Medieval Jewish philosophers did not have a specific concept of human spirituality in the modern sense of the term, although they did distinguish between the physical and the non-physical, or spiritual, aspects of existence. God was the ultimate non-physical being, having neither a body nor any physical properties.1 Other non-physical

1 See, for instance, Maimonides’ formulation in the third of his thirteen principles of Judaism in his Commentary on the Mishnah, Introduction to Chapter Ḥelek (Sanhedrin, chapter 10); the Arabic text can be found in Israel Friedlaender, Selections from the Arabic Writings of Maimonides (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1951), pp. 28–9; a medieval Hebrew translation is available in Hakdamot le-Feirush ha-Mishnah, ed. by M.D. Rabinowitz (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1961), pp. 137–8. Cf. also Yosef Kafih, Mishnah im Peirush Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon, vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1964), p. 211. A convenient English translation can be found in Menachem Kellner, Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought (Oxford: Littman Library, 1986), pp. 11–12.
entities in the world were the separate intellects (assumed to be the angels of Jewish tradition)\(^2\) and certain aspects of the human soul. Since the Jewish philosophers shared the Greek assumption that the non-physical is preferable to the physical, even when it is less accessible to intelligent discourse, they devoted much attention to these spiritual entities. If we wish, therefore, to appreciate the concept of spirituality in medieval Jewish philosophy, we must look at these discussions. More specifically, we should examine the discussions where the philosophers expounded upon the incorporeal human soul and its properties, including its intellectual aspects, to the exclusion of the physical properties of the body. When the philosophers attempted to understand the relation of the soul to ultimate reality which they also considered to be an incorporeal reality, they were dealing with what we might call the spiritual. As a result, our best chance of understanding the medieval philosophers’ views of spirituality is by analyzing their descriptions of the religious and intellectual life (and afterlife) of the human soul.\(^3\)

It would appear that in their discussions of the soul, the medieval Jewish philosophers offered two models of personal spirituality. The first can be called the intellectualist model, wherein spirituality is considered to be purely intellectual, and the highest personal level of existence, whether in this life or after death, is the contemplation of the intelligibles and the denial of all physicality. Other properties of the soul are secondary to the intellect in this world and non-existent in the next. The more radical philosophers thought that the goal of

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\(^3\) For instance, whereas Maimonides referred to the “soulful” world (*al-‘ālam al-nafsānī*) in his “Introduction to Chapter Helek”, the medieval Hebrew translator called it the spiritual world (*ha-olam ha-ruhani*); see the Arabic text in Israel Friedlaender, *Selections*, p. 18; the Hebrew text in *Hakdamot*, p. 125. Yosef Kafih translated the term as *ha-olam ha-nafsī*; see *Mishnah*, p. 204.

There are additional medieval references to “spirits,” but these probably had to do more with residual idolatrous beliefs in *pneumata* rather than with spirituality; for Judah Halevi’s often negative view of the “spirits,” see Shlomo Pines, “Al ha-Munāḥ ‘Ruḥaniyyot’ u-Mekorotav ve-al Mishnato shel Rabbi Yehudah Halevi,” *Tārībiz* 56:4 (Tamuz–Elul, 1988): 511–40.
human spirituality was the assimilation of the human intellect into a more universal intellect, most notably what the Aristotelian philosophers called the Agent Intellect. In contrast, the second model could be called a holistic one, wherein all, or many of, the facilities of the soul can take part in the spiritual quest, and individuals maintain their separate identities, both in this world and in the world to come. Not surprisingly, intellectual spirituality is the religious goal advocated by the Aristotelians such as Maimonides (1138–1204) and Gersonides (1288–1344); holistic spirituality is the domain of the anti-Aristotelians such as Judah Halevi (d. 1141) and Ḥasdai Crescas (1340–1410/11). A brief survey of the positions of these four major thinkers concerning the spiritual quest will serve to highlight the two models of spirituality just mentioned. A full discussion would have to take into account not only the summaries below but also the views of the many medieval Jewish philosophers who dealt with these issues in their writings.

For Judah Halevi the prophet was the prototype of the spiritual person who had achieved the highest level. The prophet's inner eye was able to see phenomena, which were not sensed by the normal person, and to understand their true meaning. The prophet, however, was not the only person to achieve spirituality. The attainment of proph-

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4 This distinction apparently has its origin in Islamic philosophy, with Alfarabi as the representative of the intellectualist model and Avicenna as the representative of a more holistic model; see Herbert Davidson, “Alfarabi and Avicenna on the Active Intellect,” Viator 3 (1972): 109–78; Dov Schwartz, “Avicenna and Maimonides on Immortality: A Comparative Study,” in R.L. Nettler, ed., Modern Perspectives on Muslim Jewish Relations (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), pp. 185–97. See also Gabriella Berzin, “The Concept of Happiness in the Teachings of Maimonides and Rabbi Chasdai Crescas,” Masters Thesis, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 1998 (Hebrew), pp. 18–33. I would like to thank Ms. Berzin, and another student of mine, Ehud Krinis, for their comments on this paper.

The sons of Jacob were all the chosen (ṣafwa/segulah) and the core (lubūb/lev), distinguished from other people by their Godly qualities, as if making them into a separate species and a separate angelic substance. All of them sought the level of prophecy, and most of them succeeded in reaching it. He who did not reach that level tried to approach it by means of pious acts, sanctification, purification and encountering the prophets. Know that when he who encounters the prophet hears his divine words, he experiences spiritualization (rūḥānīyya), being distinguished from his genus by means of the purity of his soul, the desire for those levels, and the attachment to meekness and purity. This was for them the manifest proof and the clear and convincing sign of reward in the hereafter, in which one desires that the human soul becomes divine, separated from its senses, envisioning the upper world, enjoying the vision of the angelic light and hearing the divine speech.

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6 The medievals generally thought in terms of male spirituality only, even though some were willing to admit that women can also achieve intellectual perfection; see, e.g., Abraham Melamed, “Maimonides on Women: Formless Matter or Potential Prophet?” in Alfred L. Ivry, et al., eds., Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism: Dedicated to the Memory of Alexander Altmann (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), pp. 99–134. The use of the male pronoun here reflects medieval assumptions.


8 Khazari, p. 35. English translations of the Kuzari are generally my own, although Hartwig Hirschfeld, translator, The Kuzari (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), will be consulted. Comparison will also be made to the Hebrew translations of Judah
In this life, the ultimate spiritual experience is prophecy, an experience which encompasses the prophet’s soul, not just his intellect. Furthermore, a person in the presence of the prophet also undergoes a spiritual experience. After death, when the human soul becomes separated from its senses, and spirituality is easier to attain, there are still sensual aspects to human spirituality, such as the vision of the angelic light and the hearing of divine speech.

Spirituality is not restricted to the prophets and to those in their presence. At the beginning of book three of the Kuzari, Halevi described the devout worshipper of God (al-muta‘abbid). This person is one who does good deeds inside society, not one who separates himself from other humans. “Rather, he loves this world and the length of days, since by means [of this world] he can acquire the next world, and the more good he does, the higher will his level be in the next world.”9 Whereas in the past certain individuals, such as philosophers like Socrates, or some of the prophets in the land of Israel, may have benefited from isolating themselves from others, this is no longer the case. Religions which advocate asceticism as a means of achieving spirituality mislead their believers, since, according to Halevi, spirituality in our day and age is a function of the whole person, even his physical parts, and not just some of his qualities. The pursuit of spirituality requires full participation in society.

Halevi then turns to a discussion of the good person (al-khair).10 This person is one who controls his physical and spiritual (nafsāniyya) powers, allocating to each its due. Unsurprisingly, the

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9 Khazarī, p. 90.
10 Kuzari, 3:2–22; Khazarī, pp. 91–112. Judah ibn Tibbon translated al-khair as he-
best way to live a life of physical and mental equilibrium is to observe the commandments of the Torah, worshipping God through joy. The commandments are for the soul what food is for the body:

The good person never acts or speaks or thinks without believing that he is in the presence of eyes which see him and take note of him, rewarding him and punishing him, calling him to account for all his words and deeds which were not correct. He walks and sits as one who is afraid and humble, sometimes ashamed of his actions, just as he is glad and rejoices and is proud of himself when he has done a good deed."11

Perhaps the best example of Halevi's stress on holistic spirituality is his distinction between the two names of God, the Tetragrammaton (God's personal name as per Kuzari 4:1 and the God of Abraham) and Elohim (a generic name of God and the God of Aristotle).

One craves for [the Tetragrammaton] with a craving of taste and perception (dhaukan wa-mushāhadah),12 whereas one inclines towards Elohim through syllogistic reasoning (qiyyāsan). The taste leads one who has sensed Him (adrākihi) to give up their lives out of love for Him and to die for him. Syllogistic reasoning, however, makes honoring Him obligatory only when there is no harm in it or no suffering.13

11 Kuzari, 3:11; Khazari, p. 98. Obviously this short summary does not do justice to the full discussion in the first half of Kuzari, book three.
12 See Lobel, Mysticism, pp. 89–102.
The intellect alone, with its syllogistic reasoning, will not lead to true spirituality, since only the senses, taste and perception, bring one to the highest levels of love and devotion to God. In this context, Halevi quoted the Psalmist (34:9): “Taste and see \( (t\'a'amu \ u-r\'e'u) \) that the Lord is good.”

From the few examples adduced here, especially the last one, it is obvious that for Halevi, human spirituality is a function of more than the intellectual capacities. The whole person, body and soul, is mobilized in pursuit of the good life, a life which is characterized by observance of the commandments which brings about religious spirituality. Although there will be no body in the world to come, the spiritual enjoyment achieved through prophecy in this world will serve as a model for the soul's pleasure in the hereafter.\(^\text{14}\)

Judah Halevi's adoption of a holistic approach to human spirituality can be seen not only in the models of spirituality just now recorded from his work, but also in his explicit rejection of the intellectualist model. The *Kuzari* provides a detailed description of intellectual spirituality, presenting it as the view of the Aristotelian philosopher. Responding to the Khazarian king's dream in which the king was told that his intentions were good but his actions were unacceptable, the philosopher ignored the king's dream by responding that one's religious activities are irrelevant for achieving perfection. Instead, people prepare themselves to become perfect by studying and education, until they can connect with the Agent Intellect in a continuous connection, such that the perfect person actually becomes the Agent Intellect. That person's limbs will be used only at the appropriate times and in the appropriate manner, as if he himself were the limbs of the Agent Intellect, not of the individual's passive, material intellect. This is the final and highest degree, which can be achieved by the perfect person whose soul has become purified from any doubt.

\(^{14}\) More details concerning Halevi's view of the afterlife can be found in my “Judah Halevi on Eschatology and Messianism,” to be published in the Proceedings of the Ninth Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies (forthcoming).
and who conceives the sciences in truth. At this point, the perfect person is like an angel, for the Agent Intellect is on the lowest rank of the angels, and he has no worry that his personal intellect will be corrupted, since both the Agent Intellect itself is incorruptible and also the intellects of all the perfect people are united with the Agent Intellect.15

The extreme Aristotelian view of the denial of individual immortality after death, described in the Kuzari apparently on the basis of the doctrines of the Muslim philosopher Abu Bakr Ibn Bajja,16 was generally not explicitly adopted by Jewish thinkers. Undoubtedly, they were sensitive to the problematics of such a doctrine for traditional belief. Nevertheless, the Aristotelian model was followed in the assumption that spirituality is a function solely of intellectual accomplishments. Maimonides, for instance, stated in his Commentary on the Mishnah that the pleasure of the soul after death is purely intellectual, a pleasure which cannot be fully understood in this world, although it is a goal before death as well as after. Although Maimonides did not accept Halevi’s holistic view of spirituality, the two of them did agree that the ultimate realization of the spiritual quest is only after death:

Just as the blind person cannot conceive the reality of colors; and the deaf person cannot conceive the hearing of voices, and the eunuch cannot conceive the desire for intercourse, so, too, bodies cannot conceive the pleasures of the soul. Just as fish do not know the element of fire, since their existence is in the element which is the opposite [of fire], so, too, the pleasure of the spiritual world is not known in the physical world. We have no other pleasures than the pleasures of the body, namely the senses’ conception of food, drink, and intercourse. We consider anything other than these as if it did not

15 Khazari, pp. 4–5. For the background of this view of conjunction with the Agent Intellect, see, e.g., Herbert Davidson, “The Active Intellect in the Cuzari and Halevi’s Theory of Causality,” REJ 131 (1973): 351–96.
exist, not recognizing it and not conceiving it at the beginning of thought, but only after great research. This is proper since we are in the physical world; therefore, we can conceive only the temporary, lower pleasures. The pleasures of the soul, however, are continuous and uninterrupted. There is neither relationship nor any similarity whatsoever between these [pleasures] and the bodily pleasures. It would be unseemly for us, believers in the Torah, or for the metaphysicians among the philosophers, to say that the angels, the stars and the spheres have no pleasure. In truth, they have great pleasure in that which they know intellectually about the Creator, may He be exalted and blessed, thereby being in great continuous pleasure. They have no physical pleasure and no concept of it, since they do not have senses as we do in order to conceive that which we conceive. Similarly, we, also, to the extent to which part of us will become purified and will reach that level after death, it will not conceive the physical pleasures and will have no desire for them.\(^{17}\)

Maimonides continued his discussion of these two pleasures by emphasizing the superiority of intellectual pleasure over physical pleasure, even in this world. If this is so now, in the physical world, how much more will it be true in the spiritual world (\textit{al-\textsuperscript{\textbar}alam al-nafs\textbar\textbar ani/ha-olam ha-ruh\textbar ani}; Kafih: \textit{ha-olam ha-nafshi}), namely the world to come where the souls have intellectual knowledge of the Creator, just as in this world they are able to have some intellectual knowledge of the upper physical realms and more.\(^{18}\)

A similar description of afterworldly spiritual bliss is provided by Maimonides in his \textit{Mishneh Torah} ("Laws of Repentance," chapter

\(^{17}\) Maimonides, \textit{Commentary on the Mishnah}, Introduction to Chapter \textit{Helek}, Arabic pp. 15–7; Hebrew, pp. 123–4 (Kafih ed., pp. 203–4). The Arabic term for both physical and spiritual/intellectual pleasure here is \textit{ladh\textbar\textbar ha}, which usually means physical pleasure; for Maimonides’ use of this term, see Berzin, “Happiness.”

\(^{18}\) See note 3.
eight). Life in the world to come is the great good which is intended
(ha-tovah ha-ţefunah)\(^19\) for the righteous, a life which is not accom-
panied by death and a good which is not accompanied by evil. In this
world, there is neither body nor corporeality, but only the souls of
the righteous who are like the ministering angels;\(^20\) there is neither
eating nor drinking nor any other physical activity; rather the souls
of the righteous “enjoy the splendor of God’s presence” (nehenin
mi-ziv ha-shekhina):

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\text{For they will know and acquire knowledge of the essence of the Holy One Blessed be He, that which they cannot know while they are in the dark and lowly body. The soul (nefesh) described thereby is not the spirit (neshama) which needs a body, but the form of the soul which is knowledge (ha-dei’ah) which has been achieved from the Creator to the extent of its power, conceiving the separate intelligibles (ha-dei’ot ha-nifradot) and the rest of His actions.}^{21}
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Echoing his discussion in the *Commentary on the Mishnah*,
Maimonides remarked that no one can fully understand pure
spirituality in this corporeal world; only in the world to come, the
world of pure intellect, will true human good be attained.

For Maimonides, then, spirituality is achieved by the intellect
and not by the physical properties of the soul, such as taste and
sight. It should be noted, however, that this type of spirituality is
available solely for the intellectual elite; most people’s souls share

\(^{19}\) Maimonides used the Hebrew term *tovah* (Arabic: *sa’adah*) rather than *ta’amug* which represents the Arabic *ladhdha*, the term used in the *Commentary on the Mishnah*. See Berzin, “Happiness,” pp. 62–71. For a comparison of Maimonides’ views of the afterlife in *Hilkhot Teshuva* with his other writings, see Adiel Kadari, “Thought and Halakhah in Maimonides’ Laws of Repentance,” Ben-Gurion University diss., 2000 (Hebrew), chapter 8.

\(^{20}\) Since Maimonides understood the angels as separate intellects (*Guide*, 2.6), the souls of the righteous are then similar to the separate intellects.

\(^{21}\) *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, 8:2–3. The “knowledge” which remains after death is obviously a reference to the acquired intellect; see below, note 28.
the fate of *karet* (excision), in which the soul completely disappears after death.\(^\text{22}\) Yet, Maimonides did not clearly offer the radical view of annihilation of personal identity through assimilation into the Agent Intellect, the view attributed to the philosopher in Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari*, and to Abu Bakr ibn Bajja by Maimonides himself.\(^\text{23}\) Perhaps since such a view would have been harmful for the masses, Maimonides refrained from explicitly discussing the afterlife altogether in his *Guide of the Perplexed*.\(^\text{24}\)

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Gersonides shared Maimonides’ view that human spirituality is a function of the intellect and not of any of the physical aspects of the soul. Thus, for instance, immortality of the soul is a natural result of intellectual achievement, and the greater the achievement, namely, the greater the approximation of the knowledge held by the Agent Intellect, the greater the pleasure in the hereafter.

Gersonides outlined the intellectualist position at the very

\(^\text{22}\) *Ibid.*, 8:1, 5. Maimonides also explained the concept of *karet* in the Introduction to Chapter Ḥelek (although in *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:6, Maimonides indicated that certain very evil people will suffer eternal punishment). At the end of his Commentary to Tractate Makkot (3:17; Kafih edition, p. 247), however, Maimonides stated that anyone who performs one of the 613 commandments in the correct manner and out of love will merit life in the world to come. The great number of commandments were commanded so as to assure that a Jew will observe correctly at least one of them and, thereby, guarantee his immortality.

Shlomo Pines has argued that according to Maimonides’ esoteric doctrine, no one can attain intellectual perfection, and, therefore, there is no afterlife, even for the intellectually accomplished; see “The Limitation of Human Knowledge, according to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja and Maimonides,” in Isadore Twersky, ed., *Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 82–109. Other students of Maimonides have rejected Pines’ conclusion, maintaining instead that Maimonides, indeed, believed that the intellectually perfect do merit an afterlife; cf. Alexander Altmann, “Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics,” in *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklärung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987), pp. 60–128.


beginning of his *Wars of the Lord* as a preamble to his discussion of the nature of the intellect (1:1):

Since the intellect is the most fitting of all the parts of the soul for immortality – the other parts are obviously perishable together with the corruption of the body because they use a bodily organ in the exercise of their functions – it is necessary that we inquire into the essence of the human intellect before we investigate whether it is immortal or not, and whether if it is immortal, in what way it is immortal. For human immortality and human happiness are accidental qualities (*masigim*) of the intellect, and it is not proper to investigate the accidents of a substance before we know the essence of it.²⁵

Gersonides then proceeded with an analysis of the nature of the human intellect, an analysis which takes up the greater part of Book One of his *Wars of the Lord*, concluding that the immortal part of humans is the “acquired intellect.” Without discussing the details of Gersonides’ views, it is noteworthy that Gersonides believed in individual immortality, in which each person’s intellect enjoys the afterlife to the extent that it had been developed during the person’s life, and not in the collective immortality of the acquired intelligibles. He also maintained that this afterworldly experience is available to many more people than Maimonides thought, since almost any intellectual cognition is sufficient to achieve an acquired intellect, an intellect which rejoices in the knowledge that it has achieved. That joy, experienced by the intellect, is a feature of both this world and the next, but, as might be expected, only after death does the intellect reach its highest level of pleasure:

If the unity of knowledge approximates the unity of knowledge of the Agent Intellect, then the possessor of that knowledge has attained a greater level of perfection, and the joy \( (\text{simhah}) \) and pleasure \( (\text{ta’anug}) \) in his knowledge is greater. Differences are found such that the pleasure enjoyed by one man in his knowledge is not the same as the pleasure enjoyed by another in his knowledge…. It is also important to realize that each man who has attained this perfection enjoys the happiness resulting from his knowledge after death. We have some idea of this pleasure \( (\text{areivut}) \) from the pleasure that we derive from the little knowledge we now possess which subdues the animal part of our soul [so that] the intellect is isolated in its activity. This pleasure is not comparable to other pleasures \( (\text{areivuyyot}) \) and has no relation to them at all. All the more so will this pleasure be greater after death; for then all the knowledge that we have acquired in life will be continuously contemplated and all things in our minds will be apprehended simultaneously, since after death the obstacle that prevents this [kind of cognition], i.e., matter, will have disappeared. For, since the soul is a unit, the intellect is prevented from apprehending [simultaneously] when it (the soul) employs another of its faculties…. After death, however, it will apprehend all the knowledge that it has acquired during life simultaneously.\(^{26}\)

For Gersonides, the spiritual quest is clearly an intellectual one, and the greater the attainment of intellectual perfection, the higher the level of spirituality in this world and the next. Other facilities of the soul can only interfere with this intellectual spirituality.

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The purely intellectualist vision of Jewish spirituality, as advocated by Maimonides and Gersonides, was subjected to a trenchant criti-

\(^{26}\) *Milhamot ha-Shem*, 1:13, p. 16a; *Wars*, pp. 224–5.
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cism by Ḥasday Crescas. Generally protesting the Aristotelization of Jewish thought, Crescas attempted to disprove the basic assumptions of Jewish Aristotelianism. Thus, Crescas refuted Maimonides’ proofs of the existence of God, based upon twenty-six propositions of Aristotelian physics, by demonstrating the logical untenability of those propositions.27 Similarly, Maimonides’ and Gersonides’ view that the afterlife is reserved for the acquired intellect,28 and thus human spiritual perfection is purely intellectual, was the object of Crescas’ critical arguments.29

What seems to have bothered Crescas most about the Aristotelian view of intellectual perfection was that it made observance of the commandments of the Torah apparently irrelevant. As we have seen, Judah Halevi claimed that humans can achieve spiritual perfection only by observing God’s commandments, but the philosopher in the Kuzari had clearly expressed the position that God could not care less what rituals one performed. Although neither Maimonides nor Gersonides advocated abandoning the commandments, and both were observant Jews, Aristotelianism’s opponents understood philosophy as undermining Jewish observance.30 As we have seen, Maimonides’ and Gersonides’ discussions concerning the pleasure of the intellect make no explicit reference to the need to observe the commandments of the Torah to help achieve that pleasure. Certainly, if one’s afterworldly success is a function of his intellectual perfection, what benefit would accrue to the intellect by observing rituals pertaining to the corporeal body?


28 Although Maimonides does not specifically use the term “acquired intellect” in this context, it would seem that attributing this concept to him is not inappropriate. He does use it in Guide 1.72, p. 193; cf. Kreisel, Political Thought, pp. 136–50.

29 Crescas’ criticism of the intellectualist view of the perfection is the subject of Warren (Zev) Harvey, “Ḥasday Crescas’s Critique of the Theory of the Acquired Intellect,” Columbia University diss., 1973; see also Berzin, “Happiness.”

30 This was one of the major accusations in the Maimonidean controversy; see, e.g., Joseph Sarachek, Faith and Reason: The Conflict over the Rationalism of Maimonides (Williamsport, PA, The Bayard Press, 1935).
There is another aspect of Crescas’ critique of Aristotelianism. Writing in the wake of the anti-Jewish riots of 1391, in which his only son was killed, and the vigorous Christian campaign to convert Iberia’s Jews, Crescas was well aware that a purely philosophical Judaism might appear stark and uninviting in comparison with Christianity’s emphasis on love of God and divine grace. It was important, then, for Crescas to produce a model of human spirituality which could compete with both Jewish Aristotelianism and Christian emotionalism.

Crescas’ model of spirituality is based on divine love, both God’s love for the Jews as well as Jewish love of God as expressed, among other ways, by observing the commandments. Thus, Crescas was able to argue that Judaism was a religion of love (contra the Christians), in which observing the Torah played a role in human spirituality (contra the Aristotelians). Before presenting his alternate view, however, Crescas outlined the philosophical opinion:

Eternal happiness (ḥazalḥah) is the apprehension of the acquired intelligibles; the more concepts one apprehends the greater in quality the happiness, and all the more so when the concepts are more precious per se. And it is also agreed among them, that each of those who attain happiness will rejoice and delight (yismah ve-yita’neg) after death in that which he has apprehended. Now, they estimated the degree of this [pleasure] on the basis of the pleasure (areivut) which we attain in our lifetime in our apprehending the intelligibles, and, how much more so must it be after death, as we shall intellectually cognize them simultaneously, continuously.31

Crescas considered the advocates of this view to be heretical (horesim ha-torah ve-okerim shoreshei ha-kabbalah), since they ostensibly denied the efficacy of observing the commandments. It is well-known, argued Crescas, that “according to the plurality of

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merits and sins shall be the delight and misery of the souls [after death].”

If the commandments are solely a preliminary step in attaining the intelligibles, there is no intrinsic advantage in performing those commandments.

Furthermore, Crescas argued that having conceptual knowledge of the intelligibles is not in itself pleasurable. What is pleasurable is the intellectual pursuit, not necessarily having knowledge of the intelligibles in actuality.

The pleasure (areivut) which is found in them in our lifetime is due to the attainment of the yearned-for thing. For inasmuch as man has the potential of attaining the intelligibles, and he yearns for them, and inasmuch as yearning is none else but the excitement of the will to attain the yearned-for object, the will having been demonstrated to be other than intellectual cognition, then when that yearned-for apprehension is in actu which beforehand had been in potentia, there is found a great pleasure.

According to the philosophers, therefore, after death, when all cognition is in actu, there will no longer be a transition from potentiality to actuality and no yearning, since, at that point, the intellect has no will. For Crescas, such a situation cannot provide the soul with pleasure. The intellectualist model of spirituality is, hence, insufficient, even in its own terms.

Crescas’ own theory of what can be considered spirituality can be seen in his discussion of the afterlife of the soul. After recalling his rebuttal of the philosophical position, Crescas outlined his doctrine:

Now, therefore, what ought to be said in affirmation of the survival of the soul is that, once it has been established in the

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definition of the soul that it is an intellectual substance, not containing within it causes of corruption;\textsuperscript{34} then, when the soul becomes perfected in conjunction and love (ba-kesher ve-ha-ahava), by means of what it apprehends (ma she-tasig) of the Law and of the wonders of the Lord, may He be blessed, it should remain in its perfection and in a strong conjunction and in the shining forth of unremitting light, owing to the removal of the obstacle which darkens its intrinsic reality, which [obstacle] is matter… and since man is compounded of a material part and of an essential spiritual (ruhani) part, which is an overflow from an overflowing intellectual substance, be that overflowing agent an angel or something else, it is fitting and necessary that that spiritual part not undergo corruption, just as it is clear with regard to the material part, that it returns to its simple components to the four elements.\textsuperscript{35}

For Crescas, spirituality is achieved by love and not by intellection alone, and it is the individual soul with will, not an acquired intellect, which survives death.

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At first glance, there seems to be a strict dichotomy between the intellectualist and holistic views of spirituality. A closer look, however, indicates that perhaps the distinction between the two models is not as absolute as it appears initially. Thus, although those who maintained intellectualist spirituality did not see observance of the commandments as an intrinsic part of that spirituality, or the afterlife as a reward for observing the commandments, nevertheless they emphasized the importance of the commandments as a step towards achieving spirituality, at least for Jews. Furthermore, intellectualist

\textsuperscript{34} Crescas’ definition of the soul may have been influenced by the Catalan thinker Bernat Metge; see Zev Harvey, “R. Hasdai Crescas u-Bernat Metge al ha-Nefesh,” Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 5 (1986): 141–54.

spirituality can also have the emotional element of love; and the holistic view has an intellectual component. Both look to the afterlife as the time when true spirituality can be attained.36

Let us analyze, for instance, Maimonides’ prescription for attaining spirituality which is presented near the end of the Guide of the Perplexed (3.51). First, Maimonides employed a controversial analogy between attaining closeness to God and entering the presence of a king sitting in his palace, in which those who have intellectual perfection enter into the palace, whereas those with only traditional rabbinic learning are kept outside.37 Then, Maimonides offered advice to his readers as to how to attain intellectual perfection:

We have already made clear to you that that intellect which overflows from Him, may He be exalted, toward us is the bond between us and Him. You have a choice: if you wish to strengthen and to fortify this bond, you can do so; if, however, you wish gradually to make it weaker and feebler until you cut it, you can also do that.38

How does one strengthen one’s intellectual bond with God? One should start with making every effort always to be thinking about God. The purpose of worship, such as reading the Torah,

36 In addition, the Maimonidean view of the prophet shares the holistic view that spirituality is a function of more than just the intellect, since the prophet uses both his intellect and his imagination. Nevertheless, the use of the imagination is more for the purpose of disseminating the prophetic message than for achieving personal spirituality.
prayer and the performance of other commandments, is to bring the worshippers closer to God by excluding thoughts of this world from their minds. Thus, people should not just pray with their lips at the same as they are thinking about business, or read the Torah as they are considering building a new house. Even when performing a commandment whose fulfillment merely requires the use of one's limbs, their thoughts should be towards God.

Maimonides suggested a practical regimen for attaining this goal. When saying the Shema, people should empty their minds of everything else and not be content (as the law allows) with having the proper intention for only the first verse of Shema. Similarly, when reciting the Shemoneh Esreih prayer, one should not be content with the proper intention for only the first benediction.

When this has been carried out correctly and has been practiced consistently for years, cause your soul, whenever you read or listen to the Torah, to be constantly directed – the whole of you and your thought – toward reflection on what you are listening to or reading. When this too has been practiced consistently for a certain time, cause your soul to be in such a way that your thought is always quite free of distraction and gives heed to all that you are reading of the other discourses of the prophets and even when you read all the benedictions, so that you aim at meditating on what you are uttering and at considering its meaning.\textsuperscript{39}

Once one has achieved this discipline, it is permitted occasionally to think of worldly matters, such as maintaining one's household and dealing with one's wife and children.

When, however, you are alone with yourself and no one else is there and while you lie awake upon your bed, you should take great care during these precious times not to set your thought to work on anything other than that intellectual wor-

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 622.
ship consisting in nearness to God and being in His presence in that true reality that I have made known to you and not by way of affections of the imagination. In my opinion this end can be achieved by those of the men of knowledge who have rendered their souls worthy of it by training of this kind.40

This regimen of constantly thinking about God, even when performing physical acts or when in conversation with other people, was the level of Moses and the Patriarchs, whose goal in life was to bring into being a religious community who would know and worship God by spreading the notion of God’s unity, “and to guide people to love Him, may He be exalted.”41

What is the nature of this love of God? Maimonides continued by offering a model of divine providence in which the person who is constantly thinking about God cannot be harmed; only when one’s thoughts are diverted from God is His providence removed from the individual. As proof for this theory, Maimonides offered Psalm 91, the “Song on Mishaps.” This psalm describes the protection offered to the worshipper of God, whether from illness or from human evil, such as war. The reason for this protection is cited in the psalm (v. 14): “Because he has set his passionate love (hashak) upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known my Name.” As Maimonides understood the verse, the individual is protected from all evil because he has “known Me and then passionately loved Me.” This “passionate love” (ishq) is an excess of love, so that there remains no thought other than those directed towards the beloved:

The philosophers have already explained that the bodily faculties impede in youth the attainment of most of the moral virtues, and all the more that of pure thought, which is achieved through the perfection of the intelligibles that lead to passionate love (ishq) of Him, may He be exalted. For

40 Ibid., p. 623.
41 Ibid., p. 624.
it is impossible that it should be achieved while the bodily humors are in effervescence. Yet in the measure in which the faculties of the body are weakened and the fire of the desires is quenched, the intellect is strengthened, its lights achieve a wider extension, its apprehension is purified, and it rejoices in what it apprehends. The result is that when a perfect man is stricken with years and approaches death, this apprehension increases very powerfully, joy over this apprehension and a great love (‘ishq) for the object of apprehension become stronger, until the soul is separated from the body at that moment in this state of pleasure (ladhdha)…. After having reached this condition of enduring permanence, that intellect remains in one and same state, the impediment that sometimes screened him off having been removed. And he will remain permanently in that state of intense pleasure (al-ladhdha al-‘azīmah), which does not belong to the genus of bodily pleasures, as we have explained in our compilations and as others have explained before us.42

From these passages, it would appear that human spirituality extends beyond mere intellectual pleasure and reaches a form of passionate love, albeit an intellectualist passionate love, one in which bodily faculties are completely negated.43 Furthermore, although the observance of the commandments is not sufficient for intellectual spirituality, the prescribed regimen to achieve such spirituality is by observing the commandments and not solely by contemplating

42 Ibid., pp. 627–8. As noted before, Maimonides used the term ladhdha to describe the pleasure of the intellect in his Commentary on the Mishnah, and cf. Berzin, “Happiness.”

43 Similar to the description of the philosopher in Kuzari 1:1; see Shatz, “Worship,” n. 47 (citing Barry Kogan).

Warren Zev Harvey argues that Maimonides’ view of loving God by striving to achieve more and more knowledge about Him is very similar to Crescas’ belief that joy is found in acquiring knowledge, not necessarily in having that knowledge; see Harvey, “Crescas versus Maimonides on Knowledge and Pleasure,” in A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman, Ruth Link-Salinger, et al., eds., (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press,
upon God and the world. The Jewish search for spirituality begins with the punctilious observance of the commandments as a means of drawing close to God and ends with a passionate love which some might even understand as a mystical relationship with God.44

Turning back to Crescas, we see that although his concept of spirituality is a function of the whole soul, especially the will, and his emphasis is on love and not intellectual achievement, still, the place of the intellect in his system is not insignificant. The soul, after all, is defined as “an intellectual substance, not containing within it causes of corruption.” Furthermore, the soul survives after death when it “becomes perfected in conjunction and love (ba-keshet ve-ha-ahava), by means of what it apprehends (mah she-tasig) of the Law and of the wonders of the Lord, may He be blessed,” namely, perfection of conjunction and love is a function of one's intellectual knowledge of God.45 Since the soul is a substance which contains an intellectual capacity, “it is possible, indeed necessary, for it to have pleasure (areivut) in its intellection.”46 Afterworldly perfection can be enjoyed because that which interferes with human knowledge, namely matter, will no longer be present.47

Both Maimonides and Crescas, though employing different ways of expressing ultimate felicity, or what we might call ultimate spirituality, blurred the distinction between absolute intellectual perfection and love of God. Neither was an anti-rationalist who denied the intellectual component of spirituality; both can be considered philosophers for whom use of the intellect is crucial for

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45 See above, n. 35.


human perfection. For Maimonides, observance of the Torah leads to knowledge of God, which in turn leads to love of God. For Crescas, observance of the commandments and love of God are themselves the essence of spirituality, but neither is sufficient without knowledge of God. Both believed that one's spiritual accomplishments, whether they be fully intellectual or both intellectual and emotional, survive death. Thus, although Maimonides stressed the intellect, and Crescas stressed the will and its love of God, the differences between them were not as momentous as might at first be imagined.

Both the intellectual and holistic models of medieval spirituality used a vocabulary which is foreign to ours: separate intellects, acquired intellect, intellectual substances. Similarly, the modern notion that spirituality somehow is dependent solely upon the emotions without a rational component was not shared by our medieval predecessors. Nevertheless, perhaps the medieval beliefs can serve as a model of Jewish spirituality today: a spirituality which is anchored in the observance of the Torah and which reaches its highest expression by means of the intellect, not by its rejection.