] were taken away! They (i.e., their faces) must therefore have been exposed, and he saw them; similarly here, they (i.e., their feet) were exposed, and he saw them. But how can they be compared? Granted that it is customary to expose one’s face before one’s master, but it is not customary to expose one’s feet before one’s master!”

In other words, Maimonides chose the wings of the Isaiah vision because, unlike the wings of the Ezekiel vision, they *concealed* the effects of the causes, and did so by concealing the sexual content of the vision, which one did not customarily expose before one’s master. (I am indebted to David Bakan, who reminds me of this connection in his posthumous volume, *Maimonides’ Cure of Souls*, 102, Bakan, Merkur, Weiss, SUNY 2009)

At the end of our chapter, Maimonides promises another explanation of why we attribute flight to angels. That chapter is 1:49. As detailed in our opening notes, he explains there that we praise angels with the symbol of flight because of the immediacy of the incorporeal causes, and the flitting quality of our perception of them.

### ISAIAH’S TWO SECRETS

Maimonides employs two proof-texts from Isaiah in our chapter, and does so in a way that conceals *Targum’s* recognition that they foretell the coming destruction of the Assyrian army, a celebrated historical miracle. The seer’s real secret is that when Jews align their will with God’s will they escape natural fate. It can happen suddenly.

This is the first passage, in its contextual surroundings, from Isaiah chapter 24:

“(12) In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction....(14) They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord, *they shall cry aloud from the sea*. (15) Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires, [even] the name of the Lord God of Israel in the isles of the sea. (16) From the *uttermost part* (wing: *mi’knaf*) of the earth have we heard songs, [even] glory to the righteous. But I said, My leanness, my leanness, (*razi li razi li*) woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.... (23) *Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed*, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.” (Isaiah 24:12, 15-16, 23)

From the way he truncated this quote-shard, Maimonides would like the incurious to take it at face value that the song praising God coming from the farthest ends of the earth is a song of universal praise. The preceding line does speak of “the isles of the sea.” He includes it under Definition 3, which metaphorically extends *kanaf* to mean *the ends of the inhabited portion of the earth*. The problem is that the whole context of the Isaiah chapter makes line 15 depart from the prevailing tone of Isaiah’s dirge. The poem is really about the coming disasters of the Jewish people. The “isles of the sea” means the diaspora of Jewish exiles. Clearly, Maimonides knows this

and conceals it. He addresses this passage in Guide 2:29 where he recognizes that it concerns the Assyrian monarch Sennacherib and King Hezekiah of Judah. The context is set at 24:12: “In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction.” He writes:

“He speaks in a similar manner when he describes the poverty and humiliation of the people of Israel (the northern kingdom), their captivity and their defeat, the continuous misfortunes caused by the wicked Sennacherib when he ruled over all the fortified places of Judah (the southern kingdom), or the loss of the entire land of Israel when it came into the possession of Sennacherib.”

*Targum* interprets that God is glorified “in the isles of the sea,” to mean that Isaiah foretold the song the scattered *exiles* will sing after the destruction of their land (see *Targum* to line 13, with Malbim). The second part of the prophecy, according to *Targum*, at line 16, is that the Jews will return and rebuild the Temple. *Targum* translates “wing of the earth” as *beit mak’desha*, the Jerusalem Temple. *Targum’s* metaphor points to divine providence, the “wing” covering the Temple, which is the protection afforded by the divine indwelling, the *Shekhina*. The divine indwelling represents God’s providential concern for the covenantal people. The *Shekhina* takes them from the rigors of fate and reposes them in blessing.

*Targum* thus takes the verse as a prophecy in which the chorus of the scattered exile hears the future chorus of the returned remnant. Even though the whole context of the chapter is the history of Sennacherib, this particular clause is a prophecy of the longer future, in which Jews must make themselves a sanctuary for the indwelling of the *Shekhina*.

However, *Targum* proceeds in the latter clauses of line 16 to spell out the meaning of this prophecy for Sennacherib. First, *Targum* takes the words which KJV renders “my leanness, my leanness” (also JPS 1917: “I waste away, I waste away”) completely differently, to mean “my secret” (as does Judaica Press). The *Targum* notices that the statement is repeated, and thus it takes the latter part of the line to mean:

“The prophet said: A secret! A reward to the righteous is shown to me; A secret! A punishment for the wicked is revealed to me. Woe to the oppressors, for they shall be oppressed; and to those who spoil, for behold, they shall be spoiled” (*amar navi rav agar l’tzadikia itkhazi li raz puranut l’rashia it’glei li lanusya d’mitansin ulbilzuz baz’zin d’ha mibazin*. Trans., C.W.H. Pauli).

Rashi captures the sense when he says, “Woe is to me that these *two secrets* have been revealed to me, the secret of the retribution (*Targum’s* second secret) and the secret of the salvation (the first secret), for the salvation will be far off until the enemies come” (Judaica Press translation).

*Targum* continues the idea in line 23, as Maimonides notes in Guide 2:29, taking “the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed” to mean that the *worshippers* of the moon and sun, the Assyrians, shall be confounded and ashamed (the second secret), while the people shall enjoy years of prosperity (the first secret):

“At the end of the same prophecy, when Isaiah describes how God will punish Sennacherib, destroy his mighty empire, and reduce him to disgrace, he uses the following figure (24:23): ‘Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign,’ etc. This verse is beautifully explained by Jonathan, the son of Uzziel (*Targum*); he says that when Sennacherib will meet with his fate because of Jerusalem, the idolaters will understand that this is the work of God; they will faint and be confounded. He therefore translates the verse thus: ‘Those who worship the moon will be ashamed, and those who bow down to the sun will be humbled, when the kingdom of God shall reveal itself,’ etc. The prophet then pictures the peace of the children of Israel after the death of Sennacherib, the fertility and the cultivation of their land, and the increasing power of their kingdom through Hezekiah. He employs here the figure of the increase of the light of the sun and moon. When speaking of the defeated, he says that for them the light of the sun and moon will be diminished and darkened: in the same sense their light is

said to increase for the victorious. We can frequently notice the correctness of this figure of speech. When great troubles befall us, our eyes become dim, and we cannot see clearly because the *spiritus visus* is made turbid by the prevailing vapours, and is weakened and diminished by great anxiety and straits of the soul: whilst in a state of gladness and comfort of the soul the *spiritus visus* becomes clear, and man feels as if the light had increased. Thus the good tidings that the people shall dwell in Zion, and in Jerusalem, and shall weep no more, etc., conclude in the following manner: ‘*Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound*’ (Isaiah 30:26); that is to say, when God will raise them up again after they had fallen through the wicked Sennacherib.”

In other words, do not interpret the verse literally to mean that the moon and the sun will change their everlasting nature.

This paragraph from Guide 2:29 links both of Maimonides’ references in our chapter (the second one, 30:20, precedes by a few lines 30:26 quoted immediately above). In Isaiah 24 the sun and moon were “confounded,” while in Isaiah 30, the light of the sun and moon multiplied. Isaiah 30:20 was the first proof-text he gave for Definition 4, *concealment*. Here is that quote shard seen in its context:

“(19) For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear it, He will answer thee. (20) And [though] the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers *be removed into a corner* (lit.: be winged) any more (*v’lo ykanaf od morekh*), but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: (21) And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This [is] the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left... (23) Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal; and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures. (25) And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers [and] streams of waters in the day of the great slaughter, when the *towers (migdalim)* fall. (26) *Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun*, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.” (Isaiah 30:19-22, 23, 25, 26)

Once again, by the way he truncated his quote-shard, Maimonides wants the general run of his readers to take it on its face that your teacher will no longer be concealed, whoever this “enlightener” (מוריד / מאוריד) may be.

Since he likes the *Targum* on Isaiah 24:23, about the confounding of the sun and moon, he should also like the *Targum* on our proof-text 30:20. But he *conceals* it, just as he concealed the *Targum* to the first Isaiah proof text, 24:15, about the song from the wings of the earth. And this is no surprise, since Definition 4 is *concealment*, and he fits the method to the matter. The *Targum* translates the text “yet shall not thy teachers *be removed into a corner*” as *v’lo ysalek od shkhintei b’beit makdsha*: “no longer shall the *Shekhina* be removed from the Temple.” It takes “wing” as the Temple, and *morekh*, “your teacher,” as the *Shekhina*. The meaning is that after Hezekiah’s great *teshuva*, providence returns, and will not “be removed.”

The previous line, 30:19, “He shall be very gracious at the voice of thy cry, when He shall hear it, He will answer thee” is given a broad reading by *Targum*, in line with his doctrine of the two secrets, as two prayers, both of which will be granted. “He will assuredly shew thee compassion: the voice of thy prayer (*tzalotakh*) He will hear, and He will answer thy supplication (*ba’otakh*).” He takes the clause (in 30:20), “And [though] the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction,” surprisingly opposite to its *pshat*, rewriting it: “And the Lord shall give unto you the treasures of the enemy, and the spoil of the oppressor” (*vihav l’khon ha-shem nikhsei san’a ubizat m’ika*). In other words, according to his reading of 30:19-20, the God would answer their two



prayers with two acts: He would smash the enemy (the second secret), and return the Shekhina/providence (the first secret).

The prophet gives further murmurings of these secrets in this same chapter 30, for at 30:23 he tells us, “Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal; and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures.” This was news, because the expectation was that Sennacherib’s destruction would continue and that the Judahites would be exiled from their fertile land like the tribes of the northern kingdom had been in 722 BCE, 21 years before. (This may be Maimonides’ hidden reference from Ibn Janāḥ’s *Book of Roots*: that the “teachers” who are concealed means the fertilizing “rain” concealed from the demoralized Jews who did not expect to see it again. See Joel 2:23, where *moreh*, usually “teacher,” can mean “rain”).

But the return of rain was a consequence of the other great secret, which Isaiah alludes to in 30:25, “...in the day of the great slaughter, when the *towers (migdalim)* fall,” which *Targum* makes explicit: “*at the time of the ruin of the kings and their armies, in the day of the great slaughter, at the falling of the princes.*”

What was this great secret?

In 701, Sennacherib besieged hapless Jerusalem with a vast army. That *Passover* eve, Hezekiah and the Jews chanted Psalms to God (Midrash, *Exodus Rabba*, 18:5). Then, according to Isaiah 37:36, “The angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand (185,000): and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they [were] all dead corpses” (see parallel accounts: 2 Kings 19:35, 2 Chron. 32:21). The account is confirmed by Herodotus (plague of rats), Berosus (3d C. BCE Hellenistic Babylonian historian), but with silence in Sennacherib’s *Prism* (“[Hezekiah] himself, like a caged bird I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city. I threw up earthworks against him—”). The parallel with the first Passover must have struck Maimonides as it did *Targum* in his rewrite of Isaiah 24:14: “they shall rejoice as they rejoiced on account of the mighty works which were done for them by the sea.” Just as the Angel of Death destroyed the Egyptian first-born while passing over the houses of the Jews, so the Angel destroyed the camp of the Assyrians but passed over Jerusalem.

This miracle of historic dimensions was the secret (*razi li*) concealed by the *wing* in the Isaiah accounts, as Maimonides knew. The prayers of the Jews had the power to destroy whole armies and return the Shekhina to Jerusalem. Why did he conceal it? Because the student of divine science must come to this meditation on his own.

That Maimonides would engage in this clever concealment should not surprise us, since he also engages in *jocular* concealment, in his treatment of Ibn Janāḥ.

### IBN JANĀḤ

Jonah Ibn Janāḥ (Abu al-Walid Marwan) was a Jewish lexicographer and grammarian of the first half of the 11th century. He may have been born in Maimonides’ hometown of Cordova. He quoted the dictum, “Truth and Plato strove. Both of them are friends of ours, but truth is closer to us.” Maimonides would have sympathized with this sentiment.

Why does Maimonides mention him? He names no other rabbis of the post-classical period in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. The only Jews cited are historic figures, and only through the Talmudic era. He names and quotes only Muslim, Christian and Pagan philosophers. In general, he assumes his audience would know the Jewish figures but might not be familiar with the gentile ones. Since he assumed the authoritative Jewish voice he did not feel the need to mention Jewish contemporaries.

Maimonides could have made the point he quotes Ibn Janāḥ for *without naming him*. Kafih, alone of the modern commentators, identifies the reference as a joke. Unfortunately, he smothers the joke in his pompous footnote 7, laboriously listing a dozen Talmudic puns. *Janāḥ* is Arabic for “wing,” Jonah is Hebrew for “dove.” His name would mean Dove son of Wing. It might have been a pseudonym, for he refers to himself in his writings in various ways (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, “Ibn Janāḥ, Jonah”).

The point Maimonides drew from Ibn Janāḥ was that *wing* means concealment. His Arabic speaking audience would recognize that his authority was the *son of wing*. He could hardly have found a better authority!

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