VOLUME II

JEWISH MYSTICISM

THE MIDDLE AGES

JOSEPH DAN

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Most of the sixty studies collected in these volumes were published in scholarly journals and other scientific publications; a few are presented here for the first time. It is my pleasant duty to thank the scores of editors and publishers who contributed in various ways to the present form of these studies. They all took part in giving the articles their final internal and external shape. Almost all of these studies are based on lectures given in American and European universities in the last thirty years, and I have benefitted from the remarks of colleagues and students who participated in the discussions.

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Cambridge, Mass.

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Introduction

I

The studies collected in this volume deal almost exclusively with one cardinal problem: the appearance of Jewish mysticism as a component of Jewish culture in the second half of the twelfth century and its development into a meaningful element in this culture during the thirteenth century. These processes occurred at the same time in central Europe, especially in the Rhineland, and in southern Europe, especially in northern Spain and southern France. They developed, as far as we know, in independent schools that had no contact with each other until the 'thirties of the thirteenth century; yet the close similarities between them are surprising and perplexing. They seem to indicate that among some circles of Jewish intellectuals and pneumatics (spiritualists) the need for such a spiritual awakening was needed, and that the materials used by them to satisfy this need were derived from similar sources. There is no doubt that the enmity against Jewish rationalism was one of the major drives that brought about the creativity in the esoteric and mystical realms,

a point strongly put forward, in different ways, by Heinrich Graetz, David Neumark, and Gershom Scholem. Yet the depth and variety of the treatises that were written, and the vast panorama of their ideas, make this explanation partial and insufficient, as Scholem maintained.

We have no conclusive historical explanation for the emergence of the various schools of esoterics and mystics in this period or for their closeness to each other. The literature written on this subject since Gershom Scholem first addressed it in 1946 in an extensive article titled "The Beginnings of the Kabbalah" (published in *Knesset le-Zekher Bialik* 1947) is vast. Scholem himself rewrote this study four times and turned it into a major scholarly book. Others have contributed an increasing number of articles and books. Yet the number of meaningful facts concerning these processes, which were not known in 1946, is very small. Some of Scholem's footnotes have produced large volumes, yet the component elements of the problem and the texts that must be taken into consideration for their discussion have hardly changed. The studies presented in this volume contradict many of Scholem's conclusions; this is based not on the discovery of new material, but on the disappearance of the hope that many new sources will come to light in the near future. Scholem's optimism, which drove him to make bold assumptions not always sufficiently attested by the extant material, had to be forsaken, and the texts that we have had to be examined as exhaustive of present and future knowledge.

The Jewish European mystics of the High Middle Ages relied on the extant texts of the ancient Jewish mystics of Late Antiquity, who flourished in the talmudic period. The previous volume in this series of collected studies was dedicated to their schools—*Hechalot* and *Merkavah* mysticism, *Sefer Yezira*, and *Sar Torah*. These and other ancient sources contributed immeasurably to the development of the vocabulary and the attitudes of the medieval mystics in the realms of cosmology, anthropology, the structure of the celestial realms, cosmogony, and other subjects. They also utilized the esoteric Jewish sources, the talmudic and midrashic references to the subjects that interested them, often offering radical new interpretations. Yet the mystics and esoterics of the High Middle Ages can-

not be regarded as a continuation of the ancient schools of Jewish mystics. They represent a new beginning, and a void of several centuries, in which mysticism was almost completely absent from Jewish culture, separate them. Jewish mysticism, one may say, has been invented twice—once in Late Antiquity and once in the High Middle Ages; in each case it was not one school or one phenomenon, but a group of similar, related and often unrelated, expressions of mystical cravings.

In this Jewish mysticism is radically different, in its attitude to the religion that gave birth to it, from the mystical schools of Christianity and Islam. In both these religions, mysticism is the product of the second century of their existence. The first monastic Christian mystics appear in the second century, and the first sufis are found in the eighth century. Judaism existed for at least a millennium and a half before the first mystical schools became part of its culture, and again existed with the absence of such activity for another half of a millennium in the beginning of the Middle Ages. The analysis of these two introductions of mysticism into Jewish culture is the main concern of these studies.

The main topics presented in the following studies are two. One is the emergence and the history of the central European schools of mystics and esoterics, often called Ashkenazi Hasidim (Jewish pietists in medieval Germany); the other is the beginnings of the kabbalah and its early development before the age of the *Zohar* in the last third of the thirteenth century. This introduction is dedicated, first, to the presentation of the essential characteristics of Jewish mysticism and esotericism in Central Europe in this period, and, second, to a reexamination of the first work of the kabbalah, the *Bahir*, which was written in the last decades of the twelfth century.

II

One of the most perplexing problems facing the historian when analyzing texts, especially texts concerning the history of ideas, is: To what extent can one take into account documentation that does not exist? The methodological answer to this question is, of course,

that one should not do so at all. Yet it is rare, if not completely impossible, that a writer of history does not rely intuitively on his expectations concerning future discoveries. Every time one uses a phrase like "following this evidence, we may assume," he actually means: "We do not have as yet enough evidence, but I am sure that in the future more material proving this will be discovered." This is a natural tendency that if not carried too far, enables the scholar to suggest parts of a historical picture even when there is not sufficient textual material to support it. As long as a clear distinction is made between extant proof and expectations of future discoveries, this attitude is acceptable in very moderate doses.

It is my thesis in this Introduction that the study of the origins of the kabbalah in the last seventy years was based on highly exaggerated expectations concerning future discoveries, and that old conclusions should now be reevaluated and changed. Because these expectations have not materialized, holding on to them in the present circumstances is counterproductive. A new understanding of the basic phenomena of the emergence of the kabbalah in the Middle Ages should be based on a more rigorous adherence to the material we have, and should take into account the possibility that what has not been discovered up to now does not exist.

A scholar surveying the situation of Jewish studies in the beginning of the twentieth century was, understandably, extremely hopeful concerning the possibility of dramatic future discoveries. Many of the major libraries of Hebrew books and manuscripts had not been catalogued. Hundreds of private collections were scattered around the world, untouched by scholars. Vast subjects were not mentioned in any scholarly publication. In that situation, to assume that something that had not yet been found did not exist was nearly impossible. It was evident to any clear-eyed observer that this was a scholarly discipline taking its first steps, and that many surprises and meaningful discoveries awaited in every corner. The discovery of the Cairo *Genizah* at the end of the nineteenth century gave a meaningful boost to the feeling that documents unlocking the secrets of the past were waiting for the scholar all over the world.

What may be said about Jewish studies in general may be said,

with far more emphasis, concerning the study of Jewish mysticism. The amount of scholarly attention that this field received was meager, and most of the published works were never read by scholars. Whole schools and whole centuries of Jewish mysticism were completely unknown to scholarship. In these circumstances, the hope that the answer to every problem was waiting in the next manuscript, the next library catalogue, was well-founded.

It is understandable, therefore, that historical studies of Jewish intellectual, cultural, and religious ideas have been imbued with the feeling that whatever is unknown and unclear today will be known and documented tomorrow. It was possible to assume and postulate, on the basis that confirmation would be presented very soon, when the analysis of material in libraries and collections proceeded.

Concerning Jewish mysticism, this attitude was further encouraged by the intense and rapidly developing study of gnosticism. Nineteenth-century Jewish scholars repeatedly emphasized the similarity of the kabbalah and gnostic mythological symbolism as known from the antignostic polemical works of the Church fathers. Writers who treated the kabbalah with empathy, like Nachman Krochmal, joined writers who opposed the kabbalah and saw it as a non-Jewish and anti-Jewish phenomenon, like Heinrich Graetz and Solomon Rubin, in postulating a connection, or even a dependence, between the kabbalistic ten *sefirot* and the gnostic pleroma. The field of gnosticism witnessed dramatic progress at that time, when new authentic gnostic sources were discovered, and new insights concerning the origins and nature of this heresy were discovered and analyzed. A belief that in the immediate future the whole complex of problems relating to the history of the early kabbalah and its relationship to gnosticism would be clarified and documented seemed to be a most reasonable one. It seems to me, therefore, that the study of the kabbalah in the first half of the present century can be characterized as being based on a mixture of texts and hopes; texts were appreciated for themselves, but also were seen as representing future discoveries. With this century nearing its end, we should, I believe, reexamine this attitude and see what can be retained and what must be discarded when the circumstances have completely changed.

III

The modern study of the beginnings of the kabbalah began nearly seventy-five years ago, when the young Gershom Scholem decided to dedicate his Ph.D. thesis to the text of the book *Bahir*, a version of which he found in the Münich library (no. 207 in Steinschneider's list). The thesis, which was ready by 1921, was published by Scholem's father in Leipzig in 1923. Eventually, Scholem reached the conclusion that the *Bahir* was the earliest work of the kabbalah, rejecting Adolf Jellinek's view that *Masechet Azilut* had that distinction, and that the text originated in Southern Europe, in the Provence or northern Spain, and that it was written in the last third or quarter of the twelfth century.

Many of Scholem's conclusions concerning the *Bahir* have been confirmed by subsequent study, most importantly its role as the earliest work known to us to include the basic symbolism of the ten *sefirot*, the most obvious and characteristic element of the kabbalah. During all these years, no work was found that could be dated as earlier than the *Bahir*, which contained the full presentation of this set of symbols. Concerning the date of its authorship, it seems now that more can be said than was said by Scholem to identify its place in the late twelfth century. Scholem relied mainly on the use made by the *Bahir* of the works of Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja, who wrote in the first half of the twelfth century. It seems to me that even later works can be identified in the terminology of the *Bahir*, among them the biblical commentaries and other works of Abraham Ibn Ezra (d. 1167), and the Hebrew translation of Bahya Ibn Paḳuda's *Hovot ha-Levavot*, made by Judah Ibn Tibbon in the Provence around 1170. The reevaluation suggested here is based, therefore, on the fact that Scholem's conclusions concerning the place of the *Bahir* in the history of the kabbalah, and concerning the time of its composition, are firmer today than they were when Scholem offered them, and that the study of the subject in the last two generations proves that they require no change or modification.

Concerning three other problems, it seems that reevaluation of Scholem's conclusions is in order. These problems are the linearity of the development of the kabbalah; the nature of the book *Bahir*; and, most important, the origins of the *Bahir*'s system of the ten *sefirot*. These problems are so closely connected that they are actually one and the same question, as I shall try to demonstrate in the following pages.

There is no doubt that from the second or third decade of the thirteenth century up to this very day, the kabbalah developed in a surprisingly linear fashion. Each kabbalist knew, in a more or less detailed way, the kabbalistic works that preceded him, and built his own mystical system on that basis. The various schools and directions of kabbalistic speculations are well understood in a sequence; even conflicting schools (like Abulafia against Moses de Leon in the thirteenth century, or Luria against Cordovero in the sixteenth) were using the same sources, relying on the same traditions, which each developed in his own distinctive way. For eight hundred years the kabbalah developed as a chain; no "wild cards," no meaningful interruptions by intrusions from the "outside." The history of the kabbalah is linear, each kabbalist (including messianic figures like Shabbatai Zevi, or the leaders of the various Hasidic movements) accepting from the kabbalistic tradition whatever he wished, rejecting what he did not like, and adding to it the achievements of his own inspiration.

This chain is a distinct fact since the establishment of the Gerona school of kabbalists in the first half of the thirteenth century. All the mystics of this school—Rabbi Ezra, Rabbi Azriel, Nachmanides, Jacob ben Sheshet, and others—knew well, and quoted extensively, the previous sources of the kabbalah, mainly the *Bahir* and the works of the early kabbalists in the Provence, especially those of Rabbi Isaac the Blind, the son of the Ravad and the first kabbalist known to us by name and writings. They were familiar with all other ancient sources of Jewish mystical and cosmological speculation, and created the basic structure which, with many changes and modifications, remained the essence of the kabbalah. Today, reading the works of the Gerona mystics, the historian is relatively certain that he knows the library of sources of the Gerona mystics and can point out, in almost every case, the material that served them in their kabbalistic speculations.

Scholem's description of the history of the kabbalah details this linear development from its beginnings, postulating that it originated

in a single source, namely the *Bahir*, and that the kabbalists of the Provence, especially Rabbi Isaac the Blind, based their symbolism and mystical speculations on the *Bahir*. For Scholem, therefore, the questions of the origins of the kabbalah and the origin of the *Bahir* became one and the same, because in his presentation there was no other source to the symbolism of the kabbalah but that found in the *Bahir*.

This linear structure, starting immediately in the beginning of medieval Jewish mysticism, seems to need drastic reevaluation. While the later development of Jewish mysticism is indeed surprisingly linear, the very beginning was probably multifaceted and relied on multiple parallel developments, which today can be summarized by the statement that the old, simple concept of the unity of God was broken in the few decades between 1180 and 1210 probably six times, by independent schools of thinkers in central and southern Europe. It is even probable that the *Bahir* and Rabbi Isaac the Blind developed independently the concepts of the ten *sefirot*. The alternative concept is discussed in some detail below.

The second problem for which Scholem's conclusions demand some revision is that of the origin of the concept of the ten *sefirot* as presented in the *Bahir*. Scholem distinguished between the question of the nature and authorship of the *Bahir*, and the appearance of the pleroma of the ten *sefirot*, being confident that the system of symbolism as found in the *Bahir* was at least to some extent an ancient tradition that the *Bahir* incorporated in the work. He hesitated between attributing it to Christian gnostic sources or to unknown Jewish schools of gnostics (whose teachings, according to Scholem, may have been the original source of gnosticism itself). Scholem was sure that the kabbalistic pleroma, whether Jewish or not Jewish—which includes also the element of the bisexuality of the divine world—was an old tradition that the author (or authors) of the *Bahir* received, developed, and incorporated in the book.

Scholem was following, in this hypothesis, a long history of identifying the kabbalah as derived from gnostic sources, which was presented by several nineteenth-century scholars. The key problem, however, is that these earlier scholars were discussing the similarities between the kabbalah as a whole and gnosticism as presented in the works of the Church fathers; they were not aware of the special position of the *Bahir* as the earliest medieval kabbalistic work. They assumed the kabbalah to be essentially uniform in its mythological concept of the dynamic ten *sefirot* and the sexual symbolism expressing the relationship between the tenth *sefirah*, the *Shechinah*, and the masculine elements within the Godhead. Their impressions were based especially on the *Zohar*, in which this dynamism and sexual symbolism are presented in a most emphatic, radical manner. Scholem, after achieving the correct conclusion that the *Bahir* was the beginning of this concept, accepted the identification of the kabbalah as gnostic without a detailed evaluation of this phenomenon as it was relating to the *Bahir* specifically. It is obvious—even from Scholem's own analyses—that the *Bahir* presented this mythology in a much more minimal, muted fashion, different in many respects form the one found in later kabbalah, as will be shown below.

Scholem's views have been criticized by several scholars since his death in 1982; but it is very surprising that these critics followed obediently and faithfully Scholem's own thesis by continuing to postulate, in increasingly strong terms (though with less and less documentation and proof) that the *Bahir* is based on ancient sources that they described variously as gnostic, non-gnostic, Jewish-gnostic, protognostic, and other adjectives. Yet not one item of positive proof to this contention has been presented, either by Scholem or by his cryptocritics. The concept that everything found in the *Bahir* that cannot be proved to be purely medieval is necessarily derived from ancient, esoteric, somewhat gnostic (Jewish or otherwise) sources has not been doubted. It seems to me that this very notion should be reconsidered in the most thorough methodological fashion.

The first methodological point that has to be clearly stated is a distinction between two different meanings of the term "gnostic." This term is usually used, by Scholem and others, to denote a link between kabbalistic (or other Jewish mystical) texts and the historical movement of gnosticism. But very often this simple meaning of the usage is confused with another: gnosticism as an abstract appel-

lation of a certain type of religious movement, a usage that is not dependent on any actual, textual connection between a phenomenon thus described and the historical movement of gnosticism. This is a difference between a historical and a phenomenological or typological use of the term "gnosticism." "Historical" means postulating a definite, provable connection between two historical movements; "phenomenological" is an adjective that does not denote any definite factual contact with gnosticism.

An example may demonstrate the vast difference between these two terminological usages. Scholem described ancient Jewish mysticism, the *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* literature of the talmudic period, as "Jewish Gnosticism," and used this term in the title of his book dedicated to its study. He was severely criticized for this by scholars who emphatically stated that the basic characteristics of gnosticism, mainly an evil demiurge opposing a hidden good God, and a central feminine figure in the divine world, are completely absent from *Hechalot* mysticism. Scholem did not answer his critics directly, but in a later work he explained that the *Hechalot* mystics present a rebellious, radical picture of the divine world that he characterized as being gnostic. It is evident that this controversy had nothing to do with the relationship between historical gnosticism and *Hechalot* mysticism; it is, in fact, a clash between two different, subjective meanings of the adjective "gnostic," in which the different participants tended to emphasize different elements, but no "true" characterization of this adjective can be presented.

In this case, Scholem clearly used the term "gnosticism" in its phenomenological, rather than historical, sense. Very often, when designating the kabbalah in general or Lurianic kabbalah in particular, it is absolutely clear that no historical meaning is intended, and that the statement should be taken as typological. Isaiah Tishby also used the term this way in his discussion of gnostic elements in Lurianic kabbalah. The most meaningful exception, as far as Scholem is concerned, is the *Bahir*. In this case, it is clear from Scholem's statements that he did seek historical, textual connections between the beginnings of the kabbalah and ancient historical gnosticism.

One of the key sentences of Scholem's description of the *Bahir* and of the early kabbalah in general is the statement that these writings represented "a renewed eruption of myth in the heart of [medieval] rabbinic Judaism." "Myth" and "gnosticism" are often synonymous in Scholem's writings on this subject. The fact denoted by this statement cannot be doubted. The problem, left unsolved in Scholem's works and needing reexamination now, is whether this renewal is phenomenological or historical. Was it based on the impact of esoteric oral and written traditions that reached the medieval kabbalists from Jewish or non-Jewish ancient gnostic sources, or was this renewal the result of intrinsic spiritual drives within the circles of these mystics? Scholem tended toward the first, historical, solution; his followers in the last generation (sometimes in the guise of critics) did so in a more emphatic manner. It seems to me that the first solution should be reconsidered and preferred, namely, to characterize early kabbalistic gnosticism as phenomenological rather than historical in character.

This problem is almost identical with the third one listed above, namely, the problem of the authorship of the *Bahir*. In Scholem's discussions of this work, the author of the *Bahir* is presented as an editor, a collector of ancient traditions, a literary formulator of symbolical systems who did not create them. He does not have any specific, personal characteristics of a mystic or a spiritual writer. In retrospect, it seems ironic that the anonymous writer who brought forth in the late twelfth century the most inspired and powerful Jewish spiritual movement of the Middle Ages and early modern times has been denied even an anonymous personality; it is as if his very existence is denied by scholarship.

It seems to me that while we may understand the circumstances in which this concept evolved in Scholem's work in the first third of the present century, it is high time that this perception is corrected. Scholem himself, in 1925, regarded even the *Zohar* as an anthology of ancient traditions; he later changed his mind and devoted a significant part of his scholarly work to the description of the individual, creative character of the author of the *Zohar*, Rabbi Moses de Leon. The same process should proceed now concerning the author of the *Bahir*.

IV

The main characteristics of the *Bahir* that were used in order to describe it as a work of gnostic myth are three: the pleroma of the ten *sefirot*, the bisexuality of the divine world, and the dualistic concept of evil. These characteristics should be examined in some detail. The simplest among them is the last one, the concept of evil, and it is postulated here that it is paradigmatic of the other two; the methodology and conclusions concerning this major subject can be utilized for the elucidation of the previous subjects.

Viewing the history of kabbalistic thought in general, it is possible to claim that, from a theological point of view, for nearly five centuries the kabbalists expressed themselves in terms that are as dualistic as any found in scriptural religions. The mythology of the *sitra ahra*, "The Other [i.e., the left] Side," in the *Zohar* is an expression of a stark dualistic concept of the conduct of the world, and a deep division concerning good and evil at least within the lower realm of the divine pleroma. The *Shechinah*, the tenth divine emanation and the lowest, which is described as the feminine element in the Godhead, is the divine battleground between the devil and the divine husband, often being captured and seduced by the evil powers. The myth of the *Shechinah* in the divine world is counterpart of the struggle for the souls of the people of Israel in the material world. Each ritualistic or ethical deed by human beings contributes to the eventual victory of the good side, while every sin, evil thought, or ethical misconduct supports the evil powers in their attempt to overcome the divine goodness both on earth and in the divine realm. Sections of this myth can be read almost as Manichaean texts. This description, however, is mitigated by several theological statements that indicate that, in the final analysis, evil itself is a servant of God, and there is an ultimate good purpose for all the suffering it causes.

Post-Zoharic kabbalah, in most cases, did not reemphasize the mythology of evil, and some kabbalists almost denied it, while others adhered to it in different degrees. The kabbalists of the sixteenth century, especially the great center of the kabbalah in Safed, included both of these elements, but by the end of that century Rabbi Isaac Luria introduced into the kabbalah a revolutionary new set of

mystical terms that included a much more radical mythology. In the Lurianic myth, evil is a preexisting element within the Godhead and the primal cause of the creation and the emanation of the divine powers, causing catastrophe in the divine realm even before the creation of the world. Further intensification of the concept of evil in the kabbalah in a dualistic direction can be found in some of the works of the Sabbatian messianic theologians of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, followed by a more conservative Hasidism in Hasidic and other modern kabbalistic schools.

The history of the kabbalah from the late thirteenth century to the early eighteenth can therefore be described as including a very strong dualistic element reminiscent of gnostic descriptions concerning the struggle between good and evil. The adjective "gnostic" in a phenomenological meaning can be applied to this aspect of the kabbalah; yet it is interesting to note that this gnostic element is increasing in kabbalistic literature as it draws farther and farther away from the historical sources of gnosticism. It is very difficult to assume that secret gnostic myths sustained the concept of evil in the *Zohar*; it is even more difficult, or actually impossible, to present such an assumption concerning Lurianic or Sabbatian kabbalah. It is clear that the intensification of the "gnostic" concept of evil in the kabbalah is independent of any reliance on written gnostic texts, or the possibility of oral esoteric traditions.

The problem is whether any contact with historical gnostic sources is possible in the very beginning of the kabbalah, in the late twelfth and in the thirteenth centuries, that is, in the sources of the *Zohar*, and especially in the book *Bahir*. It is evident that the main source for the *Zohar* in this realm was the writings of Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen of Castile, who wrote in the beginning of the second half of the thirteenth century. In his writings we find for the first time the structural concept of evil as the "emanation on the left," parallel to the good divine world of the "emanation on the right." He was the first to present a hierarchy of the powers of evil that corresponds to the hierarchy of the good divine powers. And the most meaningful element is that Rabbi Isaac was the first to suggest clearly and emphatically that the appearance of the powers of evil is inde-

pendent of man and his deeds; it is not the result of human misconduct, as earlier kabbalists, like Rabbi Ezra of Gerona suggested, but that these forces were active in the process of creation itself, and their existence, power and influence precedes the creation of the Earth and of man. Thus, the basic notions of a dualistic attitude had been formulated in the generation before the composition of the *Zohar*, and they were used, in an extensive and emphatic manner, in the *Zohar* itself.

Scholem once characterized Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen and his circle of kabbalists as "the Gnostics," clearly emphasizing that this title was meant in a phenomenological manner, not as a historical thesis indicating a direct relationship between these kabbalists and actual gnostic texts and ideas. Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen attributed his ideas and formulations to "ancient" texts and scholars and used pseudepigraphy extensively, yet no proof can be presented that he had access to esoteric texts or traditions unknown to us; rather, it can be proved that in most cases his references are pure fiction, and that in other cases he attributed to his sources ideas that are not found in them. This is indeed one of the clearest cases in which dualistic concepts can be shown to have been evolved within the framework of traditional Jewish sources (including the three generations of kabbalists that preceded him), rather than as a result of the intrusion of a new body of texts and ideas from a hitherto-unknown source.

The development of the concept of evil in the kabbalah can, therefore, be documented to be a result of intrinsic development within the kabbalah in particular and Jewish culture in general, and the increasing dualistic-"gnostic" character it assumed is not the result of direct historical influence. Can this be said also about the beginning of the process, the concept of evil in the *Bahir*?

The nature of evil is one of the central subjects discussed in the *Bahir*; a score or more of its passages are dedicated to it. The ideas and terms used can be divided into three groups. One, found especially in the beginning of the work, deals with the problem of evil as part of the process of the creation and closely integrated with the problem of the nature of matter. The duality of spirit and matter in the cosmos is directly related to the duality of good and evil in the creation. The *Bahir* does not go the whole way to actually identify matter and evil, but some of the formulations found there do carry this concept. The terms used, however, are closely dependent upon twelfth-century Hebrew works, especially the description of the creation in the works of Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja in the first half of that century; Bar Hijja was strongly inclined to use neo-Platonic ideas and sources. The identification of תהו ובהו as matter and form is derived from that source, which the author of the *Bahir* extended to include the duality of the creation of light and darkness, good and evil, by God. It seems that in this context the *Bahir* follows Jewish medieval twelfth-century ideas and terminology, adopting them to his new way of pseudomidrashic interpretation and presentation.

The second major element in the concept of evil in the *Bahir* is found near the end of the work, where the story of the Garden of Eden is retold as a struggle between God and the devil, Samael, who is operating through his emissary, the snake, using the femininity of Eve as his means. This section, emphasizing the independence of Samael and giving it the image of a powerful, rebellious satanic figure, is clearly based on Chapter 13 in the midrash *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*, which is the first Hebrew midrash to include references to Islamic traditions; it is usually attributed to an author who lived in the seventh or eighth century. It seems that this midrash used a variety of sources, internal and external ones, not used by earlier midrashim. Though the version of this section in the *Bahir* includes a stronger emphasis on some aspects compared to its source, there is no doubt that the *Bahir*, in this case, is directly related to Hebrew late-midrashic traditions.

The third, and most important, group of sections and terms relating to the problem of evil in the *Bahir* is one found in several sections of the work, identifying evil with the north, and with the left hand of God and its fingers. North and left are Hebrew synonyms; when one faces east, as every righteous person in the Middle East should, north is on one's left. Biblical Hebrew, like other ancient Near Eastern languages, uses "left" and "north" synonymously. The

association of right with right, and necessarily left with something more sinister, is intrinsic to language and its users. The association of north with evil is biblical, strengthened by historical events and geographic facts. This complex, identifying north, left, and evil, is therefore well established in language and literary sources. It was strengthened in one of the *Bahir*'s major sources—the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*, which states that God left the "northern corner" of the cosmos "untreated," daring anyone who claims to be God to finish it and thus prove his divinity. This unfinished north is the source, according to this midrash, of all the demons and evils that infest the cosmos. This text, relating to a biblical verse in Job, also facilitates the connection between north and *tohu*, enabling the *Bahir* to combine its speculations using this group of terms with the one concerning the story of the creation. We thus have a unified sequence of terms and ideas that see in left, north, and *tohu*, as well as Samael and femininity, expressions and synonyms of the power of evil, based on traditional sources and employing, especially, late-midrashic and twelfth century sources. It should also be taken into account that in Hebrew Samael and שמאל are the same word, with a slight spelling difference; the identification of this series of terms denoting evil with the figure of the satanic Samael is therefore inherent in the selected terminology. Thus these three groups of terms and pictures are united in one sequence, without needing any specific influence from another source.

There is, undoubtedly, an element of innovation in the *Bahir*'s inclusion of its discussion of evil in the anthropomorphic concept of God; the description of the fingers of God's [left] hand as the carriers of evil is certainly a profound, powerful expression that had great impact on subsequent discussions of the subject. Yet this same anthropomorphic picture includes the insistence that evil is a hand of God; not His best one, but still His hand. While some of the *Bahir*'s formulations tend to indicate some modicum of independence of the powers of evil, it is still the hand of God. No basis is given in the *Bahir* to the [gnostic] conclusion concerning an independent power of evil that has a principal part in the creation and is constantly struggling against the wishes of the good God. The text of

the *Bahir* was undoubtedly used by later kabbalists who were inclined toward theological dualism in a gnostic fashion, yet in the *Bahir* itself this tendency is not manifested.

V

It seems that the problem of evil is the one that begins the first homily of the *Bahir*. The first passage of the book brings into confrontation two verses from the Psalms (37:21, 18:12, strengthened by 97:2), which denote conflicting descriptions of the abode of God. The first states that the divine realm is characterized by a great light (the term that gave the *Bahir* its title), whereas the second states that He is hidden within darkness, surrounded by cloud and fog. The homiletical question is, which of these is true? Does God reside in the brightest of lights or the darkest of clouds? The author then states that the third verse solves the problem, taken also from the Psalms (139:12), which, in this interpretation, is believed to say that God enlightens the darkness, or even more than that: God's darkness itself is identical to brightness. It should be noted that the author of the book does not speak in this passage. Almost all of it is the quotation of four verses from the Psalms, connected by the simplest terms of midrashic homiletical discussion: "one verse says," "and one verse says," "comes the third and decides between them" (i.e., brings them into harmony). The beginning of the book with this passage is an indication that the author was determined, at least in the beginning, to follow strictly and obediently the external structure of the midrash, and to employ in the most loyal fashion the literary norms of rabbinic exegesis.

This passage can be understood as an exercise in midrashic pseudepigraphy, but at the same time it denotes the subject that interests the author: Is God light or darkness? The answer is anything but dualistic. God's essence is light, and the darkness is one of the expressions (a temporary one?) of the divine light. The same subject is central to the next dozen paragraphs, and is repeated several times in the later sections of the work.

The fact that the second passage seems to "forget" the first one

and move to a different subject is, again, one of the most common rabbinic homiletical literary norms. The subject is changed to a discussion of *tohu va-vohu*, but the two are united in sections 11–13, where they form a triad of synonyms: light and darkness, *tohu va-vohu*, and good and evil. We are forced, by the exegetical convention, to regard *tohu va-vohu* as counterparts of light and darkness in par. 2 as well.

The key nonbiblical term introduced in par. 2 is ממש, a common rabbinic term that is used here in an epigrammatic form, דבר שיש בו ממש, when the epigram is returned to its literal meaning. While the phrase is taken from rabbinic literature, its Bahiric usage is dominated by the use made of it in the *Sefer Yezira* (2:6): "He made from *tohu mamash*, and made his nothing into something." Thus a third element of the equation is added: Besides the dualities of light and darkness and *tohu* and *bohu*, we now have the duality of nothing and something, or absence and substance. Here the Abraham bar Hijja interpretation of *bohu* as *bo-hu*, indicating the imposition of form over matter and making it an existing substance, is clearly employed. The pretense to present a midrash is continued, yet in clear opposition to the first section we have here three nonmidrashic elements: an explanation of the term *tohu* as "something that surprises(?) people," an explanation of *bohu* taken from Bar Hijja's *Hegyon ha-Nefesh*, and a reference to the *Sefer Yezira*, never used by talmudic and midrashic literature. These three correspond to the verses that served as the basic text of the previous paragraph, emphasizing the difference. The only verse cited in this section is the one that includes the terms under discussion, namely Genesis 1:2.

The central idea of this section, probably a combination of Bar Hijja's exegesis and the author's own concept, is the view that *tohu* and *bohu* form a sequence. The author introduces the "midrashic" exegesis of *hayta*, "it was," as a double-meaning term: It is both "it was" and "it was *tohu*," because the key letters of *tohu* are included in *hayta*; at first everything was *tohu*, and later it was turned into *bohu*, substance. *Tohu*, therefore, is the original, primordial state, over which *bohu* was imposed and *mamash* emerged. The context, however, retains an element that is found in neither Bar Hijja nor the

Sefer Yezira: the implication that *tohu* is also darkness (because of the duality presented in the previous section), as well as "nothing." The active element of changing is taken from the *Sefer Yezira*, where the transformation of *tohu* into *mamash* is almost a *creatio ab nihilo*, in a sentence strongly emphasizing divine activity. It is difficult to learn from this section whether the author had a view identifying matter (or, at least, primordial matter) with evil; this becomes clearer later. At the same time, there is no indication of any conflicting dualism. Even if *tohu* is identified with evil, it serves here as the platform for God's creation of substance. In this, the second section is not different from the first: The duality of *tohu* and *bohu* is brought into unification by God, in the same way that light emerges from darkness in the first paragraph.

The tone of the whole discussion is changed in section 11, which evokes again the terminology of sections 1–2, but now these terms are presented under a new heading, the Ecclesiastes verse (7:14) that has become the classical Hebrew expression of the dualism of good and evil as a worldly conflict when both originate from God, because the verse insists that the conflicting elements were made by God. This is a verse that recognizes dualism, but declares both sides of it to be emerging from God. In later Jewish texts it appears in magical contexts, to justify the existence of demons and witchcraft, and in Christian texts it has, in some cases, a similar role.

The author interprets the verse in a clear, emphatic statement: God created the *bohu* and put its place in peace (i.e., good), and created *tohu* and put its place in evil. *Tohu* and *bohu* are thus identified as the primordial opposites (an aspect lacking in par. 2, where they can be understood to be different, but not conflicting). The peculiar structure "put its place in" may also be based on the *Sefer Yezira*. The continuation of this paragraph deals only with *bohu* (which is described here as the first, preceding *bohu*, in contradiction to the structure in par. 2), identifying it with the "peace" in Job 25:2, and introducing three new elements into the dualistic structure: right and left, water and fire, Michael and Gabriel. God is thus described as the presiding power over a conflicting existence, which now includes the five dualities stated in this brief paragraph.

After documenting by the verse from Job the identity of *bohu* and peace, the author is required to explain the identity of *tohu* and evil. This enables him to introduce the most important verse for this homily, Isaiah 45:2, "maker of peace and creator of evil." This verse was the cause of the selection of the term "peace" instead of "good" in this homily, making its terminology dominant before its formal introduction in par. 12 (of course, every reader was aware of that, the verse being a famous one). The exact wording of this paragraph emphasizes that *tohu* and evil, peace and *bohu* are not simple identities: "evil from *tohu*, peace from *bohu*." Coupled with the exact wording of the previous paragraph, the author seems to denote that there was a place known as evil before *tohu* was put there, and that this "place" is its origin, and the same concerning *bohu*. I doubt that this should be interpreted as if the realms of good and evil existed as sources or places before *tohu* and *bohu*; the more minimal, and reasonable, explanation should be based on their identification with left and right: He created *bohu* from the right and put it on the right side; He created *tohu* from the left and put it on His left.

Two things are absent from this presentation in pars. 11–12: There is no mention of the connection between *tohu* and *bohu* and substance, and there is no direct explanation of why the Isaiah terms of peace and evil should be understood to be related to *tohu* and *bohu*. This element remains completely arbitrary; it seems that the author regarded this identification as self-evident, based on their relation to matter, which is further developed in section 13.

Section 13 is presented as the beginning of new homily, by Rabbi Boon, and in its first sentence it connects pars. 1–2 and 11–12 into one coherent unit, by reintroducing the subject of darkness and light and the term *mamash* together with the Isaiah verse. Light is identified as that which has substance, based on the combination of both par. 1 and par. 2, even though it is not mentioned again (*tohu* is absent in the same way). Its main contribution to our subject is the renewed emphasis on the term *mamash*, which serves as the central link for all the elements in this description. Light is *mamash*, therefore the term יצירה is used by the verse to describe it in the Isaiah verse; darkness, which is not *mamash*, is described by

the less meaningful term בריאה. This distinction is connected to the Bar Hijja interpretation of the creation story in Genesis.

The author declares clearly that darkness is a relatively negative term, which does not denote a substance in the full meaning of the term. As he has said the same about *tohu* in par. 2, we have every right to assume that this distinction covers the whole range of dualities discussed in these five paragraphs:

substance	non-substance
bohu	*tohu*
good	evil
light	darkness
right	left
Michael	Gabriel
water	fire
[*yetzira*]	[*beriah*]
mountains	wind

Another important term used by the author in this paragraph is *havayah*, one of the most important words in the vocabulary of all the early Jewish mystical circles in medieval Europe. Here it is used in a position synonymous to *mamash*, though it may be assumed that it has a wider range of meanings, mainly because of its close resemblance to the holy name of God.

The universe is conceived of by the author in these five paragraphs as a definitely dualistic one, but its source is one and only, God Himself; there is no hint here of a theological dualistic concept or an independent role of the powers of evil. The discussion is connected, though in a very subtle way, to the neo-Platonic concept of matter lacking substance and existence, and therefore evil being a negative term, an absence rather than an entity. The author was certainly aware of the concept of creation as uniting [primordial] substance with form, to create actual substance, but its utilization is minimal. One can hardly describe this discussion as being a "mythologization" of the concept of evil, and certainly no tendency toward theological dualism, denoting a conflict within God, is manifest here. The discussion is limited by strict homiletical bound-

aries, but its medieval nature is clear. No basis exists for identifying any gnostic element in it.

VI

A different literary, terminological, and theological presentation of the problem of evil is found in the *Bahir* sections 161–164. These four sections contributed, more than anything else, to the development of the concept of evil in the kabbalah in the second half of the thirteenth century. It seems that even though there are marked differences, some of the basic concepts found in the previous group of sections are still dominant; this part of the *Bahir* should be regarded as different, rather than contradictory, in relation to the first one. While the creation served as background for the first presentation, human sin is the main subject of this one, moving the emphasis from cosmology to individual and national obedience to the divine commandments.

Par. 161 is a retelling, in a dramatic and forceful manner, of the story of *Mey Mara*, the quarrel concerning the bitter water when the people of Israel were wandering in the Sinai Desert (Exodus 15:24–27). The reason for the bitterness of the water is stated, initially, as resulting from the influence of "The Wind of the North." When Moses threw the tree (believed to be a branch from the Tree of Life; the *Bahir* states that the Tree of Life was growing around the water) into the waters to sweeten them, it was not enough. "God immediately put His hand in Satan to diminish him, otherwise Israel could not overcome him." The whole episode is described as one in while Satan adhered to Israel דבק בהם, intending to destroy them completely. Satan also accused [קטרג] Moses, and removed the Tree of Life in order to make the people of Israel sinful to their God. The means Satan used was a warning: If the water here is bitter, this is nothing compared to what will happen in the desert, where there is no water at all, and everybody will die of thirst and hunger. Satan also "falsified" the complaint of the people to Moses, in order to put them in the position of sinners. It needed a direct and forceful intervention of God, who directed Moses to throw into the water the

Tree of Life removed by Satan, in order to sweeten the water. An ambiguous concluding sentence seems to indicate that the whole affair was a trial by God, who sent Satan to Israel, but at the same time God put "law and justice" to Satan, probably erecting boundaries to his work.

This elaboration of the biblical story as an intense drama involving Satan, Moses, the people of Israel, and God, revolving around the waters, the Tree of Life, and, ultimately, divine law, is reminiscent, to some extent, of the dramatic, mythical elaboration of the story of the Garden of Eden. The position of Satan, however, which is that of a rebel in the Adam and Eve story (in par. 200), is more ambivalent here. On the one hand, there is no doubt that he is a divine messenger, and that the theological meaning of the whole affair was to try the people of Israel. On the other hand, it seems that Satan has autonomous initiative; the concept of trial is not mentioned until nearly the end of the story, and then it is stated that God had to take some steps to limit the freedom of action of Satan.

This is evident from the parable that follows, describing the conclusions from the *Mey Mara* story rather than illustrating the story itself. The key sentence in this parable is that the king could not protect his daughter from the evil people who wished to make her stray to an evil way: "The king could not quarrel with them," therefore he warned her not to listen to these "enemies," she should not leave the house, she should do all her work within her home, she should not be idle for even one moment, and then they will not be able to see her and harm her. In the concluding sentence of the parable these evil people are described as ones "who have this one measure [מדה אחת], that they withdraw from every good way and choose every evil way, and they hate anyone who chooses to go the good way."

This parable, when taken as an illustration of the concluding sentence of par. 161, has far-reaching theological consequences, far beyond the concept of evil and the employs of Satan. The parable explains the reason for God's giving the Torah to Israel, the meaning of the many commandments imposed on the Jewish people by

God. They are intended to keep Israel safe, at home, always occupied, so that Satan will have no opportunity to seduce them to his evil ways. But all these commandments are the result of divine weakness: The king could not overcome directly the powers of evil threatening his "daughter," and therefore he chose to protect her, rather than vanquish them. The commandments direct Israel to a protective, secluded way of life, to stay away from the places where Satan is present, because direct confrontation, by Israel or by God Himself, cannot guarantee successful overcoming of Satanic temptations. In this concept, the commandments given to Israel in the Sinai theophany do not have an intrinsic, constructive value; they are important as protection and a barrier from evil.

In this structure, Satan cannot be regarded as completely subservient to God. Though God succeeded in preventing the *Mey Mara* affair from developing into a complete rebellion of Israel against God by sweetening the water, He could not guarantee the people safety from the threats of Satan in the future. If indeed the *Mey Mara* affair was a trial of Israel by presenting the temptations of Satan before them, if cannot be regarded as a victory; if it were not for this direct divine intervention, Satan would have won the contest. It is wrong, I believe, to push too far the theological implication of an exegetical myth and a parable, but there is no doubt that when we compare this presentation to the one found in the beginning of the *Bahir*, evil is presented here in a more intense, personal manner by the figure of Satan, and his powers are much wider and threatening—so much so that the very meaning of the Torah and the commandments is found in the limitations of divine ability to confront and vanquish him.

The concluding sentence of this paragraph (162) moves away from the particular story of the *Mey Mara* episode, and presents the abstract question: "What is Satan?" The answer is: "There is one measure of God called evil, and it is to the north of God," and all evil threatening the people of the Earth comes from the north, as stated in the verse in Jeremiah (1:14). The concept of north introduced here (and developed in par. 163), is not new: It is inherent in the concept of evil as left stated in par. 12, because left and north are synonymous in Hebrew (the word "left" is used for north, as south is indicated by the word "right" in various forms). The basis for this definition of Satan and evil is found in the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*, which uses the same Jeremiah verse to describe a myth, according to which during the process of creation God left the "northern corner" of the universe open and incomplete (a play on Jeremiah's word—תפתח, פתח), so that if someone pretends to be God, he could be challenged to complete this unfinished aspect of creation. Meanwhile, according to this seventh- or eighth-century source, the "open" northern corner is the place from which all evil things enter the world—demons, evil powers, even earthquakes and storms. This is a myth seeing the creation as an island of order and system surrounded by a cosmos of evil and danger, and the "opening" to the north enables some of these surrounding elements to enter it from time to time. The *Bahir* undoubtedly used it (par. 200 is a reworking of Chapter 13 in the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer).*

Despite this mythological tendency, the *Bahir* clearly states (a statement absent in its source) that this "measure" of evil is one of God's measures; it is not independent or intrinsically motivated; it is one of the elements of divine existence. The measure called evil is a divine measure. It is impossible to ignore the close relationship of this structure to the classical rabbinic description of God's two measures, *midat ha-din* and *midat ha-rahamim*, sometimes depicted as being to the left and to the right of God. In the rabbinic structure there is no doubt whatsoever that both of these two measures are divine and constitute necessary elements of divine providence, representing, ultimately, divine justice, even if sometimes it is harsh and painful.

The mythological element increases in the terminology selected for the elaboration of this subject in par. 163. This paragraph is an explanation of "a measure," obviously "a divine measure," as stated before. It is shaped like a hand and has numerous "messengers"—that is, fingers—all of them called "evil," some of them larger than others, and all intending to make the world sinful. This whole structure is identified with *tohu*, and *tohu* is located to the north; the par. 2 explanation of the term *tohu* is repeated here. This is then identi-

fied with the evil inclination in man. It is a characteristic of "left" and "north," because this is the realm given to it to govern. The *Bahir*, however, states that the evil powers chose to reside in the north, and do not wish to be anywhere else; they do not know "the ways of the south" and are less effective in their evil works in the south. Man's evil inclination is derived from left and north, and it tries to attract man to that direction.

This whole discussion can be understood as a myth struggling to break away from—or, viewed form the other side, to remain within—the boundaries of nondualistic theology. The picture drawn is neither consistent nor systematic. It is being pulled in one direction or another, reflecting ambivalence and uncertainty concerning the nature of evil in the universe. The identification of *tohu* with the evil of the north is consistent with the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer* myth, according to which the created cosmos is an island in a chaotic universe. The *tohu* is the chaos, which enters the cosmos from the north and becomes evil. It is described in anthropomorphic terms as a huge hand with many fingers (no doubt, a left hand), which enters even the hearts of all human beings in the form of the evil inclination. The emphasis that it is evil that selects the north for its realm is important: It is not God Who allotted it this corner, but rather it is the natural preference of the evil powers to reside there. This is an increase of the concept of their autonomy, and an indication that their power is not limited by a divine decree.

Yet despite this strengthening of the mythical element and the depiction of evil as autonomous, all this discussion is centered around the explanation of the nature of one of God's "measures." It is impossible to suggest an alternative to the concept that this "hand" with the evil fingers is actually the left hand of God Himself. Anthropomorphism, in this case, while increasing the impact of this myth, is used also to emphasize the unity of the divine figure and the inclusion of Satan and evil within this unity. Anthropomorphism here is used not as a vehicle for the intensification of the independence of the evil powers (this happened in the kabbalah of Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen three or four generations later, when two anthropomorphic figures, one to the left and one to the right, were introduced into the world of Jewish mysticism), but, on the contrary, to preserve evil within the realm of the one divine figure. The reader can sense the pulsating power of a dualistic myth in these paragraphs, but it does not break free; it is still constrained within the monotheistic structure.

To the list of synonymous appellations of good and evil presented above, these sections of the *Bahir* add the following:

south	north
right hand and fingers	left hand and fingers
good inclination	evil inclination

The problem is, how can we integrate the term "Satan" into this list? Its place in the right-hand column is clear, but what can be put in the other column as its counterpart? It cannot be God, because God is the ultimate source, the one figure of which Satan is a part. This seemingly formal question demonstrates clearly the ambiguities and ambivalences of this myth of evil in the *Bahir*.

VII

Two other discussions in the *Bahir* are related to this subject, and they represent the two extreme formulations of the concept of evil in this work. The first is the description of the fifth "utterance" in the list of ten, which is the fullest expression of the *Bahir*'s concept of the pleroma; the second is the concluding paragraphs of the whole work, dedicated to the explication of the original sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Paragraphs 144 and 145 are dedicated to the description of the divine right and left, constituting the fourth and fifth "utterances," arranged in an anthropomorphic sequence. These are the fourth and fifth *sefirot* as understood by later kabbalists, and in this case there is no meaningful gulf between the original *Bahir* statement and the later kabbalistic understanding. These are, indeed, the two main aspects of divine providence, following to a large degree the ancient talmudic concepts of the *midat ha-din* and *midat ha-rahamim*. The fourth power is described as "the justice of God, His mercy (*hasadav*),

and His benevolence toward the whole world, that is, the right [hand] of God." This brief description could fit nicely in any kabbalistic description of the *sefirah chesed* in any work of this school in the subsequent centuries. It may be closer to that system than any of the ten "utterances" of the *Bahir*.

The fifth utterance, described in par. 145, is described as "the great fire" of God, and the proof-text is Deuteronomy 18:16 ("This great fire I shall not see and shall not die"), and it is the "left [hand] of God." The verse denotes the power of punishment and of death, associated with the divine fire. The author then goes on to ask "And what is it," and answers: "These are the holy beasts and the sacred *serafim* to their right and to their left, and they are the pleasant ones [or, if the text can be corrected, the secret, esoteric ones], the supreme ones, as it said (Ecclesiastes 5:7) and supreme above them and more (Ezekiel 1:18). . . . And He is surrounded by angels, [who are also] around them, bowing and kneeling before them and saying "The Lord is God, the Lord is God."

The most important source for this description is undoubtedly the *Sefer Yezira*. When describing the fourth(!) *sefirah*, which is fire coming out of water (*Sefer Yezira* 1:13), the celestial powers surrounding the throne of glory (the throne itself is the sixth "utterance" according to the *Bahir*, described in par. 146) are stated to be derived from that power. Because of that, we may determine, as the text here seems to indicate, that fire is the central homiletical element in the description of this fifth power. The author elaborates a little, but essentially his concept of this aspect of the divine world is not different from that of the *Sefer Yezira*. It can be summed up by the statement that the world of the chariot, as described by Ezekiel, is derived from fire, and constitutes a definite stage in the evolvement of existence. The one meaningful addition of the *Bahir* to the *Sefer Yezira* description is the statement that this celestial realm is to the left of God, and the indication that punishment to the evildoers emanates from this place.

If we compare this description with the one analyzed above, we find the dualities of right and left, and (at least by implication) of fire and water, presented here. The celestial forces mentioned here

(especially the *serafim*, associated with fire) may indicate that Gabriel belongs to this realm, so that, presumably, Michael would belong to the previous one, the right hand. The other dualities—north and south, *tohu* and *bohu*, matter and form, good and evil—are not mentioned here. On the other hand, the element of divine punishment was absent from the earlier descriptions, and it is found here. Satan, needless to say, has no place in this description.

It seems that this paragraph, which is the most important indication in the *Bahir* of the place of evil in the essence of the divine figure, is as antidualistic as one can expect. It is not only because the elements of myth and dualism are subdued here, but also because this aspect of the divine entity is so closely integrated within the pleroma and constitutes, in the most emphatic manner, an equal part within the divine unity. This paragraph is more of a denunciation of any mythical dualism than its statement.

It may be argued that this description should be regarded as the power of justice within God, whereas the independent, antagonistic powers of evil are found outside of the boundaries of this anthropomorphic pleroma. This concept, reflecting later kabbalistic views, cannot be regarded as relevant to the *Bahir*, because enough elements of the more mythical and dualistic references to evil in the *Bahir* are found in this paragraph; it is inconceivable that God has another "left" or another punishing fire besides the one depicted here. Later kabbalists may distinguish between the left side of the Godhead itself and the left side outside of the Godhead, "the emanation on the left." The text of the *Bahir* itself, however, does not give any indication of such concepts.

The tone of the discussion is completely different in the concluding section of the *Bahir*. The relevant part for our analysis begins with an intense description of the dualism of male and female, both in the universe and within God Himself. The author declares the Torah to be the bride of God, which becomes, when the people of Israel study her, the bride of Israel as well (par. 196, end). The author continues with a homily concerning the biblical Tamar (par. 197), which turns into a discussion of the tree *tamar*, the palm tree. This tree is the strongest demonstration of sexuality, both in the Tal-

mud and the Midrash and in medieval texts, created as a combination of masculinity and femininity (par. 198). This leads the author to state (par. 199): "The soul of the female [is derived] from the female, and the soul of the male from the male. And this is the meaning of the snake's going after Eve; he said: As her soul is from the north, I can seduce her swiftly. And what was this seduction of her? This is because he had intercourse with her."

The first sentence should be understood, I believe, as a physiological one, expressing the belief that a daughter's soul comes from the mother and a son's soul comes from the father. Male and female, according to this belief, are eternally separated as different entities, because the union of male and female that produces the human body has nothing to do with the soul. If the embryo is to be male, it receives a soul from his father's side; and if female, from her mother's side. Mother and father unite to create the body of a child, but its soul is decided by its sex, and is derived from only one of them. This belief leads the author of the *Bahir* to an explanation of the theological nature of this separation: The soul of the female is from the north side (that is, the left side), while, presumably, the soul of the male is from the right side. This is relevant to the understanding of the story of the Garden of Eden: The snake targeted Eve for his seduction because her having a soul "from the north" made her a suitable subject for his evil designs.

The idea that the snake had intercourse with Eve is found in midrashic interpretations of this chapter in the book of Genesis; the author does not innovate or add a new element. The novelty is in the depiction of femininity, exemplified by Eve, as containing, at least potentially, an evil inclination that is absent in the masculine segment of humanity. This is a meaningful addition to the list of dualistic synonyms we have been collecting throughout this analysis: We may add the dualism of male-female to those of left and right, good and evil, fire and water, *tohu* and *bohu*. This can be regarded as a further development of elements found in the *Sefer Yezira*. The two dualisms, those of male-female and of good and evil, are described as parallel, grammatical ones in the ancient work, but some sentences may be understood as putting femininity closer to evil. What is hidden in the *Sefer Yezira* becomes manifest in this concluding section of the *Bahir*. Further, the element of sex is completely absent from the *Sefer Yezira*; here it is introduced forcefully as a characteristic of the evilness of femininity (a "sexual atmosphere" has already been created in the *Bahir* in the discussions of the human and the floral Tamar).

This, in fact, is the end of the book *Bahir* as a presentation of the author's views. The concluding paragraph (200) is a paraphrase of the late-midrashic retelling of the story of the Garden of Eden, based upon Chapter 13 of *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*. This is the only example in the whole book in which a midrashic text has been included in the *Bahir* almost in its entirety, with minimal changes. In all other sections, the *Bahir* demonstrates its independence by editing, changing, and paraphrasing the sources it uses. This is the only case (with the probable exception of some of its usages of the *Sefer Yezira*, but there the changes introduced are radical) in which the author of the *Bahir* seems to be saying: This has been said long ago, and I have nothing to add.

It is meaningful to the analysis of the concept of evil in the *Bahir* that the most radical, dualistic, and mythical statement on this subject is presented in a quotation from a previous source, without any elaboration on the part of the author of the *Bahir*. The ideas and themes in this midrash are not integrated within the symbolical structure of the *Bahir*; the main terms—the feminine element in the Godhead, the pleroma, the tree of the divine emanations—are not mentioned or hinted at in this concluding paragraph. It is as if the author of the *Bahir* was telling us: "I have nothing more innovative or radical to say on this subject than what is found in a traditional, ancient source." Paradoxically, concerning this subject the *Bahir* is most radical when it is, textually, most traditional.

This may be interpreted as expressing the *Bahir*'s awareness of how radical and different the text of the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer* is on this subject. This can be overlooked by the modern reader because the ideas expressed here are so familiar, because they have a foundation in the apocryphic and apocalyptical literature of antiquity, in Christianity, in gnosticism, and in later kabbalistic descrip-

tions of the powers of evil. It seems as if these ideas are an ancient part of Jewish tradition. This may indeed be the case, but the basic textual fact is that the talmudic-midrashic world knew nothing (or expressed nothing) similar to what is found in these few sentences. In the context of this culture, this chapter of *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer* is indeed revolutionary.

One indication of the difference between this and previous discussions of the nature of evil in the *Bahir* can be found in a seemingly external element. We have been trying to collect, throughout this analysis, the terminology of Bahiric dualism of good and evil. In all previous cases but one, everything has been symmetrical: Right and left, north and south, matter and form, *tohu* and *bohu*, male and female, fire and water, etc. The exception was Satan in par. 161, which does not have a counterpart "on the right." In this section, we have to include in the list the two new elements—the snake and Samael—following Satan, as terms that have no equivalent on the other side. These three—Satan, Samael, and the snake—constitute a mythological realm that is not reflected in a parallel image on the good side. This is an expression of the much stronger dualistic character of this paragraph. Yet it should be emphasized that all three are depicted in this way in *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*; this is not the invention of the author of the *Bahir*. It seems rather clear that the symmetrical depiction of good and evil terminology in consistent pairs is the work of this author; the more mythological aspect he quotes from an older source.

Quotation, however, is also a statement. By selecting this passage and allotting it a prominent place in the conclusion of the book, the author emphasizes its importance and accepts its implications. It is a different situation when this narrative is integrated in the retelling of the Genesis story in the midrash, and when it is separated from its context and presented as an independent statement in the *Bahir*. In *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer* this is the story of "what really happened" during the confrontation between Adam, Eve, the snake, and God in Eden. In the *Bahir* it is the statement of is what Satan is and how he shaped the fate of the universe.

Satan is named in this discussion, and is categorized as a rebel

against God. These are the two interconnected, new elements in this midrash that the *Bahir* selected to present as its conclusion. The name Samael, found in the apocryphal literature of the late Second Temple period, was not a prominent one in the descriptions of evil powers in classical talmudic-midrashic literature. It has a prominent place in only one segment of ancient Jewish literature—the mystical works of the "descenders to the chariot," especially in *Hechalot Rabbati*. In these texts he is portrayed as an "officer of the court" of God. Samael is the celestial representative of the Roman Empire and of the emperor, and at the same time his duty is to castigate and denounce the sins of the people of Israel and demand punishment for them. His figure expresses the transformation of the earthly struggle between Israel and Rome into a celestial one, fought in the divine court and governed by divine rules.

According to the narrative in *Hechalot Rabbati*, supported by a more developed legend, the story of the ten martyrs, the Roman emperor heard Jewish children in Rome reciting the verse from Exodus declaring the death sentence for anyone who captures a man and sells him to slavery. The emperor then demanded justice: The ten sons of Jacob sold their brother Joseph as a slave after kidnapping him, and they were never punished. He selected the ten most prominent scholars of the age, headed by Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael, the two sages of the Mishnah who are described, pseudepigraphically, as the leaders of the mystical circle of the "descenders of the chariot," and set out to execute them as representatives of the ten sons of Jacob.

When the news of the imperial decree reached Jerusalem, the mystics assembled to discuss it under the leadership of Rabbi Nehunia ben ha-Kanah. The sages did not know whether the decision to execute ten of them was an independent one made by the emperor or a divine decree. They sent Rabbi Ishmael on a voyage to the divine realms to investigate the matter, and his journey through the celestial palaces constitutes the main part of this mystical work. Concerning the narrative element, he found out that there was a detailed discussion between God and Samael concerning the punishment of the ten sons of Jacob, now represented by the sages.

Samael was within his rights to demand punishment; the case he presented was valid. God, however, demanded that if this harsh judgement was carried out, in retribution Rome would be completely devastated in the most horrible manner, described in detail in this treatise. This description actually transforms a tale of martyrdom into an apocalypse, prophesying the imminent redemption of Israel and the destruction of the core of evil in the universe, Rome and its emperor. Samael is reported to have accepted the "deal" because of his intense hatred for the sages of the Jews; their execution was more important to him than the preservation of his earthly domain, the Roman Empire. When Rabbi Ishmael returned from his mystical journey he told his colleagues about the celestial negotiations and their result; there was great rejoicing, and the sages who were about to be martyred in horrible ways celebrated the imminent destruction of Rome.

The role of Samael is defined precisely in this narrative. He represents evil on Earth, and personifies the wickedness of the emperor of Rome; most of all, he desires to destroy the Jewish people and its leaders. But he is a part of the celestial hierarchy, his function is given to him by God, and his position is necessary to preserve the balance of divine providence for the universe. He does not have autonomous powers. All he can do is derived from his success in convincing God, and the exploitation of the sins and mistakes of the people of Israel. *Hechalot* sources make no connection between him and other chapters in the history of evil on Earth, and certainly not of the story of the Garden of Eden. This *Hechalot* description of Samael is probably the most radical depiction of the power of Satan in ancient Hebrew literature preserved in rabbinic sources. As far as Hebrew readers in the Middle Ages were concerned, this was the most extreme description of the power of the devil to be found in their ancient sources before the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*.

By placing Samael as the central figure of the story of the origin of death at the dawn of history, the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer* transformed the concept of evil into a universal, eternal one. The snake has been redefined to be the representative and expression of Samael; the snake was, at that time, in the form of a camel (based on a

talmudic tradition), and Samael was its rider. The snake does not fulfill any further function in the story; the relationship between Samael and Eve is conducted directly. Thus the story has become a confrontation between man and the devil, directly, involving every human being in the world, because all are dominated by the consequences of this original struggle. Samael is not a messenger of God, but a rebel. Following several rabbinic traditions concerning the envy of the angels when man was created, Samael is described as a rebel who sought to undermine the position of man in the eyes of God. Samael descended, with all his "forces"—large groups of angels—intending to overcome God by making man commit a sin. The devil has thus achieved cosmic proportions as an independent, rebellious power.

Another evil figure that emerged from Jewish apocalypticism in Late Antiquity saw the power of Satan expressed mainly in eschatology rather than in cosmogony. Armilos, the devil described in the Apocalypse of the *Sefer Zerubavel*, is the expression of the power of Rome and also, probably, of Christianity, being close in many respects to the Christian figure of the anti-Christ. The struggle against him is the essence of the last chapter of the history of the world, and his opposite figure is the Messiah, rather than Adam. This concept is much closer to the *Hechalot Rabbati* concept of Samael than the one presented in *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*.

It should be emphasized that the story of Eve's seduction by the snake-Samael became the center of the concept of evil in many medieval presentations. This story represents the core of the argument concerning the essence of evil: Is it celestial, or is it human? Did evil intrude into the world because of the machinations of the devil, or because of the sinfulness of man? One of the closest interpreters of the *Bahir*, the first kabbalist who made an extensive use of this work, Rabbi Ezra of Gerona, retold this story in the beginning of the thirteenth century [in a text published and analyzed by Gershom Scholem]. In Rabbi Ezra's version, the pride and sinfulness of man is the source of the appearance of evil in the Garden of Eden; neither the snake nor the devil plays a meaningful part in those ancient, formative events. This section of the *Bahir*, therefore, is the

beginning of a centuries-long discussion and controversy in Judaism concerning the nature and origins of evil in the universe. The most radical Jewish mystics who emphasized the dualistic nature of existence tended to remove the source of evil farther and farther from man, and find its roots in earlier stages of the evolvement of creation. This attitude was best expressed by Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen, the *Zohar*, and Isaac Luria. One of the main expressions of this radicalization is the marginalization of the story of the Garden of Eden: If evil was a part of existence long before that, the confrontation in Eden was just one instance in a long history of such struggles. The *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer-Bahir* version still retains the connection to the actual creation, seeing Samael's rebellion as a part of the process of the creation of man and giving him dominion over the Earth. Thus, while denying that man is the actual origin of evil, the creation of man brought forth the circumstances in which the schism in the divine world between the devil and God began to develop.

For the author of the *Bahir*, the figure of Samael had one more attractive aspect: the word Samael in Hebrew is indistinguishable from the word "left." (The letters ס and ש are interchangeable, and their usage is more of a stylistic preference than a grammatical dictate.) This is the most meaningful element that ties this midrash with the previous discussions of the *Bahir* concerning the powers of evil. Though the name "Samael" was interpreted in many other ways, especially emphasizing his "blindness," since the *Bahir* the element of being on the left became the dominant one in the kabbalah. Even Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen, who wove around this figure the concept of "emanations on the left," also described him as תנינצול, "the blind snake."

Does this myth, derived from the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*, indicate a gnostic source or a gnostic character of the *Bahir*'s concept of evil? As far as the source is concerned, it is very doubtful. The various motifs that constitute the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer* midrash on Samael are derived from antiquity, and are found in several apocryphal, apocalyptic, and pseudepigraphic sources; they were intensified by several Christian sources, which stressed the temptation of Christ by the devil. The unusual historical fact is not the appearance of these concepts in this midrash, but their long absence from the literature of rabbinic Judaism. It has been suggested that the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer* received much of this material from Arabic sources, which received them from Christian writings, thus making Christianity and Islam the vehicles for the reintroduction of some ancient Jewish myths into rabbinic Judaism. The devil as a rebel, and the devil as the seducer of Eve, and even the name Samael, are all parts of ancient, familiar traditions. They were negated and glossed over by the Talmud and midrashim, and reappeared in the eighth century in this new form. One does not have to take the intensification of the dualism of good and evil in the cosmogonies of the various gnostic sects into account in order to explain the origins of these motifs or their transmission.

The inclusion of this myth at the end of the *Bahir* carries in it a double meaning: On the one hand, this is an intensified description of the devil, making him more independent than in any of the original Bahiric descriptions. On the other hand, the author of the *Bahir* did not use his own words, his own terminology, in this description. It is presented as an appendix, a myth present but not integrated within the framework of the *Bahir*'s theology and mysticism. The maximal original Bahiric expression is found in par. 199, identifying femininity with evil and explaining that Satan made use of this fact when he seduced Eve. The further development of this theme, and especially the depiction of the devil as rebel against God and as the enemy of humanity as such (and only of the people of Israel, as in the *Hechalot* treatises), are left to the midrash itself to convey.

VIII

The conclusions resulting from this analysis can be summed up in the following points:

1. The author of the *Bahir* tended to view the powers of evil as counterparts to good elements, in a structure expressing the dual nature of existence. This tendency may have been derived, at least partially, from the *Sefer Yezira*. The dualities

of north and south, *tohu* and *bohu*, male and female, water and fire, Michael and Gabriel, right and left, etc., represent in the most consistent form the concept of evil in the *Bahir*.

2. These dualities are incorporated in the symbolical, anthropomorphic concept of God, expressed by the metaphor of the left hand of God and its many fingers. This aspect of the divine figure does have some measure of autonomy, and its works are inimical to the attempts of the people of Israel to develop their righteousness and devotion to God, yet all of them clearly originate in God and are a part of the divine totality, negating any theological conflicting dualism.
3. In the passages in which the concept of evil is integrated with the description of the Bahiric pleroma, most notably in the discussion of the fifth "utterance," there is a clear connection to the series of dualities central to the concept of evil in the *Bahir*, but it is expressed in a more muted, less radical form.
4. Some elements of a neo-Platonic view, identifying evil with matter, or at least primordial matter, are found in the *Bahir*, especially in the identification of *tohu* as that matter and as representing evil. Yet this has not been developed into a full-fledged neo-Platonic concept of matter and evil.
5. More radical material, recognizable by its being external to the dualities that dominate the *Bahir*'s view, like the concepts of Satan and Samael, are presented in the *Bahir*, but not integrated into its specific set of symbols. The *Bahir* demonstrates that it had the sources that enabled it to present a concept in which evil will be more autonomous and antagonistic to God, yet he chose not to do it. The concept of evil in the *Bahir* is therefore moderate even when compared to its own overt sources.
6. All the terms of the *Bahir* that are used to convey the concept of evil are known to us from previous sources—biblical, talmudic-midrashic, *Sefer Yezira*, *Hechalot* mysticism, and late midrashic literature of the gaonic period, as well as some medieval ones, like Abraham bar Hijja. Nowhere in the analysis of this subject does the reader have the feeling that the *Bahir* is using terminology or concepts never before presented in Hebrew tradition. The innovative elements, like the integration of evil within the anthropomorphic symbolism of the ten "utterances" as the left hand and fingers of God, are clearly ones that may originate with the author himself (concerning the place of the powers of evil, disregarding in this discussion the origins of that symbolism itself).
7. As a conclusion of the previous points, it is evident that the presentation of the powers of evil in the *Bahir* does not demand an assumption that the author had any other sources concerning this subject, either gnostic ones or any other kind. Concerning gnosticism, there is no indication of gnostic dualism, of an evil cosmocrator, of the presence of evil in the cosmogonic process in a gnostic fashion. The subject of the powers of evil, so central to the discussion of gnostic characteristics of the kabbalah in later generations, is irrelevant to the discussion of the problem of the gnostic sources of the *Bahir*.

The analysis of this subject provides, I believe, the tools for the new approach to the other "gnostic" elements in the *Bahir*, namely the femininity of the *Shechinah*, the tree of the divine powers, and the pleroma of the divine utterances. If the cardinal subject of the powers of evil did not reveal any reference to non-Jewish or unknown Jewish sources, we may infer that this may very well be the case concerning the other three. Carl Popper defined a scientific statement as one that can be shown to be wrong. The previous sentence is clearly such a statement: It can be proved wrong by the demonstration that there is a connection between the text of the *Bahir* concerning the subjects mentioned as "gnostic" and either non-Jewish gnostic sources or esoteric, hidden ones of "Jewish gnosticism." This has not happened as yet; until it does, the conclusion should stand: The new terminology and the novel concept of the divine world presented in the *Bahir* are the result of a reworking of ancient Jewish sources, to which the mystic author of the *Bahir* added his own inspiration, his own visions, which he presented in the unique exegetical format he chose for this treatise.

The alternative to this view is the one that Scholem held, which was presented in an intensified form by some recent writers; namely, that there was a hidden Jewish tradition, probably oral, in which the concepts of the divine tree, the ten-power pleroma, and the feminine *Shechinah* were transmitted from generation to generation. Using Popper's method, can such a claim be proved wrong? It cannot, because one can never prove that there was no oral tradition. Therefore, it is not a scientific statement. A statement that "this was received by oral tradition" is identical to the statement, "I have no idea how it got here," because one can never know whether or not there was an oral tradition—or, if there was, what were its messages and ideas. By definition, in history "oral" is unknown. One can understand Scholem's optimism that sources would soon be discovered. Today, fifty years later, there is no basis for such optimism, and we should rely on extant information to describe the history of the *Bahir* and any other chapter in the development of Jewish mysticism. Assumptions concerning oral traditions, and presumed knowledge of what was and what was not in them should be discarded as unscholarly speculation.

The most important result of this suggested attitude to the new ideas of the *Bahir* is that we have to accept as fact that this treatise had an author, who was an original, profound mystic who contributed in the most meaningful way to the emergence and character of Jewish mysticism in the Middle Ages. Indeed, he should be regarded as a mystical visionary on the same level as the author of the *Zohar* and Rabbi Isaac Luria, as one of the few individuals who most meaningfully shaped the concepts of eight hundred years of Jewish mysticism. This conclusion, ironically, is tautological: The author of the *Bahir* was the author of the *Bahir*, yet the surprising disregard of this anonymous figure in scholarship in the field demands such renewed emphasis. His individuality, character, and style are evident, I believe, when we examine the language of the *Bahir*.

IX

The language of the *Bahir* has not been the subject of scholarly interest. It seems that by stating that the book is pseudomidrashic,

all that could be said about its linguistic and literary presentation has been said. The work is the first among a long list of kabbalistic works that pretended to be midrashic, and it seemed that nothing could or should be said about the subject beyond the pseudepigraphic characteristic: a person writing in the twelfth century and pretending to be writing in the second century. It is postulated here that the style and language of the *Bahir* are much more than simple pseudepigraphy. Actually, the uniqueness and the meaning of the *Bahir* are essentially a new, revolutionary concept of language and the way it is used to express the esoteric and mystical symbolism that it presents for the first time.

The first point to be made is that the pseudepigraphic character, the pretense to be a midrash, does not explain most of the linguistic phenomena in the work; rather, quite a few statements in the *Bahir* contradict the pseudepigraphic purpose. If the author seriously wished to pretend to present an ancient midrash, he would not, for instance, select as one of his main heroes the figure of Rabbi Amora, the ancient authority cited in several paragraphs. Every reader who is acquainted even in a minimal fashion with talmudic-midrashic literature knows that there never was, and never could be, a "Rabbi Amora," and that the title is one shared by hundreds of scholars in the postmishnaic literature. The fact that the *Bahir* put this obviously fictitious and unhistorical figure in such a prominent place in the work testifies to the fact that disguise and misleading were not his only purposes. Rabbi Amora is a prototypical personification rather than pseudepigraphy; the message seems to be, "It does not matter which sage said the following," something that never is found in the Midrash and actually is in contradiction to the midrashic literary formulations, in which there is nothing more important than the name of the sage transmitting a tradition. The name of the sage indicates the degree of authority and the antiquity of the statement. When the *Bahir* disregards it, saying almost "It does not matter," it is actually departing from midrashic norms, emphasizing the content rather than the source, demanding acceptance of the authority of the message rather than that of the messenger. In the choice of this title, an element of humor, or even satire, can be

detected (humor is one of the elements most difficult to identify eight hundred years later, yet account should be taken of its existence; people in the twelfth century had no less a sense of humor than contemporary people, and used it as frequently as contemporary authors do).

The very first statement in the *Bahir*, "Rabbi Nehunia ben ha-Kanah said," is not a midrashic statement. Rabbi Nehunia became a typical *tana* only in the Middle Ages, after the *Bahir*. Before that, he was the best-known representative of *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* mysticism, the head of the group of *yordey ha-Merkavah*, the ancient "descenders to the chariot," as described in the esoteric treatise *Hechalot Rabbati*. In that work he is joined by two other great "descenders"—Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael. There is a meaningful difference between Rabbi Nehunia on the one hand and Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael on the other: Rabbi Nehunia is almost unknown in talmudic-midrashic literature, a secondary, undistinguished figure who is not associated with any particular meaningful position in any field. Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael, on the other hand, are the most central figures of mishnaic tradition. Putting Rabbi Nehunia in the first sentence—traditionally, the one from which the title of a work is derived, and indeed the *Bahir* is known also as the *Midrash of Rabbi Nehunia ben ha-Kanah*—means that the connection to *Hechalot* mystical literature was more important to the author than the connection with tanaitic traditions. This is closely reminiscent of the beginning of *Sefer ha-Iyyun*, which was probably written in a time and place very near to that of the *Bahir*, and its similarity to the *Bahir* should be emphasized, giving us a better understanding of the composition of these two independent and unconnected mystical treatises, which, despite their great differences, represent the same spiritual awakening among Jewish pneumatics in southern Europe near the turn of the thirteenth century.

While preserving some basic elements of the pseudomidrashic language, syntax, and methodology, the *Bahir* presents a dramatic departure from most of the linguistic norms, going so far as to seem to be trying to break down, deliberately, the very fabric of the ancient linguistic structure. This is most obvious in a long section near

the beginning of the book, which is dedicated to an explanation of letters of the alphabet and the signs indicating the vocalization of the letters, the *nekudot*. A well-known example, which Scholem drew attention to but did not analyze from the linguistic point of view, is section 37.

The first sentence in the paragraph is a reformulation of a late rabbinic midrash, found in the third chapter of the eighth-century midrash *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*. The chapter, which is actually the first one in the book (the previous two are dedicated to the biography of the "author," Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos), is dedicated to a narrative describing the process of creation. Most of the discussion is centered around the creation of the various aspects and strata of the universe, but one paragraph stresses that process is incomplete; it has been discussed above, in the context of the concept of evil in the *Bahir*.

There is no doubt that the biblical verse underlying this midrash is the verse in Jeremiah 1:14: Evil comes (literally, will be opened) from the north. The midrash used the double meaning of the root, to denote not that it will be opened, but that it is open. The *Bahir* made use of this verse and this midrash in the end of par. 162 and the beginning of par. 163, so that there is no doubt that the author was aware of these two elements, the verse and its connection to the Jeremiah verse.

Par. 37, however, is integrated in the section of the *Bahir* in which almost every paragraph begins with a question concerning a letter or a vocalization sign. Here the question is: What is *patah* (the sign equivalent to "a" as a vowel, of which there are two in Hebrew grammar: "large *patah*" and "small *patah*").

The answer is: *petah*, i.e., opening. The second question follows: What is *petah*, this opening? And the answer: the northern direction (*ruach*, also meaning wind), which is an opening for the whole world; from the gate from which evil comes, goodness comes. The third question is presented (probably by disciples, as is evident from the answer later): What goodness? It is probable that this question is motivated by the realization that the author's answer is in complete contradiction to the familiar midrash's statement that from the

north only evil comes, so there is no question about evil; the problem that the author's statement presents is that goodness also comes from that same source. The disciples, therefore, inquire concerning the nature of this innovation that contradicts the source: What goodness?

The answer to this question is formulated in a personal way that is very seldom found in the midrash: "He laughed at them [and said]: Did I not tell you, a small *patah* (or *petah*; probably meaning both, the smaller vocalization sign and a small opening). They said to him: We have forgotten, teach us a second time." This is clearly a reference to the discussion in par. 34: "They asked him: Why is [the letter] *het* in the form of an opening, and is it vocalized with a small *patah*? He told them: This is because all the sides [of the universe; also, winds] are closed, except the northern corner, which is open to good and to evil. They said: To the good? But the verse (Ezekiel 1:4) says that a wind of storm comes from the north, a great cloud and a burning fire, and the meaning of fire is [divine] anger, as it is written (Leviticus 10:2) a fire came out from before God and consumed them and they died. He said to them: There is no difficulty; this is when Israel is obeying the will of God, and this is when Israel does not obey the will of God. When Israel does not obey the will of God the fire is near, and when they do obey His will the measure of mercy unrolls and surrounds, as it is said (Micah 7:18): [God] forgives a sin and passes a crime."

This the disciples have forgotten, and in answer to their request to be reminded, the author narrates a parable: "This is like a king who had a chair. Sometimes he takes it on his arm, sometimes on his head. They said: Why? Because it is pretty and [it is a waste] to sit on it. They said: And where did he put it? On his head. He told them: With an open *mem*, as it is said (Psalms 82:12): Truth will grow from the earth and justice will observe from the heaven."

Here is a deliberate attempt to confuse and obfuscate, despite the fact that the discussion reflects a clear and coherent statement concerning a basic theological question. As far as the theological message is concerned, the author insists that the common concept, reflected both in biblical verses and in the Midrash, that the north is

open to the invasion of evil into the created cosmos is not really so. The truth is that from the north comes the divine response to the behavior of the people of Israel. When they are good and obedient, the north brings forth goodness; when they commit sins and crimes, evil, fire, and storms come to punish and destroy them. The quoted verse from Psalms seems to express that: Justice comes from above, not evil; the divine response acquires its character from the deeds of man. This is emphasized again in pars. 38–39. Here the author adds the term "gate," "gates of Zion," to the discussion as an equivalent of "opening"; the "gates of Zion" are "the openings of the world." Admittedly, the author says, these gates are open to the side of evil (that is, to the north), but God loves them when they are open, and when the people of Israel are good and satisfy God with their behavior they are qualified to be opened to the good, and God loves them more than any other aspect of the "dwellings of Jacob." The parable in par. 39 explains that the person who is inclined to do evil is more appreciated when he does good than one who is always inclined toward good. North, therefore, is more appreciated when it is the source of good, though admittedly its main inclination is toward evil.

It should be emphasized, I believe, that this Bahiric discussion actually is manifestly antimythical as well as antitheurgic. The *Bahir* denies here the concept that emerges from the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer* of the created cosmos being an island of order floating in a sea of chaos, when the process of creation is actually the sealing of the chaos outside, leaving only the "corner of the north" open to the intrusion of evil. The *Bahir* actually accepts that picture in par. 163, when north is equated with *tohu* as the realm of evil. Here, however, the mythical, constant devotion to evil is denied, and made dependent on the will of God, which in itself is an answer to the deeds of man. Though there is a basic tendency or inclination toward evil in the north, it can also easily be the gate of love and mercy, provided that the people of Israel obey their Creator. There is no meaningful tendency toward theurgy here, because the deeds of the people change their own fate, and little else. God's punishment or reward is given to them according to what they have justly

earned; God is changed neither by their obeying nor by their sins and crimes. Neither is the "north"; it has the potential to supply goodness despite its inclination toward evil, and the deeds of the people decide which aspect will become dominant. Theologically, this discussion is moderate, constrained, level-headed, and rather traditional.

The language, however, is everything but level-headed and traditional. Nothing is clear, and it seems to be deliberately obfuscated. Why the insistence of "small *patah*"? Why is the small *patah* more conducive to both good and evil than the *patah*? Why the "open *mem*"? The chair that God puts on either His head or His arm is obviously the *tefilin*, the phylacteries; how are they connected to the *patah*, to good and evil? It seems that the author wishes to obscure and mislead, to create an impression of illogicality, to deliberately destroy the sequence of midrashic exegesis and even his own systematic presentation of theological concept. He uses the duality of *patah* as a pronunciation mark, to serve as a counterpart to the duality of the "open" and "closed" *mem*, to signify the opening and closing of the gates of the north, and ultimately the duality of good and evil. Yet he does so in a manner that makes it deliberately esoteric and confusing.

Several dialogical exchanges in this section indicate an attempt to destroy the sequence and meaning of discourse. In par. 36 the disciples ask their teacher: "Why is [the letter] *dalet* thick on the side? He said: Because of the *segol* that is in the small *patah*." However one explains this—it is possible to explain it—there is no doubt that the nature of the statement is deliberately obscure and confusing. Similar examples abound here and in other sections of the *Bahir*.

We may conclude that the theology presented by the *Bahir* is sometimes logical and coherent, and sometimes it is not; but the author of the *Bahir* wished to present even his most coherent and traditional ideas in the most illogical, incomprehensible way. He intended to break the classical structure of the midrashic discourse at the same time that he was pretending to create an ancient midrash. Any medieval Jewish scholar reading these pages will not accept for even a moment that this is the way midrashic exegesis is discussed

in ancient sources. The *Bahir* wished to present something different and new, leaving only a very shallow layer of pseudomidrashic structures that appear, only from afar, to give this work the character of an ancient midrash.

If we seek a counterpart, an analogy, to this aspect of the linguistic attitude of the *Bahir*, I believe it is found in the structure of many Zen Buddhistic *koans*. The main message of the *koan*, whether conveyed in words or deeds or a combination of both, is to break the concept of logical communication, to surprise the reader or listener by words and phrases that, by their very combination, defy logic and sequential discourse. It is an attempt to communicate the incommunicable by the demonstration of the insufficiency and limitations inherent in the ordinary concept of communication. The most important means used by the *koan* for this purpose is the dialogue, the brief interchange, usually between master and disciple. The disciple asks; the master seems to answer but he does not: he conveys by his enigmatic non-answer his attitude toward the question. The broken dialogue of the *koan* demonstrates how misleading linguistic discourse can be in the quest of truth. Of course, it does use language to communicate a worldview, even though this communication is mostly of a negative nature.

These parallels between the *Bahir* and the *koan* would have sufficed, according to some methodologies recently employed in the study of kabbalah, to establish the Japanese origin of the *Bahir*. Needless to say, the purpose of this discussion is to analyze an analogy, and to use this analysis for the better understanding of the attitude of the *Bahir* toward language; no historical connection whatsoever is postulated between the *Bahir* and Zen or any other aspect of Buddhism. The analogy is a rather partial one, the main difference between these two cases being the fact that the *koan* constitutes a destructive depiction of master-disciple discourse; in the *Bahir*, this element of destructiveness is directed toward a specific kind of such discourse, that is, talmudic-midrashic exegetical discussions, of which the *Bahir* pretends to be one. This is actually the *Bahir*'s attack on its own pseudepigraphic mantle.

In this, another analogy presents itself that is much closer in

time and context to the world of the *Bahir*, but even in this case I cannot postulate a historical relationship. There is no evidence that the author of the *Bahir* was aware of its existence, or, if he was, that he understood its satirical negation of midrashic discourse. This is the satirical pseudepigraphy known as the *Parables of Ben Sira* or the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, which probably was written in Babylonia in the ninth or tenth century. Two of its four sections are relevant to this discussion. In the first, a long dialogue is presented, the speakers being the teacher and the infant Ben Sira, who is described as being a year old at the time. Ben Sira speaks a series of epigrams, arranged alphabetically, that are interpreted by the teacher to be references to his personal life, his wife, his daughters, etc., invoking a humorous effect, and demonstrating how dialogue can mean completely different things to different people. The second section constituting the main part of this narrative work is a series of twenty-two epigrams of Ben Sira (many of them quoted from talmudic-midrashic sources), which are interpreted by the son of the author, Joseph, and his grandson, Uzziel. The dialogue is a distinct satirical treatment of midrashic discourse, venomous and bitter in its attitude, negating mainly the ethical concepts that are believed to underlie the talmudic-midrashic worldview.

Another example of the personal nature of the Bahiric presentation and its distance from simple pseudepigraphy is found in sections 60–63. This part of the *Bahir* is structured in the form of questions and answers, the disciple asking and the teacher (probably Rabbi Berechia) answering. The main sequence of questions is concerned with the shapes of the letters, but the discussion wanders to many biblical verses and other subjects. In par. 60, the disciples ask: What is the meaning of the "righteous judgments" in Psalms 119:144? The teacher answers: "You did not study my words closely enough; do so and you will find out." There is no elaboration, and the dialogue remains enigmatic. The disciples continue and ask the next question in sequence (par. 61): "What is the letter *Zadi*?" and the teacher answers: "It is *nun*, *yod*, *zadi*, and its pair is also *nun*, *yod*, *heh*, this is what is written (Proverbs 10:25): The righteous (*tzaddik*) is the foundation of the world." Again, this remains enigmatic, and

the disciples continue and ask concerning a verse (Numbers 23:14), to which the teacher answers in a very suggestive way, mentioning the term "the heart to God." Par. 63 begins with the question, "What is his heart?" to which the answer is: "He said to him: If so, then Ben Zoma is still outside, and you are with him. Heart is the thirty-two (paths), which were esoteric, and with them the world was created." The continuation is an elaborate reformulation of the *Sefer Yezira* concept of the thirty-two "paths of wisdom."

The story of Ben Zoma is found in Tosefta *Hagiga* II and is elaborated in both Talmuds. It is the tragedy of a mystic and a thinker pondering cosmogonical questions who probably both lost his mind and died before his time. The phrase, "Ben Zoma is outside" either "still" or "already" refers to his lunacy and impending death, and is followed by the statement: "A few days later Ben Zoma was dead." This tragic phrase is presented in the *Bahir* as an ironic joke directed by the teacher to his disciple: "Ben Zoma is still outside (i.e., he has not grasped it) and you are with him." The author of the *Bahir* may not have been the first to use this phrase, but it certainly represents a personal style, an expression of an individual's sense of satire, and an unusual attitude toward language and exegesis inconsistent with a pseudepigraphic attempt to present a classical midrashic discourse.

These are but brief, preliminary examples of the work that should be done in broad and detailed manner to establish the spiritual, theological, and personal characteristics of the mystic who brought to Jewish mysticism the concepts of the ten-power pleroma, of the feminine *Shechinah*, and of the tree of divine powers. It is hoped that further work will reveal more layers in the personality of this fascinating, original mystic. Yet it should be noted that he was not alone: At the same time, in other parts of Europe, other Jewish sages were formulating other systems of Hebrew esotericism and mysticism.

X

The emergence of Jewish mysticism in medieval Germany and northern France is closely connected with three major historical de-

velopments that characterize Jewish culture in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These three processes affected several aspects of Jewish creativity in this period, but their impact on mystical and esoterical writings is most meaningful. They relate to changes in the concept of scholarship; in the concept of language; and in the concepts of God, the creation, and divine revelation.

Until the second half of the twelfth century, Jewish creativity in the realms of thought, ethics, and esotericism was that of individual writers working independently. Saadia Gaon, Ibn Gabirol, Judah ha-Levi, Bahya Ibn Pakuda, Abraham bar Hijja, Abraham Ibn Ezra, and many others are isolated writers; we do not know who were their teachers, their colleagues, or their disciples. The concept of "schools," so deeply ingrained since ancient times in the study of the *halachah*, is completely absent in the first three centuries of medieval Jewish thought. In the thirteenth century, almost all the writers in this field are integrated into "schools": the rationalists and the mystics of the Provence and northern Spain, the Tibbonite school, the Kalonymus school in the Rhineland, the Unique Cherub circle (see below), and many others. This dramatic transformation, which occurred in the second half of the twelfth century (the emergence of the Maimonidean school undoubtedly had a meaningful effect on it), changed the character of Jewish creativity in the fields of theology, esotericism, and mysticism, and shaped their historical development. Jewish mysticism in Germany and France is a part of this process, enhancing it and being shaped by it.

The second transformation occurred in the realm of language. The external expression of this change is the transition of Jewish creativity from Arabic into Hebrew, and the emergence of Hebrew styles and terminologies dedicated to the expression of philosophical, esoteric, and mystical ideas. Many of the writers in this period had to invent new modes of expression, having no Hebrew precedent or accepted tradition. Abraham bar Hijja, Abraham ibn Ezra, Maimonides (in his Hebrew writings), the Tibbonites, and the Ashkenazi schools created styles and terminologies to suit their particular needs. Originality in language and style usually enhances originality in content as well, and this is at least a partial explanation of the unusual variety and power of Jewish thought in this period.

The external transition to Hebrew, which was the result of historical processes that brought many Jewish communities under Christian rule (and the Jews refused, for religious reasons, to accept Latin as a language, while they viewed Arabic as a secular language of a civilization and not only the language of Islam), had many other results, some of them affecting culture in subtle ways. One of the immediate results of this process was the strengthening of the ties between Jewish medieval speculations and the world of the Talmud and the Midrash, in content and in form. Pseudepigraphy in midrashic modes abounded, and midrashic language had a renewed impact on the thought of rationalists and mystics alike. At the same time, the ancient midrashic concepts of language, as an expression of the infinite wisdom of God, were reinvigorated. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet were not regarded just as elements that combine to enable human communication, but as the sources of divine creative power (for God created the world by ten linguistic utterances made up of these letters), and including within them an infinity of meaning. Language was not regarded as a means or a tool, but as the subject and ultimate purpose of speculation.

The third major historical process that shaped the emergence of Jewish mysticism in medieval Germany was the growing distance between rationalistic philosophy and the needs of everyday religious worship. The concept of God, as described in the writings of Maimonides and his followers, appeared remote, inaccessible, and removed from religious experience. It seems that the rationalists denied any possibility of actual divine revelation, and made impossible any contact between the worshipper and transcendent divinity even in prayer: Both revelation and the acceptance of prayer postulate a change in God, an exercise of His will. The "God of the Philosophers" seemed to be incapable of such adherence to human needs. This growing distance, which was expressed in Spain and the Provence by the growing criticism of Maimonidean philosophy until the eruption of open controversy in 1232, motivated several Jewish thinkers in Germany and France two generations before the

beginning of public controversy to seek other ways to portray the relationship between the Creator and His devoted creatures. It is probable that the first example of such a radical change occurred in the schools of the Jewish esoterics, mystics, and pietists in Central Europe, known by the collective name Ashkenazi Hasidim.

XI

"Ashkenazi Hasidism" is the traditional appellation, adopted also by modern scholarship, for the groups of esoteric theologians, mystics, and teachers of ethics that flourished in medieval Germany, mainly in the Rhineland, between the middle of the twelfth century and the end of the thirteenth. This collective designation does not indicate uniformity of thought and religious attitudes; contemporary scholarship has proved that this term is applied to several circles of writers who differed considerably from each other, and that meaningful differences existed within particular groups and schools. It is evident today that this period in the history of Ashkenazi Jewry was one of the most creative and dynamic ones, even though it developed under the heavy shadow of the recurring persecutions of the Crusaders and repeated destructions of communities and cultural centers. The ethical concepts and norms developed in this period became dominant in Ashkenazi thought for centuries, and the theologies and mystical speculations that emerged there were integrated into the kabbalah, which replaced them at the end of the thirteenth century. Ashkenazi Hasidism should therefore be regarded as a general designation of the phenomenon of Jewish communities in a tormented period asserting themselves and producing vibrant schools of innovative, vigorous religious speculation, redesigning the meaning of Jewish spirituality, ritual, and social behavior. A brief historical survey of this phenomenon is in order.

XII

The central school of Ashkenazi Hasidism, the best-known and most influential, was centered around a group of leaders from the

Kalonymus family, which was the most prominent family in the Rhineland in the twelfth century. This family claimed to have originated in the Kalonymus family in Italy, a part of which was moved, so tradition claimed, by "King Karl" from Italy to Mainz at the beginning of the ninth century. The "founding father" of this school was Rabbi Samuel ben Kalonymus (d. appr. 1180), who is persistently called החסיד, הקדוש, והנביא ("the pious, the saint, the prophet"), a most unusual series of titles unparalleled in this period. He wrote several treatises in the fields of ethics, exegesis, and *halachah*, but did not leave an exceptional literary legacy. The dominant figure in this school was his son, Judah, known as Rabbi Judah the Pious (died in Regensburg, 1217), who was regarded as a great teacher, leader, mystic, and magician by subsequent generations. Rabbi Judah was the author of *Sefer Hasidim* (The Book of the Pious), the main ethical work to emerge from Ashkenazi Jewry in the Middle Ages (the most important version of which is extant in one manuscript, Parma H 3280, a short version printed in Bologna 1538), and several esoteric theological-mystical works (most of them in Oxford, Bodleian Library 1566–1567). Rabbi Judah's close relative and disciple, Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah ben Kalonymus of Worms (d. appr. 1230) was the main writer of this school. He is known as the Rokeach because of his halachic work (רקח, a *gematria* reference to his name) which includes detailed ethical introductory chapters (following the example of the *Sefer ha-Mada* of Maimonides, but very different in its contents). He wrote many esoteric treatises, including a comprehensive commentary on the prayers, the earliest in our possession (in three different versions, ms. Paris 772, ms. Vienna 108, ms. Oxford Bodl. 1204, parts in several other mss., recently published in a traditional edition by M. Hirschler). This work includes references to various events in his life, including the massacre of his family, and the history of the period, as well as a genealogy of the tradition of his family from its origins in Italy to his own time. The main collection of his theological works is the *Sodey Razaya* (סודי רזיא, *Secrets of Secrets*, also a *gematria* of his name) which includes five works: *The Secret of Creation*, *The Secret of the Chariot*, *The Book of the Holy Name*, *The Wisdom of the Soul*, and a commentary on the *Sefer Yezira*, the an-

cient *Book of Creation* (parts were printed, but the whole collection is extant in British Library ms. 737 and Munich 81, and many others). He wrote, in 1217, an introductory work to the study of esoteric wisdom, *The Book of Wisdom* (mss. Oxford Bodl. 1566, 1567, 1568, 1812, printed in a traditional edition in *Rabbi Eleazar's Commentary on the Torah*, Jerusalem 1978), which includes a description of the esoteric methodology of hermeneutical analysis that was dominant in this school.

This school developed a unique tradition concerning the history of its esoteric knowledge, describing it as an ancient one originating in the schools of the *gaonim* in Babylonia. It was transmitted to European esoterics, according to them, by a miraculous figure—Aharon ben Shmuel of Baghdad, who came to Italy from Babylonia probably in the eighth century, performed many miracles, and taught magical and mystical secrets, which the Kalonymus family transported from Italy to the Rhineland. The figure of Rabbi Aharon is described in detail in the *Chronicle of Ahima'az*, an Italian novel of the eleventh century.

Rabbi Eleazar had several disciples who continued to develop the teachings of his school after 1230. Among them are Rabbi Isaac of Vienna, the author of the halachic work *Or Zarua*, and especially Rabbi Abraham be'rabi Azriel of Bohemia, the author of the encyclopedic commentary on the *piyyut* (published in four vols. from Vatican ms. 301 by E. E. Urbach, Jerusalem 1939–1964). Other writers of this school include a radical mystic, Rabbi Nehemia ben Shlomo, known to us from several quotations only; Rabbi Samuel ben Kalonymus, the author of *Sefer Shekod*; Rabbi Judah the Pious's son, Rabbi Moshe Zaltman, who wrote a biblical commentary based on conversations with his father (ms. Ginzberg 82 and others, in different versions; a censored edition published by A. Lange, Jerusalem 1976); and his grandson, Rabbi Moshe, the author of a commentary on the *Shiur Komah* at the end of the thirteenth century.

While the Kalonymide school is the central one, there were several other groups that developed their own theologies independently of that school. The most important among them are discussed below.

An important influence was the anonymous author of the *Sefer ha-Hayim*, written around 1200 and deeply influenced by the teachings of Abraham ibn Ezra. Found in several manuscripts (British Library 756, Munich 209, and many others), it constitutes one of the earliest attempts to present, in Hebrew, a comprehensive system of theology and ethics. It presents unique concepts of divine providence, a combination of theology and astronomy, a detailed psychology, and a comprehensive explanation of the nature of evil. It did not have considerable impact, and its influence was limited. Another important treatise is the *Sefer Ha-Navon*, a commentary on the Shema prayer and the *Shiur Komah* (ms. Angelica 46, Berlin-Tübingen 239; printed by J. Dan in *Kovetz Al Yad*, vol. I, 16 [Jerusalem 1966]), which is an independent investigation by an Ashkenazi scholar of the unity of God.

The most important spiritual phenomenon in the Ashkenazi realm at this period besides the Kalonymus family is the circle of anonymous esoterics and mystics known as the Unique Cherub circle. We have from this group nearly a dozen treatises, representing probably four generations of writers, between the end of the twelfth century and the middle of the thirteenth. These mystics developed a peculiar tradition, claiming that the origin of the esoteric knowledge is a *barayta* attributed to Joseph ben Uzziel, the grandson of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), who was, according to this tradition, the son of the prophet Jeremiah. The text of this *barayta* survived in several manuscripts (Oxford Bodl. 2525, Paris 770, Parma 1138), to which two layers of commentaries were added. The *barayta* is based on the *Sefer Yezira*, and indeed the whole corpus of writings from this circle can be regarded as a series of commentaries on this ancient work.

Besides the *barayta*, this circle relied on an alphabetical theological liturgical poem to which commentaries were written, and a brief text called *Pesach ha-Yirah veha-Emunah*, Decision Concerning the Fear of God and Faith (ms. Munich 92, New York-Adler 1161), dealing with the divine power to which prayer should be directed. An important work of this circle is the commentary on the *Sefer Yezira* that is known as the Pseudo-Saadia, an abbreviation of which

was printed in the traditional editions of the *Sefer Yezira*; the full text is found in many manuscripts (Munich 40, etc.). (The attribution to Saadia relies on a layer of the commentary that begins with the words פֵּ, which is found dozens of times in other works of this circle. In this text, however, it is found several times as פֵּרֵ֫שׁ, which was understood as representing "Rav Saadia commented," but there is no proof that such an intention or such a formula ever existed in the original text. Rav Saadia is not mentioned or quoted anywhere in the works of this circle.)

One name is mentioned in the works of this circle, that of Rabbi Avigdor ha-Zarfati, who is not known from any other source. His "book" is quoted briefly, and there is no reason to suppose that he was a central figure in this circle.

The one known author of this circle was Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar, who lived and wrote in northern France and England in the first half of the thirteenth century. Three treatises of his survived (ms. Fulda 4, Paris 815, 770, and two mss. in the JThS, New York 838), two of them commentaries on the *Sefer Yezira* (one of which was published by G. Vajda in *Kovetz Al Yad*, vol. I, 16 [1966], and one, *Sod ha-Sodot* (Secret of Secrets), a theological investigation mainly concerning the structure of the divine world and the human soul, also based on the *Sefer Yezira*.

It is not known why these mystics selected the Jeremiah-Ben Sira-Joseph ben Uzziel genealogy for the pseudepigraphic source of their tradition. The legend describing the strange circumstances in which Ben Sira was born to Jeremiah's daughter (thus being both the son and the grandson of the prophet) are described in a fictional work known as the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, originating probably in ninth-century Babylonia. The author of that work of fiction also attributed to Ben Sira a son, Uzziel, and a grandson, Joseph, who are presented as exegetes of Ben Sira's epigrams. This work is in no way pietistic; it is vulgar, erotic, and, in several cases, heretical, denying redemption and afterlife, and presenting a fiercely satirical attitude toward the Bible and the Talmud. It is very strange that the cast of characters of this anarchistic fictional work would serve as the source of tradition for Ashkenazi esoterics and mystics several centuries later.

It is evident, however, that the writers of this circle expressed by their choice of sources a desire to return to direct biblical tradition rather than to a talmudic-gaonic one, as did the scholars from the Kalonymus school. In this, as concerning several other subjects, they expressed a more radical and innovative religious attitude than other Ashkenazi Hasidic circles. In many respects, this circle represents a central European parallel to the southern European circle of mystics known as the Iyyun circle, which developed an intense neo-Platonic mysticism at the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, based on the *Sefer Yezira*, their treatises described as ancient *Hechalot* traditions. Both schools demonstrate that in this period, which corresponds to the time in which the kabbalistic *Bahir* was written and in which the early circles of the kabbalists in the Provence took shape, there were intense mystical tendencies in various places in the Jewish communities in Christian Europe. Despite their independence from each other and their divergence in ideas and terminology, they all expressed a desire to reinterpret old sources in a new, mystical, and mythological way, and to create pseudepigraphic legends behind which they could hide their contemporary identity.

The new ideas and attitudes of Ashkenazi Hasidism were many, and they cover the whole spectrum of Jewish culture. Their innovations and impact on Jewish culture can, however, be summarized within four main subjects, in which the transformation they presented were most radical and their impact greatest. These are the methodology of hermeneutics, the divine pleroma, the concept of prayer, and the development of mystical prayer, and a new spiritualistic attitude toward Jewish ethics and ritual. We will briefly describe these four subjects.

XIII

Rabbi Eleazar of Worms presented in his *Sefer ha-Chochmah*, written in 1217 under the influence of the death of his teacher, Rabbi Judah the Pious, a list of seventy-three "gates of wisdom" (the number is based on the numerical value of the word *Chochmah*), each of which constitutes one method for the exegesis of biblical verses. Later

in this work he presented a detailed example of how these methods should be employed in interpreting one verse—the first verse of Genesis—by many of them. Thus we have a clear example of this school's hermeneutical concepts.

Nearly fifty-five of these "gates" present techniques based on the external characteristics of the biblical text: the numerical value (*gematria*), acronyms (*notaricon*, both of the first and the last letters of a group of words), the various methods of *temurah* (transmutation of letters, or the exchange of letters by others according to a specific rhythmic method), the proximity of words to each other (*semuchim*), the interpretation of the vocalization marks (*nikkud*), the musical signs (*teamim*) and the adornments of letters (*tagin*), and the shape of the letters themselves. Several gates are dedicated to counting the number of words, letters, and holy names in a segment of a biblical text and the interpretation of the meaning of that number (its correspondence to other segments that have the same numbers), even the exegesis of the absence of certain letters from a verse or a group of verses, and many others.

These methods are essentially midrashic, and examples for them can be found in ancient literature. To some extent this list follows traditional lists of "the ways by which the Torah is to be interpreted." There is no ancient example, however, to such a detailed and comprehensive presentation of the midrashic concept of language and hermeneutics. The theological basis of this methodology is the deep belief that language is of divine origin, that it is essentially an expression of divine wisdom, and that its use by human beings as a means of communication is a secondary, unimportant role. Language existed before the world was created, and creation itself is the result of divine speech. This concept demands that language have an infinity of meanings, because divine wisdom is infinite and can never be exhausted by human comprehension. The divine source also indicates that the exegete cannot distinguish between "important" and "not important" aspects of language, as in saying that literal meaning is important while the shape of the letters or the vocalization marks is secondary. The biblical verse includes a full semiotic expression of divine wisdom in all aspects of its presentation, and divine meaning is hidden is every aspect of linguistic expression—visual, auditory, numerical, and semantic. The Torah existed before the creation of the world, so its structure, form, and meaning are independent of human needs and limitations. No interpretation, therefore, can exclude any other, and every possible meaning found in it can coexist with a multiplicity of other explanations. The meeting between the exegete and the verse is the meeting between a human mind and a divine one; human beings may discover more and more layers of meaning, but they can never exhaust them, and cannot designate one kind of interpretation as inferior or superior to any other. The divine text is a picture of letters, marks, adornments, etc., as well as a combination of sounds, a hidden numerical layer, and many semantic messages, all of them of equal value and standing. Hermeneutics means, therefore, the infinite effort to discover more and more aspects of divine wisdom hidden in all the semiotic aspects of the verse—the pictures, the sounds, the numbers, and the various meanings.

The semantic level is represented in the list of seventy-three "gates" by many subjects: prayer, the divine glory (*kavod*), the chariot, the soul, the angels, the divine name, the "secret," "faith," divine unity (*yichud*), and others. A group of thematic gates is dedicated to ethical principles, the love of God, fear of God, piety (*hasidut*), repentance; a third group of themes is a list of texts the exegesis of which is to be combined with biblical hermeneutics—the *Sefer Yezira*, the Talmud, the Midrash, the prayerbook, the *piyyut*. The example that follows demonstrates the use of the technical as well as the thematic principles in the exegesis of the first verse of the Torah.

This list was not regarded by the Ashkenazi Hasidim of the Kalonymus school as theoretical, but a structural directive for esoteric speculation. All the works we have from the Ashkenazi Hasidim of this school—several dozen treatises—bear titles that are taken from this list; chapters in works often are also titled by such terms. The collection of works by Rabbi Judah the Pious in ms. Oxford 1566-67 includes thematic "gates"—the divine glory, the angels, and possibly the soul—and technical ones—*semuchim*, *teamim*, *tagin*. Rabbi Eleazar's *Sodey Razaya* is a collection of five thematic "gates"—Creation,

Chariot, Holy Name, the Soul, and the *Sefer Yezira*. Rabbi Eleazar's ethical chapters in the *Rokeach* include the "gates" of Piety, Love, Fear, and Repentance; another treatise by Rabbi Eleazar is a combination of three of the "gates"—"The Gates of Secret, Unity, and Faith." Other works from this circle and related ones demonstrate the same awareness of this list.

The ancient concept of the Midrash has been developed in this system of "gates of wisdom" into a comprehensive concept of language and hermeneutics, representing the full utilization of the divine message to man incorporated in the Bible in its infinite aspects and forms. The concept of the inexhaustibility of the meaning of divine language has been formalized and adopted as the basic approach to the hermeneutical treatment of ancient texts. It was used not only in the interpretation of the Bible, but also in the exegesis of the prayers, and the Ashkenazi Hasidim were described by contemporary and subsequent generations as those who "counted the words and letters," recognizing the importance of this aspect of their teachings.

XIV

As stated in the beginning of this introduction, it is probable that the Ashkenazi Hasidim were the earliest scholars in the Middle Ages to develop a Jewish concept of the divine world as including several powers that together constitute the divine unity. Kabbalists and other mystics developed similar concepts of a pleroma a generation or two later. The fact that this revolutionary mythologization of the Jewish depiction of the Godhead was presented independently and almost concurrently by several schools and groups in Christian Europe in the High Middle Ages proves that this was an essential transformation within Jewish culture that did not rely on one tradition or one source, but expressed tendencies and needs inherent in the spiritual climate of the times.

The key term in the Ashkenazi Hasidic concept of the pleroma is the divine glory, the *kavod*, that was identified, or at least closely associated, with the concept of the *Shechinah*. This term is closely integrated with the problem of divine revelation and the explanation of the anthropomorphic verses in the Bible. The questions it had to answer were those of the relationship between a transcendent, infinite God and the revealed One, which is described as having human appearance and limited dimensions. One of the sources of this concept was the statement by Saadia Gaon, identifying the *kavod* and the *Shechinah* as the supreme angel created in order to be revealed to the prophets. This idea denied the divine character of the prophetic vision, and during subsequent centuries the *kavod* assumed more and more divine characteristics. In the writings of Abraham ibn Ezra, which were known to Rabbi Judah the Pious (who wrote a commentary on Ibn Ezra on this subject), the first step toward seeing the *kavod-Shechinah* as an emanated divine entity was made; in Rabbi Judah's interpretation, as well as in the writings of the Unique Cherub circle, this idea took definite shape, and the concept of a divine world in which there is a succession of emanated powers was accepted as definite. In the Kalonymide school, the emphasis was on the "two faces" of the *kavod*—one turned toward the Godhead, from which it emanates, and one toward the creation, which is the subject of revelation and prophetic vision. These two "faces" were separated in the Unique Cherub treatises into two separate entities, the *kavod* itself, hidden from all creatures, and the revealed power sitting on the "throne of glory," the Unique Cherub, which is revealed to the prophets and has anthropomorphic dimensions. The writers of this school emphasized that the Cherub was emanated from the *kavod*, whereas everything else was created. In these treatises the *Shechinah* is also separated to some extent from the *kavod* and is regarded as the divine inspiration surrounding the *kavod* and the Cherub. Both schools use the tetragrammaton as the specific name of the *kavod*, and both identify the *Shiur Komah* figure as an emanated entity.

The implications of this concept of the divine pleroma spread to various other theological subjects. The concept of divine immanence, for instance, was divided by the Ashkenazi Hasidim into two aspects: The immanence of the supreme Godhead which penetrates everything but is neutral in character, is found everywhere in the same way, and therefore has no particular significance; the immanence of the *kavod* is a selective one, is present only in holy places

and among pious people, performs the miracles (the fixed, universal, natural laws being the domain of the supreme Godhead, the Creator), and is revealed to the prophets and mystics. A decision had to be made concerning the intention in prayer, toward which part of the divine pleroma it should be aimed (see below). The divine names were divided among the various powers, and several other aspects of Jewish tradition had to be reinterpreted in the light of this new concept of the divine realm, including the process of creation, the structure of the divine chariot, and the various powers in the celestial realms. Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric literature is dedicated, to a very large extent, to the exegetical effort, directed by the methodologies of the "seventy-three gates of wisdom," to harmonize this concept with the traditional texts.

Unlike the kabbalists, the Ashkenazi Hasidim limited their speculations to the answer of specific theological questions: What did the prophets see, in whose image was man created, who is responsible for miracles, to whom should prayer be directed? They did not develop the full scope of mythological aspects inherent in the concept of a pleroma as did the kabbalists, like attributing feminine characteristics to the *Shechinah* and thus introducing erotic symbolism into the divine world, or viewing the pleroma as a dynamic realm in which the various powers, each having its own personality and unique qualities, change and adapt to situations, sometimes being directed by the theurgic acts of man. Despite the severe restrictions of the mythological creative aspects in the Ashkenazi Hasidic concepts of the pleroma, its revolutionary meaning should not be minimized. At the same time Maimonides was writing his antianthropomorphic masterpiece, *The Guide to the Perplexed*, schools of Jewish esoterics and mystics were formulating concepts that integrated anthropomorphism more deeply into the essential Jewish concept of God than ever before.

XV

The concept of prayer is the meeting point between abstract theology and religious practice, translating into ritualistic expression

conclusions formulating the relationship between man and God. For the rational philosophers, this was one of the subjects in which their concept of God was almost irreconcilable with tradition, for religious prayer postulates a responsive, flexible God, whereas they insisted on the infinite, perfect, and unchangeable nature of God. The result was a reluctance to discuss the subject in detail and the diminution in the centrality of prayer as a vehicle for the expression of proximity between man and God.

By the introduction of the concept of a divine pleroma, the various schools of the Ashkenazi Hasidim were able to overcome this difficulty; indeed, the formulation of a pleromatic concept of the divine world was influenced to a very large extent by the needs of the theory of prayer. The Divine Glory, which was understood by Saadia to be just a supreme but created angel, became in Ashkenazi Hasidism the main target of prayers. As an emanated power, it was conceived as that divine aspect that changes according to the needs of divine providence, and as flexible in its nature so that it could listen and respond to the prayers of the people. The Kalonymus school emphasized the need for direction for the prayer; it must address a celestial focus, which the "lower face" of the *kavod* supplied. At the same time, the complete transcendence and immutability of the supreme Godhead was preserved. The mystics of the Unique Cherub circle went even further, distinguishing between the divine aspect visible to human beings and the power responsible for the acceptance of prayer. Prayer cannot be directed, according to them, to a divine power that has an anthropomorphic image, necessary for revelation, because praying to it may be interpreted as idolatry; prayer to the Unique Cherub is therefore forbidden. The divine glory, according to this circle, is formless and immanent in all reality; therefore it is hidden fi om the human senses but open to the acceptance of prayers. It is quite clear that the further development of the pleroma in this circle is the result of the theological necessity to distinguish between revelation and addressing human prayers. Thus, the Ashkenazi Hasidic pleroma gave the answer to a profound religious problem that was not solved by rationalistic philosophy. The kabbalah developed in the same direction, and one

of the first ideas it presented in the traditions emerging from its Provence school was the distribution of the various prayers among the powers constituting the pleroma.

This development was motivated mainly by theological considerations; the mystical attitude toward prayers, especially in the Kalonymus school, originated from another context, a manifestly linguistic one. Rabbi Judah the Pious was the author of the first commentary on the prayers in the history of Jewish culture; his work is lost, but many quotations that survived (mainly in a treatise titled "The Secrets of the Prayers," a brief anthology selected from Rabbi Judah's work) give a clear notion of the nature of this work and the purpose of its composition. Rabbi Judah was enraged that there were minor differences in language in the text of the prayers used in France and England, compared to the one he held to be the correct, traditional version. Such differences existed between the Palestinian and the Babylonian versions, and Judaism usually accepted (and accepts today) the fact that diverse communities have such differences. Rabbi Judah expressed, most forcefully, the view that even the most minute change—of one word or even of one letter—destroys the whole structure and meaning of the prayers; he used very strong terms when admonishing the "people of France and the Islands," accusing them of "causing exile forever" because of these changes.

According to Rabbi Judah, the text of the prayers is not that of communicative language conveying meaning. It is an intricate structure of numerical harmony, based on the number of words, letters, holy names, and numerical value of words and phrases, which corresponds to similar harmonious hidden structures within scriptures and within the universe in general. Rabbi Judah transformed the midrashic concept of the "Gates of Wisdom" into a mystical concept, expressing a mystical harmony binding together the manifestations of God within creation and within divine language. The argument that these minute changes "do not affect the meaning of the prayers" is completely wrong, according to his mystical approach, because the prayers were not intended to convey communicative meaning. Their text is an expression of intrinsic divine harmony that is expressed in other aspects of divine revelation, in language and in

action. The full meaning of this hidden harmony cannot be understood by human beings, and therefore any change, of even one letter, destroys it and makes the prayer futile. Rabbi Judah adhered to the traditional view that the prayers were formulated by the sages of the Second Temple period, but he saw them as inspired by God and reflecting the intrinsic harmony in all creation. Only the correct text, which Rabbi Judah believed was the one he had received from his forefathers, can express this mystical structure, and no change can be tolerated.

Rabbi Judah's criticism of the text of the prayers practiced by other Jewish communities was not accepted by most of his followers. Rabbi Eleazar's commentary on the prayers, many sections of which were based on Rabbi Judah's work, did not repeat the teacher's admonitions against the French and English customs. It seems that Rabbi Judah was almost alone (together with the author of the "Secrets of the Prayers") in the development of this mystical attitude toward the text of the prayers. Rabbi Eleazar transformed the mystical drive of his teacher into an esoterical theology, declining to follow the more profound spiritual implications of Rabbi Judah's radical concepts. The relationship between Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Eleazar is an example of the relationship between a radical mystic as teacher and an esoteric theologian as disciple. Rabbi Judah, however, contributed to medieval Judaism the first expression of a comprehensive mystical conception of the text of the Jewish prayers, soon to be followed by the kabbalists, who developed the concept of the mystical prayer in several new directions.

Ashkenazi Hasidic ethics, presented mainly in Rabbi Judah the Pious's *Sefer Hasidim*, is a phenomenon no less radical in its innovative creativity than the concepts of the divine pleroma and the mystical prayers. The Ashkenazi Hasidic concept of ethical behavior expressed an achievement of total spiritualization of the nature of Jewish worship and social behavior, without weakening the adherence to the practical and physical aspects of Jewish observance. They succeeded in presenting a vehemently orthodox way of life motivated by new, even revolutionary attitudes. The specific historical circumstances of life in central Europe at the time of the recur-

ring persecutions by the Crusaders do not seem to have directly affected the theology of these schools; they were dominant in shaping Ashkenazi Hasidic ethics, which should be regarded as a direct response to the historical challenges. Ashkenazi Hasidic ethics should be regarded as a detailed educational program intended to educate a *mekadesh ha-Shem*, to prepare each man for the probable fate of sacrificing his life and the lives of his wife and children for the sake of God. The constant awareness of *kiddush ha-Shem* as the likely and appropriate fate of each individual is dominant in every exposition of Ashkenazi Hasidic ethics.

It is likely that the first sections of the *Sefer Hasidim* (Parma ms. version) were written by Rabbi Samuel the Pious. If so, the most innovative principles were set by him. He did not quote any source, any legendary or factual line of transmission of his teachings; neither did Rabbi Judah or Rabbi Eleazar, who followed him (though in divergent directions). It is as if these authors assumed that their statements expressed obvious, universal truth that did not have to be proved or traditionally established. Some biblical verses and midrashic quotations are brought in as illustrations, but the new concepts are presented unapologetically. This is in contrast to the presentation of their theological and mystical views, which are consistently accompanied by proof of their traditionality.

The main idea expressed forcefully and clearly by Rabbi Samuel, followed by Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Eleazar, is that there is no intrinsic religious value to any of the commandments; the religious meaning of every ritualistic or ethical deed is decided by the amount of spiritual effort needed to overcome the obstacles, spiritual (the *yetzer hara*) or external, in order to achieve its performance. "One commandment that the *yetzer hara* tries to prevent one from doing is more meaningful than a hundred that are not faced with such an objection." Therefore, "the *yetzer hara* is beneficial to man," because without overcoming it no religious value will be achieved. The commandments and the ethical precepts are obstacles devised by God to test whether a human being is ready to overcome his human desires and inclinations for the sake of obeying and worshipping God. The recurring definition of devotion and "fear of God" is

"where there is a difficulty" (במקום שקשה עלין הרבר), where human nature has to be overcome, having the example of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac as a model. Needless to say, in such a structure the *kiddush ha-Shem* is the ultimate religious achievement, expressing the complete overcoming of all human inclinations and desires for the sake of God. This principle should direct man's behavior in every detail. When choosing a talmudic tractate to study, one should not choose the socially expected beneficial ones, but the more unpleasant ones dealing with death and mourning. No pleasure can be derived from the performance of God's commandments; they are all directed to test human endurance and devotion. This is an intensely heteronomous concept of religion, in complete contrast to the dominant attitude among rationalists, who presented autonomous systems of ethics in which religious demands serve the apparent or hidden needs of the individual and of society and true happiness cannot be achieved but by conforming to them. The *Sefer Hasidim* maintains that happiness and reward are achieved only after death, in the heavenly abode of the souls of the righteous in front of the throne of glory; this world is intended only for undergoing the divine tests, which necessarily demand human suffering.

This is why Ashkenazi Hasidic literature includes the concept of self-mortification within the framework of repentance. If performance of a commandment entails suffering, then, necessarily, the performance of a sin includes pleasure. Repentance, therefore, has to restore the balance. One should inflict upon oneself suffering in the amount of pleasure derived from the performance of the sin (תשובה המשקל). This concept does not weigh the gravity of the sin and design a correspondingly grave punishment; it weighs the pleasure of the sin in comparison with the suffering during the process of repentance. This suffering is sometimes depicted in very graphic terms, like immersing oneself in a hole in a frozen river in the winter or sitting naked near a beehive in the summer, but usually the emphasis is on fasting. The repentance manuals written by the Ashkenazi Hasidim include detailed lists of the numbers of fasting days for every sin.

This concept was integrated in a comprehensive theology used

to explain the creation and its purpose. God had no need for the world; He created it solely for His righteous servants. Such righteous people cannot prove themselves unless they are tested by the most severe difficulties. Therefore, the ideal world is the one in which the *yetzer hara* is completely dominant. God tried to create such a world, but failed because there were no righteous people who could overcome this extreme difficulty and sustain their existence. This is how Rabbi Eleazar explained the Genesis Rabba passage describing God "creating worlds and destroying them" (היה בונה עולמות ומחריבן). Finally, God decided to include the good inclination—*yetzer tov*—in the creation, and righteousness became possible, though somewhat diminished by its reliance on divinely endowed assistance. A perfect world, according to this, is one that is completely evil. Righteousness means overcoming the very nature of the world created by God, obeying His true purpose, while the cosmic laws of nature, society, and man are in direct conflict with it, created to obstruct rather than assist the achievement of righteousness. The divine decree (גזרה) that determines human activity is also such a test; the righteous should overcome even God's decrees and express their devotion to his true wishes.

This system of ethics was formulated in the works of Rabbi Samuel and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, as one directing the individual toward the pietistic way of behavior, preparing him for the ultimate *kiddush ha-Shem*. Rabbi Judah added to this another dimension, central to the teachings of the *Sefer Hasidim*: the social organization of the pietists in groups of communities that separate themselves from Jewish society to create sects of Hasidim, led by ethical directors. Dozens of sections describing the norms of such sects are included in the *Sefer Hasidim*, expressing Rabbi Judah's radical approach and declaring all other Jews wicked evildoers. This is presented in the book as historical reality. We do not have, however, any reference, positive or negative, to the existence of such a meaningful social and religious schism in thirteenth-century Judaism in Ashkenaz. No other Ashkenazi Hasidic writer refers to it in any way, and no contemporary historical or halachic work includes even one sentence that can serve as proof that this idea ever took shape in historical reality.

ONE

Midrash and the Dawn of Kabbalah

The combining of kabbalah and Midrash today should create a very potent formula. In the last quarter-century, when scholars in the various disciplines of the humanities have become aware of the scholarly works of Gershom Scholem, kabbalah has emerged as a dignified topic in academic discussion, and terms like Lurianism and Zoharic mythology are found in the most surprising places in scholarly essays. Recently, Midrash has followed kabbalah in the same path, acquiring status as a puzzling, intriguing literary genre. Few doubt that Midrash, like kabbalah, is a meaningful term, though even fewer can explain exactly why. When these two fashionable terms are joined in the phrase "kabbalistic midrash," they may be expected to communicate a profound message to our fin de siècle academic culture.

Yet, the object of this essay is nothing more than a description of a clear, unambiguous historical phenomenon; namely, the initial emergence of the kabbalah in Europe in the form of a midrash, in

the pseudepigraphic work *Sefer ha-Bahir* (The Book of Light).[1] It is my aim to analyze a section of this work in order to try to understand the midrashic technique used by the anonymous twelfth-century writer and thus to convey something of his mystical insights.

While a definition of a midrash is a difficult task, its function can be explained clearly, especially in the context of mystical literature. The Midrash (from a functional point of view) is the result of the inherent paradox that haunts a religion based upon a body of sacred scriptures: the conflict between the wish and the need to innovate, and the religious maxim that states that all truth is found in the scriptures. This means that, in order to be true, every new statement should be old. The midrashic technique is the traditional Jewish answer to this paradox. A midrashic statement is innovative, but it proves at the same time that, because Moses received the written Torah with the oral Torah in the Mount Sinai theophany, the statement itself was hidden deep in the heart of Jewish sacred texts.

The Hebrew Midrash is alien to Western literary, exegetical, and homiletical tradition because of the vast differences between the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Christian preachers had to rely, when interpreting scriptures and revealing their hidden meaning, mainly on the ideonic side, the implications of the content of the verse. Jewish preachers could use a total text, hermeneutically discussing not only the meaning of terms and words, but also their sound; the shape of the letters; the vocalization points and their shapes and sounds; the *teamim* (the musical signs added to the Hebrew words); the *tagin* (the small decorative additions to the letters); the frequency with which words and letters appear in a verse or a chapter; the absence of one of the letters from a biblical portion; the variety and number of divine names included in the text; the numerical value of letters, words, and whole verses; the possible changes of letters (*etbash*, *temurah*); the new words formed from the

[1]The title's meaning is practically identical with that of the *Zohar*, which was written a hundred years after the *Bahir*, also in the form of a traditional midrash.

initial or final letters of a biblical section (*notarikon*); and the countless ways other than ideonic content and meaning by which the scriptures transmit a semiotic message. It should be emphasized that these methods, in themselves, are not mystical, and that any message, even the mundane or humorous, can be, and was, reached in these ways. This kind of midrashic treatment is completely neutral on possible meaning and was used in the Middle Ages and modern times (relying on sources originating from the ancient period) by every Jewish preacher and exegete, each according to his own preferences and tastes. Pietists, philosophers, traditionalists, and mystics shared the same midrashic tradition.

The possibility of using the totality of the text is created by the nature of the original Hebrew language of the Jewish scriptures. This is in marked contrast to the fact that Christians in the Middle Ages and modern times have usually had to use a translated text. Some of the Christian scriptures were written originally in Greek, but in most Christian Bibles all of the Old Testament and most of the New Testament are translations. In reading the Vulgata, most Christian preachers in the Western church had a text that, in many cases, had undergone two translations. Such a text cannot preserve the sanctity of the shape of letters; at best, it can convey the ideonic meaning of the original.

Even in regard to the simple meaning of the text, there is a vast difference between reading a text in what is believed to be the language of revelation and reading a translation. Many, probably most, of the verses in the Old Testament, for example, can be translated in more than one way, because there are at least several shades of meaning, and sometimes even complete obscurities, in the text. A translator has to choose between all possible interpretations and present one of them, losing in this way the richness, as well as (from a religious point of view) the profundity of the original. The translated text thus conveys a sense of clarity that is completely missing from the original. The translator does not transmit the text, but one possible meaning of it, creating a new text that is much more flat and unequivocal than the original (especially so if it is a translation from a translation, as is the case with the Gospels). This is one of

the reasons that the Roman Catholic Church could develop a set of dogma. Dogmatic thinking must rely on an unambiguous text. The Hebrew Bible does not lend itself easily to the formulation of dogma, because of the obscurities that haunt almost every biblical verse.

These two differences—the ability to use the total semiotic message of the text, and the use of an obscure, and therefore polysemous, Hebrew original—create a most significant gap between Jewish and Christian exegetes and preachers. In rabbinic Judaism it is almost impossible to use a biblical verse as a final proof in a religious controversy; every verse can be, and was, interpreted in fully legitimate ways to support conflicting arguments. An opponent's way of interpreting a scriptural verse would rarely, if ever, be considered as falsifying the text. A biblical verse is brought to support an argument in a decorative manner, but it cannot be the decisive element in an argument. Even the *halachah* does not derive its authority from an alleged literal meaning of the scriptures; its legal power is based upon the tradition that Moses received detailed instructions concerning ritual and ethical behavior and transmitted them orally to Joshua, from whom they were passed generation to generation. Roman Catholics developed a somewhat similar, though less emphatic, notion of a tradition preserved by the Church. This included the contents of that tradition, as well as its authority, but it did not derive directly from the Scriptures. Protestants, however, who rely on the literal meaning of the twice or thrice translated text (Protestantism, to a great extent, began with the third translation to European languages), are thus removed as far as one can imagine from the atmosphere of the Jewish ancient and medieval Midrash. Paradoxically enough, Protestants, despite this distance, were among the first and leading scholars both in biblical studies and in literary criticism.

Let me give an illustration of the spirit of midrash, derived from a period contemporary with the compilation of the *Bahir*. In 1217, Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worms, distressed by the death of his great teacher, Rabbi Judah ben Samuel the Pious, the great leader and teacher of Ashkenazi Hasidism, decided to write down the teachings of his deceased master. He wrote a short book called *Sefer ha-Chochmah* (The Book of Wisdom),[2] most of which was dedicated to

the systematic interpretation of the first verses of the first chapter of Genesis. These verses were interpreted in dozens of ways, and in the introduction to the *Sefer ha-Chochmah* Rabbi Eleazar gave the list of the seventy-three *shaarei chochmah* ("gates of wisdom"), which are in fact seventy-three methods of midrashic interpretation.[3] The body of the work consists of examples of how to use these methods (the number seventy-three was derived from the numerical value of the word *chochmah*—wisdom—in the sincere belief that if the number of these methods was anything but seventy-three, a different term or spelling would have been used by the Bible to denote "wisdom").[4]

Rabbi Eleazar was not bothered by the contradictions, apparent or real, involved in interpreting the same verse many times according to different midrashic methods. The truth hidden within these verses was regarded as rich enough to be revealed in countless

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[2]This work is found in three manuscripts at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Portions were printed in my *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv: Massada 1975, pp. 44–57.

[3]I have described the main text that used the system of the "Gates of Wisdom" in "The Ashkenazi Hasidic *Gates of Wisdom*," in *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati, Louvain: Peeters 1980, pp. 183–189.

[4]Concerning the use of the numerical value of letters, words, and verses, it should again be emphasized that there is nothing mystical in this usage. Unlike European languages and Arabic, Hebrew does not have an authentic system of writing numbers that is separate from the letters in which words are written (in this respect it is similar to Greek). When an *aleph* is written, it can mean one of three things: the number one, the number one thousand, or the sound of the *aleph*. There is no other way to write the number one but to draw the letter *aleph*. When reading the letters that compose the word *chochmah*, the reader has a choice: either to read the word meaning wisdom, or to read the number 73. When opening to a page in the Bible, one can, with equal legitimacy, read it is as a series of words or a series of numbers; there were quite a few Jews throughout history who tended to see in letters first the numbers and only later the words—many of them were mystics, but the method itself is a direct result of the simplest characteristics of the Hebrew language. When Arabic numerals were adopted by Hebrew writers to denote numbers, a gap was created between the reading of words and the reading of numbers, but this is a recent phenomenon, undreamed of by ancient, medieval, and traditional modern Jewish writers. *Gematria*, therefore, is neither mystical nor bizarre, but a simple use of the inherent double meaning, as a word or a number, of every group of Hebrew letters.

ways. If so, the larger midrashic method is on the one hand superfluous, because if everything is true (even contradictory statements), why bother with a midrash? But on the other hand it is the only way to point out a traditional source for a new idea or attitude. The Midrash thus becomes a necessary tool for a religion based on divine revelation, once actual revelation no longer takes place. The texts of previous revelations are used to supply new answers to new questions, even though direct contact with the source of revelation is lost.

The Jewish mystics of the Middle Ages could choose between two ways of substantiating their revolutionary ideas. They could rely either on mystical revelation or on the midrashic method. Many of them indeed described divine powers that were revealed to them while asleep or awake, or told of the appearance of Elijah the prophet, or the hearing of voices, and so on. But most of them, including the author of the earliest kabbalistic work that has reached us, the book *Bahir*, preferred the Midrash. I now turn to the *Bahir*.[5]

Section 123 of the *Bahir* initiates a detailed discussion of the "priests' benediction," a group of three verses in Numbers 6:24–26 that are interwoven into the daily prayer. The blessing of the people by the first priest, Aaron (Leviticus 9:22), and its connection with the sacrifices are analyzed. On this occasion the author explains the Hebrew term for sacrifice, *korban*, as being derived from the verb *k-r-v*, "to bring close," so that the sacrifice is intended to bring together the people of Israel and the celestial powers (*ha-elyonim*). The homily proceeds in section 124:

> What is the reason for the raising of hands and the blessing given to them? This is because there are ten fingers in the hands, which is a hint for the ten *sefirot* in which the [creation] of heaven and earth was signed. Those ten correspond to the ten commandments, and in these ten all 613 commandments are included; if you count the number of letters in the Ten Commandments you will find 613 letters, which include all twenty-two letters except the *tet*. And why is that? This is to teach you that the *tet* is the abdomen, and is not counted among the *sefirot*.

[5]It is not certain that the sections to be discussed here were indeed written by one author in a homiletical sequence: The *Bahir* probably contains many strata and additions. The section under discussion, 123–134, however, seems to me to be a continuous homily. A brief description of the *Bahir* can be found in G. Scholem's first monograph, *Das Buch Bahir*, Leipzig 1923; rpt. Darmstadt: W. Drugulin 1970. His most detailed discussion is included in his history of the early kabbalah: *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, Berlin: W de Gruyter 1962.

The homilist creates here a connection between the number three and the number ten. The priests' benediction contains three verses, while the hands that are raised in this prayer have ten fingers. He then proceeds to discuss the number ten, and gives two further examples of its centrality—the ten *sefirot* and the Ten Commandments.

Concerning the *sefirot*, there is no reason to believe that the author means anything corresponding to the kabbalistic meaning of the term, that is, the ten divine hypostases that are central to kabbalistic theosophy. He refers to the origin of the term in *Sefer Yezira*, an ancient cosmological work of the talmudic period,[6] in which the *sefirot* have several meanings but the main one is the ten cosmic directions of five dimensions: north, south, east, west, up, down, beginning, end (corresponding to contemporary notions of the four dimensions, three spatial ones and the temporal one); good and evil conclude the list of ten. In *Sefer Yezira* these are the ten directions of the divine infinity, and the *Bahir* uses here mainly the totality expressed by the number ten. There need not be any hint of anthropomorphic interpretation in the association of fingers with *sefirot*; all the homilist does is to note the classical examples of the occurrence of this number.

The same totality is represented by the Ten Commandments, which include, by the number of letters in them, all the 613 commandments of Judaism, as the ten *sefirot* include the whole cosmos. As an aside, the author refers to the absence of the ninth letter of the alphabet from the Ten Commandments (which harms the comprehensiveness of this biblical section). He explains that this letter

[6]Concerning *Sefer Yezira* see I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of the Sefer Yezirah," *IOS* 1, pp. 132–177; and *REJ* 132 (1973), pp. 475–512.

represents the abdomen (because of its form; another interpretation, found also in the *Bahir*, section 84, connects this letter with the final *mem*). The concluding statement of this section is enigmatic: There are only ten *sefirot* but twenty-two letters of the alphabet, so there should be no surprise that every letter does not refer to a *sefirah*; and if the *sefirot* are represented by the first ten letters (*tet* is the ninth), which letter takes its place? And why does the similarity in form between the *tet* and the abdomen prohibit it from representing a *sefirah*? No answer is suggested to these questions.

The homiletical methods used here obviously employ not only numerical structure, but also the shape of the letters and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's method of *ne'elam*, wherein the absence of a given letter from a verse or a biblical section becomes a source of midrashic interpretation.

Section 125 proceeds with a brief question and a succinct answer: "And why are they called *sefirot*? Because it is written: 'The heavens declare the glory (*kavod*) of God (Psalms 19:2).'" This is a traditional midrash, moving from the suggested connection between *sefirot* and numbers (*misparim*) to another use of the same verb in Hebrew, one connected with a continuous divine revelation—the sky reveals (*mesaprim*) the glory of God. Again, this interpretation of the term (which is etymologically enigmatic, and indeed no agreed etymology is found in modern scholarship) does not denote any meaning of the term that is not found in the *Sefer Yezira*.

Section 126 opens with another question on the same subject:

> And what are they [the *sefirot*]? They are three, and they include three armies and three forces [*memshalot*]. The first force is light, and the light of life of water. The second force is the sacred beasts and the wheels [*ofanim*] and the wheels of the chariot, and all God's battalions, they bless and adore and beautify and praise and sanctify the King, great in holiness and adored in the great secret of saints, a King terrible and frightful, and they crown Him with three *kedushot*.

In a most surprising manner, the homilist returns from the number ten to the number three. He himself stated that the *sefirot* are ten in number, and his source, *Sefer Yezira*, states most emphatically

"ten and not nine, ten and not eleven," a fundamental axiom that was revered by all kabbalists who, in all their different theosophies, never departed from the sanctity of the number ten for the *sefirot*. Yet here the author claims that the *sefirot* are three forces or armies, of which he describes only two. There is little doubt, however, that this transition is motivated by the term *kavod*, in the verse cited in the previous section, as the unfolding homily later proves.

The second force is quite clear. It is the world of Ezekiel's chariot, as described in talmudic exegesis and the *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* literature, the ancient mysticism of the talmudic period.[7] The hosts of angels and celestial forces (some of them undoubtedly divine in nature) sanctify and adore God in the form of a great king sitting on the throne of glory. The style the author uses here is that of *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* literature. The first force, however, is more obscure, and the author does not support the statement with a biblical or talmudic source. It still seems that he is referring to the *sefirot* of *Sefer Yezira*. In that work, after the discussion of the ten cosmic directions or dimensions, four *sefirot* are given different characteristics. They represent the evolution or emergence of the three elements from the divine spirit. The first is the Spirit of the Living God (*ruach Elohim hayim*); the second is the evolution of the element air, or wind, from that source; the third is the evolution of water from the air; and the fourth is fire from water (the ancient cosmologist did not perceive earth as an element). It seems that the obscure reference to water and to the light of life—especially if we substitute spirit for light—brings it very close to the *Sefer Yezira* presentation. But why change from spirit to light? This can be perceived as the author's declaration of independence from the *Sefer Yezira* terminology. He

[7] G. Scholem devoted the second chapter of his book *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 2nd ed., New York: Schocken 1954, pp. 40–78, to the ancient Jewish mystical school known as *Hechalot* mysticism. His study concerned wholly with this subject is *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, New York: JTS 1960; rev. ed. 1965. A survey of the texts and the main problems of this field is presented in I. Gruenwald's *Apocalyptic and Merkabah Literature*, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1980.

uses the ancient source, but he does so in a creative manner, introducing, without homiletical support, his preference for the term "light".

This section concludes with the homiletical element that connects it to the continuation of the sermon. The celestial hosts crown God with the three *kedushot*, a reference to the third benediction in the prayer, based on the "holy, holy, holy" of Isaiah 6. Section 127 continues thus:

> And what are the three *kedushot*? Why not four? Because divine holiness is three, three, as it is written: "God is King, God has reigned, God will reign forever." And it is written: "The Lord bless thee," "The Lord make His face shine upon thee," "The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee" (Numbers 6:24–26), and it is written, "God, God" and the rest of the *midot*. And where is the third "God"? God is a merciful God, etc., the thirteen *midot*.

Like section 124, this section is devoted to giving examples of the sanctity of a number, in this case the number three. The first example is not biblical, even though it is presented as such. This is the classical explanation of the traditional vocalization of the sacred name, YHWH, as a combination of the past, present, and future of the Hebrew verb "to be," *h-y-h*. The *Bahir*'s mistake in believing this explanation to be found in the Bible was a common one. The frequency of the appearance of the explanatory phrase in the prayers and in Hebrew literature made it seem like a biblical verse. The *Bahir* states, therefore, that the most sacred divine name is a combination of three elements, God's kingdom in the past, present, and future.

The second example of a sacred triad is the original subject of this homily—the priests' benediction, made up of three verses. In this way the homilist creates a numerical identification between this benediction and the phrases of the *kedushah*. The third example is the three times God's name is mentioned in the verse (Exodus 34:6) which, according to talmudic tradition, includes the thirteen attributes of mercy.[8] It should be noted that the introduction of this

[8]Babylonian *Rosh ha-Shanah* 17b.

verse enables the author to combine the two main numbers of this homily—ten and three, united in God's thirteen *midot*. In the later kabbalah, the term *midot* is often found as an appellation of the *sefirot*, the *Zohar* actually preferring it over the *Sefer Yezira* terminology. The tension between ten and thirteen is found throughout kabbalistic midrash.

Only in section 128, the sixth section of this homily, does the *Bahir* present for the first time its mystical terminology:

> And what are "Holy, Holy, Holy" and then "God of Hosts the whole earth is full of his glory [*kavod*]" (Isaiah 6:3), but holy is the *supreme crown*, holy is the *root of the tree*, holy is united and special in all of them, God of hosts whose glory fills the whole Earth.

This is clearly a homiletical interpretation of a verse that is repeated at both the beginning of the brief section and its end. It should be noted—and this is characteristic of *Bahir* homiletics—that the key mystical terms are not presented as a result of homiletical exegesis. The midrash actually concerns only the number three. The different nature of each of these three "holies" is described by terminology not directly derived from these verses or any other ancient source.

The system thus presented may correspond to the previous three forces of section 126, at least from a structural point of view—the divine world is divided into three parts. The parts, however, denote in this section the highest and most supreme Godhead. The "supreme crown" is presented in section 141 as the first and highest of the divine manifestations. The term itself is peculiar to the *Bahir*, though it undoubtedly evolved from *Hechalot* mysticism and Ashkenazi Hasidic sources that recognized the existence of a supreme crown at the top of the divine world.[9] The second term—the "root of the tree"—is, as Scholem proved, one of the basic elements that the *Bahir* accepted from ancient gnostic speculations. Several sections of the

[9]Concerning the early references to this term, see my *Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism* (Hebrew), Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik 1968, pp. 119–125.

Bahir describe the Godhead as a cosmic tree growing upside down, its branches being the divine manifestations active in the created world, while its root (resembling the letter *shin*) is the highest part.[10] The third term, "united and special" (*davek umeyuhad*), is a combination of two terms that describe the divine glory, the *kavod* in the neo-Platonic philosophy of Abraham ibn Ezra (middle of the twelfth century), and Ashkenazi Hasidic terminology referring to the "special cherub" sitting on the throne of glory and being revealed to the prophets.[11]

The *sefirot*, as cosmic dimensions, are ten; but the divine world is described by the number three, the third being the *kavod*, the divine glory that fills the whole Earth. To this third and lowest power the author devotes the next sections of his homily:

> [Section 129] And what is the Holy which is united and special? This is similar to a king who had sons, and the sons—sons. When their sons [i.e., the grandsons] perform His wishes, He enters among them and makes everything exist and satisfies them and His goodness flows into them, so that the fathers and their sons will be satisfied. When the sons [grandsons] do not perform his wishes, He satisfies the fathers, as much as they need.

The homily and the parable are based on the contradiction between the two terms *davek* and *meyuhad*, "united" and "special," the first denoting proximity and the other distance and separation. The *Bahir* states that these are two alternatives, the first existing when God's wishes are performed, and the second when they are not. Obviously, the sons are the divine powers, which are satisfied in every case, while the grandsons are the people of Israel, whose actions decide the amount of divine sustenance flowing from the Godhead toward Earth.

The *Bahir* bases its homily in this section not on a verse, a letter, or a talmudic saying, but on its own medieval terminology.

[10]About this symbol see Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, esp. pp. 110–111.

[11]I have studied the term and its history in a monograph included in my *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature*, pp. 89–111.

Here theology is the most important element, and elementary word-exegesis assists it.

The third "Holy," the *kavod*, as a central part of the *kedushah*, is the subject of the next four sections, each interpreting one of its characteristics:

> [Section 130] And what is "The whole Earth is full of his glory?" But it is the whole of that Earth which was created on the first day, which is above and corresponding to *Eretz Yisrael*, and it is full of God's glory. And what is it, Wisdom, as it is written: "The wise shall inherit honor [*kavod*]" (Proverbs 3:35), and it is said "Blessed be the glory [*kavod*] of God from His place" (Ezekiel 3:12).

The systematic exposition of the verse in Isaiah continues with the discussion of the term "Earth", which is full of the divine glory. The homilist explains that this is not the Earth we know, but a celestial country, which corresponds to the earthly Eretz Yisrael and was created on the first day (probably relying on Genesis 1:1). The nature of this "fullness" of divine glory is described by the term "wisdom," which is derived in a traditional midrashic manner from the verses in Proverbs and Ezekiel, and from the idea originating from the rabbinic attribution of wisdom to the air of Eretz Yisrael (here, of course, referring to the celestial country).[12] However, the most important part of this section from the point of view of the structure of the homily is the introduction of the verse from Ezekiel, which is part of the *kedushah* and was the subject of discussion in talmudic and Hechalotic texts. The next section, 131, opens with a reference to this verse and an explanation of its meaning:

> And what is this *kavod*? This is similar to a king who had a great lady [*matronita*] in his room, and all his servants [*hayalotav*] were fascinated by her [*mishta'ashe-in bah*]. And she had sons, who came every day to see the face of the king and bless him. They said to him: Where is our mother? He told them: You cannot see her now. They said: Blessed is she wherever she is.

[12]Babylonian *Baba Batra* 158b.

The parable explicates a well-known midrash in Babylonian *Hagiga* 14b, which interprets Ezekiel's verse as meaning that the angels themselves do not know where the *kavod* is, and therefore they use the term *mimkomo*, understood as "wherever He may be." The *Bahir* adds nothing to this understanding, except the possible hint that the *kavod* is a female figure, the mother of the people of Israel who pray to her and bless her and the king every day. But this repetition by parable of an old midrash is only the beginning. The essence of the Bahiric mystical approach is revealed in the next section.

> [Section 132] And what is the meaning of the verse "from His place"? This is because nobody knows its place. This is similar to a princess who came from afar, and nobody knew where she came from, until they saw that she was capable, beautiful, and just in all her doings. They said: This one certainly was taken from the side of light [*mizad ha-or*; a different version reads here: *mizurat ha-or*, 'from the form of light'], because her deeds bring light to the world. They asked her: Where are you from? She answered: From my place [*mimkomi*]. They said: If so, great are the people of your place, blessed are you and blessed her place.

This is a second parable, explaining the same verse in Ezekiel, emphasizing the same word in the verse ("from His place") in a sense diametrically opposite to the first one. While in the previous parable the female figure was hidden and was blessed without her place being known, here the female figure is present. Only her place of origin is unknown and is blessed together with her, she being the representative of the place and the proof of its worthiness. The homilist does not hesitate to negate the meaning of the verse as presented by the talmudic midrash, and he insists that the *kavod* is actually revealed and resides among the praying people. Only its divine sources are hidden. This kind of radical modification is not restricted to kabbalistic midrash, but it is most pronounced in such texts. The atmosphere of freedom that mystical speculation creates enables the homilist to negate previous notions drastically, even while presenting those previous notions without argument. The text clearly

insists that even though the two interpretations are in conflict, both are true and should be accepted equally. This is the most important and unique characteristic of the Hebrew Midrash: The verses contain an infinite number of true interpretations, and there is no need and no possibility of choosing one true version.

While explaining this verse from the *kedushah*, the author introduces, without any biblical or rabbinic basis, a new term and a new concept: "from the side of light." Scholem clearly identified in this section the influence of gnostic mythological descriptions of the female divine power in exile, wandering around the world, away from her dwelling place in the divine world of light and goodness. The gnostic element is clearer in this section than in many others in the *Bahir*. The author does not feel pressed, when introducing new, revolutionary symbols to the traditional Jewish prayer, to support these new terms with a midrashic connection to scriptures. Like his introduction of the supreme crown, the root of the tree, and the "united and separated" divine glory in section 128, there is no direct homiletical connection with previously known Jewish concepts.

It seems that the source of authority for the homilist in such cases is the general midrashic form of the book. The whole work is presented as the teachings of the ancient sages, so that it is unnecessary to give midrashic substantiation to every single detail. If the new symbol is interwoven into the general framework of the traditional midrash, traditional authorization is achieved.

The homily continues in section 133 by bringing in a parable that explains the "outsideness" of the divine glory, and section 134, which describes the glory as the heart of the world, connecting it with *Sefer Yezira* once more by hinting at the number thirty-two (the numerical value of heart, *lev*), which is the number of "secret paths" of the creation in the opening paragraph of the ancient cosmological work. In section 135 the subject of the priests' benediction returns, through a discussion of the raising of Moses' hands during the war against Amalek.

The early kabbalists followed faithfully all the methods of the traditional midrash. Like other medieval homilists, they tended to emphasize midrashic methods of interpretation, including the shape

of the letters, their vocalization, their numerical value and structure, and the absence of letters from certain biblical portions. This was not a revolutionary attitude; it merely represented a different emphasis. Similarly, the introduction of new symbols, ideas, and terms did not present any difficulty to the kabbalistic homilist. Some of these were presented and interpreted as were more traditional ideas, and others were included in the general framework of the midrash. The midrashic structure offered them the requisite open literary form, which could welcome contradictory and new ideas without changing the basic literary and ideological rules of the genre.

It may be said in conclusion that the nature of the midrashic form facilitated the acceptance and integration of the kabbalah in Jewish culture. It enabled the European mystics of the Middle Ages to present their new symbols as if they were an integral part of ancient tradition.

ENDNOTE

This chapter includes some of my early conclusions concerning the nature of the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, the earliest text of the kabbalah. Since 1984, when the lecture on which it is based was delivered (in the Jerusalem seminar on Midrash, directed by S. Budick and G. Hartman, who later edited the volume based on it, *Midrash and Literature*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1987), my research in this field has progressed considerably. Some of my recent suggestions concerning this enigmatic work are included in the Introduction to this volume.

Research on this subject has been considerably facilitated by the publication of the edition of the *Book Bahir* by Daniel Abrams (Los Angeles: Cherub Press 1994). This edition includes the text of the most important Munich manuscript used by Scholem in his translation of the text, as well as a list of extant manuscripts and a detailed bibliography of past and recent research. Prof. Peter Schaefer, from the Free University of Berlin, and I are preparing a new edition of the book based on the synoptic concept; it will include six selected manuscripts representing the main families of the

text, printed side by side in columns, each with a selection of different versions from other manuscripts. We intend to include the early quotations from this work, found in kabbalistic literature from Spain and the Provence, in the presentation of the text.

A radically different treatment of the text of the *Bahir* is presented in the article by Haviva Padaya, "The Provençal Layer of Editorship of the Book Bahir," in *The Shlomo Pines Festschrift, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. 9 (1990), pp. 139-164 (in Hebrew). The author believes (following the Scholem concept ad absurdum) that the *Bahir* was composed over many periods, each contributing a particular layer to its content. I believe that there is no basis to this approach, and that the selection of "early" and "late" elements is a completely arbitrary construction. The *Bahir* is a mystical work, written by an individual mystic who used all the sources at his disposal but arranged them in a different, innovative structure of his own. Furthermore, it seems to be methodologically wrong to postulate the existence of numerous schools, writers, and editors stretched over many generations, when no shred of historical evidence for their existence can be produced, except for the arbitrary selection of terms and phrases from the *Bahir*. It is the task of the historian to relate history, not create it ex nihilo.

Since the article constituting this chapter was written, the detailed studies of Gershom Scholem on the *Bahir* have become available to English readers, mainly by the publication of an English translation of his monograph concerning the early kabbalah (*Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, trans. Allan Arkush, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press and the Jewish Publication Society 1987; see especially pp. 49-198). The main kabbalistic topics in the *Bahir* are discussed in detail in Scholem's *The Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts of the Kabbalah* (trans. J. Neugroschel, rev. J. Chipman, New York: Schocken 1991). An English translation of the *Bahir* was produced by Arie Caplan (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson 1995; the volume also includes a detailed commentary written from a kabbalistic point of view). A French translation by Nicholas Sed (Milan: Arche 1987) is very helpful. The sixteenth-century translation of portions of the *Bahir*

by Guillaume Postel, edited by François Secret, was included in Secret's collection of studies, *Postelliana* (Paris: Niewkoop, B. De Graaf 1981, pp. 21–122).

TWO

The Emergence of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Germany

I

The last two or three decades of the twelfth century present a most perplexing problem before the historian of Jewish religious phenomena: During these decades, so it seems, European Jewry produced several sects of mystics, both in southern Europe and in the center of the continent, while during the centuries before this period the mystical dimension seems to have been almost absent from Jewish European culture. In the centuries following the end of the twelfth century Jewish mysticism developed mostly in a linear fashion, each stage based on the previous one, following it or contradicting it, but no radical new beginnings ex nihilo seem to have occurred. The last decades of the twelfth century are the only period in the history of European Jewish mysticism in which circles of mystics seem to come into being independently of each other, in various parts of the continent, producing original systems of symbols and expressions of profound religious experiences. If this picture is historically correct, then these few decades are unique in Jewish medieval

history, and the reasons underlying this phenomenon should be studied in great detail.[1] This chapter is intended to analyze only a specific part of this problem, the appearance of Ashkenazi Hasidic mystical circles, though the wider problem should always remain in the background and be taken into account.

The two main centers in which the emergence of Jewish medieval mysticism took place were in southern France, the Provence, together with Catalonia, especially Barcelona and Gerona[2] and in the Rhineland, especially Mainz, Worms, and Speyer, but also including Regensburg and a few other towns. The three most important mystical circles that appeared in this period in the south European region include, first and foremost, the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, the earliest text that contains the kabbalistic symbolism of the ten divine hypostases, which became a cornerstone of kabbalistic speculation throughout the many centuries of the development of the kabbalah.[3] The second was the school of mystics surrounding Rabbi Abraham

[1]A brief attempt to present and analyze this problem was made in several sections of my book *Early Kabbalistic Circles*, published by Academon, Jerusalem 1977 (in Hebrew).

[2]The main analysis of the early kabbalah is found, of course, in Gershom Scholem's masterly study of the problem in his *Ursprung and Anfänge der Kabbala*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1962. This was Scholem's third publication of the same material. The first was an essay, "Hathalot ha-Kabbalah," published in Hebrew in *Knesei le-Zecher Bialik*, vol. 10 (Tel Aviv 1947), pp. 179–228. This essay, with many additions, was published as a book, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Schocken Publishing House 1948. In the years just before and just after the publication of the book in an extended and corrected form, considerably enlarged, in German, Scholem gave, for four years, courses on that subject at the Hebrew University. These were edited by R. Shatz and Y. Ben Shlomo, published by Academon, Jerusalem 1960–1965. The last version of this work was recently published in English, *The Origin of the Kabbalah*, ed. R. J. Zvi Werblowsky, Princeton, NJ 1987.

Compare also the chapter on the early kabbalah in my book *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension in Jewish History*, New York: New York University Press 1987, pp. 147–187. The chapter was published separately in *Modern Judaism*, vol. 5 (1985), pp. 39–66. See also J. Dan and R. Kiener, *The Early Kabbalah*, New York: Paulist Press 1986.

[3]G. Scholem, *Das Buch Bahir*, Leipzig: W. Drugulin 1923. An analysis of this work is presented in Scholem, *Ursprung*, pp. 43–174. Compare J. Dan and R. Kiener, *The Early Kabbalah*, pp. 57–70.

ben David, the Rabad, late in the twelfth century. The main writer of this school was the Rabad's son, Rabbi Isaac the Blind, who wrote the first kabbalistic treatise written by a known author, that reached us.[4] The relationship between the authorship of the *Bahir* and the school of the Rabad is not clear, and merits further study, but it can be stated that it is not certain that this school was aware of the existence of the *Bahir*, and it is possible that these two schools developed their very similar symbolisms independently of each other.[5] The third mystical circle that emerged in southern Europe approximately at the same time was the Iyyun circle, so called because of its central text, the *Sefer ha-Iyyun* (Book of Contemplation), and several other mystical works that present a symbolism radically different from the previous two, but still containing very strong mystical neo-Platonic characteristics.[6] The teachings of all three circles

[4]Rabbi Isaac's Commentary on *Sefer Yezira* was published by Scholem as an appendix to *Ha-Kabbalah bi-Provence*, the second volume in the Hebrew version of *Ursprung* (Jerusalem: Academon 1962), note 1. On the recensions of this work see H. Wirszubsky's analysis in Scholem's *Jubilee Volume* (*Tarbiz* vol. 27), Jerusalem 1958, pp. 257–264. And see *Ursprung*, pp. 219–272; *The Early Kabbalah*, pp. 71–86; G. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House 1974, pp. 45–47.

[5]This is one of the most difficult subjects concerning the history of the early kabbalah, which cannot be treated here in detail. Suffice it to say that if indeed Rabbi Isaac did not use the *Bahir*, the whole concept of the ten *sefirot* will then be one that has been developed in two different, but almost unbelievably similar, Jewish traditions.

[6]G. Scholem presented a list of possible works belonging to this circle in *Reshit ha-Kabbala* (1948; see note 2), pp. 255–262, and an analysis of them on pp. 162–175; compare *Ursprung*, pp. 273–323. Recently Dr. M. Verman concluded a Ph.D. thesis (Harvard University 1984) dealing with the textual and historical problems concerning this circle, and presented an edition of the various versions of *Sefer ha-Iyyun* (see also *The Early Kabbalah*, pp. 43–56). Dr. Verman reached the conclusion that the *Sefer ha-Iyyun* and the other works of this circle were written in the second half of the thirteenth century, and were based on the works of Rabbi Azriel of Gerona. A similar attitude to the question of the relationship between *Sefer ha-Iyyun* and Rabbi Azriel is found in I. Tishby's edition of *Rabbi Azriel's Commentary on the Talmudic Legends*, Jerusalem 1944 (Hebrew). However, no explanation was given how is it possible that mystics writing a generation after Rabbi Azriel and using his terminology in some cases could completely ignore the concept of the ten *sefirot* and all the symbols connected with that, and disregard not only the major theme in Rabbi Azriel's works but also those of the *Bahir*, Rabbi Isaac

were united in the works and ideas of the Gerona school of kabbalists in the first half of the thirteenth century; the works of Rabbi Ezra ben Shlomo, Rabbi Azriel, Nachmanides, and others reveal the clear influence of the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, Rabbi Isaac the Blind, and some elements of the Iyyun circle terminology, all combined.[7] From then onward, the kabbalah in Spain developed stage by stage, generation after generation, each deriving its ideas and symbols from the previous ones and developing its original—and often radically different—mystical systems on the basis of the teachings of the previous schools and circles, and creating the spiritual-mystical alternative to the ruling Jewish ideology in Spain—rationalistic philosophy.

At the same time, in the second half of the twelfth century, an established rabbinic school in Germany, that of the Kalonymus family, whose roots stretch all the way to eighth-century Italy, began to lean toward mystical expression of religious ideas, creating what became known later as the Ashkenazi Hasidic school of esoteric religious speculation and ethical thought.[8] This family produced the three great writers of Ashkenazi Hasidism—Rabbi Samuel son of

the Blind, Rabbi Ezra ben Shlomo, Nachmanides, and many others. It seems, therefore, more probable that this circle's central works preceded Rabbi Azriel and other kabbalists, and Rabbi Azriel used some of the terminology found in *Sefer ha-Iyyun*. It should be noted that the Scholem list includes thirty-two works, but only a few of them actually belong to the original Iyyun circle. The others are kabbalistic works that used this circle's symbolism and terminology. See M. Verman, *The Books of Contemplation*, New York: SUNY Press 1992.

[7]On the Gerona circle see Scholem, *Ursprung*, pp. 324–406; I. Tishby, *Hikrey Kabbalah u-Shluhoteha*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1982, pp. 3–35; *The Early Kabbalah*, pp. 78–150. Concerning Rabbi Azriel's commentary on the Prayers, see G. Sed-Rajna, *Azriel de Gerone Commentaire sur la Liturgie quotidienne*, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1974.

[8]The modern study of the esoteric theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism was started by G. Scholem with the third chapter of his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York: Schocken 1941, pp. 80–118. My two volumes on the subject are *Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidey Ashkenaz*, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 1968 (*Torat ha-Sod*); a summary of this book is found in "*Die esoterische Lehre des Deutschen Chassidismus*," tr. E. Hanker, ed. M. Graetz, *Hebraische Beitrage zur Wissenschaft des Judentums*, vol. 1, Heidelberg 1985, pp. 153–185; and *Iyyunim be-Sifrut Hasidey Ashkenaz*, Ramat Gan: Massada 1975 (*Iyyunim*).

Kalonymus, known as the "Pious, Saint, and Prophet";[9] his son, Rabbi Judah the Pious, the most influential thinker of the school (d. 1217); and Rabbi Judah's disciple, Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah ben Kalonymus of Worms, the main writer of Ashkenazi Hasidic literature (d. ca. 1230). These three scholars, whose works are the core of Ashkenazi Hasidic teachings, created a body of esoteric works presenting a new Jewish conception of religious worship, a new understanding of biblical and talmudic traditions, a revival of ancient Jewish mystical works, and a new interpretation of the Jewish prayers; but they are especially known for their works in the field of ethics. The *Sefer Hasidim* (The Book of the Pietists) is the major contribution of German Jewry to Jewish ethics in the Middle Ages;[10] it was written mainly by Rabbi Judah the Pious, though possibly some portions of it were written by his father, Rabbi Samuel. Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's ethical ideas were incorporated in the two opening chapters of his halachic work, the *Sefer ha-Rokeach*.

While the centrality of the Kalonymus school in Ashkenazi Hasidism cannot be doubted, the Kalonymus school was not the only one to emerge at about the same period; it seems that several groups and individuals were creating new esoteric and mystical systems without being in touch, or even without being aware, of the

[9]The biography of Rabbi Samuel and a list of his writings were compiled by A. Epstein, republished in the collection of his studies, ed. by A. M. Haberman, vol. 1, Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook 1950, pp. 245–269.

[10]The literature on Ashkenazi Hasidic ethics is growing fast, and cannot be presented here in detail. A recent important collection in Hebrew is I. G. Marcus, ed., *Dat ve-Hevra be-Mishnatam shel Hasidei Ashkenaz*, Jerusalem 1986; to this should be added H. Soloveitchik, "Three Themes in the Sefer Hasidim," *AJS Review* 1 (1976), pp. 311–357, and I. G. Marcus, *Piety and Society*, Leiden: Brill 1981; idem, "The Devotional Ideals of Ashkenazic Pietism," in A. Green, ed., *History of Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 1, New York: Crossroads 1986, pp. 356–366. Concerning *Sefer Hasidim* itself, the book was first published in Bologna in 1538; a longer version was found in Parma ms. 3280, and first published by J. Wistinetzki in Berlin in 1891. The same work, with a detailed introduction and index, was published by J. Freiman, Frankfurt am mainz 1924 (with several subsequent printings). Recently I. G. Marcus published a facsimile edition of the Parma ms., with an introduction (Jerusalem 1985).

Kalonymus school. Most important among these circles is the anonymous group that created the pseudepigraphical mystical body of works attributed to the traditions of Joseph ben Uzziel, a fictional figure who is described as the grandson of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), who in turn is described as the son of the prophet Jeremiah.[11] This circle created and interpreted a short text called *The Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel* and several other works closely related to it, the best-known among them being the so-called "Pseudo-Saadia Commentary on the Sefer Yezira." The one author of this circle whom we know by name was Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar of London, who wrote in the first half of the thirteenth century two commentaries on the *Sefer Yezira* and a theological work, *Sod ha-Sodot* (The Secret of Secrets), in which he often quoted the earlier traditions of this circle.[12] These writers put forward an original system of symbols, based on their own understanding of the ancient *Sefer Yezira*, without revealing any familiarity with the works of the Kalonymus school on the same subject, or indeed any subject.

Another meaningful work of religious thought that shows elements of an original approach to basic Jewish religious questions and presenting new terminology is the anonymous work *Sefer ha-Hayyim* (The Book of Life), which was written probably around 1200. (It is quoted in *Ketav Tamim*, written about 1220 by Rabbi Moses Taku, who attributes the work to Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, whose influ-

[11]This circle of mystics was described, and an attempt was made to list their works and their interrelationship, in my paper published in *Tarbiz*, vol. 35 (1966), pp. 349–372. The text of the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel* was published by A. Epstein (note 9, vol. 2 (1957), pp. 226–250). A recent survey of the problem is presented in J. Dan, "Pseudepigraphy in Medieval Jewish Mysticism in Germany," in: *Falschungen im Mittelalter, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Schriften Band 33*, V (Hannover 1988), pp. 519–532. Concerning the legend on which this circle based its tradition, see note 47.

[12]G. Scholem mentioned the importance of Rabbi Elhanan's works in *Major Trends*, pp. 85, 376, note 114. G. Vajda published a study of the relationship of his works to some medieval non-Jewish works (*Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Ages* (1961), pp. 15–34), and then published one of his commentaries on the *Sefer Yezira* in *Kovetz Al Yad*, vol. 16 part 1 (Jerusalem 1966), pp. 147–197. The *Sod ha-Sodot* and the second Commentary were published by me in *Esoteric Texts of Ashkenazi Hasidic Theology*, Jerusalem: Academon 1975 (in Hebrew).

ence is indeed discernible in this work).[13] The author of this book deals with theological, anthropological, psychological, and ethical problems as if he were the first medieval scholar to study them, revealing no knowledge of any other school or circle of esoteric or mystical thought. It seems to be the work of an individual, isolated theologian of some mystical tendencies. A similar phenomenon can be found in the *Sefer ha-Navon* (The Book of the Wise), written in the first half of the thirteenth century by an isolated thinker, dedicated to a commentary on the Shema, the declaration of divine unity, and to an interpretation of the ancient mystical work, the *Shiur Komah*.[14]

These facts present the historian with a twofold problem when searching for the origins and trying to explain the appearance of each of these schools: He cannot do it only by isolating each of them and trying to understand the reasons for their appearance; he must also take into account the fact that the one he is describing was not the only one, and that others appeared at the same time in other places and reflected other historical circumstances. He must, at the same time, deal with both the specific and the general; understand the detail as well as the wider picture; explain the specificity of each phenomenon; and deal with the larger problem of the uniqueness of the period as whole. Even if we understand, for instance, the reasons for the appearance of the Kalonymus school of mystics, we still have to explain why it appeared at the same time that five other schools and circles emerged and created ideas surprisingly similar to it. On the other hand, no general answer can cover and explain the emergence and the nature of all these six separate phenomena; it

[13]*Sefer ha-Hayyim* appears in the annals of Jewish scholarship in an unusual manner: When G. Scholem presented his plans of the study of kabbalah to the poet H. N. Bialik in a letter written in 1925 (published in *Devarim Bego*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved 1976, pp. 59–63), he placed *Sefer ha-Hayyim* as the first among the mystical texts that should be published in critical editions. He frequently used it in *Major Trends* and in the *Ursprung*. See also my *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 143–156. The book was copied in my *Esoteric Texts of Ashkenazi Hasidic Theology* (note 12). It still awaits a scholarly edition.

[14]*Sefer ha-Navon* was published by me, based on several manuscripts, in *Kovetz Al Yad* vol. 16, part 1 (Jerusalem 1966), pp. 199–223.

must be a combination of specific study and comparative study which will lead us to the understanding of this central and unparalleled phenomenon in the history of Jewish mysticism.

It is impossible in the framework of this chapter to deal with the complete complex of problems just described. It is my wish to present the material relevant to the appearance of the Kalonymus school of Jewish mystics, combined with a comparative study of its relationship to the kabbalistic schools in southern Europe. I hope that this will serve as a contribution toward a wider study of the emergence of Jewish mysticism in Europe in the second half of the twelfth century.[15]

II

The term "mysticism" does not have a Hebrew equivalent; therefore no Jewish mystic ever defined himself as a mystic, nor did any Jewish author define himself as a nonmystic. The appellation "mystic" is an arbitrary modern one, which scholars attach to various phenomena, each motivated by his own understanding of the nature and characteristics of mysticism. At the end of this chapter I shall try to point out the elements that seem to justify, to some extent, the use of the term "mysticism" for the Ashkenazi Hasidic circles, but the basic analysis should rest on the ways in which they described themselves and understood their own work, in which this term, of course, did not and could not play any role. But while the term "mysticism" is completely absent, another one is prominent: The term *sod*, or esoteric. The Ashkenazi Hasidim viewed themselves as presenting to themselves, and to others in some cases, something that was hidden and regarded as secret until now. A common title that appears at the beginning of several paragraphs in the writings of Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar states: "Here you are given the meaning of things that have been secret until today." The works of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms abound with references to great secrets, and the

[15]I am preparing a detailed study of this subject as a part of the *History of Jewish Mysticism*.

same is true about most of the other works relevant to our subject.[16] There can be no doubt that a common denominator to all the early Jewish mystics at the end of the twelfth century was a deep perception that they were dealing with esoteric problems, something that was hidden from the esoteric works of their predecessors and should be hidden now and in the future from anyone who does not belong to the select few who deserve to know it.

Rabbi Eleazar of Worms dedicated his most important work of esoteric knowledge to the meaning of the divine names, and called ‏ספר השם *Sefer ha-Shem* (The Book of the Name). In this work, which has not been published and is found in several manuscripts,[17] Rabbi Eleazar gave several interpretations of the name of four letters (*yod hay vav hay*) and other, more esoteric, names of God. To this detailed work he added a preface, in which he described a special ceremony to be performed before the secret of the holy name is transmitted by the teacher to his disciple.[18] The ceremony included standing in front of running water, and reciting biblical verses and benedictions concerning the holiness and mysteriousness of the divine name. This

[16]The Ashkenazi Hasidim had a concept dividing all knowledge into seventy-three parts (the numerical value of the Hebrew *chochmah*, wisdom), and two books in our possession are structured according to them; a prominent place among these "gates of wisdom" is given to *Shaar ha-Sod*, the Gate of Esoteric Knowledge. One of the two books is Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's *Sefer ha-Chochmah*, The Book of Wisdom, which also gives the list of these "gates." Parts of it were published by me in *Zion*, vol. 29 (1964), pp. 168–181 and reprinted in *Iyyunim*, pp. 44–57. The second book is an extensive commentary on the Torah, found in a Bodleian ms. and described in J. Dan, "The Ashkenazi Hasidic Gates of Wisdom," *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati, Louvain 1980, pp. 183–189. This commentary was subsequently published as "Peirush ha-Roqeah al ha-Torah," in three volumes, Bnei Berak 1978–1981, attributing it to Rabbi Eleazar, without any foundation, and adding it to the text of the *Sefer ha-Chochmah*. See my note concerning this in *Kiryat Sefer*, vol. 50 (1984), p. 644. In both works, however, a large part is given to *Shaar ha-Sod*, interpreting the biblical verses according to the esoteric method.

[17]Rabbi Eleazar's *Sefer ha-Shem* is found in manuscripts that contain the full five works that constitute his magnum opus, *Sodey Razaya*. It is the third book in this collection. The best manuscripts are British Museum 737 and Munich 81.

[18]G. Scholem noted the text describing this ceremony in "On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism," pp. 136–138; ("Zur Kabbalah und ihere Symbolik," Zurich: Rhein Verlag 1960, pp. 182–183), and compare *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 74–76.

ceremony undoubtedly reflects an old tradition of transmitting secrets from generation to generation, probably practiced by the Kalonymus family.

There is a constant paradox involved in reading works that state and emphasize the secrecy of the material included in them: If it is so secret, why was it written down for anyone, including the modern historian, to read? There can be no doubt that many secrets that were regarded as such did not reach us because they were never written down. But in the case of Rabbi Eleazar, we do have his answer to this question. It is included in his personal, autobiographical preface to his book *Sefer ha-Chochmah* (The Book of Wisdom), which he wrote in 1217, as he clearly states in this preface.[19] Rabbi Eleazar explains that now, after the death of Rabbi Judah the Pious earlier that year, and after his own son died (probably of wounds sustained during one of the Crusaders' attacks on the Jewish communities in the Rhineland), he, Rabbi Eleazar, remained alone with the traditions he received from his father and from his teacher, without children or disciples to whom he can transmit these secrets. He decided to write, he says, so that these traditions would not be completely lost. In other words, he states that though this material should never be written, the force of unusual circumstances makes it imperative for him to write it down.

We have two reasons to doubt whether Rabbi Eleazar revealed the complete truth when writing this preface. One is the fact that his teacher, Rabbi Judah the Pious, had already done this, and wrote several works of esoteric traditions, of which Rabbi Eleazar himself made extensive use in his own writings. Many sections of Rabbi Eleazar's esoteric works are either copies of Rabbi Judah's works or paraphrases and abbreviations of them.[20] He knew very well, therefore, that he was not the first to commit these secrets to paper. The second reason for doubt is that we know that Rabbi Eleazar did have disciples who continued to study esoteric lore after him. The most important among them was Rabbi Abraham son of Azriel, called "from the elders of Bohemia," the author of the encyclopedic commentary on the *piyyutim* (religious hymns), *Arugat ha-Bosem*.[21] Rabbi Abraham quotes Rabbi Eleazar as his teacher over a hundred times in his work,[22] and he also quotes Rabbi Judah the Pious, whom he knew and from whom he also received secret traditions.[23] This means that Rabbi Abraham started his studies before 1217, when this preface was written, and Rabbi Eleazar clearly disregarded him when he stated that he had no disciples.

It is very difficult to explain what Rabbi Eleazar meant exactly when expressing his deep feeling of loneliness and making this the reason for writing down the works of esoteric teachings. It is clear

[19]see note 16 (*Iyyunim*, pp. 44–57).

[20]Among Rabbi Eleazar's many works, the ones in which he seems to have used his teacher's writings most extensively are the *Sod ha-Merkavah* (The Secret of the Chariot, published as *Sodey Razaya* by Israel Kamelhar, Rhysza 1930), *Chochmat ha-Nefesh* (The Wisdom of the Soul, i.e., psychology, printed in Lwow 1876 and Safed 1883), and his Commentary on Sefer Yezira, Premiszla 1883; these are the second, fourth, and fifth parts of the *Sodey Razaya* collection.

[21]This work was published in a most detailed scholarly edition, with a comprehensive introduction, by E. E. Urbach, *Mekizei Nirdamim*, Jerusalem 1939–1963 (4 volumes).

[22]Many of these references to Rabbi Eleazar are taken from his Commentary on the Prayers, which was Rabbi Abraham's major source.

[23]Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel seldom mentions Rabbi Judah the Pious by name, in contradiction to his constant efforts throughout the book to quote authorities ancient and contemporary, Spanish and Ashkenazi, in full. The reason seems to be that Rabbi Judah the Pious objected to the practice of writing an author's name on a book, for fear that this will cause him or his descendants to commit the sin of pride; this is mentioned several times in the *Sefer Hasidim*. Rabbi Judah was, however, completely alone among his followers in this, everybody else, including Rabbi Eleazar, prominently placed their names on their works (Rabbi Eleazar probably added, in deference to his teacher, the term *ha-katan*, "the small," to his name, expressing thus the required humility). As a result, Rabbi Abraham quotes Rabbi Judah's *Sefer ha-Kavod* (Book of Divine Glory) about forty times as if it were an anonymous work, not wishing to transgress Rabbi Judah's wishes. He had, however, a special problem that he solved in a unique way. Rabbi Moses, Rabbi Judah's son, wrote after his father's death a commentary on the Torah, based on his recollections of the conversations and arguments that he and his father had about the weekly Torah portion. Rabbi Judah's statements in this work could not be quoted by Rabbi Abraham anonymously, so he used a special title: *Reah Bosem Nihoah*, the acronym of Rabbi Judah the Pious son of Samuel; *nihoah* has the same numerical value as *hasid*. Thus he obviously quoted Rabbi Judah without having mentioned his name explicitly.

that he regarded Rabbi Judah's works as insufficiently organized and unclear; it seems that in his own works he intended to systematize and present in a clearer way his master's teachings.[24] We do not know what were the exact relations between Rabbi Eleazar and Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel. But it seems that this preface is characteristic of the eternal tension in the heart of the student of esoteric material: the strong drive to preserve the secrecy of the tradition, conflicting with the equally strong drive to present the treasures at his disposal at least to a chosen, deserving few.

A very similar problem faced the kabbalah very early in its history. G. Scholem discovered and published a letter sent by Rabbi Isaac the Blind from Provence to the rabbis of Gerona (the recipients were Rabbi Moses Nachmanides and Rabbi Jonah of Gerona).[25] In this epistle Rabbi Isaac complains that rumors have reached him that in Gerona kabbalah is talked about in the streets and in the markets, and that books were written expounding it. He states emphatically that these secrets should never become public, and that books should not be written, because, as he says, "a book already written—there is no cupboard in which it can be hidden."[26] Obviously Rabbi Isaac believed that kabbalistic works should not be written, because once written there can be no hope of keeping them secret. Of course, one may ask, if Rabbi Isaac was so emphatic on this point, why did he write the commentary on the *Sefer Yezira*? (It is possible that he did not write the work himself, that one of his disciples wrote it down—but there is no proof of this.) This might be another example of the basic conflict between revelation and esotericism.

[24]An example of this attitude may have been his Commentary on the Prayers; see note 87.

[25]G. Scholem, *Teudah Hadasha le-Toeldot Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, Tel Aviv: Sefer Bialik 1934, pp. 141–162. See also *Ursprung*, pp. 219–230. Compare J. Dan, *Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics*, Seattle and London 1986, pp. 28–36, and idem, "The Ideological and Social Background to the Emergence of Rabbinic Ethical Literature in the 13th Century," in S. *Pines Jubilee Volume* (ed. M. Idel, Z. Harvey, E. Schweid), part 1 (*Mehkerey Yerushalayim be-Mahshevet Yisrael* vol. 7), Jerusalem 1988, pp. 239–263.

[26]*Sefer ha-nichtav ein lo aron.*

This concept of esotericism, characteristic of both Ashkenazi Hasidism and early kabbalah, is combined with another element: the claim that the authors do not reveal anything new; all they is pursue and develop traditions that they have received from antiquity. Significant efforts have been made both by the kabbalists and by the Ashkenazi Hasidim to present their teachings as revelations of ancient esoteric lore, sometimes emphatically described as having been revealed by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.[27] Concerning the problem of the emergence and beginnings of mystical speculation in medieval Germany, this point should be examined in detail, because it is most relevant to the question of this beginning and its reasons.

To a large extent, there can be no doubt that the first Jewish mystics in medieval Europe were indeed the followers and revealers of ancient traditions. One of the most meaningful characteristics of Ashkenazi Hasidic mysticism is the rediscovery and revival of ancient Jewish mystical sources, the *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* mysticism of the talmudic period. Large sections in the works of Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms are nothing but a presentation, sometimes in paraphrase, of several of the works of the *Hechalot* mystics. It seems that several *Hechalot* texts have reached us only in editions prepared by the Ashkenazi Hasidim.[28] There was a group

[27]The most detailed tradition was written by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms in his Commentary on the Prayers (not, as sometimes is mistakenly stated, in the treatise *Sodot ha-Tefillah*, which was written not by Rabbi Eleazar, but by another disciple of Rabbi Judah the Pious; Rabbi Judah copied it into his treatise, but there is no doubt that the original source is in the Commentary; ms. Paris 772 is a most complete version of Rabbi Eleazar's extensive work). Some versions of this tradition extended it explicitly to Moses (see H. Gross, *MGWJ* vol. 49 (1905), pp. 692–700), but the inference exists in the shorter versions as well. See the bibliography on this subject in *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 15–17.

[28]The problem of the relationship between the Ashkenazi Hasidim and other European mystics and the texts of the *Hechalot* literature is a most difficult one. A few sentences about it are included below. The core of the problem is how much of what is presented in the seven manuscripts that served as a basis for P. Schaefer's *Synopsis* (Tübingen 1981) was known to the Ashkenazi Hasidim. There is, on the one hand, evidence that at least some of these manuscripts were based on traditions from Ashkenazi Hasidic schools. On the other hand, some sections are never

among them that specialized in presenting such texts with commentaries that themselves are selections from *Hechalot* literature, like the commentaries known as *Sefer ha-Heshek* (The Book of Desire),[29] and the commentary on the hymn from *Hechalot Rabbati* (The Greater Book of *Hechalot*), *Ha-Aderet veha-Emunah* (The Garment and the Faith).[30] A work of this sort was preserved in the Mussajjof manuscript of *Hechalot* mysticism,[31] and another was composed by Rabbi Moses, the grandson of Rabbi Judah the Pious.[32] The second book in Rabbi Eleazar's magnum opus, *Sodey Razaya* (The Secrets of Secrets), is dedicated to a presentation of the celestial realm by quotations from *Hechalot* literature.[33]

We can validate the Ashkenazi Hasidic claim to base their *Hechalot* speculation on early traditions for several generations, probably even centuries. We have a document that describes the culture of the Kalonymus family's ancient roots in Italy, going as far as the eighth century: the *Megillat Ahimmaz*, the family traditions written down by Ahimmaz and including historical and fictional material concerning the life of several of the Kalonimides' ancestors.[34] In this document it is stated that *Hechalot* mysticism was studied by these

used or mentioned in the works of these mystics. A detailed study of the exact material used by European writers up to the middle of the thirteenth century is a most important task that should be undertaken.

[29]See J. Dan, "The Seventy Names of Metatron," *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. III (Jerusalem 1982), pp. 19–23.

[30]The problem was discussed in detail in my study "Perushey ha-Aderet veha-Emunah shel Hasidey Ashkenaz," *Tarbiz Jubilee Volume*, vol. 50, ed. E. E. Urbach (Jerusalem 1981), pp. 396–404.

[31]Mussajoff, *Merkavah Shelemah* ("A Complete Chariot," a publication of his owr manuscript of *Hechalot* mystical texts), Jerusalem 1927. Rabbi Judah the Pious anc Rabbi Joel the Pious are mentioned by name.

[32]This work was published by G. Scholem as an appendix to his *Reshit ha-Kabbalah* Jerusalem 1948, pp. 220–238.

[33]This part of the work was published by I. Kamelhar under the title *Sodey Razayc* (see note 20).

[34]The work was published by Benjamin Klar, Jerusalem 1944. The stories on Rabbi Aaron begin there on p. 13. See *Torat ha-Sod*, p. 18, and the detailed historical analysis by R. Bonfil, "Bein Eretz Yisrael u-Bavel," *Shalem* vol. 5 (1987), pp. 1–30.

old masters,[35] and this fact is supported by the frequent references to *Hechalot* material in the *piyyutim* of Italian and early Ashkenazi religious poets. It seems, therefore, that the reliance on *Hechalot* mysticism was not a new discovery by the late twelfth-century writers, but that they followed a tradition going back for many generations.

On two specific subjects the indebtedness of the early Jewish mystics in Germany to ancient traditions is most prominent: the image of God, and the creation. The image of God was presented in the greatest detail and the most profound mystical and mythical manner in the ancient work *Shiur Komah* (The Measurement of the Height: of the divine figure).[36] This work was known to other Jewish nonmystical authors, and caused them much embarrassment because of the stark anthropomorphism it seemed to express; Saadia Gaon, for instance, probably believed that it was a forgery, pseudepigraphically attributed to the ancient sages Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael, but he could not completely disregard it and explained that it referred to a created angelic power (a very difficult explanation, because this figure is clearly called within the work "our Creator").[37] The Ashkenazi Hasidim adapted the myth of the *Shiur*

[35]See my analysis of this section in *Torat ha-Sod*, p. 12, Z 36. G. Scholem dedicated an important and innovative discussion to this work in his *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary 1960; rev. 1965. S. Lieberman added an analysis of the pertinent talmudic and midrashic sections in his *Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim*, published as an appendix to Scholem's book (pp. 118–126). Another study of the subject is included in Scholem's paper on the *Shiur Komah* concept, in *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit*, Zurich: Rhein Verlag 1962, pp. 7–48. The texts of this work were collected and published by M. S. Cohen in two volumes: *The Shiur Komah, Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism*, Latham, New York and London: University Press of America 1983; *The Shiur Komah: Texts and Recensions*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr 1985. See also J. Dan, "The Concept of Knowledge in the Shiur Komah," *Studies in Jewish Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann*, ed. S. Stein and R. Loewe, Alabama 1979, pp. 67–73.

[37]Rav Saadia's discussion of this subject, which was probably part of the now lost Saadian answer to Solomon Ben Yeruhim (see note 40), was preserved in Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai ha-Barzeloni, *Commentary on the Sefer Yezira*, ed. by S. J. Halberstam, Berlin 1885, pp. 20–22.

Komah and made it central to their conception of the divine world;[38] the figure described is a divine one, though not the supreme God but an emanated power derived from the "divine fire" or "divine light," which serves as a subject for the revelation to the prophets. In this case, at least, the claim that they follow and reveal ancient traditional secrets seems to be entirely correct. To support this one can mention the fact that the *Shiur Komah* was known even to non-Jewish scholars, who sometimes used it in order to denounce Jewish faith.[39] This was also done by Karaitic polemicists, who saw a rare opportunity to attack the two great sages of the Mishnah, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael.[40]

A similar, though not identical, situation can be found in the early kabbalah. The *Sefer ha-Bahir* and other early kabbalistic works adopted the *Shiur Komah* anthropomorphism to present the Godhead in terms of a combination of symbols derived from human physiology. The difference is that the *Shiur Komah* myth was combined by the kabbalists with another set of symbols, that of the ten divine emanations (the *sefirot*); thus the ancient text was, for them, a source for symbolism as well as a living myth to follow.

A somewhat similar situation can be found concerning the speculations about the creation, though there are also some differences. The *Sefer Yezira* became, in the works of the early European mystics, the most important source for symbolism and speculation. A collection of the commentaries written by them to this work will

[38]The work was included in Rabbi Eleazar's *Sod Ma'aseh Bereshit* (The Esoteric Meaning of the Creation), which was partly published in the *Sefer Raziel*, Amsterdam 1701 (the section dedicated to it is on p. 37a–38b). A new, more complete edition of the work was recently published in Jerusalem in 1988.

[39]The very famous example is found in Bishop Agobard of Lyons' testimony; see the new study of it by R. Bonfil.

[40]Solomon ben Yeruhim, *Milhamot ha-Shem* (The Wars of the Lord), ed. I. Davidson, New York 1934. This work is a satirical treatment of the traditions of the talmudic rabbis in rhymed prose, personally attacking Saadia Gaon for believing in them. The first half is dedicated to halachic points of controversy between the Karaites and their rabbinic opponents, and the second to a presentation of the *Shiur Komah* and other sections of *Hechalot* mystical literature as absurdities believed by the rabbis.

be a most central anthology of medieval mysticism. The impact of this brief and enigmatic work can be equaled only by the book of Genesis itself. It is one of the greatest riddles of the history of Jewish books how a work—written probably in the third or fourth century by an author who did not belong to the mainstream of talmudic-midrashic schools, and which was not mentioned for many centuries in Jewish traditions—suddenly, in the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, became a cornerstone for all Jewish ideologies. Rationalistic philosophers and their opponents, kabbalists and Ashkenazi Hasidim, all dedicated their best efforts to its study and composed commentaries on it. Sometimes, even when not writing a commentary, an author will write a work that actually is such a commentary. Such examples can be found all the way from Rabbi Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari* (Chapter 4), to Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar's *Sod ha-Sodot*.[41]

When the early Jewish mystics in medieval Germany wrote their works based on *Sefer Yezira*, they were confident that they were following ancient traditions, revealed by God to Abraham. Yet the book itself is so brief and its terminology so unique and enigmatic that every commentator, in fact, was not revealing a tradition but presenting his own views. Every term in the *Sefer Yezira* received a new meaning by every commentator. The claim that they had an ancient tradition concerning the true meaning of this work—a claim clearly made by Rabbi Eleazar in his own commentary on the book, which is the fifth part of *Sodey Razaya*[42]—must be regarded with care. The wealth of material that we have concerning the interpretation of this work from the tenth century onward seems to indicate that the Jewish scholars of the Middle Ages did not have any previous tradition concerning this book, and that each of them—Shabbatai Donnolo in tenth-century Italy, Rav Saadia in tenth-century Babylonia, Donash ben Tamim, Judah ha-Levi, Judah ben Barzilai in twelfth-century Barcelona, and others—treated the work on their own original terms, except when relying on each other. Rabbi Eleazar is certainly correct when he states that he received traditions from

[41]Concerning the works of Elhanan ben Yakar on *Sefer Yezira*, see note 12.

[42]Published by the Hasidic author Rabbi Zevi Elimelech of Dinow.

Donnolo and other medieval sources, but we have no proof of any ancient tradition but the enigmatic text itself.

The basic historical question concerning the appraisal of the Ashkenazi Hasidic claim to be the followers of ancient tradition is, in fact, whether the most essential aspects of their doctrines, the ones that characterize them and differentiate them from previous Jewish thinkers, were indeed derived from these sources. The answer to this question, from the modern historian's point of view, should be a negative one. In most respects it can be proved that the ideas that are basic to the essence of Ashkenazi Hasidism developed in the twelfth century, and cannot be shown to be derived from ancient traditions. They often had sources—which we can follow and analyze—but these were medieval ones, like the works of Rav Saadia Gaon, Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai of Barcelona, Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja, Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, Shabbatai Donnolo, and others, which they used in a creative manner, often disagreeing with them or developing original concepts based on these medieval sources. A few examples will be given in the following pages.

Another reason for such a negative answer is that when using the wealth of material at their disposal from ancient Jewish mystical works, the Ashkenazi Hasidim either intentionally disregarded, or just did not know about, the active mystical aspects of these traditions, namely the actual practice of the "decent to the chariot."[43] No exhaustive study has been made as yet concerning the exact library of *Hechalot* texts that were used by the Ashkenazi Hasidim. It is certain, however, that the two most important ones for them were the *Shiur Komah* and *Sefer Hechalot* (*Third Enoch*, or the *Hebrew Book of Enoch*). How much material from *Hechalot Rabbati* and *Hechalot Zutarti*, the two main texts that describe the ascension of Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva respectively, was available to them and

[43]See note 28. Concerning the practice itself, see G. Scholem's studies in *Major Trends*, pp. 46–79 and *Jewish Gnosticism* (note 36), pp. 14–30. The possibility that a similar practice was known to Paulus was raised by Scholem and rejected by P. Schaefer; see *Hekhalot-Studien*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr 1988, pp. 234–249. Compare J. Dan, *Three Types of Ancient Jewish Mysticism*, Cincinnati, OH 1985, pp. 8–16.

actually used by them cannot be ascertained in an accurate manner. It is significant, however, that their works do not deal in any detail with these central episodes, which are the most important element in the ancient mystical tradition. In this the Ashkenazi Hasidim are one more example of a common medieval attitude, shared by writers ranging from Rav Saadia to Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai, who all either neglected, or were unaware of, this meaningful aspect of the *Hechalot* mystical tradition.

This point is crucial concerning the assessment of the nature of the reliance of the mystics of medieval Germany on ancient Jewish mystical works. If we take out of the ancient tradition the descriptions of the mystical ascensions of Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Nehunia ben ha-Kanah, and Rabbi Ishmael, what is left, in essence, is a description of the celestial worlds, validated and sanctified by the ancient sages, but including no element of active mystical ascension of a particular person. Gershom Scholem, when describing this school of mystics in medieval Germany, raised the question of whether they only studied, copied, and commented upon the works of the *Hechalot* mystics, or whether they also followed their mystical practices.[44] It seems that the absence of the descriptions of the mystical ascensions from Ashkenazi Hasidic writings can be interpreted in one of two ways: Either they did not know about it and therefore could not follow it, or they knew about it and did follow it but kept it a secret even in their own esoteric works. It seems to me that the first possibility is closer to the truth; it is very difficult to imagine a "conspiracy" in which all these writers, in the several schools of Ashkenazi Hasidism, decided to reveal everything but this section of the traditions that reached them (it should also be emphasized that the south European mystical sources, as well, do not include references to the mystical ascensions of the *Hechalot* sages; it is possible that these texts reached Europe later than the more descriptive material, though this explanation raises many difficult textual problems concerning the

[44]There is a possibility that though the known works of the Kalonymus school do not mention such a practice, other Ashkenazi Hasidic mystical authors, whose works were not preserved, did follow them. The possibility exists especially concerning Rabbi Yoel Hasid and Rabbi Nehemia ben Shlomo.

history, recensions, and transmission of the *Hechalot* texts). Be that as it may, Ashkenazi Hasidic contentions that all their teachings are based on ancient traditions from the East cannot be regarded as accurate descriptions of the actual situation in the second half of the twelfth century.

In southern Europe, *Hechalot* traditions and the *Sefer Yezira* serve as a central and meaningful source for the works of the early kabbalists. Rabbi Isaac the Blind presented his kabbalistic description of cosmogony and cosmology, and mainly the process of the emanation of the divine hypostases, in the framework of a commentary on the *Sefer Yezira*.[45] The *Bahir* used several sections of this work and included them in the book, introducing into them meaningful changes that transformed the ancient cosmological work into a mystical description of the divine world. The Iyyun circle, more than any other early kabbalistic school, based its terminology and symbolism on a new understanding of this ancient work. It was the mystics of the Iyyun circle, more than any other group, that demonstrated their attachment to the mystical *Hechalot* tradition in both the pseudepigraphical framework of some of their works (especially the *Sefer ha-Iyyun* itself), and the content of their speculations; a majority of the thirteen divine hypostases described in *Sefer ha-Iyyun* are derived from *Merkavah* speculations.[46] The *Sefer ha-Bahir* also includes several sections that are based on *Hechalot* terminology, and its indebtedness to the ancient mystics is obvious (it should be noted, however, that the Gerona circle, while continuing the tradition of reliance on *Sefer Yezira*, used very little of the *Hechalot* tradition). In this case too, therefore, the parallelism between the development of Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric traditions and the kabbalah is clear and striking.

Another aspect of the problem of ancient traditions is the insistent Ashkenazi Hasidic claim that they had specific, direct lines of traditions from which they received ancient Eastern esoteric traditions. Usually these claims were accompanied by stories describing the circumstances in which these secrets were transmitted. One such story that involves the legends concerning Jeremiah, Ben Sira, and Joseph ben Uzziel is obviously fictional, having its origin in the group of legends known as the "Pseudo-Ben Sira," originating in Babylonia in the ninth or tenth century.[47] Another vague tradition claims that the origin of esoteric traditions was a certain Yossef Maon, who was among these exiled by Titus when the Second Temple was destroyed.[48] Again, this is obviously a legend that is not repeated in any other source.

The most serious tradition of this kind is the well-known one ascribing Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric traditions to a chain of transmission that began with the visit of Rabbi Aaron ben Samuel of Baghdad (sometimes called Abu Aharon), who belonged to a Babylonian gaonic family, to Italy, where he revealed his secrets to the forefathers of Ashkenazi Kalonymus family. There is no doubt that some historical foundation can be found to this story, which is preserved in two independent sources—a tradition by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms and the *Chronicle of Ahimaaz*, though most of the historical details, including the exact chronology of the events described, are unclear.[49] It should be noted that Rabbi Eleazar clearly states in

[45]See note 4.

[46]The text was printed (from the edition prepared by M. Verman) in J. Dan and R. Kiener, *The Early Kabbalah* (see note 6).

[47]This work of fiction is a literary satire of some basic Jewish beliefs, especially those concerning the afterlife and redemption, and various Jewish biblical figures, including Abraham and David, and often of God Himself. See my study of it included in *The Hebrew Story in the Middle Ages*, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House 1974 (in Hebrew), pp. 69-78. The text was published in many traditional editions and is found in an unusually large number of manuscripts. M. Steinschneider printed an edition of it (Berlin 1858), and recently a scholarly edition by E. Yassif was published, Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1985. See my review of this edition in *Kiryat Sefer*, vol. 60, pp. 294-297. It is still a mystery why this circle of Ashkenazi mystics chose its heroes from a work of fiction, which it should have regarded as heretical and rude.

[48]In ms. Adler 1161, at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, there is a collection of material that combines kabbalah and Ashkenazi Hasidic traditions, including the one concerning Yosef Maon.

[49]This tradition has been studied in great detail by A. Grossman, who devoted most of his efforts to the problem of the chronology of the emigration of the Kalonymus family from Italy to Germany (*Zion*, vol. 40 [1975], pp. 85-154). It seems that Grossman's analysis rejecting all previously suggested dates as impossible

his version of this tradition that the secrets brought by Rabbi Aaron of Baghdad concerned mainly "the secrets of the prayers and other secrets"; the centrality of the "secrets of the prayers" concerning the emergence of Jewish mysticism in Germany will be discussed below.

The claim that ancient traditions served as a basis for medieval mystical speculations is, of course, common to Ashkenazi Hasidism and the kabbalah in the Provence and in Spain. The *Sefer ha-Bahir*, the earliest work of the kabbalah, was written in the form of a midrash, and attributed to ancient mishnaic sages like Rabbi Nehunia ben ha-Kanah, Rabbi Akiva, and others. This sort of clear, blatant pseudepigraphy is similar to the one found in the works attributed to Joseph ben Uzziel on the one hand and the writings of the Iyyun circle on the other,[50] where ancient sages from the Mishnah, *Hechalot*

because of conflicting evidence concerning the lives of the figures mentioned is correct. His alternative suggestions seem to me to raise too many new difficulties. For instance, to reject Rabbi Eleazar's detailed tradition as completely unreliable is very difficult, because it is derived from a school and a family that took great care to preserve such traditions; mistakes undoubtedly can be found in it, but it cannot be regarded as completely fictitious. Another difficult problem is the one concerning "King Karl" mentioned by Rabbi Eleazar as the monarch who initiated the move of that family. Grossman tends to view this statement as evidence of the existence of legends concerning Karl the Great, and that Rabbi Eleazar was following the twelfth-century custom of tying this emperor to many legendary traditions. The difficulty here is that no other Ashkenazi Hasidic authentic source ever mentioned Karl the Great; in the many volumes of Rabbi Eleazar's works he is not mentioned at all. He may have appeared in the later legends on the Ashkenazi Hasidim, which, though preserving some authentic material, undoubtedly reflect a different period and attitude. It is inconceivable that when referring to Karl the Great a thirteenth-century author will say simply "King Karl"; this is more correctly interpreted as an emphasis that is not Karl the Great, whose name included the "great" as an integral part in European languages. It seems to me, therefore, that an attempt to connect this event with one of the Carolingian emperors may still prove fruitful.

[50]See note 11, and compare J. Dan, "The Problem of Pseudepigraphy in Early Kabbalah," *Studies in Kabbalah and Jewish Ethical Literature Presented to I. Tishby*, ed. J. Dan and J. Hacker (Jerusalem 1986), pp. 111–138. Another example of kabbalistic pseudepigraphy can be found in the many "sources" and fictitious stories included in the works of Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen, a kabbalist from Castile in the beginning of the second half of the thirteenth century. See G. Scholem, "Kabbalot Rabbi Yaakov ve-Rabbi Yitzhak," *Madaey ha-Yahadut*, vol. II (1927), pp. 244–264; and compare J. Dan, "Samael, Lilith and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah," *AJS Review* vol. V (1980), pp. 17–40.

literature, or gaonic figures are used as authoritative sources of secrets. And like the Ashkenazi Hasidim, not all kabbalists tolerated this kind of pseudepigraphy: The schools of Rabbi Isaac the Blind and of the kabbalists of Gerona did not use pseudepigraphy, like the Ashkenazi mystics of the Kalonymus family, who argued among themselves whether one should emphasize his authorship of a work or not,[51] but never dreamed of attributing their own works to earlier sages. The parallels between the schools of Jewish mystics in the late twelfth century seem, therefore, to be present in many aspects of their works, and even the variations seem to follow the same general lines.

III

The importance of these similarities concerning "external" characteristics between central European and south European circles of mystics, as indications denoting the circumstances and nature of their origins, should not be minimized, but they are undoubtedly secondary to other elements that reflect more directly the essence and nature of their mystical speculations. Here, I believe, lies the most important key to understanding not only the similarities but also the differences, and therefore it can be essential to the quest for the origins of Ashkenazi Hasidic mysticism. The most important idea to emerge from all these schools, and which constitutes the main reason for their being called "mystics," is the revolutionary conception of the divine world as being composed of several structured, emanated forces, each having its own distinct personal image, even though they represent together the unity of God.

The various symbolisms of the ten *sefirot*, which together constitute the divine world, are the basic characteristic of the mysticism of *Sefer ha-Bahir* and the school of kabbalists in the Provence, led by Rabbi Isaac the Blind. The new concept of the divine world as being made up of ten emanated layers, each of which is a divine personality described in a specific set of symbols, is the essence of

[51]See note 23.

the medieval symbolism of the kabbalah. The origin—or origins—of this new system of symbols is unknown, and the rapidly increasing attempts to discover it (or them) has, up to now, added very little to our knowledge. The Iyyun circle, however, used both the numbers ten and thirteen to indicate the inner structure of the divine world, using terminology that is well-rooted in the ancient and medieval sources that were common to all Jewish medieval mystics. The basic problem concerning these circles, as well as their parallels in Ashkenazi Hasidism, is: What motivated them to depart from traditional Jewish conceptions of the unity of God, and to adapt the mythological notion of the divine world as structured from several emanated powers?

The actual development of the Ashkenazi Hasidic concept of the divine world is fairly well documented in the sources available to us. They put in the center of their speculations concerning the divine world the term *kavod*, the divine glory, which they usually identified with the rabbinic concept of the *Shechinah*, a term denoting God in His relationship to the Temple in Jerusalem and to the people of Israel.[52] It was Rav Saadia Gaon (probably following previous norms adapted by the Aramaic translators of the Bible, who, to avoid stark anthropomorphism in their translations, sometimes introduced the term "Divine Glory" instead of a direct reference to God;[53] it is also possible that there were some Karaitic speculations of similar kind among the early theologians of this sect),[54] who first formulated clearly the concept that the power revealed to the prophets, and the one described in the anthropomorphic verses of the Bible and the sayings of the Talmud, was the Divine Glory, which is a created, angelic power that was called *Shechinah* by the talmudic

[52]In rabbinic traditions the *Shechinah* is one of the many names for God, and only in the Middle Ages is there a beginning of a concept that sees it as separate power, and later as a feminine divine power. See G. Scholem, "Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der kabbalistischen Konzepzion der Schechina," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 21 (1952), pp. 45–107.

[53]While the exact dating of the old Aramaic translations is uncertain, there can be no doubt that the practice preceded considerably Saadia's works.

[54]A. Altmann, "Saadia's Theory of Revelation, Its Origin and Background," *Saadia Studies*, ed. Rosenthal, Manchester 1943, pp. 4–25.

sages.[55] In this way Saadia removed the danger of anthropomorphism from prophetic revelation, but at the same time put this peak of religious experience on a much lower level; the prophets did not see God Himself, even when they stated this explicitly (Isaiah 6:1); all they had seen was a created angel, which God entrusted with the duty of appearing in certain shapes before the prophets as a sign that what they were going to hear was indeed coming from a divine source and was not an earthly, magical delusion.

This was a neat, simple, and satisfactory solution to a very serious problem; probably much too neat, for it neglected most of the really important religious factors involved. Rav Saadia himself had to depart from it when he faced the necessity, imposed on him by the polemics of his Karaitic opponents, of explaining the nature of the enormous divine figure, called "our creator," whose astronomical measurements are given in the ancient mystical tractate *Shiur Komah*, which is attributed to the two great sages of the Mishnah, the oral law (which the Karaites did not accept)—Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael. Saadia was undoubtedly inclined to dismiss this text as pseudepigraphical, but could not do so wholeheartedly because he was facing the Karaites, who claimed that the whole Mishnah was a pseudepigraphy. He therefore added a theological explanation of the *Shiur Komah* to the suggestion that the work was not authentic. In this explanation he stated that there was another divine glory above the one revealed to the prophets, one created by God in order to be revealed to the angels, the celestial powers, and the revealed Divine Glory, and this superior glory was the one described in the *Shiur Komah*.[56] Saadia thus had to postulate a succession of

[55]Rav Saadia dedicated to this problem the second half of the second chapter in his philosophical work, *Emunot ve-Deot* (Leipzig 1859, p. 63ss).

[56]This is quoted by Rabbi Judah ha-Barzeloni (note 37). Rabbi Judah, who wrote this commentary in the middle of the twelfth century, did not repeat Saadia's view concerning a multiple system of glories. On the other hand, he was somewhat dissatisfied with the basic Saadian explanation of the process of prophecy, though he relies on it and repeats it frequently. Thus, for instance, he rejects emphatically a responsum by Rav Hai Gaon, who identifies the glory with an angel (pp. 137–138), and states that the glory is much more than an angel—but he does not explain in what way.

created divine glories, one above the other, and later formulations of the same idea, especially by the talmudic commentator Rabenu Hananel, summarized this Saadian concept in terms that may indicate that there was an infinite succession of such divine glories, one greater than the other and one above the other, the higher ones so brilliant and sacred that they were beyond the comprehension of even Moses, the greatest prophet.[57]

When the simplicity of the Saadian statement was broken by the author himself, the door was open for later developments that added to the dimensions of this celestial figure, the divine glory, and increased its religious significance. It seems that the crucial step was taken by the great neo-Platonic philosopher and biblical commentator, Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra. When discussing the revelation of God to Moses (Exodus 33), both in his commentary to the Torah and in his brief ethical and theological treatise, *Yesod Morah* (The Foundation of Worship),[58] Ibn Ezra stated that the divine glory has two "faces"—one directed toward creation, which is revealed to the prophets, and one hidden from everything, because it is turned toward God Himself, and is "united" with Him. The terminology used by Ibn Ezra is not completely clear, but it seems evident that what he was stating was that the divine glory is emanated from God, and that its relationship to the reality below it is also one of emanation.[59] The Saadian concept of a divine glory that is not divine, but created, was rejected by Ibn Ezra, and substituted by one in which the glory is indeed divine, part of the succession of divine powers emanating from God.

[57]The relevant section from Rabenu Hananel, and many other sources dealing with the same subject, were collected and presented by Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel in his *Arugat ha-Bosem* (note 21), vol. I, pp. 197-202.

[58]*Yesod Morah*, Ch. 12.

[59]Ibn Ezra uses the verb "*dvk*" (to adhere, to unite) instead of the verb "*azl*," which was adopted by the kabbalists, and Rabbi Judah the Pious followed his usage. There seems to be a good basis to the supposition that Ibn Ezra meant it to be a better expression of the idea of emanation. I. Tishby pointed out the possibility that Rabbi Shabbatai Donnolo adopted this idea—but not the terminology—in the tenth century, in his commentaries on the verse "Na'aseh Adam be-Zalmenu" and on *Sefer Yezira*.

Rabbi Judah the Pious not only knew Ibn Ezra's commentary, but also wrote a commentary on the section of *Yesod Morah* dealing with the emanation of the divine glory,[60] and while there may be some doubt concerning the exact meaning of Ibn Ezra's statement, there is none concerning Judah the Pious's understanding of it. The Ashkenazi mystic saw the divine glory as an emanated power, divine in its nature and having many functions in the divine governing of the cosmos. The most important addition that Rabbi Judah the Pious brought to the concept of the divine glory was the inclusion of the task of accepting the prayers of the people of Israel among the tasks of the glory. A created power cannot be the target of human prayers; praying to a created being is the definition of idolatry. By the addition of this task to the divine glory, Rabbi Judah the Pious clearly introduced the mystical concept of a succession of personalized divine powers emanating from the Godhead.

A very similar development occurred in the Ashkenazi mystical circle that based its traditions on the *Barayta* attributed to Joseph ben Uzziel. These anonymous mystics of the late twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth were even more outspoken and less hesitant in their descriptions of the various powers within the divine realm. The most important contribution they added to the theory of the divine glory was to go one more step away from the Saadian concept and declare emphatically that the divine glory as a whole was completely remote from human perception and could not even be revealed to the prophets.[61] Thus a power that started its "medieval history" as a created angel revealed to the prophets, became a supreme, hidden divine power, that, according to this circle of mystics, should never be described in any corporeal terms, and therefore cannot be the image to which biblical and rabbinic anthropomorphic phrases should be related; the *Shiur Komah*, perforce, cannot be the *kavod* or the *Shechinah*. An answer to the

[60]This section of Rabbi Judah the Pious's work was published in *Iyyunim*, pp. 158-167.

[61]J. Dan, "Kavod Nistar," in *Dat ve-safah*, ed. M. Halamish and A. Kasher, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University 1982, pp. 71-79.

problem of anthropomorphism became an intensification of the question: If the *kavod* is so divine and hidden, what did the prophets perceive?

The answer of this circle of mystics to this problem follows the lines of development that have occurred elsewhere: Another divine power has to be added to the hierarchy of supreme forces in order to serve this purpose. This power was called by them *ha-keruv ha-meyuhad* (the Special Cherub), who was described, according to them, in the revelations to Isaiah and Ezekiel, and the "creator" of the *Shiur Komah* is indeed this "cherub." These works insist that the Cherub is an emanated power, derived from the divine "fire" in a way that is not similar to the creation of angels and other celestial beings that were made out fire, but not emanated from the divine spirit, which is also described symbolically as fire. Paradoxically, this Special Cherub is described as sitting on the *kisey ha-kavod* (the throne of glory). As the term itself clearly indicates, the "throne of glory" was, originally, the throne of the *kavod*, the Divine Glory. These mystics could not accept that, because the *kavod*, the glory, cannot be described as "sitting," as it does not have any corporeal form; it is the Special Cherub, the revealed divine power, that sits on the throne, which the theology of this circle forced the glory to vacate.

Why did the authors of these mystical works feel it necessary to add another power to the divine realm, a power that is not mentioned in any previous source and represents their departure from old, reliable traditions? It is clear from their writings (especially one brief tractate, *Pesak ha-Yirah veha-Emunah* (Decision Concerning Faith and the Fear of God) that the motivation for this development came from their conception of the prayer.[62] The enormous religious meaning of the constant proximity between man and God, represented by the Jewish prayers, could not be directed toward a power that has a corporeal form, even if it is emanated and divine in nature. The prayers, they believed, should be dedicated and directed to a more supreme force that cannot be revealed, cannot "sit," and cannot be described in the anthropomorphic terms of the *Shiur Komah*. The religious force of the need to pray to a supreme divine power made them disassociate the divine glory from the task of being revealed to the prophets, and serving as an answer to the problem of anthropomorphism, and to the addition of a specific, new divine figure to serve this purpose. The *pesak* is an emphatic demand, phrased in halachic legal terms, that prayers should be directed not toward the Special Cherub, but toward the divine hidden glory alone.

[62]This text was translated and analyzed in my paper "The Emergence of the Mystical Prayer," in J. Dan and F. Talmage (eds.), *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, Cambridge, MA 1981, pp. 85–120; J. Dan, "Pesaq ha-Yirah veha Emunah and the Intention of Prayer in Ashkenazi Hasidism," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 19 (1991/92), pp. 185–215; idem, "Prager as Text and Prayer as Mystical Experience," *Torah and Wisdom, Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, ed. Ruth Link-Salinger, New York: Shengold 1992, pp. 33–47.

It should be emphasized that as far as the evidence at our disposal can show, there was no connection between the circle of mystics that produced these texts and the central Ashkenazi Hasidic school of the Kalonymus family. The development of the concepts of revealed divine powers and ones designated to accept the prayers, occurred independently in these two groups. A part of their terminology is derived from previous sources common to both, like Saadia and Ibn Ezra, but the actual mystical concepts of the divine emanated powers is expressed in terminology and symbolism unique to each of these circles.[63] The differences are meaningful enough to prove that none of these writers relied on another from the second group. This seems to prove how necessary, from a religious point of view, were these ideas and symbols to Jewish Ashkenazi scholars at the end of the twelfth century, so much so that they developed them independently but on closely parallel lines.

The development of these mystical notions did not stop when the problems of divine revelation, anthropomorphism, and the divine power that accepts the prayers have been answered. Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar, who followed the traditions of the Joseph ben

[63]For instance, this circle of mystics does use the Hebrew term for emanation (*azl*), which is not used by the Kalonymus school (see note 59).

Uzziel circle (and was probably unaware of the works of Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms), added another dimension in his theological tractate *Sod ha-Sodot*.[64] The first part of this work is dedicated to an analysis of the story of the creation as presented in the beginning of the book of Genesis, and Rabbi Elhanan describes a central role for the *kavod*, the hidden divine glory, in the process of the creation. According to him, the actual creation in the first six days was the result of the emanation and separation of the glory from the supreme Godhead. The completion of the process on the seventh day signifies the reuniting of these divine powers, when the full spiritual divine force of the supreme Godhead was given to the glory, and they became, in Rabbi Elhanan's original terminology, "like twins."[65] As proof to his description Rabbi Elhanan relies on the different names of God used in this section of Genesis. The holy name of four letters, YHVH, is, according to him, the name of the glory, while Elohim is the name of the supreme God (this notion is based on *Sefer Yezira*, where, according to this circle's commentaries on that work, this name signifies the supreme Godhead). When, at the end of the process of the creation, the names are united (YHVH-Elohim), they signify the reunification of the divine source and the emanated power. When the name YHVH, which is so central both in the Bible and in Jewish faith and worship, is attributed to a secondary divine power, an emanated one, a scholar may definitely conclude that the simple unity of the conception of God has been broken, and mystics using such symbolism indeed perceive the divine realm as multilayered.

Other Jewish mystics who wrote in the same period in Germany reveal the same basic tendencies, even though they did not create such elaborate systems as did the two schools of the Kalonymus family and the circle following the traditions of Joseph ben Uzziel. The *Sefer ha-Navon*, for instance, is partially dedicated to a commentary on the *Shiur Komah*, which is perceived as divine, not created,

[64]See note 12.

[65]In Hebrew: *nitomemu*, an unusual usage of the name "twins" as a verb.

power.[66] In *Sefer ha-Hayyim* it seems that the old dictum that there is a succession of divine glories, each above the other, was accepted and made a basis for a theological system; the author describes seven such divine glories constituting the celestial "ladder" between the divine realm and the Earth.[67]

One point should be added in order to put in the proper historical perspective these religious developments in the circles of the Ashkenazi Hasidim. In order to put forward such ideas they had to overcome two meaningful obstacles. One was the great prestige of Rav Saadia, who was an ancient and revered figure not only as head of the Sura academy in Babylonia, but also as a master of esoteric theology. All of these writers were familiar with the old, poetic Hebrew paraphrases of Saadia's philosophical work, *Emunot ve-Deot*,[68] and of his commentary on *Sefer Yezira*. They believed that these works incorporated Eastern esoteric traditions, and it was very difficult to contradict ideas expressed in them. Yet they did; Rabbi Judah the Pious clearly states that the correct view is not the one that Rav Saadia espoused.[69] The second obstacle was the fact that not only Rav Saadia presented the view that the divine glory was a created power for the benefit of prophetic revelation. There was a closer author who put this idea forward—Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai of Barcelona, who in his commentary on *Sefer Yezira* dedicated many dozens of pages to the emphatic statement and elaboration of Saadia's views.[70] Unlike Saadia, Judah ben Barzilai analyzed in great detail

[66]See note 36.

[67]On the *kavod* theory in the *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, see *Torat Ha-Sod*, pp. 143–156.

[68]The characteristics and chronology of this important medieval work were recently studied by Ronald C. Kiener, "The Hebrew Paraphrase of Saadiah Gaon's Kitab al-Amanat wa'l-I'tiqadat," *AJS Review* vol. XI (1986), pp. 1–26.

[69]Rabbi Judah attributes the view that the glory was created to the "third sage" in a fictitious trialogue that he presents (the first sage represents the rationalistic view that revelation is a psychological process, by which God gives illusionary images to the prophet; the second sage represents Rabbi Judah himself), and he states clearly that the words of this sage are those of Rav Saadia. The text was published in *Iyyunim*, pp. 163ss.

[70]The introduction to Judah ben Barzilai's *Commentary on Sefer Yezira* (pp. 1–105) is dedicated mainly to this subject.

talmudic sayings and made them support this view. The great prestige of Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai was thus added to that of Rav Saadia to make it very difficult to depart from their views, especially as both were great authorities in *halachah*. The fact that the Ashkenazi Hasidic mystics did not hesitate, and described their mystical contradiction to Saadia's rationalistic approach in unmistakable terms, seems to indicate the importance and the centrality of these problems in their religious and intellectual world and the necessity to present new answers to them.

IV

A comparison between the development of the theology in which the divine realm contains several emanated divine powers in Ashkenazi Hasidism, on the one hand, and the kabbalah in Provence and Spain, on the other, can be helpful to the understanding of the emergence of this idea in medieval Germany. The sequence of developments that lead from Rav Saadia Gaon's concepts of the *kavod* through his refutation of the Karaitic charges concerning the *Shiur Komah*, via the formulations by Rabenu Hananel and Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai, the possibility of a concept of emanation in Ibn Ezra's commentary, and then the stages of development inside the movement—Rabbi Judah the Pious, the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel*, Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, and Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar—cannot be done concerning the system of the ten divine emanations in the *Bahir* and the works of Rabbi Isaac the Blind. The direct line leading from the questions concerning divine revelation, anthropomorphic verses, rabbinic sayings, and the meaning of the prayers to the concepts of divine powers who are revealed to prophets, carry anthropomorphic images, accept and answer the prayers, and participate in the process of creation, is completely unknown to us concerning the beginning of the kabbalah.

The reasons for the formulation of the concept of the Special Cherub in Ashkenazi Hasidic mysticism are relatively clear; the reasons that the kabbalistic system should contain the powers of *Nezah*, the seventh *sefirah*, or *Yesod*, the ninth, are not. The tradition originating in the *Sefer Yezira* demands that there will be "ten *sefirot*, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven";[71] this was known in the same degree to the mystics in Germany and the Provence. Yet the former paid no attention to it when formulating their symbols concerning the emanated divine powers, and the kabbalists put it in the center of their system (with the exception of the Iyyun circle, where the number thirteen played a meaningful role).[72] We know many of the sources that served the kabbalists, yet no theological explanation of their system of symbols can be derived from their analysis.

The conclusion to be reached from this fact is that though the development of the concept of God as being composed of various emanated powers is surprisingly similar in both Germany and Spain Provence, it is erroneous to assume that exactly the same spiritual forces were acting in both areas, and that this similarity is the result of an identical set of circumstances. We must enquire a little deeper into this problem before formulating any conclusion.

A factor that should serve to point out both the similarities and the differences between central and southern Europe is the attitude toward Jewish philosophy, which was the dominant spiritual force among Jewish intellectuals in the Arabic-speaking world since the tenth century. In the late twelfth century and the early thirteenth, both kabbalists and Ashkenazi Hasidim were united in the struggle against it. Rabbi Jonah of Gerona was one of the leading figures in the attempt to excommunicate the works of Maimonides in 1232, and it is possible that Ashkenazi Hasidic leaders supported the

[71] *Sefer Yezira* Chap. 1, section 4 in the traditional editions; Paragraph 4 in I. Gruenwald's commentary, "Some Critical Notes on the First Part of Sefer Yezira," *Revue des Etudes juives*, CXXXII (4) (1973), p. 488, and the same in P. Hayman's translation *Shadow*, vol. 3 no. 1 (June 1986), p. 28.

[72] In thirteenth-century kabbalah the problem of the relationship between the numbers ten and thirteen was an important one, because of the tradition of thirteen divine attributes of mercy. A famous kabbalistic work of this period, attributed to a responsum by Rav Hai Gaon, explains that the ten *sefirot* have three supreme roots within the Godhead, thus reconciling the two numbers.

move;[73] at least it is certain that Nachmanides thought that they did, and referred to Rabbi Eleazar's works in his discussion of the problem.[74] There are several denunciations of the dialectical method in Ashkenazi Hasidic literature[75] (though the term "philosopher" was not associated by them with the rationalism which they rejected; it was used by them as a title for any learned scholar).[76]

While the opposition to the rationalistic movement in Judaism, and especially to Maimonides's *Guide to the Perplexed*, unites the two groups of mystical circles, it is a fact that this opposition did not hinder both of them from being influenced by rationalistic sources and ideas. Philosophical terms abide in the works of the Gerona circle, but can be found also in the traditions of Rabbi Isaac the Blind and the *Bahir* itself. The *Bahir*, despite its atmosphere of an ancient mystical midrash, most probably used terms and ideas derived from the works of Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja, Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, and even the Hebrew translation of Bachya ibn Pakuda's *Hovot ha-Levavot* (The Duties of the Heart), a translation written by Rabbi Judah ibn Tibbon in the Provence in the last third of the twelfth century.[77] There was no ban of any sort by the kabbalists against

[73]See E. E. Urbach, "Helkam shel Hachmei Ashkenaz ve-Zarfat ba-Pulmus al ha-Rambam ve-al Ketavav," *Zion*, vol. 12, pp. 149–159.

[74]This is found in Nachmanides' early epistle concerning the controversy over the writings of Maimonides, known by its first sentence, *Be-Terem Eaneh Ani Shogeg*. In the last section of this epistle Nachmanides quotes a few lines from a work by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms that describes the unity of God in terms that may seem almost identical to the philosophical ones. Nachmanides, who at that time tried to restore peace among the various parties, tried to show that differences were not that great between them. It is obvious, however, that he believed Rabbi Eleazar to be an opponent of Maimonidean philosophy. See Shevel's edition of the works of Nachmanides, vol. II, Jerusalem 1963, p. 346.

[75]In both *Sefer Hasidim* and Rabbi Eleazar's book on psychology, *Chochmat ha-Nefesh*, the term "dialectics" is used as an equivalent to heresy.

[76]Rabbi Judah the Pious used the term "philosophers" to describe Jewish sages when presenting conflicting ideas. See *Iyyunim*, pp. 31–33.

[77]G. Scholem alluded to the *Bahir*'s indebtedness to Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja (*Ursprung*, pp. 54–55); concerning Ibn Ezra, it seems that the use of the verb "*dvk*" denoted his influence (see paragraph 129 and parallels). The influence of the Hebrew version of Bachya's ethical work is evident in the *Bahir*'s adaptation of a parable presented in the end of the preface to *Hovot ha-Levavot*, concerning a king's

philosophical literature and ideas. Neo-Platonism plays a central role in the mysticism of the Iyyun circle, and the kabbalistic notions concerning divine emanation and several other subjects are impossible to imagine without the impact of this central school of medieval thought, which had a profound influence on Christian, Moslem, and Jewish mysticism alike.

The Ashkenazi Hasidim, for their part, used extensively the works of Rav Saadia, Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja, Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai, and Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra.[78] It is true that they did not regard them as rationalists, but rather as esoteric writers who received important and truthful secret traditions from previous generations. But it does not change the fact that basic ideas—even the neo-Platonic system of worlds as used by Bar Hijja[79]—were accepted by these Jewish-German mystics. Rabbi Eleazar reveals the extent of neo-Platonic influences on his thought when interpreting some key terms in the *Sefer Yezira*.[80] It is wrong, therefore, to assume that Ashkenazi Hasidism was vehemently opposed to rationalistic Jewish philosophy in a total manner.

This can be demonstrated by the fact that when a true and complete opponent to rationalism appeared in Germany, he became the opponent of Ashkenazi Hasidism no less than of the Jewish philosophers. The halachist Rabbi Moses Taku wrote, around 1220, the most thorough and unqualified denunciation of rationalism in Ashkenazi culture in his book *Ketav Tamim* (The Book of Honesty).[81] In it he

gift of cloth to his servants. This was used in the *Bahir* in a different way, in the explanation of the process of the *gilgul*. Scholem analyzed medieval influences on Rabbi Isaac the Blind, and I. Tishby pointed out the philosophical terminology of the Gerona school (see note 4).

[78]See *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 114–116, 204.

[79]G. Scholem, "Reste neuplatinischer Speculation bei den Deutschen Hasidim," *MGWJ*, 75 (1931), pp. 172–191. The concept of the four divine worlds, based on Bar Hijja neo-Platonic formulation, is found, for instance, in the *Pesak ha-Yirah veha-Emunah*.

[80]See *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 99–100. Rabbi Eleazar explains, for instance, the *Sefer Yezira* concepts of the dimensions of good and evil as referring to matter and spirit.

[81]This work was first published by R. Kircheim in *Ozar Nehmad*, vol. 3 (Vienna 1863), pp. 57–99. A facsimile edition of the Paris manuscript, the only one we have of this work, was published in Jerusalem in 1984, to which a detailed introduction and analysis by me was added.

attacked Maimonides (only the *Sefer ha-Madda* in *Mishneh Torah*; he did not know as yet the *Guide to the Perplexed*), Rav Saadia Gaon (who is the main target of the attack), and Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (to whom he wrongly attributed the *Sefer ha-Hayyim*). But with them he attacked Rabbi Judah the Pious, the *Shir ha-Yihud* (Poem of Divine Unity, which was written in Ashkenazi Hasidic circles in the second half of the twelfth century),[82] the "Books of Worms," (probably referring to Rabbi Eleazar of Worms), and the *Sefer ha-Hayyim*. All these together were regarded by Rabbi Moses Taku as speakers of a new, heretic religion, equivalent to Christianity and Karaitic heresy, which began with Saadia's *Emunot ve-Deot* and his commentary on the *Sefer Yezira*. He is not completely wrong when, compared to his own version of traditional orthodoxy, both rationalists and mystics are heretics in the same degree.

Rabbi Moses Taku, in his fierce polemics, proves one central point: Jewish rationalistic philosophy, exactly like Ashkenazi Hasidism, was seeking answers to new religious problems that Jews were facing in the Middle Ages. Traditional talmudic answers did not suffice any more, and new concepts had to be discovered in order to enable intellectual, spiritually inclined Jews to continue in their traditional worship. The conception of God had to be changed if His commands should continue to be followed. Rabbi Moses Taku was wrong, therefore, when he attributed the new ideas of the philosophers or the Ashkenazi Hasidim to heresy, comparable to other movements that started within Judaism and then were separated from it, and developed new concepts concerning the performance of commandments. Saadia, Maimonides, and Judah the Pious shared the conviction that the practical side of Judaism is to be preserved completely without any change. Their new ideas were directed to give new explanations and new motivations to the performance of the old commandments.

Can the kabbalists in southern Europe be included in this picture? Can they be also characterized as forming new ideas and new

[82]See J. Dan, Introduction to the facsimile edition of *Shir ha-Yihhud*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1985.

symbols in order to preserve traditional Jewish practices? It seems that the answer can be a positive one, once we omit the words "in order". The kabbalists indeed did that: Their new symbols and new mystical interpretations of old tradition undoubtedly assisted in the preservation of the Jewish adherence to their traditional way of life. Later in the thirteenth century the kabbalists developed a whole system of *taamey mitzvot*, explanations of the practical commandments, that used mystical symbolism to give new meaning to the performance of the commandments. The beginnings of this endeavor can be found in the *Bahir* and other early kabbalistic works. So the orthodox impact of the revolutionary new ideas and symbols of the kabbalists is undeniable. The difference is that we do not find, as we do concerning Ashkenazi Hasidism, the element of purpose, the deliberate connection between questions and answers that we find in Ashkenazi Hasidism and to a very large extent in Jewish rational philosophy. It is as if the kabbalists supplied answers to contemporary religious problems without intending to, as an offshoot of their original concepts, while the other schools demonstrate an intense connection between questions and answers.

This difference becomes much more defined if we take into consideration the distinct possibility that the Ashkenazi Hasidim had at their disposal some traditions that were remarkably similar to those that gave the kabbalah its distinctive character, but made no use of them. As Scholem has shown, the book *Raza Rabba* (The Great Secret) was one of the sources of the *Bahir*;[83] essentially it was a work closely related to *Hechalot* mysticism, but its symbolism had some of the more daring, revolutionary characteristics later found in the kabbalah. This work is partially known to us today only from quotations found in Ashkenazi Hasidic literature, though admittedly in a later stratum—the works of Rabbi Moses, the great-grandson of Rabbi Judah the Pious, who wrote at the end of the thirteenth century. It is, however, a legitimate possibility that this work was known to earlier Ashkenazi Hasidic writers, but made no impact on their

[83]Sections of this work were published by G. Scholem (note 32).

ideas or choice of symbols, while it may have had a shaping influence on the *Bahir* and kabbalistic symbolism.

Another example of the same phenomenon is found in a commentary on one of the esoteric holy names of God, attributed to Rav Hai Gaon, which was included by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms in his *Sefer ha-Chochmah*, written in 1217.[84] This pseudo-Hai commentary includes a portion that describes the ascension of prayer in the celestial realm in a most dynamic and mythological way, including some terms that have become basic symbols of the kabbalah, like *keter*, *atarah*, and *malchut asirit*.[85] It is not known whether kabbalists had in their traditions the same commentary, though some connection to the works of Rabbi Isaac the Blind can be imagined. Rabbi Eleazar, however, copied this commentary, but never used its symbols or ideas in any way in his extensive works. The centrality of the problem of the prayers for the Ashkenazi Hasidim has already been mentioned, and will be discussed further below; yet Rabbi Eleazar did not find a place for such an unusual and provocative treatment of the subject in any other of his works. He wrote an extensive commentary on the prayers, to which he dedicated many years; he may have written it in three different versions, but none of them contains any reference to the pseudo-Hai dynamic description of the ascension and the divine status of the prayer.

We can conclude, therefore, that even though the new concept of the divine world as comprising several emanated powers appeared in about the same time in Germany and in Spain Provence, and there are close similarities between the circles in southern and central

[84]G. Scholem translated this section in *Ursprung*, pp. 162–165. The Hebrew text was published and discussed in *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 118–125; and also J. Dan, "Hugey ha-Mekubalim ha-Rishonim," *Academon* (Jerusalem 1977), pp. 159–165; and in English: J. Dan, *The Emergence of the Mystical Prayer* (note 62). This text was carefully studied by A. Farber-Ginat in a Ph.D. thesis: "The Concept of the Merkabah in 13th Century Jewish Esotericism—Sod ha-Egoz and Its Development," Jerusalem 1986, pp. 231–244 et passim. Compare M. Idel, *Kabbalah—New Perspectives*, New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press 1988, pp. 195ss.

[85]These terms, which denote the most supreme *sefira* (*keter*) and the tenth and lowest (*atara*, *malchut*), are presented in this text as synonyms to the prayer when it reaches the divine realm.

Europe, the Ashkenazi Hasidic phenomenon carries a much more distinct contemporary character than the kabbalistic one. Ashkenazi Hasidism can be described as a response to the urgent needs of the time; the kabbalah seems to be revealing eternal truth, which always existed and will always be true, without revealing any special eagerness, at least in the *Bahir* and the Provence school, to confront the specific theological conflicts of the time in which it emerged.[86]

V

If we analyze the characteristics of all these esoteric and mystical circles and compare them to the dominating school of rationalistic philosophy in southern Europe and traditionalist orthodoxy in France and Germany in the second half of the twelfth century and the early thirteenth, the most obvious fact to emerge, I believe, is that almost all of the mystical circles are united in a new attitude toward the Jewish prayer. The earliest two commentaries on the prayers that reached us are those of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms on the one hand, probably in three original versions,[87] and the one written by Rabbi Azriel of Gerona. But even those mystics who did not write such extensive, specialized works on the prayers revealed in their mystical speculations a keen interest in the nature of the prayers themselves and in the mystical significance of the God–man meeting during the prayers. An important discussion in the *Bahir* is dedicated to the subject,[88] and the problem of the nature of *devekut*,

[86]The problem of the emergence of the *kabbalah* and its relationship to Jewish rationalistic philosophy was presented by G. Scholem in the opening pages of his *Ursprung*. He discussed there the attitudes of previous scholars, especially Neumark and Graetz, to the same problem. A further discussion of this problem is presented below.

[87]The differences between the three main manuscripts of this work (Paris 772, Oxford 1204, and Vienna 108) seem to indicate that the author himself edited his own work several times.

[88]A discussion of this section of the *Bahir* can be found in J. Dan, "The Dawn of Midrash in the Kabbalah," in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. G. H. Hartman and S. Budick, New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press 1986, pp. 127–140. Compare *Early Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 61–66.

adherence or communion with God, is one of the new subjects treated in depth by Rabbi Isaac the Blind, following his father, the Rabad.[89] A new interest in the text of the prayers characterizes one of the most important works by Rabbi Judah the Pious.[90] On the other hand, Jewish rationalistic philosophy almost completely ignored this central element of Jewish worship,[91] while traditional orthodoxy, dealing mainly in halachic problems, had no new message concerning the prayers to its followers.

It seems, therefore, that when trying to understand the emergence of Jewish medieval mysticism as a whole, this phenomenon should be central to our analysis. The emergence of Jewish philosophy, and especially the ethical literature that followed the basic rationalism of this movement, is often described, correctly, I believe, as a process of spiritualization of Jewish religious life, of bringing a new emphasis to the nonpractical, rational, and emotional element within Judaism.[92] It is wrong to assume that this process was limited to Jews living in Moslem countries and being influenced directly by Arabic spiritualistic works. Jews in Christian countries, as well, underwent the same process, though their ways of expressing it were radically different.

[89]See Scholem, *Ursprung*, pp. 264–273, and compare J. Dan, *The Emergence of the Mystical Prayer* (note 62).

[90]Rabbi Judah the Pious wrote an extensive commentary on the prayers, which was not preserved. Many quotations from it are included in a brief treatise, found in many manuscripts, called *Sodot ha-Tefillah* (The Secrets of the Prayers), written by one of his disciples. According to these quotations, the main purpose of Rabbi Judah was to show that the version of the prayers known to him is the only true one, and that every change, even of one letter, will destroy the intrinsic, mystical harmony of the text. See J. Dan, "The Historical Rabbi Judah the Pious," in *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry, Studies Dedicated to the Memory of H. H. Ben-Sasson*, ed. M. Ben-Sasson, R. Bonfil, and J. Hacker, Jerusalem: The Historical Society of Israel 1989, pp. 389–398; and see note 62.

[91]A definitive analysis of the attitude of Maimonides, and of Jewish philosophy in general, to the prayers was presented by Marvin Fox in his paper "The Prayer in Maimonides's Philosophy," in *Prayer in Judaism, Continuity and Change*, ed. G. H. Cohen, Ramat Gan 1978, pp. 142–167.

[92]This process has been described in my *Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature*, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House 1975, pp. 47–68, and detailed bibliography included there. Compare J. Dan, *Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics*, pp. 1–75.

Two elements should form the connection between the emergence of mysticism and the more general process of spiritualization. One is the attitude toward prayer, as mentioned above. The other is the meaningful parallel between Ashkenazi Hasidism and early kabbalah in the fact that both movements produced, side by side with their mystical works, a body of ethical literature, which was directed toward the general public. While both movements, in their different ways, preserved the structures of esotericism concerning their mystical works, both had a message that, they felt, should be directed to the public as a whole, to help shape its everyday worship. I have described in some detail the process in which the Gerona kabbalists began to write ethical works;[93] their message was completely orthodox, but it undoubtedly contained the basic premise that religious life should be rich in its spiritual and emotional dimensions; the fact that they relied on traditional sources when proclaiming this does not diminish its adherence to thirteenth-century spiritual needs.

Ashkenazi Hasidism is better known for its ethical works than for its mystical ones. Both Rabbi Judah the Pious in *Sefer Hasidim* (probably following his father, Rabbi Samuel ben Kalonymus) and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms dedicated a central place in their works to the ethical message they had for the public. They even developed a special literary genre, on the borderline between theology and ethics, dedicated to expounding in an exoteric manner their teachings concerning the unity of God and the intentions of the prayers.[94] The creation of this specific literary genre is another demonstration of the deep interest and commitment of the Ashkenazi Hasidism to bring their new concept of spiritual worship to the attention of German Jewry as whole, and to reshape its religious attitudes. This is clear indication that they perceived their new ideas as relevant and constructive concerning the religious situation in their time; the kabbalists of the thirteenth century felt the same, when they pro-

[93]See note 25.

[94]A list of the works belonging to this genre, and a description of their content, is found in my study on the *Sifrut ha-Yichud* in *Kiryat Sefer*, vol. 41 (1966), pp. 533–544.

duced the body of traditionalistic ethical literature in the first half of the thirteenth century, when faced with the controversy concerning the study of philosophy, and wishing to present the public with an alternative spiritual way to follow traditional Judaism. But was this new spiritual way a mystical one?

The application of the term "mystical" to a religious phenomenon is always difficult; the definitions of this term are many, and a productive use of it depends usually on the specific context. In the framework of this survey, we can use the term as a comparative, not an absolute, one—that is, as a comparison of the mystical element in Ashkenazi Hasidism on the one hand and in the works of the early kabbalah on the other. Such a comparison shows, without doubt, that the mystical element in the symbolism of the early kabbalah is much stronger than that of the Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric theology. But more than that: It seems to me that such a comparison shows clearly the great difference between these two schools concerning their attitude to contemporary religious needs.

We do not find in Ashkenazi Hasidism any parallel to the new kabbalistic idea of the bisexuality of the divine pleroma, of the existence of a divine feminine counterpart to the masculine system of the divine powers. We do not find in the works of the mystics in medieval Germany, before they were influenced by the kabbalah in the second half of the thirteenth century, the concept of the divine "tree" that includes ten dynamic divine figures, which are in constant movement and changing interrelationship. We do not find any Jewish-German parallel in this period to the kabbalists' deep commitment to the theurgic notion that the religious deeds of man have a meaningful impact on the well-being of the divine pleroma, a commitment found only in a vague way in the *Bahir*, but developed into a central theme of the kabbalah in the Provence and subsequent schools. The subject of the powers of evil, and the possibility of their being able to develop an independent pleroma opposing the Holy One, which is evident in the kabbalah in the second half of the thirteenth century, has some roots in the *Bahir* and other early kabbalistic works but not in Ashkenazi Hasidic works. These mystical dimensions, which gave the early kabbalah its great mythological

drive and had a great impact on the imagination and emotions of the kabbalists, are completely absent from Ashkenazi Hasidic speculation; but they are also absent from the popular ethical literature written by the kabbalists.

The mystical elements found in Ashkenazi Hasidism are, first and foremost, the new concept of the Godhead as comprising a series of emanated powers that have distinct functions. In the second place, it is found in the new discovery of, and deep adherence to, ancient *Hechalot* mystical works, and especially the myth of the gigantic *Shiur Komah* anthropomorphic figure. The third element is the new mystical attitude toward the prayers, evident in the works of Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, both concerning the sanctity of every word and every letter of the prayers, and concerning the direction of the prayers to an emanated divine power. A hint of mystical attitude can be found also in some aspects of Ashkenazi Hasidic ethics.[95] All these elements, without exception, have parallels in the works of the early kabbalists, and in all cases they are much stronger and richer in symbolism and religious impact than their presentation in Ashkenazi Hasidic works.

The conclusion suggested here, as a result of this analysis, is the characterization of the appearance of mystical elements in the works of Jewish-German pietists in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries as a result of contemporary spiritual needs: the movement toward the spiritualization of Jewish religious life, the need to confront rationalistic ideas; the need to re-establish the religious meaning of the prophecy and of the daily prayers, the search for a more intimate contact with the divine world, and the need to share those elements that are relevant to the wide public with them by the means of popular and ethical works. All this is found in the kabbalah, and characterizes the creative activity of the early

[95] An example can be found, for instance, in Rabbi Eleazar's description of the love of God in his preface to the *Sodey Razaya* (*Sefer Raziel*, Amsterdam 1701, 9a), in which this love is metaphorically described as equal to the erotic drive of a youth in sexual intercourse (see J. Dan, "The Ashkenazi Kabbalah: A New Examination," *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan, Jerusalem 1987, pp. 125–139, especially p. 136, note 29).

kabbalists as well. The great difference between the two schools is that the kabbalah is all this and much much more besides. The "answers" the kabbalah has supplied to contemporary spiritual needs are much greater than the questions; the clear balance between a problem and its spiritual response, which can be found in Ashkenazi Hasidism to a very large extent, is absent in the works of the kabbalists: Their intense, mythical and mystical symbolism far transcends contemporary needs.

It can be stated, therefore, that the emergence of mysticism in medieval Germany in the schools and circles of Ashkenazi Hasidism can be explained by a historical analysis of the spiritual circumstances of the age. To this, of course, should be added the personal inclination toward mystical speculation and expressions that probably exists potentially within every religious group in every age; it is the circumstances that make it express itself and give it legitimacy in the cultural atmosphere of the age. The kabbalah, while also being such an answer, is also the expression of some much deeper motives and cultural undercurrents that added to historical needs a new dimension of intensity, variety, and richness. The examination of these specific forces that made the kabbalah so different from Ashkenazi Hasidism and allowed it to create independently of current spiritual needs cannot be done here; suffice it to say that the irony of history in its attitude toward its faithful servants is that it is the kabbalah that had the upper hand in Jewish spirituality and mysticism in the end of the thirteenth century and subsequent periods. The relevant and balanced Ashkenazi Hasidic response to history was superseded by the much less restrained but much stronger force of kabbalistic mysticism.

ENDNOTE

The main thesis of this study seems to have been confirmed in the last decade, namely, that Jewish mysticism developed in the High Middle Ages from several separate and independent circles of mystics and esoterics. The history of Jewish mysticism from the thirteenth century to the present can be described, to a large extent, as linear:

Each generation was familiar with the teachings of the previous ones, and structured its own concepts on the development—or rejection—of previous ones. This is not the case in the earliest stage of the emergence of this phenomenon: Here we find several (probably six) groups and traditions that share some similar characteristics, but differ considerably from each other and seem to be ignorant of the work of the parallel groups. One such group has been described in detail in my book *The Unique Cherub Circle* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1997).

The main purpose of this study, like others, is to balance the analysis of similarities with the analysis of differences in the ideas, terms, and symbols of various Jewish mystics and esoterics. A different attitude is found in recent publications, most notably that by Eliot Wolfson, who seeks the complete identity of all Jewish mystical expressions, ancient and medieval, kabbalistic and nonkabbalistic. All are united, according to him, in the constant worship of the divine phallus. I find this to be a completely wrong methodology that can reveal only the writer's own preferences rather than those of the texts by arbitrary selection and far-fetched interpretation. The craft of the historian is the establishment of distinctions, striving to decipher the individuality of the text and the writer.

THREE

The Ashkenazi Hasidic Concept of Language

In the religious culture of the Ashkenazi Hasidic movement in the second half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth century, language had become the main—and probably the only—avenue by which the pietist, the esoteric thinker, and the mystic might attain any kind of contact with God. The only source of divine revelation that was available was the ancient record of the revelations to Moses, the prophets, the talmudic sages, and the early Jewish mystics—and this divine revelation was coined in letters, words, and sentences. Any attempt to reach out toward heaven, to satisfy the deep religious craving for contact with God, had to start by the pietist immersing himself in the language of the old divine revelations.

Unlike their contemporaries among the Jewish philosophers in the sphere of influence of Islamic civilization, the Ashkenazi Hasidim did not accept the notion that human logic, and therefore rational contemplation of divine truth, can serve as a way to achieve religious meaning. Their opposition to the "dialectics" of the rational-

ists was vehement,[1] and while Jewish-Spanish culture tried to build a religious culture on the twin pillars of tradition and (rational) wisdom, the Ashkenazi Hasidim recognized tradition alone as the source of religious truth. The other contemporaneous Jewish religious movement that began its development at the end of the twelfth century—the kabbalah—while officially admitting only tradition as a source of truth, actually added to it the experiential stratum of a mystical contact with the divine (often achieved through the use of ancient texts and their interpretation). The Ashkenazi Hasidim, as far as we know, saw in tradition alone their way to achieve spiritual goals, including mystical experiences.

Tradition, in this sense, is completely identical with language. There is little doubt that the Ashkenazi Hasidim preserved very old oral traditions, which were passed from father to son, from rabbi to disciple, during many generations. But even this oral tradition was always formulated in language. Even more than that, as will be shown below, it is very probable that a major segment of these oral traditions was directly related to method rather than content, to the ways by which one can interpret the word of God, rather than any specific content. Oral or written, tradition for the Ashkenazi Hasidim was the language of scripture and the methods of its interpretation. Religious experience and the craft of the commentator became identified. It is no surprise, therefore, that the considerable body of esoteric religious thought that the Ashkenazi Hasidim produced is almost exclusively hermeneutical.

Some further observations about the nature of the union between religion and hermeneutics will be presented below. This study, however, will concentrate on one document that is unique in Ashkenazi Hasidic literature for its reflective character. It is a conscious presentation of the ways by which this union is achieved, expressing an attempt to formulate and systematize the attitude of the Ashkenazi Hasidic theologian and mystic toward his sources, thus

[1]The term "dialectics" is found in *Sefer Hasidim*, Wistenzki-Freimann ed. (Parma ms.), Frankfurt-am-Main 1924, par. 752, p. 191; and in Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's *Chochmat Ha-Nefesh*, Lvov 1876, p. 7b.

revealing, more than any other, the concept of language that enabled the medieval Jewish pietists in Germany to use the Hebrew letters, words, and books as a vehicle to achieve a fully religious, numinous experience of the divine.

The two main sources that present the Ashkenazi Hasidic concept of the esoteric meaning of the Hebrew language are, first, Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's commentary on the letters of the alphabet, which constitutes the first treatise in the author's magnum opus of esoteric theology, *Sodey Razaya*. The second is the same author's explanation of the seventy-three "Gates of Wisdom," the methods of investigation of the esoteric meaning of the biblical verses. This study is dedicated to the second work and represents an attempt to investigate the concept of language in Ashkenazi Hasidic theology according to their treatment of the words of the sacred biblical text.

The main textual basis for the following analysis is Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's *Sefer ha-Chochmah* (The Book of Wisdom), which is found in two manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford,[2] and in a different version in two other manuscripts in the same library.[3] Part of this book has recently been printed,[4] and the book has received some

[2]Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Neubauer 1568, 1912. A shorter version of the book is found also in mss. 1566 and 1567 in the same library; see note 3.

[3]The two mss., 1566 and 1567 (1567 is probably a copy of the former, both from the Oppenheim collection), contain a series of treatises by Rabbi Judah the Pious, See J. Dan, *Iyyunim be-Sifrut Hasidei Ashkenaz* (Ramat Gan: Massada 1975), pp. 134–147. To end of this compilation was added a shorter version of the *Sefer ha-Chochmah*; it contains only forty-eight gates and a selection of examples of their use.

[4]The short version of the *Sefer Ha-Chochmah* was printed in the beginning of "Perush ha-Torah le-Rabbi Eleazar mi-Germaiza," 3 vols., Benai Brak (1979–1981), serving as an "introduction" to the body of the book, which was printed from ms. Oxford 268. There was some justification to this combination, because the Torah commentary in this ms. is organized according to this system of the "gates of wisdom." The author, however, is not Rabbi Eleazar, and I described the commentary in my paper, "The Ashkenazi Hasidic 'Gates of Wisdom'", *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati, Louvain 1980, pp. 183–189. This commentary, which seems to be independent of Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar, serves as proof that the system was one that was known and accepted in Ashkenazi Jewry, and not only by one specific group of writers. See J. Dan, "Perush ha-Torah le-Rabbi Eleazar of Worms," *Kiryat Sefer* 59 (1984), p. 644.

scholarly attention.[5] The linguistic concepts of the book have not been studied as yet, and I believe that such an analysis is meaningful not only to the understanding of the esoteric theology of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, but also to the understanding of Hebrew hermeneutics in the ancient Midrash and the medieval kabbalah.

The circumstances in which this book was written and the message it is intended to present are important to the understanding of its structure and contents. In this case Rabbi Eleazar was extremely helpful and opened the work with an interesting, uncharacteristic preface that explains his reasons for writing it. This preface, which I published and analyzed twenty-five years ago,[6] states clearly the date of the writing—the only Ashkenazi Hasidic work that does so clearly. It was the year 1217, the year in which Rabbi Judah ben Samuel ben Kalonymus, "the Pious," died. Rabbi Eleazar mourns his great teacher's death and describes his situation after this event as one of complete loneliness: He has no son or student to whom he can transmit the "wisdom". The long chain of misfortunes that began with the great catastrophe of 1096—the massacres by the Crusaders—has caused the decline of the esoteric tradition, and after the death of Rabbi Judah all hope of keeping it alive, so he seems to be saying, has been lost. It is his duty, therefore, to write down the

[5]Scholarly interest was concentrated on a few passages of the *Sefer Ha-Chochmah* that describe the prayer in terms closely reminiscent of kabbalistic terminology; I called it "proto-Bahiric" terminology. See G. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken 1948, pp. 51, 60; idem, *Ursprung und Anfange der Kabbala*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1962, pp. 162–166; idem, *The Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. A. Arkush, ed. R. J. Zvi Werblowsky, Princeton, NJ: The Jewish Publication Society and Princeton University Press 1988, pp. 184–187; J. Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidut Ashkenaz*, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 1968, pp. 117–129; idem, *Hugei ha-Mekubalim ha-Rishonim*, Jerusalem: Academon 1977, pp. 159–165; idem, "The Emergence of the Mystical Prayer," in J. Dan and F. Talmage, eds., *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, Cambridge, MA: Association of Jewish Studies, 1980, pp. 112–115; A. Farber, "The Concept of the Merkavah in 13th-Century Jewish Esotericism" (Ph.D. thesis) Jerusalem 1986, I, pp. 232–244 et passim; M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1988, pp. 191–197.

[6]"Sefer ha-Hokhmah le-Rabbi Eleazar mi-Worms," *Zion* 29 (1964), pp. 168–181; reprinted in *Iyyunim be-Sifrut Hasidei Ashkenaz*, pp. 44–57.

secrets of the esoteric traditions that he received from his ancestors and his teacher, because otherwise they will be completely lost.

The tone of this preface clearly indicates that this book was the first work on the esoteric traditions of his school that Rabbi Eleazar wrote, and it serves as an introduction to them and as a justification for their writing. Rabbi Eleazar wrote before that time an extensive commentary on the prayers, possibly in several versions,[7] and also his halachic work, *Sefer ha-Rokeach*, but no treatise dealing specifically with esoteric wisdom. His large collection of works on this subject, the *Sodey Razaya*, was written after the "Book of Wisdom," and it is possible that this work was intended to present the methodological basis for the later, more detailed work.

The main subject presented in *Sefer ha-Chochmah* is the list of the seventy-three שערי החכמה, "gates of wisdom," and the detailed exposition of most of them. The number of these "gates" is determined by the numerical value of the Hebrew word for wisdom, חכמה (*chochmah*), thus expressing Rabbi Eleazar's belief that the number of these "gates" is no accident, but inherent in the concept of "wisdom" itself. It seems that Rabbi Eleazar sincerely believed that he was not presenting an artificial system, but actually listing the intrinsic components of divine wisdom itself. To prove this, he devoted the major part of the "Book of Wisdom" to a detailed demonstration, in which he presented examples of the hermeneutical interpretation of most of these seventy-three "gates" when applied to one and the same biblical verse—the first one in the book of Genesis. This choice proves that he believed that the whole Torah can be interpreted in these seventy-three ways: The complete "wisdom" is therefore seventy-three commentaries on the Torah, each exhausting the methodology incorporated in each of these "gates." These methods, therefore, are not alternatives, as are, for instance, the talmudic מידות שהתורה נדרשת בהן (*middot she-ha-Torah nidreshet bahen*), each of which should

[7]On the *Commentaries on the Prayers*, see my *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 56, 65; and in "The Emergence of the Mystical Prayer," pp. 85–93; a detailed study of the Ashkenazi Hasidic commentaries on the prayers and *piyyutim* is presented by E. E. Urbach in his introduction to his edition of *Arugat ha-Bosem* by Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel, vol. 4, Jerusalem: Mekizey Nirdamim 1964.

be used in the appropriate place, one at a time: When קל וחומר (*kal vahomer*) is used, גזורה שוה (*gezerah shavah*) is not. Here, all the seventy-three methods are applicable and relevant for every letter and every word in every verse, and thus the Torah should be interpreted by each of them; none is ever superfluous or unnecessary. There can be no contradictions or "true" or "false" interpretations; if the method is valid, the hermeneutical conclusion is valid as well, and all the various conclusions, whatever their content, are regarded as complementary. The notion that they may be conflicting, and that a choice has to be made, does not appear either in this book or in any other Ashkenazi Hasidic work of speculative esoteric teachings. The confidence that the tradition of interpretation by these methods can lead the commentator only to true, valid conclusions is complete.

The seventy-three "gates" are presented by Rabbi Eleazar without any obvious order or sequence, though in some sections of the list related subjects are grouped together. In the various versions of the list we have actually seventy-eight "gates," which we can divide into three major types. Most of them are clearly methodological; some are speculative subjects; and a few are texts to be interpreted. It is evident that this, or a similar, list supplied the authors of the esoteric works of the Ashkenazi Hasidic circle with titles to their books, in an inverse relationship to the proportions of the list: Among the titles, commentaries of texts come first, followed by monographs on subjects, and only a small minority of the Ashkenazi Hasidic literature that has reached us is dedicated to the exposition of methodological principles.

The list of texts, which is the most problematical element in this system, includes: *Sefer Yezira*; *Pirkey Avot* or *Pirkey Abraham*; Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrash; and the prayers. Among these, the most popular among the Ashkenazi Hasidim was the *Sefer Yezira*; it is doubtful whether there was even one Ashkenazi Hasidic writer who did not try his hand at producing a commentary to this text.[8]

[8]Outstanding among the Ashkenazi Hasidim in this realm was Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar of London, who wrote three such commentaries, one of which was published by G. Vajda in *Kovets Al Yad*, 16 (Jerusalem I 1966), pp. 145–197, and the two others (one of them titled *Sod ha-Sodot*) in my *Textim be-Torat ha-Elohut shel Hasidei Ashkenaz*, Jerusalem: Academón 1977. The two best-known commentaries are those of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, printed in Premiszla in 1883; and the anonymous "pseudo-Saadia" commentary, which is found in many manuscripts, and a short version of which is printed in the regular editions of the *Sefer Yezira*. Besides these, Rabbi Judah the Pious, Rabbi Eleazar ha-Darshan, and others wrote such commentaries.

We do not know of the Ashkenazi Hasidim as writers of commentaries on the Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrash. The possible conceptual basis of this list will be discussed below.

The theological subjects in this list include: *Shaar ha-Emet* (the Gate of Truth); *Shaar ha-Shem* (the Gate of the Name, i.e., the holy name, the tetragrammaton); *Shaar ha-Shemot* (the Gate of the Names, i.e., other holy names); *Shaar ha-Merkavah* (the Gate of the Holy Chariot); *Shaar Maase Bereshit* (the Gate of the Work of Genesis); *Shaar ha-Kavod* (the Gate of the Divine Glory); *Shaar ha-Nefesh* (the Gate of the Soul); *Shaar ha-Mitzvot* (the Gate of the Religious Commandments); *Shaar ha-Malachim* (the Gate of the Angels); *Shaar Ahavah* (the Gate of the Love of God); *Shaar Yirah* (the Gate of the Fear of God); *Shaar Anavah* (the Gate of Humbleness); *Shaar Hasidut* (the Gate of Piety); *Shaar Shalom* (the Gate of Peace); *Shaar ha-Sod* (the Gate of Esoteric Truth); *Shaar Emunah* (the Gate of Faith); and the last—*Shaar ha-Chochmah* (the Gate of Wisdom). Of these seventeen subjects, at least fourteen are found as titles to works or chapters of works by Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms.[9] It is evident, therefore, that this was no theoretical list; it was the general system, and every book and every chapter in a book written by these authors was intended to be a part within the great whole represented by this concept of the totality of wisdom. It is also obvious that in this list the otherwise meaningful separation between the Ashkenazi Hasidic teachings in the realm of ethics and that of esoteric theology is completely disregarded. The main subjects of their teachings in the realm of pietistic behavior, spiritual or practical, are listed here as an integral part of the esoteric wisdom; indeed, Rabbi

[9]The list of titles taken from this list and the books written by Rabbi Eleazar and Rabbi Judah according to them is found in *Iyyunim*, pp. 55–56.

Eleazar expressed this notion clearly when he began his magnum opus, the *Sodey Razaya*, a collection of esoteric theological works, with an introduction dedicated mainly to the ethical subjects listed here—love, fear, piety, and humility.[10]

The examples Rabbi Eleazar provides following this list leave no doubt concerning the meaning of this segment of the general framework he presents: Every biblical verse can be interpreted to deal with any of these subjects. The first verse in the book of Genesis can be used in order to glean some religious truth concerning the divine glory, the holy chariot, the human soul, the divine name, as well as to demonstrate piety or the love of God. This is true, because of the introductory nature of this work, concerning every other biblical verse, for what is presented here is only an example. If so, the whole Torah is a detailed, inexhaustible treatise on the human soul, the divine name, or the fear of God. A commentary on the Torah, following one such subject, will be a monograph on that subject as well as a biblical commentary. This seems to be a most radical expression of the belief that the words of the Torah include a vast source of religious truth on any subject of religious wisdom in an equal manner. The Torah does not dedicate this verse or that to a specific subject; the first verse does not deal with the problem of creation any more than with the holy chariot or the meaning of the commandments. Even though this is a list of specific subjects, it is not related to special portions of the scriptures dedicated to it, because every verse, disregarding its simple, literal meaning, is equally relevant to every other subject. This concept makes the literal meaning of the biblical verses of secondary importance, if not less. If a verse dealing with the geographical borders of the tribes of Israel in the book of Joshua is as relevant to the understanding of the "work of Genesis" as is the first verse of the book of Genesis, the individual meaning of every verse becomes immaterial. The divine nature of the scriptures, so it seems, makes it impossible to dedicate any divine utterance to one subject only. Every such verse includes divine

[10]This ethical introduction to *Sodey Razaya* was first printed in *Sefer Raziel*, Amsterdam 1701, p. 6a.

truths concerning all the subjects listed here. While on the one hand this attitude strengthens and fortifies the importance of the religious message included in the verses of the Bible, on the other hand it deprives them of any specific, literal meaning. They can be interpreted to reveal divine truth concerning any subject, be it completely remote in content from any actual word included in it. On the one hand, the message of the language of the Torah is inexhaustible, but on the other, any specific message loses its exclusivity.

The more profound concept of language expressed in this document is found in the analysis of the list of methodological "gates." We know of six treatises written by Rabbi Judah the Pious, the titles of which are included in this list: the now lost *Book of Gematria*, of which several quotations are found in medieval literature,[11] and five monographs that are included in the second half of the Oxford manuscript of the works of Rabbi Judah[12]—*Sefer ha-Neelam*, *Sefer Tagi*, *Shaar Semuchim*, *Shaar ha-Kolot*, and *Sefer Pesak*. These monographs deal, according to the same order, with the letters "missing" (*neelam*) in biblical verses: the decorations of the Hebrew letters when used to write Torah scrolls (*tagim*); the proximity of verses to each other (*semuchim*); the "sounds" (*kolot*) of the Hebrew vowels and vocalization marks; and the endings of verses (*pesak*). It is evident from these treatises that the methodologies to which they are dedicated can be used throughout the scriptures and can reveal divine truths concerning any subject. They are relevant wherever the particular linguistic phenomenon with which they deal is present, which, in most cases, is almost everywhere in the Bible. Rabbi Judah's testimony thus joins that of Rabbi Eleazar in clarifying the nature of

[11]See Freimann in his introduction to *Sefer Hasidim*, Frankfurt am-Main: Wahrman, 1924, pp. 5–6. This book is mentioned by Hayim Yosef David Azulai in his lexicon *Shem ha-Gedolim* (s.v. Yehudah he-Hasid). See also A. Epstein, *Mi-Kadmoniot ha-Yehudim*, Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute 1956, p. 238. It is not clear whether this is an original work by Rabbi Judah or a compilation edited by his disciples from his works.

[12]The First half is devoted to three thematic treatises, on the soul, the angels, and the divine glory; while the second half includes the methodological treatises. See my *Iyyunim*, pp. 134–138.

the fifty-five methodologies present in the list: Each of them can and should be used constantly, without conflicting with any other and without making any other superfluous. The *tagim* and the signs representing the endings of verses, as well as the grouping of verses, join letters that are mentioned in the verse and those that are not mentioned, and the sounds of the Hebrew syllables, in conveying the divine message to the esoteric scholar and the mystic.

Some of the "gates" included by Rabbi Eleazar in the list and discussed in the following pages of the *Sefer ha-Chochmah* represent well-established and traditional methodologies of Jewish hermeneutics. The use of *gematria*, *notaricon*, and *temurah* has a long tradition in Jewish study of the scriptures before the Ashkenazi Hasidim. Indeed, it seems to me that it is no accident that it is difficult to find in Rabbi Eleazar's list any fundamentally new element; I believe that he intended to present the list of methodologies as an exhaustive one, not as an innovative one. He believed that he had collected the old, traditional methods of biblical interpretation but did not seek any new additions. Sometimes he elaborated traditional methods and included their details as independent "gates": *Shaar Ahadim*, *Shaar Kaful*, *Shaar Meshulash*, *Shaar Meruba*, and *Shaar Mehumash* probably relate to one and the same simple principle—the counting of the appearance of a certain term in a verse or paragraph in the Bible (most often, a certain divine name), once, twice, thrice, four, or five times. The general principle of the counting of the appearance of terms in biblical sections is represented by *Shaar ha-Mispar* and *Shaar Heshbonot*. On the other hand, in the case of *temurah*, the permutation of letters between one sequence and another, he included the general term and one example—*Shaar Etbash*—when, if he so wished, he could list dozens of different examples.

The use of the Aramaic translation of the Bible as a vehicle for interpretation of many verses is a traditional one, which the Ashkenazi Hasidim employed like other medieval commentators and hermeneutics. Yet there is a certain emphasis in this list on another aspect—the external characteristics of the biblical text, beginning with the *mesorah*, the traditional counting of words and letters, the "small and large letters" of the text, the differences between what is

written and what is read, additional letters or those that are omitted in the tradition of the scriptures, etc.—these are undoubtedly a part of the Jewish hermeneutical tradition since the classical Midrash, yet they seem to be emphasized in Rabbi Eleazar's system. On the other hand, the inclusion of some of the old rabbinic hermeneutical methods, like *gezerah shavah*, while most of them were not included, is surprising. It is possible that Rabbi Eleazar deliberately wanted to distance this system from the usual ways in which *halachah* is decided, but if so, why include *gezerah shavah*?

If we try to summarize in a systematic manner the hermeneutical system that is expressed in Rabbi Eleazar's list, following his own purpose in the *Sefer ha-Chochmah* as a methodological introduction to the hermeneutical analysis of a biblical verse, using modern terminology rather than his own, it seems to me that we will reach the following conclusions.

1. On the level of content, each biblical verse should be viewed as a key to more than twenty conceptual subjects.[13] Every such verse is, by its nature as a record of divine revelation, a repository of truth concerning the creation of the earthly world and the structure of the divine realm, the names of the angels and archangels, and the name of God Himself, the holy chariot, and the divine glory. Within it are hidden directives for human behavior, for ethical conduct between man and God and between individuals, directives that will lead the commentator to the true pietistic way of life. It also contains keys to the understanding of other sacred texts. Interpreted correctly, every biblical verse can open new vistas in the understanding of the Mishnah and the Talmud, the

[13]Among such works we should include Rabbi Judah the Pious's *Sefer ha-Kavod* and *Sefer Malachim*, dealing, respectively, with the divine glory and the angels. Rabbi Eleazar's *Sodey Razaya* is based completely on this section of the list, and covers a dozen or more such subjects in the five titles of the books included in it (The Secret of Creation, The Secret of the *Merkavah*, The Holy Name, The Soul, and the *Sefer Yezirah*); The introduction includes the ethical subjects, and others, which are chapters in these books, like the Kavod and Malachim, which are titles within the Secret of the Chariot.

Midrash and the *halachah*, the prayers and the *Sefer Yezira*. According to this system, it is not the specific wording of this or that verse that enables one to use it for the understanding of the divine glory, love of God, or a passage in the *Sefer Yezira*. The very fact that it is a verse written in the Bible makes it, by nature, a key to all of these secrets. The connection may be obvious or may be completely obscure on the literal level, but if God chose to include this group of letters in His holy scriptures, there can be no doubt that it bears a relevance to every one of these subjects, independent of the first impression conveyed by its literal meaning.

Beyond the stratum of the content, every biblical verse should be studied in the following ways, each focusing on one of the characteristics of the ways in which it appears in the Torah:

2. The shapes of the letters of the alphabet convey divine secrets. Rabbi Eleazar's cosmogony and cosmology are based, to a very large extent, on this type of analysis, following the ancient traditions of the mystics of the talmudic and gaonic periods, incorporated, for instance, in the *Otiot de-Rabbi Akiva*.[14] The letter is not an arbitrary, agreed human sign for

[14]The shape of the letters, which does not play a central part in the cosmogony of the *Sefer Yezira*, is a prominent source of divine truth in the midrashic-mystical collection known as the *Alphabet of Rabbi Akiva*. See A. Jellinek, *Bet-haMidrash*, Jerusalem: Wahrman 1938, 3, pp. 12–64; S. A. Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot*, Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute 1953, 2, pp. 333–417. It should be noted that it does not serve as a means of mystical knowledge in the literature of the *Yordey ha-Merkavah*, in the works of the *Hechalot*, but because of the impact of the *Alphabet of Rabbi Akiva* it was central in the works of the medieval mystics. Several sections of the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, the earliest work of the kabbalah written at the end of the twelfth century, contain mystical speculations based on the shape of the letters. Rabbi Eleazar used it in his commentary on the "secret of Genesis." Among later writers, Rabbi Jacob ha-Cohen of Castile wrote a very popular kabbalistic treatise on the subject. See G. Scholem, "*Kabbalot Rabbi Yaakov ve-Rabbi Yitzhak*," *Madaei ha-Yahadut* (Jerusalem 1928), 2, pp. 165–293. The author of the *Zohar* also devoted to it a section in the magnum opus of the kabbalah. See. M. Oron, "The Narrative of the Letters and Its Source: A Study of a Zoharic Midrash on the Letters of the Alphabet," in J. Dan and J. Hacker, eds., *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1986, pp. 97–110.

a certain sound or a shape that is just a technical means by which content is conveyed. When God first used it, it had a shape as well as a meaning, and this shape is an inseparable aspect of the divine revelation that occurred when the secret of the alphabet was given to man, when the Torah was written with such signs, originating within God before the creation. The shape of a letter, therefore, is no less part of its divine message than is its role in structuring the word in which it figures.

3. In a similar way, the name of the letter is as meaningful as its shape and its other characteristics. The true way to read a word includes the full names of the letters, and reading the word in this way, taking into account all the letters that comprise the name of the original ones, is called מילוי (*milluy*). This method is often used by Ashkenazi Hasidic commentators, especially concerning the divine names. Sometimes a special position in the commentary is allotted to the "superfluous" letters, i.e., those letters that make up the name of the letters without being included in the original word (ביתן אלף etc.). Long before modern linguists discovered it, the Jewish hermeneutics knew full well the secret that what is not actually written is no less important than what is clearly visible in a written text.
4. The position of grammar in interpreting a biblical text in the context of this hermeneutical system is quite unusual. According to Rabbi Eleazar, among the "Gates of Wisdom" are included such methods as the "singular and plural" (שער יחיד ורבים, *shaar yahid ve-rabbim*) and the "masculine and feminine" (שער זכר ונקבה, *shaar zachar unekevah*). Any commentator, seeking the literal meaning of a text, obviously uses the grammatical form of the sentence he studies. But here Rabbi Eleazar does not deal with the search for the one literal meaning. He postulates that the study of the grammatical form of a biblical term is an independent way for God to convey esoteric meaning, unconnected with the demands of the laws of grammar. God, when formulating language be-

fore the world was created and as a tool for its creation, could give any word any form He wished. The fact that He chose to express this phrase in the singular or the plural, or the masculine or the feminine, is not the result of His bowing to the laws of grammar, which do not exist outside of Him and are completely in His hand to formulate. As natural, physical phenomena in creation are not the expression of God's bowing to the laws of physics, but express His purpose in creation, so the grammatical form in which a sentence is written in the Torah is a part of the revelation of divine wisdom, and each case should be studied individually, as an expression of some specific divine secret.

5. As the letters of the alphabet, in all their aspects, are regarded in this system as a divine phenomenon, revealed to man but still including within it the totality of divine wisdom, it is impossible for the interpreter to distinguish between "essential" and "nonessential" aspects of them. For instance, the *tagim*, the decorations of the letters, have been established in rabbinic tradition long before the Ashkenazi Hasidim as meaningful aspects of divine truth. Rabbi Akiva, so the rabbinic tradition states, derived from their analysis great legal secrets and used them to establish profound legal decisions.[15] The Torah was created two thousand years before the world. During the time that elapsed from the Torah's creation (which included, necessarily, the creation of the Hebrew letters) to the creation of the world by it, and then until the time it was given to Moses, God—so a talmudic tradition maintains—occupied Himself by "tying crowns to the letters."[16] The origin of the *tagim*, therefore, is as ancient and

[15]Bavli *Menachot* 29b (*tag* and *koz* are synonymous in talmudic usage). Several treatises, some of them attributed to Rabbi Akiva, that were written in the early Middle Ages present such interpretations of the *tagim*. See *Sefer Tagin*, ed. J. J. L. Barges, Paris 1866; and the detailed introduction of Shneor Zaks (reprinted, Jerusalem 1975); Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot* II, pp. 467–474.

[16]Bavli *Shabbat* 89a: When Moses ascended to God, he found Him "tying crowns to the letters." Compare *Menachot* 29b.

as sacred as everything else in the Torah, secondary to none in its divine meaning. An ancient Hebrew writer, the author of the *Sefer Yezira*, based upon this concept his detailed description of the process by which the letters of the alphabet serve as a source for all worldly existence; according to him, when God was "tying crowns" to the letters He also assigned to each of them a specific role in cosmic existence—within nature, within time, and within man.[17] For him, the "tying of crowns," i.e., the *tagim*, was the process by which each letter received a specific potency to "govern" and control one of the aspects of existence. When Rabbi Eleazar included several "gates of wisdom" in his list that pertain to the external appearance of the letters, he was not describing a secondary or an auxiliary aspect that could be used by the commentator; these "gates" are as central and as meaningful as any other "gate" in the list. These include, besides the *tagim*, the "gate" of "small and large letters," referring to the several occurrences of letters that are written in a larger or smaller script than the others in the Bible; the signs of vocalization that are included in the total picture, as well as the meaning, of the Hebrew letters; and the occurrences of differences between the way a word is read from the way it is written שער כתבן ולא קרין, שער קרין ולא כתבן, *shaar katvan velo karyan*, *shaar karyan velo katvan*), thus achieving a system in which all the aspects of the form of the written word are taken into consideration by the hermeneutical process.

6. The order of the letters in a sentence, the most essential element in literal understanding of a text, is regarded by this system as one of many possibilities, each as legitimate and meaningful as any other. A sentence, a verse, or a paragraph

[17]See Peter Hayman, "*Sefer Yetsira* (The Book of Creation)," *Shadow, The Newsletter of the Traditional Cosmology Society*, 3 (1986), pp. 20–38; for instance, section 52 (1) (p. 33): "He (God) made [the letter] *hey* rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Aries in the universe, [the month of] Nisan in the year and the liver in mankind," and similar descriptions concerning all other letters.

in the Bible includes infinite layers of meaning, some of which can be exposed by reading these letters in a different order or a different selection. The clearest examples of this are the שער פנים ואחור, שער התחלת או סופי תיבות (*shaar panim veahor, shaar hathalat o sofei teivot*). In its simplest form, this method is represented by the acronym, when the word arrived at by the initial letters of the phrase or verse carries as much meaning as any other segment of scripture. But according to Rabbi Eleazar, this is only an example of a much wider field of hermeneutical possibilities. He does not differentiate between using the first letters or the last ones (a practice found in the classical Midrash),[18] nor even changing the order of the letters and reading them from the end to the beginning. In principle, these methods convey the concept that the letters of the Torah can be reassembled in any form the commentator wishes; the letters represent a vast potentiality of infinite meanings and can be rearranged, and the new result, which includes words not actually found in the Bible, interpreted on an equal basis with words that are present in the literal form of the verse.[19]

7. The previous method, represented by the acronym or *notaricon*, deals with the creation of nonexistent words from letters that are present in the verse. The *temurah* expresses the belief that nonexistent letters are as meaningful a part of a verse as those that exist. Again, this classical midrashic (and even biblical)[20] concept was carried to the extreme by the

[18]The best-known talmudic example of this method is the one in Bavli *Shabbat* 55a: חותמו של הקבה אמת (*hotamo shel hakadosh baruch hu emet*), based on the last three letters of the last three words in the story of creation in Genesis 2:3.

[19]In his commentary on the first verse of the Bible in *Sefer Ha-Chochmah*, Rabbi Eleazar created many new words from the letters of this verse. For instance: The first and last letters of בראשית read בת, which can be read as ב' תורות. The last letters of בראשית and ברא read: את, thus making three such words in the verse; בראשית can be also read as אב השרי, giving the date of the creation, and many other combinations.

[20]See Jeremiah 25:26, and 51:41, where Bavel is called Sheshach, using the system of אתבש.

Ashkenazi Hasidim. Not only the substitution of one letter for the other by the classical אתבש, but all the other possibilities of permutation of letters were used. It seems that the *Sefer Yezira* was the source from which they derived the legitimacy of this system, which actually enables the commentator to substitute every letter for every other one, and therefore every word for every other one. They did not hesitate to use different *temurah* sequences in the interpretation of the same word or phrase, thus actually rewriting the verse and changing radically all its words and letters. While *notaricon*, in its wider sense, represents the concept that the letters are constant while their order can be changed, here we find the opposite notion—the order is constant, but the letters themselves can be changed. The text of the Bible, in this system, is therefore one "accidental" assemblage of letters and words from among an infinite number of possibilities.

When modern scientists debate the problem of probability, a frequent example used is that of a monkey arbitrarily typing letters on a typewriter; what is the probability of his producing, accidentally, the complete text of Shakespeare's plays? Here Rabbi Eleazar seems to be saying: The present literal words and sentences of the Torah are just one "accident," arbitrarily selected by God when He gave the Torah to the people of Israel, but intrinsically the text carries all the possible permutations that such a hypothetical monkey could type. Every other assemblage of letters will be as sacred and as meaningful as the present one. The "Shakespearean" text, to continue the analogy, is no more meaningful than the myriad "attempts" by the unknowing monkey to produce it. The theological basis of this concept is that while Shakespeare's poetry is a human achievement arrived at by the use of human language, the language of the Torah is *ab initio* sacred and contains infinite truth, which is present in all the possible manifestations. The commentator does not "transmute" or change the letters and their order; he is just unearthing a different layer that existed deep

within the divine text long before the world and man were created.

8. שער הנעלם (*shaar ha-neelam*) represents another variation of this concept. When a certain verse presents its literal meaning and order, it is based on a selection among the letters of the alphabet; some are used and some are not. Thus, in fact, two grouping of letters come into being: the one that is present in scripture, and the one that has been selected, in an identical divine process, not to be present. The "nonexistent" group, therefore, is a reflection of divine wisdom in an identical manner to the one obvious to the reader. In order to exhaust the full meaning of the divine selection, the "missing" letters have to be taken into account as well as the obvious ones. Indeed, in Ashkenazi Hasidic hermeneutics, quite often this system is used: Why is this or that letter "missing" (*neelam*) in this verse? The theology hidden behind this method is one that expects a complete representation of the whole alphabet in every divine expression. Only the totality of the linguistic divine instrument can convey the totality of divine truth. God informs His pietistic commentator of His divine meaning by the omission, as well as the presentation, of certain letters.
9. The use of the Aramaic translation as one of the "gates of wisdom" should be discussed briefly. This "gate" is on the borderline between content and form. It represents the belief that the Aramaic translations were divinely inspired, and that the work of translation can be regarded as an endeavor to reveal one more layer of divine meaning within the sacred text. The Ashkenazi Hasidim do not use the Aramaic translation as if it were an early, authoritative commentary to the scriptures; rather, they regard it as an independent layer of revelation, adding more meaning rather than choosing from the various Hebrew meanings the one to be rendered into Aramaic. Hebrew and Aramaic were not regarded as separate languages; God did use Aramaic in His revelation to Daniel, for instance. Therefore, the text of the Aramaic translation supplements the hermeneutical process like every other aspect presented in the list of seventy-three gates.
10. The largest group of methodological "gates of wisdom" is devoted to those that are based on numbers. The Ashkenazi Hasidim were the most intensive users of the method of *gematria* among early medieval Jewish commentators, and it seems that they had an impact on subsequent Jewish mystical writers in later centuries. It should be noted that neither *Hechalot* mysticism nor the *Sefer Yezira* ever used this method. Though it is known in rabbinic midrashic hermeneutics, it was never a central method before the Ashkenazi Hasidim. They cannot be regarded as its innovators, but they certainly represent a new intensity in its use. Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms not only used *gematria* for words and phrases, but quite often transformed whole verses into lists of harmonized numbers. It seems that when they looked at a page of scripture (or prayers), they not only saw words and letters; they immediately perceived the long lists of numbers that these words and letters represent.

Jewish mysticism is described quite often as a system that bases its biblical hermeneutics on "numerology." This is basically incorrect: Many central works, from *Sefer Yezira* to the *Zohar*, neglect or almost ignore it. Throughout the ages, there were Jewish mystics who were inclined to use the method of *gematria*, and others who were not interested. It should be remembered that there is nothing mystical in rendering Hebrew letters into numbers: Until the last few generations, Hebrew had no alternative but to use letters for numbers. The use of special signs as numerals, which reached Europe from the East in the early Middle Ages, did not penetrate Jewish culture until modern times. Therefore, every Hebrew word or letter could legitimately be read as either word or number—as was the case in ancient Greece, and partially in Latin, the latter custom surviving in our day and age. The basic fact that it is possible to "play around" with

the numerical value of words and letters is inherent in Jewish culture and does not denote any particularly mystical inclination.

Within the framework of Rabbi Eleazar's "Gates of Wisdom" this aspect is put, I believe, in its proper perspective in Jewish mysticism and hermeneutics. *Gematria* is just one more aspect of the variety of ways in which letters convey divine meaning. It is no better and no worse than the method of counting missing letters, or interpreting the full name of letters or their shapes and decorations. One of the many levels of meaning is conveyed by the numerical value of words, phrases, and verses, and it also should be used among the seventy-three "gates of wisdom." The Ashkenazi Hasidim were inclined to use *gematria*, and they intensified its presence in the Jewish hermeneutical endeavor beyond anything known before them, but they did not impose on it a new dimension of meaning or see in it a major key that unlocked divine secrets hidden in the Bible, any more than with the other methodologies used by them and present in this list.

11. While the previous paragraph seems to diminish the importance of the *gematria* in Ashkenazi Hasidic hermeneutics, it should be emphasized that the concept of numbers and their intrinsic harmony was central, and innovative, in their system. *Gematria* is but one among the many "gates" that seem to be concerned with numbers. Others, like שער מחומש, שער חשבונות שער אחדים, שער כפול, שער משולש, שער מרובע שער מספר (*shaar ahadim, shaar kaful, shaar meshulash, shaar meruba, shaar mehumash, shaar mispar, shaar heshbonot*), are concerned with the number of times that a certain linguistic element appears in a verse or a biblical paragraph. The clearest example of that is the holy name, the tetragrammaton, and the other divine names; much of Ashkenazi Hasidic hermeneutics is based on the counting of such appearances. This is not confined to sacred names; Rabbi Judah the Pious started his treatise on the angels with a long list of the forty verses in Psalms in which the term *hasid* is present, deducing

from that the number of angels accompanying and guarding each pious Jew,[21] and there are many such examples. Beyond *gematria*, the Ashkenazi Hasidim believed (following several examples in the classical Midrash) that as any other part of scripture is not accidental, so the number of times that a certain linguistic element appears in a biblical section cannot be accidental. It must convey a specific meaning. But what kind of meaning?

In this case, another important source of Ashkenazi Hasidic hermeneutics presents a clear answer to the question. It is the great *Commentary on the Prayers* by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms—and, even more than that, the now lost *Commentary on the Prayers* by Rabbi Judah the Pious. Rabbi Judah's commentary was probably the first comprehensive commentary on the prayers to be written (while Rabbi Eleazar's is the earliest one that has reached us). The question of why Rabbi Judah wrote such an unprecedented work is therefore a legitimate one. The quotations we have from Rabbi Judah's commentary (collected in the treatise *Sodot ha-Tefilah*, the Secrets of the Prayers, by one of his disciples)[22] give a clear answer to the question. Rabbi Judah was horrified by small variations in the text of the prayers as said by the Jews of France and England, and wrote his extensive commentary in order to demonstrate that they were wrong and that the only correct version of the prayers was the one practiced by the Kalonymus tradition in Germany.

Using the text of the *Secrets of the Prayers* and the parallels found in Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's *Commentary on the Prayers*, we can get a clear picture of the methods used by Rabbi Judah the Pious to prove the veracity of his version of

[21] I published this treatise by Rabbi Judah the Pious in *Da'at*, 2-3 (1978-1979); pp. 99-120.

[22] On this treatise, see J. Dan, "On the Historical Personality of Rabbi Judah Hasid," in *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry, Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson*, ed. M. Ben-Sasson, R. Bonfil, J. R. Hacker, Jerusalem: The Historical Society of Israel 1989, pp. 389-398.

the prayers to the exclusion of any variation. These methods are purely numerical ones. Rabbi Judah states that the structure of the prayers is a fabric in which everything has numerical meaning: the number of words, the number of letters, the number of divine names in each section of the prayers is meaningful, and this meaning can be understood when compared to biblical sections, or events, in which the same numbers are interwoven.[23] The comparison between the numerical structure of the prayer under discussion and the meaning of that number in other sections of Jewish sacred tradition proves that no change is possible, because the addition of even one letter destroys the intrinsic numerical harmony.

In conclusion, we arrive at a rather radical and far-reaching semiotic statement, probably unequaled in the very long history of Hebrew commentaries on the Bible, yet, surprisingly, one that is not ideologically innovative. It is surprisingly similar to the hermeneutical message of the classical Midrash, the basis of all Jewish hermeneutical traditions.

Rabbi Eleazar clearly claims in this list, speaking for other Ashkenazi Hasidic scholars: When one is studying a biblical verse, one should interpret it taking into account the following: the shape of the letters of the alphabet, the external image they present; the shape of the decorations with which they are adorned; the shape and sound of the musical signs that accompany the syllables; the shape and sound of the vocalization marks that are added to every syllable; the fact that some letters are sometimes written larger or smaller than the rest; the fact that some letters may be pronounced differently than they are written; the number of times each letter is mentioned, and the number of letters that are absent from this bib-

[23]*Sodot ha-Tefillah* and traditions included in it have been the subject of scholarly study for a century and a half. See a brief bibliography in *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 14–15, note 1. Concerning the concept of the prayers, see E. E. Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem* (Jerusalem 1964) 4; and my paper "The Emergence of the Mystical Prayer," pp. 87–93.

lical section; the number of holy names and other terms, the many possible permutations of every group of letters, the numerical value of the letters, the combinations of first and last letters, and all the other methodological "gates of wisdom." Besides that, one should be aware of the fact that every biblical verse or phrase, disregarding its literal meaning, conveys deep truth concerning two dozen subjects, theological and ethical, and a verse has not exhausted its message until its possible relevance to all these subjects has been elucidated. In other words: Every biblical verse is at once both nothing and everything. Its literal meaning may be regarded as an accidental one among the myriad other messages incorporated in it by its divine author.

Language, according to this concept, is indeed the only and the perfect vehicle to bring man in touch with divine truth, provided that one completely rejects its limitations as a human means of communication. As long as the scholar and the mystic are bound by the concept of a literal meaning—or even believe that it has but a few midrashic or esoteric ones—they cannot approach the infinite, divine nature of the religious ladder leading man out of the realm of the earthly and the literal and into the depth of the infinite, divine truth.[24]

[24]Most of the elements described in this paper have their parallels both before the appearance of Ashkenazi Hasidism in the twelfth century and later, in the kabbalah of the late twelfth century and the thirteenth century. A comprehensive study of the concept of language in Hebrew midrashic, hermeneutical, and mystical literature will be presented elsewhere.

FOUR

The Ashkenazi Hasidic "Gates of Wisdom"

I

The concept of "gates of wisdom" is the major subject of a book known as the Book of Wisdom (*Sefer ha-Chochmah*), written by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms shortly after the death of his teacher, Rabbi Judah the Pious, in 1217. This work, which survived in several manuscripts,[1] is an esoteric study describing the ways of biblical exegesis and summarizing the teachings of the school of Rabbi Judah the Pious concerning the various ways in which scripture can serve as a basis for theological, ethical, and mystical speculation. Many problems are connected with the esoteric system presented in this work, but from a historical point of view the most important one is probably the question of whether that system was used exclusively by Rabbi Judah and his disciple Rabbi Eleazar, or whether it directed the works of other Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric theologians.[2] An answer to this

[1] Mss. Oxford 1566, 1567, 1568, 1812; see notes 2 and 4.

[2] I published a brief discussion of this work in *Zion*, vol. 29 (1964), pp. 168-181, and included in my *Iyyunim be-Sifrut Hasidey Ashkenaz*, Jerusalem 1975, pp. 44-57.

question can be achieved by the study of a major Ashkenazi Hasidic exegetical work, a commentary on the Torah preserved in Bodleian 268 at Oxford.[3]

The title "Book of Wisdom" was given to Rabbi Eleazar's short treatise because its main theme was a description of the ideal, maximal way of interpreting biblical verses. Rabbi Eleazar presented there a list of seventy-three "gates of wisdom" (*shaarey chochmah*),[4] for this is the numerical value of the word *chochmah* in *gematria*. Each of these seventy-three "gates" denotes either a method or an idea according to which every single verse in the Bible should be interpreted, and most of the Book of Wisdom is dedicated to brief examples of how these "gates" should be used. Rabbi Eleazar presented in this work an exegesis of the first verses of the book of Genesis, using about half of the methods or "gates" he listed. This treatise seems to be an introduction to Rabbi Eleazar's other esoteric works, which used both titles and methods indicated in the list of "gates"; it is possible to prove that the works of Rabbi Judah the Pious in this field also followed the same pattern. Ms. Oxford 268 is, however, the only full-length commentary from the school of the Ashkenazi Hasidim that uses extensively and systematically the method of these seventy-three "gates," thus proving that the list of the "gates" was not just a theoretical formulation, but a practical method used by early biblical exegetes.

The list of "gates" collected from ms. Oxford 268 includes about forty such "gates." The exact number is very difficult to ascertain because most "gates" appear several times in the work with slight

[3]Neubauer's catalogue, pp. 52–53.

[4]The number seventy-three is found in the lists in mss. 1568 and 1812; in the shorter version in mss. 1566 and 1567, there are only forty-eight. The list I printed (*Iyyunim*, pp. 53–54) is based on all these mss., but unfortunately I gave no due explanation for its structure: The first forty-eight are those found in all mss., according to ms. 1566; then come those that are found in both 1812 and 1568, up to number seventy-three, according to the order in ms. 1812; at the end of the list are the five "gates" that appear only in ms. 1568. I must apologize for not stating this clearly when the list was published. I thank my friend Dr. Ivan Marcus of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, for pointing this out to me, as well as for giving me some other very helpful remarks.

variations in their titles; sometimes two or even three are bound together into one title, e.g., *Shaar ha-Marbeh* and *Shaar ha-Ribuy*, which are most probably one and the same, dealing with superfluous letters in biblical verses; or the title *Shaar Sof Rosh Panim ve-Ahor*, which is really four different "gates," dealing with the beginnings and endings of verses and their initial letters computed from the beginning to the end or from the end to the beginning (compare "gates" numbered fourteen, twenty-four, and thirty-five in Rabbi Eleazar's list). It is clear, however, from the comparison between the lists that Rabbi Eleazar's system and that of the anonymous author of ms. 268 were essentially the same, the variations being secondary.[5]

The most frequently used titles, mentioned dozens of times in the commentary, are *Shaar ha-Peshat*, i.e., literal exegesis, and *Shaar Leket*, i.e., "miscellany"; every portion of the work, which is divided according to the portions of the Torah, includes these titles, usually more than once.

The largest group of "gates" is that which includes titles dealing with numbers of letters and of words (single, *Shaar ha-Yahid*; double, *Shaar ha-Kaful*; triple, *Shaar ha-Meshulash*, etc.), or with letters missing in that particular verse (*Shaar ha-Neelam*), the forms of letters (*Shaar Otiot Gedolot u-Ketanot*), letters added to the basic ones (*Shaar ha-Milluy*), grammatical forms (*Shaar Zachar u-Nekevah*), and other similar methods of detailed exegesis practiced by the Ashkenazi Hasidim, some of which are not clear to us because of insufficient or obscure examples.

On the other hand there is a large group of thematic "gates" similar to that found in Rabbi Eleazar's list. In this commentary they are not used very often, but they proved that the author of this work

[5]The titles of forty "gates" as found in the whole commentary in ms. Oxford 268 are: שער הפשט, שער לקט, שער החילוק, שער המרבה (שער הריבוי) שער משולש, שער ריבוי ומיעוט (שער המרבה והממעט), שער הממעיט, שער מספר, שער הטעמים, שער סוף ראש פנים ואחור, שער כפול, שער נעלם, שער שינוי, שער סוף ראש, שער המסורות, שער זכר ונקבה, שער מלאכים, שער אותיות קטנות, שער חבר, שער רילוג תיבה, שער אין מוקדם ומאוחר, שער אותיות גרולת, שער אותיות גדולות או קטנות, שער טעם המצוות, שער הפוך וסמוכים, שער סופי תיבות, שער שינוי נעלם, שער היחיד, שער הסתום, שער הפונה, שער הלוך וחסור, שער המילוי, שער הגלגול, שער הסור, שער התרגום, שער הכבוד, שער השם, שער סמוכים, שער תמורה.

shared not only exegetical methods with the school of Rabbi Judah the Pious, but also some of the main theological problems with which the Kalonimide school dealt: angels (*Shaar ha-Malachim*); the divine glory (*Shaar ha-Kavod*); the Holy Name of God (*Shaar ha-Shem*); esoteric knowledge (*Shaar ha-Sod*). Of special interest is *Shaar ha-Satum*, literally, "the gate of the unknown," which deals with knowledge concerning the "end," that is, eschatology, redemption, and messianism, which occupy a relatively large part of this work compared to the scarcity of discussions of such subjects in Ashkenazi Hasidic literature.[6]

Other "gates" deal with other characteristics of the biblical text, including the Aramaic translations (*Shaar ha-Targum*) or the tradition of the rabbis (*Shaar ha-Masorah*). One element that is absent is the name of esoteric works, like *Sefer Yezira* (the Book of Creation), which constitutes a significant part of Rabbi Eleazar's list.[7] The reason may be that ms. 268 is an actual commentary, whereas the Book of Wisdom is a theoretical survey of all branches of esoteric knowledge.

II

The main problems concerning the historical background of the commentary in ms. Oxford 268 are: When was it written and what traditions were employed in order to present this system of "gates of wisdom"? The most serious difficulty in answering this question is the undoubted fact, already noted by Neubauer in his description of the manuscript, that many interpolations are included in the text. There are many notes in the margins of this manuscript, and it is obvious that many others have been incorporated in the text itself by copyists. Therefore the list of persons mentioned in the work and sources cited cannot serve to pinpoint its historical background.

[6]Of special interest is the statement on p. 28a, stating that the Messiah will come on Passover in the year 1388. In another section (81a), a statement can be interpreted to mean that messianic times will begin in 1230.

[7]See *Iyyunim*, pp. 55–56.

The sources that the author of the commentary cites are those commonly used by all Ashkenazi Hasidic writers. They include dozens of quotations from the *Sefer Yezira*; *Midrash Tadsheh*; *Midrash Avkir*; *Pesiktah*; *Pesiktah Rabbati*; the *Alphabet of Rabbi Akiva*; *Midrash Soher Tov*; *Eleh ha-Devarim Rabba*; *Tana de-vey Eliyahu*; *Agadah di-Shemuel*; *Sifrey Zutey*; *Midrash Hazit*; *Midrash va-Yechulu*; *Lekah Tov*; and so on.

Frequent use also is made of ancient mystical texts, like the *Shiur Komah*, called here *Hechalot*, as in other Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric works.[8] More distinctive and indicative of the personal inclinations of the writer is the frequent use—more common than in any other Ashkenazi Hasidic work of which I am aware—of historical and eschatological sources. The Josippon is extensively used in this commentary, and the author refers several times to a story that was introduced by the Josippon but seldom quoted—the story of Zfo son of Elifaz, the grandson of Esau, who became a king of Rome—a story developed into romance later in the Middle Ages and presented in the sixteenth-century *Sefer ha-Yashar*. Another frequently mentioned story is that of the ten martyrs, who were killed because of the sins of the sons of Jacob. A special interest is revealed by the author in the stories of *Sefer Zerubavel*, the messianic Apocalypse of the early Middle Ages, which is not mentioned by name, though the messianic figures described in it—Menachem Ben Amiel and the Messiah son of Ephraim—are mentioned several times. From the *Book of Hechalot* (*Hechalot Rabbati*) the author quotes the story about the end of Rome and the fate of its principal angel, Samael. All these references tend to characterize the anonymous author of the commentary as interested in messianism, history, and Apocalypse, at least when compared to other Ashkenazi Hasidic theologians, who scarcely mentioned such subjects. This, however, is of little assistance when trying to determine the time and background of the author of this commentary.

As to the names of scholars cited in this work, there is great difficulty in identifying them, in distinguishing between citations in

[8]See *Iyyunim*, p. 113, and the notes there.

the text itself and later interpolations, but it seems to me that the most revealing fact is the complete absence of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms among the three dozen scholars mentioned.

Rabbi Judah the Pious is mentioned by name in this work, as well as by his well-known title,[9] and so is his father. Rabbi Samuel the Pious; it seems that the author had before him esoteric works by Rabbi Judah the Pious.[10] But Rabbi Eleazar is never mentioned, and none of the many other names in the commentary can be identified with Rabbi Eleazar's well-known disciples. Some of the other names belong to the tradition of the Ashkenazi Hasidic movement, like Rabbi Eliezer ha-Gadol, and others are early Hasidic authorities, prior to Rabbi Eleazar, like Rabbi Judah ben Kalonymus, from whom the author received a tradition by oral transmission (p. 11b). Some names seem to relate to Ashkenazi Hasidic circles, like Rabbi Joseph of Heidelberg (31a, 142b, and compare also 243b).

Many scholars mentioned in the text are described as living in France, thus hinting at the possibility that the author did not. Besides classical authors like Rabbi Moshe ha-Darshan, the author seems to have been in contact with "Rabbi Isaak the Prophet from France," of whom he asked a question (112b, and compare 110b: "I was asked a question by the Prophet from France"). This person might be identified with "Rabbi Isaak the Frenchman" mentioned elsewhere in the commentary (71b). It is difficult to identify this scholar with one of the many scholars by this name who flourished in France. Another name mentioned frequently is that of Rabbi Mordechai Zarfati (18a, 41b, 44b), but not enough to identify him with any certainty.

Only one scholar from Spain is mentioned in the text (excluding others mentioned in the margins or obvious interpolations), and that is Jacob Kimhi: "In the name of Rabbi Jacob Kimhi the exegete from Spain" (46b). It is improbable, therefore, that the author had any contacts with the great center of learning and exegesis in Spain.

It seems, therefore, that the analysis of the sources mentioned and the names of scholars included in the text cannot give any definitive answer to the chronological and geographical questions concerning this work. It is clear, however, that there is no proof that the author used the works or the teachings of any scholar who flourished after the first third of the thirteenth century. Unless a gross mistake has been made in separating between the interpolations and the text, or in identification of scholars mentioned, we may assume that this work was written within a decade or two after the death of Rabbi Judah the Pious in 1217.

III

The conclusions that may be drawn from the study of the commentary on the Torah in ms. Oxford 268 seem to denote that the method of interpretation of scripture according to a list of "gates" was not invented by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms when he set out to write down his esoteric tradition after Rabbi Judah's death; that it was known to a wide circle of disciples of Rabbi Samuel the Pious and his son, Rabbi Judah, and thus constituted an integral part of Ashkenazi Hasidic tradition concerning the meaning and form of the Bible. The fact that the author of this commentary used it independently of the teachings of Rabbi Eleazar seems to prove that after Rabbi Judah's death Rabbi Eleazar was not the only Ashkenazi Hasidic writer who followed the traditions of the old Ashkenazi Hasidic school; it is possible to assume that there were several centers in which this tradition continued to be studied and taught. It is impossible to suggest whether this attitude toward the writings of Rabbi Eleazar was the result of ignorance concerning his work, or a rejection of his attempt to become the main teacher of Ashkenazi Hasidism after the death of the great teacher.

From a historical point of view, this seems to strengthen the

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ריה"ב, which is an abbreviation of ר' יהודה חסיד בן שמואל. This title is known from the frequent use made in Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel's *Arugath ha-Bosem*, E. E. Urbach's edition, Jerusalem 1939–1963. This title appears in other early Ashkenazic works, probably respecting Rabbi Judah's insistence on the anonymity of his works.

[10]Several passages in this commentary reveal close resemblance to several quotations from Rabbi Judah's lost *Sefer ha-Kavod*. It is possible to assume that the author had access to Rabbi Judah's major theological work.

conclusion that Ashkenazi Hasidism should not be regarded as one school, led first by Rabbi Samuel, then by Rabbi Judah, and later by Rabbi Eleazar. There were several schools of Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric teachings, some of them completely independent of the Kalonymide school, like the circle of the "Unique Cherub," including Rabbi Avigdor ha-Zarfati and Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar of London,[11] or the anonymous author of the *Sefer ha-Hayyim* (Book of Life),[12] or the author of *Sefer ha-Navon* (Book of the Wise).[13] In the first half of the thirteenth century, when Rabbi Eleazar was establishing his own school, which became the best-known among the Ashkenazi Hasidic circles, other scholars who received the tradition of Rabbi Judah the Pious continued to study and to write, came into contact with many other scholars in Germany and France, and preserved the various shades of Ashkenazi Hasidic tradition for the coming generations.

ENDNOTE

This study is a part of my continuous work in attempting to understand the nature of the language of religion in general and mysticism in particular. A more extensive discussion of the subject is presented in "The Concept of Language in Medieval Jewish Mysticism in Germany" in volume four; see the endnotes there. The subject of this article is treated in much more detail in several chapters of my Hebrew book *On Sanctity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1997). A most important component of the Ashkenazi Hasidic concept of language is described in their system of "The Gates of Wisdom."

An important aspect that I did not mention in this chapter is the impact of the Ashkenazi Hasidic concept of language on the Christian kabbalah, and in particular on Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin. The radical midrashic concepts

[11]G. Vajda, in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, 1961, pp. 15–34; idem, in: *Kovetz Al Yad* 16 (1966), pp. 145–198; *Iyyunim*, pp. 89–111.
[12]J. Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidut Ashkenaz*, Jerusalem 1968, pp. 143–156.
[13]Published in *Iyyunim*, pp. 112–133.

developed by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms following his teacher Rabbi Judah the Pious were known to the Christian renaissance scholars. Rabbi Eleazar's *Sefer ha-Shem* was studied by the Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo, one of the important humanists (see F. Secret's edition of his *Shekhinah*, Rome 1959). Pico read Rabbi Eleazar's *Chockmat ha-Nefesh* (which he quotes as *De anima*), and Flavius Mithridates, Pico's friend and translator, translated into Latin a large collection of treatises by Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Eleazar, including the *Sefer ha-Chochmah*, which is discussed in this chapter. These writings were one of the most important sources for the Christian kabbalists' concepts of kabbalistic methodologies; they did not realize that they were actually midrashic ones. The *temurah* is used by these Ashkenazi Hasidim more than almost any kabbalist, and the same is true concerning *gematria*. The holy names of God, so central in Christian kabbalah, were an Ashkenazi Hasidic subject. The original aspects of the Christian kabbalah are thus derived to a large extent from these writings, whereas they were relatively seldom used by kabbalists in Spain (with the exception of Abraham Abulafia). When Frances Yates writes: "The kind of Cabala which Pico expounds in his seventy-two Cabalist Conclusion is a simplified version of Spanish Cabala" (*The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, London and Boston: Routledge 1979, p. 19), she is completely wrong (even though in most cases she is right, and I accept and follow many of her conclusions). The main upholders of this concept of language were the Ashkenazi esoterics, and their version of midrashic hermeneutics contributed immensely to the character of the Christian kabbalah.

FIVE

Pseudepigraphy in Medieval Jewish Mysticism in Germany

I

Jewish mysticism in medieval Germany flourished mainly during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in several centers and in various circles, with considerable variation in outlook and religious attitude. These circles are usually described as belonging to the general movement of Ashkenazi Hasidism, the central pietistic-mystical movement of the period. It is more accurate, however, to apply the term "Ashkenazi Hasidim" to the central group of mystics and pietists that was led by the Kalonymus family in Speyer, Worms, Mainz, and Regensburg, whose main leader was Rabbi Judah the Pious, and to describe other circles of Jewish mystics as independent creators of Jewish mystical systems.[1] This differentiation is especially

[1]On the Ashkenazi Hasidic movement, see especially G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1954), pp. 80–118 (and bibliography there). The role of this movement in the early history of Jewish mysticism in Europe is analyzed in detail in Idelson, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (1962). Concerning the relationship between mysticism and ethics in this movement, see J. Dan, *Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics* (1986), pp. 45–75.

important because it can be proved that there were no connections between the various circles, and most of them were not aware of the ideas and the literature produced by the others.

The main circle of the Ashkenazi Hasidic teachers produced a large body of ethical literature with fiercely pietistic characteristics, the main work being the *Sefer Hasidim* (The Book of the Pietists) written by Rabbi Judah the Pious,[2] as well as numerous works of esoteric theology, some of them written by Rabbi Judah and many others written by his disciple, Rabbi Eleazer of Worms.[3] We know of about half a dozen other writers from this circle, and one of the common denominators for all of them is the fact that none of them used pseudepigraphic methods. There was a tendency in this circle to not sign works clearly in the author's name and to produce them as anonymous, for ethical reasons: to prevent the author and his family from being proud of their books. This was mainly the attitude of Rabbi Judah the Pious, and many of his disciples did not adhere to his views in this matter. But although this attitude did produce some anonymous works in this circle, it never produced pseudepigraphic ones. As far as we know, this school of Jewish mystics, as well as several others, did not produce a single pseudepigraphic work during this period.

Against this background, the exception to the rule is doubly interesting. There was one circle of mystics that flourished in Germany in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that produced pseudepigraphic works only. This school of mystics is the subject of this chapter. It is usually designated either as the Special Cherub circle, based on the most distinctive divine power in their works, or as the Joseph ben Uzziel circle, following the name of the pseudepigraphic "author" of the central text of this group.[4]

[2]*Sefer Hasidim* was printed in Bologna in 1538, but this edition is not full. A better version was found in a Parma manuscript, published by Freimann and Wistenetzki (1924).

[3]The esoteric literature of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, which remains even today mostly in manuscripts, was described in my *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism* (Hebrew) (1968).

[4]The various works of this circle and their interrelations from a bibliographic point of view were studied in my paper "The Circle of the Special Cherub in Ashkenazi Hasidism" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 35 (1966), pp. 349–372 (reprinted in my *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature* [1975], pp. 89–111).

Several Hebrew manuscripts[5] contain a short treatise, always appearing under the title *The Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel*. The term *barayta* usually refers to sections from the works of the *tanaim*, the authors of the Mishnah in the second century; thus Joseph ben Uzziel is described as a *tana*, a sage from the period immediately after the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 C.E. As we shall presently see, this description does not agree with other characteristics of this figure found in the literature of these mystics and elsewhere.

The *Barayta* itself is an exegetical text, based on the ancient Jewish cosmological work, *Sefer Yezira* (the Book of Creation).[6] This brief treatise was composed probably in the fourth century, and includes, in a few cryptic pages that use a unique terminology, a description of the forces that created the world and sustain its existence. The basic attitude of this work is scientific, though some mystical elements can be discerned in it. In the Middle Ages several Jewish thinkers, both rationalistic philosophers and mystics (including, among others, the early philosophers Rav Saadia Gaon in tenth-century Babylonia, Rabbi Judah the Pious, and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms), wrote detailed and extensive commentaries on this ancient work. The early kabbalists in Provence and Spain in the thirteenth century wrote several such mystical commentaries and used *Sefer Yezira* as a source for their mystical symbolism.

The *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel* treats the text of *Sefer Yezira* as a body of hidden secrets that were revealed to Abraham, and that should not be studied by the public. According to this commentator, the *Sefer Yezira* includes all the secrets of the Godhead; His powers, which govern the world; the methods of divine revelation and prophecy; as well as the secrets of the human soul and its destiny after death in heaven and hell. One of the distinctive features

[5]The main manuscripts are Parma, Heb. 1138, fol. 123r–126v; Paris, Heb. 770, fol. 32r–34v; British Museum 754 (Harley 5510), fol. 221–228. Part of the text was printed by A. Epstein, *Mikadmoniot ha-Yehudim* (1955) pp. 237–247.

[6]Vast literature has been written on the *Sefer Yezira*. A brief summary with a bibliography is found in G. Scholem *Kabbalah* (1974), pp. 21–30.

of this brief treatise is the description of the Divine Glory, which was regarded as the revealed aspect of God by most Jewish thinkers and mystics as a hidden divine power that cannot be viewed even by prophets and mystics, while another power not mentioned in any previous text, the Special Cherub, is placed in the center of every prophetic vision. This cherub sits upon the divine chair of glory, and is revealed to prophets and mystics and to the righteous after their death. It is evident that the mystics of this circle designated the holy Divine Glory to be the subject of human prayers. It therefore could not be revealed, because the power one prays to cannot have any shape or form. They created a new divine power specifically for the purpose of divine revelation, the Special Cherub, which also governs the forces of the archangels and the multitudes of angels that constitute the realm of the divine chariot, first viewed by Ezekiel in his visions and later interpreted by Jewish scholars and mystics as a description of the heavenly powers.

The *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel* served as the basis for several works found in many Hebrew manuscripts, all of them quoting it extensively and interpreting its cryptic references to various secrets. The most extensive among these works is known in Hebrew bibliography as the Pseudo-Saadia commentary on *Sefer Yezira*. This work, partly printed in the traditional anthologies of commentaries on *Sefer Yezira*,[7] should not be confused with the commentary actually written by the Babylonian sage in Arabic around the year 935; there is no clear connection between these two works. The attribution to Rav Saadia in this case may not even be pseudepigraphic but based on a mistake. Many passages in the anonymous commentary begin with the Hebrew acronym PRS, which was believed to mean "Rav Saadia Commented." This is possible, but it could have other interpretations also, and we cannot be sure of its meaning.[8]

[7]The Mantua anthology of commentaries to *Sefer Yezira* includes only parts of this work. A more complete text is found in many manuscripts, the most important among them being Munich, Cod. Hebr. 40, fol. 43r–78v and Oxford, Bodleian Library 1594 (Mich. 545), fol. 158r–184v.

[8]Attempts have been made to relate this acronym to Shabbatai Donnolo, an early commentator on *Sefer Yezira* in tenth-century Italy, and others. See Epstein (note 5). No satisfactory explanation for this acronym has been suggested to date.

This extensive work, however, is the most detailed source for the mystical theology of this circle. It cannot have been written before the second half of the twelfth century, because two prominent twelfth-century Hebrew philosophers are mentioned in it: Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja of Barcelona, who is quoted concerning the series of five worlds that separate God and man, using the Arabic title "Head of Police" by which he was known; and Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, the great commentator on the Bible in the middle of the twelfth century.

Among the other works of this circle one should mention a *piyyut*, a religious hymn, that presents in verse form the main ideas of the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel*,[9] and especially a short treatise called *Pesak ha-Yirah veha-Emunah*[10] (A Decision Concerning Faith and the Fear of God). This "decision" includes instructions concerning the correct intentions during prayer—one should direct prayers to the divine glory, not to God Himself, Who is beyond any contact with the created world, nor to the lower Special Cherub that is revealed to the prophets. This treatise also includes a reference to the five spiritual worlds, based on the work of Abraham bar Hijja.

One of the most distinctive features of these works is the fact that they are presented as collective works, a summary of the ideas of several strata of commentators and exegetes. All of them are based on the Sefer Yezira, and its terminology and statements are at their center. Imposed on it we find the statements of the *Barayta*, and in connection with that there are references to a certain rabbi and great teacher—Rabbi Avigdor ha-Zarfati ("the French"), who was regarded by the mystics of this school as their great authority concerning the *Sefer Yezira* and the *Barayta*.[11] This rabbi, however, is unknown to us from any other source, and his time and place cannot be decided (the appellation "French" means that he or his family was believed to have come from France, and migrated, probably, to Germany).

[9]This poem is found in my edition of *Shir ha-Yihud* (1981), pp. 22–26.

[10]This brief treatise was first published by A. Jellinek in Kokhvey Yitzhak 27 (1897), pp. 13–14.

[11]See *Tarbiz* 35 (note 4), pp. 358–359 concerning various possibilities of understanding the reference to Rabbi Avigdor.

Above these three strata of ancient tradition, we find references to at least two layers of commentary and interpretation, by terms like "I was told," "my teacher commented," etc., proving that a group of people in at least two generations interpreted and edited what they believed to be ancient tradition. We also have some lists of books they used, many of them unknown from any other source.[12] All these characteristics seem to indicate that we are not dealing here with one, or even two, pseudepigraphic mystical writers, but with a distinct school, which flourished for two or three generations and produced a significant body of literature that is distinctive in its theology, terminology, and literary structure.

The latest source that we have for this school and its works is the writings of Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar, a scholar who flourished in the first half of the thirteenth century and studied in northern France, lived in London, and probably visited Germany as well.[13] We have several works by this rabbi, all of them based on the *Sefer Yezira*. Two of them are different versions of a commentary on this ancient work, and another, *Sod ha-Sodot* (the Secret of Secrets), is a theological exposition of the creation, interpreting several passages from the *Sefer Yezira*. The works of Rabbi Elhanan abound with direct quotations from the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel* (quoted by name), and from other works of this circle. He often states that his teachings are based on oral tradition ("This was said to me," "so I heard"), and the terminology and content of these sayings is that of the Special Cherub circle. It is obvious that Rabbi Elhanan regarded the literature based on the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel* to be the traditional correct interpretation of the *Sefer Yezira*, and he quoted it at length in his own works.

[12]This list was published by Epstein (note 5), and see *Tarbiz* 35, pp. 364–367.

[13]G. Scholem was the first to draw attention to the works of Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar. G. Vajda dedicated a paper to the study of his works: "De quelques infiltrations chrétiennes dans l'oeuvre d'un auteur anglo-juif du XIIIe siècle," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age*, 36 (1961), pp. 15–34. He also published one of his commentaries to *Sefer Yezira* in *Kovetz Al Yad*, 16 (1966), pp. 145–198. I published the other commentary, as well as *Sod ha-Sodot*, in a preliminary form in *Texts Relating to the Theology of the Ashkenazi Hasidim* (Hebrew) (1977), pp. 1–59.

The chronological boundaries of the works of this circle that we have in our manuscripts can therefore be clearly set: not before the middle of the twelfth century, when Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra wrote his commentary on the Bible, and not after the first third of the thirteenth century, when Elhanan ben Yakar wrote his works. But these boundaries refer to the edited works. When was the *Barayta* itself written, and when did Rabbi Avigdor ha-Zarfati teach? We do not know, but an early date in the twelfth century is probable. We thus have a circle of Jewish mystics in Germany who flourished for nearly a century and produced a body of literature—without our being able to pinpoint their time and place or to decide the historical setting and circumstances of their emergence. It is clear, however, that they had no contact with other schools in Germany or elsewhere, and their theology, symbolism, and spiritual message were created independently.

The problem we can try to solve, though not completely, is: Who was Joseph ben Uzziel? Why was he chosen as the pseudepigraphic teacher of this school?

II

The name Joseph ben Uzziel[14] appears in only one context in Hebrew literature prior to the use made of this name in the *Barayta*: in the literary pseudepigraphy known as the Pseudo-Ben Sira, a compilation originating probably in ninth-century Babylonia. The Pseudo-Ben Sira is a collection of stories attributed to the great writer of the Second Commonwealth period, Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus).

The work of the historical Ben Sira was unknown to Hebrew writers in the Middle Ages, as the Hebrew original of his book was lost, and only the Greek translation was preserved by the Church. A few sections of the original were discovered in the Cairo *Genizah* and the Judean Desert, but for a Jewish writer in the early centuries of the Middle Ages the only thing that could be known about him

[14]This figure should not be confused with Jonathan ben Uzziel, the celebrated translator of the Bible to Aramaic.

was the series of epigrams quoted in his name in talmudic and midrashic literature. The image of Ben Sira, which the talmudic rabbis used from time to time, was therefore one of an ancient sage who specialized in short epigrams. The author of the Pseudo-Ben Sira stories used this image, and a large part of the work is based on these epigrams.

The pseudepigraphic story begins with a "biography" of Ben Sira, which constitutes a story hardly paralleled in Hebrew literature in its vulgarity and offensiveness. Ben Sira is described as the son, and at the same time the grandson, of the prophet Jeremiah. He was born to Jeremiah and his daughter, after the prophet was forced by some wicked people to perform an act of onanism in a public bath in which his daughter later bathed and became pregnant. According to this author, *sira* in a Hebrew *gematria*[15] is equal in numerical value to "Jeremiah," which proves that he was the son of the prophet. As far as we know, all these details are the invention of the pseudepigrapher, no precedent being known to these descriptions of Jeremiah, his daughter, or Ben Sira.

Ben Sira was born, so the author tells us, with a complete set of teeth and the ability to speak. When his mother offered to breast-feed him he refused and insisted on a full meal. When he was one year old, he was taken to a teacher who tried to teach him the alphabet, but instead Ben Sira invented on the spot twenty-two epigrams starting with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, all of them detailing the biography and the troubles of the teacher and ridiculing him. When he was very young, he was brought to the court of the king of Babylonia, Nebuchadnezzar, and the author tells a series of stories about his adventures there. The king, when he realized how wise Ben Sira was, asked him many questions, to which Ben Sira answered in stories and epigrams. Many of these stories are no less offensive than the opening "biographic" tale.

The largest section of this narrative work is dedicated to the exegesis of twenty-two Ben Sira epigrams (most of them with the assistance of stories that exemplify them). The epigrams are arranged alphabetically and presented in Aramaic, and their meaning is discussed, in a parody of talmudic discussions of the meaning of biblical verses, by two interpreters: one is Uzziel, who is presented as Ben Sira's son, and the other is Joseph ben Uzziel, Ben Sira's grandson. They often present conflicting interpretations of the epigrams, which are decided by the last speaker, usually Joseph ben Uzziel. It can hardly be doubted that the whole scene is the invention of the author, these names being completely unknown in any other source. He may have heard that the historical Ben Sira had a grandson (who translated the book Ecclesiasticus into Greek and wrote an introduction to the translation), but otherwise this is pure fiction.[16]

This discussion of twelfth-century Jewish mysticism in Germany is no place to analyze the meaning of this bizarre work of fiction. Two points that characterize it should, however, be stated. The first is the fierce satiric element in the work, which pokes rude fun at the most sacred figures in Judaism. Thus, for instance, Nebuchadnezzar asks Ben Sira why the ox's nose is always wet. Ben Sira answers by telling him that when Joshua was laying siege to Jericho no horse could be found to carry him because he was so fat; so he rode an ox, and when the walls of Jericho fell Joshua kissed the ox on the nose to thank it, this being the source of the humidity of the nose. When discussing the epigram by Ben Sira "An unobedient son should be put upon the water," Uzziel, Ben Sira's son, states that a father should kill his evil child. But Joseph ben Uzziel asks, "How can a father kill his son?" and proceeds to give his own view: A father of a wicked son should cause somebody else to kill him, and then mourn him, as David mourned Absalom after he was killed by Joab in his command, according to this author. The text abounds with such stories "explaining" various phenomena in the world and "interpreting" Ben Sira's epigrams.

This work is not an innocent collection of folktales and sto-

[15]According to the numerical value of each Hebrew letter (*gematria*), both Sira and Jeremiah equal 271. *Ben*, of course, means "son" in Hebrew.

[16]The first scholarly edition of this work was published by M. Steinschneider (1878). A detailed edition was recently published by E. Yassif (1985); see my review of this edition in *Kiryat Sefer* 60 (1985), pp. 294–297.

ries. Rather, it is a religious-theological statement, presented by a creative artist. The work is a religious protest against the way God directs the world, and especially against that early divine institution that governs man's fate—death. This is the only Hebrew work until modern times that contains no positive reference to afterlife, heaven, the Garden of Eden, or messianic times. It does contain a collection of stories referring to the few people (like Enoch and Elijah the prophet) who reached heaven without first dying. It contains a satiric story about the negotiations between God and Earth prior to the creation of Adam. The Earth refused to give God the necessary amount of earth to create man until God promised, and signed a note to this effect in front of witnesses (the archangels Michael and Gabriel), that He would return this "loan" to Earth a thousand times each day, and this is how death came to govern human existence. Another story ridicules the belief in the coming of the Messiah by equating it to the belief of dogs and donkeys that one day their excrement will smell like perfume and they will be delivered from a life of constant toil.[17]

These are just a few examples showing the anarchistic character of this literary work. All the great figures of Jewish history, from Jacob and David to the talmudic sages, are the subject of ridicule and the key to the author's protest against God is his refusal to believe in life after death, demanding perfect existence without transition through death. It is a unique literary work, that, for the purpose of this paper, is important because of the invention of the family line: Jeremiah–Ben Sira–Uzziel–Joseph ben Uzziel.

III

The *Barayta* attributed to Joseph ben Uzziel by the Jewish mystics in medieval Germany does not rely on this figure alone. It states clearly that the secrets revealed in it "were given to Jeremiah in Babylonia," or "This secret was revealed by Jeremiah to Ben Sira

[17]The character of this work was studied in J. Dan, *The Hebrew Story in the Middle Ages* (Hebrew) (1974), pp. 69–78.

in Babylonia." The same statement is found also in the *Pesak ha-Yirah veha-Emunah*, testifying to the fact that these mystics not only used the name of Joseph ben Uzziel alone, but also treated him as the last in the line of tradition beginning with the revelations to Jeremiah, which were told to his son Ben Sira and from there to the grandson, Joseph. Thus, the whole fiction presented in the Pseudo-Ben Sira narrative was taken into account, leaving no doubt that that work of fiction served as a source to the pietistic mystics in medieval Germany.

We must obviously ask: Why did these Jewish scholars, who in no way shared the attitude of the pseudepigrapher of Ben Sira concerning God and death, and were pious, traditional, and orthodox Jews, use the name of Joseph ben Uzziel and his line to give credence to their tradition concerning the secret meaning of *Sefer Yezira*? Jewish mysticism in late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries in Europe (especially in Spain and Provence) used many ancient figures for pseudepigraphic purposes—Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Ishmael, Rabbi Nehunia ben ha-Kanah, Rav Hai Gaon, and others; why should they choose a dubious figure, unmentioned in talmudic and midrashic literature, like Joseph ben Uzziel? Why abandon the large body of traditional and orthodox Hebrew literature and choose a person who serves as a hero in such an offensive, rude, and anarchistic work of fiction?

We do not have an answer to this riddle, which is one of the most bizarre problems concerning the emergence of Jewish mysticism in medieval Europe. Still, a possible answer to it can be offered, though, as explained below, at least one vital link is missing in order to make this possibility probable.

The most extensive work of the circle of mystics that relied on the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel* is, as explained above, the commentary on *Sefer Yezira* known as the Pseudo-Saadia commentary. This work not only contains, the usual references to Joseph ben Uzziel, Ben Sira, and Jeremiah, but also includes an introduction to the commentary (not printed in the traditional anthology). This introduction tells briefly the well-known story of the secrets of creation being revealed to Abraham, to which another story is added: a de-

scription of the creation of a *golem*[18] by Jeremiah and Ben Sira. This description is known to us from earlier sources, but usually the creators of the *golem* are Shem, son of Noah, and Abraham, while here Ben Sira and Jeremiah replace them.[19] According to this text, Ben Sira wanted to create a *golem*, and was instructed not to do it alone but to join with Jeremiah in the effort. After three years they succeeded, but the *golem* demanded to be returned to ashes. A similar story about Jeremiah and Ben Sira's creation of the *golem* is found in another mystical text of the same period, which was probably written in Provence in the late twelfth century or the beginning of the thirteenth.[20]

The connection between Ben Sira and Jeremiah reflects, undoubtedly, that the author of this text relied on the information in the Pseudo-Ben Sira, which is the only framework in which these two figures are connected as father and son. The context, however, is meaningful. The centrality of *Sefer Yezira* to the works of the circle of mystics under discussion here was explained above. To this it should be added that their adherence to and constant dealing with *Sefer Yezira* was not purely intellectual, but also had a practical element. If *Sefer Yezira* contains the secrets by which God created the world, then the mystic familiar with these secrets could attempt to repeat the process and create something himself. The belief in the possibility of actual creation by the knowledge of *Sefer Yezira* was based on a talmudic passage in which two sages are described as creating a calf by the lore of *Yezira* (it is not clear whether it is an actual reference to the *Sefer Yezira*).[21] In the medieval descriptions of the

[18]*Golem* is the medieval Hebrew term for the creation of a living man out of dust. Usually, the creation of the body from earth was not regarded as a problem, and all the details given in medieval literature refer to the attempts to bring it to life.

[19]The history of the attempts to create a *golem*, including analysis of the texts discussed here, is described in G. Scholem's detailed study included in *Zur Kabbala und ihrer Symbolik* (1960), pp. 209–259.

[20]See Scholem, ibid., 232–234. The text is included in the treatise "The Secret of the Tetragrammaton," a part of the mystical literature of the Iyyun circle, which flourished, probably, in the Provence in the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. See J. Dan, *Early Kabbalistic Circles* (1977), pp. 52–64.

[21]Bavli *Sanhedrin* 67b, and compare 65b.

creation of a *golem* the religious problem of man's competing with God in the ability to create is mentioned.[22] The belief that *Sefer Yezira* describes the creation as a process of letter-combinations, and that the power to create was inherent in the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, was almost universal among medieval Jewish thinkers, and was probably based on the correct understanding of the *Sefer Yezira*.[23]

In several commentaries on the *Sefer Yezira* written in thirteenth-century Germany we find clear instructions for the creation of a *golem* by the combinations of letters presented by the commentators, especially in the commentary by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, written about 1220.[24] The same is true of the Pseudo-Saadia commentary of the Joseph ben Uzziel school, which contains not only detailed instructions, but also a story about an actual attempt to do it. According to it, the attempt failed because the creators were moving around the earth-figure of a man in the wrong direction, so that instead of the figure rising from the earth, they themselves were sinking in it. When they reversed direction as ordered by their rabbi, they were saved.[25]

It seems possible, or even probable, that this circle of medieval mystics became attached to the Jeremiah–Ben Sira–Uzziel–Joseph ben Uzziel line created by the author of the Pseudo-Ben Sira because of the legend that the fathers of this line were in possession of the secret key to *Sefer Yezira* by which a *golem* could be created. The fact that this story also is found outside the works of the Special Cherub circle seems to attest to this possibility. It is quite understandable that the mystics in medieval Germany could readily ignore the un-

[22]In the text from the Iyyun circle (note 20), the *golem* explains that he has to die so that people will not wish to compete with God in a process of creation. The story gives the impression that this is possible, though not desirable.

[23]According to *Sefer Yezira*, Chapter 1, God created the world using the twenty-two letters and the first ten numbers. A literal understanding of the first chapter of Genesis gives the impression that God spoke Hebrew words (e.g. "Let there be light"), composed of Hebrew letters, and the cosmos came into existence. The Mishnah states that the world was created by "ten utterances" (*Avot* 5:1).

[24]First published in 1883.

[25]Ms. Munich, Cod. Hebr. 40, fol. 43r–44v.

orthodox characteristics of the Pseudo-Ben Sira stories if the reliance on this line of tradition could give them this most desired key to not only the understanding of *Sefer Yezira*, but its use to create a *golem*. If such a story was known to Rabbi Avigdor ha-Zarfati and the anonymous writer of the *Barayta*, the attribution of Joseph to Joseph ben Uzziel as the inheritor of these secrets would be understandable. It would be based not on the nature of the source itself, that is, the anarchistic satire of the Pseudo-Ben Sira, but on the nature of the needs of the medieval mystics.

The legend that a pair of biblical figures created a *golem* most probably emerged in ancient times, and its heroes were Shem and Abraham. Who could have used this ancient legend and transformed it to a story about Jeremiah and Ben Sira? It seems that the author of the Pseudo-Ben Sira is indeed the natural candidate. He certainly had the self-confidence to treat ancient traditions in the most creative way, and his attachment to Ben Sira explains why, from infinite possibilities, Jeremiah and Ben Sira were chosen. In this way we can give a satisfactory answer to the question of why the medieval Jewish mystics in Germany chose Joseph ben Uzziel to be the ancient source of their teachings in their pseudepigraphic literature.

This, however, is at best a hypothesis, not a fact. We have nearly ninety manuscripts that contain the Pseudo-Ben Sira stories, in many different versions. Most of them have been checked and studied,[26] and no trace has been found to date of any connection between this work and the *golem* legend. The main link, the one directly connecting the creation of the *golem* to the Pseudo-Ben Sira stories, is definitely a missing link. We can assume that someday, in a neglected library or a torn manuscript, this link will be discovered and the connection established, but this has not happened as yet. The riddle, based on the deep contrast between the nature of the Pseudo-Ben Sira stories and the mysticism of the medieval pietists in Germany, is still unsolved.

Even though a complete answer is impossible at this time, it

[26]Most of these manuscripts were studied, in the preparation of his edition (note 16), by E. Yassif, who could not find any reference to the *golem* story.

seems that this analysis demonstrates the strange force of and attraction to pseudepigraphy that is apparent in the works of the Joseph ben Uzziel circle of mystics. They still had to overcome their reluctance to use the family framework of the Pseudo-Ben Sira stories (and no other element in these stories plays any meaningful role in their esoteric theology). They must have had complete confidence in the antiquity and veracity of their teachings in order to be able to use such a pseudepigraphical setting. As stated above, this circle was the exception in Germany, none of the others using such methods (which were much more widely used in Provence and Spain)[27]. This underlines their adherence to this method. Undoubtedly, these mystics wrote a most unusual chapter in the long history of pseudepigraphy in Jewish mysticism.

ENDNOTE

The group of mystics and esoterics whose pseudepigraphy is described in this study is the subject of a monograph I wrote after the publication of the article that constitutes this chapter: *The Unique Cherub Circle* (see endnote of Chapter 1). Chapter 14 deals in further detail with the pseudepigraphic "library" of these mystics. This phenomenon is doubly meaningful, as no other group of Jewish mystics and esoterics in medieval central Europe employed the genre of pseudepigraphy in such consistency and detail, making it an integral part of their worldview. A parallel is found in Spain and the Provence, in a group of obscure, yet innovative and profound mystical texts of the Iyyun circle of mystics in the last decades of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. Their writings, which are attributed mostly to fictional scholars and present a background of pseudo-*Hechalot* texts, have been studied in Mark Verman's monograph *The Books of Contemplation* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press 1992); see my review of this study in the *Jewish*

[27]Concerning this element in the kabbalah, see J. Dan, "The Problem of Pseudepigraphy in Early Kabbalah", *I. Tishby Jubilee Volume*, ed. J. Dan and J. Hacker (1986), pp. 111–138 (Hebrew).

Quarterly Review, LXXXVI (1995), pp. 191–194. These two circles, the Unique Cherub circle and the Iyyun group, probably preceded the development of the kabbalah; the kabbalists continued, however, to develop their literature in these two different literary molds. On the one hand, we find elaborate pseudepigraphic constructions in the *Bahir*, the works of Rabbi Isaac ben Jacob ha-Cohen of Castile, and the *Zohar* itself. On the other hand, the kabbalistic schools of the Provence and Gerona, and others following them in the second half of the thirteenth century, did not use this form.

See my Hebrew study "*The Epistle of Worms* and the Problem of Pseudepigraphy in Early Kabbalah" (Hebrew), *I. Tishby Festschrift (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 [1984], pp. 111–138). This article is dedicated to the study of the kabbalistic works of Rabbi Shem Tov ibn Gaon, who lived in Spain at the end of the thirteenth century and settled in Jerusalem and then in Safed at the beginning of the fourteenth century; his early writings express strong opposition to pseudepigraphy, but later he produced at least one important pseudepigraphic document.

SIX

A Note on the History of *Teshuvah* Among Ashkenazi Hasidim

I

Teshuvah, and the way it is perceived, is one of the most dynamic ideas of the Middle Ages and the modern era. The word itself, together with its biblical and talmudic-midrashic connections, and its meaning in the writings of prominent Jewish thinkers from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries, are many and varied. When we come to discuss some aspects of the perception of *teshuvah* at the beginning of the development of the idea in medieval Jewish thought, we should take into account that eight hundred years of rich dynamic development separate the early perception of *teshuvah*, which we shall discuss, and the theory of *teshuvah* that is at the center of Rav Kook's philosophy. The sole justification for this discussion is that, in the history of ideas, the commencement is always hidden within the end, and the root always influences the fruit. Even though the modern perception of *teshuvah* is far removed from that which was created by the early thinkers who devoted books to it in Hebrew, still the one is the continuation of the other, and the one is

the result of the other; and the recognition of the roots of things always deepens our understanding of the essence of their being.

The beginning of systematic thought concerning the quality and significance of *teshuvah* in our literature of the Middle Ages is in the writings of the Jewish Philosophers who wrote in Arabic, chiefly Rav Saadia Gaon and Rav Bachaye ibn Pakuda. Rav Saadia deals with this matter in his *Emunot ve-Deot*. In this work, he laid down the two principal bases that characterized the perception of *teshuvah* for many hundreds of years. One is that *teshuvah*, from its very source, is a spiritual process that takes place in the heart of man. Its root is in the contemplation and the obligations that a man takes upon himself before his God. Rav Saadia's parameters of *teshuvah* do not include action; they are entirely a crystallization of man's decision to turn in *teshuvah*, to turn back from his evil way and not to sin anymore: a decision that he assumes within his heart and communicates to his God.

The second trait laid down by Rav Saadia Gaon is that *teshuvah* is the concern of the individual in Israel, a matter solely for himself. It has to do only with the man who sins. *Teshuvah* is tied with a strong link to sin and to the sinner, and it is the consequence of the individual's decision to change his ways. In the framework of the perception based upon Rav Saadia's teaching, there is no meaning to *teshuvah* that is not for sin—to *teshuvah* as a way of life, to *teshuvah* as a perfection of the world, to *teshuvah* as a preparation for redemption, to *teshuvah* for the sins of others and of former generations, and so on—ideas that characterize modern thought in the field of *teshuvah*, especially from the sixteenth century on. At source, *teshuvah* is the ointment that the religion of Israel prescribes for the sinner's wound. It has no place except as a cure for sin. A long period of development was necessary for Rav Saadia's approach to be put aside, for the idea of *teshuvah* to assume a mystic dimension, and for its broader significance to become a central value in Jewish thought and morality.

Rav Bachya ibn Pakuda developed and expanded Rav Saadia Gaon's theory. The fact of the inclusion of a chapter on *teshuvah* in his book *Hovot ha-Levavot* (Duties of the Hearts) is evidence of the firm acceptance of Rav Saadia's principles. "Duties of the hearts," as

Rav Bachaye describes them, are spiritual *mitzvot* that a man experiences in his heart, and they are the links between his spirituality and the spiritual world of the divine. By their nature, the duties of the hearts do not include any kind of action. Those *mitzvot* that do include action the author counts as "duties of the limbs," and even Torah study and prayer are not "duties of the hearts," since limbs and senses take part in their performance. Against this, *teshuvah*, just like trust in God, and the fear and love of Him, is a purely spiritual value that is executed by man's soul alone. All the more is this so when it refers to an individual. The national and universal bases are almost entirely absent from Rav Bachaye's teaching, and his perception of *teshuvah*, like his understanding of the other "duties of the hearts," is absolutely individual. *Teshuvah* is the concern of the one who has sinned, who now wishes to turn back from his sin and to renew the spiritual link between him and his God.

The theories of Rav Saadia and Rav Bachaye in the tenth and eleventh centuries concerning *teshuvah* form a sort of "prehistory" to the Hebrew *teshuvah* literature of the Middle Ages. The beginning of the Hebrew literature of *teshuvah* is in the twelfth century, when Rav Abraham bar Hijja wrote his book *Higyon ha-Nefesh* (Logic of the Soul) and when Maimonides wrote his *Hilchot Teshuvah* as part of his *Sefer ha-Madda* (Book of Knowledge). These two works served as the infrastructure for the Hebrew *teshuvah* literature, which was limited by the principles of Jewish philosophy. And the foundations laid down by the philosophers who wrote in Arabic formed a basis for those who came after them and wrote in Hebrew. Only in the first half of the thirteenth century did a Hebrew *teshuvah* literature begin to develop that was not based on foundations of philosophy, and the first of those authors were, by all appearances, from the kabbalistic circle of Gerona—the head of them being Rav Jonah Gerondi, the author of *Shaarei Teshuvah* (Gates of Teshuvah). It should be mentioned that these thinkers, who were fiercely opposed to Jewish philosophy, accepted many of the principles of the teaching of *teshuvah* that had preceded them. In their eyes, *teshuvah* was tied directly to a particular sin, and they also stressed the spiritual character of the process of *teshuvah*.

From here it can be seen that we can point clearly to three stages in the development of the theory of *teshuvah* in Jewish thought and in the moralist literature in Spain and Provence. The first stage is the general works written in Arabic. These embodied detailed discussions on the teaching of *teshuvah* on the basis of the developing Jewish philosophy. The second stage we see is the beginning of the Hebrew *teshuvah* literature in the writings of Jewish philosophers who began to write in Hebrew in the twelfth century; and the third stage is the development, side by side, of philosophic *teshuvah* literature in Hebrew and *teshuvah* literature whose authors were opposed to philosophy but nevertheless accepted some of the principles laid down by rationalist thinkers who preceded them in this field.

Parallel with these stages of development another *teshuvah* teaching and *teshuvah* literature was being fashioned: that of the Ashkenazi (German) Hasidim, which is the subject of our further discussion.

II

The theory of *teshuvah* of the Ashkenazi Hasidim is known to us chiefly from *Sefer Hasidim* and from the sections devoted to matters of morals in the writings of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, the pupil of Rabbi Judah the Pious. Three generations of sages participated in the creation of the texts in our hands: The first was Rabbi Samuel ben Kalonymus, that is, Rabbi Samuel ha-Hasid, whose composition *Sefer ha-Teshuvah* was incorporated, apparently, at the opening of *Sefer Hasidim* in the version of the Parma ms. printed by J. Wistinetski and J. Freimann (*Mekitzei Nirdamim*, Frankfurt 5684). This version of *Sefer Hasidim* opens with an essay on matters of fear (of heaven), and this is followed by an essay dealing with *teshuvah*. As far as can be seen, Rabbi Samuel ha-Hasid was the author of these pieces.

The second generation of contributors was Rabbi Judah ha-Hasid, the principal author of *Sefer Hasidim* and the son of Rav Samuel. In the body of *Sefer Hasidim* are detailed discussions on matters of *teshuvah*. Apparently, these reflect the perception of Rabbi Judah ha-Hasid in this matter. Fragments of Rav Judah's teachings are woven also into the writings of his pupil, Rabbi Eleazar of Worms,

who represents the third generation in the Ashkenazi Hasidic movement. He devoted a detailed discussion to the subject of *teshuvah* in the frame of his *Hilchot Teshuvah* and set it at the beginning of his great halachic work *Sefer ha-Rokeach*. The discussion is also found in a special, separate pamphlet.

These three generations spread over a period beginning in the middle of the twelfth century and ending near the year 1230, when Rabbi Eleazar of Worms died (Rabbi Judah ha-Hasid died in 1217). The compositions of these three thinkers reflect a unity of opinions and a common tradition, even though there are significant differences, especially between Rabbi Judah ha-Hasid and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms. As we shall attempt to show below, there also existed, it seems, a layer of "prehistory" in the teaching of Ashkenazi Hasidic *teshuvah*, apart from these three generations.

The *teshuvah* perception of the Ashkenazi Hasidic movement is frequently described as a teaching of self-torment, opposed in its spirit to the spiritual perception of the sages of southern Europe. Indeed, it is a fact that in our medieval literature from before the sixteenth century we find no open and clear statements approving self-torture, except only in the discussions of the Ashkenazi Hasidim on matters of *teshuvah*. While the Ashkenazi Hasidim are occupied with day-to-day matters of moral behavior, their approach emphasizes a separation and a distancing of oneself from worldly pleasures. Yet we do not find teachings connected with real, deliberate self-afflictions. Against this, these things are found clearly in the field of *teshuvah*. Withal, it seems that there is some exaggeration in some of the descriptions of the self-torture of these Hasidim. Later, we shall attempt to place the theory of the Ashkenazi Hasidic torture in the area of *teshuvah* in a proper intellectual and historic perspective.

Rav Saadia Gaon's teaching with regard to *teshuvah* was known to the Ashkenazi Hasidim, albeit not first hand and not through Rav Judah ibn Tibbon's translation of *Emunot ve-Deot*, but thanks to the early paraphrastic translation of this book that was in their hands. A fragment of this translation, and specifically the passage dealing with paths of *teshuvah*, was included in *Sefer Hasidim* in the Parma ms. version. Yet the fact that they knew the Gaon's teaching did

not obligate them to accept it as it was; and in the writings of the three thinkers mentioned above, we find a completely different picture of the four paths of *teshuvah*. The consistency and uniformity with which the material is presented testify that it refers to one of the most common and most formed foundations among all the Ashkenazi Hasidim of the school of the Kalonymus family. Not only this, but in *Sefer Hasidim* we find not a few examples of teachings and stories in which these paths of *teshuvah* find concrete expression. It is clear, therefore, that we are not speaking here of a theoretical crystallization alone of a perception of *teshuvah*, but of the practical application of law that the teachers of the movement taught and that their followers practiced.

The four paths of *teshuvah* of the Ashkenazi Hasidim are well-known. Let us review them briefly. They are called *teshuvat havaah* (i.e., *bringing* himself into a certain situation), *teshuvat hagader* (literally, the "fence" *teshuvah*), *teshuvat ha katuv* (i.e., the *teshuvah* of scripture), and *teshuvat hamishkal* (*teshuvah* of "balance"). It is clear that no one is expected to conduct himself according to all four ways, since the four are made up of two pairs, and in each pair man has to choose one of the two. It follows that in order to turn in *teshuvah* the sinner has to act either according to *teshuvah* of *havaah* or of *hagader*, or in accordance with *teshuvah* of *mishkal* or of *hakatuv*—depending on the circumstance and the situation.

Similarly, it is clear that none of the four ways really deals with *teshuvah* in the meaning in which it is understood in the Jewish philosophic literature in Spain. The first two—*teshuvat havaah* and *teshuvat hagader*—deal with the ways in which a man should behave after he has turned in *teshuvah*, how he should conduct himself in his everyday life, and how he should demonstrate that he has repented with a perfect *teshuvah*. The last two—*teshuvah hamishkal* and *teshuvah hakatuv*—have to do with the punishment of the sinner, a punishment that the one who repents takes on himself in order to wipe out the transgressions that have clung to him, so as to be pure in his *teshuvah*. The process of *teshuvah* itself, the thoughts and speech of one who makes atonement, are not included in these four ways. Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, in his *Hilchot Teshuvah*, includes a

number of paragraphs dealing with *teshuvah* itself, and he even suggests, by way of example, "the *teshuvah* of one who returns with all his heart," and he details the repenting sinner's way of thinking and his confessions before God. In the writings of Rabbi Judah ha-Hasid and Rabbi Samuel ha-Hasid, these principles are little found. It follows that the Ashkenazi Hasidic ways of *teshuvah* emphasize aspects of the *teshuvah* process in its broad meaning, aspects that were less emphasized by the philosophers in Islamic lands.

Teshuvah havaah is concerned with the ability to resist temptation on the part of the one who "returns" in *teshuvah*. If, after his *teshuvah*, he finds himself in the same situation as that in which he sinned at first, in the sense of "the same place and with the same woman," and this time he prevails over his temptation and does not sin, he has now clearly proved that his *teshuvah* is complete and that he is weaned of his sin. Contrary to this, *teshuvah hagader* constitutes an opposite way: the obligation of the one who "returns" in *teshuvah* to distance himself far from everything near to or reminiscent of the abyss in which he had sinned, and to keep himself away from every temptation that might bring him to repeat his sin. If he had sinned with a woman, he must remove himself absolutely from seeing women; he should not go to the market, should not look at women's clothes, etc. That is to say, that man must build fence upon fence, and add boundary to boundary, so as to keep himself from every possibility of coming near to the subject of the sin he had committed and running the risk of repeating it. It is understood that no man can grasp both *teshuvah havaah* and *teshuvah hagader* at the same time. In order to put himself to the test of temptation in terms of *teshuvah havaah*, he has to break down all fences and boundaries. Not only must he approach the subject of his sin, but he must put himself into exactly the same situation as that in which he had sinned—and restrain himself. Against this, the one who follows the rule of the "fence *teshuvah*" in practice will not be able to reach a real trial of temptation, since he distances himself from every situation that might attract him to it. Thus, we face two alternative ways: the bold, dangerous way of *teshuvah havaah*, which incorporates a severe and serious trial in a matter in which he has already stumbled previously;

and a cautious, careful way, the "fence *teshuvah*," which prevents him from being tempted near to the sin and the danger of repeating it.

The danger in the way of *teshuvah havaah* is great for the *baal teshuvah* (the one who "returns"). He may not be able to withstand the temptation, and may repeat his sin; and this time he will be considered as an entirely deliberate sinner, since he has knowingly and deliberately "brought himself" to the sin situation by design despite his having already stumbled in it. His sin is therefore much heavier than it was the first time. But this danger is no less great for the moralist-teacher who writes these words. For if sinners pay heed to him and put themselves into temptation as a result of his teaching, and repeat their sin by design, the responsibility falls on the one who directed them to act in this way—that is, on the author of *Sefer Hasidim* or *Hilchot Teshuvah*. It is no wonder that the Ashkenazi Hasidim, in their reviews, played down *teshuvah havaah*; Rabbi Eleazar even adds that it "does not apply." Loyalty to the tradition of the generations compelled him to include this way among the other paths of *teshuvah*, but the caution of the moralist-teacher obliges him not to direct people to this way, because of the great danger connected with it. As distinct from this, the "fence *teshuvah*" was expatiated on in detail. There is no doubt that, at least in the appeal to the public in writing, the teachers of Ashkenazi Hasidim preferred it over the *teshuvah havaah*. They recommended the cautious and careful way, and preferred it over the daring and dangerous way connected with such great risk.

It should be emphasized that, with regard to these two ways, the "fence *teshuvah*" and the *teshuvah* of *havaah*, there is no place for the claim of "self-torment" as against "spirituality." There is no foundation in these ways for self-punishment; they represent ways of life chosen by spiritual considerations. Not in this area shall we find the basic difference between Ashkenazi Hasidism and those who taught the rabbinic-philosophic *teshuvah* in Spain.

III

The second set of ways, *teshuvah hakatuv* and *teshuvah hamishkal*, expresses the idea that there is no sinner who is not punished. These

two ways represent different theories in which the sinner takes upon himself a punishment that wipes out his sin and completes his return in *teshuvah*. In *teshuvah mishkal* ("balance"), which is the most important new concept of Ashkenazi Hasidism in the field of *teshuvah* teaching, the sinner is obliged to accept sufferings that balance out the pleasure that he had enjoyed from the sin. The religious and mystical perception of the Ashkenazi Hasidim saw pleasure in every sin by the fact of its being sin; contrary to this, every act of *mitzvah* and morality was linked, for them, with sacrifice and sufferings. He who succumbed to his inclination and chose the way of pleasure, the way of sin, had to balance it out by taking upon himself torments equal to the pleasure that he had enjoyed from the sin. (The question as to whether he had had enjoyment from the sin does not arise at all; the *fact* of the sin means a succumbing to man's corporeality, and this is linked with bodily and sensual pleasure.) The purpose of *teshuvah hakatuv* (scripture) is to ease the choice of the sufferings with which the sinner is to be tormented: If it is a matter of a Torah sin, for which the Torah has decreed the punishment, then the sinner must accept sufferings according to what is written (*katuv*), or similar to what is written, and thus he will fulfill willingly the punishment laid down in scripture.

In this perception, the ways of the Ashkenazi Hasidim parted from those of the teachers of philosophic morality in Spain. Maimonides, for instance, does not recognize the idea that sin causes pleasure. On the contrary, in his view sin is opposed to man's nature, and therefore no pleasure whatever can be wrapped up with it. In the view of most of the scholars of Spain, the nature of the heart of man is good from his youth. Sin is a perversion, the removal of which causes man benefit and enjoyment. Against this, the Ashkenazi Hasidim saw the tendency to sin as actually the human nature of man. For them, in order to walk in the ways of God, man has to subdue his body and his inclination, in the sense of "sanctifying the Name," and choose the way of Torah and *mitzvot*—which is opposed to his human inclinations.

In both *teshuvah hakatuv* and *teshuvah mishkal*, the idea of torments is included. Yet it is a fact that in the details in our posses-

sion from the writings of the Ashkenazi Hasidim concerning specific punishments for particular sins, almost all the directions deal with the fasts that man takes upon himself. Only with regard to the most serious sins, such as murder and adultery (of which it is difficult to believe that they were frequent and widespread in German Jewry of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth century, a Jewry suffering under the yoke of the constant evil decrees of the Crusades), do we find a punishment like exile from a man's own place. As a general rule, Rabbi Judah ha-Hasid and Rabbi Eleazar count the number of fasts (from morning to evening) that a man had to accept for each sin, and they number tens and even hundreds. It is difficult to classify this kind of fast: Is it "abstinence" or "torment"? A fast from morning to evening is surely the borderline between these two, and this is the principal practical way that the moralist-teachers of the Ashkenazi Hasidic movement recommend.

In the abovementioned writings of Rabbi Samuel ha-Hasid, Rabbi Judah ha-Hasid, and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, there is one passage that is repeated almost word for word in their discussions. It describes torment of an entirely different kind: sitting naked on hives of worms or bees in summer, or breaking the ice of a river and bathing in it in winter. These are found in a context close to *teshuvah hakatuv*, and by all appearances they are connected with this way of *teshuvah*. It is probable that the intention was that man should take upon himself torments "such as death imposed by the *bet din*" in a case in which he committed particularly serious sins. From the context, it seems that the intention was generally for the punishment of one who had sinned in adultery.

It was this passage that clothed the *teshuvah* teaching of the Ashkenazi Hasidim with the imagined garment of an extreme and picturesque theory of self-torment quoted by everyone who wishes to attribute this aspect to the teaching of the Hasidim. Yet it is surprising that the passage recurs unaltered in the writings of these three generations, as a kind of agreed text, by rote, without explanation or application, with no clear understanding of the conditions necessitating it and without it really being woven into the life of religion and morality set out by the teachers of Ashkenazi Hasidim. I

suggest that this passage should not be seen as a substantive and organic part of the practical teaching of *teshuvah* of the Hasidic philosophers. In my view, this is a remnant of an early tradition that reached them in a framework honored by them, and they incorporated it in their own words out of respect for all tradition—and Ashkenazi Hasidim were outstanding in their conservatism and their loyalty to earlier traditions. It simply expresses their main perception in the field of *teshuvah*, and is certainly not to be seen as directives and rules proposed to their contemporary reader. This is a plucked remnant, evidence of there having been before them an early tapestry of thought concerning *teshuvah* that had fallen away, but this relic remained and was restored in its own textual form in their writings on *teshuvah*.

The first scholars to give detailed investigation to Ashkenazi Hasidism and its teaching in our generation, Yitzchak Baer and Gershom Scholem, both suggested seeing the Ashkenazi Hasidic *teshuvah* teaching as a whole, and the self-torment in particular (that is, the abovementioned passage), as the fruit of Christian influence that had penetrated the world of the Ashkenazi Hasidim. Hence they too recognized the strangeness of these things within the Ashkenazi Hasidic context and sought to explain it as the fruit of an external influence. In the last fifty years, several attempts were made to identify a Latin, Christian source for this perception of *teshuvah* (the principal attempt was that of Prof. Ivan Marcus). These attempts yielded no fruit. To this day, we cannot point to the source from which the Ashkenazi Hasidim drew (if they drew) their perceptions concerning *teshuvah* and self-torment. Absence is no proof, and there is no way of showing that the Ashkenazi Hasidim were not influenced by Christianity. Maybe a source will be found in the future to prove it, but we are obliged to affirm that till now no proof has been found that there is such a source, or that the Ashkenazi Hasidic theory of torments is the fruit of Christian penitential influence in the center of Europe in the Middle Ages.

If it was not Christian influence, we are bound to assume that these things represent a pattern of behavior and thought that developed in German Jewry before Rabbi Samuel ha-Hasid and was lost

to us, and only a remnant of it was incorporated in the writings of the Ashkenazi Hasidim. It may be, however, that there is a "prehistory" to the Ashkenazi Hasidic *teshuvah* teaching, an earlier layer of thinking and conduct in this field, of which the sources describing it in detail, although committed to writing, have been lost to us. If this is indeed the case, the teaching of the Ashkenazi Hasidim will be found to be a sort of second layer in the history of *teshuvah* teaching of German Jewry, a layer that apparently displaced most of the theory of the previous layer and left only a tiny relic of the way of thought of someone who thought and behaved in this way before the middle of the twelfth century.

The possibility that this was indeed the development of the theory of *teshuvah* in Ashkenazi Jewry points to a further plank in this process. If the passage describing the torments linked with *teshuvah hakatuv* represents an earlier layer of thought about which the teachers of Ashkenazi Hasidism had reservations, we should be able to point to a clearly spiritualizing aim (relatively, at any rate) in the perception of *teshuvah* in this movement. If Rabbi Samuel ha-Hasid and Rabbi Judah ha-Hasid rejected the extreme self-mortification customary before them, and exchanged it for a more cautions approach of abstinence, they thereby expressed an aim of strengthening the spiritual foundation of *teshuvah* and limiting the physical part of its performance. If this is the case, one may see in the theory of *teshuvah* of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms a further step in this direction. By way of illustration, Rabbi Eleazar rejected the perception that confession in *teshuvah* had to be made before a scholar or a rabbi, and argued that confession is an inner, personal process between man and his God. It was he who also added prayer texts and expressions of regret in describing the process of *teshuvah*. Thus we learn that in spite of the great difference between the Spanish and the German scholars in this matter, the historic process that took place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries tended to bring them nearer to each other.

Whether or not this assessment is exact, we still have to affirm that in relation to the theories of *teshuvah* that developed in the Jewish people, especially from the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Spanish and German scholars are found to share a common position. For all of them, *teshuvah* is the cure for sin, for the particular sin of an individual; and it takes place mainly in a spiritual process of a turning back of the soul of the sinner to his God. The German scholars saw no possibility of completing the course of *teshuvah* without some physical cleansing of the bodily sin that man has committed—a view that was not accepted by the southern European scholars. Yet despite the two schools, the revolution in the perception of *teshuvah* that led to national and cosmic dimensions being attributed to it, a revolution whose principal proclaimer in our generations was Hareayah Kook, was still hidden in the far dim future.

ENDNOTE

The history of the Jewish concept of repentance and the place of Ashkenazi Hasidic traditions in its development have been studied in the last few years, first and foremost by the important monograph by Jacob Elbaum, *Repentance in the Heart and the Acceptance of Suffering: Studies in the Methods of Repentance of the Rabbis of Germany and Poland* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1992). The main emphasis in this study is on a later period, the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, but it includes meaningful discussion of the Ashkenazi Hasidic texts and their affect on later generations. Compare also the anthology by Shimon Shokek, *Repentance in Hebrew Ethical Literature, in Jewish Philosophy and in the Kabbalah* (in Hebrew) (Lewiston, Maine: Edwin Mellen Press 1995). Despite this, the main riddle is still unsolved: How did the formula, which we find complete in the writings of Rabbi Samuel the Pious in the middle of the twelfth century, evolve and crystallize; what were the sources; was there a Christian influence, and in which Latin works can it be found; how did they reach the Kalonymus school, etc. The study of the subject has benefited from the works of Ivan Marcus, especially his *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden: Brill 1981); compare his recent monograph, which concentrates on pietistic education: *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Me-*

dieval Europe (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1996). On the place of repentance in the *Sefer Hasidim*, see H. Soloveitchik, "Three Themes in the Sefer Hasidim," *AJS Review* I (1976), pp. 311–357. The printed and manuscript versions of the Ashkenazi Hasidic texts concerning repentance have been presented in the study by I. Marcus, "Hasidei Ashkenaz Private Penitentials: An Introduction and Descriptive Catalogue of their Manuscripts and Early Editions," in J. Dan and F. Talmage (eds.), *Studies in Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, MA 1982), pp. 57–83. These problems demand an extensive study of the Latin Penitentia literature and comparison to Greek Byzantine traditions.

SEVEN

The Book of the Divine Name by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms

SEFER HA-SHEM

The Book of the Divine Name, written between 1220 and 1225 in Speyer by Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah ben Kalonymus of Worms, is one of the most comprehensive works of Jewish esoteric lore in the Middle Ages, and it serves as a detailed, comprehensive example of the concept of the name and the concept of language in Jewish mysticism and esotericism in that period. It is probably the major esoteric work least studied in modern scholarship. It is extant in several manuscripts, yet it has never been printed and no detailed studies have been dedicated to it. It is the first book-length exposition of Jewish traditions and concepts concerning the tetragrammaton, and one of the most important keys to the understanding of the concept of language in Jewish mysticism.

Rabbi Eleazar of Worms (ca. 1165– ca. 1230)[1] was the most

[1]Very little is known about the date of his birth. An attempt to write a biography of Rabbi Eleazar has been made by Israel Kamelhar, who published a brief monograph on the subject (Rzeszow 1930; reprinted in New York 1975); this writer's

important disciple of the main leader and teacher of the school of esoterics and mystics to which he belonged, Rabbi Judah ben Samuel ben Kalonymus, known as Rabbi Judah the Pious.[2] This pair, teacher and disciple, are the core of a school of mystics and esoterics who belonged to the Ashkenazi branch of the Kalonymus family, which settled in the Rhineland probably in the ninth century.[3] This school is often called "Ashkenazi Hasidim," and other groups and circles of Jewish pietists, esoterics, and mystics who flourished in northern France and in Germany in the second half of the twelfth century and during the thirteenth are included in this appellation,[4] though

father, Jekutiel Aryeh Kamelhar, wrote a short biography of Rabbi Eleazar in his *Hasidim Ha Rishonim* (Waizen 1917). Both works include a bibliography of Rabbi Eleazar's works, though inaccurate and incomplete in many respects. Because of his fame as a prolific writer, several works were attributed to him that are not his. Concerning the date of his death, see my remarks in *Iyyunim be-Sifrut Hasidey Ashkenaz*, Ramat Gan: Massada 1975, pp. 86–87.

[2]Died in 1217; see below. He was the subject of a legendary, hagiographic biography that is included in the collection of stories known as the Brüll manuscript of ninety-nine stories, about a third of which are hagiographies of Rabbi Judah, his father Rabbi Samuel, and other Ashkenazi rabbis of the same period. See N. Brüll, "Beiträge zur jüdischen Sagen und Spruchkunde im Mittelalter," *Jahrbuch für jüdische Geschichte and Literatur* IX (1889), pp. 20–45. These stories were included, in a Yiddish version, in the great collection of stories in that language, the *Maaseh Buch* (see M. Gaster's edition, vol. II, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society 1934, pp. 317–396). Among the important studies of this subject see J. Maitlis, "The Hagiographic Cycle on Rabbi Judah the Pious" (in Yiddish), *Die Goldene Kait* 23 (1955), pp. 218–234, and S. Zfatman, "Maasehbuch," *Ha-Sifrut* 28 (1979), pp. 126–152. This manuscript is now in the National and University Library in Jerusalem, no. 83182; see my description in *Kiryat Sefer* 51 (1976), pp. 492–498. The text was published by me in vol. II of *The Theology and Ethics of the Ashkenazi Hasidim*, Tel Aviv: The Open University 1989.

[3]Concerning the family and its migration from Italy, see A. Grossman, "The Migration of the Kalonymus Family from Italy to Germany," *Zion* 40 (1975), pp. 154–185. Grossman is correct in his criticism of many inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the Ashkenazi traditions concerning this event, but his conclusion—that they are legends rather than records of historical occurrences—is too extreme.

[4]Concerning the Ashkenazi Hasidim in general, see G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd ed., New York: Schocken 1954, pp. 80–118; see also my two books on the subject: *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 1968, and *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature* (note 1), and I. Marcus, *Piety and Society*, Leiden: Brill 1981.

in most cases the phrase "Ashkenazi Hasidim" refers mainly to the Kalonymus school, and personally to Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Eleazar.[5]

Sefer ha-shem (the Book of the Divine Name) is one of Rabbi Eleazar's most extensive works (only his Commentary on the Prayers is a larger one), and the least known one: It has not been printed in whole or in part, and it is almost unquoted in medieval literature, both that of the Ashkenazi Hasidim and that of the early kabbalists. The reason for this is not that the book was not known; it constitutes the central part of the magnum opus of Rabbi Eleazar, *Sodey Razaya*,[6] which was a very well-known and often quoted work, extensive parts of which were printed in modern times. Yet the book is not mentioned—not even in the most detailed anthology of Ashkenazi Hasidic literature, the great commentary on the *piyyutim*, *Arugat ha-Bosem* by Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel of Bohemia, who quotes Rabbi Eleazar over a hundred times,[7] but not the *Sefer ha-Shem*. The attitude of contemporary and later mystics and esoterics to this book was decided, so it seems, by its unique character and extreme esotericism, as will be shown below. It is more surprising that modern writers neglected this work for so long: The recent enthusiasm for ancient traditions, secret rituals, and everything magical should have brought this book to the foreground, yet it seems that the difficulties in reading it made these writers choose easier targets. It is also surprising that the recent interest in secret layers of Ashkenazi Hasidic thought and the "discovery" of

[5]Other circles often included in this appellation are the Unique Cherub circle, of which we have about a dozen treatises (see my book from Tübingen: Mohr [Sieback]); the author of *Sefer ha-Hayyim* (the Book of Life), printed in a provisional edition by me in Jerusalem, 1977 and the *Sefer ha-Navon*; printed by me in *Kovetz al Yad*, vol. 16, part I (Jerusalem 1966), pp. 199–223.

[6]See notes 20–22.

[7]*Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem* was printed by E. E. Urbach in a scholarly edition in four volumes, Jerusalem: Mekizey Nirdamim 1939–1964. Vol. 4 is the Introduction, which includes a detailed study of the relationship between Rabbi Eleazar and Rabbi Azriel. Concerning these quotations, see my review of Urbach's edition, *Tarbiz* 34 (1965), pp. 201–301.

unimagined strata of meaning in their writings still left the book untouched. The reason may be that in this extremely esoteric work one cannot imagine "hidden" meanings: This is the place in which the greatest secrets are revealed, and therefore it is impossible to attach to it ideas that this or that writer thinks should be there. It is the most important expression of the inner core of the Ashkenazi Hasidic religious world, and it contains what they regarded as most secret, denying any possibility of attributing to them what a modern writer may wish. Thus, for instance, concerning the subject of creating an artificial human being, called *golem* in Jewish tradition,[8] there have been recent attempts to "pan-golemize" Ashkenazi Hasidic literature[9] or even Judaism as a whole.[10] The fact that this most esoteric work contains no recipes for the creation of a *golem* is a complete denial of the concept that this subject was extremely important, or important at all, in their works.[11] A study of *Sefer ha-Shem* is, therefore, an attempt to understand the Ashkenazi Hasidic self-concept of esotericism, and an attempt to follow their own relative emphases on esoteric subjects.

The place of this subject, the Holy Name of God, in the Kalonymus school's scheme of esotericism is clearly defined in Rabbi Eleazar's list of "Gates of Wisdom," a list that constitutes the back-

[8]The subject has been analyzed and presented by G. Scholem in his study "Die Vorstellung vom Golem in ihren tellurischen and magischen Beziehungen," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 22 (1953), pp. 235–289; English translation in his *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, New York: Schocken 1965, Chapter 5.

[9]See, for instance, M. Idel, *Golem*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press 1991, pp. 54–95.

[10]Y. Liebes, "Golem be-gematria Hokhmah," *Kiryat Sefer* 63 (1991), pp. 1305–1322.

[11]It should be noted that in the thousands of pages we have of the works of the Kalonymus school of Ashkenazi Hasidim, half of them written by Rabbi Eleazar himself, there is only one work—actually, one section of one work—dedicated to the *golem*—in Rabbi Eleazar's Commentary on the *Sefer Yezira*. To this can be added a later tradition, attributed to Rabbi Judah the Pious's *Sefer Gematriot*. Besides these, the whole subject is unmentioned. Similarly, in the dozen treatises of the Unique Cherub circle's works that we have, there is only a section in one work dealing with this subject, in the Pseudo-Saadia Commentary on the *Sefer Yezira*; in the other works it is completely unmentioned, even in the most esoteric and central work of this school—the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel*. On the *Barayta*, see A. Epstein, *Mi-Kadmoniot ha-Yehudim*, Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute 1957, pp. 241–248.

bone of his system.[12] The seventy-three "gates" mentioned in this list are the subjects and the methodologies of the Kalonymide's concept of the secret tradition and lore.[13] Most—actually, all—titles of the works of Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms are included in this list, and so is the subject of "the name."[14] Writing, this book was, therefore, for Rabbi Eleazar a fulfillment of his obligation to cover in his works the subjects included in that list, an endeavor that he started in 1217, upon the death of his master, Rabbi Judah, as is evident from his introduction to *Sefer ha-Chochmah*, which was written in that year.

One of the unique aspects of *Sefer ha-Shem* is that it may be the only major work by Rabbi Eleazar about which we do not know whether Rabbi Judah the Pious also wrote a treatise on it. Rabbi Eleazar wrote a commentary on the prayers, as did Rabbi Judah.[15]

[12]The list was published in my study "The Book of Wisdom of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms," Zion 29 (1964), pp. 168–181, from the Oxford mss. 1566, 1567, 1568, and 1812. It was also included in *Iyyunim*, pp. 44–57. Concerning this, see also J. Dan, "The Ashkenazi Hasidic Gates of Wisdom," *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati, Louvain: Peeters 1980, pp, 183–189; idem, "The Concept of Language of the Ashkenazi Hasidim," in L. Glinert (ed.), *Hebrew in Ashkenaz*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993, pp. 11–25: idem, "The Concept of Language of the Jewish Mystics in Germany," in K. E. Grözinger and J. Dan (eds.), *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter 1995, pp. 6–27; idem, "Prayer as Text and Prayer as Mystical Experience," in *Torah and Wisdom, Studies in Jewish Philosophy, Kabbalah and Halakhah in Honor of A. Hyman*, R. Link-Salinger (ed.), New York: Shengold 1992, pp. 33–47.

[13]Two-thirds of the list are midrashic methodologies, including the shapes of the letters of the alphabet, their numbers, their permutations, their proximity to each other, the numerical value of letters and words, the meaning of the vocalization marks, the musical signs and the adornments of the letters, acronyms, etc. The other third is dedicated to the following subjects: prayer, righteousness, esoteric lore, faith, love of God, fear of God, the *Sefer Yezira*, etc.

[14]Another item in this list is the "gate of names," in the plural. It seems that Rabbi Eleazar meant in this "gate" the names of the archangels and other esoteric names of celestial beings.

[15]Rabbi Judah's Commentary has been lost, but we have a description of it and many quotations in the treatise *Sodot ha-Tefillah*, written by one of his colleagues or disciples. See Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, vol. 4 (note 7) and my study "The Historical Rabbi Judah the Pious," in *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry: Studies*

He wrote a book on the soul, *Chochmat ha-Nefesh*, as did Rabbi Judah (this was probably the title of the anonymous work opening the large collection of treatises included in ms. Oxford 1566–1567)[16]. It is probable that Rabbi Judah wrote a commentary on *Sefer Yezira*, like Rabbi Eleazar, as well as works on the angels and the divine glory. But we do not have any indication of Rabbi Judah having written a book on the holy name (even the largely fictitious list of Rabbi Judah's works assembled by Israel Weinstock[17] does not include such a work). We do not know about an extensive treatise on this subject from any other school of Ashkenazi Hasidim, or earlier esoterics in general. In several cases these medieval writers followed a tradition that began with the esoterics and mystics of the talmudic period, in midrashic and *Hechalot* literature. Not in this case: No previous work of this nature is known to us, either in title or in text, before Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra's work.[18] On the other hand, commentaries on specific names, including the names of YHVH and the secret names of forty-two and seventy-two letters, are part of the traditions de-

Dedicated to the Memory of Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, R. Bonfil, M. Ben-Sasson, and J. R. Hacker (eds.), Jerusalem: Shazar Center 1989, pp. 389–398.

[16]This conclusion is reached on the basis of the Latin translation of this work, made by Flavius Mithridates for Pico de la Mirandola. The first part of this work was lost, but the second, which is extant, includes a reference to this title in the first part. I owe this conclusion to the late Prof. C. Wirszubski, who studied the Latin translations of Mithridates. See M. Steinschneider, "Johanan Alemano, Flavius Mithridates und Pico de la Mirandola," *Hebräische Bibliographie Blätter* 17 (1877), pp. 109–116.

[17]"The Treasure of Esoteric Secrets of Abu Aharon—Fact or Fiction?" *Sinai* 54 (1964), pp. 226–259. This article was written as a rebuttal of Gershom Scholem's criticism of the author's thesis concerning the ancient, eastern sources of medieval Jewish mysticism. Weinstock's original presentation was published in *Tarbiz* 32 (1963), pp. 153–159, and see Scholem's criticism, ibid., pp. 252–265. One aspect of this controversy related to the use of *gematria* in scholarly work. In the last article, Weinstock tried to prove that all the titles of Rabbi Judah's works included *gematria* hints of Judah's own name.

[18]Ibn Ezra's treatise is essentially a mathematical-theological one, within the framework of his neo-Platonic philosophy. The work was published by G. H. Lippmann, Fürth 1834 (a new printing in Jerusalem: Makor 1970). We know, however, that his writings had an effect on Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Eleazar. Rabbi Judah wrote a commentary on a section of Ibn Ezra's book, *Yesod Morah*, and this section includes, for instance, the term חכמת הנפש, used as a title of a treatise by Rabbi Eleazar.

veloped in the late gaonic period and continued in the early esoteric writings of the European Middle Ages. One example of the existence and influence of this tradition is found in Rabbi Eleazar's *Sefer ha-Chochmah*, which includes a detailed commentary on the holy name attributed to Rav Hai Gaon and other traditions.[19] The material was there: Rabbi Eleazar was the first to reorganize these traditions into a detailed, disciplinary structure. It is possible that Rabbi Judah taught these subjects orally (see below). Rabbi Eleazar was probably the first to put it in writing.

Sefer ha-Shem is not found in Hebrew manuscripts alone, as a separate work. It was copied only within the context of Rabbi Eleazar's *Sodey Razaya*. This title, which is numerically equivalent to "Eleazar" (thus all references to it as *Raziel*, etc., are erroneous), is the general title for five esoteric works, dealing first with the *Secret of Genesis*[20] and the Secret of the Chariot[21] (following an ethical introduction) and, after *Sefer ha-Shem*, The Wisdom of the Soul and the commentary on the *Sefer Yezira*.[22] The placing of this treatise expresses, even externally, its centrality. It is, by far, the most extensive work in this collection.

The place of this work in the world of the Kalonimide esoterics can be likened to that of the fourth chapter of *Shaarey Kedushah* in the works of Rav Hayyim Vital, the disciple of Isaac Luria in Safed. That chapter was also regarded as including such great secrets as to make it impossible to print, and it was seldom quoted and used. Later

[19]Concerning this section of the *Sefer ha-Chochmah*, see my analysis in The *Esoteric Theology*, pp. 105–118.

[20]סוד מעשה בראשית. This section, which is organized in the format of a commentary on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, was published in part in *Sefer Raziel*, Amsterdam 1701. The full text was published in Jerusalem in 1991, in a traditional, unreliable edition. To add to the confusion, the publisher gave the book the title *Sodey Razaya*, which is completely wrong; see above and see note 21.

[21]סוד המרכבה. This portion was published under the misleading title *Sodey Razaya* by Israel Kamelhar, Bilgoraj 1936.

[22]These two treatises were printed in Lvov in 1873 and 1876, published by modern Hasidic rabbi, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech of Dinow, who was particularly interested in the teachings of the Ashkenazi Hasidim. The first, *Chochmat ha-Nefesh*, was reprinted in an identical format in Safed in 1886.

generations, in both cases, accepted the author's esoteric attitude, and felt that they had to preserve these great secrets.[23]

While there is no Hebrew or Jewish precedent to such an extensive monograph on the divine name, there certainly was a Christian tradition that put the study of the divine names in the center of mystical speculation. The most important example is undoubtedly the treatise on the holy names included in the mystical library of the anonymous mystic known as the Pseudo-Dionysius of Areopagita.[24] This most influential work is dedicated to the place of the names of God—the biblical appellations and titles—in the world of the mystic. The impact of this work, however, was greater in Greek, in the Eastern Church, than in the Catholic western one, though the neo-Platonic western schools, like those of Scotus Eriugena (*De Divisione Naturae*), are close to it in spirit. It is difficult to know whether Rabbi Eleazar was aware of the existence of Christian parallels to his work. The use of the title *Chochmat ha-Nefesh*, so reminiscent of the Latin popular *De Anima*, is no proof, because both titles—*Sefer ha-Shem* and *Chochmat ha-Nefesh*—are derived from the works of Abraham ibn Ezra.

Similar works on the holy name were written by thirteenth-century kabbalists, but it should be noted that this subject was not central to the two or three earliest generations of kabbalistic literature; Rabbi Isaac the Blind, Rabbi Ezra and Rabbi Azriel of Gerona, and the generation of Nachmanides did not deal with it,[25] despite the fact that a section of the *Bahir* is dedicated to it, dealing especially with the names of twelve and seventy-two letters.[26] Only in the second half of that century, especially in the schools of the *Zohar*

[23]Below we shall try to compare them in content, and see whether there were similar elements in the teachings of these works that were regarded as pinnacles of esoteric lore.

[24]See my study *The Name of God, the Name of the Rose and the Concept of Language in Jewish Mysticism*, *in Medieval Encounters* 2 (1996), pp. 228–248.

[25]See G. Scholem, The *Origins of the Kabbalah*, edited by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1986, pp. 199–495.

[26]*The Book Bahir*, edited by R. Margaliot, Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute 1951, sections 110–112 et passim.

and of Abraham Abulafia, did this tradition take root, and in some cases, probably, there was a direct influence of Rabbi Eleazar's work.[27]

The only section of the *Sefer ha-Shem* that was studied in modern scholarship is the opening ritual, the handling down of the tradition of the name over the water. This is one of the most important rituals preserved in our sources concerning the way to pass on a secret tradition, and Gershom Scholem emphasized it in his study of the ritualistic element in the kabbalah.[28] I published the Hebrew text, as well as a brief analysis, about thirty years ago.[29] This ritual sets the work apart from others that do not have such a graphic, explicit description of the sanctity attached to the work, and there

[27]A school of kabbalists in northern Spain in the second half of the thirteenth century, that of the brothers Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac the sons of Rabbi Jacob ha-Cohen, claimed to have had contacts with disciples of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms and to have received their traditions from the sages of Ashkenaz. Most of this material is legendary (like the story about Rabbi Eleazar's death following injuries he received in the first flight accident in Jewish history: He would ride a cloud when hurrying to a distant destination, and once forgot the magical formula and fell down to earth and was injured; see Rabbi Isaac's treatise on the *Emanations on the Left*, published by G. Scholem in *Madaey ha-Yahadut* vol. 2 (1927), pp. 165–293, and an English translation in J. Dan and R. Kiener, *The Early Kabbalah*, New York: Paulist Press 1986, pp. 165–181; concerning the story of the "flight" see pp. 174–175). Yet some of these traditions may reflect some knowledge of Rabbi Eleazar's teachings, especially concerning the origins of evil; see my study "Samael, Lilith and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah," *AJS Review* 5 (1980), pp. 17–40. Concerning the traditions of this school in general, see J. Dan, "Badey ha-Aron and the Problem of Pseudepigraphy in the Kabbalah," in J. Dan and J. R. Hacker, eds., *Studies in Kabbalah and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1986, pp. 111–138.

[28]G. Scholem, "Tradition und Neuschöpfung im Ritus der Kabbalisten," *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 19 (1950), pp. 121–180 (reprinted in his *Zur Kabbala und ihrer Symbolik*, Zürich: Rhein Verlag 1960, and an English translation in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, New York: Schocken 1964). Scholem drew attention to the close similarity of the description of this ceremony to the one found in the *Sefer ha-Malbush*, an esoteric work found in several manuscripts (such as British Library 752 and others), and belonging probably to the gaonic period. The similarities are remarkable, but so are the differences, which tend to indicate that Rabbi Eleazar was not relying directly on this source. The connection between the ceremony and water is found also in *Kohelet Rabbah* 3:15.

[29]*The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 76–78.

is no doubt that these opening paragraphs contributed meaningfully to the work being regarded as supremely esoteric.

We are faced with a problem: If it is so secret, why did Rabbi Eleazar write it down? Writing necessarily means that the holder of a secret tradition cannot be certain who will know and use it and who will not. These paragraphs emphasize to a surety that this is prohibited: The secret of the name should be handed down only to a selected disciple, in this particular ceremony. Writing it down means that both elements are transgressed: The secret will be known to any reader,[30] and there can be no supervision regarding whether the ritual will be performed, or be performed correctly. Why did Rabbi Eleazar publish what his own introduction prohibits publishing?

The only authentic answer to this question is the one found in Rabbi Eleazar's introduction to his first work in esoteric literature, the *Sefer ha-Chochmah*, an introduction that is actually an apology for the writing of esoteric teachings. This apology is a little hollow, when we know that many of the subjects that the author apologizes for writing are those that have already been written down by his teacher, Rabbi Judah the Pious.[31] It is meaningful concerning *Sefer ha-Shem*, which was not. It should be noted that a part of the *Sefer ha-Chochmah* is dedicated to commentaries on secret names, so that

[30]In the immortal words, used in a similar situation, by Rabbi Isaac the Blind, the great kabbalist in Provence who was an older contemporary of Rabbi Eleazar: ספר הנכתב אין לו ארון. "A book that was written cannot be closed in a cabinet." This phrase is included in Rabbi Isaac's epistle to the kabbalists in Gerona who, according to rumors that reached the writer, were writing books on the kabbalah, in contradiction to their teacher's warnings. See G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 394–395 (the Hebrew text was printed by Scholem in his article "A New Document Concerning the Beginnings of the Kabbalah," in *Sefer Bialik*, Tel Aviv 1934, pp. 141-162).

[31]There is no doubt that Rabbi Judah the Pious wrote a commentary on the *Sefer Yeẓira* and a commentary on the prayers, as did Rabbi Eleazar. Rabbi Judah wrote a major work titled *Sefer ha-Kavod* (the Book of Divine Glory), which is the title of a section of Rabbi Eleazar's *Sod ha-Merkavah*. It is probable that Rabbi Judah used the title that was translated as *de anima* by Mithridates, similar to Rabbi Eleazar's *Chochmat ha-Nefesh*. Rabbi Judah wrote a treatise on the angels, and so did Rabbi Eleazar in his *Sod ha-Merkavah*.

we have some justification in assuming that the main point of Rabbi Eleazar's apology is directed toward this subject, the writing down of the secrets concerned with the holy names.

The main argument used by Rabbi Eleazar to justify this departure from the esoteric oral tradition is his loneliness: His teacher has just died; his own son died before that; he has no disciples; the end of the direct oral transmission has been reached. One cannot doubt the author's authentic feelings of doom and frustration, after more than a century of persecutions (similar words of doom are included in Rabbi Eleazar's description of the annihilation of the leading Jewish scholars during the first crusaders' onslaught on German Jewry in 1096; according to him, only a miracle saved one young scion of the family who succeeded in reviving it[32]). His own family, indeed, was murdered, so that the tragic circumstances justify the mood of this introduction. On the other hand, however, it is surprising to hear that Rabbi Eleazar had no disciples. We do know of several—such as Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel, the author of *Arugat ha-Bosem* (the fact that he was a disciple of Rabbi Eleazar in 1217, and did not join the school later, is attested by some indications that he received traditions directly from Rabbi Judah the Pious, that is, before 1217).[33] Rabbi Isaac of Vienna, the author of *Or Zarua*, a major halachic work that also has some esoteric-mystical elements, especially in the discussion of prayers, is another example.[34]

A possible explanation of this might be the fact that these disciples were "foreigners," scholars who came from other countries, while Rabbi Eleazar regarded as a rightful heir only someone from the inner circle of the Kalonimides. The whole problem of the attitude toward "foreigners" in this circle is a complex one; there are some indications that Rabbi Judah favored them over the "inner

[32]Ms. Paris 772, pp. 52a–53a. See my *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 16–17.

[33]See E. E. Urbach, Introduction to *Arugat ha-Bosem*, vol. 4, Jerusalem: Mekizey Nirdamim 1963, pp. 113–114.

[34]See H. Gross, "R. Isaak b. Mose Or Sarua aus Wien," *MGWJ* 20 (1871), pp. 248–264 (especially p. 253 and note 4 there, where the possibility of personal meeting between Rabbi Isaac and Rabbi Judah the Pious is indicated. If so, he also was close to this school before 1217).

circle"; many of them are mentioned in his son's work, which is based on the father's interpretations of the Torah, recording actual conversations and meetings.[35] It is possible, as Ta-Shema suggested,[36] that Rabbi Judah migrated to Regensburg, far from the great centers of Worms, Mainz, and Speyer, in order to be in closer contact with the scholars and students of the "East," after being disappointed by the non-response of his family to his radical ideas in both the mystical and the social-pietistic spheres. This disappointment was probably directed mainly toward Rabbi Eleazar, who, while following his teacher in many aspects, seems to have been in opposition concerning the most important subjects closest to Rabbi Judah's heart. It is possible that the rift between teacher and disciple took the shape of a conflicting attitude toward non-Kalonimide disciples, which Rabbi Judah cherished, while Rabbi Eleazar regarded as of second rank.

While this assumption may be a description of the historical attitudes of these two scholars, it is not an easy answer to the problem of the introduction to *Sefer ha-Chochmah*, because if we accept it as such we shall have to assume that Rabbi Eleazar preferred to write down the ceremony of the transmission and the actual secrets of the holy name rather than give them to, for instance, Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel. It is unthinkable that an anonymous reader should be preferred to the erudite Rabbi Azriel. A complete understanding of the situation in Speyer in 1217 eludes us, yet the result—first the *Sefer ha-Chochmah*, and later the *Sodey Razaya* including the *Sefer ha-Shem*—are present before us.

[35]This commentary, which is extant in different versions in ms. Ginzburg (Moscow) 82 and other libraries was published in Jerusalem in 1975 by E. Lange under the title *The Torah Commentary of Rabbi Judah the Pious*. The first edition was collected from the bookstores and censored, and a second edition was printed. It consists of paragraphs arranged according to the Torah portions, each discussing an exegetical problem. Within this framework Rabbi Judah's son, Moshe Zaltman, recollected his late father's explanations of many verses in the Pentateuch. He also recorded conversations that his father and he had had with other scholars; among these, the number of names originating from neighboring countries, especially in Eastern Europe, is a meaningful one.

[36]Israel Ta-Shema, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. 1 (1982).

The work itself includes no phrases or structures that may hint that the author reserves anything. There are no phrases like "This is a great secret" that cannot be explained in full, or the common Hebrew terms indicating that there is more to it, which the reader should understand or inquire elsewhere. It seems to be a complete exposition, extremely detailed and comprehensive, of an unreserved presentation of the author's analysis of the structure of the divine names and their meaning. There is, therefore, every indication that we may approach this work as a full exposition of Rabbi Eleazar's views on the subject.

The work is extant in the full manuscripts of the *Sodey Razaya*, the most important of which are Munich 81[37] and British Library 737 (the latter is a copy that was in the possession of the Cardinal Egidio de Viterbo, and his notations, in Latin, are found in the margins).[38] The differences between the manuscripts should be viewed in light of the fact that Rabbi Eleazar may have written several versions of the same work.[39] From a philological point of view, therefore, the reader of *Sefer ha-Shem* stands on firm ground when approaching this difficult text.

The first part of this extensive work is most meaningful for the understanding of the intricate relationship between the semantic and semiotic levels of the understanding of the tetragrammaton. A translation of this portion is presented and analyzed below.

[37]M. Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Handschriften der K. Hof und Staatsbibiliothek in München*, München: Palm 1985. The first part of *Sefer ha-Shem* is found also in ms. München 92, pp. 1-6, under the title עשר הויות. There are some additions in this version, and it is difficult to determine whether they were made by the author or added by a later writer. The relationship between these and other versions of the texts is the subject of a separate study. See note 39.

[38]G. Margalioth, *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Part III, London 1915 (reprinted 1965), pp. 5-10.

[39]This is a situation unlike that of Rabbi Eleazar's great *Commentary on the Prayers*, which exists in three radically different versions in the three main manuscripts—Oxford 1204, Vienna 108, and Paris 772. In the case of *Sefer ha-Shem*, it is evident that the British Library manuscript is the oldest and the most extensive, and it is the one used in the following pages.

FROM YHVH TO HVYH

The main subject of the opening section of *Sefer ha-Shem* deals with a terminological transition from the letters of the tetragrammaton, YHVH, to a new theological concept, that of the HVYH (literally, essence of being). This transition signifies Rabbi Eleazar's attempt to ascribe a semantic, theological meaning to the divine name, enabling him to perceive the powers inherent in the name as formative elements of divine and earthly existence.

The term *havayot* is one of the most important terminological innovations of Jewish esoterics and mystics in the early thirteenth century. It is not based on ancient talmudic-midrashic usage, nor is it found in *Hechalot* mysticism. Neither does it play any role in the early philosophical, rationalistic commentaries on the *Sefer Yezira*, like those of Saadia, Donnolo, or Judah ha-Levi. It is absent from the writings of rationalists who composed their works in Hebrew in the twelfth century, such as Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja and Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra. It is not used by Maimonides in his Hebrew writings. It does not seem to have played any part in the Tibbonite translations of philosophical works into Hebrew in the last third of the twelfth century. It is thus surprising to find it in a central place in the works of two esoteric writers in the beginning of the thirteenth century who knew nothing about each other—Rabbi Eleazar of Worms and Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham, "the Blind," of Provence.[40] Both of them use it in the context of commentaries on the *Sefer Yezira*, but the meaning of the term is different in their works. Rabbi Isaac the Blind did not receive it from the *Bahir*, in which it is absent, nor do we know about any previous tradition in Provence that could have been his source.[41] Rabbi Eleazar may have received it from

[40]The first analysis of this term was presented by G. Scholem in his studies of the early kabbalah; see his *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 264–265 et passim.

[41]Rabbi Isaac's *Commentary on the Sefer Yezira* was published by G. Scholem as an appendix to his *The Kabbalah in Provence*, Jerusalem: Academon 1963, ed. by R. Shatz. This Commentary includes such formulations as: ותחלת ההויות הניתנות ליחשב הן הפליאות בחוך החכמה, שהנתיבות הן פלאות בה . . . על ידי ההויות הקבועות והחקוקות בו יש בו כח להתבונן בהויות הקבועות הדקות שאין להם גבול . . . וכשנחתמו ביוד׳ הנן בשמו הגדול ונעשה בנין אחד, הם בשם והשם בהם, פנים בחוך פנים, הויות מחוך הויות (p. 1, lines 10–19). These and other statements indicate, first, that the *havayot* are connected with the tetragrammaton and with the six permutations of YHV in *Sefer Yezira* 1:13, and that they are conceived as intrinsic to God, preceding the process of the emanation of the divine powers, the *sefirot*.

Rabbi Judah the Pious (whose commentary on the *Sefer Yezira* has been lost), but there is no clear proof of that. The appearance of a key term, in similar contexts, in the writings of two great scholars at the same time, scholars who are distant from each other geographically and theologically, is in intriguing phenomenon. It should be explained by the existence of a common source, but this source—which should be a Hebrew one in order to serve them both—cannot be identified.

Three main characteristics are common to the usage of this term in the writings of Eleazar and Isaac. One is the association of this term with the innermost part of the divine realm; second is its close relationship with the concept of the *sefirot* of the *Sefer Yezira*; and third is the identification of the term with the tetragrammaton, as the term is just a minor change of the order of the letters of that name. Gershom Scholem suggested a connection between the term and the Latin theological term "essences," which is indeed very close in meaning to the Hebrew one. Yet, the fact that two out of these three characteristics reflect a definite Hebrew context suggests that even if there was a Latin influence on the formation and use of the term, it is remote, and that its adaptation to Hebrew was thorough.

Both Rabbi Isaac the Blind and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms dealt with this subject in the framework of their commentaries on the *Sefer Yezira*, which serves as a major source for their terminology. It is no surprise, therefore, that the text of that ancient, enigmatic work[42]

[42]*Sefer Yezira* had been the subject of intensive scholarly attention in the last century and a half, and it seems that in the last few years there is renewed interest in it. H. Graetz dedicated to it a significant part of his first study of ancient Hebrew esoteric texts, *Gnostizismus und Judentum*, published in Krotoschin 1846 (especially pp. 102–132). Among other studies, see Leo Baeck, "Die Zehn Sephirot im Sepher Jezira," *MGWJ*, 78 (1934), pp. 448–455. Gershom Scholem dedicated to it several discussions: *Origins of the Kabbalah*, edited by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press and the Jewish Publication Society, 1986, pp. 24–35 et passim; idem, *Zur Kabbala und ihrer Symbolik*, Zürich 1960, pp. 209–219; idem, *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem: Keter 1974, pp. 21–30; I. Gruenwald, "Some Critical Notes

is repeatedly quoted by Rabbi Eleazar in his analysis of the divine name, and key sections from its first chapter are paraphrased.

on the First Part of the Sefer Yezira," *Revue des études Juives*, 132 (1973), pp. 475–512; N. Séd, "Le Sefer Yesira," *Revue des études Juives*, 132 (1973), pp. 513–528; J. Dan, "The Language of Creation and Its Grammar," *Tradition and Translation, Festschrift für Carsten Colpe*, ed. C. Elsas et al., Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1994, pp. 42–63. An important study of the relationship between *Sefer Yezira* and *Hechalot* literature is Klaus Herrmann, "Feuer aus Wasser," *FJB*, 20 (1993), pp. 49–95. On the *Sefer Yezira* in the Middle Ages there is a vast literature; among recent publications see R. Jospe, "Early Philosophical Commentaries on the Sefer Yezira: Some Comments," *Revue des études Juives* 149 (1990), pp. 369–415; N. Séd, "Rashi et le Pseudo Sepher Yesira," in *Rashi, the E. E. Urbach Memorial Volume*, ed. G. Sed-Rajna, Paris 1993, pp. 237–250; Y. Liebes, "Sepher Yezira in the Works of Solomon Ibn Gabirol," *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism: The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Europe*. ed. J. Dan, Jerusalem 1987, pp. 73–124; J. Dan, "The Commentary on Sefer Yezira by Rabbi Judah of Barcelona," in *Masuot, E. Gottlieb Memorial Volume*, ed. M. Oron and A. Goldreich, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 1994, pp. 99–119; idem, "Three Phases in the History of the Sefer Yezira," *FJB*, 21 (1994). pp. 7–29. Among recent attempts to establish the place of this work in the culture of Late Antiquity, see S. Pines, "Points of Similarity Between the Exposition of the Doctrine of the Sefirot in the Sefer Yezira and a Text of the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies," *Proceedings of the Israeli Academy of Science and the Humanities*, vol. VII, no. 3, Jerusalem 1989, pp. 63–142; Y. Liebes, "The Seven Double Letters BGD KPRT, the Double 'R' and the Background of the Sefer Yezira," *Tarbiz*, 61 (1992), pp. 228–249 (and see a previous study of the same subject, S. Morag, "The Seven Double Letters BGD KPRT," in *The N.H. Tur-Sinai Festschrift*, Jerusalem 1960, pp. 207–242). We do not yet have a critical text of the *Sefer Yezira*. Prof. Peter Hayman, of the University of Edinburgh, has been working on a preparation of such a text. His suggestion concerning the structure of the work, its earliest versions, and his English translation are most valuable. See *Shadow, Newsletter of the Traditional Cosmology Society*, 3 (1986), pp. 20–38. Concerning previous textual discussions and suggestions, see I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of the Sefer Yezira," *Israel Oriental Studies*, 1 (1971), pp. 132–177; I. Weinstock, "Concerning the Text of the Sefer Yezira," *Temirin* 1 (Jerusalem 1972), pp. 9–61. See also P. Hayman, "Some Observations on Sefer Yezira: Its Use of Scripture," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 35 (1984); idem, "Sefer Yezira and Hekhalot Literature," in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism: Ancient Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan, Jerusalem 1986, pp. 71–86, English section); J. Dan, *Ancient Jewish Mysticism*, Tel Aviv 1989, pp. 144–153; idem. "The Religious Meaning of the Sefer Yezira," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 11 (1993), pp. 7–35. There is also a renewed interest in this work by traditional kabbalists; see, for example, A. Kaplan, *Sefer Yezira: Translation and Commentary*, York Beach, ME 1990. Compare also A. Finkel, "The Exegetic Elements of the Cosmological Work, Sefer Yesirah," in *Mystics*

Rabbi Eleazar begins the interpretation of the tetragrammaton by stating:

> YHVH, means: He was (HYH), and will be (YHYH), and is (HVH), and all three are imbedded in its writing and in its reading (that is; the combination of the three tenses is evident both in the spelling of the name and in its vocalization). Therefore it should have been written when its four letters are united, so that one letter does not precede another. This is why it is said: "The name of the evildoers will rot,"[43] because he did not want to study its writing. And in its being written YHVH it means that in the beginning "will be" (YHYH) will rule (literally, will be king), and in its middle "is" (HVH) is king, and in its end "he was" (HYH) king. This is what is said in the *Sefer Yezira*: "Their beginnings (i.e., of the ten *sefirot belimah*) is inserted in their end, and their end is inserted in their beginning and adheres to it"[44] [this last term, *davuk*, is not found in any version of the *Sefer Yezira*, and should be regarded as the author's paraphrase]. So He began in the end and the end in the beginning. So how is it possible to write one letter before the other? In the beginning of the *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*: "In the beginning, before the world was created, there was God alone and His name alone."[45] According to the meaning of the name the liturgical poet wrote: Then like everything you were, because [your old age?] in the beginning and your youth in the end, for the Creator, may His name be blessed and His will in eternity and He is invisible to the eye because He is

of the Book, ed. R. A. Herrera, New York: Peter Lang 1993, pp. 45–55. Concerning the dating of the work, it should be noted that the attempt by Nehemia Alony to prove that the treatise was written after the Islamic conquest and that it reflects Arabic concepts of language and grammar has not been successful. See his studies "The Anagrammatic System of the Sefer Yezira," *Temirin* 1 (1972), pp. 63–99; "Zunz, Kraus and Scholem—Their Understanding of the Sefer Yezira," *Sinai* 74 (1974), pp. 42–46.

[43]Proverbs 10:7. Rabbi Eleazar refers here to the statement in the Mishnah (Bavli *Yoma* 38b), in which the story is told about Ben Kmazar, who could write four letters with four pens held together in one hand; he refused to reveal his secret and therefore his name is cursed.

[44]*Sefer Yezira* 1:7.

[45]*Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*, beginning of Chap. 3.

not created, and everything is created but for Him, and he shows something visible, His glory, to the prophets, as we shall explain.[46]

This paragraph essentially presents the traditional explanation of the name, in the most accepted way in the Middle Ages. The name is understood as the combination of the Hebrew words for was, is, and will be, that are composed of the three letters used in the name. As current in that period, the name is connected with the phrase "He is king, He was king, He will be king forever," which was regarded as a paraphrase of the name. We find a passage stating exactly this in the *Bahir*,[47] in which the kabbalist demonstrates by this and other examples the centrality of the number three in the divine realm.[48]

Rabbi Eleazar's original addition to this basic interpretation is the claim that there is no "beginning" or "end" to the name. As it

[46] יהוה משמעהו הי׳ה ויהי׳ה והוה. ושלשתם נעוצים בכתיבתו בקריאתו. על כן דין הי׳ה לבהוב ד׳ אותיותיו ביחד שלא יקדים אות לאות. על כן אמר: שם רשעים ירקב, שלא רצה ללמוד על הכתב (סימן מחיקה על מילה זו) מעשה ובכתיבתו יהוה משמע בהחלהו יהי׳ה, ימלוך, ובאמצעיתו הוה, מלך, ובסופו הי׳ה, מלך. זהו האמור בספר יצירה: נעוץ החלהן בסופן וסופן בהחלהן נעוץ ודבוק. החחיל בסוף וסוף בחחלה. על כן איך יתכן להקדים לכתוב אות לאות. ובהחלת פרקי דר׳ אליעזר: עד שלא נברא (!) הקבה׳ (סימן מחיקה על מילה זו) העולם הי׳ה הקבה׳ ושמו בלבד. לפי משמעות השם יסד הפי׳ט: אז כעין כל אתה הי׳ה כי יוששך בראשית ובהרוחך באחריה, שהבורא ית׳ שמו בחפצו עד עולם. ונעלם מן העין לפי שאינו בראוי, והכל נברא חוץ ממנו, ומראה דבר הנראה, כבודו, לחוזים כאשר נבאר. (ms. British Library 737, 166b.)

[47] Margalioth edition, section 127.

[48] See J. Dan and R. Kiener, *The Early Kabbalah*, New York: Paulist Press 1986, pp 61-62. In this section the author of the *Bahir* divides the divine name, and the whole divine realm, into a system of triads, making three the key number. Rabbi Eleazar, though using forms of the name of three and four letters, does not emphasize the number three. This is a subject that evoked Christian interest in the tetragrammaton: The convert Petrus Alfonsi, in his *Dialogi contra Judaeos*, written in 1110, derived the trinity from the tetragrammaton, relying on an ancient Jewish source that he called Secreta Secretorum. See B. McGinn, "Cabalists and Christians: Reflections on Cabala in Medieval and Renaissance Thought," in R. H. Popkin and G. M. Weiner (eds.), *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews*, Kluwer Academic Publishers 1994, pp. 11-14. This source can be identified as the ancient *Raza Rabba* or *Sod ha-Gadol*, which served as a source for the *Bahir*, quotations of which were printed by G. Scholem in *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken 1948, pp. 212-238, and see his *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 106-123. This work was probably one of the earliest to analyze the tetragrammaton in detail, and may have influenced several medieval writers.

is, it starts with the future, goes to the present, and ends with the past. The meaning of this order, or, actually, the lack of it, is attested by one of the descriptions of the ten *sefirot* in the *Sefer Yezira*, picturing them as a closed circle, when the beginning is combined with the end and the end with the beginning, thus these terms lose any meaning. Rabbi Eleazar therefore states that essentially the name should have been written in a combination of the four letters into one, to prevent its "spreading" over time; past, present, and future in the divine name are one and the same, and they express an eternity undifferentiated by the tenses. Rabbi Eleazar finds confirmation for this view in the words of the late midrash *Pirkey de-Rabbi Eliezer*, which formulates the eternity of the name, and in a sentence from a liturgical poem, which states the same idea, God's transcendence of time, in the paradoxical placing of God's "old age" in the beginning and His "youth" in the end of time.

The name, therefore, is conceived of as a declaration of God's transcendence of time, but as an insufficient one. The union of the three tenses in the divine name could be conceived as the divine existence in time, from beginning to end. This concept would unite God with the movement of time and history in their entirety but will not state that he transcends it. He can be pictured as an eternal king, existing and ruling in every phase of history, constituting its center. Rabbi Eleazar wishes to free the name from time entirely. If the name were written in one combined letter, the passage of the tenses could not be distinguished in it. Because this is possible neither in writing nor in pronouncing, the name begins with the future, to break the sequence of historical time. The image taken from the *Sefer Yezira* demonstrates the inapplicability of the tenses and times to God: In Him, everything is united into one sequence, undifferentiated into specific periods. From the linguistic point of view, Rabbi Eleazar actually indicates the limitation of language, even when formulating the holiest and most esoteric name, to convey its real meaning. This is indicated, but remains unexpressed in the formulation of the letters of the name.

There are, in this passage, two points that lay the foundation for detailed discussions later. One is the implicit identification of the

name with the ten *sefirot* of the *Sefer Yezira*, and the second is the declaration that God is invisible because He is a creator and not a creature, and the visible element viewed by the prophets is the divine glory, which is to be described later.

The author continues:

> Why YHVH in the beginning of the name (i.e., why is it starting with the future form, with the *yod*), meaning "will be" (YHYH), and in its end "he" (H), meaning "He was" (HYH)? This is in order to make known that his essence (HVYH) is after the world as before the world, as in the end, when the world will come to an end. And when the world is (i.e., exists), His essence was not diminished, and the world did not intrude on Him, like wine in bread, like water in a sponge, like the sun in a window closed with glass, like the spirit in man.[49]

The concept of eternity expressed by the name is extended in this paragraph in two ways: First, on a terminological level, divine existence is expressed by the term HVYH (translated here as "essence"), thus His existence is identified with the name, both terms comprising the same letters. The second is conceptual: Divine existence in the middle phase, "the present" (HVH), which is closest in sound to "essence" (HVYH), is identified as divine immanence. God and His name existed alone before the creation of the world, and they will continue to do so after its end. Meanwhile, during the period in which the world does exist, it does not interrupt or change divine existence and essence in any way. The series of metaphors indicating the nature of divine immanence seems to be fixed formula: These are examples in which a substance does not change or diminish the existence of another. The world is imbued by divine presence like a sponge in water, like bread saturated in wine, like the glass in a window through which the sun shines, and, the final example, like the spirit filling a man's body.

[49] ולמה יהוה בראש השם, משמע יהיה, ובסופו הא, משמע שהיה, להודיע שהוייתו אחר העולם כקודם העולם, כמו בסוף לאחר שיכלה העולם. ובהיות העולם לא נחסרה הוייתו והעולם לא הפסיקו, כיין בפת, כמים בספוג, כשמש בחלון שכתום בזכוכית, כרוח באדם. (166b).

The parallel between the existence of God in the world and man's soul in the body is an ancient one; it is found in talmudic literature in several contexts. Rabbi Eleazar utilized it extensively in his treatise on psychology, *Chochmat ha-Nefesh*, which is included in the same work—*Sodey Razaya*—as *Sefer ha-Shem*. In that treatise, however, man is the focus, and the analogy is used to investigate the nature of the existence of the soul in the body. Here it is only a passing reference, one in a series of examples that demonstrate divine immanence. It should be noted, however, that the term *havayah* is used to describe both divine existence in the created world and the soul's presence in the body.

The next paragraph integrates this interpretation of the name with the cosmology of the *Sefer Yezira*:

> And why is *yod* in the beginning of the name? Because of Y HVH, that is, ten *havayot*: up and down, east and west, north and south, darkness and light, beginning and end. This is what [is stated] in the beginning of the *Sefer Yezira*.[50] Ten *sefirot belimah*, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven,[51] that is, they are no less than ten and no more than ten. And still they are all included in the *aleph*, which is the beginning of count [i.e., the first number]. Because of this, you should understand with wisdom and study with intelligence, meaning, put your mind in them and investigate them, and treasure and keep it, and establish everything clearly and place the creator in His abode, because He is the creator and maker of everything alone. The interpretation is that when you think in your heart about the creator of the world, how His place [literally, station] above, above, infinitely, and in the same way in front and in the back, behind east and west, north and south, up and down, [spreading] infinitely in every direction. Or you will think from the beginning, from when, or toward the end, until when is He. Or you should think how great is the light which is with Him, or how He is in the "depth" of darkness. When you shall think about all this, and establish everything clearly, and give your heart, because He

[50] *Sefer Yezira* 1:5.
[51] Ibid., 1:4.

created everything and there is none besides Him, and He is in everything and rules everything.[52]

Rabbi Eleazar presents here a paraphrase and a commentary on three sections of the *Sefer Yezira*, chapter 1. The identification between the name and the descriptions of the *sefirot* in the *Sefer Yezira* is established in the beginning of the paragraph: the name can be read as Y HVH, that is, ten *havayot*. These ten *havayot* are then easily identified with the ten *sefirot*, and from now on the two terms are used as if they were identical in meaning. This interpretation of the name is identified with the *Sefer Yezira* statement that the number of the *sefirot* must be ten, no more and no less (a concept that shaped meaningfully the images of the divine world in the kabbalah throughout the many centuries of its development). And as *Sefer Yezira* emphasizes several times that the ten *sefirot* have one center, Rabbi Eleazar introduces the concept of the *aleph*, the first letter, which is the number one, a concept that will be utilized later.

Rabbi Eleazar goes on to quote the list of the *sefirot* as presented in *Sefer Yezira* 1:5, identified as the ten cosmic directions or the five cosmic dimensions. There are, however, two most meaningful deviations from the text of the *Sefer Yezira*. In the ancient treatise, these ten *sefirot* are characteristics of the cosmos, not of God; God resides in the center, and from Him the universe expands indefinitely in these ten directions. In Rabbi Eleazar's presentation, these directions become a description of divine infinity; God is infinite in all these directions. This is part of the identification of the *sefirot*, which need not be divine entities, with the *havayot*, which must be divine, constituting together with their number the holy tetragrammaton.

[52] ולמה יו"ד בחחלת השם, לפי ש' הוה, כלומ' ש' הוייתן מעלה ומטה מזרח מערב צפון דרום חשך אור ראשית אחרית, והו בראש ספר יצירה. עשר ספירות בלימה, ש' ולא ט', ש' ולא י"א, כלומ' שאינם לא פחו' מי' ולא יותר מי', ואעפ"כ כן כולם כלול' בא' שהוא ראש למניין. על כן הבן בחכמה והבן בבינה, כלומ' שים דעתך בהם וחקור בהם וצור ושמור והעמד דבר על בוריו, והשב יוצר על מכונו, כי הוא יוצר ובורא לבדו. פי', כשתחשוב בלבבך על בורא עולם, היאך הוא חנייתו למעלה למעלה עד אין קץ, וכן לפנים ולאחור, לאחורי מזרח ומערב צפון ודרום מעלה ומטה, עד אין קץ בכל מקום, או תחשוב מראשית, מאימתי, או לאחרי, עד אימתי הוא, או תחשב היאך נדולה האורה אשר עמו, או היאך הוא בעובי החושך, כשתחשב כל זה העמד הדבר על בוריו ותן ללבבך כי הוא יצר הכל ואין זולתו, והוא בכל ומושל בכל. (166b–167a).

This is a process parallel to the one in which the early kabbalists transformed the *sefirot* of *Sefer Yezira* into manifestations of the divine powers.[53]

The second difference is textual: Instead of using the *Sefer Yezira* terms of good and evil for the last pair of directions, Rabbi Eleazar presents the terms light and darkness. This deliberate change should be regarded as an intentional paraphrase; there is no version of the *Sefer Yezira* that includes these terms, and all the texts we have agree that the fifth dimension is the one of good and evil. In the next paragraphs Rabbi Eleazar uses the authentic terms, so that there is no doubt that he had before him the same text we do today. Light and darkness are, therefore, Rabbi Eleazar's interpretation of at least one aspect of the *Sefer Yezira* terminology. In the more detailed explication of the subject in the second half of this paragraph, Rabbi Eleazar clarifies to some extent what he means by these terms. All the ten *sefirot*, according to him (basically, in agreement with the literal meaning of the ancient text), indicate infinity: God is infinite in time and in space, and also the great light that resides with Him is of infinite brightness. Concerning darkness, however, he states: "How He is in the depth, or the thickness, of darkness." This term "thickness" (*ovi*) reveals the true meaning of the concept: In medieval Hebrew discourse, the opposite of "thickness," "thinness," is identical to "spirituality." The "thinner" something is, the more spiritual it is. "Thickness" indicates materiality. "The thickness of darkness" should be understood as a description of matter (and, indeed, such a definition is found in the next paragraphs). This tenth *sefirah*, or direction, defines the infinity of divine presence within matter. God is present even in the deepest and darkest corners of existence, within matter itself.

This could be regarded as just one more statement of divine

[53] A recent attempt to ascribe this transition to Shabbatai Donnolo, the tenth-century commentator on the *Sefer Yezira*, is completely wrong: The *sefirot* in Donnolo's concept are purely universal and not divine. See E. Wolfson, "The Theosophy of Shabbetai Donolo, with Special Emphasis on the Doctrine of Sefirot in *Sefer Hakhmoni*," in B. Walfish (ed.), *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume* II, Haifa: Haifa University Press 1992, pp. 281–316.

immanence, were it not for the fact that it is presented as the meaning of the *Sefer Yezira* term "evil." The conclusion is unavoidable: Rabbi Eleazar identifies here matter with evil, and insists that God's immanence is present in the depth of this evil-material realm in the same way that it is present in every aspect of existence. The duality of light and darkness is identified with that of good and evil, and with that of spirituality and materiality. This could be understood as standard medieval neo-Platonism, were it not for the fact that one central aspect of the neo-Platonic equation is missing: that of ontology. The standard neo-Platonic formula equates matter with non-existence, because true existence is purely spiritual. In the statements of Rabbi Eleazar on this subject there is no indication of any doubt concerning the full existence of matter—or of evil—while most neo-Platonists defined evil as an absence, rather than as an entity. A straightforward identification of matter and evil when they are considered ontologically positive is rare in medieval thought. It is even rarer if we take into account the fact that Rabbi Eleazar is describing here divine characteristics. The ten *sefirot* are aspects of the divine presence.

Rabbi Eleazar's position does not, of course, identify matter and evil as divine attributes. Rather, he sees all the *sefirot* as directions in which infinite divine presence is to be found, but not identified with. God is infinitely in the east, but He is not the east; He is present in the great light "That is with Him," but He is not that light. In the same way, God is in matter (and, therefore, in evil), but He is neither matter nor evil. In fact, Rabbi Eleazar, in a somewhat unusual formulation, follows the Saadia Gaon's concept of divine presence in the universe: Nothing can stop or hinder His presence. He is in everything, and seas and mountains cannot stop Him. One of the most important formulations of this attitude is found in the *Shir ha-Yihud*, the Hymn of Divine Unity, which was composed in the circles of Ashkenazi Hasidim a generation or two before Rabbi Eleazar.[54] The hymn includes (in the portion that is

[54]Concerning this work and its history, see my Introduction to the facsimile edition of the book, Jerusalem: Magnes Press and the National and University Library 1982.

titled in a later recension as "For Tuesday") the unequivocal statement that nothing can stop divine presence, not even filth, and that, as Saadia says, it is like the rays of the sun that penetrate everywhere without being affected by their surroundings. God is present in matter, filth, and evil, without becoming part of them or being affected by them.

This concept of divine immanence necessarily denies divine intervention in the realms that it penetrates. If God is not affected by His surroundings, He is also unable, on this level at least, to affect them. This is a "neutral" divine immanence, which preserves the theological concept of divine omnipresence without postulating divine dominance. As will be evident below, the Ashkenazi Hasidim developed a second form or level of divine immanence that is affected by reality and does influence it.[55]

The next paragraph is a partial repetition of the previous one, this time stating the same concepts as subjects prohibited to contemplate:

> "Ten *sefirot belimah*. Close your heart from thinking, close your mouth from talking about ten things, for if you think about the Creator of the world, about His abode [or, station]—how He is above or below, or toward the east or the west, the north or the south—or about the light, which is the air in heaven, or in the thickness of the heaven, or about the beginning or about the end—about any of them that you may think, close your heart, remove thought from your heart, and close your mouth from talking, and return to the ritual of God's worship, like the holy beasts, who, when they wish to straighten up, they immediately "to and fro" humble themselves and bow. And a covenant has been enacted on this subject of the ten "measures," that all the scholars will not know the end of the ten havayot."[56]

[55]Concerning the concepts of immanence of the Ashkenazi Hasidim see my *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 66-88.

[56]עשר ספירות בלימה, בלום לבך מלהדהר בלום פיך לדבר, אחר י׳ דברים שאם תחשב על בורא עולם על חנייתו היאך הוא למעלה או למטה או כלפי מזרח או כלפי מערב או צפון או דרום, או על האור, הוא האויר ברקיע או בעובי הרקיע או על ראשית או על אחרית, על איזה מהם שתחשב בלום לבך הסר מחשבה מלבך וסתום פיך מלדבר ושוב לעבודת הקבה׳ כחיות כשרצות לזקוף קומתם מיד רצו ושוב וכופפין קומתם ומשתחוו ועל דבר זה של י׳ מדות נכרת ברית שלא ידעו כל החכמי׳ סוף וקץ לי׳ הוייתן. (167 a-b).

Rabbi Eleazar follows in this paragraph the statement of the *Sefer Yezira* that prohibits contemplation of the ten *sefirot*.[57] In the ancient treatise, as well as in Rabbi Eleazar's paraphrase, a pun is employed: to "close," or "shut up," in rabbinic Hebrew is *blom*, which can be taken as being derived from the same root as the term *belimah*. Many readers, in the Middle Ages as well as in modern times, have understood this pun as if it were an indication—by the ancient author himself—of the meaning of *belimah*: something that one should not talk or think about. This conclusion is completely unjustified: The author seems to have used the pun of the two similar words, but this does not indicate that they have the same meaning.

The behavior of the holy beasts is taken as an indicator of the correct way to behave: to remain humble, not to raise one's head, not to observe or contemplate. The Hebrew term *razo vashov*, taken from Ezekiel's description of the beasts in the chariot[58] and repeated in the *Sefer Yezira*, has been adopted by many Jewish mystics and esoterics as an expression of the dynamic character of the divine realm. Kabbalists interpreted it as the upward and downward movement of divine entities; modern Hasidism saw in it an indication of the dynamic movement of the *tzaddik* from the divine world to the earthly realm and vice versa. Rabbi Eleazar explains it concerning the celestial beings' desire to know the secrets of their own abode: On the one hand they inquire, but on the other they are forbidden to ask or to know too much. Concerning the last sentence of this

[57]*Sefer Yezira* 1:8. There is some similarity between Rabbi Eleazar's paraphrase of *Sefer Yezira*'s prohibition and the opening of another important esoteric text of this period, the *Barayta* attributed to the fictional figure Joseph ben Uzziel, which served as a basis for the speculations of the Unique Cherub circle in the late twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth century. It reads (ms. Oxford 1947, p. 50): אמר מושל ביראה אלהים לי דבר צור ישראל הזהר בלום פיך מלדבר ולבך מלהרהר בעשר שרשים ואלו הם מהו רוח אלהים, איך נבראה ארץ, איך נברא כסא הכבוד . . . אילו " שרשים שאין לדבר ולהרהר בהם, ואילו הן מידותיהן שאין לדבר בהן ולהרהר: מה היה טרם הבראה אילו " שרשים שאין לדבר ולהרהר בהם, ואילו הן מידותיהן שאין לדבר בהן ולהרהר: מה היה טרם הבראה ומה אחר יום הרין לסוף, מה היא הטובה הגנוזה לצדיקים ומה הרעה הגנוזה לרשעים, ומה הוא המקום המרוחק למטה ולמעלה ולמזרח ולמערב ולצפון ולדרום . . .

[58]Ezekiel 1:14.

paragraph, it is unclear who are the scholars who are forbidden to know these secrets, and whether Rabbi Eleazar and the readers of this book are included in this "covenant" of esotericism.

Rabbi Eleazar did not repeat the list of ten *sefirot* in this section exactly as he stated it in the previous one. The first eight are identical, but concerning the last two, good and evil, he presented a more elaborate formula. He identifies the "light" of that section with the "air" in the firmament. It should be noted that these two words, *or* and *avir*, are almost identical in Hebrew script; only a tiny *yod* differentiates between them. From the point of view of meaning, they are also almost identical: "Air" means something intangible, spiritual; so does light. This enables Rabbi Eleazar to treat them as synonyms (especially as in the *Sefer Yezira* itself the terms "air" and "spirit" are the dominant ones; "light" is not mentioned, despite its centrality in the description of the creation in Genesis). However, the "air" or "light" in the firmament is the equivalent of "good" in the list in the *Sefer Yezira*; the equivalent of "evil" is "the thickness of the firmament," the material aspect in the celestial realm. It is meaningful that in Rabbi Eleazar's presentation the connection between the term "evil" and the kind of evil that people know, the kind so frequently encountered in earthly life, is weakened considerably when the term is taken to denote the supposedly pure matter of the celestial realms.

The next paragraph is a more elaborate explanation of the meaning of the ten *havayot*:

> *Yod* is in the beginning of the name, and it is the smallest of all the letters. This is to indicate that nothing, [big] or small, can be hidden from Him. He knows the thought before it is being thought, and he tells the end from the beginning.[59] This is why everyone dreams at night what he has done during the day. And light for the righteous. The depth of evil—this is the evil He will do to the sinners, it is impossible to know the depth of this. The depth of good—the time to give birth; the depth of evil—the time

[59]Isaiah 46:10.

to die.[60] It is impossible to investigate [and understand] His ways, because He exists [HVH] with good and with evil, and He knows how to lead His creatures in His "measures," This is the meaning [of the verse]: Can you know the purpose of His [doings]?[61] His *havayot*, His wisdom . . . as they will be, as they are, as they were.[62]

Two points are added to the previous picture; first, that divine transcendence of time means that the future is open before God as is the past. Therefore, He has knowledge of everything that will happen; concerning every beginning, He knows the end. This means that everything is preordained, that existence is predetermined to the minutest detail. The author connects this with the phenomenon of dreams, and this is elaborated in the next paragraph. Second, Rabbi Eleazar uses for the first time in this work the term "evil" as found in the *Sefer Yezira*, and gives another interpretation of the good evil dimension: "Good" is the light reserved as a reward to the righteous (possibly a reference to the "hidden light," the light created in the first day and, according to talmudic tradition, "hidden for the righteous for the future"), while evil is the "evil" and "darkness" that God will inflict on the evildoers. The author interprets the duality of good and evil in the *Sefer Yezira* with the dualities expressed in the famous list of Ecclesiastes, beginning with "a time to give birth, a time to die." In the biblical work these are depicted as the extremes that human existence has to tolerate in this world; Rabbi Eleazar describes them as part of the divine essences. He leaves no opening whatsoever for a dualistic concept of God or of any level of existence, by emphasizing that God "is" (HVH) within good as within evil. The next phrase may indicate that both are among God's "measures," *midot*, the ancient rabbinic term for divine characteristics.

[60]See Ecclesiastes 3:2.

[61]Job 11:7.

[62]" בראש השם והיא קטנה מכל האותיות, לומ' אין דבר גדול וקטן שלפים ממנו. והמחשב' טרם יחשוב יודע מגיד מראשית אחרית. לכך הכל חולם בלילה מה שעשה [צל': מה שיעשה] ביום, ואורה ליצקים, עומק רע, שיעשה לרשע" רע וחשך אין להעמיק לדעה עומק טוב עת ללדת ועמק רע עת למות, אין לחקור דרכיו כי הוא הוה עם בטוב עם ברע ויודע לנהג בריותיו במדותיו, זהו אם עד תכלית שרי המצא, הוייתן דעהו, כמו שיהיה, כמו שהוה והיה. (167b)

The subject of divine determinism in the cosmos is developed in the next paragraph:

And before the world [was created] he decreed everything. And He decrees everything in a single moment, beginning, end, and middle, and He exists (HVH) for everything. He has the ability to do all the different needs of the creatures, all that is written in the biblical portion of "time for everything" [Ecclesiastes], and all the matters of the world, to bring forward great and wonderful new things [i.e., miracles] that were done and that were never created. And He exists [HVH] with all the thoughts of the heart and with all that is done. You should know that this is how it is, for if a person sees in his dream an oven full of fire, or sees a frog, and there is no scholar in the world who can trust himself [if this happens to him] from having a quarrel the next day. A person should immediately ask in prayer that the dream should be turned into a good one, so that he will be angry for the sake of heaven, against the transgressors of God's will.[63]

It is evident that the term *havayah* is consistently used by the author to express divine presence and divine will. Theologically, this passage, like the context of this discussion as a whole, is designed mainly to deny any possibility of assuming that things may occur in the world without God's will. If something exists, or even potentially can exist, it is the result of a divine decree, and this decree cannot be refused or overcome. The fact that opposites exist in the world does not deny the solitary source from which they come. A close terminological association is created between the term "decree" (*gezerah*) and the terms *hava* and *havayah* that is developed elsewhere into the term *havayot ha-gezerah*, one of the most important concepts of Ashkenazi Hasidic theology.

The deterministic view of existence is integrated with the con-

[63]וקודם העולם גזר הכל, ונוזר הכל ברגע אחד, אחריה וראשית וחוזך, והווה לכל דבר. יש יכולת לו לעשות כל מיני צורך הברי־אוה (!) כל אשר כחב בפרש' לכל זמן וכל ענייני עולם לחדש נדולות ונפלאות אשר נעשו ואשר לא נבראו. והוה עם כל הרהורי לב ועם כל מעשה. והדע לך שכך הוא, שהרי אדם רואה בחלום חנור מלא אש או רואה צפרדע ואין חכם בעולם שיכול לאמין את עצמו מלעשות מריבה למחר. ויש לו לאדם לבקש מיד הפלה להפוך החלום לטובה, ויכעס לשם שמים על עוברי רצונו. (167b)

cept of the nature and meaning of dreams. In the previous paragraph a sentence was dedicated to this subject, which indicates that there is a connection between the dream and man's deeds during the day. There, however, it is not clear that the author describes dreams as prophesying and deciding the future; the sentence could be read as a statement that a person's daily experiences shape his dreams. In this paragraph, however, there is no ambiguity in the concept of dreams: They express the divine decree before something happens, and there is no way in which their coming true can be prevented. The knowledgeable scholar, who knows the secret symbolism of dreams and understands that if he dreamed about a fiery oven he is going to be angry and provoke a fight next day, cannot use this knowledge to prevent this from happening. The only thing he can do is pray that God will enable him to use his anger for a good, Godly purpose rather than for an evil one, and that his anger be directed toward sinners and not toward the righteous.[64] But even now he can only pray; God has decreed what will happen—He revealed it in a dream, and it will happen.

Rabbi Eleazar is the third writer, of the third generation of Ashkenazi Hasidism, to discuss dreams and view them as expressions of divine decrees. The concept is clearly stated in a passage in the *Sefer Hasidim*, which was written, most probably, by Rabbi Samuel ben Kalonymus the Pious, Rabbi Judah's father. The works of Rabbi Judah include this element as well, and Rabbi Eleazar further developed it in this work and especially in his *Chochmat ha-Nefesh*, his treatise on psychology. During these three generations nothing meaningful changed in the basic concept. Rabbi Samuel the Pious also insists that the only thing a person can do when interpreting a

[64]This idea had a long history in Jewish mystical thought in the next few centuries, and had its most visible impact on the modern Hasidic movement. The Besht, its founder, and his disciple, Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezeritch, developed a detailed system of transformation of evil thoughts and inclinations into good ones, often using the example of the transformation of evil anger into a justified one against sinners. The context, however, is usually that of "foreign" thoughts occurring during prayer, rather than a decree expressed in a dream. See I. Tishby and J. Dan, "Hasidic Thought and Literature," *The Hebrew Encyclopedia*, vol. 17, pp. 784–799.

sign indicating the future (in his case, it is the itching of a certain part of the body; an itch in the nose, for instance, indicates unavoidable anger or fighting) is to pray that God will turn it to the good.[65] The deterministic worldview of these writers includes human actions, human intentions, and human thoughts. The most detailed description of this concept is found in Rabbi Judah the Pious's *Sefer Malachim* (Treatise on Angels).[66] The first part of this work deals with the effect of angels on human everyday life (the second part is dedicated to archangels and celestial powers). Divine decree, as Rabbi Judah describes it, is carried out by hosts of angel-messengers that are sometimes called "instigators" (*mesitim*). In one revealing paragraph, which was partially copied in the *Sefer Hasidim* from this treatise, Rabbi Judah describes the work of these angels concerning dreams: In the early hours of the morning, when a person is drowsy, the angels sit inside his ear and whisper to him, and he cannot distinguish between his own thoughts and those inserted in his mind by the angels. Even though these angels perform a duty as divine messengers, Rabbi Judah categorically states: "A person is punished for the

[65]*Sefer Hasidim*, par. 14 (*Das Buch der Frommen*, Wistinetzki-Freimann ed., Frankfurt am Main: Wahrmann 1924, pp. 13–14). The concept of determinism in this section, probably the earliest presentation of such a concept in Jewish thought in the Middle Ages, is rather complex. On the one hand, the impact of the divine decree on human life is absolute, deciding not only his earthly fate but also his religious standing. Rabbi Samuel states: "Everything is decreed from above, how many thoughts he will think, how many of them imposed, how many of them of his own volition, how many good ones and how many bad ones." In such a structure religious freedom and choice between good and evil is impossible. Yet, according to the same passage, "The decree is modified according to his will," that is, divine decree is not arbitrary but dependent upon an individual's autonomic inclinations. If so, the decree itself is not a cause but a result of man's religious characteristics, and should be regarded as a part of the reward and punishment system. This is a very difficult concept, because if man's innermost nature decides his fate, this nature, the soul, is certainly imposed.

[66]I published this treatise in *Da'at* 2–3 (1978–1979), pp. 99–120, from Oxford ms. 1567; see the discussion there. In Rabbi Eleazar's *Sod ha-Merkavah*, the second treatise in the *Sodey Razaya* collection, the second part of Rabbi Judah's work, dealing with the celestial powers, is paraphrased. See I. Kamelhar's edition, *Sodey Razaya*, Bilgoraj 1936, pp. 6–8.

thoughts of his instigators in the same way [that he is punished] for the thoughts of his own heart."[67]

The next subject of discussion concerning the nature of the havayot is that of miracles:

> And the power of His *havayah* is evident in the knowledge of His miracles, like the miracles he employed in Egypt and at Mount Sinai and the Conquest of the Land. And when he performs the different deed, then it is evident that he is (HVH) concerning that wish. And it is said: "for she is barren," and it is written: "and God accepted his request," when the wish that a man cannot do or being about in any way but by entreating the omniscient is done, the heart immediately recognizes that He is present (HVVH) within his heart and the expression of his mouth, and knows when to do and in what (?), so the heart recognizes that that entity (HVYH) is from God [literally, from the name]. And if you will say that this could be [the work of] the power in charge of witchcraft or demons, and that the *havayah* is derived from there, this we cannot say [i.e., accept] because we know that there are wishes that the employers of witchcraft or demons cannot perform and say, and God did and said.[68] Like Moses against the *hartumim* and Elijah against Jezebel, and Elisha who cured the leper and Daniel against the magicians and witches. So it is evident that there is a *havayah* that cannot be done but by God alone. And He is the Master of the *havayah*[69] and the *havayot of the divine decree*, for He told Daniel the secrets of the dream, and to Isaiah, "Where are your wise men and

[67] *Da'at*, pp. 106–107. Rabbi Judah illustrates this by the example of Pharaoh of Egypt, whose heart was "hardened" by God so that he would continue to receive punishment (see Exodus 10:1). Rabbi Judah, however, extends this example to every Jew, while tradition has it that such denial of the freedom of choice is reserved for non-Jewish evil people.

[68] Compare Genesis 41:25.

[69] The term the author uses, *baal havayah*, corresponds in structure to the titles he used concerning magicians and masters of demons—*baaley keshafim* and *baaley shedim*. This term corresponds also to the term *baal shem*, the master of the holy name, which made it first appearance in this school of Ashkenazi Hasidim. See, concerning Rabbi Joseph Baal Shem, J. Dan, "Demonological Stories from the Works of Rabbi Judah the Pious," *Tarbiz* 30 (1961), pp. 288–289.

> they should know what was His will, and all the magicians and necromancers and astrologers did not know."[70]

This passage, as is this whole section of *Sefer ha-Shem*, is rich with terminological innovations. At least three seem to occur here for the first time: "Master of the *Havayah*" as a title of God in His role as the employer of miracles; the term *havayot ha-gezerah*, the "essences of the divine decree," and the term *shinuy*—change, or metamorphosis—for a miracle. The most frequent Hebrew term for miracle, *nes*, is absent here. The *havayah* is conceived of here as one aspect of divine revelation, used by God to prove His abilities and dominance. This passage is close in style and character to a brief treatise by Rabbi Judah the Pious, titled *Sod ha-Yihud*, the Secret of Divine Unity.[71] In this work Rabbi Judah answers a series of questions presented as "And if you ask how the heart can believe that . . . ," and the answer is given by describing one of God's supernatural abilities. For instance, the answer to the question "How can the heart believe that God can hear all the prayers of many people in many places at the same time" is the "miracle" God employed by giving human beings the ability to observe many things and many colors at the same time; God's hearing ability is miraculous, as is man's vision. Sometimes particular miracles are mentioned. In Rabbi Eleazar's presentation here, the question also seems to be "How can

[70] וכולת הוייהו נכרת בהכרת נפלאותיו, כגון באותות ובמופתים שעשה במצרים ובהר סיני ובכבוש הארץ. ובעשותו המעשה המשונה אז נכר שהוא הוה לאותו חפץ. וכתי כי עקרה היא, וכתי ויעתר לו ה', בהעשות החפץ שאדם אינו יכול לעשות ולמצא בשום עניין אלא בהתחננו לידע כל מיד מבחין הלב שהוא הווה בתוך הלב ואצל פיו ויודע מתי לעשות באיזה הוא, הרי מכיר הלב שאותה הוייה מן השם. ואם שמא מן הממונה על בעל כשפים הוא שדים אוחה הוייה, זה אין אנו יכולין לומי לפי שמציינו חפצים שבעלי כשפים ובעלי שדים לא יוכלו לעשו ולהגיד, וה' עשה והגיד. כמו משה כנגד החרטומי ואליהו כנגד איזבל ואלישע שרפא את המצורע, ודניאל כנגד אשף וכשף וחרטום, הרי נכר שיש הויה שאין יכולת לעשות אלא לקבי, והוא בעל ההויה והויות הנזרה שהרי הגיד לדניאל רזי החלום, ולישעיה: איפה חכמיך וידעו מה יעץ וכל אוב וידעוני והחוזים בכוכבים ואתים לא ידעו. (167c–168a).

[71] This short treatise was printed by I. Kamelhar as a preface to his edition of *Sod ha-Merkavah*, to which he gave the title *Sodey Razaya* (note 21). It belongs to one of the most important Ashkenazi Hasidic literary genres, *sifrut ha-yihud* (treatises on divine unity). See my survey of this genre and some examples in *Kiryat Sefer* 41 (1966), pp. 533–544.

the heart believe," and the final achievement of a miraculous event is that now the heart indeed "believes."

A miracle is defined by the term *shinuy*, which is almost identical to the term "supernatural": a change in the laws of nature. When a barren woman gives birth, it is a miracle, even though birth itself is regarded as a natural process. Healing a person of leprosy is a miracle, because it cannot happen naturally, this disease being regarded as incurable, while healing other diseases is not miraculous. This *shinuy* is not a monopoly of a God: Witches and demons can bring about supernatural phenomena in a wide range of subjects, so that concerning any particular *shinuy* there is a question whether it was a divine miracle or a demonic or magical one. The proof of divine supremacy over magic, witchcraft, and demons is by competition: When Moses or Elijah or Daniel successfully overcame magicians and witches, they proved that he who is assisted by God will overcome those who use magical and demonic powers.[72] It seems that there is no intrinsic criterion that could distinguish a divine miracle from a demonic one; the *shinuy* is the same in both cases. The difference is quantitative rather than qualitative: God can do more and better than the magicians, but the process is essentially the same.

One way to distinguish between a divine miracle and a magical one is that a divine miracle is an answer to a prayer. If a miracle follows a request presented in prayer, "the heart believes" that the divine essence, the *havayah*, is present in the supernatural event. This is another indication that the miracles are conceived of here as demonstrations of divine power, not only as a means of achieving the purpose of the miracle. This is at least one of the keys to the understanding of the concept of the *havayah*: a demonstration of divine

[72]It should be stressed that magicians, witches, and demons are not conceived of here as essentially evil. They can perform these miracles because of specific knowledge, and, ultimately (see below), this power is also derived from God. The competition between God and miracle workers is not a competition between good and evil, not even between "white magic" and "black magic." As will be shown below, sometimes the powers of magicians and demons are used by the Ashkenazi Hasidim to demonstrate divine characteristics. This discussion does not contain any dualistic elements.

power, expressed by the presence of the holy name. The conclusion of this discussion in this section of *Sefer ha-Shem* emphasizes it:

> In this way the meaning of the name is proved, that He is the Master of the *havayah*, concerning everything that is esoteric, every change [*shinuy*] and wonderment, and no one is like Him, because everything is created and He created it. This is the reason that the meaning of the Name is this, that He is the Master of all the *havayot*. For there is a master craftsman who knows what another does not, and another is knowledgeable in this and another is knowledgeable in another thing, but the Creator is the Master of all the *havayot*. And when there is a great craftsman or a great scholar, it is immediately evident that he is [i.e., inspired] from the Master of the *havayot*, like Joseph and Bezalel and Kalev. "And in the heart of every one who has a wise heart I have given wisdom," and Solomon and Daniel.[73]

Two problems have to be clarified, and they are intricately interconnected: What is the meaning of *havayah* in Rabbi Eleazar's concept of God, and how is this term connected with the name itself, which is composed of the same letters? A sentence in this paragraph may indicate that the term HVYH preceded the name YHVH and is indeed a reason for the formulation of the tetragrammaton: לכך נקרא משמעות שם כך הוא בעל כל ההויה. If we accept this sentence literally, it means that the term HVYH is the source of the divine name. Such a conclusion seems to be far-fetched, if we take into account the structure and context of the whole book, in which this section is one among many different interpretations of the tetragrammaton. Yet this does indicate the centrality of the concept of the *havayot* in the theology of Rabbi Eleazar.

It is evident that the term is used to indicate supreme wisdom and knowledge, of which great men may take an aspect, while God

[73]הרי מוכיח משמעות השם שהוא בעל ההויה לכל נעלם ולכל שינוי להפליא ואין דומה לו כי הכל נברא והוא ברא׳ לכך נקרא משמעות שם כן הוא בעל כל ההויות. כי יש אומן שזה יודע מה שזה אינו יודע, ויש חכם בזה ויש חכם בזה, אבל הבורא הוא בעל כל ההויות, וכשמצא אומן או חכם מופלא מיד נכר שמבעל ההויות הוא, כמו יוסף ובצלאל וכלב, ובלב כל חכם לב נתתי חכמה, ושלמה ודניאל. (168a)

contains all of them in an ultimate fashion. The unique wisdom of Solomon who built the Temple or Bezalel who built the tabernacle in the desert is derived from divine *havayot*.[74] In the same way, Joseph's and Daniel's wisdom concerning dreams (which means the knowledge of the future) is derived from divine wisdom, which is identified with the *havayot*.

This term, however, denotes not only divine wisdom. It is also the proof of His presence, influence, government, and inspiration. Physical miracles and spiritual ones are regarded as the result of the power of the name, and an indication of its presence. This aspect is defined clearly in the sentence in the previous paragraph:.ויכולת הוייתו נכרת בהכרת נפלאותיו. This is a more theologically elaborated formulation of another formula, found dozens of times in the writings of Rabbi Judah the Pious and frequently in those of Rabbi Eleazar: זכר עשה לנפלאותין or, in other versions: הרי נפלאותין זכר לייחודו. These terms represent a basic Ashkenazi Hasidic concept, according to which the goodness of God is apparent in the created world by the unusual and the miraculous, not by the usual, ordinary, and natural. Rabbi Judah the Pious's "Secret of Divine Unity" is dedicated to this subject, as are many portions of his other works. The dominant idea is that the laws of nature, of society, of history, and of man do not represent divine benevolence, as this world was created in order to try the righteous and make them exercise fully their adherence to God despite great difficulties. These difficulties, hurdles on the way to righteousness, are therefore in contradiction to the divine nature, even though they serve a divine purpose. In direct opposition to the world view of rationalistic theologians of the three scriptural religions, the understanding of creation does not lead directly to the understanding of God. Many aspects of reality contradict God's nature, in order to serve as obstacles for the righteous to overcome.

[74]The wisdom of these two great builders is of particular importance because they had to build an earthly structure that resembled on the one hand the celestial Temple, and on the other, creation as a whole. Bezalel, according to a talmudic statement (Bavli *Menachot* 29a) "was knowledgeable concerning the letters [of the alphabet] by which the heaven and earth were created," for the building of the Temple has cosmic significance. According to the *Sefer Yeẓira*, the divine abode, in the center of the universe, is the Temple.

God's true nature, according to this system, is revealed by those phenomena that contradict natural law. In such supernatural events—be they one-time miracles or miraculous properties—the goodness of God is expressed directly. In these cases God intervenes to achieve a certain purpose without being bound by the general reason of universal existence as expressed by the laws of cosmic existence. The predominantly mentioned purpose of such phenomena, according to Rabbi Judah, is informative: to enable man to realize the true nature of God. Miracles are not designed mainly to save a person or a people from trouble, but to demonstrate an aspect of divine power. It may be said that miracles are the theologian's textbook, rather than the laws of the universe. A careful examination of such phenomena is the most certain way to know God and His powers. In some cases, these indications of divine powers inserted into the supernatural level of earthly existence are found in bizarre, and even repugnant, magical practices. Still, they have to be examined by the believer, because of the invaluable information concerning the nature of God hidden within them.

An example of this world view, which plays a prominent part in the writings of both Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar, concerns the nature of prophecy. The question of what the prophets see in their visions was one of the most perplexing problems with which the Ashkenazi Hasidim dealt. Rav Saadia Gaon, in his theological work, insisted that the visions of the prophets cannot be of anything that is divine in nature. According to his system, the only divine being is the Creator, and He, because He is infinite and therefore shapeless, cannot be envisioned in any way. The prophets, therefore, could not see God; what was revealed to them was a created entity, the glory, which Saadia identified with the talmudic term *Shechinah*. This power is angelic in nature, even though it is more glorious and great than all other angels; its appearance indicates to the prophets that it is indeed God Who is addressing them in the vision.

Other rationalists, in the gaonic period and in Moslem Spain,

tended to describe the prophetic vision as psychological rather than an actual external occurrence. God inserts a vision into the prophet's heart, and he imagines that he sees something outside of him, while actually God is speaking inside him. Both this concept and the Saadian one are united in denying the existence of divine revelation. If it is revealed, it is not divine, and if it is divine, it is not revealed. Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Eleazar did not accept this conclusion, which destroys one of the most potent elements of religious faith: the belief in the actual revelation of God to his chosen messengers, including Moses and the people of Israel during the Mount Sinai theophany.

Their solution was that what the prophets saw was indeed divine—not God Himself, but a lower divine entity, an emanated divine glory. They preferred to give up the concept of the complete unity of God and to introduce emanated divine powers, rather than to yield to the rationalistic conclusion that revelation is impossible. This is one of the most developed aspects of their theology,[75] but the point that is relevant to this discussion is their way of refuting the Saadian concept of created glory revealed to the prophets. Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Eleazar argue that a created being has to yield to the laws of nature. A created glory cannot be revealed to the prophet and not be visible, at the same time, to people standing beside him. The biblical example of Elisha seeing a vision while his servant, standing near him, did not see anything proves that the revelation was that of a divine power that can choose who will see it and who will

[75]This subject has been discussed in many studies. See A. Altmann, "Saadya's Theory of Revelation: Its Origin and Background," in *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1969, pp. 140–160; C. Sirat, *Les Théories des visions surnaturelles dans la pensée juive du Moyen Âge*, Leiden: Brill 1969; J. Dan, "The Emergence of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Germany," in R. A. Herrera (ed.), *Mystics of the Book*, New York: Peter Lang 1993, pp. 57–95. An important recent contribution to the subject was the publication of a treatise dealing with this that the editor, Israel Ta-Shema, titled "A Treatise on Zekher Asa L-Nifleotav by Rabbi Judah the Pious," *Kovetz Al Yad* 17 (1995), pp. 121–146. This treatise includes a thorough discussion of the subject, though judging by the style, it was probably written not by Rabbi Judah but by one of his disciples, one who had access to original material by Rabbi Judah.

not. And—say Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Eleazar—in order that people will be able to believe in such a miracle, God implanted in reality an indication of His ability. This indication is described in detail in the writings of these two scholars, and we have many other sources concerning it from Moslem and Christian sources.[76] It is the magical practice of invoking demons to be revealed on a bright surface covered with oil. Three people participate: a magician, the person asking a question, and a little boy or girl. The magician instructs the child to look into the oil and to report what he sees. Demons appear, attired in various ways, and the magician sends them back until the right demon in the right attire appears and is described by the child. Then the magician instructs the child to demand that the demon reveal the answer to the question, which usually is a mundane one—petty theft or a lost article—and the demon reveals the location of the missing property and sometimes the identity of the thief. This practice is known in Judaism from talmudic times, and is attested up to modern times. It is called "the princes of oil" or "the princes of glass and thumb."[77] For Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Eleazar, this ability was given by God to magicians so that the correct understanding of the process of prophecy will be factually demonstrated: The child envisions on the bright surface the images of demons, which the magician and the person presenting the request, who stand beside him, do not see. This is proof that God can present His visions to the prophets, without people standing near them seeing them, thus proving that they are divine in nature and not the revelation of created powers.

The term used by Rabbi Eleazar in the last passage for this divine phenomenon is *havayah*. God has inserted His supernatural powers into various corners of the creation, so that they will testify to His unlimited powers. The *havayah* thus represents the scattered, unexpected "sparks" of divine goodness and miraculous powers that are זכר לנפלאותיו, an expression of an aspect of the divinity that is

[76]See my study "Sarey Kos ve-Sarey Bohen," *Tarbiz*, 32 (1963), pp. 359–369.

[77]Or any other bright surface. In fact, the term is not really "prince" but "demon," but copyists preferred the less offensive, reading שר instead of שד.

usually absent from the created world when it follows the laws of nature and society.

This is the fourth meaning of the term *havayah* on a theological level that has been presented in this brief section. The four differ from each other and, at least in one case, are in clear conflict with each other.

The first meaning of *havayah* is the extension of God in time and above time, His encompassing existence as a whole without being divided by the inner structure of existence. This meaning is identified by Rabbi Eleazar with the ten *sefirot* of the *Sefer Yezira*, which are interpreted here in theological rather than a cosmological fashion: They are the directions of the extension of God, above everything and in everything.

The second meaning is that of divine immanence, and the indifference of this immanence to the nature of the surrounding existence. God is present in good and in evil, in light and in darkness, in reward and in punishment, in the same way. He is not influenced by the specific characteristics of anything into which He extends His immanence.

The third is God's presence in the divine decrees, in *havayot ha-gezerah*. All that happens in the created world, all the events of man's life, and even his innermost thoughts are decreed by God, be they good or bad. This stark determinism is another expression of God's infinite presence, the *havayot*.

The fourth, as last seen, is God's selective presence in the miraculous and supernatural aspects of existence. He reveals His real nature, His goodness, in those phenomena, and thus enables the righteous to understand His uniqueness and His powers.

While three of these meanings can, with some effort, be reconciled with each other, the clash between the two types of divine immanence indicated by the second and fourth points is unavoidable. It is necessary to conclude that in Rabbi Eleazar's thought the term *havayah* was used for the two different kinds of divine presence, despite the intrinsic conflict between them. The term indicates divine active and nonactive presence in an equal way, indicating that it refers to a level of divine presence that is far beyond any differentiation caused by the demands of the existence of the universe.

> Why is the beginning of the name YHVH, because He states from beginning—the end,[78] and from Him come all the *havayot*. And why in the end of the name HYH, because in the end all will testify that He was. And why the three tenses in one word, YHYH, HVH, HYH, in order to make known that He was before the world and after the world, and He has not been diminished in any way, and after the world He will not miss anything or diminish, and before the world and when the world exists and after, His *havayot* are the same. Because of this it was the right way that the letters of the name will be written together, so that one letter will not precede another, because everything is changeable (*meshuneh*), except the Creator. For a child does not have wisdom, and then he becomes wiser and wiser. And if you say that there is no word that serves for both the past and the future, it is said: and all my garments I shall have redeemed,[79] and in the same way: He has [will] save me, which can be read as "he has saved me" and "he will save me."[80]

Here again Rabbi Eleazar emphatically removed God's essence from subjection to history. God is not moving with the world from past and the creation, through the present, and into the future after the world. God is essentially removed from history and independent of it. He existed before the world was created in the same way that He exists now, and in the same way that He will be after the world will come to an end. The key statement is: "Everything is subject to change except the Creator." Rabbi Eleazar did not have a traditional term for that concept, and used the word *meshuneh* for this purpose.

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[78] Isaiah 46:10.

[79] Isaiah 63:3.

[80] ולמה ראשית השם יהוה, לפי שמגיד מראשית אחרי, וממנו כל ההויות ולמה באחרית השם היה, לפי שבאחרית יעידו הכל הוא היה. ולמה משמש ג' לשונו' בתיבה אחת, יהיה, הוה, היה, להודיע שהוא קודם העולם ואחר העולם, ולא יחמעט מאומה. ואחר העולם לא יחסר ולא יחמעט, וקודם העולם ובהיות העולם ואחר, שוין הויותיו. לכך היה משפט להכתב אותיות השם יחדיו, שלא להקדים אות לאות. כי הכל משונה, חוץ מן הבורא. כי ילד אין בו חכמה, ואהכ מחחכם ומוסיף חכמה. ואה אינה נמצא חיבה משמש לשעבר ולהבא, הרי כתי' וכל מלבושי אגאלתי, הרי להבא ולשעבר, וכן הצילני, אם תקרא הצליני הצלני. (168a)

At the same time, while Rabbi Eleazar gives semantic, theological meaning to the semiotic group of letters of which the name consists, he declares the insufficiency of language to express even in the bizarre, nonsemantic structure of HVYH the real meaning. The name should have been written together, without one letter preceding the other, because any placement of future before past or present or past before future and present or any other structure is misleading and wrong. The name should have been written in one combined letter, expressing all three tenses without one preceding the other. Even the nonsemantic, nonlinguistic structure of the name is insufficient to express God's transcendence of time. Language, even when taken to an extreme nonsemantic edge as it does in this name, is still a distortion and falsification of the nature of the divine. Rabbi Eleazar goes on to demonstrate that a word can mean both past and future, but the examples are semantic, and the purpose of unifying the tenses at the same time, in one letter-word, cannot be achieved by language. There is no doubt that Rabbi Eleazar regarded the tetragrammaton as the ultimate linguistic expression of God: This whole treatise is dedicated to proving it. Yet in the beginning of the book he repeats twice the demonstration how inadequate even this sacred name is in expressing the essence of God.

Rabbi Eleazar continues his elaboration of the meaning of the name in a series of aspects, some of which are discussed in greater detail in later portions of the book.

> *Yod* is the world to come, *hey* is this world. *Vav* is the [six] parts of the Mishnah. *Hey* is the [five] books of the Pentateuch. *Yod* are the [ten] *sefirot*, and the *maaser*. And why is *hèy* beside the *yod*, because He is given the five. *Vav*, that He created everything in six days. *Hey*, to perform the five commandments on this *luah* and five on that *luah*. And why is the tetragrammaton composed of letters taken from the singles and not from the tens or hundreds, because He is one and there is no second to Him.[81]

[81] יוֹ׳ העולם הבא ה׳ והעולם הזה. ו׳ סדרי משנה, ה׳ חומשי הורה, ״ ספירות והוא [הספירו׳] ועותים לו מעשר. ולמה ה׳ אצל יוֹ׳, שנותנין לו החמש. ו׳ שברא בו׳ ימים הכל. ה׳ לעשות ה׳ רברות על לוח זה וה׳ על זה. ולמה שם בן ד׳ אותיות מן האחרות ולא מן העשרות ומאות, לפי שהוא אחד ואין שני לו. (168b)

The methodology of examining the numerical value of letters is introduced here briefly (to be followed by an examination of the vocalization marks, both of them among the "seventy-three gates" of the list in the introduction to *Sefer ha-Chochmah*). The identification of *yod* and *hey* as representing the two worlds, this one and the one to come, is traditional—it is stated several times in talmudic and midrashic literature.[82] Usually, this is an explanation why *bet* is the first letter of the Torah: it represents the number two, referring to the two worlds. Rabbi Eleazar proceeds to give some reasons for the selection of these particular letters for the tetragrammaton: The *hey*, representing five, corresponds to the five books of the Pentateuch, and to the five commandments on each tablet (this is why there are two *heys* in the name); the *vav* represents the six parts of the Mishnah; the *yod* represents the ten *sefirot* and the tax, the *maaser*. The fact that the letters chosen for the name are taken from the first ten letters, representing numerically the numbers from one to ten, is designed to express the unity of God; this is why the letters representing higher numbers were ignored. It should be noted that for Rabbi Eleazar—as for anyone else at that time—the number ten was included among the singles rather than the "tens"; the concept of zero is still absent from these calculations, and the "singles" being the numbers from zero to nine is a concept unknown at that period in central Europe.

> And why is *yod* in the beginning of the name? Because there are seven vocalization marks: Ah, A, E, Eh, I, U, O. These are six marks that are below [the letters], and the seventh is above. . . . This is why the syllable O was created, for it is above in the head of the name, for the whole world became saturated by His utterance, and the name above fills up everything, and it is as great as He wishes. And He contacted His *Shechinah* according to His wish between the cherubs, for He is like [according to?] His *havayot*. And why there is no *kof* in the name, because He is full. . . . Because the name is supreme and sublime, and He exists (HVH) with the low-spirited and the downtrodden, He diminishes Himself. This is why He did not want the hundreds

[82] See Bavli *Mencahot* 29b.

> in His name, and he wanted the *yod*, awakening the hearts from the multitude of evildoers, as it is written, not from them and not from their multitude.[83]

The connection between the opening question, why *yod* is in the beginning of the name, and the answer, concerning the seven vocalization marks, is unclear. It is possible that Rabbi Eleazar identified the O sign, a dot above the line, with the *yod*, which is also a dot; but this is not stated. The section repeats the presentation of the smallness of the *yod* as an indication of divine identification with the small and the humble. The "hundreds," represented by the letter *kof*, are the "multitude" of evildoers that God rejects, while he draws close to the downtrodden.

The talmudic concept of the "contraction of the *Shechinah* between the two cherubs" in the Holy of Holies in the Temple[84] is used by the author as an illustration of divine connection with the small and humble: God diminished Himself in order to be among them. Yet the concept is developed beyond the talmudic statement, and seems to carry a theological message. Unlike the Talmud, Rabbi Eleazar does not regard the *Shechinah* as a synonym for God; it is a separate entity, to some extent. God contracted the *Shechinah* according to His will, and this is in accordance with his *havayot*. The statement is unclear, but four elements participate in the process, without their being completely identified with each other: God, His will, His *havayot*, and the *Shechinah*. This sentence is too concise to allow us to establish its full theological meaning, yet some points can be made.

The current enthusiasm in scholarship to discover precedents

[83] ולמה ״ בתחלת השם לפי שזי ׳קודוח הם, אֶ אֶ אֶ אֶ אֶ או, הרי ו׳ ׳קודוה למטה והשביעי למלא מלא כים(?) לכך נברא הברת או שהוא למעלה בראש על שם שנתמלא בדברו כל העולם, והשם למעלה ממלא כל והוא גדול כחפצו, ומצמצם שכינתו כחפצו בין הכרובים שהוא כפי הוייתיו. ולמה אין קוף בשם, שהוא מלא כים(?). לפי שהשם רם ונשא והוה עם דכא ושפל רוח המחמעט עצמו, לכך לא חפץ המאוה בשמו, שחפץ ביוד כים(?). לפי שהשם רם ונשא והוה עם דכא ושפל רוח המחמעט עצמו, לכך לא חפץ המאוה בשמו, שחפץ ביוד יעורר(?) לב מהמון רשעים, שכתי לא מהם ולא מהמונם. (168b)

[84] *Vayikra Rabba* 23:24, and see G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York: Schocken 1954, p. 410, note 43.

to the Lurianic concept of the *zimzum* will undoubtedly lead someone to view this sentence as an indication of the traditionality of the doctrine. This, of course, is meaningless: The revolutionary concept of Luria is not an invention out of the blue, but an integration of traditional motifs within a revolutionary new myth of the relationship between God and the creation. Nothing of this can be found here (or in other so-called precedents pointed out so far). If there is any resemblance between Rabbi Eleazar's presentation and later doctrines, it is with that of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century kabbalists who interpreted the Lurianic myth in a way that diminished its radical nature. The frequent expressions in the homilies of Rabbi Dov Baer, the *maggid* of Mezeritch, the great disciple of the founder of the Hasidic movement in the second half of the eighteenth century—that it was God's love of His creatures that made Him "contract" Himself in order to make revelation and contact with the righteous possible—do resemble Rabbi Eleazar's statement. God Himself, in His full power, could not be present in the created universe; only His diminished, contracted *Shechinah* could represent Him within the realm of human cognition.

It should be taken into account that this work was written when the Ashkenazi Hasidim were making their first hesitant steps in the establishment of a theology based on the concept of multiple divine powers emanated from each other. Rabbi Eleazar, in this sentence, adheres as much as he can to the talmudic framework without presenting the full power of the new concept of the *Shechinah* as an emanated divine manifestation.

The main problem, from a theological and terminological point of view, is the meaning of the term *havayot* in this context. The syntax of the sentence does not clarify whether "He is like His *havayot*" refers to the supreme Godhead or to His "contracted" manifestation. It seems that this sentence could serve, because of its ambiguity, as a basis for any conclusion concerning the meaning of *havayot*.

The connection between the *Shechinah* and the divine world is stated in the next paragraph, using arithmetical methodology:

> And there is no NH in them, because from *aleph* to *yod* they are NH (fifty-five). Put it this way: *aleph* and *tet* [make ten], *bet*

and *het* [make ten], *gimel* and *zayin*, *dalet* and *vav*, and *hey*—these are forty-five. Add to them the *yod*, and they are fifty-five. Add to that one times one, two times two, which are four, they are [now] five. Three times three are nine, they are [now] fourteen. Four times four are sixteen, they are thirty. Five times five, they are twenty-five, this is [in all] fifty-five. Six times six are thirty-six, they are now ninety-one. Seven times seven are forty-nine, [the sum] is one hundred forty. Eight times eight are sixty four, [the sum] is two hundred four. Nine times nine are eighty-one, [the sum] is two hundred eighty-five. Ten times ten are one hundred—the [sum is] three hundred eighty-five, the numerical value of *Shechinah*.[85]

As becomes evident in the continuation of this discussion, Rabbi Eleazar identifies the first ten numbers with the *sefirot*, and therefore the arithmetical properties of these numbers are indicative concerning the nature of the divine *sefirot*. Two computations are presented—the sum of adding these numbers, which is fifty-five, a number he has not utilized as yet for a semantic purpose, and the sum of the multiplication of these numbers by themselves, that is, seeing them as square roots, which gives the sum of three hundred eighty-five, which is the numerical value of the five letters composing the name of the *Shechinah*. An inherent identification is indicated, therefore, between the ten numbers, the ten *sefirot*, and the *Shechinah*. All these elements are united within the small letter *yod*, which is the subject of the author's continued analysis.

It should be noted that this concept of the numbers is quite close, in all probability, to the original meaning of the *Sefer Yezira*; the basic meaning of the term *sefirot* is the first ten numbers, even though much is added to their cosmological significance beyond the arithmetical meaning. But the *Sefer Yezira* made no identification between numbers and letters. This is one of the most surprising characteristics of the ancient treatise, often ignored because of the millennium in which this identification dominated the commentaries on this work. The first part of the *Sefer Yezira* deals with the *sefirot*, while the second part (Chapters 2–5) deals with the various groups of letters and their role in the creation; the two, however, are not united, even though they both constitute elements of the "thirty-two paths of esoteric wisdom" by which the universe was created, namely the ten numbers and the twenty-two letters. When numbers are discussed, they are not identified with letters. When letters are discussed, they are not identified with numbers. In Rabbi Eleazar's commentary, both in the present text and elsewhere, such a distinction is impossible, and Rabbi Eleazar is a loyal representative, in this regard, of almost all of the dozens of commentaries written on this work from the late twelfth century onward. Rabbi Eleazar is a better representative of Jewish concepts of language in this case than the *Sefer Yezira* itself. Traditional *midrashim* made use of the arithmetical properties of the letters in an increasing frequency, and yet this element is absent from the *Sefer Yezira*, which is the most profound expression of a Jewish concept (though unique one) concerning the role of language and numbers in the creation of the universe.[86]

It is evident that for Rabbi Eleazar language and arithmetic are one and the same. The numerical value is one of the inherent properties of the alphabet, and it is no different than many others, like acronyms, the *temurot*, the shape of the letters, or the vocalization marks. It is neither more nor less "mystical" than any other midrashic method. It is the property of a language that is not regarded as essentially semantic, or rather, that semantic meanings can be gleaned from its nonsemantic characteristics.

Rabbi Eleazar continues the analysis of the *yod*:

This is why *yod*, which is the smallest of the letters, and our calculation from *aleph* to *yod* gives the sum of fifty-five, and the sign

[85] ולא נה בהם, כי מן א' עד יוד הם נה. ותשים כן: אט, בחח, גן, דו, הי, הרי מה. חשים עליהם י', הרי נה. ועוד, א' פעמי' א' הם [חסר ומשובש, צל - א'], כ' פעמי' ב' הרי ד', הרי ה', ג' פעמי' ג' הם ט', הרי יד', ד' פעמי' ד' הם יו, הרי ל', ה' פעמי' ה' הם כה, הרי נה, ו' פעמי' ו' הם לו, הרי צא, ז' פעמי' ז' הם מט הרי קמ, ח' פעמי' ח' הם סד, הרי רד, ט' פעמי' ט' הם פא, הרי רפה, י' פעמי' י' הם ק, הרי שפה, מציין שבינה. (168b)

[86] See my discussion in the article "The Concept of Numbers in the Sefer Yezira," *Da'at*, 34 (1995), pp. 5–15.

> is: For the heavens are your Lord God's.[87] This is why all the *sefirot* [are] up to yod. And when you say "eleven," "twelve" [i.e., *yod-aleph*, *yod-bet*], you are returning to the previous computation, one and two [*aleph* and *bet*]. And when you say "twenty" [*kaf*], they are two times ten [*yod*]. This is [the meaning of] ten *sefirot belimah*. This is why *yod*, the small one, is in the beginning of the name.[88]

The primacy of the first ten numbers is based on the belief that all the rest are nothing but a repetition of the original one; that from eleven to twenty the numbers are just a duplication of the first sequence. It seems that Rabbi Eleazar interprets here the term *belimah* of the *Sefer Yezira* as saying "no more": The *sefirot* are ten, because there are no more meaningful numbers; here you must stop, because the rest is just a repetition.

It seems that in these few paragraphs in the beginning of his great work, Rabbi Eleazar has successfully established the focal position of the tetragrammaton in all the relevant realms of existence, earthly and celestial, as well as in the aspects of language in which he was interested. The name, in its semantic form, HVYH, has been identified with the *sefirot* of the *Sefer Yezira*, and thus became the expression of the intrinsic structure of God Himself and of the universe in all its directions. It has been, by this identification, proved to include all aspects of good and evil, light and darkness, matter and spirit, the present world and the world to come. It is the basic structure of time in this three phases, and the intrinsic meaning of the sequences of numbers and letters, thus being the basis of arithmetic and of language. In the concept of *havayot ha-gezerah*, it controls the most minute deeds, thoughts, and dreams of every human being.

Rabbi Eleazar's concept can be summarized by stating that God is the Name, Name is language, language is everything. God is present in Himself and in the universe in the form of language, which

[87] Deuteronomy 10:14.

[88] לכך ״ שהיא קטנה באותיות וחשבונו מא׳ עד ״ עולה נה, וסימן הן לה׳ אלהיך השמים. לכך כל הספירות עד ״. וכשתאמר יא, יב, הרי אתה חוזר למנות כבתחילה, אב. וכשתאמר כ׳ הם ב׳ פעמ״ ״. זהו עשר ספירות בלימה. לכך ״ הקטנה בראש השם. [168b–169a]

springs from the four letters of His name, YHVH. The identification of God with language by way of the Divine Name makes Jewish mysticism turn into language when in quest of God. The text and God are not two opposites, but identical infinite beings, united by the letters of the tetragrammaton.

ENDNOTE

This study was written within the context of preparation of a monograph on Rabbi Eleazar's *Sefer ha-Shem* and the publication of a selection of texts (in Hebrew and English) from this vast work. A presentation of Rabbi Eleazar's concepts within a wider framework of speculations concerning the name of God is found in the study "The Name of the God, the Name of the Rose, and the Concept of Language in Jewish Mysticism," republished—in Volume Four; see the endnotes there concerning the development of the concept of the tetragrammaton in Christian kabbalah.

EIGHT

Ashkenazi Hasidism and the Maimonidean Controversy

I

The development of the Ashkenazi Hasidic circles of mystics, pietists, and esoterics is contemporary to the periods in which Maimonides wrote most of his works, in which they were translated, and in which the first controversies about his writings erupted in his last years and after his death (i.e., the second half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth). In the same period in which Maimonides wrote his *Guide to the Perplexed*, Rabbi Judah ben Samuel the Pious wrote most of his *Sefer Hasidim* and works of esoteric theology, and Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worms wrote his great *Commentary on the Prayers*, the first comprehensive such commentary that has reached us. Most of Rabbi Judah's and Rabbi Eleazar's works were written when the *Guide* was being translated into Hebrew.[1] When the great controversy about the *Guide* began in 1232,

[1] Rabbi Judah the Pious died in 1217, and Rabbi Eleazar died ca. 1230. See J. Dan, *Iyyunim be-Sifrut Hasidei Ashkenaz*, Ramat Gan: Massada 1975, pp. 44–47.

both Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Eleazar were already dead, and we do not find any reference to that hectic period in the writings of their immediate disciples. It is as if these two major phenomena in Jewish cultural history during the High Middle Ages co-existed without touching, each completely independent and ignorant of the other.

It is true that in Maimonides' works we do not find any reference or any sign of awareness of the existence of the new trends and ideas in Ashkenazi Jewry. But in the works of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, there is some knowledge of the great rationalistic awakening to their south, in Spain, though mostly in a marginal way. It is the purpose of this chapter to assemble and analyze the materials found in Ashkenazi Hasidic works and in works closely related to them that may enable us to understand the attitude of Ashkenazi thinkers in the late twelfth century and the early thirteenth concerning the cultural developments in Spanish Jewry at that time, especially toward rationalistic philosophy in general and Maimonides in particular.

A most interesting connection between Ashkenazi Hasidism and the Maimonidean controversy occurred in 1232, though neither any of Maimonides' followers nor any Ashkenazi Hasidic writer was involved in it. This connection is found in the works of a great thinker belonging to the third great Jewish ideological movement that flourished almost exactly at the same period, the kabbalah. Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides), the leader of the kabbalistic school of Gerona in the first half of the thirteenth century, and one of the most important leaders of northern Spanish Jewry at the time of the controversy of 1232, was trying to prevent the controversy from assuming dangerous dimensions. As a community leader, rather than as a kabbalist, he wrote his famous epistle *Be-Terem E'eneh Ani Shogeg*,[2] which is intended first and foremost to establish common ground between the Maimonidean rationalists on the one hand and their opponents in Catalonia and the Provence on the other. One of the leaders of the anti-Maimonidean camp was Nachmanides'

[2]See C. B. Chavel, *Kitbei Rabenu Mosheh ben Nahman*, Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook 1963, 1, pp. 336–348. The quotation is found on pp. 346–347.

nephew, Rabbi Jonah Gerondi. In this epistle, which was written early in the controversy, Nachmanides tried not to take any side, to keep himself acceptable to both camps, to hide his own ideological preferences, and to preach unity to the quarreling radicals on the two sides. Circumstances did not allow Nachmanides to hold this neutral position for long, and he was pushed into the anti-Maimonidean camp when personal attacks against Rabbi Jonah's family, which was his as well, compelled him to take a less even-handed position.[3] But in this epistle he was still trying to prove to both camps that their differences were not as great and insurmountable as they believed.

Nachmanides did that by citing a quotation from a work by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, *Shaarei ha-Sod, ha-Yihud veha-Emunah* (The Gates of Esoteric Knowledge, the Unity of God and Faith), a brief treatise that Rabbi Eleazar wrote as an exoteric pamphlet to preach to the public the true way of faith and, especially, of prayer.[4] The sentences Nachmanides chose to quote demonstrate Rabbi Eleazar's belief in the complete unity of God, His transcendence, and His omnipotence and omniscience.[5] These sentences seemed to prove,

[1]On Nachmanides' position in this controversy see: D. J. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and Maimonidean Controversy*, Leiden: Brill 1965, pp. 166–175 et passim; J. Sarachek, *Faith and Reason*, Williamsport 1935. Compare G. Scholem, *The Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. A. Arkush, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, New York: The Jewish Publication Society and Princeton University Press 1987, pp. 404–410. See also J. Dan, "The Cultural and Social Background of the Emergence of Traditional Ethical Literature," in M. Idel, W. Z. Harvey, E. Schweid, eds., *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. VII (1988)), 1:239–264.

[4]This work was first printed by A. Jellinek from a manuscript in Munich in *Kochvei Yizhak* 27 (1862): pp. 7–15; following the manuscript, this edition includes some additions that do not belong to Rabbi Eleazar's work. It was reprinted by A. M. Haberman in *Shirei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Kavod*, Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook 1948, pp. 173–180; it was also added to the edition of the Torah Commentary by Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor, Jerusalem 1956, pp. 124–131, and to Y. A. H. Halevy's edition of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's *Commentary on the Torah*, London 1959. I published a critical edition of this work in *Temirin* 1 (1972): pp. 141–156.

[5]Chavel, *Kitbei*, p. 347. In this quotation, the *Shiur Qomah* and other anthropomorphic attributes are regarded as those of the "visible *kavod*," without clarifying its created or divine nature.

according to Nachmanides, that the belief in an abstract, completely spiritual God, without any anthropomorphic characteristics, which the rationalists preached following Maimonides, was accepted by the most orthodox and traditional segment of Judaism at the time, namely the sages of Ashkenaz. Nachmanides admonishes the quarreling rabbis of Spain and the Provence: If everybody is in agreement about the unity of God, His incorporeality, His omnipotence—what basis is there for such fierce mutual criticism? Why should the study of the *Guide* be prohibited, if essentially it follows the same ideas as those of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms? In the background of Nachmanides statement there probably was the knowledge that the opponents of Maimonides had applied for assistance to the rabbis of northern France and Germany, asking for intervention against the study of Maimonidean writings and joining the ban against them.[6] We do not know exactly who these rabbis were or their exact response, but it seems that Nachmanides intended to prevent the spread of the controversy to more countries and to show that the basic teachings of Maimonides could be accepted by the Ashkenazi traditionalists.

The quotation Nachmanides used was accurate, and it seems to uphold the thesis that he tried to expound—but only externally. Nachmanides was wrong, knowingly or unknowingly, on two counts: First, the controversy was centered around the basic problem of the means by which religious truth can be achieved—by human reason, or only by tradition and by interpreting hermeneutically the ancient texts, the Bible and the Talmud. The Ashkenazi Hasidim claimed that all their knowledge, esoteric and otherwise, was acquired by means of tradition, and they fiercely rejected any notion that man can independently arrive at true theological conclusions using his reason. The second point is that while the quotation Nachmanides used did describe the nature of the supreme Godhead, the Ashkenazi Hasidim additionally believed in, and described in detail, another divine figure, that of the Divine Glory (*kavod*), which can be revealed

[6]See E. E. Urbach, "The Role of the Scholars of France and Germany in the Maimonidean Controversy," *Zion* 12 (1947): pp. 149–159 (Hebrew).

to the prophets, and therefore can assume visible attributes. In this way they explained that the anthropomorphic statements concerning God in the Bible, the Talmud and Midrash, and ancient mystical works like the *Shiur Komah* refer to that Divine Glory.[7] In their exoteric works, like the one quoted by Nachmanides, they did not dwell on the "secret" of the Divine Glory,[8] but in their esoteric works they clearly stated that human prayer can be heard and answered only by this lower, emanated, divine power, and not by the supreme Godhead. Such a concept, of a secondary divine power that is both anthropomorphic and the addressee of prayer, was unacceptable to the Jewish rationalists. While there can be no doubt about the sincerity of Nachmanides and his good intentions, his statement obscures the true nature of the Ashkenazi Hasidic concept of God and the means of achieving theological truth.

On the other hand, we have a text that may have been motivated by similar considerations, that is, trying to gloss over and ignore the deep contradiction between Ashkenazi Hasidic theological speculations and those of the rationalists. This is a section of Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel's, "of the Elders of Bohemia," encyclopedic commentary on the *piyyutim*, *Arugat ha-Bosem*.[9] This work is unique in the history of Ashkenazi literature in its comprehensiveness. Usually in the twelfth and thirteenth century, Jewish culture in the south of Europe, which was deeply influenced by Arabic culture, and Jewish culture in central Europe, especially in northern France and the Rhineland, had very little in common, and few writers quoted extensively contemporary, or recent, works written by Jews in the other part of Europe. *Arugat ha-Bosem* is the most prominent exception. The author had a detailed and extensive acquain-

[7]On the Ashkenazi Hasidic concepts of the Divine Glory, see J. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*, Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik 1968, pp. 104–168 (Hebrew).

[8]The exoteric Ashkenazi Hasidic "Yihud Literature" was described by me in *Kiryat Sefer* 41 (1966) pp. 533–544 (reprinted in Dan, *Iyyunim*, pp. 72–88).

[9]This monumental work was published in a critical edition in four volumes by E. E. Urbach, Jerusalem: Mekizei Nirdamim 1939–1964. The fourth volume contains the editor's detailed introduction.

tance, unparalleled in his time, of most that was written both in his own cultural realm and in the Spanish one. He was unusually careful, compared to the norms of his time, to quote exactly, by title and author's name, every work he used. And as his commentary was encyclopedic and anthological in character, preferring quotations to his own words, he presents a comprehensive panorama of Jewish culture in Europe as a whole.

What characterizes the book as whole is also apparent in its treatment of particular subjects. When the author presented his commentary on a *piyyut* that starts with the phrase: "His Glory is the sign for his myriads of hosts," he devoted several pages to a detailed exposition of the nature and meaning of the Divine Glory.[10] This exposition was made mostly in the form of an anthology, in which the views of several medieval authorities on the subject were presented, among them those of Rav Saadia Gaon, whose treatment of the subject served as a starting point for almost all medieval thinkers, those of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, those of Rabbi Moses Taku (whose views will be discussed in section IV), and those of Maimonides.[11] It seems that Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel did not have access to a Hebrew translation of the *Guide*: The Maimonidean quotation he used is taken from the *Sefer ha-Madda* and deals with God's incorporeality and the interpretation of anthropomorphic descriptions of God contained in the visions of the prophets.[12] Maimonides' statement, quoted by the author, of course, completely contradicts those of the Ashkenazi Hasidic authorities he included in this section. Yet Rabbi Abraham quotes it without even one word of criticism; nor is there any attempt to reconcile it with those of his direct teachers, Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, whose views he undoubtedly embraced. He presents the Maimonidean quotation as a legitimate position, though one among several, in dealing with the difficult problem of divine revelation.

[10]E. E. Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem* 1, pp. 197–202.

[11]Among the scholars quoted by Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel on this subject are Shabbatai Donnolo, Rabenu Nissim, Rabenu Hananel of Kairuan, Rabbi Nathan of Rome, the author of the *Aruch*, and others.

[12]*Mishneh Torah*, *Yesodei ha-Torah* 1, pp. 8–9.

When was this section written? As E. E. Urbach has shown, *Arugat ha-Bosem* was concluded ca. 1234, that is, during the great controversy.[13] Yet in the book itself there is no reference to this upheaval. The author may have known, as suggested by Urbach, about the earlier controversy in the beginning of the century concerning Maimonides's belief in the resurrection.[14] But the contemporary events went unmentioned. There can be two explanations for this fact. One is that Rabbi Abraham did not know what was happening in Spain and the Provence—something very difficult to accept when his keen interest in every aspect of Jewish contemporary culture is taken into account. The second is that he chose to ignore it, to present a facade in which every view is legitimate and worth quoting, thus trying to negate the bitterness and intensity of the controversy—an attitude similar to that of Nachmanides in his first epistle of 1232.

These two examples seem to prove that not everybody involved in the traumatic events of 1232–1235 wished to take a clear stand and to devote his writings to prove that his faction was right and the other was wrong. Some writers tried to minimize the depth of the conflict and to emphasize the uniting factors rather than the points of contention, and this includes Ashkenazi writers. But these efforts could not hide the deep divisions that separated Ashkenazi Hasidism from Jewish rationalism.

II

The term "philosophy" is not found in the writings of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, but the term "philosopher" is a common one. It seems that these writers used this term without the contemporary, medieval connotations in which it acquired the meaning of someone who follows the methods, and some of the contents, of the teachings of the ancient Greek and medieval Arab rationalists. Rather, they used it in the way in which it is sometimes found in talmudic

[13]See Urbach. *Arugat ha-Bosem* 4, p. 112.

[14]Urbach, "The Role of the Scholars," *Zion* 12, pp. 149–159.

and midrashic literature, as a synonym for a "sage," a "wise person," who may or may not be Jewish. A detailed treatise written by Rabbi Judah the Pious around the year 1200 adapted the literary form of an argument between three scholars about the nature and theological significance of the Divine Glory; this format was probably adapted through the influence of some vague, inaccurate knowledge of the format of Rabbi Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari*. The three Jewish scholars who argue their cases before "an Arab king in Spain" are alternately called *chachamim*, wise men, and *filosofim*, philosophers; among them is the one who represents Rabbi Judah's own views. It is clear that the author of this work did not find any derogatory element in the term "philosopher."[15]

The Ashkenazi Hasidic writers did have a specific term that represented for them the evils of rationalistic thinking: "dialectics." This term, transcribed into Hebrew, is used in a clearly derogatory manner in both Rabbi Judah the Pious's *Sefer Hasidim*[16] and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's treatise on psychology, *Chochmat ha-Nefesh* (The Wisdom of the Soul).[17] In both cases, it is impossible to discern from the context what exactly these writers meant by this term; nor can we guess exactly from where they took it (the Hebrew sources available to them did not use this term, and it has not been established that they had access to Latin philosophical works).[18] Rav Saadia Gaon is often quoted—both his *Emunot ve-Deot* and his Commentary on the

[15]See Dan, *Iyyunim* pp. 31–33.

[16]*Sefer Hasidim*, eds. J. Wistinetzky and J. Freimann, Frankfurt am Mainz 1924, sec. 752.

[17]*Chochmat ha-Nefesh*, Lvov 1876, p. 6b.

[18]I. Baer, in his ground-breaking study of Ashkenazi Hasidism (*Zion* 3 [1938], pp. 1–50), suggested that these scholars knew Latin and used some Christian theological texts. As far as I know, no supportive evidence to this thesis was presented in the more than fifty years that passed since then. While G. Vajda pointed out some interesting parallels between the works of Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar of London and some Latin theological sources, these are parallels rather than positive proof of first-hand knowledge of Christian Latin sources. See Vajda, "De quelques infiltrations chrétiennes dans l'oeuvre d'un auteur anglo-Juif du XIIIe siècle," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinal et Litteraire du Moyen Age* (1961), pp. 15–34.

Book of Creation (*Sefer Yezira*). They often rely on Abraham ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Bible and his *Yesod Mora* (The Foundation of the Fear of God, a brief ethical treatise that Ibn Ezra wrote in London). At least one circle of Ashkenazi mystics used extensively a neo-Platonic source quoted by Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja in his philosophical study of creation, *Megillat ha-Megalleh*. These works were used in the esoteric and theological works of the Ashkenazi Hasidim in an unqualified manner, except in two cases in which they refuse to accept Rav Saadia's views concerning the created nature of the Divine Glory,[19] and his un-messianic understanding of the phrase in the morning's prayer, *Or Hadash al Ziyyon Tair*.[20] How can we regard their objection to rationalism as total when such works are regarded as authoritative sources?

The answer is that the Ashkenazi Hasidic teachers did not regard these works as ones of rationalistic investigation, but rather as compilations of reliable traditions transmitted by these writers. Rav Saadia is described by them as a Master of Secret Traditions,[21] a concept that was easy to accept as they did not have before them the accurate philosophic translation of Rabbi Judah ibn Tibbon, but the early, probably eleventh-century, poetical paraphrase of both his *Emunot ve-Deot* and the Commentary on *Sefer Yezira*.[22] This paraphrase presents Saadia's deliberations as if they were poetic, visionary declarations, based not on reason but on tradition and spiritual experience. The Ashkenazi Hasidic attitude toward these works proves that one could have read them in the Middle Ages, in this

[19]Rabbi Judah the Pious declares emphatically that the concept of revelation adapted by him contradicts that of Rav Saadia. See Dan, *Iyyunim*, p. 154.

[20]I quoted this section from the Jerusalem ms. 8 3296. See "On the Historical Personality of Rabbi Judah he-Hasid," *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry, Studies Dedicated to the Memory of H. H. Ben-Sasson*, eds. M. Ben-Sasson, R. Bonfil, J. R. Hacker, Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel 1989, p. 395, note 17 (Hebrew).

[21]Such a statement concerning *Or Hadash* is included in the same passage. Rabbi Judah objected to the possibility that Rav Saadia was mistaken concerning this problem because "Rav Saadia had great knowledge of esoteric traditions."

[22]On the Saadian paraphrase, see R. C. Kiener, "The Hebrew Paraphrase of Saadia Gaon's *Kitab al-Amanat* . . ." *AJS Review* 11 (1986), pp. 1–26.

paraphrase, without realizing that they were philosophical, rationalistic treatises. Abraham ibn Ezra was quoted by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms as *Avraham ha-Hozeh*, Abraham the Visionary,[23] expressing the belief that his knowledge was acquired not by human investigation but by divine revelation. Concerning Abraham bar Hijja, it is not clear whether they knew who he was; only his title as "chief of police" in Arabic was known to them in a corrupt manner, which they probably did not understand.[24] The neo-Platonic source quoted by Bar Hijja,[25] which describes the five spiritual worlds, was integrated by these mystics into a pseudepigraphic text, the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel*, which they described not only as a talmudic source, but as one containing the teachings of the prophet Jeremiah and his "son" Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), that is, originating directly from biblical times.[26] They certainly had no notion of its philosophical character.

At the turn of the thirteenth century, a reader of Hebrew could study the works of Jewish philosophers in this language without being exposed to the essence of philosophical attitude—the method, the system of proving logically one's conclusions. This also includes, of course, Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Madda*, in which the author's views are presented as norms rather than as results of logical, methodical investigation. Thus, verses that Saadia used to illustrate his conclusions were regarded by the Hasidim as proof-texts in the midrashic manner. These medieval sources, which contributed in a most meaningful manner to the development of the theology of the various Ashkenazi Hasidic circles, were not regarded as rationalistic ones,

[23]*Chochmat ha-Nefesh*, p. 31c.

[24]In the printed version of the Ashkenazi commentary on *Sefer Yezira*, which is known as the "pseudo-Saadia," this theory is quoted from a *Sefer Zah ve-Ashur*. Needless to say, there is no such book. This is a corruption of Abraham bar Hijja's Arabic title, Sahib al-Shurta (chief of police). See note 25.

[25]G. Scholem, "Reste neuplatonischer Spekulation in der Mystik der deutschen Chassidim und ihre Vermittlung durch Abraham bar Chija." *MGWJ* 75 (1931), pp. 172–192.

[26]On this subject, see J. Dan, "Pseudepigraphy in Medieval Jewish Mysticism in Germany," *Fälschungen im Mittelalter*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 5, Hannover 1988, pp. 519–531.

nor did they convey any rationalistic message in the way that the Hasidim received and used these sources.

It should be pointed out that there was no similarity between the way Jewish scholars in Spain treated Arabic culture in general and philosophy in particular, and the way the Ashkenazi scholars treated the Latin culture that flourished around them. Arabic was regarded by the Jews as the language of a civilization, and not a religion (much as English is regarded today), in which ideas can be expressed to represent any religion or even secular ideas. The gaonim started to write halachic monographs in Arabic, beginning in the tenth century at the latest. Latin, on the other hand, was regarded by Ashkenazi Jews as the language of the Church, everything expressed in it being Christian in nature. The "neutral" language, the everyday one, was the vernacular, German or French, which, at that time, was not extensively used for theological and philosophical speculation. Thus the Jews in central Europe were not exposed, as were their brothers in the south, to the impact of philosophy from their immediate neighbors, and they did not have any incentive to study Latin. This does not mean that scattered ideas did not reach them, or that some basic neo-Platonic attitudes that prevailed among the intellectuals around them were not used sometimes in their works.[27] But again, the essence of philosophy is the systematic use of logical methods, and to this they did not have any access—and if they did, they regarded it as the "dialectics" that are forbidden and heretical.

Ashkenazi Hasidism, at the turn of the century, therefore can be described as circles of Jewish intellectuals who relied exclusively on tradition and hermeneutics in order to develop their systems of thought. They received and integrated into their speculations several philosophical Hebrew sources, without being aware of their original nature, and accepting them as treasuries of Jewish traditions or divine revelations to great sages.

[27]Rabbi Eleazar, for instance, identifies matter and evil in a neo-Platonic manner in his commentary on *Sefer Yezira*. See J. Dan, *Esoteric Theology*, pp. 98–100.

III

While there is no doubt concerning the thorough opposition of the Ashkenazi Hasidim to the methods and basic concepts of Jewish philosophy, it should be pointed out that they did not oppose systematically ideas and attitudes that characterize the religious philosophy of the rationalists. We do find in their writings, on several occasions, some of the most typical concepts of Jewish philosophy that either are treated tolerantly as legitimate possibilities or are accepted without hesitation. Two examples can demonstrate this: One is concerned with their favorite subject of speculation, divine revelation, and the other is concerned with divine providence.

Rabbi Judah the Pious dedicated a part of a treatise to a fictional description of a religious debate of three scholars before an Arab king in Spain, a debate at the end of which the king converted to Judaism with all his people.[28] The three scholars are described as Jews, debating among themselves the problems connected with the revelation to the prophets. The positions adopted by the three scholars are quite clear and distinct. One—described as "the third scholar" by Rabbi Judah—follows the concept of revelation as presented in Saadia Gaon's *Emunot ve-Deot*, namely, that what the prophets actually saw in their visions and described as God Himself is a created being, the Glory (*kavod*), a special, supreme angel created specifically for this purpose.[29] The appearance of the Glory before the eyes of the prophet is regarded as a proof of the divine source and the veracity of the content of the prophecy. Revelation, according to this position, is indeed a natural phenomenon in which one created being, the *kavod*, is envisioned by another, the prophet.

The second position, presented by "the first scholar," is that the whole process of divine revelation is a psychological one, directed by God, who makes the visions appear in the mind of the prophet without anything actually happening in the external world. Some

[28]A detailed analysis of this discussion is presented in Dan, *Esoteric Theology*, pp. 129–143. The text was printed in Dan, *Iyyunim*, pp. 159–160.

[29]*Emunot ve-Deot*, Leipzig 1859, pp. 62–67.

elements of this position can be found in the talmudic-midrashic tradition, and it is found in the works of some early medieval Jewish thinkers, such as Rav Hai Gaon, before it became central in the schools of the Jewish rationalists. The biblical and talmudic descriptions of the appearances of God before the prophets should not, according to this view, be taken literally; they never happened. They reflect only the prophet's imagination, directed by God, and the whole process is described by Rabbi Judah as *ahizat einayim*, an illusory phenomenon.

The third position, attributed by Rabbi Judah to "the second scholar," is the one adopted by most of the Ashkenazi Hasidic thinkers: Revelation is a process by which an emanated divine power, the Divine Glory, is envisioned by the prophet. This view is supported by Rabbi Judah's interpretation of Abraham ibn Ezra's commentary on Moses' vision of the Glory in Exodus 33.[30] According to this interpretation, the Glory, which is emanated from God and is of His essence, has a supreme, upper aspect that cannot be seen by man, while its lower aspect is the subject of prophetic vision. Thus, what the prophet describes is indeed a divine revelation, though God Himself is not its subject, but the lower aspect of His emanated Divine Glory.

These three views are presented by Rabbi Judah, in a treatise probably written about the turn of the thirteenth century, as completely legitimate and acceptable within Judaism, though two of them are wrong and only one is true. When criticizing the two rejected views, he does not complain of their heretical nature; he insists that they do not do justice to the biblical verses. There is no acrimony in this rejection; the "second scholar's" view is accepted because it is better, not because the others are so bad.

A religious school that calmly debates the various merits and demerits of three such views, which can be described as Saadian, Maimonidean, and Ibn Ezraian, cannot be described as categorically inimical to all aspects of Jewish rationalism. It is not the actual con-

[30]Ibn Ezra's commentary to Exodus 33:23. The section is also included, in a more expanded form, in Ibn Ezra, *Yesod Mora*, ed. S. Stern, Prague 1933, Chap. 12.

cepts of the Jewish philosophers that were opposed by the Ashkenazi Hasidim, but their methodology: the reliance on human reasoning, rather than on tradition and exegesis of ancient texts.

Rabbi Judah the Pious and his school described divine providence in great detail in their works. The concept of God's supervision of every earthly detail by means of hordes of angels constituting an enormous bureaucracy that decides everything, from marriage to every fleeting thought and intention, is unparalleled in the history of Jewish religious thought.[31] Yet, very near to the time and place in which these works were written, another Ashkenazi scholar, the anonymous author of the *Sefer ha-Hayyim* (ca. 1200), presented a radically different view.[32] When confronting the problem of the existence of imperfection, sin, and evil in the created world, he insisted that divine providence supplies only the general rules, not the individual details. According to this author, who was unaware of the works of Rabbi Judah and the Kalonimide school, God gave the world only the basic laws by which it is governed, but the actual details of the nature and fate of every phenomenon is not directed by divine providence; though he does not state it clearly, it seems that he regards these details as the product of earthly accident, which should not reflect on the nature and powers of the Creator. In many other respects, the author of the *Sefer ha-Hayyim* is surprisingly close to the Kalonimide school, and the works of Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra are among the major sources of his ideas. But concerning the problem of imperfection and evil, he adapted a position diametrically opposed to that of Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, and is close to concepts held by several Jewish rationalists in explaining the imperfections in the created worlds.

[31]An example of this concept of divine providence is found in Rabbi Judah the Pious's *Sefer Mala'akhim*, which I published from ms. Oxford 1567 in *Daat* 2-3 (1978-1979), pp. 99-120.

[32]Concerning *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, see G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York: Schocken 1954, p. 122 and *The Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 181-183. The text is found in J. Dan, *Ashkenazi Hasidic Theological Texts*, Jerusalem: Academon 1977, pp. 11-15 (Hebrew).

Ashkenazi Hasidism should not, therefore, be regarded as expressing a direct opposition to every theological idea that is characteristic of Jewish philosophical rationalism in the Middle Ages. In this, Nachmanides was correct in pointing out some basic similarities in the attitudes of both schools of thought. This becomes evident when we analyze the most comprehensive attack on rationalistic views expressed by a medieval Ashkenazi thinker, that of Rabbi Moses Taku; his attack on rationalism was turned into an attack against Ashkenazi Hasidism as well.

IV

Rabbi Moses Taku wrote his polemical work against the theologians of his time and previous generations around the year 1220, without knowing anything about the beginnings of the controversies concerning Maimonidean rationalism. He may have had some knowledge of the polemical exchange concerning the belief in the resurrection of the dead, though this is not certain.[33] It is clear, however, that he had no knowledge of the existence of the *Guide to the Perplexed*, or of Maimonides' centrality among Jewish rationalists. It may be stated that even though he wrote his treatise fifty years later, his worldview, concerning Jewish culture in southern Europe, was that of 1170 or so (and even that concerning only works that were extant in Hebrew at that time; of works in Arabic he knew nothing). His knowledge concerning developments in the Ashkenazi cultural realm was somewhat more up to date, but still surprisingly incomplete.

Rabbi Moses ben Hisdai Taku was a well-known figure in the schools of the Tosafists, and many details concerning his life and works were analyzed by E. E. Urbach.[34] Most of his only nonhalachic

[33]See note 14.

[34]E. E. Urbach, "Arugat ha-Bosem le-Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel," *Tarbiz*, 10 (1939), pp. 30-50; *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, 4th ed., Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik 1980, 1:26, 144, 360-361, 420-425; 2:564, 582-583, 704 et passim. *Arugat ha-Bosem* 4:78-79, 157 et passim.

treatise, *Ketav Tamim*, is probably lost, and only one section of it has survived in one manuscript in Paris. It was first published by R. Kirchheim in 1860[35] and was republished in a fascimile edition recently.[36] It seems that this fragment contains less than one-third of the complete work. Judging by the number of references to it and quotations from it in later generations, it had hardly any impact; it seems to represent an isolated, inconsequential episode in the history of Jewish thought in the Middle Ages. This appears to be due to three reasons: The first reason is that it was written a decade or so before the great controversy of 1232; second, it lost some of its thrust by including Ashkenazi Hasidim and rationalists in the same camp and fiercely criticizing them as if they were one; and third, this episode reflects the peculiar Ashkenazi Hasidic attitude toward ideological conflicts. Before explaining these points, which are, in fact, an explanation of the relative passivity of Ashkenazi thinkers in the Maimonidean controversy in the thirteenth century, the unique theological positions of Rabbi Moses Taku should be briefly described.

According to *Ketav Tamim*, three postbiblical theological catastrophes occurred in Judaism that produced three great schools of heretics: One was led by Jesus Christ and produced Christianity; the second was led by Anan and produced Karaism; and the third is expressed in *Emunot ve-Deot* and the Commentary on the *Sefer Yezira* by Saadia Gaon. There is a hint in the fragment of the work in our possession that the attribution of these works to Saadia is, according to Taku, pseudepigraphical,[37] thus saving the Gaon of Sura from joining the figures of Jesus and Anan as arch-heretics; it is not clear whether Rabbi Moses developed this excuse for Saadia systematically and actually based his polemics on it. In most cases, he seems to be attacking Saadia without any reservation. According to Rabbi

[35]*Ozar Nechmad* 3, Vienna 1860, pp. 54–99.

[36]*Ketav Tamim*, ms. Paris H711, ed. and introd., J. Dan, Jerusalem: Dinur Center for Jewish History, 1987.

[37]*Ozar Nechmad* 3:79 (ms. p. 26a): "Because Rav Saadia, if *Sefer ha-Emunot* is his, because it is not signed." See J. Dan, ed., *Ketav Tamim*, Introduction, p. 23, note 70.

Moses, while speculative works of Saadia are the foundation of this new heresy, the followers of this new danger to orthodox Judaism are Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (who is erroneously described as the author of the abovementioned *Sefer ha-Hayyim*); Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, of whose writings he is familiar only with the *Sefer ha-Madda*; the author or authors of the *Shir ha-Yihud*; and Rabbi Judah the Pious (it seems that Taku was familiar with the treatise in which the controversy between the three scholars concerning revelation was presented, and he referred to it as *Sefer ha-Kavod*, The Book of Divine Glory). Rabbi Eleazar of Worms was not mentioned by name, but there is a reference to "books from Worms," which may indicate Rabbi Eleazar's works.[38] Rabbi Moses Taku states emphatically that all these writers based their views on the Saadian works, which are the source of all evil. This radical opposition to all theological speculation earned Rabbi Moses Taku, in Gershom Scholem's eyes, the title of one of the two truly reactionary Jewish writers of the Middle Ages.[39]

Taku's criticism is concentrated on attacking two basic ideas that, according to him, characterize the ideas of this new heretical school: divine revelation and divine immanence. He insists on the literal acceptance of the prophets' descriptions of their visions as well as the anthropomorphic references to God in talmudic-midrashic literature. He does not do so because of his belief in the literal veracity of these descriptions; he insists only that they represent the maximum that can be conveyed concerning God's essence and appearance, and that any further inquiry cannot lead to valid conclusions. God chose to reveal to us in the scriptures whatever is found in them; man should be satisfied with that, and ask no more questions. It is not that Rabbi Moses Taku believed in an anthropomorphic God; most probably, he did not. It is a fact that Taku is the only Ashkenazi writer in this period to deny completely the authenticity of the *Shiur Qomah*, even though this anthropomorphic trea-

[38]See *Ozar Nechmad* 3:7 (ms. p. 24b). J. Dan, ed., *Ktav Tamim*, Introduction, p. 8.

[39]G. Scholem, "Yediot Hadashot 'al Rabbi Yosef Ashkenazi," *Tarbiz*, 28 (1959), p. 59.

tise is traditionally attributed to the great sages of the Mishnah, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael.[40] He confidently declares that the heretics forged many books, and that they are recognizable by being different from what is clearly found in the Talmud and the classical Midrash. He could, because of his great self-confidence as an authentic speaker for talmudic tradition, discern between what is acceptable and what is not in that tradition, something that even Rav Saadia could not afford, and therefore, though he was certain that the *Shiur Komah* was a pseudepigraphic forgery, he had to offer an explanation to it as if it were authentic rabbinic tradition.[41] Rabbi Moses Taku denied the normative power of anything that is not found in the center of the talmudic tradition, and did not hesitate to delineate the boundaries of this tradition according to his own preferences. He did not oppose one or the other Ashkenazi Hasidic solution to the problems of prophetic revelation and anthropomorphic descriptions; he denied the necessity to ponder these problems and opposed their investigation by any method whatsoever.

The second basic idea that Rabbi Moses Taku opposed fiercely was the concept of divine immanence, which was developed by the various circles of the Ashkenazi Hasidim following some of Saadia's statements. God, while being completely transcendent, is at the same time present within everything in the cosmos in a uniform way,

[40]Taku writes (p. 3a–b): "And so it is in the *Shiur Komah*, which is written in the *Alpha Beta of Rabbi Akiva*, it has no end and no measure, if it [the treatise] is reliable, because it is not found in our Talmud or in the Jerusalem Talmud or in the great midrashim. For there are books that the heretics have forged in order to mislead the world, like the *Perek Shira*, and it is written in its end [of the *Shiur Komah*] that anyone who studies it always will earn this and that and this or that scholar guarantees it. And what is written in the book the names of the limbs [of the divine figure in the *Shiur Komah*], the palm of His right hand its name is such and of the left its name is such. . . . One should not believe this, for they say it only to strengthen the impact of their words. And we have heard that Anan the heretic and his followers used to write treatises of heresy and lies and used to bury them in the ground and later they unearthed them and claimed that they have found ancient books."

[41]Saadia's statement concerning the *Shiur Komah* is quoted by Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai of Barcelona in his Commentary on *Sefer Yezira*, ed. S. Z. H. Halberstamm, *Mekizei Nirdamim*, Berlin 1885, p. 21.

because nothing can stop him or deny his immanence in it. This raises the problem of divine presence within evil, sin, and filth. Saadia's answer to that was that God's immanence is not harmed by evil or filth in the same way that the sun's light is not diminished or defiled by such elements. This answer was quoted in the *Shir ha-Yihud*[42] and other Ashkenazi Hasidic works. Taku could not tolerate the notion of God's presence in the baser layers of cosmic existence, and saw in such statements heretical attacks on God's complete purity and transcendence. He ridiculed, in several sections of *Ketav Tamim*, the religious attitude of people who can believe that God can be found in filth and sinfulness, but did not offer an alternative conception of the nature of divine presence within the created world. Again, his only demand was that whatever God chose to reveal to us in scriptures and the Talmud should be understood literally, and any questions regarding such matters should not be analyzed and discussed. Tradition should not be required to present answers to every question raised by curious minds, and it has no obligation to present a sustained, coherent, and unambiguous system of thought. We should be thankful for the little that is revealed to us, and ask for nothing more.

Rabbi Moses Taku's concept of the role of Maimonides in his time is best expressed by his statement that "the idle chatter of Moses ben Maimon is not even his own"; he is only following the *Book of Beliefs*, i.e., Saadia, who was the first to ponder the essence of the divine.[43] Anyone aware of the existence of the *Guide to the Perplexed* could not make such a statement, and after the great upheaval of 1232 such a view never could have been expressed. Taku's polemics reflect an intellectual realm in which the most important and meaningful events of the first third of the thirteenth century either had not yet occurred or were completely unknown.

[42]The description of the divine immanence is found especially in the section titled "Tuesday" in the division of the poem according to the days of the week, found in later editions. See my Introduction to the Magnes Press edition of the *Shir ha-Yihud*, Jerusalem 1982.

[43]*Ozar Nechmad* 3:77 (ms. p. 24a), and see J. Dan, ed., *Ketav Tamim*, Introduction, p. 23.

V

Not all the facts concerning the participation of Ashkenazi scholars in the events of 1232–1235 and later have been clarified, and some work has still to be done in order to glean from the existing material a balanced historical picture of the role of Ashkenazi Hasidism in the great controversy concerning Maimonidean rationalism. Still, it is quite clear that these pietists did not show during this debate the sustained anti-Maimonidean activity that some rabbis in the south expected of them; they did not rise as one man to completely deny and denounce Maimonides and his teachings. There were, undoubtedly, many reasons for this phenomenon, but the survey presented can elucidate at least some of them.

Antirationalist treatises were not a new phenomenon to the Ashkenazi scholars in 1232; Rabbi Moses Taku preceded them by a decade or more. The worst denunciations of the teachings of Maimonides by his opponents in the Provence and northern Spain seemed mild when compared to Taku's comparison between Saadia and Jesus and Anan. Any description of the religious dangers inherent in the *Guide to the Perplexed* made in 1232 would fall short of Taku's description of *Sefer ha-Emunot* as the root of all evil in contemporary Judaism. Any Ashkenazi scholar who read *Ketav Tamim* a decade earlier could not be overwhelmed by the cries of danger of Maimonides's opponents in 1232–1235, who claimed, like Taku, that the *Guide* represented a Jewish heresy.

More meaningful than that is the fact that Taku's polemics included both Maimonides and Rabbi Judah the Pious, and described them as partners to the "new religion" threatening the foundations of traditional Judaism. It is very hard to imagine that Taku's warning was taken seriously by scholars who were familiar with the personality and the teachings of Rabbi Samuel the Pious, Rabbi Judah, and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, who upheld strict orthodoxy in any halachic or ethical problem. *Sefer Hasidim*, the book that expressed Ashkenazi Hasidic everyday legal and ethical behavior, is one of the most orthodox religious works written in the Middle Ages. To describe the school that produced it as religiously dangerous, and to equate it with the dangers of Christianity or Karaism, was as absurd then as it is now. One may imagine that the new accusations of 1232 were accepted with an element of skepticism by some Ashkenazi rabbis of the time who were exposed to Taku's ideas.

We have no historical information concerning the reception that *Ketav Tamim* had in Germany immediately after its publication. One could expect a controversy to arise, and that some scholars, including the leaders of Ashkenazi Hasidism, would debate and refute Taku's accusations. It is quite certain that at least several of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's books that have reached us were written after *Ketav Tamim* was published (Rabbi Eleazar died ca. 1230), yet there is no reference in his writings to Rabbi Moses Taku or his ideas; I could not find even one passage that could be viewed as an indirect refutation of any of Taku's arguments. There can be no doubt that in Rabbi Eleazar's circle Taku's book was known, because his direct disciple, Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel, the author of *Arugat ha-Bosem*, the extensive commentary on the *piyyutim*, quotes Taku often; his book was written, as Urbach has shown, around the year 1234. Rabbi Abraham's quotations from *Ketav Tamim* do not reflect in any way the radical nature of the controversy presented in the book. He uses that text calmly as he does every other text in this encyclopedic work, including Saadia, Maimonides, and the Ashkenazi Hasidic leaders. If we had to rely on *Arugat ha-Bosem*, we would never guess that Rabbi Moses Taku was a bitter opponent of Rabbi Abraham's teacher and his teacher's teacher, Rabbi Judah the Pious.

The only other Ashkenazi-Hasidic source that mentions *Ketav Tamim* is *Sefer ha-Navon*, which is an anonymous commentary on Shema Yisrael and on *Shiur Komah*.[44] The author often quotes Saadia's *Sefer ha-Emunot*, but not directly; it seems that he did not possess a copy of this work, so he quotes the Babylonian Gaon as "in *Sefer ha-Emunot* in *Sefer ha-Tamim*." Having no way to use Saadia's work directly, the author quotes him from the work of his arch-opponent, *Ketav Tamim*. He does so without any hint at the

[44]This treatise was published by me in *Kobeẓ Al Yad*, vol. 16, part I (Jerusalem 1966), pp. 199–223; it was reprinted in J. Dan, *Iyyunim*, pp. 112–133.

nature of that work, and no word of polemics against Rabbi Moses Taku can be found in this treatise. This is despite the fact that Taku not only opposed Saadia, but also denied the authenticity of *Shiur Komah*—the subject of his work.

These three very loud silences—those of Rabbi Eleazar, Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel, and the author of *Sefer ha-Navon*—concerning the arguments directed against their ideas and sources by Rabbi Moses Taku cannot be regarded as accidental. It is as if the scholars of the age, headed by the Ashkenazi Hasidic teachers, agreed to disregard and ignore the fierce polemics of *Ketav Tamim*. They showed no disrespect to Rabbi Moses Taku, and *Arugat ha-Bosem* quotes him in matters of *halachah* and theology as a source equal to all others used to elucidate a given problem. Thus, they avoided a "pre-controversy" concerning the impact of rationalism on traditional Judaism that could have erupted in the Rhineland a few years before the great controversy began in the Provence and northern Spain. It is probable that when that great event occurred, there were at least some Ashkenazi scholars who decided that the attitude adopted concerning *Ketav Tamim* also was suitable to the appearance of the Hebrew translation of the *Guide to the Perplexed* and the epistles of its opponents.

We do not know whether Nachmanides' epistle, which tried to show the closeness of some rationalistic ideas to those of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, was known to the scholars in Germany during the period of the great controversy, and, if it was, whether it had any effect. But it seems probable that the arguments against Maimonides that did reach them had less than maximum effect, because they had been exposed, a few years earlier, to a much stronger version of an antirationalistic polemic. The same work, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, that was written during the years in which the conflict raged in southern Europe ignored both the Taku episode and the Maimonidean controversy. This may be understood as at least a partial agreement with Nachmanides' argument: An attack against the Maimonideans could be construed, following Taku's polemics, as an attack against Ashkenazi Hasidism itself.

NINE

The Emergence of Messianic Mythology in Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah in Spain

I

From the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, the history of Jewish messianism is closely connected with the ideological developments within the circles of the Jewish mystics, the kabbalists. In the period after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the kabbalah began to produce acute messianic ideologies, and for three hundred years, from Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Eliezer ha-Levi early in the sixteenth century[1] up to Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav in the nineteenth, kabbalistic mysticism served as a basis for messianic theories and movements. These theories had enormous historical consequences, culminating in the mystical Sabbatian movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is not surprising, therefore, that very often we tend to identify kabbalistic mysticism with acute mythological messianism, influencing masses of Jews to messianic

[1]See G. Scholem, "The Messianic Idea in the Kabbalism," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays*, New York 1971, pp. 37–48.

activity. At the basis of this activity there is a mythological symbolism, apocalyptic in character, that was used by the kabbalists who developed the messianic element in kabbalah.[2] It is possible to follow the development of this mythological symbolism, the main elements of which are found in the greatest mystical work written in Spain at the end of thirteenth century, the *Zohar*.[3]

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the influence of the *Zohar* increased gradually, its symbolism shaped Jewish mystical messianism, and the symbols used by the author of the *Zohar* became the dominant ones in Jewish messianic thought. The new, revolutionary messianic mythology of Rabbi Isaac Luria in Safed of the sixteenth century, which served as a basis for later messianic movements, is based on Zoharic terminology.

The centrality of the messianic element in the kabbalah after the *Zohar* tends to emphasize the lack of interest in this subject in kabbalistic literature before the *Zohar*. The first kabbalistic work, the *Sefer ha-Bahir* of the late twelfth century, does not contain messianic symbolism. The early kabbalists, from Rabbi Isaac the Blind in Provence to the Gerona kabbalistic school of the first half of the thirteenth century, did not dwell on this subject as part of their mystical works. From time to time we can find in a kabbalistic work a reference to messianic redemption, but it is expressed in the usual, traditional manner without any use of the mystical symbolism of the kabbalah. In the first three generations of kabbalistic schools and circles in Spain we do not find among them any messianic tension or tendency to speculate on this subject, and it is obvious that this element did not serve any role in the development of early kabbalah.

Since the difference between early and later kabbalah regarding messianic mythology is so striking, it is necessary to present the historical question: How did a secondary or even neglected subject in the early mystical works become a central and dominant one in

[2]G. Scholem described this myth in his introduction to *Shabbatai Zevi*, *The Mystical Messiah*, Princeton, NJ. 1973, pp. 1–77.

[3]On the messianic element in the *Zohar*, see Y. Liebes, "The Messiah in the Zohar" (Hebrew), in *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought*, Jerusalem: The Israeli Academy of Sciences 1982, pp. 87–235.

the later works of the Jewish mystics? We have to analyze the causes of this process and try to understand them.[4] This study is dedicated to the first emergence of messianic myth in kabbalistic literature, which served as a basis for its development in the *Zohar* and from there to subsequent kabbalistic works of later periods. The thesis presented here is that messianic mythology was introduced into the kabbalah by Rabbi Isaac son of Rabbi Jacob ha-Cohen of Castile, especially in his treatise *A Commentary on the Teamim*.

This treatise by Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen was printed from manuscripts by Gershom Scholem more than fifty years ago.[5] It was written in an ordinary literary genre found frequently in early kabbalistic literature. The early kabbalists were acutely interested in the biblical text, and studied and commented on it from every possible viewpoint. They attached mystical significance not only to the meaning of the text, but also to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, their forms and shapes, the vocalization signs, and even to the signs used in the biblical text to signify the melody by which it is to be said, the *teamim*. Rabbi Isaac's commentary on these signs is, therefore, a continuation of a convention found in kabbalistic literature in the three generations that preceded him. The tradition that believes that the shapes of the letters, the vocalization signs, and the *teamim* represent hidden mystical secrets encompassing the mystical message of the Bible is central in early kabbalah, and especially in the second half of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth we find many kabbalistic treatises dedicated to this subject. Among them was Rabbi Jacob ha-Cohen, Rabbi Isaac's elder brother, who, together with his brother, established the important kabbalistic school in Castile around 1260–1270.[6] These subjects are studied both

[4]This paper follows two others in which I tried to describe the main stages of the development of kabbalistic concepts of evil and messianism; see notes 36, 52.

[5]G. Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac Sons of Rabbi Jacob ha-Cohen" (Hebrew), *Madaey ha-Yahadut*, II (1927), pp. 165–293. The text itself is printed on pp. 269–275.

[6]On the circle and its works, see Scholem, *Madaey ha-Yahadut*, especially pp. 168–197. See also the series of studies Scholem published in *Tarbiz* on this circle: vol. 2 (1931), pp. 188–217, 415–442; vol. 3 (1932), pp. 33–66, 258–286; vol. 4 (1933), pp. 54–77, 207–225; vol. 5 (1934), pp. 50–60, 180–198, 305–323.

in special works and in more general ones, the most comprehensive among them being *Badey ha-Aron* by Rabbi Shem Tov ben Gaon, which was written in Jerusalem and Safed between 1315 and 1325.[7] Rabbi Shem Tov used many sources, most of them from the kabbalistic schools in Spain, among them the traditions of the Cohen brothers' circle. Another branch of such speculation is represented by Rabbi Abraham Abulafia[8] and by Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla in his early works, both writing in the concluding decades of the thirteenth century.

The main source for mystical speculation concerning the meaning of the alphabet in the works of the early kabbalists was the ancient *Sefer Yezira*, the Book of Creation, which was understood as describing the secrets of the creation as included in the twenty-two letters and the ten numbers. To this was added the tendency of the early kabbalists to seek mystical union and perfection by retreating to the simplicity and wholeness of the "secret of Genesis," in the complete unity and harmony of the universe when it was completely spiritual, before the creation of the world introduced the conflicting elements of present existence.[9] This tendency, a mystical retreat to the early beginning, is contradictory to messianic tendencies, because it seeks mystical redemption in the past instead of in the future. It reflects a wish to disengage from the developing historical process, which will culminate in the future messianic apocalyptic upheaval, and find refuge in the simple, precreation past of divine unity.[10]

Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen's commentary on the *teamim* reveals in its subject a conventional attitude, dealing with a subject common in early kabbalistic literature. But it is completely unusual and innovative in its ideological message. This is revealed first and foremost in the dynamic, future-oriented content of the commentary.

[7]A facsimile edition of this work from the Paris manuscript was published by D. S. Lewinger, Jerusalem 1979.

[8]On Abulafia, see M. Idel's detailed study in his Ph.D. thesis, *The Writings of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia*, Jerusalem 1976, especially pp. 395–433.

[9]G. Scholem, "The Messianic Idea in the Kabbalism," pp. 38–40.

[10]Ibid., p. 13.

When most other kabbalists described in their works the stages by which existence emerged from divine unity, Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen found in the signs of the *teamim* descriptions of future occurrences, related to the apocalyptic events of the messianic era.

Rabbi Isaac sees the various signs as hinting at the struggle between Samael, the satanic opponent of God, who was driven away from the divine realm, and the celestial powers fighting against him. The forces of Samael are described in the form of camels, horses, and donkeys, which are destined to fall from their exalted position and are now beginning to lose their standing,[11] but their final fall will not come until messianic times, because strong forces come to his assistance.[12]

According to Rabbi Issac, the melodic signs accompanying the letters of the Bible signify a dynamic myth of a struggle between the powers of good and evil, which began when Samael was driven away from his position in the divine world, a struggle that continues throughout the history of the world and will be decided when the redemption come, and Samael will be completely overcome by the divine forces of goodness.

In another passage in this brief treatise Rabbi Isaac finds in the form of these signs hints of a divine lamentation over the length of the period of the exile and the great strength of the enemies of God and of the people of Israel, but at the same time he connects these signs with a biblical verse[13] that he interprets as signifying the future redemption from these hardships, in which divine powers and earthly people share the same fate. The redemption will be revealed by the reappearance of the primordial light, the light of the days before the creation of the sun and moon.[14]

Rabbi Isaac connects the description of the sufferings of Israel

[11]Exodus 23:5.

[12]Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac," p. 270, and see the various versions noted there. (I checked the versions of ms. Vatican 188, pp. 44b–48b, and ms. Mussaiof 218, and corrected only the places where the differences affected the meaning of the text.)

[13]See Ezekiel 21:31.

[14]Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac," p. 270.

in exile, which is a symbol of the incompleteness of the divine order both in the divine realm and on Earth, with the description of the future redemption, the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the return of the world to its original harmony. The biblical verse[15] in Isaiah signifies the dispersal of the armies of Samael and the overcoming of the twelve princes of his armies,[16] as the twelve tribes of Israel[17] will be gathered from all over the world. Another Isaiah verse[18] connected with one of the *teamim* prophesies that when the redemption will come, the *atarah*, the tenth divine power in the kabbalistic system of the *sefirot*, usually called the *Shechinah*, symbolized by the moon, will regain its original strength and will return to its rightful place in the divine world from which it was exiled.[19]

The various elements of the biblical text do not symbolize for Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen the stages of the process of the revelation and emanation of the divine powers as it did in previous kabbalistic works, but a mythological struggle between the forces of evil and forces of goodness in the divine world, a struggle during which the *Shechinah* was pushed downward. The apocalyptic struggle will end when Samael will be defeated, the *Shechinah* will be redeemed, and the people of Israel will return to Jerusalem. These symbols are found frequently in later kabbalistic works and have become basic concepts of kabbalistic historiosophy; but they cannot be found in kabbalistic literature before Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen.

A large portion of the treatise is dedicated by the author to the list of names of the celestial princes of evil. These names he connects with the names and forms of the *teamim*, and, using homiletical interpretations of biblical verses[20] he describes their relation to Samael and their future defeat.[21] As usual in other works by Rabbi

[15]Isaiah 27:13.
[16]The princes of evil are described earlier in the treatise, p. 269.
[17]Scholem's versions reads "The tribes of God," while Vatican and Mussaiof manuscripts have "The tribes of Israel."
[18]Isaiah 30:26.
[19]Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac," p. 271.
[20]Psalms 119:102.
[21]Ibid., p. 271.

Isaac, he pretends to rely on early tradition, claiming that what he is revealing in this treatise was handed down by old, wise kabbalists who had a secret tradition. Such tradition concerns, for instance, the power he calls Gabriel and a mythical sword used by him. The power of this sword will change the present situation, in which the divine powers are driven back and away from the created world and the people of Israel are being decimated, and bring forth the apocalyptic change, hinted in a verse in the Book of Lamentations.[22] The lowly will rise, the defeated will become winners, and the "emanation on the right," that is, the powers of good, will regain their original stature. Then, according to Rabbi Isaac, there will be a complete unity of the divine powers, symbolized by a sexual unity that he finds hinted at in a verse in the Psalms,[23] thus achieving the complete redemption in both the divine and the material worlds.[24]

Rabbi Isaac presents here, for the first time, a detailed mythical symbolism that became central in later kabbalistic speculation. The fight between the "emanation on the right" and the "emanation on the left," the powers of evil, is the main event of the apocalyptic period of messianic times. Spiritual perfection is symbolized by sexual unity in the divine world as a messianic, mythical symbol. These elements are repeated time and again when Rabbi Isaac comments on the names of the *teamim*[25] and the names of the celestial princes.[26]

The various *teamim*, according to Rabbi Isaac, represent powers of the emanations on the right, or the emanations on the left, or stages in the struggle between these forces. One of them is responsible for the sufferings of Israel because of their sins, another serves Samael by prolonging the period of exile, whereas another represents God's forgiveness and the revelation of the time of messianic redemption.[27]

[22]Lamentations 2:3.
[23]Psalms 85:11.
[24]G. Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac," p. 272.
[25]Rabbi Isaac uses the method of *notaricon*, that is, seeing the name of the *team* as comprising the first letters of the words in a verse.
[26]Scholem, ibid.
[27]Ibid., p. 272.

A series of these melodic signs describes the whole process of the redemption. They represent the divine power called by the kabbalists *tiferet*, the sixth and central divine power in the system of the ten *sefirot*, which represents the masculine divine power. Before Him, and before the *malchut*, the *Shechinah*, which is the feminine divine power, the forces of evil will be brought bound in chains of iron. When the evil forces on Earth, represented by the kingdom of Edom, will be vanquished, these divine powers will be united in sexual union, correcting and reconnecting the chain of divine emanations that was broken by the exile; all this is expressed by Ezekiel's prophecy[28] as understood by Rabbi Isaac. A day of revenge will come in which divine powers responsible for revenge, for the sword, and for the chain of emanations will finally execute their preordained missions. Then the Messiah, who is described as a snake or a dragon, who is now imprisoned, will be freed and overcome all the powers of evil.[29]

The detailed homiletical and hermeneutic exegesis of the *teamim* and the related biblical verses combine to create a complete mythical picture of the redemption. The myth describes the apocalyptic struggle between Samael-Edom and his princes and forces, and the Messiah and his princes, a struggle that will bring the deliverance to both the celestial and the earthly good powers. Rabbi Isaac expresses the sufferings of the people in exile, but promises revenge and freedom in the messianic era.

The main process of the redemption will not occur on Earth, but in the divine world, where the victory of the divine forces of good over the satanic powers of Samael will bring complete unity and harmony, a return to the situation before the fall of Samael. The earthly redemption, the ingathering of the exiles, and the building of the Temple in Jerusalem are the direct result of this process in the divine realm.

All these elements that constitute the messianic myth are known today from countless works, both mystical and nonmystical, of

[28]Ezekiel 25:14.

[29]Scholem, ibid., p. 273, and compare Scholem's note there (note 1).

Hebrew writings concerning the redemption. The interest in this brief treatise of Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen is based on the fact that, as far as we can determine today, no Jewish thinker used these symbols before Rabbi Isaac. The commentary on the *teamim* should therefore be viewed as the earliest kabbalistic work that presents symbols and ideas that later became basic building stones in the works of later thinkers, kabbalists and nonkabbalists. The works of Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen served as a source for the author of the *Zohar*, Rabbi Moses de Leon, who wrote his great work a decade or two after Rabbi Isaac. Very few later writers used the works of Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen, while everybody relied on the *Zohar*. By his influence on the *Zohar*, Rabbi Isaac shaped to a very large extent the messianic mythology of later Judaism from the fourteenth century onward.

II

The importance of Rabbi Isaac's treatise on the *teamim* is that the whole work, brief though it is, is dedicated to the detailed exposition of the messianic myth. The dedication of a complete treatise to a subject expresses its importance in the eyes of the author. But Rabbi Isaac dedicated to this myth some central portions of his major work, the *Treatise on the Emanations on the Left*.

Messianism is not the main subject of the *Treatise on the Emanations on the Left*. Most of this work is dedicated to the elucidation of Rabbi Isaac's new and revolutionary conception of the powers of evil in the divine world. Rabbi Isaac, unlike previous kabbalists in Spain and Provence, developed a bold mythology describing the emergence of the evil powers from the highest divine *sefirot*, and their independent structure of ten emanations "on the left." Because of this dualistic myth Gershom Scholem called Rabbi Isaac and his school "the gnostics."[30] In the last chapters of the treatise, Rabbi Isaac, however, connects the myth of the evil powers with the messianic myth found in his commentary on the *teamim*.

In Chapter 19 of the treatise, the author describes the emana-

[30]See G. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem 1974, p. 55.

tion of Samael and Lilith, the evil counterparts of the sixth and tenth divine *sefirot*. He claims to be quoting an ancient source he calls *Shimusha de-Hechalot Zutarti*,[31] and presents the text in Aramaic. Samael and Lilith were emanated as an androgynous entity, united as one being, like Adam and Eve. The figure of Lilith is divided into two—The Elder Lilith (Lilith Savta), who is Samael's wife, and The Younger Lilith (Lilith Ulemta) who is the wife of Asmodeus, the king of the demons. He then continues:

> This is the text of the chapters of *Hechalot Zutarti* as we have received it, word for word and letter for letter. The sages who know this ancient lore have received secret tradition from ancient sages, who found written in those chapters that Samael, the greatest prince of all, was extremely jealous of Asmodeus the king of the demons because of Lilith who is called Lilith Ulemta, whose likeness is that of a beautiful woman from the head to the navel, and from the navel downward—burning fire. And the daughter is like her mother. . . . And they say that from Asmodeus and his wife was born a great prince in heaven, who rules over eighty thousand evil and destructive angels, who is called *Harba de-Ashmedai Malka* (the Sword of King Asmodeus), and his name is Alfpunias,[32] and his face burns like fire. He is also called Gurigur,[33] for he fights against the princes of Judah called Gur Aryeh Yehuda. In the same form was born in heaven a prince from the *malchut*, who is called Harba de-Meshiha (the Sword of the Messiah), and he also has two names, Meshihiel and Cochviel. When the right time will come, then the sword will be taken from its sheath, and the prophecies will come true[34] . . . and we shall soon see the face of our righteous Messiah, we and all our people.[35]

[31]Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac," p. 189.

[32]The name is probably constructed from the Hebrew words for "face of fire" (*pney esh*), with the addition of "a thousand" (*elef*) in the beginning.

[33]The name is most probably a counterpart to *Gur Aryeh* (lion's cub as a description of the tribe of Judah). It is improbable that a name such as Gregorius is hinted here, because Rabbi Issac constructed the dozens of names he included in the treatise from biblical verses.

[34]See Isaiah 34:5; Numbers 24:17.

[35]Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac," pp. 260–261.

It is evident from this paragraph that the messianic myth is constructed by Rabbi Isaac parallel to the myth of the powers of evil. Rabbi Isaac used ancient traditions concerning the demonic powers, but gave them new meaning;[36] he gives invented names to various celestial princes of good and evil; and his structure puts the sword of Asmodeus as counterpart to the sword of the Messiah, and uses messianic biblical verses to give them proper names.

In Chapter 21 the author describes the status of Israel and its princes among the celestial powers, especially Michael and Gabriel, and in Chapter 22 he connects a series of symbols—Samael, Lilith, Leviathan, snake, etc., and even creates an interesting new term—Taniniver, no doubt meaning "blind snake," based on the interpretation of the name "Samael" as "blind." He describes the relationships among these powers, and concludes by prophesying the future. According to him, when the time of the redemption will come, the power of the emanations on the left will diminish, Samael and Lilith will weaken, and the "blind prince" (Samael) will be vanquished by Gabriel, the prince of the divine power who will fight against the evil forces.[37]

The final chapter of the treatise, Chapter 23,[38] is a commentary on a talmudic saying[39] that describes future collaboration between Gabriel and Leviathan. This commentary includes a detailed description of the messianic wars between Israel and their prince; Gabriel against Leviathan and the snake. Rabbi Isaac attributes this description to revelations received by a great pietist who saw it in dreams and transmitted his visions to the ancient kabbalists. According to these visions, Gabriel will knock down the government and

[36]Concerning Rabbi Isaac sources, see J. Dan, "Samael, Lilith and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah," *AJS Review V* (1980), pp. 17–40.

[37]Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac," p. 262. Rabbi Isaac homiletically describes the relationship between Leviathan the prince of evil and Leviathan who is a Levite and belongs to the holy, good side.

[38]In the printed version of the treatise there is one more paragraph titled "Chapter 24," but it is obvious that this is an addition that belongs in another place in the treatise, while Chapter 23 concludes the structure of the work.

[39]See Bavli *Baba Batra* 74b–75a.

power of Samael and all his princes and assistants, who oppose both Israel on Earth and the powers of good in heaven, especially since the destruction of the land of Israel and the Temple. Since that upheaval, the divine world is not complete, and the emanations of the good side are submerged by millions of princes of evil and destructive angels who govern the heavens. When the prince of power, Gabriel, awakens, he will take revenge for all those saints who were murdered and sanctified the holy name in their death; their tragedy was caused by these powers of evil. Gabriel will take revenge from Edom,[40] and then there will again be unity between the male and female powers in the divine world, and the righteous will enjoy the promised pleasures in the messianic world. Rabbi Isaac states that he is quoting from the revelations to that pietist, as preserved by the sages of Germany. He claims to be quoting from a book, *Sefer ha-Orah*, that he saw in the hands of a righteous and wise man, a great scholar and kabbalist, in the city of Narbonne.[41]

Rabbi Isaac, in this description, emphasized especially the element of revenge, and seems to be expressing not just an invented theological system, but also deep emotions and hopes. He relied on visions the contents of which were transmitted to him, according to which there is an exact parallel between occurrences in the divine and the earthly worlds, both concerning the sufferings following the exile and the future revenge.

This description, and similar ones in this treatise, make the *Treatise on the Emanations on the Left* a unique work in the history of kabbalistic literature. The work begins with a fiercely mythological system of the emergence of evil in the divine world, connected with the story of the creation and the myth of the ancient worlds that were destroyed before the present one was created, and continues with the myth of Samael and Lilith, their emanation, and their functions. The concluding part of the book deals with the period of the redemption and the messianic wars, revealing here also a new, mythological approach. The present, according to the author, is

[40]Following Ezekiel 25:14.

[41]Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac," pp. 263–264.

nothing but a brief interval between the process of creation and the emergence of the evil powers, and the process of redemption and the destruction of these powers. In this historical attitude Rabbi Isaac is different not only from other kabbalists, but also from the basic attitudes that can be found in other rabbinic, philosophical, and Ashkenazi Hasidic works of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, where the main emphasis is on the present. Rabbi Isaac is unique in his historical perception of the present as link between the myth of creation and the myth of messianic redemption.

The appearance of this acute messianic mythology in the works of Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen leads us to three historical conclusions.

1. Rabbi Isaac was, as far as we know, alone in his concepts of the messianic struggle in his own time. Our knowledge of the literature of early kabbalah, while certainly incomplete, is still detailed enough, after the studies of G. Scholem, I. Tishby, E. Gottlieb, and others, so that we know not only biographical and bibliographical details but also the general spiritual atmosphere in which the early kabbalists created their works, including the school to which Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen belonged.

   In all the other kabbalistic works of the many circles that created their mystical writings in the last decades of the twelfth century and the first two-thirds of the thirteenth, we find no element of mythological messianism; this was evidently not one of the spiritual forces that motivated kabbalistic creativity. We may find some discussions of messianic theology, commentaries on biblical verses, and expressions of messianic hopes, but these are usually presented in commonplace, traditional terms. The fierce creativity of Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen in the works discussed above cannot be found in earlier works by other kabbalists.

   More than that, in the works of Rabbi Isaac's own brother, Rabbi Jacob ha-Cohen, we do not find these elements. Rabbi Isaac's disciple, Rabbi Moses of Burgos, wrote commentaries on Rabbi Isaac's works, and some of his trea-

tises published by Scholem[42] also reveal an attempt to ignore this mythological vision. Rabbi Moses wrote a book called *The Pillar on the Left* (*Ha-Amud ha-Semali*), which is an interpretation of Rabbi Isaac's treatise on the subject. In Rabbi Moses's work the messianic elements are almost completely ignored, and it is evident that the disciple did not share his rabbi's feelings on this subject.

Other kabbalists who continued the traditions of this school of mystics, like Rabbi Todros Abulafia in his works *Shaar ha-Razim* (the Gate of Secrets) and *Ozar ha-Kavod* (the Treasury of Divine Glory), are completely lacking in this mythological aspect. The same is true about Rabbi Shem Tov ben Gaon's *Badey ha-Aron*, who used traditions of this school. Other kabbalists, like Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla at the end of the thirteenth century, continued in their discussions of the powers of evil and messianic redemption the same attitudes to be found in the kabbalistic works that preceded Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen. We cannot find any parallel, or any trace of influence, to Rabbi Isaac's views in the works of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia[43] or other kabbalists at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth. It is very difficult to reach definite conclusions based on the lack of these elements, but still our detailed knowledge of the works and the atmosphere of the periods leads inevitably to the conclusion that Rabbi Isaac, whose disciples did not continue in the path he described and whose works are an episode in the history of kabbalistic thought, was alone with his views.

There can be little doubt that Rabbi Isaac's mythology would have remained an isolated, echoless phenomenon in the history of the kabbalah were it not for the effect it had on the author of the *Zohar*, Rabbi Moses de Leon. It may be

[42]See G. Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moses of Burgos, The Disciple of Rabbi Isaac," *Tarbiz* 3 (1932), pp. 258–286 (Hebrew).

[43]See note 8.

said that Rabbi Isaac did not influence any other kabbalist—except the one who really counted, the author of the most important work of the kabbalah in Spain. The symbolism and mythology of the *Zohar* had lasting effect on Jewish culture as a whole, and through this work Rabbi Isaac's revolutionary mythology became dominant in Jewish messianism in the periods after the *Zohar*.

Rabbi Moses de Leon used many sources in his immense work, and in other subjects we can say that what he did not find in one source he could find in another. But concerning the myth of evil and messianic redemption Rabbi Moses de Leon did not have any other source. If it were not for these treatises by Rabbi Isaac, it is possible that this element would not have been included in the *Zohar* at all, and Jewish messianic thought would have been completely different. It seems to me that we have in this example a unique demonstration of the power of a single thinker to influence in a dominant way major subjects in the thought of a whole nation.

2. One of the most frequently expressed views concerning Jewish messianism, which is at the same time completely wrong, is the one that states that there is a direct connection between messianic expectations and movements and the hardships suffered by the people of Israel in exile. It is often stated that when Jews live a "normal" life, when they are not suffering from persecutions by Gentiles, the messianic drive becomes diminished; while when persecutions increase, messianic movements appear with increasing force. G. Scholem already pointed out how simplistic and incorrect this view is,[44] and it seems that Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen presents one more example to refute this view. We do not know about any hardships or persecutions that befell Rabbi Isaac or his school; if there were such occurrences, they certainly could not affect Rabbi Isaac more than they did his brother, Rabbi

[44]Scholem discussed this briefly, for instance in *Shabbatai Zevi* (note 2), pp. 1–8, and compare I. Tishby, *Netivey Emunah u-Minut*, Tel Aviv 1964, p. 262.

Jacob, or his disciple, Rabbi Moses. The fact that in the works of Rabbi Isaac we find an acute messianic drive and wish for drastic revenge against the oppressors of Israel, coupled with lamentations of the lowly state of Israel in exile, while this element is lacking in the works of kabbalists very close to him, seems to prove that Rabbi Isaac expressed personal, individual attitudes that were not motivated by external historical events. The loneliness of Rabbi Isaac in his views (and the loneliness of Rabbi Moses de Leon in being influenced by them) seems to prove that individual thinkers can create messianic ideologies without being motivated by unusual suffering. The relationship between Jewish messianism and external historical events is much more complicated then to be schematically summarized.

3. The main theological phenomenon that can be identified from the analysis of Rabbi Isaac's works is the close relationship between the mythological conception of evil and the mythological description of messianic redemption. Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen was the first Jewish thinker to present a clear dualistic explanation for the existence of evil in the world. The *Treatise on the Emanations on the Left* is the first Hebrew work that presents a picture of a dualistic structure in the divine world to explain the dualism of good and evil in the created world, and the first to state that an independent evil realm, which fights against the good powers, exists both on Earth and in heaven, and its source is within the Godhead.[45]

Rabbi Isaac's treatise is the first attempt in the history of the kabbalah to create a connection between the system of kabbalistic emanations, the ten *sefirot*, with the traditional Jewish demonological figures (Samael, Lilith, Asmodeus), and

[45]Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac, pp. 168-197. It should be remembered that when Scholem wrote this paper the exact chronology of the writing of the *Zohar* was not known, and the possibility that there were common sources to both still existed. It is clear now that in these matters Rabbi Moses de Leon had no other source but the works of Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen.

from this connection to formulate an explanation of the evil phenomena in the world, including leprosy, hydrophobia, etc., into one complete "emanation on the left," which was called later by the author of the *Zohar* "the other side" (*sitra ahra*).[46]

The question is: Can it be an accident that the same Jewish mystic created both the myth of evil powers as an independent force and the mythological description of the messianic process? It seems that when we examine other examples, we can find a close relationship between creativity in the description of evil and creativity in messianic myth. One such example is the ancient apocalypse, the Book of *Zerubavel*,[47] which narrates the drama of messianic redemption in great detail and at the same time shows great originality and creativity in the description of the satanic figure Armilos, pictured as the monstrous son of Satan and the statue of a beautiful woman in Rome. The images in this book, which was written in the early Middle Ages, influenced Hebrew literature for a thousand years.[48] There is a parallel in the detailed descriptions in this apocalypse between the figures on the good side—*Hefzibah*, the mother of the Messiah, and the Messiah son of Joseph and son of David—and the powers of evil opposing them.[49] It is evident in this work that the author seeks a balance between the two conflicting powers in the messianic apocalypse, in order to increase the dramatic effect of the struggle between them.

A much later example also leads to the same conclusion. The Lurianic kabbalah, created by Rabbi Isaac Luria in Safed in the second half of the sixteenth century, is characterized

[46]Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Jacob and Rabbi Isaac," p. 255-257.

[47]See I. Even-Shmuel (Kaufman), *Midreshey Geula*, Jerusalem 1954, pp. 55-88. Kaufman considered the book to be an apocalypse written in the beginning of the seventh century. The parallels between this book and *Hechalot* literature suggest the possibility of an earlier date.

[48]See J. Dan, *The Hebrew Story in the Middle Ages*, Jerusalem 1974, pp. 45-46 (Hebrew).

[49]J. Dan, *The Hebrew Story in the Middle Ages*, pp. 40-43.

on the one hand by its acute messianic tension, and on the other by its strong dualistic attitude.[50] According to Luria, the origin of the powers of evil was deep within the eternal Godhead before the creation, and it came into actual being by an upheaval within the divine realm that preceded the creation of the world. The power of the evil element within the world is almost unlimited. At the same time, Lurianic kabbalah put the messianic redemption as the main goal of every deed of every Jew, and gave mythical, cosmic dimensions to religious observance. There is a parallelistic process in the intensification of the myth of evil and the myth of redemption in Lurianic mysticism.[51]

On the other hand, it can be demonstrated that those kabbalists who objected to the dualistic tendencies in the kabbalah, and who held that the sources of evil were to be found on Earth, for "no evil descends from heaven,"[52] did not put much emphasis on the messianic drama. I. Tishby described in a detailed paper the cycle of kabbalistic attitudes toward evil from mythological conceptions to philosophical abstractions.[53] It seems that we should add the messianic myth in the kabbalah as an integral part of the same cycle.

ENDNOTE

The problem of the relationship between the kabbalah and messianism has drawn increasing interest in recent years, especially

[50]On Luria's concepts of evil and redemption, see G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1954, pp. 244–286, and I. Tishby, *Torat ha-Ra veha-Kelipa be-Kabbalat ha-Ari*, Jerusalem 1942.

[51]In Lurianic kabbalah, the enhancing of the coming of the redemption is the duty of every individual, while the role of the Messiah is not central. In the theology of the Sabbatian movement the figure of the Messiah was established in the center of the messianic myth. See Scholem, *Shabbatai Zevi*, pp. 44–46.

[52]See J. Dan, "No Evil Descends from Heaven," ed. I. Twersky, *Proceedings of the Harvard Conference on Jewish Thought in the 16th Century*, Cambridge 1983, pp. 89–105.

[53]I. Tishby, *Netivey Emunah u-Minut*, pp. 23–29.

as the result of the reemergence of Hasidic messianism in the Lubavitch (Chabad) communities in the United States and Israel in the 1980s and early 1990s. This contemporary demonstration of the development of a messianic movement from a kabbalistic background (for Chabad is, to large extent, the Hasidic sect whose teachings are most deeply rooted in kabbalistic concepts and terminology) marks a new chapter in the relationship between the two phenomena. The study published here serves as a reminder that originally the kabbalah, as it appeared in Judaism in the late twelfth century, was not a messianic phenomenon; quite the opposite, as Scholem has shown, it was oriented toward the achievement of individual redemption by mystical communion of the worshipper with God, unrelated to universal and national redemption. The turning point was indeed the work of Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen, whose writings stand in stark contrast to those of his kabbalistic predecessors and his contemporaries, including his father and his brother. The eight hundred years of the history of the kabbalah clearly indicate that there can be a connection between kabbalah and messianism, but also that they are not inseparably intertwined; the kabbalah can inspire people and direct them toward an achievement of a very high spiritual status without demanding a messianic attitude.

TEN

The Emergence of Mystical Prayer

I

The mystical concept of prayer in Judaism emerged in the same period during which Hebrew mystical literature began to flourish among the Jews of Europe,[1] the second half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. The discussion of the nature and meaning of the liturgy is one of the most prominent characteristics of the writings of these early Jewish mystics, and this sets them apart from other schools of thought of the same period, which de-

[1]Ancient Jewish mysticism in the talmudic period, known as *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* (holy palaces and holy chariot) mysticism, did not deal with the problem of liturgy, especially not in connection with the mystical ascent to the divine realm, described in detail in *Hechalot Rabbati* and *Hechalot Zutarti*. (See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 2nd ed., New York 1954, pp. 40–79, and his book devoted to this period, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, New York 1960.) Though some of their mystical hymns later became a part of the Jewish prayerbook, there is no specific reliance on prayer in connection with mystical experience.

voted only scant attention to this subject. One of the early descriptions of the kabbalah, written by an opponent, characterizes the kabbalists as innovators mainly—or even only—in the realm of mystical prayer.[2] It is evident that the development of a new attitude toward the liturgy is closely connected with the emergence of the various Jewish mystical schools, so that the analysis of this particular problem may shed further light upon a crucial phase in the history of Jewish mysticism and religious thought in general.

Jewish mysticism in Europe developed in several places at about the same time. The period between the last decades of the twelfth century and the first years of the thirteenth was that during which various schools of Jewish mystics produced their first written works. Foremost among these is the school of Rabad of Posquières in Provence,[3] which was followed by the great kabbalistic school in Gerona in northern Spain.[4] In Germany there were several schools and circles that were occupied with esoteric speculation, the most prominent being the school of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, headed by Rabbi Judah ben Samuel the Pious,[5] as well as some circles whose geographical and chronological background is quite uncertain. These include the school that attributed its writings to the tradition of Joseph ben Uzziel[6] (the "Special Cherub" circle), or the author of the *Sefer ha-Hayyim* (the Book of Life). The same period produced

[2]Rabbi Meir ben Simeon of Narbonne, in a polemical epistle against the kabbalists (published by G. Scholem, "Teudah hadashah le-toledot reshit ha-qabbalah," *Sefer Bialik* [Tel Aviv 1934], pp. 148–150): "It is now some time since fools and ignoramuses have wrongly interpreted our faith in God and the matter of prayers and benedictions," etc. His polemic is directed mainly against the kabbalists who directed various parts of the liturgy, at different times, to various aspects of the Godhead, that is, to the different *sefirot*.

[3]On Rabad, see Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières*, Cambridge, MA 1962, especially pp. 286–300; on the kabbalistic school in Provence, see G. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, Berlin 1962, pp. 175–272.

[4]Scholem, *Ursprung and Anfänge*, pp. 324–406.

[5]A short description of these schools and their major works is presented in my *Torat ha-sod shel hasidut Ashkenaz*, Jerusalem 1968, pp. 46–67.

[6]Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge*, pp. 273–291.

the pseudepigraphic literature of the Iyyun circle,[7] among others.[8] While some of these different groups had close connections with others, as did the Provençal kabbalists with the Gerona school,[9] it seems that others flourished independently, without influencing other circles or being influenced by them.

The independence of these various circles gives the scholar an opportunity—a rare one in the history of Jewish mysticism—to study the mystics' attitude toward prayer in its many aspects when there is a possibility of distinguishing between original contributions and the influence of common sources. Whereas in later phases of the history of the kabbalah—especially after the publication of the *Zohar*—it is very difficult to ascertain which ideas in the writings of a mystic were motivated by his own experience, and which were development of the mystical tradition that he received. Such a possibility exists in the period discussed here, for no common, normative mystical tradition united the various schools. Over a period of many decades, these early circles of esoteric lore developed their own ideologies, theologies, and systems of symbols in relative independence. Each of these groups had its own preferred ancient sources, its own traditions, and very often its own body of pseudepigraphic material, which they used to develop their own doctrines. At that time no attempt was made to create a unified system of mystical symbols, and thus the individual characteristics of the thought of each circle were preserved.

This unusual diversity of schools, which gave Jewish mysticism works like the *Bahir*, the basic text of the early kabbalah;[10] the works

[7]See my *Iyyunim be-Sifrut Hasidei Ashkenaz*, Ramat Gan 1975, pp. 89–111.

[8]While the Iyyun circle relied mainly on "tanaitic" sources (especially those mentioned in *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* literature) and gaonic sources, the Special Cherub mystics relied on a tradition described as if transmitted by the family of Ben Sira, beginning with his father, the prophet Jeremiah, through Sira's son, Uzziel, and his grandson, Joseph ben Uzziel.

[9]The correspondence between these schools was analyzed by G. Scholem in *Sefer Bialik*, pp. 141–147.

[10]A translation of this text into German was published by G. Scholem in *Das Buch Bahir*, Leipzig 1923; reprint ed., Darmstadt 1970.

of Rabbi Isaac the Blind, the most prominent kabbalist in the Provence;[11] the esoteric works of Rabbi Judah the Pious and his disciple Rabbi Eleazar of Worms;[12] the works of Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar of London;[13] and many others, offers a unique opportunity for comparative study of these circles. It is possible to follow the development of the major mystical ideas and to distinguish between the elements found in the works of all or most of these circles and those that are particular and specific to one group alone. The possibility of comparing parallel mystical phenomena and discovering both the common and divergent attitudes toward a central problem can bring into sharp focus the religious problems that were facing Judaism at that time, and enable us to analyze the various responses to them.

This chapter is an attempt to analyze some of the basic attitudes of the Jewish thinkers, mystics, and esoteric writers in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries toward the concept of prayer; to look for a common denominator in their formulations concerning this problem; and to try to form some conclusions that will link religious and theological developments in that period with the mystical treatment of the subject of prayer and intention during prayer.

II

Until the late twelfth century, the prayerbook was treated by Jewish scholars mainly as a halachic, not a theological, concern. Monographs on prayer were written by the gaonim in Babylonia, but these were compilations of halachic rules concerning the text

[11]Rabbi Isaac's most important work, the commentary on *Sefer Yezira* (The Book of Creation), was printed by G. Scholem in his *Ha-Qabbalah be-Provens*, Jerusalem 1963, pp. 1–18, in an appendix.

[12]Very few of their works were printed; see the list of the printed works and works in manuscript in *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 256–267.

[13]His commentary on the *Book of Creation* was printed by Georges Vajda, "Perush Sefer Yesirah le-Rabbi Elhanan ben Yaqar," *Kovetz al Yad*, 16 (1966), pp. 145–197. Two other works were printed by me in *Torat ha-Elohut shel Hasidei Ashkenaz* Jerusalem 1977.

and practice, the time and the manner of praying. Only in the last two decades of the twelfth century did Jewish thinkers begin to write comprehensive and detailed commentaries on the text of the liturgy, discussing basic religious problems and treating the prayerbook in the same way that biblical pericopes were studied. It seems that the earliest comprehensive commentaries on the liturgy were written by Rabbi Judah the Pious and by his disciple, Rabbi Eleazar of Worms.[14] Rabbi Judah's commentary was lost, but we have a description of the book, which states that it was an eight-volume work.[15] Rabbi Eleazar's commentary is extant today in several manuscripts[16] and served as a basis for later commentaries.

The question of what prompted the Ashkenazi Hasidic teachers to decide to devote so much effort to exposition of the text of the liturgy is, of course, the crucial problem: Did it signify a change in the basic attitude toward prayer that occurred in this circle at that time? A partial answer, at least, can be gleaned from the study of the extant quotations from Rabbi Judah the Pious's lost commentary on the liturgy. These quotations were preserved in a short thirteenth-century treatise called *Sodot ha-Tefilah* (the Secrets of the Liturgy), which has been preserved in several manuscripts.[17] This treatise was compiled by a disciple of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms and its aim was mainly polemical. The quotations the author used from Rabbi Judah's work were intended to prove the correct wording of some of the basic portions of the liturgy and to justify the tradition accepted by the Ashkenazi Hasidim. His criticism was directed against Jews in France and England, who, according to Rabbi Judah, changed a few words and adopted a different tradition. One of the quotations reads:

[14]See E. E. Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4 vols. (Jerusalem, 1939–1963), 4:73–111, and my comments in *Iyyunim*, pp. 58–71.

[15]For one of the descriptive quotations, see note 22.

[16]The most important ones are those of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Opp. 160 (Neubauer 1204), Paris (ms. 772), and Vienna (ms. 108). Some of the differences between the various manuscripts should be explained as resulting from Rabbi Eleazar's own corrections and re-editing of the work.

[17]See a short list in *Torat ha-Sod*, p. 15, note 2.

> The people [Jews] in France made it a custom to add [in the morning prayer] the words: *Ashrei temimei derech* [blessed are those who walk the righteous way], and our rabbi, the Pious, of blessed memory, wrote that they were completely and utterly wrong. It is all gross falsehood, because there are only nineteen times that the holy name is mentioned [in that portion of the morning prayer],[18] . . . and similarly you find the word *Elohim* nineteen times in the pericope of *Ve-elleh shemot*. . . .[19] Similarly, you find that Israel were called "sons" nineteen times, and there are many other examples. All these sets of nineteen are intricately intertwined,[20] and they contain many secrets and esoteric meanings,[21] which are contained in more than eight large volumes.[22] Therefore, anyone who has the fear of God in him will not listen to the words of the Frenchmen who add the verse *Ashrei temimei derech*, and blessed are the righteous who walk in the paths of God's Torah,[23] for according to their additions the holy name is mentioned twenty times . . . and this is a great mistake. Furthermore, in this section there are 152 words, but if you add *Ashrei temimei derech* there are 158 words. This is nonsense, for it is a great and hidden secret why there should be 152 words . . . but it cannot be explained in a short treatise. Furthermore, according to the words of the Frenchmen who add *Ashrei temimei derech*, *ashrei* appears four times: *Ashrei temimei derech*, *Ashrei yoshevei*, *ashrei ha-am*, *ashrei ha-am*. This is a mistake and a gross lie, for there are only three occurrences of *ashrei*, in keeping with the three occurrences of *Yom Kippurim* in the Pentateuch, and in keeping with the three occurrences of "God

[18]If the verse under discussion is added, there are twenty such names.
[19]According to the author, the number of holy names in this section of the liturgy should correspond exactly to the number of times that the name is mentioned in the first portion of the book of Exodus.
[20]Literally, by clasps and loops (*bi-kerasim u-ve-lulaot*). This term, based on Bavli *Shabbat* 99a (cf. Exodus 26), is repeated frequently in this text.
[21]*Sodot u-teamim harbeh meod.*
[22]*Machzikim yoter mi-shemonah kuntresim gedolim.*
[23]The author here uses the language of the verse under discussion, thus stating: You achieve the content of this verse by *not* using it in the liturgy.

> the Lord of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,"[24] and in keeping with the three occurrences of "God the Lord of Israel" in the book of Psalms . . . and in keeping with the three-thousand-year length of the Garden of Eden,[25] and in keeping with the three times that we say "holy" every day. All these are intricately intertwined, and they are connected with grand and great mysteries, written in several volumes. Therefore, everyone who fears God should always pray and say: May my soul never be together with that of the Frenchmen, and may I never be part of their congregation, for they invent things out of their own imagination and add in their prayers several words that are not needed. Thus they cause exile to themselves and their children until the end of all generations.[26]

In another passage we read:

> Give heed, you inhabitants of France and the Islands of the Sea [England], who err utterly and completely, for you invent lies and add several words in your prayers, of which the early sages who formulated the prayers never dreamed, when they commanded us to say the prayers in place of the sacrifices in the Temple. Every benediction which they formulated is measured exactly in its number of words and letters, for if it were not so, our prayer would be like the song of the uncircumcised non-Jews. Therefore, give heed and repent, and do not go on doing this evil thing, adding and omitting letters and words from the prayers.[27]

Similar statements concerning many of the basic benedictions abound in this treatise, thus making it impossible to assume that the fury of Rabbi Judah and of his disciple is directed toward people who distort the meaning of a certain ancient text because of some ideological or theological consideration. In order to understand this

[24]Meaning that this specific form appears three times in the Bible (1 Kings 18:36, 2 Chronicles 30:6, and probably referring to 1 Chronicles 29:18).
[25]I could not find an early source for this statement.
[26]Ms. Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, 8° 3 296, fol. 2.
[27]Ibid., fol. 7r.

religious phenomenon, we have to take the basic contention of this treatise exactly as it is stated: Every addition or omission of a word, or even of a single letter, from the sacred text of the prayers destroys the religious meaning of the prayer as a whole and is to be regarded as a grave sin, a sin that could result in eternal exile for those who commit it.

The attitude expressed in this document is unique. It is very difficult to find a similar example throughout the long history of Jewish polemical literature on this subject. The vehemence expressed here stands in sharp contrast to the usual relaxed Jewish acceptance of the ancient fact that there are differences in the customs of praying and the text of the prayers among the major Jewish communities. Sometimes even small communities had their own distinctive traditions. These variations tend to be minor in scope, and seldom, if ever, carry any theological implications. In most cases, Jewish respect for ancient tradition overcame the annoyance at the differences in the customs of prayers, and sometimes communities were praised because of their adherence to their particular tradition. From the pre-medieval differences in prayers between the customs of Babylonia and *Eretz Yisrael* to the variation between modern Ashkenazi and Sephardi customs, Judaism tolerated the various traditions and did not try to impose one dogmatic text at the expense of the respected traditions of various communities.

The unusual attitude of Rabbi Judah the Pious and his school toward these variations in the neighboring French Jewish communities stemmed from the emergence of a new attitude toward the liturgy as a whole. This school of the Ashkenazi Hasidim was intensely interested in the problems of the liturgy and Rabbi Eleazar's voluminous commentary on the prayerbook written in the late twelfth century and probably edited by the author himself[28] is in itself a proof of this change, both by its being the first such commentary to reach us, and by its contents. All the Ashkenazi Hasidic teachers put the problem of the liturgy in the center of their exegetical and theological works, thus opening a new era in Jewish speculation on

[28]See note 16.

this subject, after it had been neglected for many generations.

Rabbi Judah's explanation for this new attitude is found in both this work, the *Secrets of the Liturgy*, and his other esoteric works. He and his disciples evolved a mystical theory, according to which the words and letters of the various prayers are not accidental, nor are they only vehicles for their literal meaning. Their order, and especially their numbers, reflect a mystical harmony, a sacred divine rhythm, which was introduced by the rabbis who formulated the daily prayers during the period of the Second Commonwealth.[29] This mystical harmony can be discovered in historical events, directed by God; in nature, especially in the miraculous occurrences directly influenced by divine powers; and, first and foremost, in the Bible. According to Rabbi Judah and the Ashkenazi Hasidic school in general, there can be nothing accidental in the Bible, not even the forms of letters; the punctuation, the vocalization, and especially—in the numerical structures—the number of certain letters, consonants, or vowels in a certain verse; the number of words from the same root; the number and variety of divine names in a certain pericope; the absence of one or more letters from a chapter; and many other elements of the scriptures besides their content.[30] The most important is the element of *gematria*—the numerical value of each letter of the alphabet combined to form connections and parallels between different parts of the Bible. It sometimes seems that where other readers would see letters and meanings in the Bible, the Ashkenazi Hasidim would see only rows of figures and numbers, mystically connected. The main characteristic of Rabbi Judah's commentary on the liturgy seems to have been—judging by the quotations before us in this short treatise, the *Secrets of the Liturgy*—to treat the text of the liturgy in the same way as that in which the Bible was studied by the Ashkenazi Hasidim, and to claim that the

[29]It is clear that Rabbi Judah did not regard the prayers as divine in their origin, but completely accepted the traditional description of the development of the prayers and their role after the destruction of the Temple. The sages who wrote the prayers followed, however, a divine esoteric harmony.

[30]Parts of Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric literature are dedicated to biblical commentaries describing these characteristics of the Scriptures. See *Iyyunim*, pp. 52–57.

mystical harmony inherent—by divine revelation and inspiration—in the biblical text is to be found also in the text of the prayers.[31]

Ashkenazi Hasidic literature does not reveal to us whether this novel mystical concept of the liturgy had any practical significance that influenced the behavior of a Jew when actually praying in the synagogue.[32] It is possible that this new approach was merely "academic," and it was not regarded as necessary to keep all the numerical combinations and associations in mind when actually praying. However, there can be no doubt that this new attitude had two results, one of which is manifested in this treatise, while the other is evident from all Ashkenazi Hasidic treatments of the subject: (1) No change can be tolerated in the text of the prayers, not even a minute one, because every change—even of one letter—would destroy the numerical harmony inherent in the text. It does not matter, therefore, whether the change is beneficial from the point of view of meaning and content, for this level of meaning is not the most important one in the prayers. The text was formed to reflect mystical harmony, and any change would destroy it. (2) The liturgy received new importance and new meaning within the framework of religious practice. A completely new dimension was added in this way to the daily prayer service; it stopped being just a reciting of requests and praises of God in ancient formulas and became a vehicle for becoming a participant in a mystical, divine harmony. The prayers suddenly received a new depth of meaning and importance, which was undreamed of in the thousand years that had passed since they were formulated. The commentary on the liturgy by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms (d. ca. 1230) and the quotations from Rabbi Judah's lost commentary are the first book-length nonhalachic treatment of the liturgy in Jewish thought. There can be little doubt that there had occurred a major conceptual and religious change, of which the

[31]Sections of Rabbi Eleazar's commentary on the liturgy follow the same system (besides literal interpretation and theological discussion), and comparison of the quotations included in this treatise and Rabbi Eleazar's commentary suggest that Rabbi Eleazar made use of his teacher's traditions when composing his work.

[32]See *Iyyunim*, pp. 66–67.

appearance of these works is but one manifestation.[33]

The fierce polemical tone of Rabbi Judah's criticism of the changes introduced by the "Frenchmen" in the prayers can therefore be explained as a result of his fear that the prayers may be regarded as completely human in origin and meaning, making them secular and meaningless in religious and mystical practices. According to him, even if the content and meaning of the prayer is religious, expressing love and devotion to God, it still will be just "a secular song like that of the non-Jews" if it does not have the added mystical dimension of hidden truth, which cannot be revealed by the literal meaning of the words alone. In his polemic, Rabbi Judah defends not only the specific tradition of prayer he received from his parents and teachers; he also defends prayer as an elevating force, forming a connection between man and God, a connection that no mere words can achieve. The problem that should be answered is: Was there a real danger of dissociating prayer from worship in the highest sense? Was the threat imaginary or real?

III

Before these questions can be answered, it is necessary to establish the fact that in the eyes of the early Jewish mystics and esoterics of that period the problem of the liturgy was a theological one, not merely an exegetical question; that is, these problems were closely connected with the developments in the concept of the divine world, and not only with problems of worship. Several texts written late in the twelfth century and at the beginning of the thirteenth could serve this purpose, but most of them are purely esoteric texts, obviously not written for the instruction of the general public. One of the few exceptions is the short text translated below that is titled *Pesak ha-Yirah veha-Emunah* (A Decision Concerning Fear of God and True Faith). It seems that this text includes in a

[33]This is an contrast to the *piyyutim*; a whole literature of commentaries on them emerged long before Rabbi Judah (see Urbach, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4, pp. 24–72).

popular, brief form a summary of the most crucial theological problems of that age, the most important among them being that of the meaning of the prayers.

This short treatise is one of the works of the circle of mystics who developed the theology of the "Special Cherub,"[34] and who relied on a body of pseudepigraphic sources attributed to Joseph ben Uzziel.[35] We do not know exactly where and when the teachers of this circle—most of them anonymous—wrote their works, but it is probable that their center was in northern France and that they flourished during the second half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. The most important work from this circle is a commentary on the *Book of Creation* known as the Pseudo-Saadia,[36] and the three works of Elhanan ben Yakar of London,[37] written in the first half of the thirteenth century and constituting a summary of the theology of this circle in previous generations. The *Pesak* with which we are dealing here was printed by A. Jellinek,[38] who was misled by a manuscript in Munich to suppose that this was a section of a treatise by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms.[39] The *Pesak* is found in at least one other manuscript as an independent work,[40] and there can be little doubt that it is popular synthesis of the teachings of this circle, intended for a public that could not study the esoteric works based on the *Book of Creation*.

The text begins with the statement:

[34]I described the works of this circle in detail in "Hug ha-keruv ha-meyuhad bi-tenuat hasidut Ashkenaz," *Tarbiz*, 35 (1966), pp. 349–372, reprinted in *Iyyunim*, pp. 89–111.

[35]Joseph ben Uzziel is described as the grandson of Ben Sira in the Pseudo-Ben Sira (tenth century?). See my *Ha-sippur ha-ivri bi-yemei ha-beinayim*, Jerusalem 1974, pp. 69–78.

[36]See Abraham Epstein, *Mi-Qadmoniyyot ha-Yehudim*, Jerusalem 1957, pp. 211–216.

[37]See note 13.

[38]"Shaarei ha-sod ha-yihud ve-ha-emunah," *Kochevei Yitzhak*, 27 (1862), pp. 13–15 (based on ms. Munich 92).

[39]I published the text of Rabbi Eleazar's work in "Shaarei ha-sod ha-yihud ve-ha-emunah," *Temirin*, 1 (1972), pp. 141–156.

[40]Ms. Adler 1161 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America), fol. 70*v*.

> All God-fearing people, when they pray, have to direct[41] their prayers, when they say "Blessed is God," and when they kneel before Him and thank Him and direct their prayers in their hearts, only to His holiness alone, which is His glory and which has neither form nor image, only voice, spirit, and speech,[42] and so Isaiah said: "To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?" (Isaiah 40:18).

The opening sentence declares clearly that the following "decision" is not directed to mystics or theologians alone, but is relevant to every God-fearing person. This becomes even clearer when he defines his subject: the necessary intention when one blesses the name of God. According to Jewish law, such blessings constitute the core of the thrice-daily prayer, and a Jew is expected to bless God in these words one hundred times every day.[43] The decision refers, therefore, to the most common daily practice of Jewish faith, relevant always and everywhere to every Jew. The polemical tone of this treatise is also evident from the opening, because it is formulated as a prohibition of a prevalent practice and substitution instead of as the correct way to worship God.

The instruction emphasized here, which is repeated later in the treatise, is that one should not direct his prayers to a visible divine power, but to the holiness, or glory, of God, which does not have any form, likeness, or image. The author interprets the verse which speaks about *El*, God, to refer to this holiness or glory.

The background of this instruction can be understood clearly once we know the history of the term "glory" (*kavod*) during the Middle Ages. When the problem of the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible and in talmudic passages first arose, one of the main answers offered by Jews was the use of the term *kavod*, often found in the Bible in connection with divine revelation and

[41]*Yesh le-chavven ke-she-hem mevarechim*.

[42]According to *Sefer Yezira* (the Book of Creation) 1:9, in the description of the first *sefirah*.

[43]Bavli *Mencahot* 43b.

anthropomorphic statements, as denoting a supreme being that is not really God but a secondary power that can assume form and image, and can thus be described in anthropomorphic and material terms. We find this method used often in the Aramaic translation of the Bible, but it was theologically defined by Saadia Gaon in his philosophical work[44] and in his other writings. Saadia states that the glory, the *kavod*, is the greatest of angels, created by God for the specific purpose of revealing it to the prophets. This glory serves as proof to the prophets that it really is God Who is being revealed to them, and He assumes the proper form for the fulfillment of this purpose. In this way, Saadia preserved both the unity of God—there is no other divine being—and answered the question of the anthropomorphic descriptions: They describe the glory, who is a created angel, not God Himself.

It is clear from the opening sentence translated above that the concept of the glory in this treatise is diametrically opposed to that of Saadia, for here the author states, in unambiguous terms, that the glory, or the holiness, is that aspect of God that does not have any form or image, and he interprets the prophet's prohibition against attributing such likeness to God (*El*) to the glory. Obviously, the system offered by Saadia and adopted by many of his followers among the Jewish philosophers was abandoned here.

This process of change occurred long before the *Pesak*, and the main stages can be clearly identified.[45] The process began, most probably, in the writings of Saadia himself, who, when arguing against the Karaites concerning the ancient anthropomorphic mystical text of the *Shiur Komah*,[46] suggested that the enormous measurements of the divine being described there by Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva is another created angel, a higher one, who was created by God in

[44]*Emunot ve-deot*, Chap. 2. Concerning this problem, see my detailed discussion in *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 104–115.

[45]The main text in which the Ashkenazi Hasidim discussed this problem was published in *Iyyunim*, pp. 153–187.

[46]Concerning this key text, see G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 63–67; and his *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 36–42.

order to be revealed to the highest angels.[47] This formulation led later writers to decide that there is more than one glory, that indeed there is "glory above glory,"[48] a succession of such powers that could easily enough be turned into a series of emanated divine manifestations, in the current neo-Platonic environment dominant in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This tendency already includes within itself the concept of a "hidden glory" (*kavod nistar*), for the "glory above glory" is not revealed to man. This concept of the hidden glory, which was impossible and paradoxical in the framework of the Saadianic concept of the glory, became one of the cornerstones of the emerging Jewish mystical schools at the end of the twelfth century, most notably in the *Sefer ha-Iyyun* (The Book of Contemplation).[49]

The description of the glory as a created angel, as described by Saadia, was gradually replaced by the concept of the divine, emanated glory. This process was enhanced by two flaws in the Saadianic concept. First, it was very difficult to identify the divine being described by Rabbi Ishmael in the *Shiur Komah*, a being called in that ancient text "the creator,"[50] with a created angel. Second, Saadia identified the glory with the *Shechinah*, one of the basic rabbinic appellations of God Himself.[51] It was impossible to accept the description of the *Shechinah* as a created being, and, as the identification was accepted, the glory was elevated from the status allotted it by Saadia into a clearly divine being.

One of the major steps in this direction was made by Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, in his commentary on the Torah and in his other

[47]Saadia's answer is quoted by Judah ben Barzilai ha-Barzeloni in his *Perush Sefer Yesirah*, ed. S. J. Halberstam, Berlin 1885, p. 21.

[48]See the notes in *Torat ha-Sod*, p. 112.

[49]In the better versions of this work (Ms. British Museum Add. 15299, Cat. 752), the author, Rav Hamai, is described as knowing the secrets of the hidden glory in the opening sentence of the treatise.

[50]*Yotzer bereshit*.

[51]See G. Scholem, *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit*, Zurich 1962, pp. 135–190; E. E. Urbach, *HaZaL, Emunot ve-deot*, Jerusalem 1969, pp. 29–52.

works.[52] Ibn Ezra—who is often mentioned in the literature of the Special Cherub circle[53]—described the glory as an emanated being,[54] whose upper aspects were completely hidden from the prophets and from the world in general, while its lower aspects were revealed to human beings on some occasions. Thus the glory became a divine intermediary between the supreme Godhead and the created world, an intermediary who could be described as manifold, containing several aspects and fulfilling several functions. This concept of the glory was the one adopted by most of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, among them Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms,[55] and it had a dominant influence in the development of the theology of the Special Cherub circle which produced the *Pesak*.

Against this background it is possible to understand the polemical tone of the opening words of the *Pesak*: It seems that the readers of the *Pesak* conceived of the glory as an object for their prayers, and at the same time believed that it had anthropomorphic attributes, for it is revealed to the prophets in physical images. The author, therefore, states clearly that these images cannot be attributed to the glory, which is hidden and does not have any likeness, and only thus can it indeed serve as an object for human prayer, for prayer to a being that does have a physical image might be considered pure idolatry. The necessity of seeing the divine glory as the power toward which one turns in prayer makes it imperative that it be denied all anthropomorphic attributes. This seems to be the *Pesak* author's main concern.

The most important aspect of this attitude for our subject is that we find here the earliest evidence—in this treatise and in parallel discussions in other texts of the same period—for the existence of a hitherto unknown problem: Who, or What, is the object of

[52]Especially in his commentary on Exodus 33:23, and in Chap. 12 of his short ethical treatise, *Yesod morah*.

[53]See *Iyyunim*, pp. 103–104.

[54]Isaiah Tishby suggested that Shabbatai Donnolo in tenth-century Italy had already expressed the idea that the glory was emanated; see *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 112–113.

[55]A description of their attitude is presented in *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 129–142.

human prayer? The subject is developed further in the text of the *Pesak*:

> Concerning what is written: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,"[56] and "the eyes of God," and "a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above"[57]—all these metaphors[58] do not refer to the place of His holiness and the *Shechinah*. For I have explained that His holiness does not have any image or form, only voice, spirit, and speech, and the heavens and the Earth are full of Him. No created being can know the place of His holiness and glory, nor can any angel or seraph or all the hosts and legions of the heavens, as it is said: "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place."[59] Rather, all the metaphors in the scriptures, such as "Let us make man in our image," refer, as I have explained, to His greatness, which is his Kingdom, which is in the east.

Instead of Ibn Ezra's explanation that the revealed element in the divine world is the lower aspect of the divine glory, which was accepted by most of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, we find here a different symbolism: The revealed aspect of God, described in the anthropomorphic verses of the Bible, is a separate being called here "greatness" and "kingdom," a being that resides in the east, while the glory or the *Shechinah* cannot be seen either by man or angel, and it resides in the west.[60] The author proceeds to describe this being:

> And so the *Shiur Komah* of Rabbi Ishmael refers to that Greatness and Kingdom, and it is called the Special Cherub, who is emanated from His great fire, which is a fire that feeds on fire. . . . That fire which feeds on fire is His Holiness and His Glory, and from that fire He emanated and created the Special Cherub, not from the same fire from which the angels were created . . . but

[56]Genesis 1:26.

[57]Ezekiel 1:26.

[58]*Kol hanach dimyonot*.

[59]The verse in Ezekiel 3:12 was interpreted as indicating that the angels themselves did not know the place of the glory, and this verse is included in the *kedushah*.

[60]Compare Exodus Rabbah 2:2.

> from the fire that He emanated from His Holiness, and not from the fire from which the hosts of heaven were created, so that His glory would not be the same as theirs.[61] And He created for him an image and a form, the form of a man, eyes and hands and hips, and on his forehead is engraved *Yah Akhatriel*,[62] and [there are] phylacteries on his head[63] . . . and he has the Measurement of the Height (*Shiur Komah*) of Rabbi Ishmael, and man was created in his image, and he sits on the throne of Glory.

It is evident that this being, the Special Cherub, is considered by the author to be the subject of all anthropomorphic images—those in the Bible, those in talmudic literature, and those in the early Hebrew mystical works of *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* mysticism. His endeavor to explain away all physical descriptions of God is quite similar to that of the Jewish philosophers in the Middle Ages, with one clear difference: The author here does not try to cleanse God from such metaphors, for this is taken for granted; he concentrates his efforts on proving that the divine glory, the holiness, cannot be described in such terms, which refer, according to him, to a lower, emanated being that he calls greatness, kingdom,[64] or the Special Cherub. The term "Special Cherub" probably originated in Saadia's writings, for the Gaon also attributed all physical images to a lower being that he described as an angel created specifically for that purpose. But in this mystical circle, that being is not the *kavod-Shechinah* of Saadia, but a lower being—albeit emanated—while the *kavod-Shechinah* is cleansed from such attributes. How difficult this

[61] *Shelo le-hashvot kevodah li-chevodo*. (To prevent a misunderstanding, *kavod* was not translated here as "glory," though the author certainly hints at a distinction between their status and His in the heavenly spheres.)

[62] See Bavli *Berachot* 7a.

[63] See Bavli *Berachot* 6a.

[64] This term, *malchut* (kingdom), became the most frequent symbol used by the kabbalists for the *Shechinah*, the tenth and lowest divine power. The attribution of this term to the *Shechinah* is unknown in early sources, and it is quite possible that it occurred in prekabbalistic esoteric circles. G. Scholem suggested that the source was in Judah ibn Tibbon's translation of several sections of Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari*, and see below, sec. VII.

task was, from a terminological point of view, becomes evident from the last sentence of the section quoted: The power that sits on the throne of glory is not the glory, as the term denotes, but the Special Cherub, while the glory cannot be described with such an anthropomorphic term as "sitting."

In the concluding passage of this brief treatise the author returns to his main subject—the liturgy:

> That Special Cherub that sits on his throne of glory has a partition made of electrum, in various colors, that is called Ishiel and it is somewhat like light blue. That partition encircles the throne of glory on three sides, except the western side, where His holiness in the west shines on His greatness in the east on the throne of glory. And this is the meaning of "Blessed is the glory of the Lord"[65]—the glory of the Lord is His holiness, "from its place"—it goes and shines over His greatness and His kingdom. And it is to this Glory that we direct ourselves when we say the benedictions and say, "Blessed is the glory of the Lord from its place." In the same way, every "Blessed" (*baruch*) that is uttered by those who fear God should be intended to bless and thank and pay homage to that glory of His holiness. . . .[66]
>
> . . . For God made that Special Cherub so that all the princes of heaven will have an allotted place to praise and glorify their creator . . . for His holiness has neither form or image. This is why we end the third benediction[67] "the Holy God" (*ha-El ha-kadosh*), and not "the great God" (*ha-El ha-gadol*), as I have explained, so that, while worshipping his creator, one should not intend or bless anything but His holiness, which does not have any form or image, for Thou art a great and holy King, great in His greatness, and His kingdom is the Special Cherub, and holy is His holiness, which is in the west, and this is our faith.

[65] Ezekiel 3:12.

[66] The author repeats, in a sentence that is not translated here, a formula describing five divine worlds that appears in all the writings of this circle. See *Iyyunim*, p. 110, and note 72 there.

[67] The third benediction of the eighteen is the *kedushah*, which is discussed by the author.

The concluding words refer to the author's sources: "This is a secret, studied in the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel*,[68] who revealed it from the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, and it should be revealed only to those who can keep secrets, from the book of Rabbi Avigdor ha-Zarfati, of blessed memory."[69]

It is evident that the primary concern of the author of the *Pesak* is to clarify for his readers the object of human prayers, the divine aspect that is intended to listen and receive human worship. In order to achieve this purpose he has to overcome an obstacle: the anthromorphic attributes in ancient literature. Obviously, the same divine aspect cannot serve both functions—revelation to the prophets that necessitates assuming human form, and acceptance of the prayers—for praying to a being that has form and image is construed as idolatry. Therefore his main object is to explain to the readers that God has a special aspect that has a form and is revealed to the prophets, which is called His greatness, His kingdom, the Special Cherub that sits on the throne of glory and resides in the east, while the prayers should be directed toward another divine aspect, from which the Special Cherub is emanated. That is the divine glory, which is called His holiness, or *Shechinah*, and resides in the west, in a place unknown to all the hosts of heaven because it does not have any form or image.

This distinction between the revealed aspect of God and the hidden power that receives the prayers is a new one, as is the whole concept of the Special Cherub; we do not know of any similar formulation before the second half of the twelfth century. In this period, however, there are parallels to the structure described in the *Pesak*, most clearly in the works of the Ashkenazi Hasidim from the circle of Rabbi Judah the Pious, who adopted the Ibn Ezra system of a dual divine glory, the higher "face" of which is hidden, and a lower face that is revealed to the prophets, both being aspects of an emanated glory. However, the Ashkenazi Hasidim added to the Ibn

[68]This *barayta* is a medieval text, based on the *Sefer Yezira*, that was attributed to the grandson of Ben Sira. See *Iyyunim*, pp. 92–93.

[69]This scholar is not known from any source other than the texts from this circle. See *Iyyunim*, p. 98.

Ezra system a crucial element—prayers should be directed toward the upper, hidden "face" of the divine glory.[70] The author of the *Pesak*, and his sources in the circle that relied on the pseudepigraphic works attributed to Joseph ben Uzziel, preferred a structure that includes separate beings, the lower one for the purpose of revelation and the higher one for the purpose of prayers. It is evident, however, that the changes in the concept of the glory and the divine world introduced by these esoteric writers in the systems of Saadia and Ibn Ezra stem from one basic difference: The earlier philosophers never discussed the problem of intention during prayers; the object of human prayer was not one of the theological questions they set out to solve. The Ashkenazi Hasidim, and the Special Cherub circle, had to adopt earlier systems to the new spiritual environment, in which the problem of the object of human prayer was paramount.

There is a close connection between the religious problem of the anthropomorphic expressions and that of the object of prayer: Both these problems tend to enhance a system that describes various aspects in the divine world, for both questions postulate divine functions that are difficult to attribute to the supreme Godhead. But while both of them are quite similar as problems, the answer to one can never be an answer to the other. They must be mutually exclusive, because one and the same divine aspect cannot be invisible in order to receive the prayers and yet be revealed in form and image to the prophets. This is the reason that, in the writings of these early Jewish esoteric writers, we find an increasing tendency to identify various aspects in the divine world and create systems of emanating divine powers. There are at least two functions that have to be performed by lower powers and not the Godhead itself, while these two functions cannot be carried out by the same lower power. Thus, the seeds of a mythological concept of the divine world, which includes various powers that perform different functions, have been planted in these esoteric works. When the early kabbalistic texts, which

[70]The relevant text by Rabbi Judah the Pious is his short commentary on "Aleinu le-shabbeach," which I published in *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature*: "Sifrut ha-yihud shel hasidei Ashkenaz," pp. 82–84.

describe a system of ten such powers, were first received by Jewish thinkers late in the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, the concept that their symbolism represented was, therefore, not as novel as one tends to suppose, for even if the answer—the kabbalistic symbolism—was a new one, the problems that necessitated a divine hierarchy of powers were not new anymore.

Rabbi Judah the Pious's commentary on the prayers, as reflected in the quotations in *Sodot ha-Tefillah*, represents a new departure in the medieval Jewish attitude toward the text of the prayers. The *Pesak* translated above is an example of a new attitude toward the relationship between a person praying and the divine power that accepts his prayer. Both new attitudes were the cornerstones for a completely novel concept of the liturgy developed later by the kabbalah. The question that should be discussed at this point is: Can we identify the reason for the emergence of this new attitude in the cultural and religious environment of the late twelfth century?

IV

The problem of directing oneself during prayer toward a certain aspect in the divine world did not arise in earlier Jewish sources, the Bible, the Talmud, the Midrash, and the writings of the gaonim, because the concept of God in these sources did not prevent the worshipper from believing that God listens to his prayers and may answer them. The concept of God that was open to images according to which God participated in human battles, rewarded the righteous, and punished the wicked was consistent with a religious system according to which God demands prayers at certain times and places, and inspired the sages to compose a mandatory text for these prayers, combining the practice of daily prayer in the wider system of divine providence and guidance of human affairs.

When this concept of the divine was replaced in the Middle Ages by a completely different one, based mainly on the writings of Aristotle, the old concepts could not be preserved unchanged.[71] The

[71]See, for instance, Maimonides' *Guide*, 1:33, and see note 73.

new definition of God insisted, first and foremost, on the eternal existence of God, and this eternity necessitated a concept of an eternally unchanging God. Every change, argued the medieval philosophers, denotes a certain lack that existed before that the change came to correct; therefore, by definition, God cannot change. Thus, He cannot be influenced in any way, either by prayers or by any other means. Since He is the supreme wisdom, He cannot receive new information, for if it really were new, it would mean that He was ignorant before receiving it, which is impossible by definition. Therefore, God cannot "listen" to a human prayer; He cannot absorb it as information, and He cannot be influenced by it, because neither change nor ignorance is possible in the divine realm. The Aristotelian Prime Mover, which became the basic concept of the divine in all Jewish schools of thought in the Middle Ages, even the mystical ones,[72] necessitated a new approach to all problems of divine "activity," casting doubts not only upon old concepts of divine providence, but even upon the act of creation itself. Jewish philosophy, from the tenth century onward, was created in order to reconcile the new concept of the unchanging God with the old traditions in the sacred religious texts, and offered a new way of religious worship, based on spiritual and intellectual attitudes that lead man toward pure contemplation of God.

It is instructive for our problem that the Jewish philosophers did not dwell in any detail on the problem of reinterpretation of the Jewish concept of prayer in order to reconcile it with the new spiritual worship described by them, for the difficulties were enormous. The halachic attitude toward the liturgy was—and is—very clear and definite, and the philosophers who were also halachists did not deviate from it. Saadia wrote a halachic monograph on the text and laws of prayer, and so, of course, did Maimonides in his *Mishneh Torah*; both are perfectly orthodox works, neither reflecting nor referring to the implications of the new concept of God for

[72]Philosophical terminology describing the prime cause was used by kabbalists to describe either *keter*, the highest of the *sefirot* (sometimes indistinguishable from *ein sof*), or *ein sof* Himself, the supreme, eternal Godhead.

the practice of daily prayer. This is not the proper place to deal in detail with Maimonides' brief treatment of the subject of prayer in the *Guide to the Perplexed*.[73] Suffice it to say that this work did not—and does not—offer the average reader any clear answer to the problem of how the Prime Mover can listen to an individual's daily prayer.

To this basic question was added another as a result of the spiritualization of religious life that was prevalent among the adherents of rational philosophy.[74] Even when prayers were given a significant place in the framework of the relationship between man and God,[75] the religious emphasis remained on the personal, individual contact between the worshipper and the divine world, and the connection was described in terms of love and communion, sometimes expressed in words. Naturally, these words of worship were considered to be a reflection of the specific characteristics of the moment of worship, expressing the feelings and thoughts of the worshipper on that particular occasion. This concept of the verbal connection between God and man had nothing in common with the traditional Jewish laws concerning prayer: Jewish prayer is not personal, because it insists that everybody use the same text; it is not individual, because it insists that prayers should be said in a fixed social structure, at certain times and certain places, in a public place together with other Jews. This traditional character of prayer could not be explained on the basis of rationalistic, individual worship. Every person should have the right—and the need—to express his feelings toward God in his own words, which reflect the specific moment and circumstances in which he addresses Him; he should be able to apply to God in any place and at any time that he feels the need to do so, without being bound by the halachic laws concerning the traditional

[73]See the detailed analysis by Marvin Fox, "Ha-Tefillah be-machshavto shel ha-RaMBaM," in *Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change* (Hebrew), Ramat Gan 1978, pp. 142–167.

[74]See my *Sifrut ha-musar ve-ha-derush*, Jerusalem 1975, pp. 47–68; Isaiah Tishby, *Mivchar sifrut ha-musar*, Jerusalem 1971, pp. 114–121 et passim.

[75]Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakuda, for instance, rated the traditional prayers as part of the physical commandments, as opposed to the spiritual ones (which included man's nonverbal adherence to God). See references in note 74.

prayers. This contradiction between the teachings of rational, individualistic philosophy and the demands of the *halachah* was characteristic of the more general conflict between the new concept of religious life and the traditional *mitzvot*, only more so. While other commandments, like *shaatnez* or *tzitzit*, seemed to be meaningless in the framework of rational, personal worship,[76] the text and laws of the prayers seemed to contradict the prevailing concept of religious life. Moreover, while other commandments were based on clear biblical demands and were believed to express divine demands, even if their reasons were hidden, the text of the prayers and the laws concerning them were derived from a historical occurrence—the destruction of the Temple and the impossibility of offering sacrifices. Both the text and the laws were instituted by relatively late rabbinic authorities, who composed the wording of the benedictions and taught the *halachah* concerning the place and time of worship. For the Jewish intellectual in the twelfth century, the problem of prayer was, therefore, one aspect of the overall contradiction between prevailing concepts of spiritual worship and the old tradition, but it was one of the most difficult and perplexing sections of this problem, for which even the *Guide* did not offer a clear answer.

It seems that the emerging mystical attitude toward prayer in the second half of the twelfth century should be understood against the background of these problems—the need to reconcile praying with the new concept of God as the unchanging, eternal power that cannot be influenced, and the feeling that the text of the liturgy does not bring man, as an individual worshipper, closer to God. This does not mean that we should regard the mystical attitude as a polemical, antiphilosophical reaction to the prevailing mood of the age, as had been done two generations before.[77] Quite the contrary: The mystical attitude toward prayer, as reflected in the *Pesak ha-Yirah*

[76]A survey of medieval attitudes to this problem is found in Isaac Heinemann, *Taamei ha-mitzvot be-sifrut Yisrael*, 2 vols., Jerusalem 1959, 1:46–116.

[77]David Neumark, *Toledot ha-filosifyah be-Yisrael*, 2 vols., New York 1921–1929, 1:166–354; and see G. Scholem's remarks concerning his thesis, *Ursprung und Anfange der Kabbala*, pp. 6–9.

veha-Emunah and similar sources could not have evolve were it not for the fact that the mystics themselves craved to accept the crucial elements of rationalistic philosophy concerning the nature of God. The author of the *Pesak* does not argue that, contrary to Maimonidean-Aristotelian concepts, God does listen to human prayer and that He can be in touch with every praying person and answer his requests; the author, like other mystics, insists only that below the Godhead that is completely hidden and remote from human worship there is another divine power that can and does listen to prayers and answer them. This is an attempt to preserve the transcendence of God and at the same time describe the divine world in such terms that intimate human connection with it may remain possible. The only way to achieve this is to give up the philosophical concept of the "unity" of God, and treat lower divine powers as the object of human religious life in mystical terms. This mystical attitude is not a reaction toward the philosophical upheaval of the Middle Ages; it is an attempt to preserve the most important concept introduced by the philosophers—the transcendent character of God and His remoteness from any activity in the created world—while at the same time not to give up the belief in a personal God, Who provides for the created world and listens to human prayers. This dual purpose could not be achieved while still holding fast to the rationalistic methods of medieval philosophy. The philosophers themselves, naturally, preferred loyalty to rational methods even at the cost of undermining the belief in a personal, provident God; the mystics preferred the content of the ideas of rationalistic orthodoxy, and thus they could disregard the departure from rational method as long as both contrasting concepts of God were upheld. Obviously, the term "reaction" is completely inappropriate for a description of the relationship between Jewish mysticism and Jewish philosophy. Medieval universal concepts made a drastic choice mandatory for every thinker in that period; nobody could uphold all elements of the traditional beliefs and embrace, at the same time, completely and conclusively, the new, Greek-influenced methods of inquiry into the nature of the divine realm. A choice had to be made, and this choice divided the mystics from the rationalistic philosophers. While the mystics accepted the possibility of a division within the divine world and the existence of divine emanations, which included, below the Prime Mover, various aspects of the personal God, the philosophers followed logical methods and denied the possibility that such divine powers took part in providence over the created world. Scholars have already pointed out the similarity of the problems facing Jewish philosophers and mystics even when their answers differed,[78] and it seems that the attitude toward prayer is one of the clearest examples for such a situation.

Another aspect of the same process is the attitude toward the text of the prayers. Rabbi Judah warned his neighbors in France and Britain that if they allowed even the most minor changes in that text, their prayers would become "like the songs of the uncircumcised non-Jews." Free expression of feelings, religious or secular, was regarded by Rabbi Judah as a non-Jewish song, which has no place in the framework of worship. While this argument was not directed against rationalistic philosophers but against fellow halachists and pietists, the problem faced in this commentary by Rabbi Judah is the same one that bothered the philosophers and all thinkers of that period: Why does God insist on a repetitive prayer, said again and again several times every day in exactly the same words, instead of allowing free expression of the individual's religious feelings in his personal words, reflecting every special occasion? The framework of rationalistic philosophy did not offer a popularly accepted answer to this question, a fact that necessarily weakened the position of the traditional text of the liturgy in the eyes of the intellectuals of the age. It seems that the school that Rabbi Judah represented was the first to offer an answer to that problem—a nonrational answer, bordering on a mystical attitude, namely, the existence of a hidden, esoteric harmony between the text of the prayer and a divine structure, mainly a numerical structure, which is also reflected in the scriptures, in history, and in the creation. Therefore, every deviation

[78] An analysis of the attitudes of the philosophers and the kabbalists toward the Greek concepts is found in Isaiah Tishby's discussion of the Godhead in *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2 vols., Jerusalem 1949–1961, 1:96–98.

from this structure destroys that harmony and secularizes the text of the prayers, turning them into simply collections of words and meanings, like the songs of the non-Jews. Clearly, the driving force behind such a concept of the liturgy was the attempt to give religious meaning, even if it be a mystical one, to the fixed, repetitive text of the prayerbook, and the polemics against the minor changes held by the "Frenchmen" was a secondary outcome of the main process. Here also, while rationalism pointed the way toward forsaking the traditional text of the prayers, Rabbi Judah did not defend it by claiming, for instance, that only by the daily repetition of the Shema can a person express his own individual and changing feelings. The school he represented chose to depart from rational thought and present a mystical system that gave a completely new (and hidden) layer of meaning to the practice of prayer.

V

This departure from rationalistic attitudes was not an easy one for most Jewish mystics. The study of the various attitudes toward prayer in the writings of the early Jewish mystics does not reveal a unified system, but a plethora of terms, explanations, and exegeses that clearly denote the enormous difficulties that faced them while formulating their novel approaches to this central problem. It seems that none of them defined these difficulties more clearly than Rabad himself, the main teacher of the kabbalistic school in Provence, who, in one paradoxical sentence, expressed the complexity of the religious problem he was facing.

We do not have in our possession any kabbalistic text written by Rabad himself. Very few sentences in his writings can be interpreted to reflect a kabbalistic attitude, and the rest are "traditions" (*kabbalot*) preserved by later kabbalists, which have to be carefully analyzed before credence can be given to their being original expressions of Rabad's positions. One such tradition is preserved in manuscript,[79] in a series of such *kabbalot* concerning prayer, of which the

[79]Ms. Jewish Theological Seminary of America 838.

main speaker is one of the early kabbalists in Provence, Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir.[80] Rabbi Jacob's attitude is expressed very clearly, in a way undoubtedly accepted by the later redactors of the text, because it reflects the views that became the basic ones in later kabbalah and those accepted as normative in most details. Rabbi Jacob teaches his readers to direct every part of the prayers to the relevant *sefirah*, divine power, which can and will listen and answer. Thus, the first such "tradition" reads: "The first three [benedictions in the Amidah] and the last three—to *binah*, and the middle ones—in daytime to *tiferet* and at night all of them to *binah*."[81] The six blessings that are usually regarded as praises of God should be directed to the third *sefirah*, the first or highest one, which influences the created world, while the intermediate ones, which are regarded as requests, should be directed to the central power that rules the world, the sixth *sefirah*, *tiferet*. This attitude is probably reflected also in an antikabbalistic text, the epistle of Rabbi Meir ben Simeon of Narbonne.[82] Later in the text there are more "traditions" of Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir, all reflecting the same basic system. But before those further traditions are quoted, the text has the following statement: "The tradition of Rabbi Abraham [Rabad], the first three and the last three to *illat ha-illot*, and the middle ones to *Yotzer bereshit*." Unlike the statements of Rabbi Jacob, this system presented in this sentence was not accepted by later kabbalists and was not used in their systems of intentions in prayer. This fact seems to prove that we do have here an original tradition of Rabad's, for while one may suspect later pseudepigraphy if Rabad is quoted as one more witness for the accepted systems of later mystics, it is very difficult to imagine anyone inventing, or editing in a radical way, an utterance that disagrees with the prevalent beliefs of the age. There can be little doubt about the authenticity of this sentence, and its attribution to Rabad can be accepted.

[80]On his position among the early kabbalists, see Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, pp. 200–206.

[81]G. Scholem, *Reshit ha-qabbalah*, Jerusalem-Tel Aviv 1948, p. 73, note 2.

[82]Rabbi Meir states that the kabbalists demanded, among other things, that one "pray to one created God during daytime and to another, a higher but still created one, at night." G. Scholem, in *Sefer Bialik*, p. 149.

G. Scholem analyzed in detail the terminology used by Rabad in this sentence,[83] and there is little doubt that the use of the Aristotelian term *illat ha-illot* (the "cause of causes," the first cause, the prime mover) is quoted here in a sense completely in agreement with the original meaning—the supreme Godhead, be it *ein sof* or *keter*, the highest *sefirah*. For in any way that we interpret this term it will still mean a divine power that is far removed from the created world and takes no part in the daily providence over all existence. Therefore, the first and last blessings of the prayer should be directed, according to Rabad, to a divine power that cannot listen and cannot answer, being completely transcendent, and it makes no difference whether we take the words themselves to denote a philosophical or a mystical term. *Yotzer bereshit*, the creator, the demiurge, on the other hand, is clearly an active power who is central to the process of creation and therefore also the process of daily providence, be it a reference to *binah* or just a general term for the active aspect of God. These "practical" requests of the thirteen intermediate blessings are to be directed, according to Rabad, to a divine power that can listen to them and answer them.

When formulating such an attitude, Rabad deviates both from the accepted philosophical attitude and the mystical one. He accepts the division of the divine world into transcendent and active, which the philosophers, especially the Maimonidean school, opposed. Yet, on the other hand, he does not join his fellow mystics in designating every part of the liturgy to its proper divine power that was emanated for that particular purpose, for he insists that the first six should be directed to the transcendent Godhead. This is the classical compromise in which the combined system loses all the advantages of both ideologies it tries to reconcile. Rabad, who was familiar with Aristotelian philosophy as well as with the early ideas of the kabbalah,[84] was undoubtedly aware of the nature of the compromise he was putting forward in this system. Why did he choose this way?

What may be illogical in the framework of systematic thinking

[83]Scholem, *Reshit ha-qabbalah*, pp. 75–78.

[84]Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières*, pp. 273–286, and see my note on the subject: "Haqdamat ha-RaVaD le-Sefer baalei ha-nefesh," *Sinai*, 77 (1975), pp. 143–145.

can be well understood on the background of religious needs. We emphasized above the fact that Jewish mystics joined the Jewish philosophers in the acceptance of the new concept of the transcendent God, as defined with the help of Aristotelian philosophy. Rabad, as one of them, could not adopt a system that, while recognizing the existence of such supreme divine power, divorces it completely from the horizons of practical, daily religious worship. He undoubtedly knew that such a divine power cannot listen to or answer human prayers, and because of this he directed the requests in the prayers to an active, lower divine power; yet he felt that he had to insist that some part of the practice of worship should be directed to the supreme Godhead, even if it could not have any practical religious meaning. It is as if he were saying to his disciples, to people like Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir: "It is a beautiful system of intentions in prayers that you are describing; take my thirteen intermediate blessings and divide them according to your traditions. But the six first and last, these I shall keep and say in another way, the Maimonidean one, even though I know that it is of no avail. At least a part of the prayers should be directed to the supreme Godhead, and it does not matter whether He can listen or not." This attitude is completely paradoxical and unsystematic, but very understandable and true from a religious point of view, which does not hesitate to adopt paradoxical, illogical ideas if they satisfy basic religious needs. If the needs are conflicting—like the need for a personal, close, intimate divine power and the need for an eternal, remote, transcendent Godhead—a paradox must be the result. Scholem summarized this deep conflict in the hearts of the early kabbalists in a sentence that reads: "Their gnostic conception penetrates and enters their prayers also, but does not conquer them completely."[85]

VI

The great variety and the conflicting attitudes in the schools of the early Jewish mystics concerning the liturgy can be demon-

[85]Scholem, *Reshit ha-qabbalah*, pp. 96–97.

strated by one more text, which is probably the earliest appearance of a mystical, kabbalistic concept of prayer in a halachic, popular work. Rabbi Asher ben Saul of Lunel wrote his *Sefer ha-Minhagot*[86] early in the thirteenth century. He was undoubtedly close to various mystical circles, though it is doubtful whether he was a kabbalist. It is clear, however, that his brother, the same Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir, was one of the first kabbalists to formulate a detailed system of intentions for prayer based on kabbalistic symbolism.

The halachists of the thirteenth century usually were careful not to combine kabbalah with *halachah*, and Rabbi Asher was no exception. Yet when he was dealing with the explanation of the structure of the verse of Shema Yisrael[87] he deviated somewhat and did include a sentence that revealed mystical interpretation of that key verse:

> The meaning is that each Israelite says to himself and to others: Accept God, our Lord, Who is the divine glory (*kavod*) that resides above the cherubs. God is one, who is the supreme crown (*keter elyon*), and about Him it was said: Before one, what to do you count? But others say that it was said with reference to *tiferet Yisrael*, and that it is a great mystery.

The problem that Rabbi Asher discussed is the syntactical one: Why does the verse repeat twice, unnecessarily, God's name ("God is one" could serve the purpose of the meaning; why repeat "God, our Lord, God is one"?). After the passage quoted here the author deals with several grammatical explanations, but here a theological reason is given—the repetition is necessary because it refers to various aspects of God. Among these he mentions: (1) the divine glory, which in this context is undoubtedly synonymous with the *Shechinah*, for the *Shechinah* is the traditional term for the divine power that resides above the cherubs in the Temple; and (2) the supreme crown, which is a term used in the *Bahir*, the earliest

[86]Published by Simchah Assaf in his *Sifran shel Rishonim*, Jerusalem 1935, pp. 123–182.

[87]Assaf's edition, p. 133.

kabbalistic book, to denote the highest divine power, but which was often used in previous Jewish sources in a less defined manner to describe a power in the divine world,[88] so that this term does not necessarily signify that a kabbalistic system is being used here. This term too, refers to the first *sefirah* in the nonkabbalistic system of the *Book of Creation*, or perhaps to the divine power above the *sefirot* according to that ancient text of the talmudic period.[89] Thus the multiple references to God in the key verse of every Jewish prayer are explained by a system that recognizes various aspects in God without using the kabbalistic symbolism of ten divine powers, and the terminology used could be completely independent of kabbalistic symbolism.

The second sentence offers another explanation, which is not given in full. Rabbi Asher hints that there is another system, according to which the seemingly superfluous name of God in the verse refers to the power called *tiferet Yisrael*. The context is therefore clearly kabbalistic, for this term is found only in purely kabbalistic texts (even the *Bahir* does not use it).[90] Rabbi Asher terms this system "a great mystery" and does not wish to elucidate it any further. One might guess that if he were pressed on this point, he could have said, "Go ask my brother, Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir; he is an expert on this subject." Indeed, until the writings of the Gerona kabbalists Rabbi Jacob was the only one who explained in detail how one should direct his prayers to the various *sefirot*.

This passage seems to prove the independence of the mystical interpretation of the liturgy from the emergence of the kabbalah even in places and circles where the kabbalah was known. Rabbi Asher,

[88]The term appears usually in the plural, *ketarim*; but see the title *keter nora* (Solomon Musayoff, *Merkavah Shelemah*, Jerusalem 1925, p. 6a).

[89]An interpretation of this section is suggested by Ithamar Gruenwald in "Some Critical Notes on the First Part of Sefer Yezira," *Revue des études juives*, 132 (1973), pp. 475–512.

[90]This term is derived form the mystical interpretation of the verse in 1 Chronicles 29:11, which is not found in any nonkabbalistic circle or in the *Bahir*. The first users of the terminology based on this verse are the kabbalists in Provence, Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir being one of the earliest.

who knew at least some kabbalah, regarded kabbalistic symbolism concerning the liturgy as one possible explanation, but not the only one, and the idea that different divine powers take part in the structure of the prayer can be gleaned from Hebrew esoteric ideology and terminology that developed before or alongside the kabbalah. This seems to be a clear testimony to the fact that the problem of the direction of the prayers was sought not only in the circles that produced the kabbalah, but far and wide among Jewish intellectuals in the twelfth century.

VII

Another indication of the centrality of the problem of prayer in Jewish nonkabbalistic esoteric and mystical thought is found in a short treatise from the beginning of the thirteenth century that is probably the first that deals not only with the intention of the prayers but with the mystical status of the prayers themselves. Many bibliographical and terminological problems, with which we cannot deal here, are raised by this text. The important facts, however, are these: The text was included in Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's work known as *Sefer ha-Chochmah* (Book of Wisdom), which was written in the same year that his teacher, Rabbi Judah the Pious, died, and the exact date, 1217, is mentioned in the preface to the book.[91] It is very doubtful, if not completely impossible, that Rabbi Eleazar is the author of this text; it uses terminology and concepts that cannot be found in the many volumes of esoteric works by Rabbi Eleazar that are known to us. The editor of the *Book of Wisdom*, who did his work after Rabbi Eleazar, notes that this text is a commentary on the holy name of forty-two letters by Rabbi Hai Gaon.[92] It seems, therefore, that Rabbi Eleazar included in the series of commentaries on the holy names, which constitute the first half of the *Book of Wisdom*, one text that was attributed to Hai, without trying to integrate its terminology and content with those found in Rabbi Eleazar's own attitude toward this problem. Thus, it is impossible to date this text with any certainty, but it is probable that it was written late in the twelfth century.

[91]The introduction to the Book of Wisdom, which includes the date, is printed in *Iyyunim*, pp. 45–50.

[92]See my analysis of this problem in *Torat ha-Sod*, pp. 123–128.

The text is very difficult to translate, because of the frequent use of *gematria* and other Hebrew homiletical methods,[93] but its major theses can be described as homiletical attempts to combine various mystical symbols with the essence of prayer. The author identifies Yufiel (an angelic name, but, like similar names in this text, it does not refer to inferior angelic powers but to divine aspects) as the "priest" in the divine world. He is the one who accepts the key part of the prayer, the blessing of the *kohanim* (priests) through the 1800 angels who receive it from Israel and transfer it to Yufiel the Priest. Then it is sacrificed on the divine altar by the power called Barkiel.[94] Then it is given to Sandalphon, a talmudic angelic name,[95] who is identified as the power revealed to Moses, and the name "God" in the Bible refers to him.

Yufiel is then identified with the crown (*atarah*) on the head of the Creator, a crown that is composed of the holy name of forty-two characters, and that was revealed to Ezekiel in the chariot. This crown is the divine power that Moses could not see (Exodus 33:23).

The author continues this series of identifications and states: "When the crown is on the head of the creator, it is called Akhatriel,[96] and then it is the crown (*keter*)." Both these terms, *atarah* and *keter*, are key kabbalistic symbols, but the first refers to the tenth and lowest divine power, while *keter* is the first and highest; only in a nonkabbalistic system can they be identified as one and the same.

[93]The text in Hebrew was published in *Torat ha-sod*, pp. 119–122; a German translation was included by Scholem in *Ursprung und Anfange der Kabbala*, pp. 162–166.

[94]The name Barkiel is explained by the author as referring to sacrifices (*yakriv-barki*, the same letters in Hebrew).

[95]Bavli *Hagiga* 13b, where Sandalphon is described as a power associated with Ezekiel's chariot, and his duties include putting crowns on God's head (because of this he is coupled with Akhatriel, whose name includes the element *keter*, crown).

[96]See notes 95 and 88.

This power, *atarah-keter*, is then described by the author as being the divine glory (*kavod*) and at the same time the prayer: "For the prayer (*tefillah*) is a prayer (*tzelota*) to God, and she sits to the left of God like a bride beside her bridegroom, and it is called princess (*bat melech*), and sometimes because of her function she is called 'echo' (*bat kol*). "The author then identifies the prayer as the *Shechinah*, which is described as an emanated power that resides with God, and is called a princess because she resides in His home. He concludes this section by stating: "He [God] has a prayer, which is called *eslo* (with Him),[97] and she is the tenth *malchut* (*malchut asirit*), and she is the supreme mystery (*sod kol ha-sodot*)."

In the second half of this short text, the author emphatically identifies this divine power as the *Shiur Komah* described in *Hechalot* literature,[98] and the power seen by the prophets even though it is an emanated power. According to him, this *Shechinah* resided on Earth before the deluge, and only because of the sins of those generations she left Earth and ascended to heaven. He emphatically states that while the *Shechinah* can be revealed to prophets, the Creator himself is completely hidden. In one half-sentence he hints at a connection between the *Shechinah* and the Cherub.[99] Further descriptions of the crown (*keter*) follow, and the author concludes with homiletical interpretation of another portion of the prayers, and then finishes by stating: "This is the mystery of the crown and the *Shechinah*; everybody who knows it has a portion of the next world, he will be saved from the judgment in hell and inherit both worlds [this and the next one], and he is beloved both in heaven and on Earth."

The relationship between the symbolism used by this author and kabbalistic symbolism is problematic, because it is very difficult to assume that the symbols of *keter*, *atarah*, and *malchut asirit* were known in a prekabbalistic and nonkabbalistic context, and it is even

[97]The Hebrew term for emanation, *atzilut*, was often connected homiletically with this term, and here both meanings are employed.

[98]See note 46.

[99]See section III.

more difficult to interpret this whole text as a kabbalistic one. But the central point for this study is that it does not depend on the way that one may solve this problem: It is clear that in this text, the prayer (*tefillah*, or, in Aramaic, *tzelota*) is a divine power itself, not only a means by which contact with a divine power is achieved. The theological context of this text is not one debating whether or not the prayers should be directed toward the *Shechinah*, and whether the *Shechinah* is a divine, emanated power or a created one; in this text the prayer *is* the *Shechinah*, and the prayer itself is an emanated power, which has a place in the divine world as a crown of the hidden Creator. Thus the prayer is transformed from being a mystical way toward God to being a mystical essence by itself. When a person prays, according to this mystical attitude, he does not pray to the *Shechinah* or the Creator; he is praying to the prayer itself. Human prayer becomes here a lower manifestation of the divine prayer, an earthly symbol of the mystical entity of the prayer, one mysterious part of the whole "mystery of all mysteries."

Our knowledge of this period is certainly incomplete, but it is still wide and detailed enough to be certain that the attitude reflected in this pseudo-Hai text was not the prevailing one, not even a fairly common one. It might even be regarded as a unique, disregarded phenomenon. But two facts have to be borne in mind while analyzing it. First, it is an indication of things to come, for in later Jewish mysticism, from Zoharic kabbalah on, similar attitudes toward prayer are to be found, sometimes in a central position and often as one dimension in a much larger system. Second, the text should be viewed as one indication of a much wider religious phenomenon, the search for a new meaning to the liturgy. Most thinkers in the late twelfth century and the early thirteenth did not reach such radical mystical conclusions, but most of them were inching their way from the extreme of the rationalistic denial of any contact between prayer and the Prime Mover toward a more meaningful, somewhat mystical attitude represented by the various texts surveyed here.

ELEVEN

Prayer as Text and Prayer as Mystical Experience

Knowledge of the development of the attitudes of Jewish mystics and esoterics toward prayer in the High Middle Ages can be used to analyze and achieve a better understanding of the general spiritual phenomena that characterize Judaism at that time. In almost every case in monotheistic, or scriptural, cultures,[1] prayer was considered the perfect and most important meeting-place between mysticism and established religious ritual. Mystics could not deny or denigrate this aspect of synagogue, church, or mosque practice as irrelevant or secondary to the achievement of their highest spiritual aspirations, and, by necessity, prayer became the meeting-ground of all worshippers, mystics and nonmystics alike. The nature of this

[1]It seems to me more accurate to refer to the three religions as "scriptural" rather than "monotheistic." The definition of monotheism, especially in mystical contexts, is rather vague and often unhelpful. "Scriptural," on the other hand, is clear, and describes accurately the attitude of a religion to its written sources. Concerning the specific subject of prayer, the concept of the prayerbook is unique to each of these religions, reflecting their scriptural characteristics.

meeting expressed, in many cases, the deepest levels of meaning in both parts of the religious community, exposing clearly both the differences and the common concepts of the two types of religious aspiration.

What was true throughout the history of mysticism in all scriptural cultures was doubly true concerning the early period of the development of Jewish mysticism in medieval Europe, the period in which the Ashkenazi Hasidic teachers created their esoteric works and in which the early kabbalists formulated their systems of symbols, namely, the second half of the twelfth century and the first half of the thirteenth century.[2] One of the most important aspects common to both movements was the strong insistence on their being the followers of ancient traditions, transmitted from one generation to another for centuries and millennia, denying the fact that most of their systems were new, medieval innovations. Both Ashkenazi Hasidism and the early kabbalah created legends and traditions to connect them to the ancient world of the Talmud and the Bible. Figures like Aharon of Baghdad, Ben Sira, Jeremiah, and others served the Ashkenazi Hasidim as legendary links to the past; the stark pseudepigraphy of the Iyyun circle of mystics is an example of a similar kabbalistic attitude.[3] Later, this approach was to dominate the external, literary pseudepigraphical framework of the *Zohar* itself. The very name "kabbalah," and the reinterpretation of ancient texts in the kabbalistic manner, most magnificently demonstrated in Rabbi Azriel of Gerona's *Commentary on the Talmudic Legends*,[4] testify to this insistence on the antiquity of the mystical tradition.

Essentially, we have here a prominent example of a spiritual

[2]For a comparative review of the beginnings of the kabbalah and Ashkenazi Hasidism, see J. Dan, "Das Entstehen jüdischer Mystik im mittelalterlichem Deutschland," in K. E. Groezinger, ed., *Proceedings of the Conference on the History of the Jews in German-Speaking Countries*, Frankfurt 1991, 127–172.

[3]Concerning these traditions and pseudepigraphic mystical literature, see J. Dan, "Pseudepigraphy in Medieval Jewish Mysticism in Germany," in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter* V (Hannover 1988), 519–531.

[4]This work was published in a scholarly edition by I. Tishby, Jerusalem 1946; new ed., Jerusalem 1986.

paradox. Mystics, in general, are individuals who seek their own, profound communion with God, in an intensely personal and unique manner. Tradition, on the other hand, is by nature universal and national, denoting the minimal, common element of contact with God. Mysticism and tradition are not in conflict with one another; they represent two different levels of religious and spiritual experiences, divided from one another as the common is divided from the unique. Jewish mystics of the High Middle Ages represent the insistent demand to combine the two into one whole, coherent religious experience.

This point becomes much clearer when we compare the medieval mystics with the earlier, ancient group of Jewish mystics, those who created the *Hechalot* mysticism of the ascent to the divine palaces. Rabbi Nehunia ben ha-Kanah, mentioned in *Hechalot Rabbati* as the leader of this school of mystics, describes the exposure of the "secret of the world" (סודו של עולם), which should become the property of every adherent, as being "like a man having a ladder in his house" by which each such mystic can, and should, whenever he so wishes, ascend and achieve a direct, intense relationship with God.[5] The *Hechalot* mystics offered an alternative way of religious achievement to the one common in the Talmud and Midrash, a relationship that was independent of the interpretation of scripture and reliance on ancient oral tradition transmitted from generation to generation. The *Hechalot* teachers in their treatises taught the ways by which one may become a part of the divine world, participate in the celestial rituals rather than the earthly ones, and envision directly the glory of God and His retinue. The *Hechalot* mystics, in the process of developing their mysticism, created many liturgical poems, some of which were incorporated into the traditional Jewish prayerbook.[6]

[5]This aspect of ancient Jewish mysticism is discussed in my book *Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv 1990, pp. 123–134. For a more detailed discussion, see my article, "The Revelation of the Secret of the World and the Beginning of Jewish Mysticism," included in this series, vol. 1, chapter 3.

[6]The relationship between ancient Hebrew prayers and *Hechalot* mysticism has not yet been comprehensively studied. A beginning was made by A. Altmann in his

Medieval Jewish mystics did not dare go so far. There is no reason to believe that spiritually they were any less daring and far-reaching than were the *Hechalot* mystics. Their adherence to tradition, their complete confidence that all truth must be ancient, that the Mount Sinai theophany included a profound divine revelation that encompasses all aspects of truth past, present, and future was, however, axiomatic. "New" and "true" must be a contradiction, because if it is accepted that something may be both new and true, it implies truth that Abraham, Moses, Solomon, and Rabbi Akiva did not know. If truth can be new, doubt may be cast upon old biblical and talmudic beliefs. For these mystics, therefore, the divine truth mystically revealed to them must necessarily be old. If it is old, it must be found in the Torah and the Talmud in the teachings of ancient prophets and sages. This is the reason that these early masters of Jewish medieval mysticism dedicated such a large effort to the reinterpretation of ancient texts, of scripture and the oral law, to prove and identify their own novel notions, symbols, and concepts within these old sources. In other words: The appearance of medieval Jewish mysticism necessitated the transformation of all ancient Jewish traditions into mystical ones. Medieval mysticism could not exist if Judaism, from its very beginning, was not essentially mystical.

One of the early examples of this attitude is found in the persistence shown by the mystics, both Ashkenazi Hasidim and kabbalists, in interpreting the ancient *Sefer Yeẓira* in a mystical manner. Over a dozen such commentaries were written during the first century of the existence of these two movements.[7] These mystical commentaries were written in the wake of two centuries during

study of *Hechalot* poetry. See his *Faces of Judaism* (Hebrew,) Tel Aviv 1983, pp. 44–67. A more detailed study was offered by M. Bar Ilan in his book *Mysteries of Prayer and Hechalot* (Hebrew), Ramat Gan 1987.

[7]The first such kabbalistic work by a known scholar is the Commentary on *Sefer Yeẓira* by Rabbi Isaac the Blind in Provence. Somewhat before that treatise was written, and parallel to it, almost all the Ashkenazi Hasidim known to us wrote such commentaries, including Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar (who wrote three such works), and others.

which that book was interpreted by great Jewish scholars as a work of science and rationalism.[8] The success of these mystics is evident: The book is regarded by many, to this very day, to be a work of mysticism, even though it is quite clear, I believe, from its analysis that it is an attempt to establish a scientific approach, based on linguistics, to the processes of cosmogony and cosmology.[9]

Medieval Jewish mysticism had to strike a balance between the innovative, revolutionary spirit of its creators and the necessity of presenting everything as eternal truth, permeating all ancient texts and revelations. It had to be both new, direct revelation and old, undeniable truth. This dual character of the kabbalah is one of the most meaningful characteristics of this movement as well as that of the Ashkenazi Hasidic esotericism and mysticism. In every phase of these movements' histories, we find expressions of original, novel aspirations of meeting and uniting with the divine intertwined with adherence to the old, traditional sources as the treasuries of such aspirations, notions, and symbols. It is a paradox but, at the same time, is also a prominent feature of medieval Jewish mysticism. Commentary on ancient texts and mystical revelations were expressed as one; traditional lore and revolutionary visions were united in one text. This duality is what makes the kabbalah a unique phenomenon in Jewish (and not only Jewish) mysticism.

The dual character of mystical speculation and the revelation of new truths in old texts is found, in a most complex and profound manner, in the treatment of the prayers by the medieval mystics. Prayers are the best representative of this duality: They constitute both an attempt to reach out and touch God and an ancient text by which divine truth was revealed to the great sages of antiquity. Prayer encompasses both the individual facing God in a unique moment of spiritual uplifting, and the combined, national tradition of divine revelation to many generations of patriarchs, prophets, and

[8]On the philosophical-rationalistic commentaries on the work, see now R. Jospe, "Early Philosophical Commentaries on the *Sefer Yeẓirah*, Some Comments," *REJ*, 149 (1990), pp. 369–415.

[9]See the chapter on this book in my *Ancient Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 144–153.

sages. Prayer can be a vehicle for a personal expression of love and union with God, and a treasury of ancient symbols of esoteric divine truth. These two aspects, united within the Jewish prayerbook, made the interest of the medieval mystics in prayer a starting point for the expression of Jewish medieval mystical thought and experience.

It is no accident that the two earliest commentaries on the prayers were written by the great figures of the early kabbalah and the teachers of Ashkenazi Hasidism. They had been regarded as a basic, understandable text, needing no explanation, until these mystics began to have an impact on Jewish culture. Unlike the *piyyut*, which was regarded as a difficult, complex text both linguistically and ideologically,[10] the great scholars who dealt with the prayerbook, from Rav Amram Gaon to Maimonides, did not see any need for a detailed interpretation or commentary on the ancient text. They dealt with many halachic problems, like the time of prayer, the order of the blessings and other parts of the ritual, the meaning of specific parts,[11] and some differences in the wording of some sections, but did not compose a commentary, like those written on the biblical works, talmudic tractates, or even the *Sefer Yezira*. Only when the mystical element became paramount in Spain and in Germany do we find the first appearance of a systematic commentary on the prayerbook.

This phenomenon, one of the most meaningful in the development of Jewish culture during that period, should be investigated on two levels. One is the particular circumstances and the unique nature of each work in this field, and the other is the combined picture, revealing the underlying spiritual drives characteristic of the

[10]The history of the commentaries on the *piyyut* is outlined in E. E. Urbach's detailed introduction to his scholarly edition of the most important such commentary in the Middle Ages, Rabbi Abraham be-Rabbi Azriel of Bohemia's *Arugat ha-Bosem* written around 1234; the author was a disciple of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms. Urbach's description is found in vol. IV of that work (Jerusalem 1939–1963).

[11]The best-known example of such a discussion concerns the meaning of the benediction *Or chadash al zion tair*: Does it refer to everyday's light or to the messianic redemption? Saadia held the first view; Rabbi Judah the Pious, the second.

emerging mystical aspect of Jewish religion at that time. It seems to me that these two directions of research will yield results that converge to explain the intrinsic duality of the attitude toward the prayers among the mystics of southern and central Europe.

The circumstances in which the first Hebrew commentary on the prayers, the now-lost voluminous work of Rabbi Judah the Pious (d. 1217), was written are known to us, and I have described them in several studies.[12] The portions of the commentary that remained in the small treatise *Sodot ha-Tefillah* (the Secrets of the Prayers), collected by one of the faithful disciples of Rabbi Judah and other sources, indicate that this was essentially a polemical work rather than an exegetical one. Its purpose was to demonstrate that not one sentence, word, syllable, or even letter in the traditional text of the prayers (as received and upheld by Rabbi Judah) can be changed without causing extreme religious harm. Rabbi Judah harshly criticized the minor, meaningless changes in the prayers that were introduced and accepted by the "sons of France and the Islands of the Sea," and explained that these changes "cause the extension of the exile for them and for their descendants forever." The importance of the strict adherence to the letters of the prayers is explained by Rabbi Judah in the commentary, which comprised six folio volumes.

Rabbi Judah maintained that the text of the prayers represents a harmonious structure, uniting all of scripture and ancient, sacred texts, as well as all cosmic, celestial, and human phenomena. There is a numerical structure, Rabbi Judah insisted, that gives meaning to the number of the letters, words, names of God, specific letters, and specific words in the prayers. The importance of the prayerbook cannot be judged by the understanding of the contents alone; the

[12]On Ashkenazi Hasidic commentaries on the prayers, see Urbach's Introduction, (see note 10) and my description in *Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidei Ashkenaz*, Jerusalem 1968, 17f. See also my "The Emergence of the Mystical Prayer," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan and F. Talmage, Cambridge, MA 1981, pp. 85–120; my study on the *Sodot ha-Tefillah* in *Culture and Society in the Middle Ages, Studies in Memory of H. H. Ben Sasson*, ed. R. Bonfil, M. Ben Sasson, and J. Hacker, Jerusalem 1989, pp. 389–398.

prayers are first and foremost a sacred text that reflects the harmonious, esoteric structure of existence. This harmony can be revealed to the initiate if he carefully compares the intrinsic numerical correspondence between the various parts of the prayers and other sacred structures—biblical passages, talmudic sections, and structures in the cosmos (e.g., "the length of the garden of Eden")—historical events (as recorded in the Bible), and all other constituent parts of the divine endeavor of creation and guidance of existence. The most minute change, which has no impact on the content of the prayers, can destroy this carefully constructed intrinsic, esoteric harmony, and render the prayers not only useless but religiously and spiritually harmful.

This is a novel, radical concept of the prayers that lacks a precedent in Jewish thought, even though it was constructed on the basis of previously formulated notions. Its basic premise is the fierce denial that the prayers constitute a linguistic composition, intended to convey a particular meaning. The prayers are not what they say, but what they represent. They should not be misinterpreted to be a conversation, a statement man makes before God. They transcend language by far and are structured in harmony with all the other elements of divine creation. In other words, they represent secrets inherent in the divine intentions, in God's self-presentation through creation and revelation throughout the history of the world. This, the "meaning" of the prayers, lies not in the understanding of the language but in the demonstration of the intrinsic harmonious structures hidden in them, closely tied with all other divine secrets that permeate all of existence.

It is an interesting fact that Rabbi Judah did not present any body of proof to support his concepts, except for the very demonstration of the numerical harmony in the prayers. However, this harmony could not have been regarded by him, or by any reader, to be an exclusive truth based solely on such a demonstration. When Rabbi Judah insisted in one paragraph that the dominant number must be three, and gave examples for the importance of this number throughout creation, and in the next paragraph insisted that there the dominant number was four, which he similarly demonstrated, then it is obvious to all that the order can be changed, and that proof can be adduced as much for the sanctity of the number three in the first case as for that of the number four in the second. The arbitrary nature is obvious, and cannot be attributed to Rabbi Judah's naiveté. He undoubtedly knew very well that, as arguments go, it was rather easy to present a completely different set of numbers and support them by proofs no less powerful and compelling than the one he had chosen.

It seems rather clear that the real proof, in the eyes of Rabbi Judah and his supporters, of the veracity of the details presented in his commentary was not the numerical demonstration itself, but rather tradition; i.e., their absolute belief that Rabbi Judah received the correct text of the prayers from his fathers and forefathers, from his teachers and their teachers. Once having accepted this, they believed that this correct textual tradition was supported by the tradition of the correct interpretation, choosing the relevant and true numbers to serve as verifications for the harmonious structure that is at the heart of every section. Rabbi Judah did not present his concepts as rational, logical interpretation; he stated what he believed to be the correct tradition, handed down by generations of scholars and sages. It is no accident that the same *Sodot ha-Tefillah* is ended in many manuscripts by a recounting of the famous historical tradition of Ashkenazi Hasidic generations, which the author of this treatise took from Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's commentary on the prayers, a tradition that could have, like so many other portions of that work, originated in the works of Rabbi Judah himself.[13]

When writing this commentary, Rabbi Judah undoubtedly saw himself as a defender of the tradition in three aspects: (1) the correct text of the prayers; (2) the correct interpretation of the prayers, that is, the defender of the right choice of key numbers representing the esoteric harmony within the prayers; (3) the protector of the true meaning of the ritual of prayers itself. It is in this third aspect that the mystical character of this attitude manifests itself: While

[13]This genealogy of the esoteric traditions of the Ashkenazi Hasidic teachers was the subject of many studies, although the main problems remain unsolved.

Rabbi Judah believed that he was simply following its tradition, we may view it as the intrusion, probably for the first time in medieval Europe, of the mystical element into the concept and practice of the prayers.

Rabbi Judah's concept of the prayers is characterized by divorcing their real meaning from their literal one and considering the former one to be the more significant. Their spiritual impact, according to Rabbi Judah, is not derived from what they say, but rather from the mystical connection that this text has with the secret divine infrastructure of existence, which is based on the combination of letters and numbers, the elements used by God in the process of creation. The correct text, judged by its numerical harmony, thus represents spiritual, mystical power, independent of the actual meaning of the words and sentences.

This discussion serves as the background for a novel cultural phenomenon in Judaism, commentaries on the prayers. Rabbi Judah was so enraged by the slightest changes in the prayers found in the ritual of French and English Jews that he had to write a detailed, multivolume work to demonstrate how wrong they were. In this framework, he presented his conception of the meaning of the prayers, the first statement that has reached us of a mystical meaning of the prayerbook as a whole.

Was Rabbi Judah, when writing this commentary, acting as mystical visionary or as traditionalist commentator? It seems that the very positioning of the question demonstrates how inadequate our modern terminological distinctions are when they are utilized to describe such medieval spiritual phenomena in Judaism. Rabbi Judah undoubtedly saw himself as a traditionalist, defending the secret lore he received from his forefathers and relying on this tradition as the ultimate proof of his system and the details of which it was made up. At the same time, however, he represents a mystical breakthrough in the history of Jewish culture, in the revelation of new layers of significance and possibly of spiritual activity within the prayerbook. Mystical innovation and traditional orthodoxy are completely united in Rabbi Judah's commentary on the prayers.

Rabbi Judah's disciple, Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah ben Kalonymus

of Worms, is the author of the first extensive commentary on the prayers that has reached us. It is extant in three manuscripts that differ considerably from each other, so much so that it is possible to surmise that Rabbi Eleazar wrote this commentary in more than one edition, and that many of the changes among the versions represent corrections, additions, and omissions by the author himself. Rabbi Eleazar included in this commentary several references to events in his life, which tend to prove that he wrote this work over the course of many years, probably thirty or more. There is no doubt that despite the fact that Rabbi Eleazar authored many other works of ethics, esotericism, mysticism, and *halachah*, the commentary on the prayers was his most important endeavor. Future generations accepted this view, and often described the whole Ashkenazi Hasidic movement as characterized by attaching numerical value to the text of the prayers.

As in many other things, Rabbi Eleazar was much less radical in his views and attitudes than his teacher, Rabbi Judah. While the earlier commentary was a harsh, polemical work dedicated to one purpose alone, Rabbi Eleazar's work is more balanced, comprehensive, and noncontroversial. He included in his work the demonstration of the numerical harmony in the text of the prayers, but added to that two more aspects of interpretation: (1) a simple, linguistic and literal commentary; and (2) theological discussions about the meaning of the prayers. Rabbi Eleazar omitted all polemical references to the differences in the text of the prayers, even though the ideological statement sanctifying every letter and word in them is made clearly and emphatically, and he underscores his reliance on ancient tradition that makes his version of the prayers the normative, correct one.

These two great works were the beginning of the whole Jewish literary-ideological genre of prayer interpretation. Many followed their lead, but it seems that the closest follower did so independently of the works and ideas of the Ashkenazi Hasidim. Rabbi Azriel of Gerona wrote his commentary on the prayers probably without knowing anything about the Ashkenazi Hasidic traditions and achievements. His source was a two-generation tradition of

kabbalistic treatment of the subject in Provence and Catalonia; his commentary is thus a summary of a long line of discussions of the meaning of the prayers by Jewish mystics in that area.[14]

Rabbi Azriel's approach to the prayers is intensely textual, relying on the actual words and letters of the traditional text no less than did the approach of Rabbi Judah the Pious. He did not use the idea of a numerical harmony hidden within the text, but he believed that every letter of the prayers denotes a divine aspect, and he treated every word as a symbolic representative of a divine manifestation. The simplest words of the blessings, repeated so often in the text of the prayers, assume cosmic dimensions by denoting the structure and the dynamics of the divine powers, the ten divine manifestations or *sefirot*. His exegetical effort is directed toward the unification of two separate realms: the prayerbook on the one hand, and, on the other, the new, revolutionary discovery of the mystical intrinsic structure of the Godhead, a discovery that is the essence of the Provençal and Spanish kabbalah in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. In every way, Rabbi Azriel's commentary is extremely different from that of Rabbi Judah the Pious; yet there is a close similarity between them. Both maintained that mystical truth can and must be found within the letters, words, and structures of the unchanging, constant Jewish prayerbook.

The origin of this paradox, i.e., of finding new, revolutionary spiritual dimensions within the most ancient texts and thus fortifying adherence to them while opposing any change in them, can be found even in the first, earliest glimmer of a kabbalistic attitude (in itself, probably, prekabbalistic), demonstrated in a tradition ascribed (probably correctly) to the Rabad, Rabbi Abraham ben David, father of the first known kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac the Blind, and opponent of Maimonides at the end of the twelfth century. Rabad is supposed to have stated that the prayers should be directed to two divine powers: The first and the last three benedictions (Shemoneh

[14]On his treatise, see G. Sed-Rajna, *Azriel de Gerone, Commentaire sur la liturgie quotidienne*, Leiden 1974.

Esreh) should be directed to the supreme Godhead, while the middle thirteen, dealing, supposedly, with worldly needs, should be directed to the Creator, the demiurge. Whether or not this statement is kabbalistic, it does represent a new mystical worldview, a new concept of the divinity, which is expressed in terms of the treatment of the ancient text of that prayer.[15] Between the Rabad and Rabbi Azriel, several Jewish mystics developed and elaborated this idea in several forms, laying the basis for the sophisticated, multilayered structure of the kabbalistic concept of the prayers.

A close parallel to Rabad's statement can be found in a *pesak* concerning faith and fear of God, which originated in a circle of mystics that flourished in Germany in the same period (the turn of the thirteenth century). This circle, known as the Special Cherub circle, claimed to have in its possession a body of ancient traditions, ascribed to the prophet Jeremiah and his son-grandson, Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus). The author of this *pesak*, using a halachic tone like Rabad, states in this brief text that the blessings and benedictions should be directed to a specific divine power, the divine glory, which is neither the supreme Godhead nor the lower, revealed divine aspect (the Special Cherub). The "God" mentioned in the text of the blessing is that divine power, and He alone should be addressed by every Jew during prayers.[16]

Again, we have in this circle a new mystical revelation, a new attitude toward existence and the structure of the divine world, which is expressed through and by the ancient text of the prayers. Novel mystical experiences are channeled into old traditional ones by the unification of the new insights with the letters and words of the ancient texts. A spiritual revolution is not expressed by new texts, new words, new descriptions; it is manifest in a new interpretation of the ancient text of the prayers, making it even more sacred, more orthodox and unchangeable. Paradoxically, the more the medieval mystics changed the nature of Jewish concepts of the Godhead and

[15]On this, see J. Dan, "The Emergence of the Mystical Prayer."
[16]The text is translated in J. Dan, "The Emergence."

introduced new dimensions into the divine world, the more they adhered to the minutest details of the ancient textual tradition. A maximal expression of this paradox would be a statement concluding that the text is much more sacred than the Godhead; changes may be introduced into the concepts of God, but never into the words of the prayers.

These examples reflect, I believe, the dominant attitude toward the text of the prayers among medieval Jewish mystics. Yet it was not the only one to be found in the history of Jewish mysticism. The first Jewish mystical historical phenomenon—the literature of the *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* mystics—seems to have developed a much more radical approach to the prayers. Their mystical experiences were expressed very often through the creation of new hymns and prayers, reflecting the fact—or so it seems—that they did not find the ancient texts sufficient for the expression of their new spiritual visions and emotions, and, as a result, were forced to create new such texts.

The hymnology of the *Hechalot* mystics and its relationship to the normative prayerbook has not yet been exhaustively studied, though many important papers in the last few years have addressed it. We cannot be certain, for example, whether several *Hechalot* mystics authored texts that they then passed on to the prayerbook, or whether the *Hechalot* mystics adopted for their own mystical purposes some pre-existing key elements from the prayerbook. The case of the *alenu le-shabeach* is the most intriguing one.[17] Despite the many unsolved problems, there can be no doubt that we find in *Hechalot* mysticism two aspects. One is the glorification of ancient prayers, most notably the Kedushah (a section of *Hechalot Rabbati* is presented as a "commentary" on mystical visions to the celestial celebration of the Kedushah),[18] and the basic form of the blessing or benediction

[17]The Hebrew text of the *Hechalot* version of this prayer was published by Gershom Scholem in the *Hechalot* treatise that he appended to his *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, New York 1960; rev. ed. 1965, pp. 105–106.

[18]The connection between the *Hechalot* literature and the Kedushah was studied by I. Gruenwald in an article published as Chapter 5 in his *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, Frankfurt 1988, pp. 145–174.

is central to this literature, as shown by Margarete Schluter. On the other hand, some sections, presented as hymns, are intensely original and individual, representing probably the peak of Jewish mystical poetry, achieved so close to the beginning of Jewish mystical literature. It can be stated with confidence that the *Hechalot* mystics saw no contradiction between these two attitudes. They individualized and gave a mystical dimension to the ancient traditions at the same time that they created their new texts, which were original expressions of the intense visions and experiences that their mystical endeavors entailed.

The nature of this literary phenomenon is very different from that found in Ashkenazi Hasidism and the early kabbalah. The *Hechalot* mystics did not write commentaries; in fact, they diverged from the most dominant literary form of their time in Jewish culture, namely, the Midrash, and dared to present their mystical truth as independent of biblical verification and reliance on oral tradition. They dared to approach truth directly, as symbolized by the direct vision of the divine realm, related in personal, individual terms, and even directed their followers to do the same. Such daring is extremely rare in medieval Jewish mysticism.

Paradoxically, the *Hechalot* texts served the medieval mystics as ancient traditional sources, to be interpreted in the same way that the Bible and the prayers were used (though one feels a closer sense of intimacy and closeness between the Ashkenazi Hasidim and the *Hechalot* texts through their use of these texts in commentaries and paraphrases in a way that one does not see in their treatment of other ancient traditions). We do not find, however, in the mainstream of European Jewish mysticism the same freedom of expression, daring mystical creativity, and direct announcement of an approach to God that is found in *Hechalot* mysticism. While this way of expression was not the main literary vehicle of the medieval mystics, we do find, from time to time, similar expressions of direct creativity in the realm of the prayers.

One of the best-known and most important examples of such an attitude is found in the brief text published by Gershom Scholem, "The Intention of the Prayer by the Early Kabbalists." Scholem sug-

gested that the author of this text was Rabbi Azriel.[19] I find this unacceptable, and it seems to me that it originated in the circles of the Iyyun mystics in Provence or northern Spain early in the thirteenth century. This text clearly presents a free, nontextual approach to mystical experience achieved by a psychological process of uplifting the soul and freeing it from the bonds of reality (parallel, in some respects, to *Hechalot* practices). This text represents an enthusiastic, individual kind of mysticism, intensely different from that of the mystical commentators on the prayers described above.[20]

Similar expressions of direct mystical prayer are found, sporadically and infrequently, throughout the history of Jewish mysticism; their centrality is always secondary to the interpretative-exegetical mystical approach to the ancient texts. In a similar sporadic way we find eruptions of poetic creativity among Jewish mystics, sometimes, though not often, using original poetry (in the traditional forms of *piyyut*) for mystical expression. Such phenomena are found especially in Spain in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and in sixteenth-century Safed. The best-known examples of Safed poetry, which became part of Jewish traditional ritual, are those of Shlomo Alkabetz and Isaac Luria. Yet these important and meaningful exceptions do underlie the prevailing, sustained Jewish mystical tradition of expressing visions and revelations by means of pedantic, seemingly uninspired commentaries, exegeses, and hermeneutical treatments of the ancient texts included in the traditional prayerbook.

Is this textual approach to the prayers "less mystical"? Is "true mysticism" to be found only in direct, bold expression of an experience, in the style of the *Hechalot*? This, indeed, is a question that tests the sincerity and the methodology of the historian of religious

[19]See G. Scholem, *The Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. A. Arkush and ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, Princeton, NJ 1987, pp. 416-420.

[20]Let me state clearly that my doubt concerning Rabbi Azriel's authorship of this text is not based on the clear contradiction between it and his commentary on the prayers. I sincerely believe that these two opposite approaches to mystical experience through prayers can reside in the soul of one mystic as complementary, rather than contradictory, attitudes.

ideas. Are we to dictate to the ancient and medieval mystics the "proper" way to express their mystical experiences? Shall we let them choose freely the literary genre according to their own norms? The historian is required to record, understand, and analyze, rather than to dictate and discern between the "proper" and "improper" ways of expressing mysticism.

Mysticism in the scriptural religions is an intensely textual phenomenon. It is a fact that some of the most famous mystics, especially the Carmelites of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, created an "image" of mystical expression, making a comparison between them and others a "test" of "true" mystical expression. This seems to me to be one of the worst possible mistakes, misleading us and preventing true understanding of the mystical phenomenon. There is no inherent, necessary connection between mysticism and a specific literary genre. Christian mystics throughout the centuries, in the eastern and western churches, expressed themselves in a variety of literary genres very different from those employed by Santa Theresa and Saint John of the Cross, and they were in no way inferior to their Carmelite followers. It should be remembered that mysticism in the three scriptural religions is based on a profound, sincere belief that God resides in the ancient texts, that ancient revelation as recorded in them incorporates mystical truth no less than a direct observation of the celestial realms. These texts, written in a sacred language (Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, or Latin), represent God no less than any other aspect of existence, worldly or divine. In the same way, these mystics belonging to the scriptural religions were sustained by the deep and sincere belief that complete truth is ancient, whereas modern revelation is suspect, if not essentially heretical. All truth resides in the revelations to Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed, rather than in the obscure glimpse to which a contemporary mystic may aspire. Admittedly, it is more difficult to discern and analyze mystical experiences hidden in the tedious lists of numbers or the interpretation of individual words and letters in the works of Rabbi Judah the Pious or Rabbi Azriel of Gerona than it is to analyze the magnificent descriptions of Saint John of the Cross or *Hechalot Zutarti*. These modern prejudices, however, should not shape

our attitude to the sincere mystical works of the early interpreters of the prayers in a mystical way. Our concept of the nature of the mystical experience should be shaped by the evidence we have from the works of the mystics themselves, and we should balance our emphases following the phenomena that mystical texts present. If mystics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries chose to view their union with the supernal entity as derived from their immersion within the meaning of traditional texts, which included, according to their belief, the intrinsic structures of the universe and of the Godhead, we should do our best to follow them, empathize with their emotional and religious concepts, and try to picture the image of the text as a mystical experience, as they themselves had done.

As historians, we can analyze the strong traditionalist drives that made these mystics combine innovative mystical experiences with adherence to ancient texts that constitute the basis of a scriptural, monotheistic religion. If they chose to be rebels in content and not in form, to present their most revolutionary novel visions in the format of orthodox interpretations of ancient texts, this was their prerogative. The *Hechalot* mystics, living in a different historical and cultural situation, dared more. The medieval Jewish mystics had different parameters of the possible and the impossible, and they adjusted their mystical life to them. To use a *Merkavah* literature metaphor, some may view Ezekiel as looking upward to the opening heavens and observing the divine chariots, while others may see him looking down into the waters of the River Kevar and seeing there the reflections of the heavens breaking and opening and revealing their secrets. Some mystics may look above, climb the mystical ladder to reach divine truth and unity; others may do it by introspection, discovering Him within their own hearts; others still may look downward, into the letters and words expressing ancient divine revelation, discovering new mystical truths and paths toward unity with the cosmic harmony and the divine structure within the letters and words of the Hebrew text.

TWELVE

Pesak ha-Yirah veha-Emunah and the Intention of Prayer in Ashkenazi Hasidic Esotericism

The short treatise titled *Pesak ha-Yirah veha-Emunah* is one of the treatises that reached us from the mystical-esoteric works of a circle of writers, most of them anonymous, who flourished in Germany in the last decades of the twelfth century and the first half of the thirteenth. Their works were long regarded as a part of the corpus produced by the main school of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, the Kalonymus family, and many of their ideas were regarded as belonging to that group of writers, especially to Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, the great disciple of Rabbi Judah ben Samuel the Pious.[1] This confusion was the result of a bibliographical accident: The first Ashkenazi Hasidic treatise to be printed by a scholar, *Shaarey ha-Sod ha-Yichud veha-Emunah by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms*, was printed

[1]See especially Abraham Epstein, *Mikadmoniot ha-Yehudim*, ed. by A. M. Haberman, Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute 1957, pp. 211–217, 226–250; G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 2nd ed., New York: Schocken 1954, pp. 80–118. Scholem corrected this mistake in his later writings; see especially his *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem: Keter 1974, p. 40.

by A. Jellinek in 1857[2] from a particularly bad manuscript, Munich 92. This manuscript included several passages and short treatises that were added to Rabbi Eleazar's work, and Jellinek did not differentiate between the original text and the additions.[3] As a result, the distinction between Rabbi Eleazar's statements and those belonging to other sources was obscured. In a detailed study, published more than twenty-five years ago, I analyzed the sources of the circle of the special Cherub, tried to establish the bibliography and the chronology of these works, and pointed out the main outlines of their religious attitudes that differentiate them from other Ashkenazi Hasidic groups.[4] The main works of this circle include the *barayta* attributed to Joseph ben Uzziel,[5] the commentary on *Sefer Yezira* attributed to Rav Saadia Goan,[6] a poetic adaptation of the teachings of the *barayta* and a commentary to it.[7] The teachings of this circle have

[2]*Kockvey Yitzhak*, 27 (1862), pp. 13–14. This was reprinted several times: See *Perush ha-Torah le-Rabenu Yosef Bechor Shor*, Part I, Jerusalem 1956, pp. 129–130; H. Y. I Ha-Levi, *Perush ha-Torah le-Rabbi Eleazar mi-Germeiza*, London 1959, pp. 142–143 The text of Rabbi Eleazar was reprinted also by A. M. Haberman, *Shirei ha-Yihuc veha-Kavod*, Jerusalem 1945; Prof. Haberman, however, noticed the difference between the original text of Rabbi Eleazar and the *Pesak*, and did not reprint it without explaining his decision.

[3]Concerning the history of this work and a new edition of the Rabbi Eleazar text, see J. Dan, "Sharey ha-Sod ha-Yihud veha-Emunah le-Rabbi Eleazar of Worms," *Temirin*, I, Jerusalem 1972, pp. 141–156.

[4]חוג הכרוב המיוחד בספרות חסידי אשכנז published in *Tarbiz*, 35 (1966), pp. 349–372; reprinted in my book *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature*, Ramat Gan: Massada 1975, pp. 89–111. Compare also J. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 1968, pp. 156–164. A general description of this circle and its works is J. Dan, "Pseudepigraphy in Medieval Jewish Mysticism in Germany," in *Falschungen im Mittelalter*, V, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Hannover 1988, pp. 519–531. This paper is a chapter from a comprehensive book on this circle that I am completing and preparing for publication.

[5]Parts of this text have been printed by Abraham Epstein (see note 1), pp. 241–245, and see *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature*, pp. 92–93.

[6]A short version of this commentary was printed in the traditional editions of the *Sefer Yezira*; the complete text is found in many manuscripts. See *Studies in Ashkenaz Hasidic Literature*, pp. 98–101.

[7]For a brief discussion of this text, see my *Introduction to the Shir ha-Yihud*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1982.

been expressed in the most systematic manner in the three treatises by Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar of London: his *Sod ha-Sodot* and the first and second commentaries on the *Sefer Yezira*,[8] all written in the first half of the thirteenth century and based on the previous texts.

This short treatise, the *Pesak*, is unique among the writings of the Special Cherub circle in that it is directed toward a practical instruction. It is a directive, immediate and unambiguous, concerning the intention of prayer, telling the reader clearly and emphatically what he should and should not do concerning a central Jewish ritual practiced many times every day. This is the only place in the literature of this circle where a connection is made between the speculations and exegesis of these mystics and actual, daily religious life.[9] Its importance is even greater because it is one of the earliest examples we have (it can even be the earliest) of the results of theosophic-mystical speculation being formulated in the form of a halachic decision and directed toward the public as a whole.

At the same time, this brief treatise is a summary, in a concise and relatively clear manner, of the teachings of this circle of esoteric writers, stating in a few paragraphs the main points of their concepts of the divine worlds, relying on their most important sources, and thus assists us in the understanding of the teachings of

[8]The first commentary was published by G. Vajda in *Kovetz Al Yad*, 6 (16), part 1 (Jerusalem 1966), pp. 145–198; the figure of Rabbi Elhanan was studied in his papers: "De quelques infitrations chrétiennes dans l'oeuvres d'un auteur anglo-juif du XIII siècle," *Archives d'histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age*, 1961, pp. 15–34; "Le manuscript hébreu no 815 de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris," *Etudes Orientales à la mémoire de Paul Hirschler*, Budapest 1950, pp. 21–27. The first to describe him briefly was G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York: Schocken 1954, pp. 85, 370, 376. See my *Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*, pp. 39–40 et passim, and *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature*, pp. 101–103. The *Sod ha-Sodot* and the second commentary were published by me in *Texts of Ashkenazi Hasidic Esoteric Theology*, Jerusalem: Academon 1977.

[9]Concerning the place of this treatise in the development of the concept of prayer in this period compared to kabbalistic and other Ashkenazi Hasidic attitudes, see J. Dan, "The Emergence of the Mystical Prayer," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan and E. Talmage, Cambridge, MA: The Association of Jewish Studies 1982, pp. 85–120.

this group of mystics, emphasizing the central ideas that they cherished and wished to share with the public.

The *Pesak* belongs to a well-known literary genre that developed in Hebrew in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—the *Yihud* treatises (ספרות הייחוד), which were especially adopted by the Ashkenazi Hasidim, and wrote than a dozen such treatises.[10] In the Special Cherub circle, the closest example of such a work, besides the *Pesak*, is the אלפא ביתא בייחוד הבורא,[11] which summarized the teachings of the *barayta* in a concise, systematic manner.

The purpose of the *Yihud* literature is to present the major conclusions of theological discourse that are of importance to every Jew in his religious life, his concept of God, and his intention during prayer. In most cases, treatises of this kind avoid controversial and complex problems and concentrate on the aspects that seem to the authors to be acceptable without detailed analysis and complicated proof. In some cases, the subject discussed is presented in a way that does not reflect the true beliefs of the author and can be regarded as deliberately exoteric, hiding from the reading public the true views of the authors. Despite the *Pesak*'s closeness to this literary genre, we do not have any other example in which halachic language is employed in this manner. From this point of view, it is a most emphatic and vigorous statement of practical conclusions from theological or mystical speculations.

The text of the *Pesak*, besides the Munich manuscript used by Jellinek, is found in Leipzig ms. 30, from which A. Epstein printed most of it. The text used here is the Jellinek version, compared to Oxford ms. 2575, pp. 4a–5b. Another version is found in ms. New York, Adler collection 1161 at the Jewish Theological Seminary; this was translated in my study of the emergence of the mystical prayer (note 9).

[10]Concerning this literature and the Ashkenazi Hasidic examples, see *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature*, pp. 72–88; J. Dan, היבוד ייחור אשכזי מהמאה הי"ד, in *Tarbiz* 44 (1975), pp. 204–206.

[11]See note 8.

The first sentence of the *Pesak* states:

> All those who fear God have to intend, when they bless "blessed is God," and they bow and express thanks and intend in their hearts—to His holiness alone, who is His glory, without image and form, only voice and speech.[12]

"Those who fear God" is a general term that here denotes the widest possible range of addressees; it does not have any intrinsic element of limitation. In this context it is not different from stating that the *Pesak* is intended for all those who pray to God, because the very fact of praying indicates regard and reverence.[13] The emphasis on the "blessing" intends to include in the statement not only formal praying but every blessing that a man utters, that precedes, and sometimes also follows, almost every daily action. A classical talmudic statement estimates the number of such blessings (including during prayers) as a hundred each day.[14] There is no doubt, however, that this is the most common and basic contact between a Jew and God, the basis of his constant awareness of the relationship between his life and God's commandments. The *Pesak*, therefore, refers to the widest possible public concerning the most common daily practice.

The second sentence in this statement is a concise definition of the divine entity toward which the blessings should be directed: a divine power described by the two titles, קדושתו and כבודו, that is identified by two negative characteristics—it had neither image nor form—and two positive ones—it has voice and speech. It is clear, therefore, that the author distinguishes between visual and auditory

[12]לכל יראי ה' יש לכוין כשהם מברכים ברוך ה' ומשתחוים ומודים ומבונים בלבם לאותו קדושתו לבדו שהוא כבודו בלא דמות וצורה רק קול ורוח ידבור. In ms. Oxford 2575 (p. 4a), the reading is: לכל יראי הש' יש לו לכוין כשהם מברכין ומשבחין ומודים ומשתחוים לכוין בלבם לאותו שקדושתו לבדו אשר הוא כבודו בלא דמות וצורה זולתי קול ורוח ידבור

[13]There is, of course, the possibility that יראי השם here is a reference to esoterics, the members of this circle. I did not find in their writings sufficient proof of such a terminological use, and the exoteric nature of the *Pesak* does not tend to confirm such a reading.

[14]מאה ברכות שחייב אדם לברך בכל יום, see Bavli *Menachot* 43b.

anthropomorphism; the glory or the holiness does not have the dimensions to be revealed visually, but it does have the ability to communicate orally. Clearly and emphatically, the author does not wish to deny anthropomorphism to the extent that it makes communication impossible. Prayer is communication, and the demand to pray to a being that cannot hear or speak is unthinkable. In the same way, for this author, blessing a being that has physical dimensions that can be visible is prohibited. The divine glory, therefore, is in an intermediate position concerning anthropomorphism, to enable it to have an audile contact with man, but not visual one.

This statement is a radical one if we take into account the religious—and linguistic—background of this statement. The term כבוד itself was first defined in medieval Jewish theology as the supreme angel that is revealed—visually—to the prophets. Saadia Gaon repeated this definition several times in his writings.[15] God created this power, according to Saadia, for the specific reason to supply the prophets with a visual proof of the veracity of the prophetic message. Its existence is pointless if it is not seen. While Saadia's works may be regarded as old, this same thesis was repeatedly stated in the twelfth century, most notably by Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai of Barcelona in his commentary on the Sefer Yezira.[16] Even Abraham ibn Ezra, who denied the Saadian concept of the glory as created angel and introduced the concept of the emanated, divine glory, still insisted that what the prophets saw was the lower, visible aspect of the glory, while its upper part, the one adhering to God Himself and joining it, is invisible.[17] Here, the author identifies the

[15]*Emunot ve-Deot*, Leipzig 1853, pp. 62–68; and see, about the whole subject, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*, pp. 104–116; A. Altmann, "Saadia's Theory of Revelation, Its Origin and Background," in *Saadia Studies*, ed. I. Rosenthal, Manchester 1943, pp. 4–25.

[16]The first part of the Commentary is dedicated to this subject. See the edition by S. Z. H. Halberstamm, Berlin 1885; compare my study of this work in *Masudot, Studies in Memory of E. Gottlieb*, eds. M. Oron and A. Goldreich, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 1994, pp. 99–119 (in Hebrew).

[17]In his Commentary on the revelation to Moses, Exodus 33, and repeated in the twelfth chapter of his *Yesod Morah* (Constantinople 1530).

term *kavod*, a clear designation for a visual entity, with a hidden, invisible power, contrary to common linguistic usage at that time.[18] The concept of the *kavod* in this way is, of course, the one found in the other treatises of this circle; yet presenting it in this succinct and almost provocative way in a "halachic" statement intended to direct every person in his hundred blessings every day should be regarded as a rather radical step.

The author continues by supplying scriptural affirmations to his statement:

> And so Isaiah said: To whom then will you liken God, and what likeness compares with Him;[19] but it is said: Let us make man in Our image and after Our likeness,[20] and "the eyes of God,"[21] and also "upward from what had the appearance of his loins"[22]—all these metaphors[23] do not refer to the place of his holiness and *Shechinah*, as I have explained that He, His holiness, does not have any form and image, only voice and wind [of speaking] and speech,[24] and he is filling the heaven and the Earth, and there is no creature that knows the place of His holiness and His glory, not an angel nor a fiery angel nor all the hosts and armies [of angels] above, as it is said,[25] "Blessed is the glory of God from its place."[26]

[18]For an analysis of this transformation in that period, see J. Dan, "Kavod Nistar," in *Dat ve-Safah*, ed. M. Halamish and A. Kasher, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University 1982, pp. 71–79.

[19]Isaiah 40:18.

[20]Genesis 1:26.

[21]This is a general reference to the many instances where the phrase—or similar ones—is mentioned in scriptures; see, for instance, Deuteronomy 11:12.

[22]Ezekiel 1:27.

[23]כל הנך דמיונות

[24]רק קול ורוח ודבור; compare *Sefer Yezira* 1:9.

[25]Ezekiel 3:12.

[26]ובן אמר ישעיה למי תדמיון אל ומה דמות תערכו לו והוא דכתי' נעשה אדם בצלמינו בדמותינו, וכי' עיני ה' [בכי אוכספורד נוסף: אזני ה', ידי ה'], וכן ממתניו ולמעלה במראה אדם. וכל הנך דמיונות לא קאי אמקום קדושתו ושכינה [כי'א: אמקום ליהא, קדושתו ושכינתו] בדפרישית שאין לו קדושתו [ביא: כי אין לקדושתו] דמות וצורה רק קול רוח ודיבור והוא מלא שמים וארץ [כיא: והוא מלא כל הארץ כבודו] ואין שם בריה יודע [כיא: ואין מי יודע] מקום [ליהא בכיא] קדושתו וכבודו, לא מלאך ולא שרף ולא כיתי נדודים שלמעלה [כיא: נדודי מעלה], שע' בכי.

The biblical verses that describe God as all-encompassing refer to the divine glory, whereas those that denote image or physical, visual anthropomorphic characteristics do not. He repeats that this entity does have the power to communicate, and this time he quotes fully the *Sefer Yezira* triple phrase. To the two designations of this entity, כבוד and קדושה, he adds a third, שכינה, in a way that, at least here, seems to be a synonym, following the Saadian identification of the *kavod* and the *Shechinah*. The glory is invisible not only on Earth but in heaven as well, and when the celestial angelic powers congregate to bless God, they bless this glory without seeing it. The Ezekiel verse is interpreted here in the same way it is explained in the Talmud[27] as denoting the ignorance of the angels concerning the residence of the *kavod*, thus once again proving his all-encompassing presence and the lack of any physical, visible element.

This statement, of course, raises the question of what the prophets saw, and what the subject of the biblical anthropomorphic metaphorsis. The author answers this unstated question:

> But all the written (biblical) metaphors like "Let Us make a man," etc., as I interpreted it, refer to his greatness, which is his kingdom that is in the East, and also the measurement of the height of Rabbi Ishmael refers to that greatness and kingdom of His. And it is called the Special Cherub, which is emanated from His great fire, which is a fire that consumes fire. You know that, for He touched them with His little finger and the angels that were created of the fire were burned up when they said, "What is man that thou art mindful of him";[28] so there is a fire that consumes fire, that is Him and His holiness and His glory. And from that great fire He emanated and created the Special Cherub, and not from the same fire from which the angels and the *serafim* and the celestial beasts and the *ereelim* and the *cherubim* and all the hosts of the supreme world were created. And also all the hosts of the heavens and the heavens of heavens that are nine were created from that fire that He derived from the water, from the third part, as it said, "He measured in the 'third' the soil of the earth."[29] And that Special Cherub that was created from His great fire that He emanated from His holiness and not from the fire from which the celestial hosts were created, so that his station will not be comparable to theirs.[30]

[27]Bavli *Hagiga* 13b.

[28]Psalms 8:5, and the talmudic midrash on it in *Sanhedrin* 38b.

It seems that this detailed analysis should be read as the author's essay on the meaning of emanation, as he understood it. The process of emanation is equated, at least metaphorically but with a literal substratum, to the derivation of fire from fire. The author envisions the celestial and divine powers described as made of fire, and he tries to reconcile and harmonize two essentially different systems. One is the biblical-talmudic, which describes God as fiery essence [כי ה' אלהיך אש אוכלה הוא][31] and the angels as made of fire [עושה מלאכין רוחות משרתין אש ליהם].[32] The relationship between these two, which must be separated because one deals with the Master and the other with His humble servants, is defined with the assistance of the talmudic story about the angels who opposed the creation of man, and God burned them by His little finger. The conclusion is that the divine fire is one that can burn up the fire of the angels, so that there are two kinds of celestial fire, one of which the angels are created and one that is the essence of God and can burn up the creatures made of the more lowly kind of fire.

The second system with which the first has to be harmonized is that of the concept of emanation of divine powers, which is

[29]Isaiah 40:12.

[30]אבל כל הדמיונות הבתובים כגון נעשה אדם וכו' הנך דפרש"ת [כגון - דפרש"ת ליתא בכי"א] קאי אגדולתו שהוא מלכותו שהוא במזרח וכן שיעור קומת של [בכי"א נוסף: פרק"] ר' ישמעאל קאי על איהו גדולה ומלכותו ונקרא כרוב המיוחד הנאצל מאשו הגדולה שהוא אש אוכלה אש תדע שהרי נעצ באצבעו הקמנה ונשרפו אותן המלאכים שנבראו מן האש כשאמרו מה אנוש כי תזכרנו ואם בכ אש אוכלה אש שהוא וקדושתו וכבודו ומאותו אש הגדולה אצל וברא כרוב המיוחד ולא מן אותו האש שובראו מלאכים ושרפים וחיות ואפנים וארלים וכרובים וכל כיתי גדודים של מעלה [בי"א: גדודי מעלה] וכן כל השמים ושמי השמים שהם ט' [בי"א: כי הם, ט' ליתא] נבראו מאותו האש שהוא הוציא מן הבים מן חלק שלישי שנ' וכל בשליש עפר הארץ. ואותו הברוב המיוחד שנברא [כי"א: נברא] מאשו הגדולה שהאציל מקדושתו ולא מן האש שנבראו כהוח של מעלה [כי"א: שהאציל מקדושתו וכל שלא] שלא להשיוה לכבודו.

[31]Deuteronomy 4:24

[32]Psalms 104:4.

metaphorically described as the derivation of fire from fire, or a candle from a candle. The Special Cherub is declared to be an emanated entity, its source being the "great fire" that He emanated from "His holiness." In this scheme, so it seems, there are three stages of divine beings—the supreme God, the emanator, and then the holiness, which is emanated divine fire—and below it the Cherub, which is also presented as emanated fire from the holiness but as an action of the Supreme God.

The terminology for the different kinds of light that the author uses in order to harmonize the two systems differentiates between "fire that consumes fire," His great fire," and the "fire He extracted [or derived] from the water." The relationship between these three "fires" is not completely clear. Are the first two, which obviously belong to the divine realm, identical? Is the third fire, derived from the water, the same fire from which the angels were created? Is it identical with the earthly fire? Concerning the question of the "fire derived from water," the context of the *Sefer Yezira* may supply the answer. It is clear that the concept is taken from the description of the last—fourth—stage of the development of the elements in *Sefer Yezira* 1:12, which also includes the detailed description of the creation of the throne of glory and celestial hosts from the fire that was derived from water, and together they form the "fourth *sefirah*." The question of whether this celestial fire of which all the heavenly entities (but not God himself) are constituted is the same as the earthly, elemental fire is one that relates to the original meaning of the *Sefer Yezira*, while an interpreter, like the author of the *Pesak*, could answer it according to his own theological and cosmological system. Neither that section of the *Sefer Yezira* nor this statement in the *Pesak* include any reference to the elemental, earthly fire

It seems that the most probable interpretation of this structure will be the assumption that the author recognizes several—possibly three—stages of divine fire, each emanated from the previous one: the supreme fire of the divine Godhead, the source of everything; the fire of the Holiness; and the third, but still divine, fire of the Special Cherub. It is possible that "fire that consumes fire" relates to the first, supreme layer, as it is the tool of the Creator Himself,

Who used it to burn the angels opposing the creation of man. The "great fire" is associated with the holiness or glory; the term denotes the chariot, as it is mentioned in Ezekiel 1, and Ashkenazi Hasidim (and probably also their *Hechalot* sources) used it to denote the world of the chariot as a whole, especially when describing it as the celestial nut.[33] Concerning the third divine, emanated fire, that of the Special Cherub: It is not distinguished by a specific term, only by the emphasis that it is not the fire derived from water, which is the one used to create the celestial realms and the various heavens; it is more supreme and divine, so that the stature of the created hosts will not be identified with that of the Special Cherub, which is much higher in the divine hierarchy.[34]

It is evident that this discussion is intended to locate the Cherub precisely as the lowest stage of divine emanation but, at the same time, as being far superior to the celestial hosts and the heavens. Everything is fire, yet this fire is divided into several specific realms, with a clear dividing line between the created powers, those created from the fire originating from water as described in the *Sefer Yezira*. In this way the verb אצל is defined as relating to the divine realm, whereas the term ברא is used only for the lower one, that of the angels. The combination of both of them, here as elsewhere in the works of the Special Cherub circle, אצל וברא, is found concerning only emanated beings, not created ones, so that we can see the addition of אצל to ברא as a statement that divine beings are being dis-

[33] בי אשו הגדולה כמו אנה עבה; see J. Dan, "Hokhmat ha-Egoz, Its Origin and Development," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. XVII (1966), pp. 73–82; idem, "The History of the Text of Hokhmat ha-Egoz," *Aley Sefer*, 5 (1978), pp. 49–53. See now the detailed analysis of the whole subject of the *egoz* theory in the interpretations of the chariot in the Middle Ages and their ancient sources in A. Farber, "The Wisdom of the Egoz in Merkabah Exegesis" (Ph.D. thesis, Jerusalem 1986).

[34] The same phrase is used in Elhanan ben Yakar's *Sod ha-Sodot* to describe the relationship between the Creator and the divine glory: כעודו ברא ואצל מזיו הוא אשו, שאר משרתים ומצורות מאש הנברא מן המים, שלא להשוות כבודו לכבודם. See the ms. New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, p. 48b, and my *Theological Texts of the Ashkenazi Hasidim*, Jerusalem: Academon 1977, p. 1. Compare also the Pseudo-Saadia commentary, ms. Munich 40, p. 45: ומאותו אש היוצא מן חלק ג׳ מים ברא שמים והמלאכים וחיות ואופנים וכסא הכבוד וכל צבא מרום לבד מכרוב המיוחד שברא מאשו הגדולה אך השאר צבא מרום לא רצה לבראם מאשו הגדולה שלא ישא [! צל ישוי] אשם לאשו כי אש איכלה הוא.

cussed. It seems to me that this discussion is important, because it proves that the detailed distinction between creation and emanation is not one imposed on the text by modern readers, under the influence of the development of this concept in the kabbalah, but was clearly defined by the author himself. The same insistence on exact definition of the meaning of emanation is found in the works of Rabbi Judah the Pious and Eleazar of Worms, in the Iyyun circle and in the writings of Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar.[35]

The terminology used for describing the Cherub is fivefold. This entity is called, in this brief paragraph: (1) Special Cherub; (2) *Shiur Komah*; (3) "In the East"; (4) His greatness; (5) His kingdom. The first of the five is obviously the innovation of this circle, and may have been influenced by the Saadian designation of the visions of the prophets as those of an angel specifically created for this purpose.[36] The author rejects unhesitatingly the concept that this entity is created, and this indeed is the main purpose of this paragraph, but he may have retained the concept that this entity is the angel about whom Rav Saadia was writing, only amending its nature to be that of supreme, emanated fire of God. The second term is clearly the maximum expression of anthropomorphism in Hebrew tradition, and the Cherub, being visible, is the subject of the detailed physical description in the ancient *Hechalot* text. The third term, "East," is actually the identification of the relationship between the Cherub and the *Shechinah*. The *Shechinah* resides in the west, according to many ancient descriptions (often connected with the "Western Wall" of the Temple, from which the *Shechinah* never moved).[37] The Cherub, being placed so emphatically in the east, is therefore the "anti-*Shechinah*"; like her, he is also present in one universal direction, the opposite one to the *Shechinah*. He thus is placed in the same context as the *Shechinah*, and at the same time is clearly differentiated from her; receiving this title, "East," no one can confuse him with the *Shechinah*, who resides in the opposite direction.

[35]See *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*, pp. 125–163 (and see the quotations in note 34).

[36]It is reasonable to assume that the authors of this circle took the phrase from one version of the Hebrew translation of *Emunot ve-Deot*; however, I have been unable to find such a version. See R. C. Kiener, "The Hebrew Paraphrase of Saadia Gaon's "Kitab al Amanat," Ph.D. thesis, University of Philadelphia 1984, pp. 110–111.

[37]לא זזה שכינה מכותל מערבי, see Exodus Rabba 2:2.

The "greatness," גדולה, is presented here as parallel to the holiness, קדושה, of the divine power above it. The term itself, more accurately translated as "bigness," refers to a being that has dimensions, based on the key verse used in the *Shiur Komah*, גדול אדוננו ורב כח,[38] which was interpreted as stating that the figure described has dimensions, and these are hinted, in *gematria*, in the last two words. It is also a reflection of the text of the prayer, עלינו לשבח לאדון הכל ולתת גדולה ליוצר בראשית.[39] This is a part of the insistence that any biblical or talmudic reference to anthropomorphic dimensions should be attributed to the Cherub and not to the power or powers above it.

The most problematic term used here is the last term, kingdom (מלכות). This term became a most common title of the *Shechinah*, the tenth and last *sefirah*, in the kabbalah, and much has been written concerning the possible source of this term.[40] Despite many doubts and difficulties, it seems to me that the textual evidence leaves us no choice but to view the literature of this circle concerning the Special Cherub as the source of the kabbalistic usage, especially as there is a possibility that the Cherub is indicated even in the *Bahir*.[41]

[38]Psalms 147:5.

[39]Concerning this prayer and its relationship to the *Shiur Komah*, see G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, 2nd ed., New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary 1965, pp. 26–29.

[40]See G. Scholem, *The Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. A. Arkush, ed. R. I. Zvi Werblowsky, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press and the Jewish Publication Society 1987, p. 223 et passim. Scholem's examples from Judah ha-Barzeloni and Judah ha-Levi do not carry the same terminological weight as does this text. The reference to Rabbi Eleazar is to a quotation by him from a pseudo-Hai text. In all these examples we do not find the same terminological weight that the present text expresses, identifying the *malchut* as a specific entity, differentiated from what is above it and what is below.

[41]The *Bahir*, Margaliot ed., sec. 128: ומאי הוי קדוש קדוש קדוש ואחר כך ה' צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו, אלא קדוש כתר עליון, קדוש שדש האילן, קדוש דבק ומיוחד בכלם, ה' צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו. See the analysis in J. Dan, "Midrash and the Dawn of Kabbalah", in

There is a systematic parallelism between the descriptions of the Cherub and those of the *kavod* in the previous sentence:

כבוד corresponds to מלכות
מערב corresponds to מזרח
קדושה corresponds to גדולה
שכינה corresponds to כרוב המיוחד

The author is clearly describing a systematic structure of the divine realm, and the terminology is deliberate and accurate. It represents a system of symbols that has become current and traditional in this circle, probably for several generations, and the author uses it in a precision that is certainly no less, and probably more, systematic than the parallel systems found in the *Bahir* or the Iyyun circle. As far as the history of Jewish speculation concerning the structure of the Godhead, it seems that these formulations represent a mature and self-confident concept of a multilayered divine realm, even though the very idea was hardly several decades old when this text was written.

The relationship between the Special Cherub and the anthropomorphic ancient revelations is re emphasized in the continuation of the text:

> For him [the Special Cherub] He created an image and a form, and a human form, and eyes, and hands [ידות] and "from his hips upward"[42] and on his forehead it is engraved "Yah Akhatriel"[43] and phylacteries on his head[44] and it is written about him "who

Midrash and Literature, ed. G. H. Hartman and S. Budick, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1986, pp. 127–140; compare J. Dan and R. C. Kiener, *The Early Kabbalah*, New York: Paulist Press, 1987.

[42]Ezekiel 1:27.

[43]This is a reference to the talmudic story, taken from the *Hechalot*, about Rabbi Ishmael, here described as a High Priest, seeing Achatriel Ya Adonai Zevaot in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. See Bavli *Berachot* 7a, and compare J. Dan, "The Concept of History in Hekhalot Mysticism," *Binah*, I (New York: Praeger 1988), pp. 47–57.

[44]This is another reference to a talmudic anthropomorphic passage מניין שהקבה מניח תפילין, Bavli *Berachot* 6a.

> like your people Israel one nation on Earth"[45] and he has the *Shiur Komah* of Rabbi Ishmael, in his image man was created, and he sits on the throne of glory, and he is above all the proud ones, which are the four kings of earth, eagle, lion, bull, and man to the four sides of the throne, to indicate that he is the king above all the kings. And also the cherubs below, over the ark, and the *Shechinah* with them, for the Special Cherub is above on the throne of glory, his greatness is not from him but from His holiness, which is in the west, and this is why there are cherubs below who serve His holiness.[46]

The biblical anthropomorphic metaphors are attributed to the Cherub in one brief sentence, proving that the author did not see any difficulty in explaining them as describing this visible, low divine entity; only Ezekiel's vision is mentioned, with a general reference to all the rest by the examples of eyes and hands. There is a more detailed reference to talmudic and *Hechalot* descriptions. The repeated emphasis on the identity of the Cherub and *Shiur Komah* figure indicates, I believe, that this Cherub is essentially and predominantly the anthropomorphic *yotzer bereshit* of the *Shiur Komah*. The talmudic passage concerning God's putting on phylacteries has been a celebrated subject of controversy with the Karaites and the rationalists as being one of the most blatant expressions of anthropomorphism,[47] and one that is very difficult to explain as a metaphor or simile. The Cherub supplies the author with a perfect solution. The verse quoted does not seem to be related to the subject at all; the probable explanation, I believe, is that it was regarded as a

[45]2 Samuel 7:23.

[46]לאוחו יצר [כיא: ואוהו כרוב יצר לו] דמות וצורה וצורת אדם ועינים וידות [כיא: וידים] ממתנים ולמעלה ועל מצחו [ביא: על מצח] חקוק יה אכהריאל והפילין בראשו וכתו' בו ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ ושיעור הקומה של ר' ישמעאל יש לו בצלמו נברא אדם והוא יושב על ככא הכבוד והוא רם על נאים שהם ד' מלכי ארץ [כיא: שהרי ד' מלאכי ארץ הם] נשר אריה שור ואדם לארבע רוחות הכסא ללמד [כיא: ללמד] כי הוא מלך על כל המלכים וגם הכרובים למטה על ארון [כיא נוסף: העדות] ושכינה עמהם [כיא: עליהם] כי הכרוב המיוחד למעלה על ככא הכבוד גדולתו א"נ ממנו אך מקדושתו שבמערב [כיא: אך מקדושתו שהיא במערב] ולכך יש למטה מהכרובים [כיא: שם מטה הכרובים] משמשים לקדוש"ה.

[47]See מלחמות השם לסלומך בן ירוחים, ed. I. Davidson, New York 1934, pp. 108–111

reference to the celestial figure of Israel, החיה ששמה ישראל, and thus, read without this explanation, it may be understood that a divine being is residing on Earth.[48] If so, it means that the figure of the Cherub is found on Earth instead. The emphasis that the Cherub is sitting on the throne of glory may be a reflection of the concept that angels cannot be seated,[49] and that a power sitting must be divine—a subject that is central to the story of the heretical statement by Elisha ben Avuya concerning Metatron.[50] The Cherub, however, being divine, is actually sitting on the throne. The author does not seem to be aware of the paradoxical nature of his formulation here, that the power sitting on the throne of glory is emphatically not the glory but the Cherub. The very phrase כסא הכבוד is thus separated from its literal meaning and the opposite interpretation is adopted: The *kavod* is that which cannot, under any circumstances, be sitting at the *kissey ha-kavod*; the Cherub is found there

Theologically, the unambiguous statement that man was created in the image of the Cherub is a far-reaching one. The kabbalists for instance, found the anthropomorphic counterpart of man in the totality of the sefirotic pleroma,[51] not in a particular part of it. The insistence that man was created in the image of the Cherub indicates that the author was still, to some extent, following the Saadianic method of explaining away anthropomorphism, even though he elevated the source of human image to the divine realm. *Imago dei*, however, is interpreted here as the identity of the image of man and the image of the Cherub, without regard to the problem of the identification of the Cherub as the Creator, following the literal meaning of the verse in Genesis 1:26.

[48]This verse is discussed in the Talmud in connection with the divine phylacteries; see Bavli *Berachot* 6a. It may also be a reference to a celestial beast named Israel; see Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Tübingen 1981, par. 406; חיה אחת יש שם ששמה ישראל וחקוק על מצחה ישראל.

[49]מלאכים אין להם קפיצים, see Bereshit Rabba 65; Vayikra Rabba 6; *Pesikta Rabbati* 22; and see Bavli *Hagiga* 15a.

[50]Bavli *Hagiga* 15a; H. Odeberg, *The Hebrew Book of Enoch*, 2nd ed., New York: Ketav 1973, Chap. 15 (Hebrew section).

[51]See the detailed discussion of the kabbalistic *imago dei* in G. Scholem, *The Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, New York: Schocken 1991, pp. 15–55.

The author is faced with a more serious difficulty when explaining the relationship between the Cherub and the divine power residing in the Holy of Holies in the Temple, between the two *cherubim*. This may have been caused by the very strong insistence in traditional texts that the divine residence in the Temple is the *Shechinah*,[52] whereas in the system of the *Pesak* the *Shechinah* cannot reside in one place. A simple statement that the Cherub is that divine power in the Temple will be in conflict with traditional terminology, as well as with the biblical description according to which two *cherubim* are already in place there; the addition of a third does not fit the needed structure as formulated both in the Bible and in the talmudic interpretations. This seems to be the reason for the introduction in this juncture of the concept that the divine presence of the Cherub is not wholly original, but that it is the result of divine emanation from above, from the Holiness in the west. The concluding sentence is not completely clear; yet it seems to explain that the *cherubim* in the Temple actually serve the supreme holiness, that is, the *Shechinah*, and thus the traditional structure is being preserved. The quotation from *Sefer Hechalot* that follows is intended to explain this: "And so it is found in *Sefer Hechalot*: Yah Akhatriel is his greatness, Hadriel the God of Israel is his holiness, Adiriron is his power."[53] The inference, based on this quotation, is that the archangels, though created and lowly in comparison (despite the divine appellations added to their names), reflect various divine powers above. Akhatriel and Adiriron may be on the same level, but the first reflects the divine greatness, that is, the Cherub, and Hadriel the holiness, that is, the *Shechinah*. No counterpart is found to the third archangel, Adiriron, in the divine system of the *Pesak*. The

[52]Concerning the position of the *Shechinah* between the cherubs, see Tanhuma, Va-Yachel 7, Bamidbar Rabba 4, and Midrash Tadsheh Chap. 2.

[53]It is difficult to pinpoint the source of this quotation. These three celestial powers are not found in one sequence in the *Hechalot* texts collected by Schäfer in his *Synopse of Hechalot Literatur* (see his *Concordanz zur Hechalot Literatur*, vol. I, Tübingen 1987, pp. 46, 139, 180), or in other texts that I could check. It may have been derived from one of the many paraphrases that various schools of Ashkenazi esoterics compiled from *Hechalot* literature in the twelfth century.

conclusion is that the *cherubim* in the Temple are thus a reflection of the *kedushah*, the *Shechinah*, and not only of the Special Cherub, the *gedulah*. Clearly the author regarded, not surprisingly, the divine presence in the Temple as the most supreme divine element on Earth, and for this purpose the Cherub alone was not sufficient, his divine stature being too low. He did not have such hesitations concerning the other functions and descriptions that he emphatically attributed to the Cherub.

A further description of the Cherub follows:

> That Special Cherub, sitting on his throne of glory, has a *pargod* of coloured *hashmal*, whose name is Ishael, and it is like light blue, and this is the *pargod* which surrounds the throne of glory on three sides except the west, where his holiness in the west shines over his greatness in the east over the throne of glory. This is [the meaning of] "blessed is the glory of God," the glory of God is his holiness, "from his place"[54] he goes and shines over his greatness and his kingdom. And to this glory we bless and say, "Blessed is the glory of God from its place."[55]

The same connection between the glory and the Cherub that was described concerning the divine residence in the Temple is stated here concerning the target of man's prayers. The ambiguous phrase in Ezekiel, which has become a part of the *kedushah* and has been interpreted in the *Talmud* as denoting the ignorance of the celestial hosts concerning the place of the divine glory (a concept repeated in the beginning of the *Pesak*),[56] is explained here in a detailed picture. The Cherub is sitting on the throne of glory, surrounded on three sides by the *pargod*, and open only toward the west, from where the spiritual divine power of the *kavod* shines upon it. The person

[54]Ezekiel 3:12.

[55] לאותו הכרוב המיוחד היושב על בסא בגודו יש פרגוד של השמל מוצבע ששמו אישאל [בי״א: צבע שמו חשמל, אישאל ליתא] ודומה להכלה, והוא הפרגוד מסבב [כי״א: שכוכב] כסא הכבוד משלש צדדין לבד [כי״א: חוץ] ממערב שזורחת קרושתו שבמערב על גדולתו [כי״א: קדושתו, והוא ש׳בוש] שבמזרח על כסא הכבוד, וזהו בכ׳, כבוד ה׳ הוא קדושתו, ממקומו, הולך וזורח [כי״א: הולך ליהא, הוא זורח] על גדולתו ומלכותו, ולאותו כבוד אנו מברכים ואומרים בכ״ם.

[56]See note 27.

praying and blessing cannot but direct his prayer to the Cherub, because this is the only visible and localized element in the divine realm, but his intention is toward the source of the divine light pouring over the Cherub from the glory in the west. The Cherub, therefore, is not the subject of the intention of prayer; he may only serve as a focus for the direction toward which the worshipper turns, and as a vehicle for the transmission of the divine light of the *kavod* that shines upon him, and thus the worshipper may be in contact with it as well.

The descriptive character of the previous paragraph is now replaced by an emphatic tone assuming legal phrasing and terminology that is a repetition of the opening sentence of this treatise: "And so every 'blessed' that comes out of the mouth of the fearful of God must be intended as blessing and thanking and bowing to His glorious holiness."[57]

The next paragraph, after this summary, is exegetical in nature:

> And that kingdom of his, which is His holiness, is called in the *Sefer Yezira* the world of the *modi*, and it is one of the four worlds that are ten *sefirot*: The world of the *modi*, the world of *ravrevanut*, the world of *mada*, and the world of the *nefesh*. And the meaning of *modi* is from the word "praise," for God has created that Special Cherub as a fixed place enabling all the celestial princes to praise and worship their creator.[58]

The identification in the first sentence of this paragraph of *kedushah* and *malchut*, which is directly contradictory to the terminology employed throughout this treatise and the other Special Cherub texts, should be regarded as a textual aberration.[59] It should probably read גדולתו instead. The next reference is also a textual

[57] וכן כל ברוך היוצא מפי ירא׳ השם צדיך לכון ולברך [ולברך ליהא כי״א] להודות ולהשתחוות לאותו כבוד קדושתו.

[58] ואותו מלכותו שהוא קדושתו נקרא בספר יצירה עולם המודי [בי״א: בספר יצירד הטדני] והוא מד׳ עולמות שהם עשר ספירות עולם המודי [כי״א: הטדני] עולם הרברבנות [כי״א: הדברניה] עולם המרע עולם הנפש. ופי׳ מודי [בי״א: טדני] הוא לשון שבח ומהלל לפי שיצרו הבה׳ לאותו הכרוב המיוחד כדי להיות לכל שרי מעלה מקום קבוע להלל לשבח ולפאר ליוצרם.

[59]Compare the version in ms. Leipzig: ואותו מלכותו שהוא גדולתו נקרא בספר יצירה עולם הטדני , and see A. Epstein, *Mi-Kadmoniot ha-Yehudim*, p. 239, note 39.

aberration, a very familiar one in these texts. The author here seems to be quoting from the *Sefer Yezira*; the subject is not found in that ancient work, and there is no doubt that the source cited is the *Megillat ha-Megaleh*, a treatise written in the first half of the twelfth century by Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja.[60] Rabbi Abraham was known as the "head of police," an honorary title that was quoted in Arabic, צאחב אלשורחטה. The Ashkenazi writers, unfamiliar with Arabic, corrupted this title and tried to read it in Hebrew. Thus, in the pseudo-Saadia commentary on the *Sefer Yezira*, it is quoted as *Sefer Zah ve-Ashur* (ספר צח ואשור), creating one of the more interesting, though unused, titles of a Hebrew book. The copyist of the *Pesak* here reduced it even further, and amended the text to read ספר יצירה, a work that is conspicuously absent from the cosmogonical discussions of Abraham bar Hijja.

Bar Hijja, using unknown neo-Platonic sources, as proven by Scholem in a detailed analysis,[61] explained that the light is mentioned in the description of the creation in Genesis five times, a number that corresponds to the "grades of light" or the "worlds of light" that are above the firmament, and that were created in the first day of the creation. This statement is brought by Bar Hijja as a quotation from the חכמי המחקר, a common appellation in the works of this scholar for neo-Platonic philosophers. He states that these worlds or stages can be called by several names, according to the reader's wish, thus minimizing the meaningfulness of the names. The first, according to Bar Hijja, is the:

> wonderful light that was revealed to the archangels and to the prophets and to the nobles of Israel in Sinai; this world is called by the philosophers the *nudni* (amended in another manuscripts as *noda*, known), and this is what is referred to in the verse when it says, "And God said let there be light."[62] The second stage is

[60] *Sefer Megillat ha-Megalle von Abraham bar Chija*, ed. Adolf Poznanski and Julius Guttmann, Berlin: Mekizei Nirdamim 1924. The section discussed here is on pp. 22–23.

[61] G. Scholem, "Reste neuplatonischer Spekulation bei den deutschen Hassidim." *MGWJ*, 75 (1931), pp. 177–191.

[62] Genesis, 1:3.

> the voice that was heard by Moses from among the *cherubim* and by the angels when they go on a mission and to the whole people of Israel in Sinai, and the philosophers call it the world of *ravrevanut* (other reading: *dabranut*). This is what came into being with the word "light." It is possible, according to our sages, to call these two stages the throne of glory and the holy spirit. The third stage is the light of wisdom and knowledge and intelligence and the Torah, and this is the wisdom given to the angels and the *seraphim*, and the light of this wisdom spreads and covers the righteous among men. In this stage are also the angels and the *hashmalim* and the *ophanim* and all the hosts of heaven. The philosophers call this stage the world of *mada*, knowledge. The verse mentioned it in the word "and He saw," for seeing is not perfected in the eye or the heart but in wisdom and knowledge, as it is said: And God saw the light that it was good,[63] and the meaning of "He saw" here is that he gave wisdom the power to see the good and understand it. The fourth is the soul or the spirit that is inserted in men, in the righteous among them and those who are not righteous. The philosophers call this stage the world of the *nefesh*, the soul. The verse mentions it when it states that the light was separated, as it is said: And God separated between light and darkness.[64] The light is a reference to the souls of the righteous, which are covered by the light of knowledge and the fear of God, and their souls exude light and shine. The darkness indicates the souls of the wicked, who are beyond the reach of the light of fear [of God] and the knowledge of God. And the philosophers call this stage the world of creation. The fifth stage is the light hidden for the righteous in the future [the world to come]. The verse refers to it in the Bible and calls it by two names, day and night, as it is said: And He called the light day and the darkness he called night.[65] The light [in this verse] is a reference to the Garden of Eden that has been constructed for the righteous, and the darkness indicates hell (*gehinom*), which is the place of the wicked.[66]

[63] Genesis 1:4.

[64] Genesis 1:4.

[65] Genesis 1:5.

[66] *Megillat ha-Megaleh*, p. 22.

It should be noted that none of the other elements in Bar Hijja's elaborate construction are found in the text of the *Pesak*. The analysis of the reference to light in the Genesis text and the application of the stages or worlds to entities created in the first stage of the cosmogonic process—the vision of the prophets, the voice heard by the people addressed by God, wisdom and knowledge, the souls and their future residence—all these are absent here. There can be little doubt that what attracted the Special Cherub authors to this passage in *Megillat ha-Megaleh* is the direct connection between this early stage in the creation and the entity envisioned by the prophets, which was, for them, a clear reference to the Special Cherub.

The names of the worlds were corrupted, because they are not explained by Bar Hijja and they constitute meaningless titles that can be interpreted in any way an exegete may choose. The first, נודני or נודע in Bar Hijja, was understood in the *Pesak* as מודי, interpreted as "giving thanks," because the Cherub is the subject of the praises and thanks of the celestial hosts when they pray to their creator. Other versions of this text have instead the peculiar, unexplained term טדני.[67] The other three follow accurately the Bar Hijja terminology—עולם הנפש, עולם המדע, עולם הרברבנות. The author of the *Pesak* listed here only four of Bar Hijja's five worlds, the one omitted being the "world of creation," עולם יצירה. There seems to be no theological reason for this omission, and there is no indication that the author of the *Pesak* had before him a text that was different from that of the other authors from this circle. It seems, therefore, that the omission should be regarded as purely technical, probably by a copyist, and may have been the result of the term יצירה being used as the title of the source of this whole tradition, which for some reason a copyist did not repeat it as the name of a specific world. It is possible that it was the same copyist or editor who read מודי, because

[67]This term, עולם הטדני, has not been satisfactorily explained (see Scholem and Vajda in the studies referred to here). The version טדני is the dominant and probably the correct one, and Bar Hijja either invented it here following an unknown etymology or received it from an unknown source.

the same explanation is found concerning the more common טדני, and it is very hard to imagine that the order will be the other way around, from מודי to טדני, which is the more difficult version.

We have several other versions of the Special Cherub circle's rendering of the Bar Hijja passage. One is included in the first source, the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel*;[68] another in the Pseudo-Saadian Commentary on the Sefer Yezira;[69] and the others in the treatises by Elhanan ben Yakar, *Sod ha-Sodot* and the two Commentaries to the *Sefer Yezira*.[70] The centrality of this passage to their worldview cannot be doubted, and it contributed (in structure, not in specific detail) to the development of the concept of the worlds in the early kabbalah.[71] The context in the works of the Special Cherub circle is consistently that of the figure of the Special Cherub; they seem to insist that the system of the worlds is a framework, within which the status of the divine revealed power, the Special Cherub, is to be understood.

Elhanan ben Yakar, in his first commentary on the *Sefer Yezira*, transformed this quotation into a statement of ancient tradition: "This is the tradition from the time of the early prophets, five are called a world."[72] This opening sentence is very strange. It could give the impression that Elhanan no longer identified the title of the book from which this text is quoted in the other sources. Elhanan often ascribed the material he used to great, ancient, unspecified traditions, but in this case it could have been possible to guess that the corrupted readings of the צאהב אלשורשה did not mean anything to him, and he substituted it with the general declaration that it was derived from ancient tradition. However, the fact is that in the Paris ms. of

[68]See A. Epstein, *Mikadmoniot ha-Yehudim*, pp. 244–245.

[69]A. Epstein (ibid., pp. 231-232) copied and analyzed the version of this tradition in the pseudo-Saadia commentary, and the version in the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel* itself, according to ms. Oxford 1947a, p. 50.

[70]See G. Vajda, *Kovetz Al Yad*, 16 (1966), part I, pp. 164–165, and the notes on pp. 192-193.

[71]See G. Scholem, לחקר הורה העולמות בקבלת הראשוניס, Tarbiz, 3 (1932), pp. 33–66. Compare J. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 203–205.

[72]See Vajda, *Kovetz Al Yad*, p. 164.

this commentary, and in the New York ms. of the second commentary, the reference to the source is clearer than in any other Special Cherub treatise: אברהם חי״א in the first and צאחב אלשירטה in the second. It is very difficult to imagine that either the general reference to the ancients or the clear reference to *Megillat ha-Megaleh* is a correction by copyists. The two (or even three) versions have to be regarded as original. Why did he use different openings to the same passage?

The version brought by Elhanan in this commentary is essentially identical to the one in the *Pesak*. In his other two treatments of the same subject, however, Elhanan ben Yakar amended the structure considerably. This is evident especially in the first commentary, in which Elhanan added to the list the other three realms described by the term "world"—אילו חמישה נקראו עולם מלבר עולם הגלגלים ועולם המשכן והארם נקרא עולם קטן רומה לעולם הגלגלים. This is an obvious attempt at terminological harmonization, trying to include in this system all the aspects of the universe described by this term.

The conclusion of the *Pesak* repeats the major distinction presented in this treatise, the difference between the revealed Cherub and the hidden *kavod*, and its meaning for human prayer:

> That Greatness of His is elevated over all the peoples and is uplifted[73] [the text is corrupt in this sentence]. "Uplifted" includes the letters of the word "he is not", ונשא שאינו, in order to say that His holiness does not have any form or image. This is why the triple blessing is concluded by "the holy God" and not "the great God," as has been explained, because it is wrong to say a blessing or to intend, in any ritual of the creator, only to His holiness without form or image. "For thou art a great and holy king," "great" is His greatness and His kingdom and it is the Special Cherub, and "holy" is His holiness in the west, and this is our faith. And this is what we say "and the holy beasts will sing,"[74] etc., the face of every beast and *ophan* and cherub," to the Cherub, that is, to the Special Cherub that is the world of *modi*, "they turn their faces and bow."[75]

[73]Psalms 113:4

[74]See Epstein, op. cit., p. 244.

The *kedushah*, according to the author, is concluded by the term האל הקדוש, to emphasize that the praise to God (the creator), should be directed to the *kedushah* in the west. The *piyyut*, describing the celestial ritual, includes a reference to the Cherub, because the *Merkavah* beasts turn toward the Special Cherub because it is visible. The interesting aspect of this brief example of exegesis is that here we find an early example of a process that became very central and powerful in thirteenth-century kabbalah, namely, the division of parts of the prayers, or even specific words in every blessing, between the divine powers of the celestial pleroma.[76] This practice, so prominent in Rabbi Azriel of Gerona's Commentary on the Prayers, was severely criticized by contemporary opponents of the kabbalah,[77] but it became a most prominent characteristic of the kabbalistic impact on ritual. In the case of the *Pesak* there is no real division of the spiritual intention during prayer; the only subject for it is the

[75] ומס אוהו גדולתו [כיא: ומס הוא יח׳ גדולתו] הוא רם בו׳ רם על כל גוים ונשא הולך מגדולתו [כיא נשחבש: הוא ונשא שאין לו לקדושתו] וכתו׳ ונשא אותיות שאינו, כלומר שאין לו לקדושתו לא רמות ולא צורה ולכך חותמין בברכה משולשת [כיא: שלישית] האל הקדוש ולא האל הגדול כרפרש שאיך לברך ולכוין בכל רבר עבורה ליוצרו רק לקדושתו בלא רמות וצורה, [בכיא נוסף: וזהו] כי אל מלך גדול וקדוש אתה, גדול הוא גדולתו ומלכותו, והוא כרוב המיוחר, וקדוש היא קדושתו שבמערב, והיא אמונתינו, וזה שאנו אומרים והחיות ישוררו וכו׳ פני כל חיה ואופן וכרוב לכרוב, כלומר לכרוב המיוחר, שהוא עולם המורי [כיא[הטרני], סובבים פניהם [כיא: כנפיהם] ומשחחוים [כיא נוסף: ומשבחים].

[76]This is most clearly expressed in the Commentary on the Prayers by Rabbi Azriel of Gerona, but is found also in traditions of Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir and even in the tradition concerning the prayer that reached us from Rabbi Abraham ben David, the father of Rabbi Isaac the Blind. See G. Scholem, *The Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 416–419 et passim, and G. Sed-Rejna, *Azriel de Gèrone, Commentaire sur la liturgie quotidienne*, Leiden 1974; idem, "Sur quelques commentaries kabbalistique sur le rituel," *REJ*, 124 (1965), pp. 307–351; and *The Emergence of the Mystical Prayer* (note 9). This attitude is radically different from that prevailing in the commentaries on the prayers of Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms.

[77]Especially by Rabbi Meir ben Shimeon of Narbonne; see G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 42–43.

kavod, the *kedushah*, the *Shechinah*. Yet when a visible element is included, as it is in this *piyyut*, it is attributed to the Special Cherub, which is identified with the first world of Bar Hijja's cosmology. The very fact that the author accepts that the blessing "the great king" is interpreted as relating to the Cherub is a major step toward the division of prayer between the powers of the pleroma. At least the possibility of such exegesis has received, in this *Pesak*, some element of legitimation, and serves as a contemporary parallel, assisting us in understanding the spiritual circumstances that led the kabbalists to their radical treatment of the ritual of prayer.

Two sections are added in the Munich ms. 92 to the *Pesak*. There may be some doubt whether they belong to the treatise itself or are the addition of a later editor. This section in the manuscript is an anthology collected from several sources and appended to Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's *Shaarey ha-Sod ha-Yihud veha-Emunah*. Because of this character, these two paragraphs could have been copied independently of the text of the *Pesak*; they are absent in Oxford ms. 2575. Yet the facts that they are derived from the treatises of the Special Cherub literature and that they directly relate to the questions of prayer and anthropomorphism make it possible to assume that the author of the *Pesak* added them to his treatise as further confirmation of his "halachic" decision from ancient sources. They are both closely related to the *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel*, some sentences being found there word for word. The first reads:

> A secret. It is studied in the *Baraita of Joseph ben Uzziel*, who revealed it from the mouth of Jeremiah the prophet, and should not be revealed but to the humble and esoteric. This is from the book of Rabbi Avigdor ha-Zarfati, and this is also from his book.[78]

If indeed this is a direct continuation of the *Pesak*, then it can be understood as a connecting sentence written by the author of

[78] סוד. תניא בבר־יחא יוסף בן עוזיאל שגילה מפי ירמיהו הנביא ואין לגלותו אלא לצנועים. מכפר הר אביגדור הצרפתי זל וגם זה מספרו. See A. Epstein (note 1), pp. 241–245, and compare J. Dan, *The Hebrew Story in the Middle Ages*, Jerusalem: Keter 1974, pp. 80–92, concerning the origins of this tradition.

the *Pesak*. In this case, this sentence should be read as a declaration that the content of the *Pesak* is taken from the book by Rabbi Avigdor ha-Zarfati, and that the following paragraph is taken from the same source. Another possibility is that only the first sentence in this additional "secret" is from Avigdor's book (as well as the continuation), whereas this has nothing to do with the previous *Pesak*. It is very difficult to decide between these two possibilities, because each has a drawback. Concerning the first possibility, the syntax of the first sentence is not that of an ending but of a beginning, whereas if we see it as the ending of the *Pesak* and the establishment of the source, the structure is most unusual. Concerning the second possibility, it is difficult to see what the "first quotation" is here, what we learned in the *Barayta*. Comparison of other versions of the *Pesak* adds little to the elucidation of this textual difficulty. Oxford ms. 2575 ends the *Pesak* with a statement that this is taken from Avigdor's work, without any reference to a continuation. This could be, of course, either the original version or an abbreviation by the copyist of this manuscript.

The quotation from Rabbi Avigdor's book reads:

> And God of Hosts is exalted in justice.[79] When He judges the nations of the world He becomes very high in His world and He rises up on His throne and His name is sanctified in His heights, as it is said: So I will show My greatness and My holiness, etc.[80] My father(?)[81] interpreted: In *Sefer Hechalot*[82] "And God of hosts is exalted in justice," etc.; this is because the throne of glory is not situated equally (straight, even), but one side is high and one side is low. When the Holy One blessed be He sits on the chair in the measure of justice, then He is elevated, sitting and ascend-

[79] Isaiah 5:16.

[80] Ezekiel 38:23.

[81] The initials פא can be read as "another interpretation" (פירוש אחר), or as "my father interpreted" (פירש אבי). Another possibility is "Avigdor interpreted" (פירש אביגדור).

[82] This is probably a reference to the description in the Hebrew book of Enoch; see P Schäfer, *Synopse*, par. 38.

ing on the high side, as it is said: God has risen in the voice of *shofar*.[83] Elohim is the measure of justice, and then he arises, when he hears the cry of Israel, Lord is the measure of mercy, the voice of *shofar* [means] that when they pray loudly they improve their deeds, and then it is transformed to the measure of mercy; it is as if the glory descends to the lower side of the throne. And then it is called YHVH, because [El] YHVH in *etbash* is MZPZ, which is, in *gematria*, "with mercy." This is the name of his holiness without a form or image, only voice and wind and speech, and he is like the lights in the west, and this is "for I am holy, I the Lord.[84]"[85]

The main theme of this paragraph, like many others in the treatises of this circle, is the relationship between *gadol* and *kadosh*, the two divine entities that are the innovation of this school of thought and the main subject of wonderment. The relationship between these two powers is investigated in the context of various verses and portions of the prayers, because the two terms, which were regarded hitherto as essentially synonymous, are now separated into two divine realms. In this case, however, there does not seem to be a clear solution to this problem.

The key verse discussed here is the one that includes both elements—והתגדלתי וההקדשתי. The author cannot treat them as meaningless synonyms; he must differentiate between them. In order to

[83]Psalms 47:6.

[84]Leviticus 20:26

[85]ויגבה ה' צבאות במשפט·כשעושה משפט באומות העולם ונשגב בעולמו ומהרומם על בסא ומחקדש שמו במרומו, שנ' והתגדלתי והחקדשתי וכו' פֹּא בספר היכלות ויגבה ה' צבאות במשפט וכו' כי כסא הכבוד אינו יושב בשוה אך צד אחד גבוה וצד אחר נמוך כשהבה יושב על כסא מדת הדין או מחרומם יושב ועולה בצד גבוה שנ' עלה אלהים בתרועה ה' בקול שופר. אלהים זה מדת הדין ואז עלה כששומע תרועת ישראל, ה' זו מדה רחמים בקול שופר שמתפללים בקול משפרירים מעשיהם אז מתהפך למדת הרחמים כביכול ומנמיך כבודו בצד כסא הנמוך ומיקרי ה', כי אל באחבש מצפץ בני' ברחמים, זהו שם קדושתו בלא דמות וצורה כי אם קול ורוח ודיבור והוא באוריה שבמערב וזהו כי קדוש אני ה'. The ending of this paragraph is closely connected to a paragraph found in the Munich ms. just before the *Pesak* itself, p. 4a. The *Shechinah*, which is the *kedushah* in the west, is described in a similar way to that of the *Pesak*, and a quotation is added from the *Ophan for Yom Kippur by Rabenu Kalonymus*. A. Epstein discussed this in detail; see ibid., pp. 233–234.

do this, he used another biblical reference concerning uplifting—עלה אלהים בתרועה ה' בקול שופר. The situation of judgment of the nations, in which God is situated in the "measure of justice," is therefore expressed by an uplifting. This the author associates, following talmudic tradition, with the name Elohim (whereas YHVH is associated with the "measure of mercy").[86] The picture he develops to explain this is that of the lopsided divine throne, which has a higher side and a lower side. The "throne of justice," which is actually "the side of throne that is the side of justice," is the elevated one, whereas the lower side is the one devoted to mercy. The verse is thus interpreted as denoting that when Israel prays and the *shofar* is sounded, Elohim is transformed to YHVH, justice is transformed into mercy, and the divine figure on the throne moves from the elevated side to the lower side, the one dedicated to mercy.

This seems an elaborate, though methodologically unexceptional, explication of the second verse. It does not explain the unique meaning of the first verse and the relationship between התגדלתי and התקדשתי. One could expect that one of the two names, and one of the two measures, and one of the two sides of the throne, will be connected with the *kedushah* in the west and the other with the *gedulah* in the east. This seems indeed to be the author's explanation of the "elevation" associated by the verse with the employment of divine justice. The emphasis on the other side, that of mercy, as being identified with the *kedushah* in the west, is clearly stated and therefore cannot be doubted. Other texts from this circle consistently identify the *kavod*, the glory, with the name YHVH. Yet the second side of this equation remains unclear, and we can understand that it presented several difficulties for the author. If he followed

[86]See Exodus Rabba 3:6, and E. E. Urbach, *Hazal*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1969, pp. 29–30. The most detailed discussion of this subject in the writings of the Special Cherub circle is to be found in the opening paragraphs of Elhanan ben Yakar's *Sod ha-Sodot*, which is dedicated to the discussion of the relationship between these two names in the opening chapters of Genesis. According to Elhanan, YHVH is the glory, the *kavod*, and Elohim is the supreme creator, the Ruah Elohim Hayyim. See *Texts of Ashkenazi Hasidic Esoteric Theology*, Jerusalem: Academon 1977, pp. 1–6.

completely the term התגדלתי and concluded, as he did in the *Pesak* itself, that the presence of the root גדל indicates the figure of the Special Cherub, he would have to conclude that the Cherub is called Elohim, that he sits on the elevated side of the throne, and that (at least in a situation of judging) he is higher than the *kavod-kedushah*. This the author does not do, and thus leaves the basic question, concerning the first verse, asked in this paragraph unanswered. It also leaves unanswered a problem concerning the *kedushah*: According to this description, the *kavod* sits on the throne of glory, despite the insistence, in the *Pesak* and elsewhere, that it is the Cherub who occupies this place, because the *kavod* does not have "form and image" necessary for sitting.

It seems, therefore, that this paragraph reveals in a very candid way the difficulties encountered when the ancient texts undergo radical reinterpretation in order to make them consistent with a new concept of the divine realm, one that includes several powers. The exegetical need is, therefore, to divide the traditional descriptions of the divine realm between the new powers of the newly defined pleroma. This task contains many difficulties, of which this is an example.

The last passage in this collection is one that is presented as a direct quotation from the *Barayta*, though evidently it includes an element of commentary on it:

> This cannot be disclosed, only to the humble, *Barayta of Joseph ben Uzziel*. "And they saw the God of Israel"[87]—this proves that they saw the *Shechinah*, "and there was under His feet like a pavement of sapphire stone" under the throne of glory. Our sages of blessed memory said: Anyone who translates this verse literally, that is, and they saw the glorious God of Israel, is a liar, and anyone who adds to it, they saw the angels of the Lord, God of Israel, is committing infamy and curses God, for he makes the glory into an angel.[88] It should be "And they saw the glory of the God of Israel." Ibn Ezra: And a vision, not in riddles.[89] This means that he was envisioning in a bright glass (or mirror)—could it be the vision of the *Shechinah*? The Bible says that man shall not see me and live, neither man nor the holy beasts,[90] they do not see the face of the *Shechinah*, they even do not know its place, as it is said, Blessed is the glory of the Lord from its place.[91] As our sages of blessed memory said, man is a microcosmos,[92] meaning that in the same way that God blessed be He fills up all the universe and in His spirit establishes the worlds, the lower world and the upper world, so the soul establishes the body and leads it in any direction it wishes. And what our sages of blessed memory said, every place that is said [in the Bible] "and God," it is He and His court,[93] meaning the [seventy nations?] because by it the wicked are punished, as it said, It is you who dries up the sea, etc., overcoming the serpent.[94]"[95]

[87]Exodus 24:10.
[88]Bavli *Kiddushin* 49a.

This enigmatic section can be regarded as one of a series of commentaries concerning the relationship between the revealed and hidden aspects of God, intended mainly to remove any possibility of anthropomorphic reference, in biblical verses, to the divine power that is invisible, referred to here by the term *Shechinah*. The text is very succinct, the style is concise and often uses hints without elabo-

[89]Numbers 12:8.
[90]Exodus 33:20. The word וחי is interpreted here as referring to the holy beasts of the vision of Ezekiel. Elhanan ben Yakar, in *Sod ha-Sodot*, explains it as referring to the angels in general.
[91]Ezekiel 3:12.
[92]Tanhuma, Pequkey 3; see E. E. Urbach, *Hazal*, pp. 206–208.
[93]See E. E. Urbach, *Hazal*, pp. 182–183.
[94]Isaiah 51:9.
[95]אין מגלין אלא לצנועים ברייתא דיוסף בך עוזיאל וירא את אלהי ישראל, מלמד שראו שכינה וחחת דגליו כמעשה לבנת הספיר חחת כסא הכבוד. ואמרו חכזל, המחרגם פסוק זה כצורחו פי' יחזו ית יקר אלהא דישראל הרי זה בדאי, והמוסיף עליו וחזו ית מלאכיא דה' אלהי דישראל הדי זה מחרף ומגדף שעושה הכבוד מלאך, אלא וחזו ית יקרא אלהא דישראל. אבן עזרא: ומראה ולא בחידות פי' שהיה מסתכל באיספקלריאה המאירה, יכול מראה שכינה, תל' כי לא יראני האדם וחי, לא אדם אף חיות הקדש אינם דואות פני שכינה, אלא אף מקומו אינם יודעים שנא' בכים. כמו שאמרו דזל' כי אדם עולם קטן דל' כי כמו שהבה ממלא כל העולם כלו וברוח מעמיד העולמים עולם התחתון ועולם העליון, כן הנשמה מעמדה הגוף ומנהיגתו לכל אשר יחפוץ, ומה שאמרו רזל' כל מקום שנ' וד' הוא וביח דינו, רל' על הע' כי על ידה נפרעין מן הרשעים שנ' הלא את המחבה ים וכו' מחוללה תנין

ration, yet in most cases the references can be explained and the theological message understood. This seems to me an indication that the circle of writers discussed here was devoted to a new reinterpretation of biblical and talmudic sources in the light of their new approach to the understanding of the relationship between the revealed and hidden divine realms.

The verse in Exodus is one of the most difficult anthropomorphic statements in the Bible, because of its extreme simplicity. It states clearly and unambiguously that the people of Israel, during the great theophany of Mount Sinai, saw the God of Israel. Talmudic tradition already identified the specific aspect of God revealed to them—the *Shechinah*, that aspect of God in talmudic tradition that is closest to the people of Israel. Theologically, the use of the term *Shechinah* here does not diminish the anthropomorphic impact of the verse, from either a talmudic point of view or the new approach to terminology by the circle of the Special Cherub. *Shechinah* is identical with God in the talmudic tradition, and the Special Cherub exegetes saw in it, if not God Himself, at least a supreme aspect of the pleroma which cannot be envisioned. The author of this paragraph does not dwell on the continuation of the verse; it is sufficient for him to repeat the talmudic interpretation that what they saw was the floor below the throne of glory. In this realm the problem of anthropomorphism does not arise, because its visibility is not in doubt

Concerning this disturbing verse, the author finds it enough to quote the talmudic discussion of its translation, without adding any theological background. It is wrong to translate it verbatim, concluding that God is visible; it is even worse to translate it with an explanatory note concerning seeing angels, because it makes the vision of God into a vision of created beings (exactly what Rav Saadia had done!). It should be translated in a way that denotes that the visible element is separate from God Himself. The terminology is not convenient to the Special Cherub mystics, because the glory, according to them, is also invisible, but this question is not referred to in this text.

The second anthropomorphic reference to be discussed is the talmudic interpretation of the verse "in a vision and not in riddles,"

in which Moses' vision is explained that it was "through a bright glass."[96] The question is: Could it be "the face of the *Shechinah*" that he envisioned in this way? It could not, because this face is invisible, as the verse in Exodus clearly states. This is supported by the statement that the celestial powers, like the holy beasts seen by Ezekiel, also cannot see the "face of God," and this is ascertained by the usual interpretation, stated in Bavli *Hagiga*, concerning the verse "Blessed is the glory of God from its place."[97] Of course, this is contradictory to what has been stated in the previous sentence, according to which the people of Israel did see the glory during the Mount Sinai theophany.

In a positive way, the invisibility of the divine glory is identified, following another talmudic statement, with the invisible presence of the soul within man. It is what makes him alive, it is the source of his existence, every part of him is full of it, yet nobody can see it. In the same way, the divine glory fills up the universe, yet it is completely invisible.

The concluding sentence seems to be incomplete and enigmatic. Whether it refers to the *atarah*, the kabbalistic-Provençal appellation of the tenth *sefirah*, is unclear.[98]

The reference to Ibn Ezra and his biblical commentary[99] dates the text as no earlier than the beginning of the second half of the twelfth century, which corresponds to our knowledge and conclusions from other sources that the literature of this circle was written

[96] Bavli *Yevamot* 49b.

[97] Bavli *Hagiga* 13b.

[98] I preferred the reading of this letter as referring to the seventy nations being judged, but it could also be an abbreviation of the term *atarah*. If indeed it is, this paragraph could be connected with the group of Ashkenazi Hasidic traditions, mainly concerning prayers, that are found in ms. New York 1161, which combines terminology derived from the works of Rabbi Judah the Pious and his circle, those of the Special Cherub circle, and the kabbalistic concept of the ten *sefirot*. See J. Dan, "כוונת התפלה מקבלת הריח" *Da'at*, 10 (1983), pp. 47–56.

[99] See Ibn Ezra to Numbers 12:8, and compare his commentary there, verse 6, and to Exodus 33 (an excursus at the end). See U. Simon, *Ibn Ezra on the Torah*, Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute 1976, s.v.

in the last decades of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. Yet the fact that Ibn Ezra is the only medieval source cited is meaningful. This commentator was regarded also by the writers belonging to the central school of Ashkenazi Hasidism, the Kalonymus family, as a supreme authority, as a person who represents ancient traditions. Rabbi Eleazar of Worms even refers to him as "Abraham the Visionary."[100] Rabbi Judah the Pious wrote a commentary on a passage written by Ibn Ezra, even though he did not, in that place, mention his name.[101] As far as medieval sources are concerned, it is no accident that the two authorities quoted in the *Pesak* are Abraham bar Hijja and Abraham ibn Ezra, the two scientist-philosophers who wrote in Hebrew and represented an essential stage in the transition of Jewish theological speculation from Arabic to Hebrew in the High Middle Ages.[102]

In conclusion, the *Pesak* represents a first hesitant step toward normative theology taken by a group of esoterical thinkers in medieval Germany who expressed a radical new departure in the concept of God, and it contains, to some extent, mystical inclinations. This brief treatise is centered around the basic exegetical problem that faced the writers of this circle (like so many others in this period, including Maimonides)—the interpretation of the verses and talmudic sayings that indicate the anthropomorphic nature of God. In the other treatises of this circle, the prophetic vision is almost the only subject; here, however, the subject of prayer is added. The *Pesak* holds, therefore, a meaningful place in the history of Jewish liturgy and mysticism: It is probably the earliest instruction, phrased in a legal format, to pray to a pleromatic concept of the divine world, and to direct the prayer toward a specific aspect within the structure of the divine powers.[103]

[100] אברהם החזוה in *Chochmat ha-Nefesh*, Lvov (Lemberg) 1876, p. 29c (Rabbi Eleazar was quoting from Ibn Ezra's commentary to Exodus 22:22).

[101] *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature*, pp. 155–159.

[102] See *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*, pp. 20–24.

[103] This treatise should be added to the traditions concerning the division of the various blessings, especially those of the eighteen benedictions, which the early kabbalists in Provence divided between the various divine powers, mostly in the framework of the kabbalistic ten *sefirot*; see, in detail, in *The Emergence of the Mystical Prayer* (note 9).

ENDNOTE

The three studies that make up chapters 10, 11, and 12, which were written during a period of over twenty years, represent a continued effort to understand the place and meaning of prayer in the history of Jewish mysticism. A more general, comparative study of the subject, "The Language of the Mystical Prayer," is included in this series (vol. 4). Prayer had a central place in Jewish mysticism throughout its history, from *Hechalot* texts—some of which were included in the standard Jewish prayerbook (see Meir Bar Ilan, *Sitrey Tefilah ve-Hekhalot*, Bar Ilan University Press 1988)—up to modern Hasidism. The one authentic letter that we have describing the ascension of the soul of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of modern Hasidism in the eighteenth century, is dedicated partly to instructions concerning prayer. Yet the most intense period of speculation concerning the mystical nature and meaning of the Jewish prayers was in the High Middle Ages, mainly between 1185 and 1230. Most of the texts discussed in these three studies belong to this brief period. A parallel phenomenon can be found in the histories of Christian and Moslem mystical schools, which often united the practice of immersion in prayer with the spiritual experience of mystical union with God. A recent publication on this subject is M. Idel, "Prayer in the Kabbalah of Provence" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 62 (1993), pp. 265–286. The treatment of the texts in this article is unacceptable; it often relies on scribal errors to develop far-fetched theories.

The two fundamental phenomena expressed by these texts is the inclusion of the language of the prayers within the framework of the metalinguistic mystical experience, and the close connection between the development of this attitude toward prayers and the division of the divine world into separate, personal images. A detailed study of this process, in a comparative manner, is included in my book *Al ha-Kedushah* (On Sanctity), Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1997; further elaboration is in preparation in the monograph "The Language of the Mystics."

THIRTEEN

Ashkenazi Hasidim, 1941–1991: Was There Really a Hasidic Movement in Medieval Germany?

I

Gershom Scholem's chapter on Ashkenazi Hasidism in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*[1] should, I believe, be understood on the one hand as the result of the publication of I. F. Baer's paper on *Sefer Hasidim* a short time before that;[2] on the other, as a response by Scholem to the series of articles on Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric literature by Abraham Epstein a generation before.[3] But above all,

[1] New York (actually Tel Aviv): Schocken Books 1941, pp. 88–118. A Hebrew translation is included in א. מרקוס, דת וחברה במשנתם של חסידי אשכנז, לקט מאמרים, מרכז ולמן שזר, ירושלים. חשמ"ז

[2] המגמה הדתית-חברתית של ספר חסידים, *Zion*, 3 (1938), pp. 1–50. Reprinted twice: in I. Marcus's recent collection of studies on *Sefer Hasidim* (see note 1) and in the collected papers of I. Baer, published by the Israeli Historical Society, vol. II, Jerusalem 1985. An English adaptation of this paper appeared in *Binah* vol. I, ed. J. Dan, *Studies in Jewish History*, New York: Praeger 1989.

[3] Abraham Epstein, לקורות הקבלה האשכנזית, first published in החוקר vol. 2 (1892), pp. 1–11, 37–48; reprinted in his collected writings, edited by A. M. Haberman, *Mosad ha-Rav Kook*, vol. II, מקרמוניות היהודים, Jerusalem 1957, pp. 226–248.

it is the very fact of its inclusion in this volume that transformed research in the field of Ashkenazi Hasidism and opened a new era in the attempts to understand their esoteric theology and their original system of ethics.

One can still find today books describing Jewish mysticism that list the three books of Jewish mysticism as *Sefer Yezira*, *Sefer ha-Bahir*, and *Sefer ha-Zohar*; and others that mention the *Zohar* and Luria as the two main phenomena of Jewish mysticism. The enormous impact of *Major Trends* was, and is, first and foremost, its table of contents, which suggested a coherent structure of the history of Jewish mysticism. Before this book, it was not natural to include Sabbatianism or Hasidism as chapters in such a history; the concept represented by the last three chapters—Luria, Shabbatai Zvi, the Besht—was unheard-of and unimagined. From the publication of this book onward, people could accept or oppose Scholem's thesis, but it did give a frame of reference to everybody. In the same way, I believe there was only one scholar before Scholem whose horizons included both Abraham Abulafia and the *Zohar*—Adolf Jellinek. In the same way, there was only one scholar whose horizons included both the *Zohar* and Eleazar of Worms—namely, Abraham Epstein. Nobody before Scholem had this sequence of nine phenomena even remotely in his historical concept of Jewish history of ideas. Only since Scholem has Ashkenazi Hasidism acquired its place in the grand scheme of Jewish history as a whole.

It seems to me that Scholem was more hesitant concerning this chapter than concerning any other in the book. I cannot actually prove that, but from the many discussions we had about Ashkenazi Hasidism I received the clear impression that Scholem doubted the existence of Ashkenazi Hasidic theology. He sometimes described their esoteric writings as a haphazard collection of half-baked ideas assembled from Saadia, Donnolo, and others, without any original contribution, and certainly without any basis of even semisystematic development. I tend to believe that he included the chapter in his book after many hesitations, and then somewhat half-heartedly. The fact that he did it had to do with Baer's essay, and the residue of his work on the studies by Epstein, which he did not want to ignore when presenting a scheme of Jewish mysticism. As a guess I

may add that had Scholem decided to include a chapter on the early kabbalah—as obviously he should have done (the fact that he did not may have been because of his immersion in the subject at the time, in preparation of the publication of *Reshit ha-Kabbalah* in its early version several years later)[4]—he would have included some remarks on Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric writings in that framework, and not given it a chapter of its own. That is what he did later in the four versions of his treatment of the beginnings of the kabbalah.[5] His attitude to the subject in his comprehensive presentations of the kabbalah in, for instance, encyclopedia articles or comprehensive treatments of specific subjects in his Eranos lectures tend to prove that he did not regard Ashkenazi Hasidism as a full-fledged "trend" in Jewish mysticism. Its importance lay in its serving as a link between the early kabbalists and the previous phenomena of *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* mysticism and the early medieval thinkers. His rejection of the Epstein term "Ashkenazi Kabbalah" was not so much a declaration of the deep differences between the two as it was the result of his feeling that there was not that much original thought in Ashkenazi Hasidism to warrant such a comparison.

In its structure, the chapter is actually divided into three parts: One is a critical review of Baer's article, though Scholem tended to accept most of Baer's theses; another was a restatement, with many additions and changes, of the material assembled by Epstein; the third was the result of his collection of material concerning

[4] See his התחלות הקבלה in: כנסת לזכר ביאליק. vol. 10, Tel Aviv 1947, pp. 79–228. This was followed by the republication of this paper in book form, with several appendices, as ראשית הקבלה by Schocken, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv 1948.

[5] In the early works mentioned in note 4, very little attention is given to Ashkenazi Hasidism, though it is constantly in the background of his discussion of the *Sefer ha-Bahir* and the kabbalah in Provence. In the later versions—the full-scale treatment in his *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1962, and the Hebrew lectures collected in ראשית הקבלה וספר הבהיר (ed. R. Schatz, published by Academon 1961)—much more space and attention is given to the Hasidim. (Compare also the corrected version in the English translation of the work, *The Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R. J. Zvi Werblowsky, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press and The Jewish Publication Society 1987.) Still, they always are presented in an auxiliary role, illustrating and serving as suppliers of sources, rather than as a full-fledged spiritual phenomenon of independent value.

Ashkenazi mystical phenomena from various manuscripts and books—like the section on "questions from heaven," the messianic elements in Ashkenazi thought, the works of Elhanan ben Yakar,[6] the *Sefer ha-Hayyim*,[7] etc. He obviously had a file in which he assembled such material, but none of these subjects received at that time any analysis in depth; the material was, to a large extent, raw material waiting for analysis. He obviously intended to work on some of these subjects, though not on others, in the future. He encouraged Georges Vajda to investigate Elhanan ben Yakar (mainly because of the Paris mss. of his works),[8] and later did the same with me; in fact, the first time we had a scholarly discussion on that subject, in the autumn of 1958, his first question to me was whether I was familiar with the writings of that scholar of French and English background; happily, I had read the Fulda[9] manuscript by then and could answer in the affirmative. A few weeks later I received from him a copy of the *JTS* mss. of *Sod ha-Sodot* and the Commentaries on the *Sefer Yeẓira*.[10] The situation was manifestly different concerning the *Sefer ha-Hayyim*: In this case, Scholem was rather emphatic in telling me to leave this text alone as far as publication was concerned, because he intended to publish it himself. Because of this when I decided to use the text in a seminar, I prepared a provisiona

[6]*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. p. 85 and note 114 on p. 376. Scholem was the first to draw attention to this scholar, one of the earliest mystics to live in England, who derived his traditions from French and Ashkenazi sources. I have studied some aspects of his thought in *Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidim* and in *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature*, pp. 101–103.

[7]Scholem mentioned this book, which was hardly ever mentioned before him in scholarly literature, in the first place among works he intended to publish in scholarly editions in his letter to H. N. Bialik, in 1926, when he presented his plans for the study of Jewish mysticism. See *Devarim be-Go, Am Oved*, Tel Aviv 1976, p. 65.

[8]See G. Vajda, פירוש ספר יצירה לר' אלחנן בן יקר in קבץ על יד, vol. 16 part I, Jerusalem 1966, pp. 145–198; and his previous study of the sources of this scholar: "De quelques infiltrations chrétiennes dans l'œuvre d'un anglo-juif du XIIIe siècle," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* (1961), pp. 15–34.

[9]Ms. Fulda, no. 4, פירוש ספר יצירה לרי אלחנן בן יקר.

[10]Part of this material was published by me in the booklet כתבי רי אלחנן בן יקר published by Academon (Jerusalem 1974), sometimes bound together with *Sefer ha-Hayyim* in טקסטים בתורת הסוד של חסידי אשכנז, Jerusalem: Academon 1977.

copy of the book to serve only that purpose. We know the background for that: In his 1926 letter to Bialik, Scholem put the *Sefer ha-Hayyim* at the top of the list of books that should be published among the "classics" of Jewish mysticism, part of the great enterprise that Bialik was planning at that time.[11] Many years later, however, Scholem would ask me from time to time: "Why don't you publish the *Sefer ha-Hayyim*? It is important, you know." By that time I was mature and careful enough to be looking for a Ph.D. candidate to do the work.

The fact is that this chapter remains as the only comprehensive study that Scholem dedicated to the whole phenomenon of Ashkenazi Hasidism, to be followed only by sections of papers here and footnotes there, and a few pages in his discussions of the beginnings of the kabbalah. One may even be harsh enough to conclude that until the end of his life Scholem was not absolutely certain that Ashkenazi Hasidism was indeed a real chapter in the history of Jewish mysticism. This should not diminish his contribution to making it so by the inclusion of the chapter in the 1941 volume.

It is obvious, both from the study of this chapter and from his treatment of the subject in his works on the early kabbalah, that "history began with *Sefer ha-Bahir*." The careful historical sequence, the detailed investigation of what was first and what came next in the chronological and conceptual sequence, acquired real importance for Scholem in the period after the *Sefer ha-Bahir*. When studying Ashkenazi Hasidism (as when studying *Hachalot* and *Merkavah* mysticism), he saw only one body of ideas, actually shared by all the people who participated in the movement. He did not differentiate between schools and periods (though he did seek the bibliographical sequence of the authorship of specific treatises). Thus, he presented all the groups and works of the writers he dealt with—Rabbi Judah the Pious, Rabbi Samuel ben Kalonymus,[12] Rabbi Elhanan ben

[11]See note 6.

[12]It is my duty to note here an important correction that Scholem himself made to the text published in *Major Trends*. There he attributed a small treatise, *Sefer Shekod*, by Rabbi Samuel ben Kalonymus, to Rabbi Samuel the Pious, Rabbi Judah's father. Early in our discussions he told me that this was a mistake, and that this

Yakar, *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, and others—as presenting one direction, one body of ideas, without pointing out the possibility of differences, controversies, or stages in the development of these ideas and trends. Ashkenazi Hasidism was one whole (if that); in this he followed Baer and Epstein, who equally viewed all these writers as saying one and the same thing.

Therefore, I believe that one of the most meaningful developments in the study of this field in the last half-century has been the breaking up of the monolithic view of Ashkenazi Hasidism and the emergence of images of particular circles and schools, individual writers and unique treatises, each contributing to the general religious and ideological vibrancy in the Rhineland in the "Ashkenazi Hasidic century," between the middle of the twelfth century and the middle of the thirteenth century. The publication of E. E. Urbach's edition of *Arugat ha-Bosem*[13] is one of the most meaningful scholarly achievements of this period, giving a vast textual and personal panorama for the study of the subject. Urbach's studies of the halachic teachings of the Ashkenazi Hasidim (in the last decade followed by studies by Israel Ta-Shema[14]) have also added an important dimension to any work in this field. Many scholars did some work also on the esoteric theology, or mysticism, of the Ashkenazi Hasidim—G. Vajda,[15] H. Soloveichik,[16] I. Weinstock,[17] and others, and I

Samuel was another person, a contemporary of Rabbi Eleazar, whose question Rabbi Eleazar answers in a section of *Chochmat ha-Nafesh*. See *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 376, note 122.

[13]The first volume of this edition was published before Scholem's chapter, in 1939, but the work was not completed until 1963, when the third and fourth volumes were published (by מקיצי נרדמים) in Jerusalem, the last one being the detailed introduction to the whole project. See my review in *Tarbiz* 34 (1965), pp. 291–301; (reprinted in my עיונים בספרות חסידי אשכנז, מסדה, רמת גן השלה pp. 58–71).

[14]See especially I. Ta-Shema, בארה של מרים-גלגלי מנהג צרפת בסעודה שלישית של שבת *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, IV (1985), pp. 151–270; שאלות והשובות מן השמים הקובץ - *Tarbiz*, 57 (1988), pp. 51–66. ותוספותיו

[15]Concerning Vajda's studies, see note 8.

[16]Especially his study of Rabbi Eleazar's *Chochmat ha-Nefesh*, *Journal of Jewish Studies*, XVIII (1967), pp. 65–78. Concerning his work on the *Sefer Hasidim*, see note 23.

[17]Dr. Israel Weinstock began his work in an attempt to identify the traditions of Rabbi Aharon ben Shemuel of Baghdad, known as Abu-Aharon, who is mentioned in Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's genealogy of the Ashkenazi Hasidic traditions, especially concerning the Secrets of the Prayers, and is figured as a magician in the *Chronicle of Ahimaaz*. Using mainly *gematrias*, he believed he had identified a group of traditions by this figure in British Museum ms. 752. He presented his findings to Scholem, who told him (as he later told me) that he could not at that time study that, but a World Congress of Jewish Studies was approaching (1961), and he encouraged him to present it in this forum. Scholem was absent at the time of that Congress, and I was the only one who argued against Weinstock when he gave that lecture, which was published later in *Tarbiz*, 32 (1963), pp. 153–159; Scholem published his answer to Weinstock in the same *Tarbiz* (pp. 252–265), proving how arbitrary and meaningless Weinstock's methodology was. Weinstock answered in a long article in *Sinai*, 54 (1964), pp. 226–259, and went on to construct a whole theory attributing the *Bahir* to Abu-Aharon, uniting the kabbalah completely with Ashkenazi Hasidism, and finally proving that the Jewish philosophers, from Saadia to Maimonides, were actually kabbalist-pietists, in the most traditional, orthodox harmonistic fashion, which had at that time strong political support from the ha-Poel ha-Mizrahi party, the Mosad ha-Rav Kook, and personally from Yitzhak Raphael (details of the political context of Weinstock's work I heard from Ephrayim Gottlieb, who once was close to this party's circles, but was horrified by certain attitudes that developed there and left in disgust). Weinstock's book and articles did not make much impression at that time or later, despite the fact that Israel Weinstock was personally a very nice man, a good friend, with whom I and others had good relations despite the controversy. He never uttered or wrote a harsh word against anyone. The absurdity of his scholarly claims, joined with the obviousness of the Orthodox political context, made his positions completely marginal. The restating in the last few years of the same positions will not fare any better; the contemporary imitators of Weinstock will go the way of Weinstock's original publications. The only thing that surprises me is the ability of Weinstock's followers to present their traditional views as if they were a new, unprecedented discovery, when actually they follow the long traditions of the kabbalists themselves, in the footsteps of Dr. Weinstock. See, concerning this, my foreword to G. Scholem's *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, New York: Schocken Books 1991, pp. 10–11 and note 17 on p. 276. Weinstock's papers were the first reaction to Scholem's chapter on Ashkenazi Hasidism; the first two editions of *Major Trends* were almost unknown in Jerusalem (very few people in the 1940s read anything concerning Jewish studies in English), and only the 1954 edition began to make an impression in the late 1950s. It seems to me that the important legacy of the Weinstock episode is the demonstration of the intrinsic dynamism that does not allow one to stop at the identification of the kabbalah with Ashkenazi Hasidism; one immediately proceeds to present a unity with *Hechalot* literature, with the talmudic sayings in esoteric matters, and, eventually, with the works of the Jewish medieval rationalistic philosophers. The central figure in the context is, of course, Maimonides. Like the medieval kabbalists themselves, modern followers of this attitude cannot accept the separation between Maimonides and the kabbalah, and unbelievable intellectual calisthenics are being performed to bring a unity between them.

contributed three books and about fifty papers.[18]

On the whole, I believe Ashkenazi Hasidim today is neither neglected nor overindulged in our scholarly work. Relatively speaking, it was an episode in Jewish history as far as mysticism is concerned, only a handful of their ideas finding a place within the kabbalah after undergoing far-reaching changes. The number of scholars involved in these creative circles was rather small—I do not believe that there were more than a score of them at any time, and even in

[18]The three books are תורת הסוד של חסידות אשכנז. Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 1968; מהשבה היהודית בספרות חסידי אשכנז (above, note 13); and the three-volume עיונים בחסידות אשכנז בהולדות חסידות אשכנז, Tel Aviv: The Open University 1989–1990. Among the studies one may mention: "Rabbi Judah the Pious and Caesarius of Heisterbach," *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, XXII, ed. J. Heinemann, Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1971, pp. 18–27; לתורת החלום של חסידי אשכנז; סיני כרך סח. חשלא, עמי רפח-רצג: שאלות ותשובות מן השמים מיוחסות לר אלעזר מוורמס. סיני כרך מט. חשלא, עמי קצה; ספר שערי הסוד היחוד והאמונה לר אלעזר מוורמס. טמירין כרך א: בעריכת י. ויינשטוק, ירושלים חשלב. עמ קמא-קנו; קטונוריזציה של סיפורי חסידי אשכנז. דברי הקונגרס העולמי החמישי למדעי היהדות, כרך ג. ירושלים תשלב. עמ 111–119; קטע מספר הכבוד לר יהודה החסיד, סיני כרך עא. תשלב. עמ קיח-נכ: לחקר האגדות על ר אלעזר מוורמס. סיני כרך עד. תשלה. עמ קער-קעז: ומעשה דוד והצרור בספרות חסידי אשכנז. סיני כרך עה. חשלה, עמ רלט-רמא; חיבור יחוד אשכנזי מהמאה הי"ד, חרביץ כרך מד, תשלה. עמ 204–206; להולדות הטקסט של חכמת האזון, עלי ספר לחקר הספר העברי, חוב ה, תשלח. עמ 49–53; ספר מלאכים לר יהודה החסיד. דעת חוב 3, 2–3, תשלח-תשלט. עמ 99–120 "The Ashkenazi Hasidic Gates of Wisdom," *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G Nahon and C. Touati, Louvain 1980, pp. 183–189;
פירוש האדרת והאמונה של חסידי אשכנז, ספר היובל של תרביץ (כרך חמישים). בעריכת א אורבך, חשמא, עמ 396–404; תפילה לר אלעזר מוורמס, טמיריו ב, ירושלים תשמב. עמי עז-צא; כבוד נסתר, קובץ רח ושפה-מאמרים בפילוסופיה בעריכת מ. חלמיש וא. כשר, אוניברסיטת בר-אילן, רמת גן תשמב. עמ 71–79; חורתם המוסרית והחברתית של חסידי אשכנז (בקורת על ספרו של א. מרקוס). חרביץ כרך נא. תשמב. עמ 319–325; כוונת התפילה מקבלת הריח, דעת חובי 10, תשמג. עמי 47–56: פירוש התורה לרי אלעזר מגרמייזא, קרית ספר כרך נט. תשמד עמי 644: בעיית קידוש השם במשנתה העיונית של חסידות אשכנז, כתוך: רח וחברה במשנתם של חסידי אשכנז. לקט מאמרים בעריכת א. מרקוס. מרכז שזר. ירושלים תשמז. עמי 207–216: לתולדות תורת התשובה של חסידי אשכנז, יובל אורות. הגותו של הרב אברהם יצחק הכהן קוק, בעריכת ב. איש-שלום. רוזנברג, ירושלים תשמז. עמי 221–228; הקבלה האכזנזית—עיון נוסף, דברי הכנס הבינלאומי השני לתולדות המיסטיקה היהודית—ראשית המיסטוקה היהודית באירופה, בעריכת י. דן, מחקרי ירושלים במחשבת ישראל כרך ו (ג–ד). תשמז. עמי 125–139 "Pseudepigraphy in Medieval Jewish Mysticism in Germany," in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter, V. Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Hannover 1988, pp. 519–531; לדמותו ההיסטורית של ר יהודה החסיד, בתוך: תרבות וחברה בהולדות ישראל בימי הביניים. קובץ מאמרים לזכרו של חיים הלל בן ששון, בעריכת ר. בונפיל, מ. בן ששון, י. הקר. מרכז שזר לתולות ישראל. ירושלים תשמט. עמי 389–398; "Das Entstehen der Jüdischen Mystik im mittelalterlicher Deutschland," in *Judentum in deutschen Sprachraum*, ed. K. E. Grözinger, Frank furt am main: Suhrkamp 1991, pp. 127–172.

that century, during most decades their number was even smaller. I do not believe that it had any meaningful impact on modern Hasidism (unlike their ethics), even though one can easily point out at least eighty manuscripts of Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric writings being found in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century. The reverence for their names was greater than the attention to their specific ideas. The hagiographic material concerning them, which began to spread in the fifteenth century first in Hebrew and then in Yiddish, assisted in keeping their memory alive,[19] but their system was completely overshadowed by the kabbalah.

Therefore, when reviewing Scholem's chapter at a fifty-year distance, it seems to me that the portion dedicated to Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric theology should be remembered for three main reasons, which are as important today as they were in 1941:

1. The inclusion of the esoteric works of the Ashkenazi Hasidim in the history of the appearance of Jewish mysticism in Eu-

[19]Concerning Ashkenazi-Hasidic hagiography, see י. מייטלים, דער שבחים ציקל פון ר יודא חסיד, די נאלדענע גייט, 23 (1955), pp. 218–234; S. Zefatman, in *Hasifrut*, 28 (1979), pp. 126–152. See especially T. Alexander, "Narrative and Thought in Sepher Hassidim," Ph. D. thesis, The University of California, Los Angeles 1977; now published in an updated edition by J. C. B. Mohr (Tübingen 1991), including a detailed bibliography. The important aspect of this subject is that as far as we know today the hagiography concerning the Ashkenazi Hasidic leaders was the only one to develop between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries; all other hagiographic cycles in Hebrew literature relating to medieval figures are of the sixteenth century or later. In many cases—too many to be an accident—it can be clearly proved that the developed hagiographic stories originated in stories told by the Ashkenazi Hasidim themselves, as anecdotes that do not refer to themselves and that were turned, in a long literary process, into narratives of which the Ashkenazi Hasidim became the miraculous heroes. See also the discussion in my *Ashkenazi Hasidism in the History of Jewish Thought*, vol. II, Tel Aviv: The Open University, 1989–1990, pp. 193–209; "A Note on the History of Teshuvah in the Teachings of the Ashkenazi Hasidim," in *The World of Rav Kook's Thought*, ed. B. Ish-Shalom and S. Rosenberg, New York: Avi Hai 1991, pp. 271–282; "Prayer as Text and Prayer as Mystical Experience," in *Torah and Wisdom, Studies in Jewish Philosophy, Kabbalah and Halacha in Honor of A. Hyman*, ed. Ruth Link-Salinger, New York: Shengold 1992, pp. 33–47; "Pesaq ha-Yirah veha-Emunah and the Problem of Prayer in Ashkenazi Esotericism," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge*, 19 (1991–1992), pp. 185–215.

rope in the High Middle Ages as a separate, distinct spiritual phenomenon that, even though it contains meaningful similarities and parallels to the early kabbalah, is still an independent phenomenon, to be analyzed as a specific Ashkenazi spurt of creativity.

2. The emphasis on the medieval character of this phenomenon, even though it relied so heavily on *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* texts and other known and unknown sources and claimed to be the result of ancient, eternal tradition. In later works, especially in his studies of the early kabbalah, Scholem repeated and emphasized this point in his discovery and analysis of Ashkenazi Hasidic texts in this context.
3. The description of these Ashkenazi esoteric writers as one secondary source of influence on the medieval kabbalah, one whose impact should not be neglected but also should not be overestimated.

On the negative side, the most important weakness of Scholem's presentation was the neglect of historical analysis of the development of Ashkenazi Hasidism—its divisions into various sects, groups, and individual writers and the major differences in their teachings and views of the most central theological subjects they discussed. Scholem failed to see in this phenomenon (as he did concerning *Hechalot* mysticism), a dynamic, vibrant, and variegated spiritual trend, something he succeeded in doing so magnificently concerning the kabbalah itself. Still, he opened the door for continuing research in the field, and thus the correction of this shortcoming should still be regarded as an achievement dependent on his research.

II

It seems to me proper to dedicate most of our discussion concerning Scholem's third chapter to the portion in it describing Ashkenazi Hasidic ethics, especially the *Sefer Hasidim* itself. In this field, I believe, we are approaching a more important crossroads in our understanding of one of the major spiritual phenomena of the Jewish Middle Ages, one that had great impact on subsequent de-

velopments in Judaism and, to some extent, is even relevant to contemporary developments in Jewish life and culture.

Again, I would like to adopt a personal tone, and relate some of my experiences concerning this subject. My first encounter with *Sefer Hasidim* was in 1956-1957, when I attended Isaiah Tishby's lecture-course on Ashkenazi Hasidism that was centered around an analysis, subject by subject, of *Sefer Hasidim*. That year was the first after my graduation and was the beginning of my preparation for the writing of an M.A. thesis; by the end of that year I decided to dedicate the thesis to Ashkenazi Hasidism, and, in fact, the basis of my Ph.D. thesis on the subject had been laid that year. As a diligent student I wrote down Tishby's lectures in detail, and typed them when I got home after class, thus having a typed volume. Many years later I tried to convince Tishby to edit and publish these lectures as a book, which he considered but ultimately refused to do. Despite his great interest in this subject, Tishby never published even a brief article on the *Sefer Hasidim*, and only short references to the subject are found in the various chapters of his *Mishnat ha-Zohar*.

This fact had great influence on the nature of my work on the *Sefer Hasidim* over the years. Almost everything I had to say about that book was in contradiction to Tishby's lectures. My concept of the book emerged as a disagreement with his descriptions, about which we had frequent discussions. The main point was Tishby's insistence, following M. Güdemann[20] (and supported, to some extent, by I. Baer and Scholem), that the *Sefer Hasidim* was an enormous anthology, reflecting the work of generations of Ashkenazi Hasidic leaders; he described the book as a collective effort of dozens of anonymous Ashkenazi Hasidim, thus using this concept to formulate the phenomenon as a movement, which existed for several generations and had a distinct group of leaders, the חכמים. Tishby tended to believe most of the stories, fables, and exempla in the book as factual and historical. Even from the beginning I could not agree to that. I maintained even then that the book was essentially a work

[20]M. Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der abendländischen Juden*, vol. I, Wien 1880.

written by Rabbi Judah the Pious alone, to which some sections were added from the works of Rabbi Samuel the Pious, Judah's father (especially in the beginning of the Parma ms., but also in other places),[21] and by Rabbi Judah's disciple, Rabbi Eleazar of Worms (in the end of the Bologna edition, together with some sections from Maimonides). The *Sefer Hasidim*, I believed (and still do), is an original, individual work of Rabbi Judah the Pious.

Tishby was generous in not discouraging my dissent. Even during the formal M.A. examination in July 1958, after I completed my M.A. thesis, when many other scholars were present (Simon Halkin, J. Schirman, among others), he asked me to repeat my thesis after answering several detailed questions, and my contradicting his views did not prevent their giving me the first *summa cum laude* degree in the history of that department. I could not, however, publish my conclusions, because they were so closely based on Tishby's lectures. I directed all my efforts to the study of Ashkenazi Hasidic esotericism, waiting for Tishby to publish his book. He never did, and so I never did, to this very day. I published brief descriptions of Ashkenazi Hasidic ethics and narratives,[22] but never confronted directly the problem of the authorship and nature of the *Sefer Hasidim*.

Meanwhile, other scholars joined this field and concentrated their efforts on Ashkenazi Hasidic ethics, most notably Ivan Marcus[23], Haim Soloveitchik,[24] and Israel Ta-Shema.[25] I hope I am

[21]See, concerning that, Freimann's Introduction to the Frankfurt am main edition of the Parma ms. published by Wistinetzki (1924), pp. 10–14.

[22]See ספרות המוסר והדרוש, Jerusalem: Keter 1975, pp. 121–145; הסיפור העברי בימי הביניים, Jerusalem: Keter 1974, pp. 162–187.

[23]Of Marcus's numerous studies of the subject, I believe the most important one to the understanding of the *Sefer Hasidim* as a literary work is his analysis of the structure of the various versions of the book; see his article "The Recensions and Structure of Sefer Hasidim," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*, XLV (1978), pp. 131–153. His studies of the social significance of the phenomenon have been presented, first and foremost, in his book *Piety and Society*, Leiden: Brill 1980, and in subsequent studies: *Jewish Spirituality* (ed. A. Green), vol. I, pp. 356–366, and his contribution to this volume.

[24]"Three Themes in Sefer Hasidim," *AJS Review*, I (1976), pp. 311–357.

[25]See note 14.

not doing them any injustice if I describe their attitude toward the problem of the authorship of the *Sefer Hasidim* as intuitively similar to mine. I believe that in the papers and books they published, the statements "Rabbi Judah the Pious maintained" and "*Sefer Hasidim* states" are almost interchangeable. As far as I know, no serious effort has been made to discover other authors and different elements in the *Sefer Hasidim*, in the Güdemann-Tishby manner. The notion of the *Sefer Hasidim* as a "national work" of Ashkenazi Jewry, reflecting a collective effort, seems to be absent from recent scholarship.

Yet, my basic approach, the strong belief in the individuality of the creative spirit, led me to further ideas that necessarily should be regarded as more controversial. My approach, though founded very early, was finally triggered by a sentence in Haim Soloveitchik's important essay on "Three Themes in the Sefer Hasidim."[26] There, in one note, the author points out that there is no reference in Ashkenazi literature to any of *Sefer Hasidim*'s particular ideas (with one minor exception), and that there is no external proof to the existence of the pietistic communities described in the *Sefer Hasidim*. The words of Rabbi Judah were the only source for any description of the pietistic sect as a historical reality. This was strengthened by the detailed analysis of this subject in the book and papers of Ivan Marcus, who diligently presented them and analyzed profoundly their social significance. He did not find even one supporting source outside of the *Sefer Hasidim*.[27]

This absence became more and more clear when I studied further the esoteric works of the Ashkenazi Hasidim. The vast material presented in Rabbi Eleazar's many volumes contains not even a single reference to an Ashkenazi Hasidic sect; neither does the encyclopedic work of his disciple Rabbi Abraham ben Azriel, *Arugat ha-Bosem*. A possible, doubtful exception is a paragraph in Rabbi

[26]Ibid., note 24.

[27]To this should be added the detailed work by A. Grossman concerning the development of Jewish scholarship in Ashkenaz. See his חכמי אשכנז הראשונים, 2nd rev. ed., Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1989; it seems that the absence of any such proof is obvious to the reader of Grossman's numerous studies.

Moses Taku's *Ketav Tamim*, describing enthusiastic behavior of some groups of people; the relationship of that passage to Ashkenazi Hasidism is unknown, and certainly it does not contain any element of Rabbi Judah the Pious's instructions concerning the structure of Ashkenazi Hasidic communities.[28]

We are faced, therefore, with a serious methodological problem. On the one hand there are several dozen passages in the *Sefer Hasidim* (only in the sections free of any influence of Rabbi Eleazar or Rabbi Samuel) in which there is found a vivid, factual description of vibrant Hasidic communities. Rabbi Judah instructs these groups, as individuals or as communities, in the proper way of behavior, either directly or by the means of the decisions of a *Hacham*. Analyzing these descriptions, all scholars N. Simhony, Baer, Scholem, Jacob Katz, and, in the most detailed manner, Ivan Marcus—agree that they reflect a historical phenomenon, a movement, or a sect—or group of sects—dedicated to the ideal of pietistic perfection portrayed in the writings of Rabbi Judah. They established some kind of Hasidic leadership, and probably their ultimate leader was Rabbi Judah himself. According to this picture, the *Sefer Hasidim*, at least in part, is a record of the deliberations and decisions of these pietists, answering their ethical questions and directing them in the conduct of the affairs of their communal groups. I should clearly state that I find these analyses accurate and reflective of the *Sefer Hasidim* descriptions. I have no argument to present against the conclusions drawn from these texts; it is, indeed, the picture emerging from the relevant passages of the book. Nor have I any basis to suspect that the texts were tampered with, that they are unreliable from any possible point of view. These passages undoubtedly originate from the last years of the twelfth century and the early ones of the thirteenth; they have all the characteristics of the personal style of Rabbi Judah, and they are, therefore, an authentic, original historical document.

My doubts are based on the methodological assumption that the existence of such a meaningful social phenomenon in medieval

[28]The context of this passage indicates that it refers to the *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, and the question of the sources of this esoteric work has not yet been clarified.

Jewish communities in central Europe should be supported by external, independent sources as well. The period we are discussing is one that is not poor in Hebrew sources. The large body of halachic works originating from this period, in responsa, biblical commentaries, exegetical works, and even historical documents, makes one expect that any major social phenomenon will be mentioned in a parallel manner in several sources. This is especially so, as some of the characteristics of the pietistic communities were bound to create controversies or even upheavals. Rabbi Judah insisted that the Hasidic groups conduct their affairs independently of the surrounding communities. If they can "take over" a town or a neighborhood they should do so, and if they cannot they should move to another place, establish a new pietistic center, or join an existing one. This was bound to create tensions and frictions—if not worse—between the pietists and the rest of the Jews, and undoubtedly would have posed a problem for the established leadership structure throughout Ashkenazi Jewry. It is unimaginable that such events could proceed unmentioned in any other source, without any opposition emerging and confronting the demands of the extreme pietists. Yet, our sources do not contain any mention of such tension, friction, controversy, schism, or any other aspect of such unusual developments in the dozens of Jewish communities in the Rhineland and elsewhere, from which we have rather extensive historical sources from this period.

The problem becomes more serious when we take into account the harsh tone taken by the *Sefer Hasidim* toward the non-Hasidim. While there may be differences concerning the exact meaning of רשעים and other derogatory terms used by the book for Jews who do not comply with Rabbi Judah's demands, the schismatic character of *Sefer Hasidim*'s social aims is manifest. Rabbi Judah insisted, first and foremost, on the separation of the Hasidim from the evil doers among whom they were residing. There is no parallel in Jewish medieval history to such a clear call for the denial of religious legitimacy from the majority of the Jewish social structure (with all the relevant implications concerning the leadership), and the establishment of an alternative social and religious framework. How could such a ma-

jor, far-reaching development escape all mention in our sources?

The enigma is increased when we examine the works of other Ashkenazi Hasidic writers. If such a far-reaching social phenomenon was occurring, how could Rabbi Judah's disciples ignore it completely in their voluminous works? Rabbi Eleazar summarized twice his ethical views (once in the introductory chapters to the *Rokeach*, his halachic work, and again in the introduction to his *Sodey Razaya*, the collection of his major works in esoteric theology). These statements are closely related—though not identical—to the ethical norms presented in the *Sefer Hasidim*. If, when writing these treatises, there was an ongoing movement of implementation of these ideas, how could he avoid mentioning it? Even if it had occurred in the past, could he refrain from mentioning such a meaningful experiment? In his commentary on the prayers, Rabbi Eleazar several times dedicated some paragraphs to descriptions of events occurring when he was writing, both historical events and personal ones. There is no mention of any social occurrence, any reference to the movement organized by his teacher. The same silence is found in the works of other disciples and followers of Ashkenazi Hasidic theology and ethics in the first and second halves of the thirteenth century.[29]

It seems to me that we must conclude that Rabbi Judah's plans were never carried out. *Sefer Hasidim* is a blueprint for a structure that was never built. These sections of *Sefer Hasidim* should be regarded as imaginary; they reflect Rabbi Judah's social dream, which is preached using the literary device of answers to questions that were never asked, referring to situations that were never actual.

Ivan Marcus has demonstrated the significant differences between the ethical concepts of Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Eleazar. Ac-

[29]A prominent example is the *Or Zarua*, the comprehensive halachic work of Rabbi Isaak of Vienna, a disciple of Rabbi Eleazar. This work refers constantly and systematically to current examples, mentioning various customs (*minhagim*), naming many past and present authorities and their religious practices, and reflecting in the most minute manner the actual religious life surrounding the author in the first half of the thirteenth century. If such a pietistic movement were active in that time, it is completely untenable that it would be so conspicuously absent from any reference in this large work.

cording to his analysis, which I wholeheartedly accept, Rabbi Judah emphasized the social and communal aspect of Hasidism, whereas Rabbi Eleazar's approach was intensely individual.[30] For Rabbi Eleazar, the basic concepts of Hasidic ethics were to be followed by every Hasid in his heart, in his intimate relationship with God, and his personal social conduct. There is no hint in Rabbi Eleazar's works of a social organization or a leadership structure of Hasidism. A person, according to him, became a Hasid when he privately followed the strict ethical demands of Hasidism in his individual behavior and way of life. Rabbi Judah, on the other hand, dedicated much of his ethical teachings to the social structure of the Hasidic community.

Following this analysis, we may conclude that Rabbi Judah's closest disciple never accepted Rabbi Judah's dream of separate, independent pietistic communities that regard all other Jews as evildoers and transgressors. He could assume this position as long as Rabbi Judah's concepts remained a program and a dream; all he had to do was what he actually did—ignore the subject completely. The situation would have been completely different had Rabbi Judah actually established such communities. In such a case, Rabbi Eleazar would have had to face the choice between joining them and contradicting his own convictions, or opposing them and becoming the opponent of his great teacher. Knowing Rabbi Judah's fierce polemical attitude toward deviations from the truth as he saw it, the result would undoubtedly have been a public, high-profile controversy. As nothing actually happened, Rabbi Eleazar could emphasize and develop those parts of Rabbi Judah's program that he accepted, and quietly ignore the rest. He did ignore other parts of Rabbi Judah's convictions, like the opposition to the writing of the author's name in books and liturgical poems; this is why Rabbi Judah's works are all anonymous, while Rabbi Eleazar's include acronyms and *gematria* references to his own name (to which he took care to add the title הקטן, "the small" or "the insignificant," in order to express humility).[31] This could be done as long as Rabbi Judah did not lead a major

[30]*Piety and Society*, pp. 109–120.

[31]See, concerning this, my remarks in *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature*, p. 143.

social movement. Had he achieved it, the controversy would have come into the open.

We have evidence of another case in which Rabbi Judah the Pious was completely isolated from all his colleagues and disciples: His fierce criticism of the changes in the text of the prayers practiced by the French and the English communities, the main theme of his Commentary on the Prayers, preserved in the pamphlet prepared by one of his disciples.[32] Rabbi Judah accused these communities of falsifying the text, of heresy, and of causing the extension of the exile because of several minor, meaningless changes in the prayers. None of his other disciples repeated these accusations, and no controversy was caused by it. Rabbi Eleazar, who used portions of Rabbi Judah's Commentary in his own Commentary on the Prayers, omitted all references to his teacher's harsh criticism. It is as if everybody decided to ignore the extravagance and extremism of the great teacher, and to concentrate on the areas of agreement between them. I believe that the social program of *Sefer Hasidim* falls into the same category. Rabbi Judah went too far, in the eyes of his school, and while no one contradicted him directly, there was a tacit agreement in the Kalonymus family to ignore the excesses of the great teacher. They wrote their treatises on mysticism and ethics as if the great social schism suggested by Rabbi Judah had never been included in the *Sefer Hasidim*.

In his description of Ashkenazi Hasidic ethics, Scholem followed closely the analysis of I. Baer, which was published a short time before *Mayor Trends*. Both of them treated the *Sefer Hasidim* as a reliable, authentic source, avoiding a critical analysis of the validity of its descriptions. I join them in the belief that *Sefer Hasidim* is probably the most authentic, variegated, and sincere Hebrew document revealing the life of Jews (and non-Jews) in the Rhineland in the High Middle Ages. But even the most authentic text needs corroboration from other sources, especially concerning elements that are directly

[32]This controversy was described in my paper on the historical image of Rabbi Judah the Pious and the *Sodot ha-Tefillah* in the *Ben Sasson Festschrift* (above, note 18, near the end).

related to a political and social program of the author. Anything that the *Sefer Hasidim* mentions in passing, every piece of unintentional information concerning life at that period, can be accepted without hesitation. But the main thrust of the book, the ethical, social, and structural upheaval preached by Rabbi Judah, should be studied in comparison with other sources. In this case, I believe, the orchestrated silence of all Ashkenazi literature, from the works of those closest to Rabbi Judah to the most distant, is a historical fact.[33] In this aspect alone, *Sefer Hasidim* is an expression of a dream, not reality. Dreams, as we know, also contain historical meaning and power, and Rabbi Judah's program, even if never realized, is a major phenomenon in the history of Ashkenazi Jewry that had important consequences not only at that period, but also much later, in Safed, in early-modern Eastern Europe, and even in the present.[34] Yet it should be understood as what it actually was: a radical dream, denied even by the closest disciples of the great leader.

In conclusion, I believe that the last fifty years have seen an increasingly close analysis of the Ashkenazi Hasidic phenomenon, revealing in it much more diversity and complexity than presented by Scholem. In a few cases, Scholem himself realized it and incorporated some such conclusions in his later works. It seems to me that this is the path to be followed in the future as well.

[33]A similar silence concerning an important controversy involving, to a large extent, the same people is found surrounding the harsh and radical criticism of the Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric theology by Rabbi Moses Taku in his *Ketav Tamim*. All Ashkenazi authorities referred to the halachic teachings of Rabbi Moses (e.g., *Arugat ha-Bosem* and *Or zarua*) as if this criticism had never been expressed. See my discussion in the Introduction to the facsimile edition of *Ketav Tamim*, published by the Dinur Center, Jerusalem 1984.

[34]The fact, as I believe, that Rabbi Judah's program was not carried out in the late twelfth century and the thirteenth century does not mean that it did not ever have any effect. It seems to me that the closest Judaism ever came to the adopting of this program in our day and age is with the separate communities of ultra-Orthodox Jews who regard all others as evil doers who have to be avoided. The process began, of course, with the schism between Hasidim and Mitnagdim, but developed into a strict separatism that, besides the teachings of Rabbi Judah the Pious, has no basis in Jewish theory or practice before the nineteenth century.

FOURTEEN

Jewish Culture in Medieval Italy: Philosophy, Ethics, Mysticism

I

The general context in which spiritual creativity in Italian Jewry in the High Middle Ages should be understood is that of the general, comprehensive transformation that Judaism underwent in that period: the process of spiritualization of the Jewish conception of God, of man, and of the nature of religion. These centuries were dedicated to a vast attempt to reinterpret Jewish traditional sources, received from ancient times, in the light of medieval conceptions that integrated Greek philosophy and science (especially as transmitted and interpreted by the Arabic philosophy) with monotheistic tradition. The main ideological trends that dominated Judaism in this period had this paramount agenda: to present Jewish traditions, beliefs, and practices as reflecting, or even as the only true expressions, of the spiritual conceptions of faith and ritual. Jewish rationalistic philosophy of the Middle Ages, as well as the mystical schools of the kabbalah, and the various schools of ethical creativity are to be understood as parts of this comprehensive transition. Every verse

in the Bible, every talmudic statement, and every aspect of rituals, prayers, and practical commandments was interpreted in this light. Jewish culture in medieval Italy was a part of this process, and in several instances was the leader in the introduction of new ideas and concepts that served this ultimate purpose. It is impossible to describe in a brief essay all the many authors and treatises that flourished between the tenth century and the fifteenth in Italian Jewry. The following description is focused, therefore, on a handful of examples that demonstrate some of the most characteristic aspects of this vast cultural panorama.

The place Italy held in the development of Jewish philosophy and mysticism was influenced by its geographical and cultural position. Italy was not the center of any particular trend or school of Jewish thought in this period, but all schools and all trends had some roots in it. The Jewish communities in this country were dynamic and vibrant, with scholars wandering to other countries and communities receiving guests and immigrants from other countries, so that developments in various places had an immediate response in Italy. It was a most important bridge between East and West, between Babylonia and the land of Israel as well as Egypt and the heart of Europe—France and Germany. One of the earliest literary works that document this position of Italian Jewry is the *Chronicle of Ahimaaz*, which, written in rhymed prose, surveys in a legendary manner the achievements of a central family—the Kalonimides—from the eighth century to the eleventh. The description of the leading cultural centers in southern Italy in this period, as found in the Ahimaaz Chronicle, illustrates this unique position.[1] According to the evidence in this literary saga, esoteric lore flourished in southern Italy as early as the eighth century, and the leading writers at that time were versed in the secret traditions of the *Hechalot* and *Merkavah* mystical literature.[2] It seems that the early masters of Jewish culture in Italy received texts and traditions from the East, from Babylonia and *Eretz Yisrael*, that included the works of the mystics of the talmudic period, which they studied and transmitted, and incorporated some of this material in their liturgical poetry. The *Chronicle* proves the interest prevailing at that time in magic and holy and secret names of God. A detailed narrative in it describes the arrival of a wonderful figure from Babylonia, Rabbi Aharon ben Samuel of Baghdad,[3] who performed miracles and taught secret traditions.[4] The leading writer of the circle of mystics and pietists in medieval Germany in the early thirteenth century, Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worms, describes the arrival of Aharon in Italy as the beginning of the European tradition of the esoteric, mystical study of the prayers; Aharon is described as the sage who brought "the secrets of the prayers" from Babylonia to Italy, and these were transmitted to the Rhineland when a part of the Kalonymus family moved from Italy to Mainz in the ninth century. Many parts of these narratives are legendary in nature, but it is a meaningful fact that the leading center of Jewish mysticism, esotericism, and ethics in medieval Germany viewed its source as being the culture of Jewish communities in eighth-century southern Italy.

Another example of the dominant place acquired by the early Jewish communities in Italy in the development of Jewish culture in Europe in the Middle Ages is the innovative work of the physician-philosopher Rabbi Shabbatai Donnolo in the tenth century. Shabbatai Donnolo was the first philosopher-scientist in the history of Jewish culture in medieval Europe who wrote Hebrew treatises dealing with philosophy and science. While his contemporaries in other countries wrote in Arabic, Donnolo wrote in Hebrew, thus emphasizing, from the very beginning, the uniqueness of Jewish spiri-

[1] See B. Klarr's edition, Jerusalem: Tarshish 1954, and see also the facsimile edition of the Toledo manuscript of the work, Jerusalem: The Hebrew University 1964; J. Marcus, "Studies in the Chronicle of Ahimaaz," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* IV–V (1932–1934), pp. 85–93.

[2] The paragraph dedicated to this subject precedes that which describes the arrival of Aharon of Baghdad; see *The Esoteric Theology of the Ashkenazi Hasidism*, and see also E. Yassif.

[3] A great deal has been written on the subject of this miraculous personality. See A. Neubauer, "Abu Ahron," *Revue des études juives*, XVIII (1891), pp. 230–237; G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York: Schocken 1954, pp. 41, 84.

[4] J. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 1968, pp. 16–20.

tual creativity in the Italian peninsula: independent treatment of the sources of influence and impact, the connections with traditional Jewish culture and the adherence to the Hebrew language. Two hundred years would pass before similar treatises were composed in Hebrew elsewhere, in Spain, Provence, and other places.[5] Donnolo's works, therefore, represent an important opening in the history of medieval Jewish culture as a whole.

Donnolo was a physician, and several of his medical treatises have survived and reached us,[6] but he is best known for the book *Hachmoni*, which is a compendium of three treatises: an autobiographical introduction, a commentary on the verse (Genesis 1:28) "Let us make man in our image," and the commentary on the *Sefer Yeẓira*.[7] The last two are dedicated, essentially, to scientific investigation. The first is a treatise on the subject of microcosm and macrocosm that constitutes Donnolo's answer to the question of how man can be regarded as representing the image of God. Adam was created not in the image of God, maintains Donnolo, but in the image of the universe. Donnolo thus expresses the main concern of Jewish philosophy and science in the theological realm in the first centuries of the Middle Ages: the denial of any possibility of anthropomorphic conception of God. All the biblical and talmudic references to a corporeal, physical imaging of God should be interpreted and proved to be metaphorical, or exegeted in any other way, in order that the infinity, perfection, and lack of limitations of God will be demonstrated. The verse in Genesis 1:28 is one of the strongest, most difficult anthropomorphic statements of the Hebrew Bible, and therefore its exegesis is of paramount religious and theological importance. The nature of the solution indicates a basic philosophical attitude: God's revelation is the creation itself. Inasmuch as we can learn anything about God, it is through the study and understanding of natural phenomena. God expressed his characteristics by the laws He imposed on the creation, and therefore the universe is as close a reflection of Him as man can ever grasp. Man, the most elaborate and perfect element of the creation, therefore reflects in his physical essence those perfect laws of the Creator, and this is why the verse can use the *imago dei* metaphor that God created man in His own image—in the image of universal perfection expressed by the laws of nature. Most of the treatise is dedicated to the detailed comparison between the various aspects of the universe and the limbs and processes of the human body, establishing a microcosm-macrocosm relationship (human hair represents the forests and plants in the world; the two eyes represent the sun and the moon; etc.). The basic rationalistic-scientific philosophical approach is established in this treatise in the clearest form: The only way to understand God is to understand nature; theology is the investigation of the scientific laws of the cosmos. These ideas were developed in a similar direction in the works of the Jewish rationalists who wrote in Arabic, from Saadia to Maimonides.[8]

Donnolo's attachment to the *Sefer Yeẓira* is understandable as a further development of this attitude.[9] The ancient work (which was composed by a scientist-linguist probably in *Eretz Yisrael* in the third or fourth century[10]) includes a clear statement concerning an ana-

[5]The first commentary on the *Sefer Yeẓira*, for instance, to be written in Hebrew after Donnolo was that written by Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai of Barcelona in the first half of the twelfth century. See the S. Z. H. Halberstamm ed., Berlin: Mekizey Nirdamim 1885; compare J. Dan, "Rabbi Judah of Barcelona's Commentary on the Sefer Yezira," in *Masuut, Studies in Kabbalah and Jewish Thought in Memory of Ephrayim Gottlieb*, ed. M. Oron and A. Goldreich, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 1994, pp. 99–119.

[6]They were collected by Z. Mountner, who also wrote several studies of the medical science of Donnolo and his sources, Jerusalem 1949.

[7]Concerning the history of the *Sefer Yeẓira* and the medieval commentaries, see J. Dan, "Three Phases of the History of the Sefer Yezira," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge*, 21 (1994), pp. 7–29, and R. Jospe, "Early Philosophical Commentaries on the Sefer Yezira: Some Comments," *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 149 (1990), pp. 369–415.

[8]See especially S. Pines, *Maimonides's Guide to the Perplexed*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1962.

[9]This is unlike the situation concerning Saadia Gaon. The enigma of why Saadia dedicated one of his two philosophical treatises to the unknown, esoteric *Sefer Yeẓira* does not have a satisfactory answer. Concerning Donnolo, however, his scientific interest in the book is quite obvious.

[10]The basic concept of this work is the notion that because the world was created by God's linguistic utterances, the laws of language were imposed on the universe; the grammar of language was transformed during the creation into the physical laws of the universe.

logical structure between man and the universe, and parallels between them are drawn.[11] Donnolo quite naturally perceived the traditional work as reflecting his own scientific-rationalistic concept of the universe. By writing a detailed commentary on this work, Donnolo was establishing the traditional credentials of his own worldview.[12] Donnolo viewed the *Sefer Yezira* as an ancient Hebrew work of science that, when studied and presented in the proper way, can prove that Judaism included in it from ancient times the most important element of contemporary science and philosophy.

Donnolo's contribution also should be recognized concerning the development of the Hebrew language as the means of philosophical and scientific discourse. It should be remembered that Donnolo could not use any precedent when he presented his treatises; no tradition existed in expressing theology, philosophy, or science in Hebrew. Even his great contemporary sage in Babylonia, Rav Saadia Gaon, wrote his treatises (which include a Commentary on the *Sefer Yezira*) in Arabic. Nearly two more centuries would pass before several schools of Jewish thinkers in northern Spain, Provence, and the Rhineland would create a literature expressing these subjects in Hebrew. The fluent style in which Donnolo's works are written should be regarded as one of the most important achievements, contributing meaningfully to the emergent Jewish culture in medieval Europe.

[11]According to the *Sefer Yezira*, everything in the universe is constructed by three parallel phenomena emerging from every letter of the alphabet—one in the cosmos (the planets, the stars, etc.), one in time (the seasons, the months, and the weeks), and one in man (the number of limbs, orifices, etc.).

[12]It is wrong, therefore, to conceive of Donnolo's commentary as if it were a work of mysticism or even an investigation of the intrinsic structure of God. This is in direct opposition to the main scientific agenda of the work. See E. Wolfson, "The Theosophy of Shabbatai Donnolo, with Special Emphasis on the Doctrine of Sefirot in Sefer Hakhmoni," in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume II*, ed. B. Walfish (*Jewish History*, 6), 1992, pp. 281–316. This error is the result of an anachronistic conception of the *Sefer Yezira* itself: As the work has been interpreted as a work of mysticism for the last eight hundred years, it may be mistakenly regarded as essentially mystical. This is not the case if one takes into account the fact that numerous commentaries between the tenth and the twelfth centuries treated it as a scientific, rationalistic work.

Donnolo's works had an effect especially in Christian Europe, where the influence of Arabic language and philosophy was minimal. The Jewish writers in France and, mainly, in Germany found in the Hebrew treatises of the Italian scientist an important source for their speculations, while their contemporaries in Spain and Provence were influenced mainly by Arabic writings. Esoterics like Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar of London[13] and Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worms,[14] and many others, utilized Donnolo's teachings in the construction of their theological systems. His main contribution can be defined as the transformation of the two main creation-narratives of ancient Judaism—one in Genesis and one in the *Sefer Yezira*—into medieval subjects of discourse, and as the making of Jewish traditions of antiquity into the cornerstones of restructuring Jewish spirituality in the new conceptual terms of a civilization based on science and rationalism. He represents in this the beginning of a long involvement of Jewish thinkers in Italy in the dramatic intellectual upheavals of the next centuries, first in the rationalistic movement and later in the medieval kabbalah.

II

During the twelfth century, the connections between the Jewish intellectuals in Italy and those in Spain, Provence, and North Africa (including Egypt) increased gradually, and they were integrated into the vast sphere of influence of Jewish rationalism, which became the dominant Jewish worldview in southern Europe during most of the Middle Ages. The Jewish rationalists found in this system of thought the best vehicle for the spiritualized understanding of the character of Judaism and its ancient sources. A vast process

[13]On Rabbi Elhanan, see G. Vajda, "De quelques infiltrations chrétiennes dans l'oeuvre d'un auteur anglo-juif du XIIIe siecle," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, 28 (1961), pp. 15–34; J. Dan "Remnants of a Polemic Concerning the Unity of God in the Sod ha-Sodot by Elhanan ben Yakar of London," *Tarbiz*, 61 (1992), pp. 249–271.

[14]In Rabbi Eleazar's comprehensive commentary on the prayers, written at the end of the twelfth century, a large section from Donnolo's *Hachmoni* was adopted to explain the prayer Nishmat (ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library 1204).

of reinterpretation of texts and of values was going on, and some of the important chapters were being written in Italy.

One of the most important cultural achievements that mark the first half of the thirteenth century in Italy has been created by an immigrant from Provence, Rabbi Jacob ben Abba Mari Anatoli, who did not even live within a Jewish community in the country, but resided in the court of Emperor Frederick II in Naples.[15] Anatoli came to Italy, on the invitation of the emperor's court, from the veteran school of Jewish rationalism that developed in the previous two generations in Provence and belonged to the leading family of scholars of that school, the Ibn Tibbon family. This school is best known for its great endeavor, the translation of the major philosophical works of the previous two centuries from Arabic to Hebrew. Judah ibn Tibbon started this enterprise in the 1160s, with the translations of Saadia's *Emunot ve-Deot* and Bachya ibn Pakuda's *Hovot ha-Levavot*, as well as other ethical treatises.[16] The pinnacle of the achievements of this school was the translation, by Samuel ibn Tibbon, Judah's son, of Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*. Numerous original philosophical works were written by members of this school, including Samuel ibn Tibbon's *Maamar Yikavu ha-Mayim*, a rationalistic discussion of the process of the creation.

Anatoli became a full-fledged member of the international group of intellectuals assembled in the emperor's court, discussing biblical and theological problems with other scholars there. Among them was John Scotus, who is described by Anatoli as "the wise man with whom I associated." He quotes, twice, conversations with the emperor himself. There is no reason to doubt that he was comfortably

[15]Anatoli's book, *Malemad ha-Talmidim*, was printed in Lyck in 1866. Concerning his life and work, see especially Israel Bettan, "The Sermons of Jakob Anatoli," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XI (1936), pp. 191–242. This study was republished in I. Bettan's *Studies in Jewish Preaching*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society 1939, pp. 49–88. See also G. Vajda, *L'Amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du Moyen Age*, Paris 1957, pp. 163–178; J Dan, *Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature in the Middle Ages*, Jerusalem: Keter 1975, pp. 82–94.

[16]Among them: Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Tikkun Middot ha-Nefesh*, a scientific-ethical work, and the collection of ethical epigrams, *Mivhar ha-Peninim*.

integrated within that court, despite his distance from his homeland and from Jewish society.

Anatoli's most important work, *Malemad ha-Talmidim*,[17] is a collection of fifty sermons, each based on verses from one of the weekly portions of the Torah read in the synagogue. This format became the classical standard of Jewish homiletics to this very day; hundreds of such collections of sermons have been compiled during the centuries, yet it seems that Anatoli was the first to use it.[18] *Malemad ha-Talmidim* is not the first rationalistic work presented in the form of homilies: It was preceded, in the middle of the twelfth century, by Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja's *Hegyon ha-Nefesh*, which is written in the form of four sermons for the High Holidays.[19] Anatoli, however, was the first to present a complete series of sermons covering all portions of the Torah and dedicated solely to the exposition of his rationalistic system.

While this work is important from the point of view of the history of Hebrew literary genres, it is even more important from the point of view of the development of Jewish rationalistic thought. It represents the major transition from Maimonidean thought to its post-Maimonidean extensions, which include important changes and deviations from the teachings of the great twelfth-century philosopher. Anatoli's work is the one in which allegory is most clearly presented as the main expression of the rationalistic exegesis of biblical texts. Maimonides himself refrained from using this method, and probably was aware of the dangers encountered when following it. Led by Rabbi Jacob Anatoli, thirteenth-century rationalists—especially in Italy—embraced it wholeheartedly.

The difference in attitude can be presented by comparing the

[17]The Hebrew title is a combination of two meanings, using the homonymic nature of the word *malemad*; it can be understood as the teaching of students as well as the prod, or whip.

[18]Such structural elements can be found in the ancient, classical Midrash (Vayikra Rabba), yet they are organized according to the *sedarim*, the Palestinian custom that did not continue in Europe.

[19]On this work, see J. Dan, *Ethical and Homiletical Literature*, pp. 69–82; G. Wigoder, *Hegyon ha-Nefesh*, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 1972.

concept of the commandments, especially the ritualistic ones, in Maimonides' interpretations and those of Anatoli. For Maimonides, the commandments were a means by which a person was trained toward the achievement of the ideal of philosophical contemplation. The commandments that have clear social objectives, that regulate a person's health, family life, and social and business behavior, are obviously intended to create the external circumstances needed for concentration on the spiritual aspects of religious life. These Maimonides called *mishpatim*, following a talmudic distinction. The rituals, however, do not include such obvious benefits, and they were understood by Maimonides as exercises intended to subjugate a person's soul to the worship of God, or to separate him from idolatrous practices.[20] The edifice that Maimonides built concerning the meaning of precepts and rituals is that of a separation between two stages: the preparatory phase, in which one acquires the necessary physical, ethical, and social characteristics needed for rationalistic devotion, and the second stage, in which actual spiritual worship is practiced by the contemplation of philosophical truth. This two-stage system fixed clearly the place of all commandments and rituals in the lower, preparatory stage.

It is evident that for Anatoli, like other thirteenth-century rationalists, this was not enough. The demand to devote one's life to the continuous and arduous quest for perfection in the performance of the rituals could not be integrated with the low-stage concept of their religious meaning. In order for the spiritualization of worship to be complete, spiritual meaning has to be found within the commandments themselves, not only in the purpose that they serve. Allegorization was the result; by using this means, it could be demonstrated that rationality and spirituality reside within the commandment itself, thus uniting the two stages of preparation and achievement into one whole. Contemplation of God and spiritual worship could, in this way, be extended to cover all of human life, not only the segments that could be dedicated purely to philosophical speculation. It can be said that when the concept of ritual in Anatoli's work is compared to that of Maimonides, the religious element can be found to be much stronger in the teachings of the Naples preacher.[21]

[20]Thus, paradoxically, Maimonides postulated that some of the most important commandments, like the sacrifices at the Temple, were a divine accommodation; the people of Israel, when they were redeemed from Egypt, were so absorbed in idolatry that God could not command them immediately to refrain from any offering of sacrifices. He preferred that they sacrifice to the true God, rather than continue their idolatrous ways. Many commandments were interpreted by Maimonides in this way, without answering the question of why they should still be relevant after those particular forms of idolatry have vanished.

Anatoli employed the allegorical method not only concerning the meaning of the commandments but also in interpreting biblical narratives. The drive to identify Judaism's sacred heritage with the ideas of Greek philosophy was very strong, and led Anatoli, for instance, to identify the biblical story of Abraham and Sarah with the Aristotelian conception of matter and form, or the three sons of Noah with the three classes of the Platonian republic.

It should be emphasized that Anatoli regarded his allegorical explanations as revealing the one true meaning of the traditional ritual or story, not as one of many possibilities of interpretation. In this he deviated from the classical Hebrew midrash, which conceived of every biblical verse as open to an infinite number of true interpretations, all of them together never exhausting the infinity of divine wisdom of which the Torah is the earthly representative. Rational truth, for Anatoli, was one precise concept that may assume different garbs in its presentation in a Greek philosophical dialogue

[21]When seeking an explanation for this phenomenon, two elements that distinguish the thirteenth century from the twelfth have to be considered. One is the writing in Hebrew, the language of tradition and ritual; the second is the evolvement of schools of Jewish thinkers, whereas before the thirteenth century thinkers were independent, isolated individuals. See my analysis of the nature of the thirteenth century in Jewish thought in my book *Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics*, Seattle and London: Washington University Press 1986, pp. 24–35, and in the article "The Ideological and Social Background to the Emergence of Traditional Ethical Literature in the Thirteenth Century," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 7 (1988; S. Pines Festschrift), pp. 239–264. To these one may add, speculatively, that writing in Christian countries Jewish thinkers were much more aware of the religious nature of their tradition than when they were part of Arab civilization.

or a Genesis story, but its intellectual message is the same, and it can be formulated in human language in an accurate manner.[22]

The intense allegorization of the concept of the commandments in Anatoli's sermons reflects an attitude that was shared, though in different forms, by other Jewish philosophers in thirteenth-century Italy. The best-known example is found in the works of Rabbi Zerachia Hen, who was regarded as one of the radical Maimonidean scholars when the schism between traditionalists and rationalists errupted into an open conflict after the beginning of the great controversy in 1232. This event, which engulfed Jewish intellectuals in southern France and northern Spain, had an impact in both central Europe—northern France and Germany—and Italy. We do not know whether Rabbi Jacob Anatoli had any direct connection with the events following 1232, but Zerachia Hen and other philosophers of this period wrote in the context of that controversy. Zerachia Hen should be compared to his contemporary and fellow-Maimonist, Rabbi Hillel of Verona, whose positions were remarkably more moderate than those of Zerachia. These two scholars, however, made Italian Jewish intellectuals equal participants in the turmoil that shaped in a significant way the development of Jewish culture during the next two centuries. Since then, the history of Jewish culture in Italy is closely connected, and parallel in many aspects, to the developments in Jewish culture in northern Spain and Provence; until the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, these three centers of Jewish culture present similar and interconnected processes.

Rabbi Hillel's major work, *Tagmuley ha-Nefesh* (the Rewards of the Soul), is one of the most important philosophical works in Hebrew concerning the nature of the soul and the problems of its

[22]The traditional Jewish concept of language assumed that language is divine, that it was the instrument of creation, and that the Torah was the blueprint of the universe. If so, it is impossible to conceive of the final, complete meaning of any linguistic statement, because divine wisdom is beyond the comprehension of man. This is why, for instance, Judaism could not develop a set of dogma, because dogma is the ultimate belief in the possibility of language to express comprehensive truth in a normative manner. See G. Scholem, "The Name of God and the Theory of Language in the Kabbalah," *Diogenes* 1970; J. Dan, *The Name of God, the Name of the Rose and the Concept of Language in Jewish Mysticism.*

individuality and its unity.[23] Rabbi Hillel sought to analyze and reconcile the views of Aristotle, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Sinna on this subject, and his conclusions closely resemble those of Thomas Aquinas. His approach is frequently purely philosophical, though the religious meaning of the conclusions does not escape him. This work demonstrates how deeply several Jewish intellectuals in Italy were immersed in current philosophy in the second half of the thirteenth century, being aware of not only the Greek and Arabic sources, but also the scholastic discussions going on in their own time.

One of those processes was the evolvement and increasing impact of Jewish mysticism. The kabbalists of medieval Europe make their first appearance as a historical power within Jewish religious thought during the controversy of 1232. The Catalonian school of kabbalists, centered in Gerona, produced one of the prominent traditionalists who instigated the controversy by demanding the excommunication of the study of rationalistic philosophy, Rabbi Jonah Gerondi; and his nephew, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides), was the leader of northern Spanish Jewry at the time and tried, at first, to mitigate and suppress the controversy, but was obliged later to support Maimonides' opponents. Both of them were kabbalists, who corresponded with the head of the kabbalistic school of Provence, Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham, known as Rabbi Isaac the Blind.[24] These and other kabbalists who participated in this conflict did not base their arguments publicly on kabbalistic ideology; they presented themselves as talmudists and traditionalists, but there is hardly doubt that they were motivated by the secret tradition that they possessed and developed.[25] The example of the developments in Spain and Provence proves that the anti-Maimonidean movement

[23]The work was first published by S. Halberstamm in Lyck in 1874, and again by the Israeli Academy of Sciences, Jerusalem 1966. A series of important studies on Rabbi Hillel and his period was published by J. Sermonetta. See also J. Guttmann, *The Philosophies of Judaism*, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 1963, pp. 181–184.

[24]See G. Scholem, "A New Document Concerning the Beginnings of the Kabbalah," *Sefer Bialik*, Tel Aviv 1934, pp. 141–162.

[25]On the role of the kabbalah in this controversy, see G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R. J. Z. Werblowsky, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1986, et passim; and my study, "The Ideological and Social Background" (see note 21).

was the historical power that brought together the adherents of the kabbalah and gave them a meaningful position within Jewish cultural trends in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This process should be taken into account when reviewing the hesitant beginnings of the study of the kabbalah and mystical creativity in Jewish Italian culture.

III

It should, however, be taken into account that there was never a complete symmetry between developments in Italian Jewry and those of Provence and Spain. In every period, and concerning every cultural trend, Italian Jewish intellectuals preserved their uniqueness. Many of the philosophers who participated in the intense debates of the thirteenth century were either of foreign descent—like Rabbi Jacob Anatoli—or educated in Provence and Spain, like Hillel of Verona. A more "authentic" Italian scholar presented a different approach to Jewish spirituality, adding an original aspect to the cultural turmoil of the time. This is Rabbi Yehiel ben Yekutiel of Rome, whose ethical work represents a unique phenomenon in the history of Jewish ethics.

Maalot ha-Midot (The Ascension to the Ethical Attributes) is detailed work of ethics, constructed in the way that classical Jewish ethical works have been written since *Hovot ha-Levavot* by Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakuda: a series of chapters, each dedicated to the discussion and presentation of one of the central ethical norms. The language used by Rabbi Yehiel is also the standard thirteenth-century intellectual language, heavily influenced by the philosophical and rationalistic discourse, though there is an emphasis on traditional usages, quotations of biblical verses, and talmudic sayings and their interpretation. Essentially it is not meaningfully different from that used by, for instance, Rabbi Jonah Gerondi's traditionalistic ethical works.[26] The difference between Rabbi Yehiel's ethical treatise and

[26]*Shaarey Teshuvah* and the Commentary on the Book of Proverbs. Compare, however, a close parallel in the thirteenth-century Spanish or Provençal anonymous work known as the *Sefer ha-Yashar*. (One of the many attributions of this treatise is to Rabbi Zerachia the Greek, who sometimes was identified with Zerachia Hen. There is no basis for this attribution.) See S. Shokek, *Sefer ha-Yashar*, New York 1991. The language of this work resembles that of *Maalot ha-Midot*, but the ideological trend is meaningfully different.

his contemporaries in Spain and Provence lies in his attitude to life and the role of ethics in shaping an individual's daily activities. Rabbi Yehiel presents a balanced, moderate concept of ethics that is designed to create an atmosphere in which a person may enjoy life, and even his religious practices, negating any element of abstinence and self-deprivation. This is most evident in the chapter dedicated to *derech eretz*,[27] which describes a harmonious daily life in which the observance of the religious and ethical norms joins without any conflict with the enjoyment of balanced family life; professional achievements; and enjoyment of food, drink, nice clothes, and social standing. The work presents an ideal in which the material and spiritual elements merge to enable a person to achieve a comfortable balance between his personal needs, the demands of God, and social interaction. In this it may be unique in the history of Jewish ethics as a whole,[28] and there can be little doubt that it reflects some of the authentic characteristics of the more tolerant, relaxed religious attitudes of many segments of Italian Jewish culture. The author may have seen himself as a loyal follower of the ethics of Maimonides, which emphasize moderation and balance; yet for the great philosopher ethics was a means to achieve the suitable circumstances for the pursuance of higher goals of philosophical and spiritual adherence to an abstract God; in *Maalot ha-Midot*, however, no metaethical ideal is presented. Ethics is a goal for its own sake, and ethical life represents an adherence to God's commandments and

[27]It is very difficult to translate this term. I. Tishby suggested the term "civilization," following the usage of the term in early modern Hebrew works.

[28]Some elements of this attitude can be found in the tenth chapter of Rav Saadia Gaon's *Emunot ve-Deot*, which presents an ethical system of balance and moderation, and also in Rabbi Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Tikkun Middot ha-Nefesh*. Ideologically, it is not necessarily in conflict with the Maimonidean concept of ethical life. Yet no one presented such a detailed program of a harmonious way of life as did Rabbi Yehiel.

to the traditional norms of talmudic teachings. This treatise does not properly belong to the ethical literature created by rationalists; it is an expression of a quest for a harmonious fusion between traditionalism and the demands of contemporary life, without subjugating a person to a rigorous quest for the transcendent.

The second half of the thirteenth century saw the first appearance of Jewish mysticism as a component of Italian Jewish culture, though in a very hesitant and moderate fashion. Rabbi Abraham Abulafia, the great mystic from Spain, who visited many countries and attempted to establish schools in several places, taught also in Italy and Sicily, though he complained in his writings that his success was limited. There can be little doubt, however, that some of his works and teachings did find fertile soil in the minds and hearts of young Italian spiritualists, and influenced later developments.[29] A distinct influence of the kabbalah on Italian Jewish culture did not begin, however, till the age of the *Zohar* and under the impact of the publication of this peak of the achievements of Jewish mysticism in the Middle Ages. The most prominent example of this impact was Rabbi Menachem Recanati.

Recanati's two works, his *Commentary on the Torah* and the *Reasons for the Commandments*, are mature kabbalistic works based on the traditions of the Gerona circle in Catalonia and the newer ideas and symbols of the *Zohar*. It is doubtful whether he had a complete text of the *Zohar*; he quotes extensively from some parts of it.[30] These quotations, found in almost every page of his works, served to introduce the *Zohar* into the world of Italian Jewish mystics, who had some traditions originating from the teachings of

[29]Abulafia's life in Italy drew much attention from scholars in the last century and a half, mainly because of his attempt to meet the Pope and because of the messianic background of his activity. See G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 126–129; M. Idel, *AJS Review*. There should be a separation between Abulafia's role as a messianic activist and his teaching of the kabbalah. The first enterprise did not influence Jewish culture in Italy or elsewhere in a meaningful way, while his introduction of kabbalistic traditions and directions for mystical activity may have had more impact.

[30]Concerning his use of the *Zohar*, see E. Gottlieb, *Studies in Kabbalistic Literature*, ed. J. Hacker, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press 1976, et passim.

Abulafia. Gershom Scholem characterized the kabbalah in Italy as derivative and secondary,[31] yet it did contribute meaningfully to the spread and development of kabbalistic schools in the peninsula, which was destined to have a significant place in the history of Jewish mysticism. Recanati can be regarded as the first school-builder in Jewish mysticism in Italy in two respects: His works, especially the Commentary, were interpreted in the sixteenth century;[32] and his ideas, most notably his conception of the *sefirot* as vessels of the divine light rather than pure extensions of divinity itself, were repeatedly quoted and discussed by medieval kabbalists in Italy and elsewhere, and had a meaningful place in Rabbi Moses Cordovero's formulations in sixteenth-century Safed.[33] The scarcity of Zoharic texts contributed to the popularity of Recanati's works, which served as a source for kabbalistic texts and traditions. Some scholars in Italy, up to the sixteenth century and the printing of the *Zohar* in Cremona and Mantua, quoted the *Zohar* from Recanati's text.

The impact of kabbalah among the Jewish intellectuals in Italy should be perceived not only as the appearance of an alternative to rationalistic philosophical speculations, but also as the continuation of the quest for the spiritualization of Jewish religiosity. The kabbalists differed from the rationalists in many respects, but they shared with them the main goal of the spiritualization of Jewish religious life. As Isaiah Tishby formulated it, the rationalists and kabbalists gave different answers to the same questions. Recanati's motives essentially were not so different from those of Anatoli, Hen, and Yehiel ben Yekutiel.

Jacob Anatoli had to use drastic allegoristic methodologies in order to demonstrate that rationalism is the true meaning of bibli-

[31]"But there was little independence in the Italian kabbalah, and for a long time it consisted of no more than compilations and interpretations, following the *Zohar* and the *Ma'arechet ha-Elohut*, and, to an even greater extent than in Spain itself, the writings of Abraham Abulafia" (*Kabbalah*, Jerusalem: Keter 1974, p. 63). This view is too harsh.

[32]Especially that of Rabbi Matatiah Delcrut, mss. Oxford 1623 and 1615 (see Gottlieb, *Studies*, p. 574)

[33]*Pardes Rimonim*, Chap. 4.

cal and talmudic texts. The kabbalists achieved a similar purpose by their claim of traditionality; the term "kabbalah" means "tradition," and expresses the belief that these secrets, together with the written and oral Torah, have been revealed by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, and have been transmitted from generation to generation ever since. While Anatoli and the other rationalists had to prove the veracity of their views and interpretations by the power of reason, the kabbalists relied on the claim of traditionality. But in both cases, the different sources of authority led to parallel conclusions: The ancient traditions of Israel, especially those concerned with commandments, rituals, and ethics, should not be conceived as relating only to daily life on Earth. They represent a superior, esoteric truth with which the believer becomes connected by their performance. For the rationalist, the understanding of the philosophical meaning of the commandments leads to an immersion in the divine rationality, through contemplation. For the kabbalist, the commandments represent, symbolically, deep mystical processes that are occurring within the Godhead, and by following the symbols—the rituals, prayers, ethical norms—one becomes a participant in these processes. Recanati's elaboration of the meaning of the commandments, which follow the teachings of the *Zohar*, is intended to give the reader some hints and directions concerning the symbolic nature of practical demands formulated by the ancient Jewish sacred writings. The vast panorama that the *Zohar* presents of the dynamic inner life within the divine realm; the personified presentation of each of the ten divine attributes, the *sefirot*; a world that is composed of masculine and feminine elements, of good and evil tendencies that cause incessant change and drama within the Godhead—all are reflected in the created world in the struggle concerning the religious adherence to the divine commandments. Their performance contributes to the divine processes because each ritual is mystically connected with a particular phase in the divine realm, and the spiritual force expressed in the performance is influential in shaping the occurrences above. The kabbalah gave, with this concept, a meaningful place for human action in the drama of the divine inner life, and made humanity participate, for better or worse, in shaping the results of celestial struggles. The body of divine laws given by God to man is an arsenal of symbols by which the believer can interfere, in a benevolent way, in the occurrences in the divine world, while sinners contribute to the strengthening of negative and evil powers.

From this point of view, Recanati's works—like other kabbalistic works of this period—achieve in a different way the same goal of spiritualization of Jewish religiosity. For the kabbalists, the meaning of the performance of the commandments is not found in any earthly context; it is hidden within the realm of the inner structure and dynamic processes of the divine *sefirot*. Despite the material nature of the ritual itself, it is the earthly representation of a purely spiritual process, and its impact is a spiritual one within the realm of the *sefirot*. The kabbalah, in this way, established a new, spiritual system of meaning for Jewish rituals and ethics, based on what was presented as a purely traditional body of ideas and beliefs, as an alternative to the allegorical spiritualization of religious life that was based on philosophical rationalism derived from Greco-Arabic systems of thought.

One peculiar element in the works of Recanati that is indicative concerning the kabbalah in Italy in general is the question of the relationship between mystical revelations and interpretations of traditions. There are some references in Recanati's works to revelations and dreams he has had; yet, as Gottlieb remarked, he should not be regarded as a mystic who bases his teachings on metalinguistic experiences.[34] Indeed, Recanati's works are read as exegetical discussions of texts, hardly revealing any element of individual perception based on mystical experience. This problem reflects the intrinsic duality of kabbalistic literature in general: On the one hand, the kabbalah presents itself as tradition and rejects innovations. All truth has been given, as noted above, by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, and the secrets of the kabbalah were transmitted from generation

[34]This is Gottlieb's response to the depiction of Recanati as a mystic who relied on such experiences in Gudemann's work, *Geschichte der Erziehungwesens . . .* in *Italien*, vol. II, Wien 1884, pp. 180–182.

to generation. On the other hand, the esoteric literature of the kabbalah served as the main framework for Jewish mystics for the expression of their intense religious experiences, visions, and speculations, many of them intensely individual in nature and innovative in meaning. These two aspects lived together in many kabbalistic works. The *Zohar*, for instance, is presented as a homiletical commentary on biblical texts, yet many sections in it forcefully express intense mystical perceptions.[35] Recanati and other kabbalists in Italy present their works in an exegetical-traditional format. It is not easy to know whether they indeed conceived of their work as purely traditional commentaries, that is, "kabbalah" in the literal sense of the term, or whether behind the homiletical format there is an element of original metalinguistic revelation that is hidden behind that veil.

The intensity of kabbalistic creativity in Italy increased in the fifteenth century, mainly under the influence of external and internal events. The persecution of the Jews in Spain, which led to the expulsion in 1492, caused the migration of several kabbalists from Spain to Italy even before the expulsion, and the contacts between Spanish and Italian scholars became more frequent and intense. The renewed interest in Italian culture in ancient secrets and esoteric lore enabled the kabbalah to hold a more central place in Jewish culture than it did before. The great upsurge in interest in neo-Platonism brought mysticism and philosophy into closer contact, and the problems of divine emanation and the nature of the *sefirot* became a meaningful subject of discussion. On this background, the kabbalists of this period became more productive and more outspoken; some of their works are expressions of the problems and needs of that period, but others may have been based on earlier Jewish mystical traditions in Italy that now had an opportunity to be expressed and combined with contemporary speculation. Thus, for instance, the treatise *Or Olam* by Rabbi Elahanan Sagi Nahor ("the blind") may be such a combination. We know no details concerning the author's

[35]Because of this, it is wrong to view the *Zohar* as "theosophic," as some scholars, following Scholem, insist on doing.

biography, but he probably lived in Italy and continued Italian traditions, as demonstrated by E. Gottlieb.[36] The author presented in this work a detailed argumentation against Rabbi Isaac Mor Hayyim, a Spanish kabbalist who migrated to Italy, concerning the nature of the *sefirot*.

One of the foci of kabbalistic creativity in the late fifteenth century was the commentaries on the classical kabbalistic work, *Maarechet ha-Alohut* (the Hierarchy of the Divine World), an anonymous short treatise written in Spain in the fourteenth century. The best-known commentary on this work was written by Rabbi Yehudah Hayat, who immigrated to Italy from Spain, but other commentaries were written by Italian kabbalists, expressing not only the Spanish tradition but the traditions of the Italian schools. This renewal of kabbalistic creativity was combined with an intensification of messianic speculations and messianic activity, which were to characterize Italian Jewish culture in the sixteenth century.

While in many respects Jewish spirituality in Italy in the fifteenth century represents a drawing together of philosophy and the kabbalah, there are meaningful exceptions. One of these is the treatise *Behinat ha-Dat* (The Examination of Religion) by Rabbi Eliyahu Delmedigo, a work that was written in the same year as the expulsion from Spain. Rabbi Eliyahu was born in Crete, studied in Italy, served as a rabbi in Padua, became proficient in Greek, Latin, and Arabic, and lectured in several Italian cities; Pico della Mirandola was one of his admirers. His philosophy represents an attempt to draw the boundaries between philosophical investigation and critical thought on the one hand, and religious faith on the other. His conclusions, which were heavily influenced by the teachings of Averoes, established a wide range in which logic and science are dominant, while only a core of basic religious principles may be accepted by faith. These did not include the kabbalah: Rabbi Eliyahu was one of the first Jewish scholars who clearly expressed a doubt concerning the antiquity of the *Zohar*, and hence concerning the

[36]E. Gottlieb, *Studies*, p. 397 et passim.

divine origins of the kabbalah as a whole. He concluded that the *Zohar* was written in Spain by Rabbi Moses de Leon, a conclusion in which he was joined by several later scholars in Italy, most notably by Rabbi Judah Aryeh of Modena in the middle of the seventeenth century. It seems that Italy never shared the unanimous acceptance of the authority of the kabbalistic tradition that was prevalent in other Jewish communities.

In the fifteenth century, Jewish culture in Italy reflected the crises that afflicted the Jewish center in Spain without sharing the tremendous conflicts, suffering, and frustrations that accompanied them. The clash between rational philosophy and kabbalah was present there, but not the bitterness that accompanied it, until exiles from Spain brought it to the shores of Italy, mainly in the works of Rabbi Joseph Yaabez. The messianic awakening in Spanish Jewry was reflected in Italy, but not with the same intensity, until it was introduced by Judah Abarbanel when he settled in Italy after the expulsion.

Between the thirteenth century and the sixteenth century, Jewish culture in Italy was increasingly intertwined with Jewish culture in other countries, and by the end of this period almost every aspect and version of Jewish religiosity was represented in Italy. The expulsion from Spain and the settlement of many intellectuals from among those exiled from the Iberian peninsula brought this process to its culmination. Despite this, Italy never lost its unique characteristics of moderation, openness, and tolerance; all controversies seem to be represented in Italian Jewish culture, but with a lower degree of intensity and enmity. The constant awareness of the ethical aspect of every ideology and the closer contacts between Jewish intellectuals and the Christian communities of scholars preserved these attributes. The emergence of the Christian kabbalah at the end of the fifteenth century is one of the most prominent expressions of this uniqueness. Many of the strands woven in the Middle Ages, including the messianic and mystical-experiential tendencies, were expressed in their full power following the revolutionary transformation of Jewish culture in the sixteenth century.

ENDNOTE

This article was published in Italian in the volume *Storia d'Italia, Gli eberei in Italia*, ed. Corrado Vivanti, Torino 1996, pp. 341–360. The English version is published here for the first time. The volume includes up-to-date studies of all aspects of Jewish history and culture in Italy with current bibliography. Concerning the kabbalah, the volume includes a comprehensive survey of the Christian kabbalah: Eugenio Garin, "L'umanismo italiano e la cultura ebraica," pp. 361–387.

FIFTEEN

An Early Hebrew Source of the Yiddish *Akdamot* Story

I

The famous Yiddish folktale whose hero is Rabbi Meir Shatz is one of the most complete early Yiddish folktales; indeed, it may almost be described as a short novel. This story was undoubtedly known long before the time of the earliest extant manuscript or printed version date.[1] It is a story about a Jewish master of the Holy Name who came from the land of the ten lost tribes, beyond the River Sambatyon, to deliver the Jews of a certain country from the evil sorcery of the Black Monk and his followers, who terrorized Jewish communities and killed many thousands of Jews. When the very existence of the Jewish community was threatened, the Jews asked the king's help, but the king refused to deliver them unless they brought forth a Jewish sorcerer who would prove to be greater

[1]The first printed version was published in 1694; the manuscript version is found in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, 2213[6] in Neubauer's Catalogue. See the bibliography compiled by I. Rivkind, pp. 9–12 (see note 2). See also H. Shmeruk, *Karpi Memorial Volume*, Jerusalem 1968, pp. 123–126.

than the Black Monk. The Jews then sent Rabbi Meir Shatz to the land of the ten lost tribes to bring such a sorcerer. After many adventures, Rabbi Meir crossed the Sambatyon, and a man from the tribe of Dan was sent to deliver the Jews. He proved to be a greater sorcerer than the Monk, and killed his adversary by magic. Rabbi Meir stayed in the land of the lost tribes (not wanting to recross the Sambatyon on the Sabbath), and the man from Dan stayed with the Jewish community. Before leaving the land behind the Sambatyon, the sorcerer had received from Rabbi Meir the *piyyut Akdamot Milin*, which he taught the Jews in Europe. This *piyyut* has been said on Shavuot ever since.

This story is only found in Yiddish, and I. Rivkind published a critical edition of its two principal versions.[2] Rivkind tried to prove that the legend is based on some historical facts,[3] but I. Zinberg has shown that there is no reason for believing that this is more than a folktale,[4] its motifs being prevalent in Jewish medieval stories. Though there is no doubt that Zinberg is right, it is still interesting to note that there is an attempt in this tale to present the story as if it were an account of historical events, using many dates and known historical figures.[5] This pseudohistorical style is one of the characteristics of the developing Yiddish (and, sometimes, Hebrew) folktale. It is an element that seems to have been added to the story in the process of its being written down and acquiring literary form.

A better understanding of the process of development of the late-medieval folktale may be obtained from a comparison between the early-medieval and late-medieval versions of the same story. It seems to me that the following story, translated here from the Hebrew, is an early version of the later *Akdamot* story, preceding it by at least two hundred years.[6]

[2]I. Rivkind, "The Historical Allegory of Rabbi Meir Shatz" (Yiddish), *Philologische Schriften*, III, Vilna 1929, pp. 1–42.
[3]I. Rivkind, op. cit., pp. 4–8.
[4]I. Zinberg, *History of Jewish Literature* (Hebrew translation from the Yiddish), vol. IV, Tel Aviv 1958, pp. 90–92.
[5]See below p. 363.
[6]Thus solving the difficult chronological problem raised by the later Yiddish version, which uses a date from the fourteenth century and a hero from the eleventh century. Clearly, the story itself must be much older than the historical setting described in the later versions.

I found the story in the Ginzberg ms. 82, now in Moscow,[7] in a commentary on the Pentateuch by Rabbi Judah the Pious of Regensburg that was written from memory after Rabbi Judah's death (1217) by his son.[8] The story, therefore, was known as early as the first years of the thirteenth century, and possibly at the end of the twelfth, as there is no reason to believe that Rabbi Judah was its author;[9] he most probably received it from an earlier twelfth-century source, either written or oral.

II

[Ms. Ginzberg 82, 78b:] "Thou shalt not suffer a sorceress to live"[10] and "Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death."[11] Once there was a sorcerer who, whenever he saw beautiful Jewish girls on the Day of Atonement, would turn them into asses and bring them to his home. At night, he would restore them to womanhood and sleep with them.

There was a master of the Holy Names whose name was Rabbi Joseph. He lived at a distance of three months' journey from the sorcerer's town. The townspeople sent a pious man to tell him what was happening in their own. Rabbi Joseph told him: "Stay with me till the Day of Atonement." The pious man, upon hearing this, began to cry. Rabbi Joseph asked him: "What is bothering you? Why are you crying?" The Jew answered: "The beautiful girls will be kidnapped again."[12]

[7]See *Tarbiz*, 30 (1961), p. 272.
[8]See *Zion*, 29 (1964), p. 169, note 4.
[9]*Tarbiz*, 30 (1961), pp. 272–275. Rabbi Judah, it seems, recorded stories that he had heard or read, and used them in his writings with no alterations. This seems to be the case in stories included in both his theological and his ethical works.
[10]Exodus 22:17.
[11]Ibid., verse 18.
[12]I.e., they will not arrive in time to save the girls.

When the Day of Atonement arrived, Rabbi Joseph brought him to the public baths, and very soon they came to the place where the sorcerer was.

Rabbi Joseph asked the people: "Who stole the girls?" They answered: "We don't know anything, we don't know what happened to them." So Rabbi Joseph pronounced a Holy Name, and came and stood at the front door of the sorcerer's house. Rabbi Joseph then called for the sorcerer, who looked out and put his head out of the window. Rabbi Joseph pronounced a Holy Name, and the walls of the house stretched and closed around the sorcerer's head, almost choking him. The sorcerer then said to Rabbi Joseph: "If you loosen the walls around my head, I shall tell you what I did to the women." Rabbi Joseph did so, and the sorcerer told him: "On the Day of Atonement, when the beautiful daughters of Israel walked with bare feet and wore beautiful clothes, I would turn them into asses by magic, and later, at night, return them to their original shape." Rabbi Joseph then asked: "Where is the magical broth [you used] and where are the girls?" The sorcerer answered: "At such and such a place."

So Rabbi Joseph took out the broth and the girls [from that place], and then he pronounced another Holy Name, and the walls closed, and the sorcerer's head fell into the street.

Rabbi Joseph, blessed be his memory, came then to the synagogue, and said: "Open the doors of the Holy Ark for me." The people opened the doors, and he went and stood inside the Ark and closed the doors behind him. Later, the people opened the doors and failed to find him there, for he had flown back to his place.

By this story you have learned that magic enables a man to sleep with beasts and with women, and that is the reason that the Holy Scripture put the verses "And if a man entice a virgin that is not betrothed and lie with her,"[13] "Thou shalt not suffer a sorceress to live,"[14] and "Whoever lieth with a beast"[15] close to each other.[16]

[13]Exodus 22:15.
[14]Exodus 22:17.
[15]Exodus 22:18.
[16]See *Tarbiz*, 30 (1961), pp. 288–289.

III

This story differs from the Yiddish *Akdamot* story in many respects, but it seems that there are enough points of resemblance between the two to make it possible to regard Rabbi Judah's story as an early version of the considerably later *Akdamot* story. The main points of resemblance are the following:

1. In both stories, the Jews are threatened by a Gentile sorcerer, who uses magic to inflict troubles on the Jews. This is an unusual motif in stories of this kind, for the Gentiles usually did not have to resort to magic in order to be able to harm the Jews; their natural powers sufficed.
2. Both stories refer to one of the major Jewish holidays—the Day of Atonement in the early version, Shavuot in the later one.
3. In both stories, the Jews seek help from their brethren who live far away.
4. In both stories, the Jews choose carefully an emissary to go to the deliverer's place; it is an anonymous pious Jew in the early version, and the famous Rabbi Meir in the later one.
5. In both stories, the motif of magical travel is prominent. The deliverer's magical power is denoted by his miraculous arrival at the place where he was needed, in spite of his having set out for the journey at the latest moment possible. This method of creating suspense is used in both stories, making the reader anxious to know whether the deliverer will arrive in time to save the Jews.
6. In both stories there exists an element of competition in magical power between the Jew and the sorcerer, when the usual prayers and fasts cannot avail to defeat the enemy of the Jews.
7. In both stories the main emphasis falls on the power of the Holy Names; both deliverers are masters of the Holy Name.[17]

[17]Rabbi Joseph is called here בעל שמות, which is probably one of the earliest places in European Hebrew literature where this term is used.

8. In both stories, the sorcerer dies in a strange and cruel manner and his death is described in detail.
9. In both stories, beautiful Jewish women are threatened.
10. Both stories originate from, and are described as occurring in, the realm of Ashkenazi Jewry.[18]

These ten points seem to rule out the possibility that the resemblance between the stories is accidental or due to common popular beliefs. If indeed the *Akdamot* story is a later development of Rabbi Judah the Pious's story, the comparison between them might supply us with some information as to the ways in which such stories developed between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries.

IV

It seems evident that most differences between the two stories, both in detail and structure, can be explained by two simple principles characterizing the later version: (1) an attempt to upgrade the importance of the plot; (2) an attempt to give the story a semblance of historical authenticity.

The attempt to upgrade the importance of the events is evident in every point of comparison between the two stories. The anonymous sorcerer of the early version becomes, in the later story, a leader of a group of sorcerers, a notorious "Black Monk"; the threatened community in the later version is no longer a small Jewish town whose girls are threatened, but the Jewish population of an empire; in the later version, not only the virtue of the Jewish girls is threatened, but the lives of all the Jews, of whom the sorcerer had already killed tens of thousands. The deliverer in the later story is no longer a certain unknown Rabbi Joseph, but a representative of the ten lost tribes; the distance between the threatened community and the deliverer's place had grown between the two versions from a three months' walk to half the world, and the River Sambatyon; the emissary is no longer just a pious Jew, but the famous Rabbi Meir; and the delivery is described in the later version in terms of a public competition between Judaism and Christianity, not just a quarrel between two sorcerers, as in the early version. Many more details point to the same. It is evident that the author of the later version tried to create a terrible, magnificent tale out of the more modest materials of the early version.

As to the second principle, the semblance of historical authenticity, it is quite probable that the emperor, the exact date, the personality of Rabbi Meir Shatz, the marriage of the deliverer, and his life in the delivered community were all added to the story to make it seem like a true historical account of the miraculous delivery of the Jews from a cruel enemy. Both principles are part of one and the same tendency: to turn an anecdotal short story into a historical novel.

No wonder, therefore, that some of the details of the early story had to be omitted. Rabbi Judah told the story when explaining some verses of the book of Exodus, and the conclusion to be derived from it was exegetical in nature: the connection between witchcraft, rape, and copulation with animals. This, obviously, could not be the conclusion of a wider, novelistic story, the pseudohistorical account of the deliverance of a large Jewish community from certain death. The reference to the biblical verses had to be omitted, and with it the erotic story of the transformation of the girls into asses. It is possible that the more refined taste of an editor was at work here. It is also understandable that the strange use of the Holy Ark in the synagogue as a means for magical travel was omitted. This does not seem to be a Jewish motif at all.

The comparison between these two stories illustrates the way later stories developed from early medieval ones. It is not the only case in which stories of Rabbi Judah the Pious, which were included in his writings, developed into later, more expanded stories. Another example is the famous story of the Jerusalemite.[19]

[18]See Rivkind, op. cit., pp. 1–3.

[19]See J. Dan, "Five Versions of the Story of the Jerusalemite," in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, XXXV (1967), pp. 99–111.

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