THE MANIFEST IMAGE:
REVEALING THE HIDDEN IN HALEVI, SAADYA
AND IBN GABIROL

SARAH PESSIN

Beholden to their captivating sway, we live in and through a field of images. Images are the markers of human-world encounter, the means through which the world is revealed to us. Thinking Platonically about the image in its dually positive and negative lights, we may say on the one hand that images are the feeble means through which truth discloses herself — shadowy, at best inadequate disclosures which hide and distort the truth in her very attempt at self-disclosure; in this sense, we may say of images that they are truth-concealers, revealing to us a world which is truth’s feeble shadow. On the other hand we may say of images that they are truth-revealers, functioning, as they do, as stepping stones towards the real, stepping stones which can bring our weary souls back to that place, up there where we must go, stepping stones which can lead us to the truths laid bare, to truth herself standing pure and unshadowed behind, or ‘above’ if you’d prefer, the veil of images. In this sense, images are the most wonderful sites of possibility — in leading us towards the true, we may describe them as the first step towards, and as such, as the very grounds for, human-divine encounter.

In this paper, I explore precisely this role of images — their role towards human-divine encounter — in the medieval Jewish works of Judah Halevi (1075-1141), Saadya (882-942) and Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/2-1054/8), and will show in particular how the importance of the image in human-divine encounter emerges in the metaphysics of Ibn Gabirol (in particular, in his doctrine of matter). Unlike Halevi and Saadya who teach us of the role of images in prophecy as the imagino-centric sites for encounter with the Divine, Ibn Gabirol, I will show, sees the very act of philosophical theorizing itself as an imagino-centric site for Divine encounter. In this way, Ibn Gabirol provides a Neoplatonic turning point in Jewish thought in
ich the spoken (or written) word of philosophical theory itself can come an imagino-centric site for divine revelation. For Ibn Gabirol Neoplatonist, I argue, the words used to create theory themselves some the imagistic ‘something’ spoken to enable a momentary counter with the divine ‘no-thing’.

Let us begin with the Platonic image we started with and the y that image fosters the moment of true enlightenment, the moment which man meets truth, or, with respect to the texts in which we are ticularly interested, the moment of human-divine encounter. swing on the Platonic setting where the image reveals the true (in its ɛ as stepping stone towards the true), we may speak, in our interest speaking of “divine revelation,” of the image as ground for human-ine encounter only in the sense of “preparatory ground” – whatever ɛ the image plays here, it is only as rung on a ladder, the actual ment of divine revelation itself is not to be found in the image, but s, the image helps get us to the proper ground for that divine ouner. In Platonic terms, the proper ground to which the stepping ses of image lead is the universal ground of intelligibility. With ect to the possibility of divine encounter, we may here say that it is e, upon the ground of intelligible truth, that the noetic moment of encounter can unfold. Here, human nous stands proud, coming v into its full enactment, pulsing through with truth and, in this se, standing ready to “receive the divine invasion” (to borrow a turn shrase from Hadot).

But of course, ‘stepping stone towards noesis’ is not the only sible way in which the image can unfold as site of divine revelation.

ab Halevi: Images and the Insights of Inner Eye

It is here that we may turn to Judah Halevi’s notion – a notion ch can be traced as well in the thought of al-Ghazkalli – of an “inner ”, an “a‘yn bâjîna”:

Speaking of this Inner Eye, Halevi describes


Halevi, Kuzari 4.3. For extensive discussion and references, see Diana Lobel reen Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah

what for the sake of ease we might describe as a faculty other than intellect – a way, we may also say, of apprehending truths which is different from and greater than intellectual knowing. The Inner Eye is a divine gift, a clarity of vision, as it were, which enables its recipient to “see things as they are” and to do so directly (unlike Intellect which must step upon many stones, arriving at “things as they are” only indirectly through inference). Inner Eye sees things truly and sees that truth directly; it is a divine light in man’s encounter with truth; as Halevi elaborates:

Just as the Creator, exalted be He, has graciously established this relationship between the external sense and the material object of sense perception, He has likewise graciously established a relationship between the internal sense and the incorporeal concept [of the thing perceived]. And so, He has given those of His creatures whom He has honored an inner eye, which sees things [as they are] in themselves without [any] disparity, and from which the intellect may seek proof through inference about the [true] concept of those things as well as their inner nature..."
In fact, it is this divine gift of Inner Eye which, for Halevi, characterizes the prophet: the Inner Eye, first of all, in giving clarity of vision, is that in virtue of which the prophet is able to lead a people:

The person for whom that eye has been created is the one who is truly [clear]-sighted. He regards all [other] people as being like the blind, and so he guides them and directs them along the right path.

Furthermore, and speaking more to what we might call the mechanics-of-prophecy itself, Halevi describes the Inner Eye as the faculty, as it were, which has prophetic visions — seeing not only the matters of this world clearly, but seeing too other-worldly sights, forms — or images — from the divine world, and even forms — or images — of the divine himself. Speaking of these prophetic visions, encounters with spiritual forms, Halevi notes:

[One might almost [say] that eye is the imaginative faculty as long as it serves the intellectual faculty.] Thus, [the Inner Eye] sees great and awesome forms, which point to realities about which there is no doubt, and the greatest proof for their reality is the agreement of that entire class [of individuals honored by God]. I mean, all of the prophets, about those forms. For in fact, they witness things that mutually attest to one another, just as we do with regard to the things we perceive with our [external] senses.

Whatever the Inner Eye is seeing, it is not “making it up” as it were — a conclusion, which, for Halevi, is evidenced in part by the conformity of prophetic visions across a wide range of prophets. In fact, stressing further the visual aspect of the prophetic vision — and the sense in which the Inner Eye deals in images in particular — Halevi stresses that the Inner Eye allows the prophet to properly (i.e. directly) experience God and elements of the divine world via appropriate images, including imagistic encounters with the divine reality itself as a king seated upon a throne.

Inner Eye sees things truly and sees that truth directly; it is a divine light in man’s encounter with truth, and it is, furthermore, associated with the image, in particular, with the image that appears to the prophet in his ultimate moment of human-divine encounter. Halevi notes that the Inner Eye’s prophetic witness of “the most perfect forms” takes place “within the imagination,” describing the most perfect reception of these visual forms — ascribed in particular to the respective prophecies of Moses and Elijah — as “a matter of direct experience through sight (al-basar), in a vision...and not in riddles (Num. 12:8).”

To be sure, Halevi goes on to describe the role that intellect must play here in interpreting the significance of the vision of God — and so an image of God as, for example, a king sitting will be
importantly different from an image of God as, for example, a king on a high throne with angels around (Isa. 6:1-2) (the latter particularly signifying God in a time of abandonment). And yet, in spite of intellect’s role, it is still the image which is primary — the image, here in the case of Halevi’s prophecy-via-Inner-Eye, is the moment of divine revelation itself, God manifesting his truths and himself to the blessed prophets through the contour, shape and color of manifest imagery. Here, the image is not the stepping stone to noetic encounter with the divine, but is, rather, the sacred encounter with divinity itself, superior in both immediacy and clarity to any sort of noetic feat per se.12

Saadya: Image and the Intermediacy of Second Air

Turning to Saadya, we find a similar encounter with the divine in image — again, where image is not a stepping stone to divine encounter, but is the site of divine revelation itself. In his own analysis of prophecy and the importance of images therein, Saadya speaks not of an Inner Eye but of a “2nd Air” — an external phenomenon of sorts in and through which God manifests his truths and Himself to the prophets through visual image, as well as through sound — what we might, for our purposes here in any case, call auditory image (note: for our purposes, there is really no reason to distinguish between sights and sounds: they are both images, one visual, one auditory). While Saadya does seem to suggest that the prophecy of Moses (viz. the paradigm case of prophecy) lacks a visual aspect,13 we may certainly in general isolate in Saadya’s doctrine of Prophecy two important elements, viz. a

“Created Word” which is an auditory phenomenon revealed to the Prophet by God, and a “Created Glory” — a kind of visual element of the Prophecy. This visual element is, furthermore, described in particular by Saadya as the verification mechanism for the prophet: it is in seeing the Created Glory that the prophet knows his prophetic encounter to be true.

Along these lines, in his Commentary on the Book of Creation (Tafsir Kitab al-Mabaddi),14 Saadya describes a prophetic “intermediary” between God and man responsible for prophetic images (visual as well as auditory). Saadya describes this intermediary as a 2nd Air, “the subtle second air” (al-hawd’ ath-thani al-latif)” — a grade of air over and above the mundane, elemental variety of breathable (or, what he calls “manifest”) air.

For Saadya, it is this prophetic air and site of prophetic imagistic encounter which is referred to in Jewish textual sources by the notion of divine ‘Shekhinhah’ (Indwelling),15 divine ‘Kavod’ (Glory),16 as well as by the notion of ‘Divine Throne.’17 Regarding its role in prophecy we are told:

And from it [i.e., 2nd Air] comes the sagacious knowledge (al-ilm al-ilkm) which God bestows upon his elect, as it says “And there rested upon him the spirit (air) of God, the spirit (air) of Wisdom and Understanding, the spirit (air) of counsel, etc.”…”18

12 See Kuzari 4.3.19 (Kogan p. 14).
13 While intellect is still important, the image-centric moment of Inner Eye vision is superior. To be sure, for Halevi intellect is (a) the site for knowledge of essences, and (b) that which enables the prophet to figure out what the Inner Eye’s images of God and the divine world are alluding to. And yet, greater in immediacy and power is the Inner Eye, that divine gift which (a) ensures the knowledge of essences inferred by intellect is correct, and (b) enables the imagination to supply the appropriate images (or, forms) through which to ‘see’ the divine and the divine world itself.
15 For the Judeo-Arabic text (with a Hebrew translation), see Perush Sefar Yejira, edited by J. Kafih (Jerusalem, 1972). For the Arabic text (in Arabic characters) and a French translation, see Commentaire sur le Sefer Yejira par le Gaon Saadya, edited by M. Lambert (Paris, 1891). This commentary is currently unavailable in a published English translation; translations provided in this paper are my own.
16 Tafsir Kitab al-Mabaddi, Kafih p. 108, Arabic lines 9-10. This air is described a few lines later as “the second subtle air” (al-hawd’ al-latff ath-thani) (Kafih p. 108, line 19).
19 Tafsir Kitab al-Mabaddi, Kafih p. 109, Arabic lines 8 ff.
20 Tafsir Kitab al-Mabaddi, Kafih p. 109, lines 1 – 3; my translation and parentheticals. The scriptural citation from the end of the quote is from Isaiah 11:2. It
As for Halevi, so too for Saadya, there is an important role to the prophetic image; it reveals the truth to the prophet and serves as the moment of divine revelation itself. The moment of the image is the moment of the divine Indwelling itself, as it is at once the Holy Spirit of Divine Glory in its encounter with man.


Turning to Ibn Gabirol and his Neoplatonic heritage (as seen too, for example, in the writings of Isaac Israeli), we certainly may also speak of the role of image in direct prophetic encounter with the divine. But in approaching Ibn Gabirol, we may uncover a further, and perhaps unexpected, sensitivity to the sacred moment of image, of lived divine revelation. For, in addition to the revelation of divine truth to man in the moment of prophetic visual image, I argue that there emerges in Ibn Gabirol’s text an appreciation of God’s revelation to man in the visual imagery of metaphysical theory itself.

To be sure, Halevi and (to a lesser extent) Saadya reveal to us how the moment of divine Indwelling itself is linked to image: The idea of an image-based divine Indwelling is seen in Halevi’s commitment to an imagino-centric faculty of Inner Eye, and is seen in Saadya’s commitment to an imagino-centric intermediary of Second Air.

It is interesting to note that the next verse in Isaiah describes the person upon whom this prophetic spirit has descended as now being in a position to see and judge by means superior to the regular eyes and ears. This might alert us to the fact that the visual/auditory prophetic experience in Saadya’s account is not a sensory visual or auditory experience in the ordinary sense.


22 Keeping in mind – as mentioned above – that Saadya seems to remove the visual/image element from the ultimate paradigm of divine encounter, viz. Mosaic prophecy. See footnote 14 for reference to Almann’s discussion of this.

Sensitive to the images at play in the encounter-with-God-through-image, Halevi locates these images in the Inner Eye, whereas Saadya locates them in the intermediation of the Second Air. Enter Ibn Gabirol’s metaphysics of form and matter. Ibn Gabirol’s Fons Vitae text offers a technical set of arguments for and elaborations of the idea that all things are composed of matter and form, as well as many Neoplatonic insights about the importance of intellect. It is here, I argue, precisely in these complex metaphysical discussions that we find Ibn Gabirol’s commitment to the importance of image and imagination.

There are two points to be made here, and while I support both, it is the second in particular for which I am arguing: The first point that must be made is that it is a mistake to read the Neoplatonic commitment to the importance of intellect – in Ibn Gabirol or in any other Neoplatonist – in isolation from a commitment to the importance of the realm of imagination; in fact, the Neoplatonic idea of intellect and the importance of “returning to intellect” – in Plotinus, as in Ibn Gabirol – is, contrary to certain philosophical discussions of intellection, deeply sensitive to the importance of beauty, images, and the imagino-centric ability of humans to be moved by both. The very idea of Neoplatonic intellection includes – one might even say rests upon – a sensitivity to the role of imagery and beauty. As this is not the main point of my thesis, I will not elaborate upon this idea further here; it is, however, an important first point that needs to be made in a consideration of Ibn Gabirol’s corpus – even the technical metaphysics of the Fons Vitae – as a testament to the importance and centrality of image in one’s encounter with the divine.

23 An inspired classic treatment of the importance of image in Jewish esoteric texts, with a wealth of information and insights on the Neoplatonic tradition as well, can be found in Elliot R. Wolfson’s Through a Speculum That Shines (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). On the importance of images and beauty in the Neoplatonic Jewish philosophical vision in particular (with special focus on Abraham Ibn Ezra), see Aaron W. Hughes’ wonderfully insightful study, The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought (Indiana University Press, 2004).
There is, though, a second, additional point to be made: It is not only a consideration of Ibn Gabirol's Neoplatonic grounding which reveals to us the importance of image in his work (for example, in his general idea of a "return to intellect"), but the details of his particular theory of matter (a theory not found in other Neoplatonic texts). As I explain at length elsewhere, and as I will say a bit more below, the doctrine of matter in Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* is important precisely inasmuch as it offers us a picture of reality — an imagistically vibrant picture through the use of images of materiality which is designed to be experienced by the reader (not just understood) and, as such, to move the reader into a new experience of reality. What is most important about Ibn Gabirol's metaphysics, I argue, is its imagistic value: Ibn Gabirol constructs his metaphysics of matter — using images of matter-as-receiver — in a way which is designed to show us this truth — to show it to us imagistically and, in this way, to experientially embed the reality of that truth onto our hearts. For Ibn Gabirol, I argue, it is the very moment of metaphysical analysis itself which becomes the imagino-centric site for man's encounter with his ultimate truth (as I explain elsewhere and below, the truth that he is a receiver) and, as such, the site for man's encounter with God. Ibn Gabirol's matter analysis is an imagino-centric picture through which the reader re-experiences herself (as receiver) in her true reality, as she truly is, and, as such, as revealing now finally the divine face itself in her own. In experiencing self anew through the imagery of Ibn Gabirol's matter metaphysics, the reader is offered a moment of transformation and, as such, a moment of encounter with the divine. In this way, through the very image of Ibn Gabirol's matter analysis, the human being encounters the sacred through the image.

While Halevi and Saadya respectively isolate a special image-faculty and a cosmic image-intermediary, for Ibn Gabirol, I argue, it is his *Fons Vitae* metaphysics itself which serves as the imagistic site for divine encounter. Here, the images at play in the image-based divine encounter are located in the very imagery of metaphysical / cosmological theory itself: God is here revealed-through-image not in an internal human image-faculty, and not in an external cosmic image-intermediary, but, rather, in the imagery of philosophical theory, and as such, in the very pages of the philosopher's written craft. To more fully explain what I have in mind, I turn to Ibn Gabirol's philosophical doctrine of matter.

In his *Fons Vitae* text, as well as throughout a number of his poems, Ibn Gabirol constructs a vision of being in terms of form and

---


---

25 This text, originally written by Ibn Gabirol in the eleventh century in Arabic, is extant in a complete Latin version (translated into Latin in the twelfth century by the translation team of Dominicus Gundissalinus and John of Spain), as well as in an abbreviated thirteenth century Hebrew version (translated and abridged by Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera). Some bits of the Arabic original of the work can be found as citations in Moses ibn Ezra's *Arugat ha-Bosem*. As Ibn Gabirol's full original Arabic text is non-extant, references in this paper are to the Latin translation of the *Fons Vitae* (FV), which is earlier and more complete than Falaquera's Hebrew translation; cf. Baeumker's edition: *Avencebrols* (Ibn Gabirol) *Fons Vitae*, ex Arabico in Latinum Translatas ab Johanne Hispano et Dominico Gundissalino, edited by Baeumker (Münster, 1892), in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters, Texte und Untersuchungen*, edited by Baeumker and Hertling (Münster, 1895). For a partial French translation and commentary, see *Les sources de vie: livre III*, translated with commentary by Fernand Brunner (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1950). For a partial English translation, see *The Fountain of Life* (Book 3), translated by Henry E. Wedeck (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962). For an English translation (which does not, however, always help illuminate the philosophical themes at play), see *The Fountain of Life* (*Fons Vitae*) by Solomon Ben Judah Ibn Gabirol (Avicennae), translated by Alfred B. Jacob (Stanwood: Sabian Publishing Society, 1987). For a contemporary Hebrew translation of a special Latin text, as well as the Hebrew text of Falaquera's thirteenth century abridged translation from the Arabic, see *Rabbi Shlomo ben Ibn Gabirol, Safer Megar HaVeyi*, translated [into Hebrew] by Yaakov Blostein, in *Otsar Ha-Mahkaven shel Ha-Yadavut*, edited by Abraham Sifroni (Israel: Mosad Ha-Or Kuk, 1969), *Oeuvres de la source de vie de Salomon Ibn Gabirol*, in Solomon Munk's, *Mélanges de Philosophie Juive et Arabe* (Paris: Chez A. Fracq, Libraire, 1889) for Falaquera's Hebrew text with Munk's French translation and commentary. For the Arabic fragments of the original text as found in Moses ibn Ezra, see Shlomo Pines' "Safer 'Arugat ha-Bosem': ha-Qetaim mi-tokh Safer 'Meqor
matter — not just the well-known Aristotelian hylomorphism, but a view sometimes referred to as Universal Hylomorphism — the idea that even human souls and intellects have a material component.

Following on the insight of Shem Tov ibn Falaquera — the 13th century editor of the condensed Hebrew summary of Ibn Gabirol’s *Fons Vitae* text — we might here, in this unusual doctrine, note an affinity between Ibn Gabirol’s thought and a tradition of texts circulating in Ibn Gabirol’s 11th century Arabic Neoplatonic milieu to which we might refer as the Ps. Empedoclean tradition. Leaving aside the origin of this tradition, what is key to note is that this so-called Empedoclean tradition speaks, as for example can be found recounted in the writings of Shahrastani,27 of a First Matter, literally the First Element (*al-‘ungur al-‘awwal*) which, in the cosmic order of things, stands, as it were, between God and the Universal Intellect. Following a standard Plotinusian model of an ultimate divine source followed by a Universal Intellect whence all else flows, the Ps. Empedoclean tradition — and Ibn Gabirol in its wake — envisions a material moment, as it were, intermediating between the ultimate divine source and this Universal Intellect.28


28 This idea can be found as well in Plotinus’ own notion of the Intelligible Matter, as for example at Enneads 2.4. For an analysis and discussion, see John Dillon’s “Solomon Ibn Gabirol’s Doctrine of Intelligible Matter,” in *Neoplatonism and Jewish

To be sure, placing Ibn Gabirol within a tradition of cosmic First Matter helps us better appreciate Ibn Gabirol’s own interest in the composition of all things (including souls and intellects) in terms of matter. For any Neoplatonist who envisions a One followed by Intellect as the cosmic fount, it certainly makes sense to talk of the presence in all things of Intellect; so too, then, for Ibn Gabirol and matter: as a Neoplatonist who additionally focuses on the presence of a Cosmic Matter (at the heart of even the Universal Intellect), we should expect — and indeed find in Ibn Gabirol — a description of being’s rootedness in matter, a description of the ground of all reality — including souls and intellects — in a material moment.

For our purposes, let us focus on the implications for human being. What, we might ask, is it to say that human being is grounded in a material reality?

It is here, I argue, that the importance of image emerges. For, the insight of this idea that the human soul is most deeply grounded in matter is precisely to be found in the imagery of the claim. To say that all things are grounded in matter is to paint a portrait of the real through images of receptivity, a portrait in which the truth of being is to be

Thought edited by Lenn Goodman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992). While Plotinus’ idea of Intelligible Matter does indeed seem conceptually akin to Ibn Gabirol’s notion of a First Element (inserted, as it were, between the divine and intellectual principles), the portions of the Enneads where Plotinus addresses this idea are not (as far as we know) among the Arabic Plotinus materials (including material from Enneads 4 – 6), and so, there are no grounds to suggest a direct influence from Plotinus’ Intelligible Matter to Ibn Gabirol’s own similar idea. As Dillon notes, this would seem to be a case of great minds thinking alike!

Dillon also comments on possible parallels to the notion of a spiritual matter in Proclus’ 72nd proposition in the *Elements of Theology* (Dillon, op. cit.). On parallels with Lembicia, see C. K. Mathis II, “Parallel Structures in the Metaphysics of Lembicia and Ibn Gabirol,” in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought,* edited by Lenn Goodman (Albany: SUNY, 1992): pp. 61 – 76. Mathis points to resonances between Ibn Gabirol’s First Element (or First Matter) and the Greek idea of (a) a second one (*ho hoplos hen*, the Simple One) after the ineffable one (*pontikes arxhetaon*, the Utterly Ineffable), as well as (b) a dyadic moment of Limit (*peras*) / Unlimit (*apeiron*) between the Simple One and the One-Existent (*to hen on*, itself construed as the lat moment of one and the first moment of Intellect).
found in the image of material reception. Matter is the receiver, the sustainer; it is the resting place for the All, the seat for the Other. To stress that the noetic core of human being is itself rooted in matter is, hence, to paint a portrait of human being where true human nature is revealed as receptive human nature. To say that man’s soul is rooted in matter is not an obscure metaphysical claim about some bit of dust in the soul of man, nor is it merely to point abstractly to some metaphorical idea of potency; it is, rather, to seize hold of the imagery of matter-the-receptacle, an image which captures clearly matter’s disposition as receiver, beckoning to human being’s own truest nature as receptacle-receiver and, in the power of that image, bringing the reader to experience that reality of self, for herself. It is precisely through the imagery of a material core at the root of all things — including souls and intellects — that Ibn Gabirol illuminates the truth of man’s spirit as receiver and enlivens a re-experience of self: At her core, human being is matter; at her core, human being is a desire-to-receive-the-Other.39

Ibn Gabirol’s metaphysics of matter hence emerges as a construction of reality designed to illuminate and reorient through imagery: the point is not to informationally describe some bit of material substrate — or potency — in the soul of man, but to bring about, in conjuring up the image of man’s soul rooted in matter, a renewed sense of self — the imagery of matter at the heart of man bringing the reader to a renewed encounter with self as receiver.

I additionally argue that this is precisely to find in man an ethical core.38 In Ibn Gabirol’s idea of “human being as receiver” there emerges nothing less than a manifold existential examination of human subjectivity, one which locates the very grounds of human being in ethical receptivity and response. In the image of matter, we find a vision of receptivity, a vision of sustaining-the-Other; and in these visions, we find calls to the ethical, calls to receive and sustain the world around ourselves in the image of matter itself. To live in the world under the image of matter, or, as we may say, under the image of “self-as-receiver”, is to experience the very nature of self in a renewed way, a way in which I emerge as ethical receiver of the world around me, a way in which I emerge (very much, we might add, in the image of God himself) as steward and caregiver, as supporter and sustainer.

In this image of self, there emerges, then, not only the call to re-experience oneself as an ethical receiver, but the call, as such, to re-experience oneself in sacred encounter. For in coming to live in the world under the image of “self as matter / self as receptacle / self as sustainer of the world around me,” I will have come to live in the world in the image of God, the ultimate steward and caregiver, supporter and sustainer.31 In coming to live in the world under the image of “self as

39 This is not to say that Ibn Gabirol equates God and matter: he does not; the idea is simply that God, in his innermost essence, bears a closer similarity to the sustaining disposition of matter than to the active and discursive unfolding of form. On the relation of God and matter in other thinkers, though, it is arguably the influence of the *Fons Vitae* which leads such Christian thinkers as David of Dinant to equate God and matter; cf. Etienne Gilson’s *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955) pp. 241 – 243. On the relation of God matter in Jewish traditions around the time of Ibn Gabirol, cf. Gad Freudenthal, “Stoic Physics in the Writings of R. Saadia Ga’on al-Fayyumi and its Aftermath in Medieval Jewish Mysticism,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 6 (1996), pp. 113 – 136. On the relation of God and matter in Greek thought more generally, we might also note the description of the divine monadic principle as matter and as receptacle in Nicomachus of Gerasa’s *Arithmetica Theologogema* (a work which we know to be extant only in a summary by Proclus, as well as in an anonymous compilation of a similar name — the *Theologogemata Arithmeticae* — sometimes attributed to Iamblichus); for Greek text see *Iamblichus’ Theologogemen Arithmeticae*, edited by Victorius De Balso; in *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1922), and for an English translation, see The *Theology of Arithmetic: On the Mystical, Mathematical and Cosmological Symbolism of the First Ten Numbers.*

38 In my longer work on this theme, I show how matter at the core of human being corresponds to love, and I offer textual support from the Ps. Empedoclean texts for a “matter — love” correlation in Ibn Gabirol. In my longer study, I also draw out how man’s soul is, in this regard, akin to the Divine Throne. See my *Embroidering the Hidden*, forthcoming. For implications of this idea within a feminist discourse, see my “Loss, Presence, and Gabirol’s Desire: Medieval Jewish Philosophy and the Possibility of a Feminist Ground,” op. cit.

37 For further details, see my *Embroidering the Hidden*, forthcoming.
matter / self as receiver / self as sustainer." I will have found a way of living in the world with God. For, it is precisely in living in the world as sustainer – re-experiencing myself as ethical receiver, and living now in service to the Other – that I will have come to an encounter with God, not only imaging myself in his image, but, as such, receiving upon my heart the divine Indwelling itself. In coming to serve the world as sustainer (to serve the world, that is, in the image of matter), human being will have, following in the image of God himself, come to manifest the divine Presence itself in her own being.  

Ibn Gabirol allows readers to experience the truth that the core of reality (and of man) is receptivity by impressing that truth upon us through the play of images, through the repetitive and recurrent image of all things being rooted in matter, as through the repetitive and recurrent image of matter as a sustainer for form-the-sustained. Ibn Gabirol communicates his underlying message about the importance of human receptivity (I am a receiver, my role is to sustain) precisely through the power of image, through the power of repeated descriptions of the sustaining place of matter – of hierarchical levels of matter no less – in the cosmic picture of the real.

It is in this way, I argue, that God, for Ibn Gabirol, is to be found – and is in fact revealed and encountered – by human being in the image. Ibn Gabirol’s metaphysical construction of reality – in terms of a first matter above and beyond even intellect itself, a first matter which grounds all things, including the soul of man – affords us, I argue, an image in and through which to re-experience the very experience of being me. If I can live in the world through the image of self-as-matter, if I can come to live in the world ethically responsively as a sustainer (in the image, we might add, of God’s own role as sustainer) then I will have come to experience the presence of God – the divine Indwelling itself – in the heart of man.

Conclusion

To compare this idea with Halevi and Saadya on the role of images in encountering the divine, we may summarize as follows: The divine Indwelling, for Halevi, is found in an encounter with special prophetic images in a special human image-faculty; the divine Indwelling for Saadya is found in an encounter with special prophetic images in a special cosmic image-intermediary; the divine Indwelling for Ibn Gabirol is, I argue, found in the very moment of philosophical metaphysics, in the moment at which we construct our world and what it is to live in it, a construction – a picture – which relies upon images to move us, and to move us, in particular, to living in the world with God. This moving image is found in Ibn Gabirol in the image of matter-as-ground, itself fostering an image of self-as-receiver, an image in and through which we may re-experience the very nature of human


I have traced the implications of this reading of Ibn Gabirol’s metaphysics of matter for issues in feminism; see my “Loss, Presence, and Ibn Gabirol’s Desire: Medieval Jewish Philosophy and the Possibility of a Feminist Ground,” forthcoming in Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy, edited by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson (Indiana University Press).

35 It should be noted that this paper is not intended to downplay the importance of imagination in Halevi, or to suggest a lack of continuity between Ibn Gabirol’s and Halevi’s overall ideas about image and imagination. Here, I am merely contrasting the more popular ideas of imagina-centric divine encounter in Halevi and Saadya with what I take to be a very different kind of imagina-centric divine encounter in the Fons Vitae. In this spirit, I would like to thank Aaron Hughes for astutely pointing out, in private correspondence, that the three authors’ different accounts of images can be “explained in terms of their different intellectual affiliations,” noting in particular Saadya’s Kalam sensibilities on the one hand, and Halevi’s anti-philosophical sensibilities on the other. These differences in affiliation, Hughes rightly suggests, are relevant to thinking about why Halevi, for example, “attempts to create a theory of images beyond metaphysics, whereas, Ibn Gabirol, as the quintessential Jewish Neoplatonist, creates a theory of images in metaphysics.” I am thankful to Aaron for these insightful comments.
being, coming to live now as ethical sustainers of the world, and, as such, to re-experience the very nature of human being as filled with the holy divine Indwelling itself. In living ethically in the world under the image of self-as-receiver / sustainer, we have come to live in the world with God. It is in this sense, I argue, that for Ibn Gabirol, we encounter God in the image: in internalizing into our heart the image of self-as-receiver (the image painted for us in Ibn Gabirol’s metaphysical construction of reality in terms of an underlying material core), in living in the world as ethical sustainers, the human being strikes upon the moment of divine revelation itself in her very way of being in the world.

Just as in God’s own act of creation, so too in Ibn Gabirol’s metaphysical construction of a reality rooted in a material ground, human being finds a place to live, a way to be, and all of this through a field of images in which she encounters the divine, images through which she may experience the bounds of her own reality as of a piece with the boundless unfolding of the divine Glory itself.

PROPHECY, IMAGINATION AND THE POET’S FINE FRENZY. REFLECTIONS OF A CAMBRIDGE PLATONIST

DOUGLAS HEDLEY

So much the rather thou celestial Light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irritate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

John Milton Paradise Lost III 51-55.

In this essay I wish to discuss the work of John Smith (1618-1652) sometime Fellow and Dean of Queens’ College Cambridge. Smith is one of the so called ‘Cambridge Platonists’. This term, however, is a 19th century coinage. These writers were known by their contemporaries as the ‘Latitudinarians’. The term was meant to designate (and denigrate) the Platonists as theological ‘liberals’, as men attached to the “virtuous mediocrity” of the Church of England in opposition to the “meretricious gaudiness of the Church of Rome, and the squallid sluttery of fanatic conventicles”. However, they may also be thought of as Christian Cabalists, and their Platonism is definitely Neoplatonic. Henry More thought of himself as a Christian Cabalist and Ralph Cudworth was the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge University. At the centre of Smith’s posthumous Select Discourses (henceforth SD) we find a long section on the nature of ‘Prophecy’ with special reference to Hebrew prophecy and the thought of Moses Maimonides. Prima facie it may seem strange for a Platonist to discuss prophecy so extensively. Yet for Smith, as for More and

1 I am deeply indebted to the help and suggestions of Sarah Hutton, Brian Hobbs, James Vigus, Dan Davies and Alain Wolf.
Robert Berchman
&
John Finamore
(Editors)

History Of Platonism

Plato Redivivus

University Press of the South
2005