

# BY WAY OF TRUTH: ASPECTS OF NAḤMANIDES' KABBALISTIC HERMENEUTIC

by

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Perhaps no one figure is more responsible for the legitimization of kabbalah as an authentic esoteric tradition of Judaism than Moses ben Naḥman (1194–1270). Although from the beginnings of its literary history kabbalah was associated with men of rabbinic standing, such as R. Abraham ben David of Posquières, no one before Naḥmanides had attained a reputation for excellence in halakhic and mystical matters and had written extensively in both domains. Naḥmanides' involvement with kabbalah, especially in the context of a commentary on the Torah written for the layman, as the author plainly states in his introduction,<sup>1</sup> surely lent a stamp of approval to

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1. *Perush ha-RaMBaN 'al ha-Torah*, ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1959), 1: Introduction, p. 7.

the whole enterprise. R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon in his *Baddei ha-'Aron u-Migdal Hananel* gave the following characterization of Nahmanides' kabbalistic literary activity:

The great rabbi, Moses ben Nahman, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote his book [i.e., the commentary on the Torah] and a book [on] Job.<sup>2</sup> He alluded to hidden matters in every place (רמזו בנסתרות בכל מקום ומקום) to arouse [people's awareness] as is appropriate and according to what he received.<sup>3</sup> However, he concealed his words to a high degree, for it is written, "Honey and milk are under your tongue" (Song of Songs 4:11).<sup>4</sup>

It is of interest to compare the above passage with a contemporary characterization given by Gershom Scholem:

Nahmanides . . . hinted, in greater or lesser detail, at kabbalistic doctrines calculated to whet the reader's appetite for further initiation rather than to veil the mysteries. In this sense, the propagandistic impact of Nahmanides' writings cannot possibly be overestimated.<sup>5</sup>

Admittedly, Nahmanides' style is highly allusive and presents great difficulty for the uninitiated. Moreover, he himself urged his readers, in the introduction to the Torah commentary, to concentrate on his new insights regarding the plain meanings and the homiletical explanations (חדושים ובמדרשים) and to leave aside the kabbalistic allusions, for in any event, claims Nahmanides, one can understand the latter only if one has a teacher to expound them and not by means of one's supposition or deduc-

2. An obvious play on the famous talmudic discussion in b. Bava Batra 14b concerning biblical authorship of various books: משה כתב ספרו . . . ואיויב. My thanks to Prof. David Berger for indicating this reference to me.

3. Cf. the interesting formulation in Shem Tov ibn Gaon's *Keter Shem Tov*, printed in J. Koriati, ed., *Ma'or wa-Shemesh* (Livorno, 1839), fol. 39a, where it is stated that Nahmanides "also revealed a lot to the enlightened one (משכיל) through an oral transmission going back to Moses, our rabbi, peace be upon him."

4. *Baddei ha-'Aron u-Migdal Hananel* (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 29. For the use of this text to explain the inherent necessity of concealing truth in parabolic form, see Maimonides' introduction to his commentary on the mishnaic order of *Zera'im*, in *Mishnah 'im Perush ha-RaMBaM*, ed. Y. Kafih (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 19, and idem, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:12.

5. G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton, 1987), p. 385. See also idem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1948), pp. 50–51; *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), p. 51.

tion (סברא).<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless the simple fact that he did incorporate these kabbalistic ideas and themes in his commentary proved to be monumental, for it both spurred widespread kabbalistic activity which attempted to explicate these allusions and it placed in the hands of the nonspecialist a document that assumed that the hidden meaning of Scripture and the inner dimension of Jewish tradition consisted of kabbalistic theosophy.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the central importance of this seminal figure in the history of both kabbalah and biblical interpretation, there is as yet no comprehensive treatment of either Nahmanides' hermeneutics or his kabbalah. To be sure,

6. *Perush*, Introduction, p. 7. See the use made of Nahmanides' comments in R. Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi, *Masoret Hokhmah*, in Scholem, *Qiryat Sefer* 2 (1929): 126: *ובדעתי לערוך: טענות בריאות וטובות נגד בעלי סברות הללו ושאר סברות אחרות כי אין הדבר תלוי בסברא רק בקבלה מפה אל פה מקובל חכם לאוץ מקבל משכיל כאשר כתב בהקדמת פירוש התורה הרב המקובל האמיתי הוא הרמב"ן ז"ל*. Cf. Hayyim Vital's introduction to *Eṣ Hayyim* (Jerusalem, 1910), fols. 4c-d: "This wisdom [i.e., kabbalah] was openly revealed until the death of R. Shimeon b. Yoḥai. . . . From that time all the wise men who knew this wisdom were occupied with it in great concealment and not openly. And one would not reveal it except to one student in each generation, and even this only in chapter headings, from mouth to mouth. . . . This wisdom went on from generation until generation until the RaMBaN, blessed be his memory, the last of the true kabbalists [אחרון המקובלים האמתיים]. . . . The work [i.e., the Torah commentary] composed by the RaMBaN, blessed be his memory, is 'true and firm, well-established and existing' [according to the formulation of the prayer after the *Shema* in the morning service: *אמת ויציב ונכון וקיים* for the one who understands it. . . . One should not come near all the books of the later kabbalists [who lived] after the RaMBaN, blessed be his memory, for from the RaMBaN and onward the way of his wisdom has been hidden from the eyes of all sages, and nothing remains but some of the branches of the introductions without their roots." On the distinction between *קבלה* and *סברא* in Nahmanides' thought, see M. Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 58-60. On p. 59, n. 33, Idel has referred to Abraham ibn Ezra and Judah ha-Levi as possible sources for Nahmanides. See also *Tosafot*, *Soṭah* 24b, s.v. *ורבי יונתן*; and Pseudo-Bahya, *Torat ha-Nefesh*, ed. I. Broydé (Paris, 1896), p. 24. And cf. the words of the R. Meir ha-Levi Abulafia cited in B. Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 77. For the supremacy of prophecy (נבואה) or tradition (קבלה) over rational inquiry (חקירה), see *She'elot u-Teshuvot le-RaSHBA* (Jerusalem, 1976) 1:9, and the extended analysis of this text in D. Horwitz, "The Role of Philosophy and Kabbalah in the Works of Rashba" (M.A. thesis, Yeshiva University, 1986), pp. 8-23. The supremacy of the force of an orally received tradition to the use of logic in the application of accepted hermeneutical principles is seen clearly in the famous story of Hillel and the Benei Betera in j. *Pesahim* 6:1, 33a. Cf. R. Loewe, "The 'Plain' Meaning of Scripture in Early Jewish Exegesis," *Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies London* 1 (1964): 153.

7. See E. Gottlieb, *Mehqarim be-Sifrut ha-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 88-90; Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 385-86; I. Twersky, Introduction to *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, p. 3, and other references in the following note.

there have been several important scholarly contributions that have dealt with select aspects of Nahmanides' thought.<sup>8</sup> In particular, the work of Moshe Idel should be singled out, for he has made the most systematic effort to characterize Nahmanides' kabbalistic orientation, especially as it compares and contrasts with the subsequent development of kabbalah in late-thirteenth-century Castile.<sup>9</sup> What is still lacking, however, is a thorough understanding of the dynamics of Nahmanides' kabbalistic hermeneutical stance. The aim of this paper is to analyze some of the key features of this hermeneutic. The analysis will proceed from three vantage points: an examination of (1) the fundamental principle of the twofold nature of the text which informs Nahmanides' approach to Scripture; (2) the relation between the way of *peshat* (literal-narrative meaning)<sup>10</sup> and that of *sod* (esoteric meaning), most frequently referred to by Nahmanides as *derekh ha-'emet* (the way of truth);<sup>11</sup> and (3) the function of rabbinic 'agga-

8. The most important of these are the articles by J. Perles, B. Septimus, D. Berger, and A. Funkenstein mentioned below at various points in my analysis. See also the work of E. Gottlieb cited in the preceding note. Noteworthy as well are the valuable comments of Gershom Scholem scattered through many of his writings, but mostly in *Origins of the Kabbalah*, chap. 4, and *Ha-Qabbalah be-Gerona* (Jerusalem, 1974). Note should also be made of C. Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Hoqer u-khe-Mequbbal* (Jerusalem, 1978), dealing mostly with Nahmanides' interpretation of the commandments. Concerning the latter, see also J. Katz, *Halakhah we-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 30–33.

9. See Idel, "We Have No Tradition," pp. 51–73.

10. Definitions of *peshat* are numerous, although it is usually rendered as the "plain," "simple," "literal," or "contextual" sense. For the most recent survey of various scholarly opinions, see S. Kamin, *Rashi's Exegetical Categorization in Respect to the Distinction between Peshat and Derash* (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 12–14 [in Hebrew]. On p. 14 the author gives what seems to me to be a most sensible and comprehensive definition of *peshat*, and one that I believe is applicable to Nahmanides: "The explanation of a verse according to its language, syntactical structure, thematic connection, literary genre and structure, and the mutual relations between these elements." In my hyphenated expression "literal-narrative" I have tried to capture this sense of the term. See J. Rogers and D. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York, 1979), p. 16, who describe the biblical exegesis of John Chrysostom (347–407) and the Antiochene school from which he emerged as the "grammatical-historical interpretation." See also Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time* (London, 1959), 1:90–91, 96. On the Antiochene school's reaction to the allegorism of the Alexandrian school of Christian exegetes, see J. Guillet, "Les Exégèses d'Alexandrie et d'Antioche, conflit ou malentendue?" *Recherches de science religieuse* 34 (1947): 257–302; H. de Lubac, *L'Écriture dans la Tradition* (Paris, 1966), pp. 67–69; J. Pelikan, *The Preaching of Chrysostom: Homilies on the Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia, 1967), pp. 14–15.

11. It is of interest that in Isaac of Acre's *Oṣar Ḥayyim*, *derekh ha-sod* is distinguished from *derekh ha-'emet*. See, e.g., MS Guenzberg 775, fol. 13b, where a particular verse, accord-



*dah* in Naḥmanides' kabbalistic exposition. Whether or not Naḥmanides was the recipient of authentic ancient traditions, as Idel has forcefully argued,<sup>12</sup> it is only by fully exposing his presentation of kabbalistic doctrine that we will be able to evaluate the innovative or conservative trends in his exegesis and determine the role played by the creative religious imagination in his thought.

# I

With respect to the question of Naḥmanides' kabbalistic hermeneutic, one finds various views expressed in the scholarly literature. Amos Funkenstein, for instance, characterized Naḥmanides' "kabbalistic reading" of Scripture as a "mystical-theosophical exegesis."<sup>13</sup> Idel reacts to this characterization by stating that such terms "fit the Zoharic perception of the Torah and its exegesis rather than Naḥmanides." Indeed, says Idel, "it seems doubtful whether Naḥmanides had a kabbalistic hermeneutical method of his own,"<sup>14</sup> by which the author means that Naḥmanides did not have a hermeneutic orientation that was unique to him. In his *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* Idel reiterates this view by drawing the following contrast between the hermeneutical assumption of the early period in Catalonia, epitomized by Naḥmanides, and that of the later period in Castile, the generation of the Zohar. For the former kabbalah is "identified with specific traditions concerning limited segments of the Bible," whereas for the latter it "focuses on the results of powerful hermeneutic devices that enable the mystic to discover the many hidden meanings latent in the canon."<sup>15</sup> Hence, Idel bases his claim that Naḥmanides has no hermeneutic method of his own on his view that Naḥmanides had a limited corpus of esoteric truths that he had

ing to the "way of mystery" (*'al derekh ha-sod*), is said to refer to Metatron, whereas according to the "way of truth" (*'al derekh ha-emet*) it is said to refer to 'Aṭarah, i.e., the *Shekhinah*. From this and other examples one may assume that the exegetical categories have distinct ontological correlates: the *derekh ha-emet* being reserved for the realm of the divine emanations, the *sefirot*, and *derekh ha-sod* for the angelic realm below the *sefirot*.

12. See also the article of Pines cited below, n. 100.

13. A. Funkenstein, "Naḥmanides' Symbolical Reading of History," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan and F. Talmage (Cambridge, 1982), p. 134.

14. Idel, "We Have No Tradition," p. 63, n. 45.

15. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), p. 215.

received. That is, he did not systematically or creatively apply kabbalistic interpretations to Scripture, but only commented in this way where he had an authoritative tradition. Naḥmanides thus leaves one with the impression of lacking a comprehensive hermeneutic.

A careful analysis of this problem is crucial to a correct understanding of Naḥmanides' thought and his contribution to both biblical exegesis and kabbalah. Let me begin by stating what I intend by the expression "hermeneutical method": a theoretical system of beliefs that determines one's understanding of a text and the operations of interpretation by which one applies those beliefs to specific texts.<sup>16</sup> Given this working definition, it seems to me undeniably the case that Naḥmanides does exhibit such a kabbalistic hermeneutical method. The main difference between Naḥmanides and the Zohar—i.e., with respect to the question of hermeneutical methodology and not with respect to particular doctrinal points—lies in the fact that Naḥmanides, as was pointed out by Joseph Perles in an article published in 1858, wanted to integrate better the esoteric interpretation with philological and aggadic concerns.<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that the latter are not present to some degree in the Zohar; on the contrary, as Wilhelm Bacher demonstrated, concern with *peshat* as well as *'aggadah* and/or homiletics is found in the zoharic corpus.<sup>18</sup> The issue is rather that in the Zohar all other exegetical modes are subsumed under the theosophical. The author of the Zohar wanted to create a symbolic work of an independent status, whereas Naḥmanides sought to provide a multidimensional commentary on the scriptural text in which kabbalistic explanations were accorded an important but relatively limited role from a statistical or quantitative point of view. With

16. My formulation is based partially on the definition of hermeneutics offered in Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, 1981), p. 43. I am not arguing that Naḥmanides applies his hermeneutical method in any systematic manner. Indeed, his approach is that of an exegete rather than a philosopher or logician, responding therefore to the needs of the particular moment as determined by a given textual context. Nevertheless I think one can speak legitimately of a "hermeneutical method" in the case of the exegete, even if the underlying principles of interpretation are not stated in a methodical or systematic way.

17. J. Perles, "Ueber den Geist des Commentars des R. Moses ben Nachman zum Pentateuch," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 7 (1858): 118.

18. W. Bacher, "L'exégèse biblique dans le Zohar," *Revue des études juives* 22 (1891): 33–46, 219–229.

respect to the specification of scriptural words as symbols for theosophic processes or states, I see no real difference in method between Naḥmanides and the Zohar, but only in range of applicability.<sup>19</sup> That is to say, both Naḥmanides and the author of the Zohar share, in my opinion, a basic hermeneutical assumption about the Torah which enables them, each from his own perspective, to view the text as a *corpus symbolicum* of the divine.<sup>20</sup> For both, the Torah is a theosophical prism imparting to one with proper training esoteric knowledge about God. To be sure, Naḥmanides works with an alternative conception of kabbalah, as may be adduced from his comments in the introduction to the Torah commentary, that involves not theosophy but a knowledge of Torah as consisting of an amalgam of divine names. Such a conception can be traced to much earlier sources and was shared in Naḥmanides' time by the German Pietists and other kabbalists, most notably, Abraham Abulafia.<sup>21</sup> While it is undoubtedly true, as Idel has argued,<sup>22</sup> that this tradition or kabbalah based on the divine names has no explicit theosophical implications, the fact of the matter is that the vast majority of

19. The limited scope of Naḥmanides' kabbalah, as described by Idel (see above, nn. 14–15), seems to me to be beside the point with respect to the issue of the hermeneutical principle that I am describing. After all, even if one accepts at face value that one can reconstruct all of Naḥmanides' kabbalah from his written documents, the fact is that he does make general claims in his writings about the nature of Torah which inform his hermeneutical stance.

20. Kabbalists are rarely interested in commenting on the whole biblical context. This is not to say that context is entirely irrelevant for kabbalistic exegesis, but rather that kabbalists were not interested in taking the full context into account when offering their theosophic interpretations. In this respect the kabbalists, like the older midrashists, are "verse-centered." Cf. J. Kugel, "Two Interpretations of Midrash," in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. G. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven, 1986), pp. 94–95.

21. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1965), p. 39; Idel, "The Concept of Torah in the Hekhalot Literature and Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 52–53 [in Hebrew].

22. See Idel, "We Have No Tradition," p. 54, n. 10: "It is worth mentioning that Naḥmanides conceives of Kabbalah as a tradition about the Divine Names having no explicit theosophical implications." See also the formulation of Idel, "Some Conceptions of the Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought," in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, ed. J. Hackett et al. (Washington, 1988), p. 132: "Naḥmanides . . . seemingly disregarded the esoteric nature of such other Kabbalistic topics as the names of the *Sefirot*." See, however, Funkenstein, "Naḥmanides' Symbolical Reading of History," p. 134, who understands Naḥmanides' statement that the Torah is comprised of divine names as alluding to "constellations within the divine realm," i.e., the *sefirot*, thus interpreting Naḥmanides in a theosophic way.

Nahmanides' kabbalistic allusions do have theosophical implications and cannot be understood without the standard kabbalistic symbolism.<sup>23</sup> It is thus clear that in practice Nahmanides read words of Scripture in a symbolic way that could be decoded only by reference to a theosophical kabbalah. The difference in the scope and variation of applicability of this symbolism between Nahmanides and the Zohar is, from the methodological point of view, insignificant. The fact that Nahmanides does interpret select words or expressions of Scripture as symbolic references to the divine colors his overall hermeneutical stance vis-à-vis the text, even if this mode of interpretation is not applied methodically and uniformly. Such a reading of Scripture, I submit, was equally shared by Nahmanides and the Castilian kabbalists who formed the circle of the Zohar, such as Moses de León and Joseph Gikatilla.

In agreement with Funkenstein,<sup>24</sup> I would maintain that the kabbalistic hermeneutical method of Nahmanides is stated by the author himself in the context of his discussion on creation: "And know that in the truest sense Scripture speaks of lower matters and alludes to supernal matters," הכתוב יגיד בכתובים וירמז בעליונים.<sup>25</sup> Although the statement occurs in the specific context

23. The precise relationship between the theosophical reading of Torah and this alternative magical-mystical one is not worked out in Nahmanides, as far as I can tell. See Joshua ibn Shu'aib, *Derashot 'al ha-Torah* (Cracow, 1573; reprint ed., Jerusalem, 1969), fol. 59a, who cites and explicates Nahmandies' view about the primordial Torah. Ibn Shu'aib, based on a close reading of Nahmanides' introduction, concludes that this primordial Torah, written in one continuous manner (כתיבה צרופה), was in fact divided into three parts or aspects, connected exegetically to the verse, "I wrote down for you a threefold lore," כתבתי לך שלישית (Prov. 22:20): (1) the names of God; (2) the fifty gates of understanding (בנינה) in which are included the account of the chariot, the account of creation, physiognomy and chiromancy, and all other possible wisdom; and (3) the Torah as we have it with accentuated marks and divisions of words (בפסוקי טעמים). If we assume that theosophic kabbalah is to be included in the second category, the fifty gates of understanding having a definite theosophic reference, as is clear from Nahmanides himself (see *Perush*, Introduction, pp. 3–4), then perhaps we have here an effort to combine the two esoteric traditions in some hierarchical fashion. The matter requires further investigation. Cf. ibn Shu'aib, fol. 4a, where he offers an alternative threefold division of the contents of Torah: (1) secrets of the account of the chariot and the account of creation; (2) positive and negative commandments; and (3) narratives. See below, n. 44. On the conception of kabbalah as an esoteric tradition involving the divine names, see also Nahmanides' commentary to Exod. 28:30.

24. Cf. Funkenstein, "Nahmanides' Symbolical Reading of History," p. 133.

25. *Perush*, Gen. 1:2 (p. 15). That this statement refers to an emanative process in the sefirotic realm that parallels the creation of the lower worlds is clear from the various supercommentaries on Nahmanides. See Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov*, in *Ma'or wa-Shemesh*,

of the creation story, it seems to me justified to extend its usage and to employ it as a general principle of methodology insofar as it assumes a certain hermeneutical posture vis-à-vis the text that is reflected in the cosmic structure. Interestingly enough, this statement, or paraphrase of it, was already employed as a general hermeneutical principle in other contexts by a number of Nahmanides' disciples.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Funkenstein, however, I do not understand the implication of this to be that there is a necessary divergence or discrepancy between the literal-narrative (*peshat*) and the mystical-theosophical (*sod*) interpretations. On the contrary, Nahmanides' hermeneutic is rooted in kabbalistic ontology which recognizes two parallel worlds, the divine and the mundane: what goes on below has a corresponding phenomenon above, just as what goes on above has its reflection below. The point is well-made in the anonymous text that apparently derived from the school of Nahmanides, *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*. "In all of the section of Genesis the words have a double meaning (דברים כפולים), revealed and hidden (נגלה ונסתר), and both are true. For just as there are things below, so above there are things similarly called, and these [things above] are the foundation for things below which are in their pattern."<sup>27</sup> The words of this kabbalist

ed. J. Koriat (Livorno, 1839), fols. 27a–b; *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN* (Warsaw, attributed to Meir ibn Sahula [according to Scholem the author is Joshua ibn Shu'aib; for references and counterclaims, see E. Gottlieb, *Ha-Qabbalah be-Khitvei Rabbenu Bahya ben 'Asher* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 214, n. 1]), fols. 1a–b; Isaac of Acre, *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayim*, ed. A. Goldreich (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 13 (of critical text); the anonymous commentary in Oxford-Bodleian MS 1645, fols. 81a–b (concerning this text see Gottlieb, op. cit., p. 15, and Goldreich, op. cit., pp. 76–103 [of the introduction]); Joshua ibn Shu'aib, *Derashot*, fol. 3b.

26. Cf. the anonymous supercommentary on Nahmanides' commentary to Gen. 3:22, apparently from the school of R. Solomon ibn Adret, preserved in MS JTS Mic. 1895, fol. 11b; Shem Tov ibn Gaon's *Baddei ha-'Aron u-Migdal Hananel*, p. 32; Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 234.

27. *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* (Jerusalem, 1963; reprint of Mantua ed., 1558), fol. 90b. And see Bahya ben Asher's commentary to Gen. 6:2 (ed. Chavel, 1:98): "All the matters of the account of creation are twofold (כפולים) and all is true." Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 207–209, where the author contrasts the hermeneutical stance of what he calls "theosophical" and "ecstatic" kabbalah on the grounds that the former, unlike the latter, knows no antinomy between the exoteric and esoteric, the plain and hidden meanings. Idel perceptively links the hermeneutical stance to the respective positions of the two schools on the question of the role of the body in religious life. That is, for the theosophic kabbalists, just as the body was seen as reflecting the higher structure of God, so the plain meaning was seen as reflecting the esoteric truth; for the ecstatic kabbalists, on the other hand, the body is seen as a hindrance to the mystical goal and, analogously, the plain meaning can be an obstruction to the hidden meaning. Concerning the latter, see also Idel, "Kitvei R. 'Avraham 'Abula'fiyah u-Mishnato" (Ph.D.

are based on Nahmanides' own commentary to Gen. 3:22, as we shall shortly see below. It is significant, however, that he has extended Nahmanides' hermeneutical principle from the particular case of the narrative about the Garden of Eden to the whole section of Genesis. It would not be incorrect, in my opinion, to further extend this principle to Scripture in general, as the notion of two layers of meaning reflecting two levels of reality is operative in other contexts in Nahmanides' commentary as well.

Here it would be beneficial to cite a few examples from Nahmanides himself. In his commentary to Gen. 3:22 Nahmanides maintains that while the Garden of Eden does literally exist on earth with all the details as described in the Bible, these matters nonetheless point to supernal realities: "All these things are twofold (כפולים),<sup>28</sup> the overt and the hidden in them are true (הגלוי והחשום בהם אמת)."<sup>29</sup> Elaborating on this point in his *Sha'ar ha-*

diss., Hebrew University, 1976), p. 193, and idem, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, N.Y., 1988), pp. 73–74. In my view, Idel's characterization of the hermeneutics of theosophic kabbalah is a fitting characterization of Nahmanides as well, and one is therefore quite justified in speaking of a hermeneutical method in conjunction with the latter.

28. Nahmanides' position is brought into focus when one contrasts his sense of the twofold nature of scripture with that of the eleventh-century Northern French exegete, R. Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (Rashi). The latter too employs twofold exegesis, but for him this means only that the literal-syntactical and homiletic-aggadic meanings exist simultaneously (cf. Nahmanides' commentary to Gen. 8:4). There are no ontological correlates to these exegetical categories, whereas for Nahmanides there are. On Rashi's view, see S. Kamin, *Rashi's Exegetical Categorization*, pp. 158–208.

29. *Perush*, Gen. 3:22 (p. 42). Cf. Bahya ben Asher, *Be'ur 'al ha-Torah*, Gen. 2:9 (ed. Chavel, 1:67). See *ibid.*, Gen. 18:8, p. 173, where Bahya employs the following saying to emphasize that the literal and esoteric are both true: הגלוי והחשום בהם אמת. See also *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:186, where, after hinting at the esoteric doctrine of transmigration alluded to in Eccles. 1:4, Nahmanides writes: כי דברי שלמה מכופלים בחכמה. See also the anonymous supercommentary to Nahmanides' commentary preserved in MS JTS Mic. 1895, fol. 11b: ... הבין כי נג עוז בארץ. מרמה למטה ורומו למעלה ועץ הדעת הע' ועץ חיים' היא התפא'. The twofold nature of Nahmanides' interpretation of this biblical episode has already been discussed by B. Safran, "Rabbi Azriel and Nahmanides: Two Views of the Fall of Man," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, pp. 88–89. Safran, however, is not careful to distinguish between his usage of the terms "allegorical" and "symbolic," and the reader is left with some confusion as to which term best describes Nahmanides' hermeneutical stance from his point of view. He thus writes: "Nahmanides repeats his contention that the Eden story is *allegorical* ... and goes on to explain that the serpent is *symbolic* of Samael, of Satan. The allegorical identification of the serpent in Sha'ar ha-Gemul corroborates the reader's sense of Nahmanides' direction, 'הדברים כפולים' (p. 89, my emphasis). By understanding Nahmanides' use of the word כפולים in the sense of allegorical versus literal, Safran is led to the conclusion that for Nahmanides "there must be a sense in which the serpent is no serpent." In fact,

*Gemul* (the concluding part of *Torat ha-'Adam*), Nahmanides notes, with respect to all the matters pertaining to the Garden of Eden, that they are twofold because they are images from which one can understand the secret of deep matters, סוד הענין הזה שדברים כפולים . . . כי הם כציורי דבר להבין סוד ענין עמוק, במשל.<sup>30</sup> The realities in the earthly Garden of Eden are “images of the upper secrets,” ציורין לסודות העליונים; indeed, for Nahmanides, the lower realities only take on the names that they have on account of the upper realities, [העליונים] חופסין השם הזה שאלו התחתונים מהם.<sup>31</sup> Nahmanides therefore insists that

however, this interpretation undermines the whole point of Nahmanides' approach. Nahmanides wants to argue that the various elements of the Eden story are true in two senses—*כפולים*—in the literal sense and in a symbolic one. The symbolic meaning does not, however, undermine the literal. In kabbalistic terms, the serpent was a real serpent, but at the same time the serpent symbolizes the force of evil in the upper world, Samael. That this is the correct interpretation can be proven by a close examination of the context in *Sha'ar ha-Gemul*, for after Nahmanides cites chapter 21 of *Pirquei Rabbi 'Eli'ezer* wherein the figurative explanations are given, he stresses from chapter 20 of the same work as well as from other rabbinic contexts that it is clear that the Garden of Eden was an actual garden on the earth, שכל האגדות מפורשות הן, בן עזר שהוא גן ממש בארץ (*Kitvei Ramban*, 2:296). See also the citation below at n. 33, and the passage from *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohit* cited in n. 27. An allegorical reading attributed to Nahmanides that leads to the denial of the reality of a biblical datum, such as that of Safran, simply misses the mark. See above, n. 25, and below, nn. 56 and 60. Indeed the reading of the biblical episode that Safran attributes to Nahmanides is the very one adopted by Abraham Abulafia, who openly rejected the literal meaning of the text and proffered in its place an allegorical one; see Idel, “Kitvei 'Avraham 'Abul'afiyah u-Mishnato, p. 223. R. Solomon ibn Adret was much more favorably disposed to the allegorical mode of exegesis, especially when applied to rabbinic aggadah. Cf. C. Horowitz, “On the Rashba's 'Commentary to the Aggadat'—Between Kabbalah and Philosophy,” *Da'at* 18 (1986): 15–25 [in Hebrew]; D. Horwitz, “The Role of Philosophy and Kabbalah in the Works of Rashba,” pp. 89–118. See, however, *She'elot u-Teshuvot le-RaSHBA* 1:9, where ibn Adret criticizes those philosophers who treat matters in the Torah, such as resurrection of the dead, allegorically when these matters contradict the ways of reason. Ibn Adret's position is that at times verses in the Torah should be taken in an allegorical manner, but when there is a received tradition about a certain matter the literal meaning should not be denied even if it contradicts reason. The function of allegorical exegesis is even stronger in Bahya ben Asher, who incorporated it as one of the four modes of interpretation of Scripture (see below, n. 60). See Idel, “We Have No Tradition,” p. 69. On the kabbalistic aversion to allegorization of Scripture, see the comment of Recanati, *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Miṣvot* (Basel, 1581), fol. 3a: “In every place in the Torah that you can elevate the event or the commandment to an entity higher than it, you must elevate it . . . provided that you do not say that the matter is not as it is in its literal sense but it alludes to [or symbolizes] the thing above it.” Recanati therefore advocates a symbolic reading of the text by means of which a particular narrative or commandment is understood in terms of a higher process, but he cautions against this symbolic reading leading to a denial of the literal sense of the text.

30. *Kitvei Ramban* 2:296–97.

31. Ibid. 2:297. Cf. Joseph Gikatilla, *Sha'arei 'Orah*, ed. J. Ben-Shlomo (Jerusalem 1981), 1:49–51. See also the anonymous commentary on the *sefirot* preserved in MS Paris 770, fol. 62a, where the point is made in language that is close to that of Gikatilla: “Know that man is

one should not merely treat matters pertaining to the lower Garden of Eden allegorically, thereby removing them from reality. On the contrary, he maintains that the mundane realities exist both as entities in themselves and as symbols for the supernal entities in the celestial and divine realms.<sup>32</sup> "For the words of Torah regarding the matter of the Garden of Eden are not parables without [literal] truth, and the words of our rabbis and the tradition of the fathers . . . in these matters are not vain talk or a parable in the figurative sense. Rather everything is true and reliable, the outer and inner, from grade to grade, and from elevation to elevation."<sup>33</sup>

Other examples may be gathered from various places in Nahmanides' commentary to the Torah. Thus, in Gen. 14:18, after explaining that Shalem refers to Jerusalem, Nahmanides notes that it was known through a tradition (קבלה) that "Jerusalem corresponds to the upper temple in which is found the *Shekhinah* of the Holy One, blessed be He, who is called *Sedeq*."<sup>34</sup> Again, in his commentary to Lev. 23:24 Nahmanides notes that the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur allude to the ten *sefirot*. More specifically, the dynamic of these days involves the unification and balancing of the attributes of mercy and judgment,<sup>35</sup> the masculine and feminine

made in the image of the upper *sefirot* . . . for there are upper potencies (כוחות) that are called hand, foot, eye, head, as you find it written in Scripture in many places. . . . So in man there is an eye, a hand, and [other] limbs. And this is [the import of] the saying of the sages, blessed be their memory, 'The Torah speaks in the language of man.' In any event these [*sefirot*] are potencies and not [physical] limbs. Yet the limbs of man are called by [the names of] these potencies. Therefore the limbs of man and his intellect are like the *sefirot*." And cf. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, ed. R. Margaliot (Jerusalem, 1978), §80 and the interpretation thereof in Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov, *Sefer ha-'Emunot* (Jerusalem, 1969), fol. 19b.

32. For Nahmanides, there are actually three levels: the earthly Garden of Eden, the heavenly Garden of Eden in the seventh heaven, 'Aravot, and the upper Eden in the divine realm, the *Shekhinah*, also referred to as the *צרור החיים*, "bundle of life." See *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:160–161, 2:297–298. This structure is found in the Zohar and in the Hebrew theosophic writings of R. Moses de León as well, expressed in language that is derived from Nahmanides. For references, see Moses de León, *Shushan 'Eduṭ*, ed. G. Scholem, *Qoveṣ 'al Yad* n.s. 8 (1976): 350, n. 164. See also I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem, 1970), 1:419–421.

33. *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:298–299: שאין דברי תורה בגן עדן וענינו משל שאינו אמת ואין דברי רבותינו וקבלה: האבות . . . באלו הענינים דברי הבאי או משל בנדר המליצה אלא הכל אמת ואמונה חיצון ופנימי מין מעלה למעלה ומין רוממות לרוממות. See the extended discussion in n. 29. On the technical terms משל and מליצה, see discussion below.

34. *Perush*, Gen. 14:18 (p. 87).

35. According to the classical 'aggadah, the purpose of Israel's blowing the shofar is to change the attribute of judgment into that of mercy; see *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, ed. M. Mandelbaum (New York, 1962), pp. 337, 344; *Leviticus Rabbah* 29:3, ed. Margulies, p. 674;



aspects of God: “Rosh Hashanah is the day of judgment in mercy, and Yom Kippur the day of mercy in judgment.” This kabbalistic truth is alluded to, moreover, by the astrological fact that the sign of this month is Libra, depicted by the scales of balance.<sup>36</sup> Hence, the cosmic phenomenon structurally parallels or mirrors the theosophic reality. In his commentary to Num. 23:1 Nahmanides intimates that the seven altars built by Balak for Balaam symbolize the seven lower *sefirot*, and by means of the sacrifices offered on these altars Balaam sought to cleave to the divine will.<sup>37</sup> The esoteric interpretation of the scriptural reference thus points to an ontological realm that parallels the mundane world. To cite one final example: in his commentary to Gen. 2:20 Nahmanides alludes to a kabbalistic meaning of the word *זאת* in the expression, *וזאת הפעם עצם מעצמי*, “this one at last is bone of my bones” (Gen. 2:23). He refers the reader to his commentary on Deut. 33:1 whence it becomes clear that the word *זאת* is a symbol for *Shekhinah*: *כי* <sup>38</sup>*המלה זאת תרמוז לברכה שהיא התורה והיא הברית*.<sup>39</sup> Now, Nahmanides’ point is

*Midrash Tehilim* 47:2. For the use of this motif in later kabbalistic sources, see references in my *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León’s Sefer ha-Rimmon* (Atlanta, 1988), p. 144, n. 4 (Hebrew section).

36. *Perush*, 23:24 (pp. 153–154). Cf. the parallel in Nahmanides’ sermon for Rosh Hashanah, printed in *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:221. And cf. the anonymous fragment in MS Vat. 214, fol. 6b: *והוא סוד ראש השנה והוא יום דין ברחמים*.

37. *Perush*, Num. 23:1 (p. 293). In *Sha’ar ha-Gemul* (*Kitvei Ramban*, 2:303) Nahmanides reiterates this symbolism but adds that the seven *sefirot* comprehended by the sages in this world are also alluded to in the seven candles of the *menorah*. It is interesting that in his commentary to Num. 23:1 Nahmanides approvingly notes that ibn Ezra had alluded to the mystical meaning of the number seven. For other points of contact with ibn Ezra on kabbalistic matters, see the references given by B. Septimus, “‘Open Rebuke and Concealed Love’: Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition,” in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, pp. 23–24, n. 43. See also Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 387. Yet see the historically revealing remark of Isaac of Acre in *Me’irat ‘Enayim*, pp. 81–82: “R. Abraham [ר”א, i.e., R. Abraham ibn Ezra] did not speak in accordance with the way of kabbalah, which is the way of truth (על דרך הקבלה שהיא דרך האמת), for he was not a kabbalist (מקובל).” R. Isaac’s remarks are based on Nahmanides’ own criticism of ibn Ezra in his commentary to Exod. 13:21. See also Nahmanides’ own comment concerning ibn Ezra in his commentary to Exod. 33:12 (p. 519): “He could not know the truth, for he did not hear it nor did he prophesy (לא שמע ולא ינבא).”

38. See also Nahmanides’ commentary to Exod. 25:3, Lev. 16:2. By contrast the word *זו* is a symbol for the masculine *Yesod*, the sign of the covenant (אות ברית); cf. Nahmanides, Exod. 15:2.

39. *Perush*, Gen. 2:20 (p. 39). On the identification of *Shekhinah* and *Torah*, see also Nahmanides’ commentary to Gen. 1:1. On the identification of *Shekhinah* and *berit*, cf. commentary to Gen. 9:12, 17:9, Deut. 4:21.

clearly not that the *Shekhinah* is created out of earthly Adam, but rather that the mundane creation of Eve from the side (or rib) of Adam reflects the process above of the emanation of the feminine *Shekhinah* out of the masculine *Tiferet*. As it is expressed in the commentary on Nahmanides attributed to Meir ibn Sahula: ורמז הרב בכאן דו פרצופין והבן זה.<sup>40</sup> Elaborating further Shem Tov ibn Gaon writes in his *Keter Shem Tov*:

In the word זאח there is a secret. When you understand the matter of the דו פרצופין then you will know that man alludes to [the attribute of] mercy and the woman to [the attribute of] judgment.<sup>41</sup> The view of the sage [i.e., Nahmanides] is that from man, which is *Tiferet*, was taken 'Aferet [*Shekhinah*], which is זאח.<sup>42</sup>

Lower woman, therefore, reflects and symbolizes the upper woman, *Shekhinah*, and this is the mystical allusion of the biblical expression זאח הפעם.

This ontological parallelism, or in Nahmanides' own language, this duplicity, holds the key to understanding kabbalistic symbolism as well as the effort of kabbalists, including Nahmanides, to link their system to the biblical corpus.<sup>43</sup> Scripture contains, simultaneously, narrative and law, on

40. *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN*, fol. 3a. See also Menaḥem Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1961), Gen. 2:23, fols. 12a–b.

41. Cf. the "Secret of Du-Paršufim" attributed to R. Abraham ben David of Posquières, published by Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* (Tel Aviv, 1948), p. 79: "Adam and Eve were created *du-paršufim*. . . it is well-known that two opposites were emanated, one of them judgment and the other mercy." Cf. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 217–218; I. Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 291, n. 20; and, most recently, Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 128–129.

42. Published in *Ma'or wa-Shemesh*, fol. 29a.

43. The understanding of symbolism in kabbalah has been dominated by Scholem's view of the symbol, which, as is well known, was influenced by Romantic conceptions, particularly those of Goethe. (Cf. D. Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* [Cambridge, 1983], p. 138, n. 108; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 218.) According to Scholem, "the mystical symbol is an expressible representation of something which lies beyond the sphere of expression and communication" (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* [New York, 1956], p. 27). Similar definitions are to be found in Isaiah Tishby (see *Netivei 'Emanah u-Minut* [Jerusalem, 1964], p. 13) and Joseph Dan (see *The Early Kabbalah* [New York, 1986], pp. 9–12). This conception of the symbol implies an unbridgeable gap separating signifier and that which is signified, for the latter forever remains something hidden, inexpressible, out of range of phenomenological discernment. It strikes me, however, that the force of symbols as they are understood by the kabbalists consists precisely in the fact that there is a much closer connection—indeed coincidence—between the *signans* and the *signatum*. The latter are two sides of one coin, the

the one hand, and theosophic truths, on the other.<sup>44</sup> That this is Nahmanides' overriding hermeneutical assumption may be ascertained from a telling remark that he makes in the sermon *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*. After

one reflecting and influencing the reality of the other. (See U. Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* [Bloomington, 1984], p. 130.) There is no inexpressible *signatum* for the kabbalist; on the contrary, words from Scripture (or even later rabbinic texts) can be transformed into symbols precisely because the reality which they symbolize can be so expressed. In the absence of expression there is no symbol except for symbols that depict the inexpressible, such as 'Ein Sof (the Infinite), 'Ayin or 'Efes (i.e., Nothingness), or *Hoshekh* (i.e., Darkness), terms which have the symbolic function of being beyond expressibility and hence beyond symbolization. Where the symbol is something expressible, so too that which is symbolized. In the kabbalistic symbol the gap between abstract and concrete is closed, for there is only one reality with two parallel manifestations. Hence, the choice of particular symbols is not arbitrary but is determined rather by the fact that there is something in the nature of that symbol that informs one about the essential reality of that which is symbolized. For a slightly different formulation, but one which similarly calls into question Scholem's point of view, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 231–232.

44. Here it is worth mentioning again (see above n. 23) that, as is evident from the introduction to the Torah commentary, Nahmanides has besides the theosophic reading of Scripture another mystical tradition based on reading the text as a fabric of divine names. There too Nahmanides upheld the simultaneous veracity of two textual levels, the literal-narrative (דרך קריאתו) and the esoteric-mystical (על דרך השמות). Both ways of reading the text were given to Moses at Sinai, the former in writing and the latter orally. In this case it does not appear that the esoteric reading has anything to do with theosophical symbolism. See, however, Katz, *Halakhah ve-Qabbalah*, p. 30, who assumes that Nahmanides is speaking about theosophic truths in his characterization of the Torah as an amalgam of names. What is not sufficiently worked out in Nahmanides is the relationship between the esoteric and exoteric reading with respect to the question of commandments. Interestingly, Abraham Abulafia, who employed Nahmanides' formulation of the Torah as being a composite of names as a cornerstone for his own hermeneutics (see Idel, "Kitvei R. 'Avraham 'Abula'fiyah u-Mishnato," pp. 177–178; and idem, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 46–47) attempts in some passages to link the esoteric and exoteric levels. See, e.g., *Sitrei Torah*, MS Paris 774, fol. 119a, where the Written Torah is described as the Torah "understood in its plain meaning, all of its matters and commandments," whereas the Oral Torah is the Torah "in its secret meaning . . . having to do with the secret names and the reasons for the commandments." See Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics*, p. 171, n. 88. And cf. *Sitrei Torah*, fol. 125a, cited in Idel, op. cit., p. 55, where the revealed aspect of Torah is identified as the commandment and the concealed aspect as Torah, "for it refers to the entire body of wisdom of this commandment, its purpose and its substance." Hence, in contrast to Nahmanides, at least as one may gather from his writings, Abulafia forges an essential link between the magico-mystical conception of Torah as names and *ja'amei ha-miswot*. Elsewhere Abulafia's formulation is closer to Nahmanides and no explicit relationship is established between the two modes of reading; see 'Osar 'Eden Ganuz, MS Oxford 1580, fols. 26a–b; *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, the first part of the larger commentary on the Pentateuch entitled *Sefer ha-Maftehot* (cf. Idel, "Kitvei R. 'Avraham 'Abula'fiyah," pp. 20–21) preserved in MS JTS Mic. 1686, fols. 96a, 102a. Cf. ibid., fol. 146a.

stating the view, repeated as well in the introduction to the Torah commentary, that all wisdom is contained in Scripture,<sup>45</sup> Nahmanides writes:

45. Cf. *Perush*, Introduction, p. 3. See also Jacob ben Sheshet, *Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, ed. G. Vajda (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 29. And cf. Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, fols. 205b–206a: “Why [are there] thirty-two [paths of wisdom according to *Sefer Yesirah*]? Because the Torah begins with [the letter] *bet* and ends with *lamed* [the consonants equal thirty-two] to teach you that everything is hinted at in the Torah but it is hidden from people, for the secrets of Torah were not transmitted but ‘the secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him’ (Ps. 25:14).” The view that all sciences are contained in the Torah is well-attested in the medieval philosophic literature as well; see H. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, 1947), 1:162–163; I. Twersky, “Some Non-Halakhic Aspects of the Mishneh Torah,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 114–115. Cf. Maimonides, *’Iggeret Teiman*, in *’Iggerot ha-RaMBaM*, ed. J. Kafih (Jerusalem, 1987), p. 22. Idel, “We Have No Tradition,” p. 62, notes the similarity between Maimonides’ and Nahmanides’ views regarding an ancient esoteric lore in Judaism. The crucial difference between the two, apart from the nature of the content of this lore, is with respect to the question of the remnant of this lore in medieval times. In Idel’s mind, according to Maimonides, the tradition was completely lost and thus had to be reconstructed on the basis of philosophic sources; according to Nahmanides, however, there still are traces of this ancient lore lingering on in the tradition and one cannot therefore freely reconstruct it but rather must preserve the authoritative interpretations that we possess. In point of fact, however, at times Maimonides does speak of the ancient lore (consisting of physics and metaphysics) that was neglected and forgotten (cf. *Guide of the Perplexed*, I, 71 and *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Qiddush ha-Hodesh* 17:24; Altmann, “Das Verhältnis Maimunis zur jüdischen Mystik,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 80 [1936]: 315), but at other times he speaks of a residue of this lore in prophetic and rabbinic literature that can be rediscovered through interpretative techniques (cf. *Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction; I, 17; II, 3, 11, 30). Cf. I. Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven, 1980), p. 370, who writes that Maimonides’ “passion for philosophy is thus in a formal sense restorative rather than innovative.” See also S. Rosenberg, “Biblical Exegesis in the *Guide*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 94–95 [in Hebrew]; A. Altmann, “Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics,” in his *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 1987), p. 129 and other references given there in n. 151. Cf. J. L. Teicher, “The Mediaeval Mind,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 6 (1955): 11, who writes that Maimonides’ feeling “that he is only restoring and recovering the lost sciences of the ancient sages” is “typical, not of the Middle Ages, but of the Renaissance.” In truth, however, the tendency to cloak innovation in the garb of traditional authority, and hence to present new insights as a recovery of ancient truth, is very characteristic of the medieval mentality; see the citation from J. Preus given below, n. 156. And cf. L. Berman, “Maimonides, the disciple of Alfarabi,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974): 167, n. 44, who describes Maimonides’ “back projection” of philosophy into rabbinic texts in light of Alfarabi’s thesis that a truly virtuous religion must have been preceded by demonstrative philosophy. Perhaps a more precise way of expressing the difference between Maimonides and Nahmanides would be with respect to the question of constraint on one’s exegetical activity. Whereas Nahmanides restricts the viability of exegesis as a vehicle to establish kabbalistic lore, for these secrets were transmitted orally from Sinai and one therefore requires a teacher to ascertain them, it would seem that Mai-

In any event I am bothered, for I see that the Torah speaks about the account of creation and the wisdom of formation (במעשה בראשית ובהכמת היצירה), but I do not know where it alludes to the account of the chariot. The upper chariot (מרכבה העליונה), which is the knowledge of the Creator (דיעת הבורא), is written in the Torah, but I do not know where there is an allusion in the Torah to the chariot of the palaces (מרכבה של היכלות). Perhaps it was an oral tradition (קבלה) until Ezekiel and Isaiah came and gave it [textual] support.<sup>46</sup>

There is little doubt that the cryptic reference to the upper chariot signifies the sefirotic realm, knowledge of which constitutes theosophic knowledge of God.<sup>47</sup> Theosophic gnosis, therefore, is identified as an esoteric discipline

monides allows for much greater exegetical freedom as long as one's interpretative stance accords with what is known from external sources to be rationally sound.

46. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:163.

47. Cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 207. This identification of the upper chariot with the sefirotic realm also underlies the statement of R. Solomon ibn Adret in his letter to the Jews of Provence to the effect that "things alluded to in the commandments of the Torah [i.e., the kabbalistic *ta'amei ha-miṣvot*] constitute the *ma'aseh merkavah*." The letter is printed in 'Ein *Ya'aqov* to Sukkah 28a, 46b: זהו ענין ריב"ז [ר' יוחנן בן זכאי] שהסתכל בטעמים וזכה להתבונן בהם חזו ענין: המרכבה שהדברים הרמזים במצות התורה הם הם מעשה מרכבה. Cf. J. Katz, *Halakhah ve-Qabbalah*, pp. 73–75; D. Horwitz, "The Role of Philosophy and Kabbalah in the Works of Rashba," pp. 87, 121–125. It must be pointed out that in the context of that letter ibn Adret is attacking the rationalists, who neglected the practical fulfillment of commandments such as prayer and phylacteries and instead were given to the study of philosophic and scientific books. Such people, following Maimonides no doubt, viewed the highest goal to be the study of *ma'aseh merkavah*, or metaphysics. Against them ibn Adret is skillfully pointing out that *ma'aseh merkavah* is essentially the study of the reasons for the commandments which are alluded to and contained (הרמזות ומורכבות) in the actual precepts. (Hence the application of the term מעשה מרכבה to the study of טעמי המצות, for the mystical reasons are comprised—מורכבות—within the particular commandments.) For a discussion of a similar theme in other thirteenth-century kabbalistic sources, see D. Matt, "The Mystic and the Miṣvot," in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Green (New York, 1986), pp. 372–376; and E. Wolfson, "Mystical Rationalization of the Commandments in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 59 (1988). See also *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-RaSHBA* (Jerusalem, 1976), 1:94, where ibn Adret states that every commandment has a body and a soul, the latter being identified with the mystical reason of that particular commandment. And cf. J. Perles, *R. Salomo b. Abraham b. Adereth sein Leben und seine Schriften* (Breslau, 1863), pp. 28–29 (Hebrew section). The centrality of *ta'amei ha-miṣvot* in the kabbalah of Naḥmanides has been pointed out by Idel; see "We Have No Tradition," pp. 63, 67. See, in particular, Naḥmanides' comment in his "Derashah 'al Divrei Kohelet," *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:190. In the context of addressing the issues of creation vs. eternity, Naḥmanides writes: "But [with respect to] these matters and others like them one cannot understand their truth from one's own mind (מדת עצמו) but only through a tradition (טעם המצות בקבלה). This matter is explained in the Torah for whoever has heard the reasons for the commandments through the [mystical], as is fitting. This one receives from

written in the Torah. This metaphysical knowledge is a privilege of the mystic exegete, who knows how to decode scriptural words and episodes as symbolic expressions of the divine realm.

Hence, what is ontological parallelism from one point of view is symbolic accommodation from another.<sup>48</sup> That is, just as on the metaphysical level the divine reality (composed of the dynamic potencies or emanations) is reflected and expresses itself in the mundane world, so too on the textual level the divine is reflected and expresses itself in concrete symbols—culled from Scripture—that are comprehensible to the human mind.<sup>49</sup> The literal meaning thus corresponds to events in this world and the symbolic to events in the divine realm; just as the two realms are parallel so too the two levels of meaning.<sup>50</sup> A classic example of this parallelism *qua* accommodation is to be found in Naḥmanides' remark in his commentary on Gen. 1:3:

Know that the days mentioned in the account of creation were in the creation of heaven and earth actual days (ימים ממש), composed of hours and minutes, and there were six days of activity according to the literal meaning of Scripture (כפשוטו של מקרא). According to the inner sense of the matter (ובפנימיות הענין) the *sefirot* which emanate from above (הספירות האצולות מעליון) are called days, for every utterance that causes existence is called day (כי כל מאמר פועל הויה חקרא)

another until Moses, our teacher, who received from God." The centrality of *ṭa'amei ha-mišwot* in kabbalah is also evident from the oft-cited quote from Meir ibn Sahula's commentary on *Sefer Yeširah* to the effect that kabbalah consists of two disciplines, the doctrine of the *sefirot* and the explication of *ṭa'amei ha-mišwot*. See Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1948), p. 17; Matt, "The Mystic and the Mizwot," p. 377. See also the definition of kabbalah offered by Joseph Jabez in his *Commentary on 'Avot* 3:12 and cited by Matt, op. cit., p. 401, n. 28: "the knowledge of *ṭa'amei ha-mišwot*."

48. For a description of kabbalistic symbolism, see above, n. 43. On the use of accommodation as an exegetical technique in early Christian biblical interpretation, cf. F. L. Battler, "God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity," *Interpretation* 31 (1977): 22–26; Rogers and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, pp. 9–12, 18–19, 27–30, 53–54. For the use of accommodation in Origen, see also R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event* (Richmond, Va., 1959), pp. 226–227. For the analogue to the principle of accommodation in Philonic exegesis and some parallels in rabbinic sources, see H. A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, pp. 115–138.

49. Cf. the passage from the anonymous German Pietistic work, *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, cited in Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 182–183: "And it is the same with all the [divine] *middoth*, and everything that comes to pass in the lower world takes place through them, and this is the secret of the whole Torah and the whole Scripture." On the proximity of the theology of this text to kabbalistic theosophy, see also Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 112; and J. Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidut 'Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 143–156.

50. See citation from *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohit* given above, n. 27.

ים).<sup>51</sup> And there were six [*sefirot*], [as it says] “Yours, Lord, are *greatness, might, [splendor, triumph, and majesty—yes, all that is in heaven and earth]*” (1 Chron. 29:11) [i.e., a reference to the lower six *sefirot*, *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tif’eret*, *Neṣaḥ*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*]. Yet the utterances were ten, for no day is grasped with respect to the first three [of the *sefirot*, *Keter*, *Ḥokhmah*, and *Binah*].<sup>52</sup>

According to Naḥmanides, then, the literal meaning of the creation story is preserved, for there were six actual days, yet these days allude to a process going on in the divine realm.<sup>53</sup> It is not sufficiently clear whether Naḥmanides maintained that the creation of the lower world took place concomitantly with the emanation of the divine grades or whether he maintained that chronologically the divine grades—the upper six days—emanated first and then at the end of the process the lower six days were created.<sup>54</sup> Both possibilities were affirmed by thirteenth-century kabbalists, as was shown by Ephraim Gottlieb.<sup>55</sup> In any event, what is clear is that, for Naḥmanides, there are two distinct but parallel ontological levels that correspond to two levels of meaning in the text.

In this regard Naḥmanides would have assented in form to Maimonides’

51. The ספירה is thus equated with the מאמר, which causes the existence of the הויה, the latter term being a technical reference in Naḥmanides for a cosmic cycle; see his commentary to Lev. 25:2. Naḥmanides’ terminology is based partially on *Sefer ha-Bahir* §158. For a slightly different interpretation of this passage, see M. Idel, “The Sefirot above the Sefirot,” *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 245–246 (in Hebrew). A similar expression occurs in a kabbalistic explanation of the Sinaitic theophany found in a collection of materials, apparently from the school of R. Solomon ibn Adret, extant in several manuscripts, including MSS JTS Mic. 1895, fol. 7a, 1896, fols. 78a–b, and 8124, fol. 5b; מעמד הר סיני היה ב’ ספירות כי י’ דברות נבראו מהם כי כל ספירה וספירה פעלה מאמר. See also MS Oxford 1974, fol. 1a.

52. *Perush*, Gen. 1:3 (p. 16). The six days of creation are interpreted as a symbolic reference to the *sefirot* already in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, §§ 57, 82.

53. For Naḥmanides the six days of creation also prefigure the six millennia of world history. Cf. *Perush* to Gen. 2:3; Exod. 20:11, 21:2; Lev. 23:36, 25:2. Cf. Funkenstein, “Naḥmanides’ Symbolic Reading of History,” p. 140. See also *She’elot u-Teshuvot le-RaSHBA* 1:9 and 423. The theosophical and typological interpretations are brought together by Menahem Recanati in the introduction to his *Sefer Ta’amei ha-Miṣvot*, fol. 3a: “The seven last *sefirot* are the seven days of creation, as is known to the sages of kabbalah. And do not wonder at the fact that the sages of kabbalah said that the secret of the seven days of creation alludes to what was and what will be afterward. This can be understood from what the rabbis, blessed be their memory, said. ‘The world exists for six thousand years and is desolate for one thousand’ [cf. b. Sanhedrin 97a].”

54. For the latter view, see *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 25b. Cf. also Naḥmanides’ commentary to Lev. 18:25 where it is said that the *Shekhinah* (שם הנכבד) created everything and placed the force of the upper realities in the lower ones.

55. Gottlieb, *Mehqarim be-Sifrut ha-Qabbalah*, pp. 18–28.

characterization of scriptural truth as parabolic, for it functions on two indispensable levels, the external shell and the internal core, to use the imagery employed by Maimonides himself.<sup>56</sup> (The key difference lies, of course, in the fact that for Nahmanides the two layers of meaning have objective correlates, i.e., they are ontological as well as epistemological or exegetical categories, whereas for Maimonides they are only the latter.)<sup>57</sup> Indeed, in the introduction to his "Sermon on the Words of Kohelet," Nahmanides describes the nature of the parable in terms highly reminiscent of Maimonides' account in the introduction to the *Guide of the Perplexed*. In addition, he refers in positive terms to a statement of Abraham ibn Ezra from the introduction to his Torah commentary:

As it is said, "For understanding proverb and epigram, the words of the wise and their riddles," להבין משל ומליצה דברי חכמים וחידותם (Prov. 1:6). That is to say, they will understand the proverb (משל) and the epigram (מליצה) which is the literal sense (פשוט), and they will understand the wisdom and the riddle (חכמה וחידה), i.e., the secret (סוד) which is forbidden to explain. Thus the chapter, "A capable woman who can find?" (Prov. 31:10). The external utterance, which is true according to the *peshat* (שהמליצה שהיא כפשוטו אמת), imparts knowledge in matters concerning a good and diligent wife. . . . And it alludes to (or symbol-

56. Cf. *Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction, and I, 71. A clear formulation of the Maimonidean perspective is given by R. Levi ben Abraham ben Hayyim in his *Liwyat Hen*, extant in MS Oxford 1285, fol. 35a. In this regard Teicher's characterization of R. Solomon ibn Adret as one who sought a "compromise between the fundamentalist's view and a selection of some elements of Maimonides' view" is applicable to Nahmanides as well. See Teicher, "The Mediaeval Mind," p. 8. That is to say, Nahmanides employed the Maimonidean esoteric-exoteric distinction in his hermeneutic, but he wished to maintain a fundamentalist reading of the text that unequivocally preserved the literal, historical sense. See above, n. 29.

57. Interesting in this regard is a passage in Abraham Abulafia's *Sitrei Torah*, MS Paris 774, fol. 115a, wherein he tries to uphold the truth of the revealed aspect of Torah, i.e., the literal sense, as well as the concealed aspect, i.e., the mystical sense. The Torah, says Abulafia, "operates on two levels of existence . . . the revealed and concealed aspects." Abulafia then compares the two respectively to the body and the soul. Here it would seem that we have an instance of trying to connect the Maimonidean hermeneutic with ontic categories, or, in Abulafia's terms, "two levels of existence." In fact, however, as Idel has shown, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics*, p. 77, the meaning of this passage is that there is only one reality, and the concealed aspect consists of the fact that this world preexisted. That is to say, the esoteric sense is basically a denial of a traditionalist view of creation. For Maimonides there is one cosmic continuum with the divine agent outside the world; for the kabbalists, by contrast, the divine and cosmic are not only parallel worlds but they are intersecting realms that mutually interact and interpenetrate.



lizes, תרמו)<sup>58</sup> the act of Torah. . . . And it alludes to (or symbolizes) that attribute called 'Aṭarah [i.e., the *Shekhinah*]. . . . And thus R. Abraham [ibn Ezra] wrote in his commentary to the Torah, "In the tree of knowledge the secret is tasty, but things are also true according to their literal sense," ובעץ הדעת סוד ינעם ובפך הדעת סוד ינעם.<sup>59</sup>

In the above passage Nahmanides distinguishes three senses, viz., the literal, the midrashic or homiletical, and the kabbalistic.<sup>60</sup> These three, in

58. On the use of the word רמז in Nahmanides' writings, see below, n. 188.

59. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:180. See also *ibid.* 2:297. For ibn Ezra's passage, see *Perushei ha-Torah le-R. 'Avraham ibn 'Ezra*, ed. A. Weiser (Jerusalem, 1977), 1:7.

60. It is of interest that the one layer of meaning that Nahmanides neglects is precisely the one utilized by Maimonides, viz., the allegorical. Cf. *Guide of the Perplexed* III, 8, where the "capable woman" of Prov. 31:10 is interpreted as an allegorical reference to matter. See also *ibid.* I, 34, where "Do not give your strength to women" (Prov. 31:3) is interpreted as a reference to material or sensual pursuits. Cf. *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot De'ot* 4:19. If one were to add the allegorical to Nahmanides' list, then one would have a striking example of the four levels of meaning that one finds explicitly for the first time in kabbalistic sources from the end of the thirteenth century. See W. Bacher, "L'exégèse biblique dans le Zohar," *Revue des études juives* 22 (1891): 37–39; P. Sandler, "On the Problem of Pardes," *Festschrift for E. Auerbach* (Jerusalem, 1955), pp. 223–235 [in Hebrew]; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1969), pp. 53–61; A. Van der Heide, "Pardes: Methodological Reflections on the Theory of the Four Senses," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 34 (1983): 147–159; F. Talmage, "Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism," in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages*, pp. 319–321. On Nahmanides' general avoidance of allegory as an exegetical technique, see Scholem, *op. cit.*, p. 53, and *idem*, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 386. And see above nn. 29 and 56. Scholem's description of Nahmanides is, of course, one specific example of his overall position that the medieval kabbalists employed symbols in place of the allegories utilized by the philosophers. See e.g., Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 26–27; *Origins*, p. 407. Scholem's allegory-symbol schematization, based as it is on the Romantic model of Goethe, has been criticized by several scholars. See E. Schweid, "Mysticism and Judaism according to Gershom Scholem: A Critical Analysis," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Supplement 2 (1983): 18–20 [in Hebrew]; M. Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 220, n. 62; Uri Shoham, *Ha-Mashma'ut ha-'Aheret* (Tel Aviv, 1982), pp. 61–64; Talmage, "Apples of Gold," p. 341; and Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 218–219. Notwithstanding the need to revise Scholem's oversimplified schema, it seems to me that his characterization is accurate as far as Nahmanides goes, although this does not imply that Nahmanides never relies on the mode of allegorical exegesis (see, e.g., *Perush*, Gen. 6:6, to be discussed below). For an example of Nahmanides' rejection of allegorical interpretation, see *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:24. Nahmanides rejects the philosophers who allegorically explain Satan, the angel of death, or the evil inclination (identified as such by Resh Laqish; see b. Baba Batra 16a) as a reference to the material principle in the world. "The sages of Israel attributed to him [i.e., Satan] all these names because of their conviction that he is an existing angel and not some natural phenomenon or force." For a discussion of some of the sources in which this allegorical conception of Satan is found, see M. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany, 1988), pp.

turn, fall under a twofold classification between the external and internal sense, the literal corresponding to the former, and the homiletical together with the kabbalistic to the latter. It is important here to keep in mind the technical philosophical terminology upon which Nahmanides is drawing: he is using *mashal* and *meliṣah* synonymously to refer to the external sense or that which is uttered or expressed,<sup>61</sup> whereas *hokhmah* and *ḥidah* are used to connote the internal sense and hence the *sod* of the matter. In other contexts,

34–35. See also D. Silver, “Nachmanides’ Commentary on the Book of Job,” p. 15, who has pointed out that in his comments to Job 1:1 Nahmanides emphasizes the historicity of this biblical episode and thereby tacitly rejects the allegorical line of interpretation suggested by the rabbis and reinforced by Maimonides. Finally, in *Sha’ar ha-Gemul, Kitvei Ramban*, 2:283, Nahmanides affirmed the actual existence of Gehenna as a distinct locality. This stands in marked contrast to Maimonides’ interpretation of Gehenna as an allegory for an individual’s punishment. Maimonides was already attacked for this allegorical interpretation by Meshullam ben Solomon Dapiera; see H. Brody, “Poems of Meshullam ben Solomon Dapiera,” *Studies of the Research Institute for Hebrew Poetry in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 1938), 4:17. A mediating position between Maimonides and Nahmanides was attempted by ibn Adret; see discussion in D. Horwitz, “The Role of Philosophy and Kabbalah in the Works of Rashba,” pp. 105–107. Nahmanides’ upholding of a literal reading of Scripture and his frequent rejection of allegorical interpretations thus has to be seen as a reaction to Jewish rationalistic tendencies. It should be noted that other Jewish exegetes, especially in the Franco-German orbit, e.g., Joseph Bekhor Shor, Solomon ben Meir, David Kimḥi, Meir ben Simeon, and the anonymous author of *Sefer ha-Maskil*, reacted to both Jewish and Christian allegorists. See S. Stein, *Jewish-Christian Disputations in Thirteenth-Century Narbonne* (London, 1969), p. 11; F. Talmage, *David Kimhi: The Man and the Commentaries* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 82–83; E. E. Urbach, *Ba’alei ha-Tosafot* (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 135–136; I. Ta-Shema, “*Sefer ha-Maskil*—An Unknown Text from the End of the Thirteenth Century,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2 (1982/83): 416–438 [in Hebrew]; E. Touitou, “Peshat and Apologetics in the RaSHBaM’s Commentary on the Biblical Stories of Moses,” *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 227–238 [in Hebrew]; idem, “The Exegetical Method of RaSHBaM in the Light of the Historical Background of His Time,” *Iyyunim be-Sifrut HaZal ba-Miqra’ u-ve-Toledot Yisra’el* (Ramat-Gan, 1982): 51–74 [in Hebrew]; S. Kamin, “The Polemic against Allegory in the Commentary of Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1983/84): 367–392 [in Hebrew]; M. Haran, “Midrashic Exegesis and the Peshat, and the Critical Approach in Bible Research,” in *Studies in Judaica*, ed. M. Bar-Asher (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 76–77 [in Hebrew]. For the interchange between Jewish and Christian exegetes in this area and in this period, see especially B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 103 ff.; A. Grabois, “The *Hebraica Veritas* and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century,” *Speculum* 50 (1975): 619–626.

61. Cf. I. Efros, *Philosophical Terms in the Moreh Nebukhim* (New York: 1924), p. 82, s.v. משל. Efros refers to the *Guide of the Perplexed* II, 29 and 57, where משל ראשון means primary or literal meaning. On the Arabic root underlying the medieval usage of מליצה for the external sense or utterance, cf. H. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge, 1929), p. 639. The usage is also found in a passage in the *Sefer ha-Maskil* cited in I. Ta-Shema, “*Sefer ha-Maskil*,” p. 422, n. 16. See also below, n. 219.

as we shall see below, Naḥmanides follows standard medieval Hebrew usage and distinguishes between *mashal* and *melīṣah*, using them to refer respectively to the parabolic or figurative and literal sense.<sup>62</sup> With respect to the word *ḥidah* Naḥmanides somewhat departs from accepted philosophical convention, according to which *ḥidah* was used interchangeably with *mashal* to refer to allegory.<sup>63</sup> According to Naḥmanides, then, the text contains *mashal* and *melīṣah* on the one hand, and *hokhmah* and *ḥidah*, on the other. These are not to be construed as mutually exclusive phenomena. Naḥmanides wants to preserve both the literal and the symbolic as simultaneously valid readings of the text.

Naḥmanides expresses this dual nature in several places in his biblical commentary and other writings, particularly with respect to the relationship between *peshaṭ* and *midrash* or '*aggadah*.'<sup>64</sup> That Naḥmanides used these

62. On *משל* in the sense of allegory or figurative meaning in Naḥmanides, see also citation from *Sha'ar ha-Gemul* above, n. 33. And cf. Efros, *Philosophical Terms*, p. 80, s.v. *מרץ*. To be sure, although this usage became widespread in medieval Hebrew literature, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the word *משל* was used in the sense of allegory already in classical midrashic literature; see S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1962), p. 68, and other references given there in n. 170.

63. See, for instance, the introduction of Abraham ibn Ezra to his *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, ed. Weiser, 1:6. On the words *mashal* and *ḥidah* as synonyms for allegory in Maimonides, see *Guide*, Introduction; *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 8:2, and *Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:1. Cf. Bacher, *Ha-RaMBaM Parshan ha-Miqra'*, pp. 19–20, n. 6. See also the comments of Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, p. 55, n. 2. And cf. Joseph ben Isaac Bekhor Shor, *Perush 'al ha-Torah* (London 1956), Num. 12:8, p. 78 (for a detailed analysis of this passage, see S. Kamin's article mentioned above n. 60). For some kabbalists *mashal* was used in the sense of kabbalistic symbol. See Judah ben Yaqar, *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, ed. S. Yerushalmi (Jerusalem, 1979), pt. 1, p. 98, who comments on the *merkavah* tradition of the image of Jacob inscribed on the Throne in these words: *וכל זה דרך משל וסוד*; and see *Perush 'al Shir ha-Shirim*, *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:481, where R. Ezra of Gerona says about the term wine: *קבלנו כמו כן כי הוא משל על החכמה* (cf. Vajda's French translation, *Le commentaire d'Ezra de Gérone sur le Cantique des Cantiques* [Paris, 1969], p. 48: "symbolisent la Sagesse"). See also R. Ezra's comment in *Perush ha-'Aggadat le-R. 'Azriel*, ed. I. Tishby (Jerusalem, 1949), p. 12: *ענין עטרה הוא משל כי ענין עטרה הוא משל*. Cf. MS JTS Mic. 1878, fol. 25a. To be sure, in other contexts R. Ezra employs the word *משל* in the sense of allegory; cf. *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:480: *הנשיקה משל לדביקות הנשמה*. This latter example has already been noted by Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 219. See also Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-'Eshkol*, ed. J. Kaufman (New York, 1926), p. 143, where *משל*, *מליצה*, and *חידה* refer respectively to allegory, the literal sense, and kabbalistic meaning. It seems to me that this division reflects Naḥmanides' usage.

64. For references, see Perles, "Ueber den Geist des Commentars des R. Moses ben Nachman zum Pentateuch," p. 120, n. 2; Septimus, "Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," p. 23, n. 41.

latter two terms interchangeably can be seen from his famous statement about the status of *'aggadah* at the Barcelona disputation, to be discussed more fully below: "We have besides [Bible and Talmud] a third [kind of] book called *midrash*, that is to say, sermons. . . . We also call this [kind of] book *'aggadah* . . . that is to say, they are merely things that one man tells another."<sup>65</sup> I would like to focus particularly on a comment that Naḥmanides makes in his notes to the second principle in the introduction to Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Miṣwot*. In the context of that principle, which is essentially Maimonides' view that not every *miṣwah* derived from Scripture on the basis of the thirteen hermeneutical principles or by amplification (רבי) is to be counted in the class of 613 divine commandments (i.e., biblical precepts) given to Moses at Sinai, Maimonides notes that sometimes the rabbis derived laws from Scripture without any textual basis. This procedure, argues Maimonides, goes against the rabbinic dictum אין מקרא יוצא מדי פשוטו, a biblical verse should never lose its literal sense.<sup>66</sup> In reaction to

65. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:308. The interchangeability of the words מדרש and אגדה is by no means unique to Naḥmanides. See, e.g., Abraham ben Isaac of Narbonne, *Sefer ha-'Eshkol*, ed. B. H. Auerbach (Halberstadt, 1868), pt. 2, p. 47. See also the sources cited in Talmage, *David Kimḥi: The Man and the Commentaries*, pp. 74–76.

66. Cf. b. Shabbat 63a; Yevamot 11b and 24a. Of the many discussions concerning this rabbinic principle, see in particular I. Frankel, *Peshaṭ in Talmudic and Midrashic Literature* (Toronto, 1956), pp. 71–77; R. Loewe, "The 'Plain' Meaning of Scripture in Early Jewish Exegesis," pp. 164–167; S. Kamin, *Rashi's Exegetical Categorization*, pp. 37–43. Maimonides' position is that in the case of an explicit tradition that is traced back to Mosaic revelation at Sinai it is possible for a halakhic exegesis to take the verse in a nonliteral way. The limitation on nonliteral exegesis is only applicable in those cases where there is no explicit tradition. Cf. Maimonides' introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, *Seder Zera'im*, in *Mishnah 'im Perush ha-RaMBaM*, ed. Kafih, pp. 9–10, where he makes clear that those laws which are considered הלכה למשה מסיני cannot be derived on the basis of the hermeneutical principles nor is there any allusion to them in Scripture. Cf. Maimonides' commentary to Nazir 4:7, in Kafih ed., *Seder Nashim*, p. 123: "this law has no allusion (רמז) in Scripture but is only a tradition (קבלה)." A similar formulation appears in Maimonides' commentary to Sanhedrin 6:6, ed. Kafih, *Seder Neziqin*, p. 119. And see Maimonides' commentary to Kelim 17:12, ed. J. Kafih, *Seder Toharot*, p. 100: "Whatever is not explained in the language of the Torah (בלשון התורה) is called 'from the words of the scribes' (מרברי סופרים), and [this includes] even those things which are laws [given] to Moses at Sinai (הלכה למשה מסיני), for the meaning of [the expression] 'from the words of the sages' is that the matter is either a scribal tradition [קבלת הסופרים], but see the alternative reading from the standard printed edition cited by Kafih, n. 26, which has דעה instead of קבלה as all the explanations and laws that were received (המקובלות) from Moses, or a scribal amendment (תקן סופרים), as all the amendments and decrees." Extrabiblical scribal traditions thus comprise two categories for Maimonides: either that which was received from Moses

Maimonides, Nahmanides emphasizes that with respect to biblical interpretations connected with halakhic matters the verse does not lose its literal sense (המדרשים כולם בענין המצות אין בה מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו) because all these interpretations are contained in the language of the text (כולם בלשון הכתוב) (נכללים).<sup>67</sup> Nahmanides goes on to contrast his conception of *peshat* with both those “who lack knowledge of the language” (חסרי דעת הלשון)—or, according to another reading, the “language of those who lack knowledge” (בלשון חסרי דעת)—and the Karaites, referred to as the צדוקים, i.e., the Sadducees. While it is not entirely clear to whom Nahmanides refers by the first category, I would suggest that Nahmanides may be attacking those who would limit *peshat* to the *sensus literalis* as established purely on philological grounds, i.e., on the basis of the grammatical and syntactical construction of Scripture. Like the Karaites, such a group would fail to see that Scripture is multilayered and that rabbinic interpretations are themselves part of the text. In Nahmanides’ words: “the text contains everything (הכתוב יכול הכל) . . . for the book of God’s Torah is complete (כי ספר תורה ה’ חמימה), there is no extra word in it nor any lacking, everything was written in wisdom.”<sup>68</sup> Rabbinic interpretations, therefore, are to be seen as organically connected to, or anchored in, the text and not as some external imposition upon it. Here we have a striking example of a phenomenon noted already by Bernard Septimus: Nahmanides advanced the Andalusian tradition of *peshat* “by broadening the conception of interpretation” to include rabbinic, halakhic, and aggadic, as well as kabbalistic, modes of explanation.<sup>69</sup> This is not to

or that which was instituted by the sages. Concerning the latter, see the monograph by J. Neubauer, *Ha-RaMBaM 'al Divrei Soferim* (Jerusalem, 1957). See also the commentary of R. Aryeh Leib Horowitz, *Margenitav Tava*, to *Sefer ha-Miṣwot* (Jerusalem, 1985), 18b, s.v., כללו של דבר.

67. I am citing from Chavel’s edition, *Sefer ha-Miṣwot leha-RaMBaM we-hassagot ha-RaMBaM* (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 44. On Nahmanides’ interpretation of this principle, see Kamin, *Rashi’s Exegetical Categorization*, p. 38. Nahmanides, of course, recognized that certain rabbinic rulings exceeded biblical law; see, e.g., his commentary to Lev. 19:19, where he distinguishes two types of law, one whose basis is דברי סופרים and the other whose basis is דברי תורה. And cf. *ibid.*, Deut. 4:2, where Nahmanides follows Maimonides’ opinion regarding the legal status of *taqqanot* (cf. *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Mamrim* 2:9).

68. *Sefer ha-Miṣwot*, loc. cit.

69. B. Septimus, “Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition,” p. 18. It is of interest to note that Abraham Abulafia expresses the notion that the Written Torah comprises three subjects: מקרא משנה חלמוד; see Idel, “Kitvei R. 'Avraham 'Abul'afiyah,” pp. 178–179, 222 (and cf. now idem, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 48–49). Of particular relevance to my

say, of course, that in Nahmanides' opinion every rabbinic statement may be considered to contribute substantially to the *peshat* of the verse. On the contrary, any careful reader of Nahmanides' biblical commentary is well aware of the fact that he distinguishes different methodological approaches to the text, and on occasion flatly rejects aggadic or midrashic explanations (a point to be discussed further on) on grounds that they do not edify the literal sense of the text. Indeed, Nahmanides goes on to say, in the very context that we are discussing, that the rabbinic dictum *אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו* refers to incidents wherein the rabbis, through their halakhic interpretations, "uprooted the literal sense completely" *שהם עוקרים בכאן הפשט לגמרי*. The key point is, however, that for Nahmanides both contextual and midrashic (used now in the broad sense of the term) meanings are to be found in the text: "the verses of Scripture are true literally and figuratively," *הכתובים אמת במליצה ומשל*.<sup>70</sup> He therefore embraces the form of the Maimonidean hermeneutic, even in the context of criticizing Maimonides:

Thus is the matter in every place interpreted by them [i.e., the rabbis] with respect to the figurative and literal sense (*בכל מקום הנדרש להם בענין משל ומליצה*), they believed that both were true, the internal and the external (*שניהם אמת פנימי*) *אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו* (and *וחיצון*). . . . And this is [the meaning] of their dictum *אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו*, i.e., a verse should not lose its literal sense; they did not say, *אין מקרא אלא כפשוטו*, i.e., the verse is only according to its literal sense. We have rather the interpretation [of the verse] together with its literal sense (*יש לנו מדרשו עם פשוטו*), and it

analysis is a passage from *Sefer ha-Hokhmot* cited by Idel, "Kitvei R. 'Avraham 'Abul'afiyah," p. 222, for the view expressed by Abulafia resembles Nahmanides' position. According to Abulafia the Torah is given in three ways that correspond to the *פשט* (literal), *פירוש* (interpretative or explanatory), and *דרש* or *אגדה* (homiletical and legendary or mythical). "It was necessary for the Torah to perfect the house of the righteous by means of these three ways. The first ones are dependent on the literal sense (*פשט*). . . . The second is its [i.e., the verse's] interpretation (*פירושו*), for even the words of interpretation (*דברי הפירוש*) are in accordance with their literal sense (*כפשוטם*). And the third are the homiletical and legendary [or mythical] (*הדרש והאגדה*) when they too are understood according to their literal sense (*כפשוטם*). . . . It is appropriate to include all three ways in the first name, since all are the *פשט*." For a different rendering in English, see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 90. Mention should also be made of Isaac ibn Latif's somewhat unusual classification of the four methods of scriptural interpretation: the literal (*דקדוק המלות*), which comprises grammatical meaning; the aggadic, which is identified as *פשט*; the allegorical (*משל*); and the mystical (*דרש*). See S. O. Heller-Wilensky, "Isaac Ibn Latif—Philosopher or Kabbalist?" *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann, p. 210.

70. *Sefer ha-Miṣwot*, loc. cit.

should not lose either of them. On the contrary, Scripture must bear everything, and both [the literal and figurative] are true.<sup>71</sup>

This notion of two layers of meaning embedded in the text is the basic hermeneutical principle underlying Naḥmanides' approach to Scripture. Whatever ancient teachings he was working with, if any, were channeled through this understanding of the text. The Torah could yield at once historical and metaphysical truths. There are, in particular, two critical relationships that must be examined against the background that I have laid in the first section, viz., the relation between literal and esoteric, and, secondly, the relation between Naḥmanides' kabbalistic allusions and the interpretation of relevant aggadic sources. It is to these two themes that we must now turn our attention.

## II

At this juncture it would be beneficial to take up the issue of the relationship between *peshat* and *sod* in Naḥmanides' thought. Several scholars have addressed the question of *peshat* versus *sod*, literal versus esoteric, in Naḥmanides' biblical exegesis, though a comprehensive treatment is still wanting. Funkenstein maintained that there is only one place in Naḥmanides' commentary where *peshat* and *sod* overlap or correspond, viz, the rationale for sacrifices offered at Lev. 1:9.<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere *peshat* and *sod* are, in Funkenstein's words, "quite divergent—at times even grammatically so."<sup>73</sup> Bernard Septimus and David Berger, by contrast, have pointed out in independent studies that in many instances kabbalah and the search for *peshat* converge in Naḥmanides. Septimus, for his part, lists thirteen instances of this phenomenon in the Torah commentary and suggests that it "requires separate treatment."<sup>74</sup> Berger, noting some of these examples and adding a few more both from the commentary and other works of Naḥmanides, concludes, contra Funkenstein, that "Naḥmanides displays a pronounced

71. Ibid., p. 45.

72. Cf. Gen. 2:8 (p. 35).

73. Funkenstein, "Naḥmanides' Symbolical Reading of History," p. 133.

74. Septimus, "Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," p. 21, n. 37.

tendency to equate *peshat* and *sod* by finding that the plain meaning of Scripture can be explained satisfactorily—or most satisfactorily—only by resorting to kabbalistic doctrine.”<sup>75</sup>

From my own examination of the relevant sources it has become clear that the critique of Funkenstein’s position by Septimus and Berger is correct, for the sharp distinction between *peshat* and *sod* in Nahmanides suggested by Funkenstein cannot be upheld. On the other hand, the relationship of these two layers of meaning in all the cases noted by Septimus and Berger is not identical. A detailed analysis of the relevant sources reveals certain nuances that deserve more careful attention. In those cases in Nahmanides’ commentary where there appears to be an overlapping of *peshat* and *sod*, and where the latter does indeed connote a kabbalistic truth,<sup>76</sup> I have been able to demarcate two main lines of orientation. In some

75. Berger, “Miracles and the Natural Order in Nahmanides,” in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides*, p. 112, n. 19.

76. In fact, it is not at all evident that Nahmanides consistently employs the term *sod* to refer to kabbalistic truth. Cf. Nahmanides’ commentary to Lev. 16:8 (cited by Septimus) where the secret of the matter (סוד הענין) of the scapegoat to Azazel, based on ibn Ezra’s esoteric explanation, is explained as an offering on behalf of God to the force of destruction in the world that is connected with Mars in the celestial realm, with Esau (i.e., Christianity) in the earthly realm, with goats in the animal kingdom, and with demonic forces that Scripture refers to as שַׂעִירִים (satyrs). It is interesting to note as well that in that context Nahmanides approvingly cites ibn Ezra’s Neoplatonic position. See parallel in *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:165, where Nahmanides’ refers to ibn Ezra’s סוד and calls it the plain meaning, דבר פשוט. And cf. *Perush*, Lev. 18:25, where the “secret of the matter,” סוד הדבר, refers to a mystical—though not kabbalistic—idea rooted in older aggadic sources; the text is discussed below. See also the commentary to Lev. 23:17. In another case, not noted by Berger or Septimus, in his commentary to Num. 21:9 Nahmanides explains the “secret of the matter” (בסוד הדבר) concerning the serpent of brass made by Moses as a reference to the medical principle that illness is sometimes healed by means of the cause of the sickness. Such a principle does not seem to me to have anything uniquely or intrinsically kabbalistic about it, even though kabbalists may have employed some such view in their theosophic systems. See the commentary of Menahem Recanati to Num. 21:8, fol. 77d. Recanati cites the “esoteric” interpretation (*sod*) of Nahmanides and calls it *peshat*; אלה דברי הרב ז”ל ונכונים הם לפי הפשט. Recanati goes on to suggest, in contrast to Nahmanides’ view, an esoteric interpretation based on a zoharic passage (cf. Zohar 3:130b). Cf. Perles, “Ueber den Geist des Commentars des R. Moses ben Nachman zum Pentateuch,” p. 118, n. 6. See also Isaac of Acre, *Me’irat Einayim*, p. 201: “I am astounded at the RaMBaN, blessed be his memory, for he mentions a secret (סוד) in connection with this matter [i.e., the brass serpent of Num. 21:8] but does not allude to any secret. . . . Perhaps the Rabbi [Nahmanides] called even a physical entity (דבר טבעי) a secret, since they are hidden from the many.” It should be noted that R. Isaac also offers his own kabbalistic interpretation: the brass serpent symbolized the unity of mercy and judgment, for through it God had the power to both heal and wound. And cf. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:262 where we find the expression סוד החשבון used to designate the secret of messianic computation. See, by contrast, Scholem’s unqualified statement in *Origins*, p. 387: “Authors like Ezra and



instances the literal and mystical meanings overlap because there is only one textual dimension, whereas in other instances there is an overlapping but the text allows for two levels, exoteric and esoteric. In the former there is a complete identity between *peshat* and *sod* in the realm of exegesis which refers to only one distinct reality outside the text; in the latter there is no such identity in the realm of exegesis but only an overlapping that allows for two levels of meaning—literal and mystical—which refer to two levels of reality—mundane and divine. In what follows I will provide detailed examples from Nahmanides' commentary for each of these typologies.

1. I will begin by discussing some of the contexts where this overlapping of *peshat* and *sod* actually implies a form of identification. In such cases, it seems, we are dealing with only one possible interpretation, with only one textual dimension. That is, the text can only be understood in one way, for the literal sense is only explicable by means of kabbalistic truths. In these instances, then, Nahmanides transmits kabbalistic truths as if he were explicating the literal sense of the text. Thus, for example, Nahmanides' understanding of the narrative in Gen. 38 concerning levirate marriage is such that the *peshat* of the text is speaking about the esoteric tradition concerning transmigration of the soul.<sup>77</sup> There is no other way to read the text but in this light: the *sod* of *yibbum* constitutes the narrative stuff of the biblical tale. As was noted above, Funkenstein already observed that in his commentary to Lev. 1:9, "And the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on the altar, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the Lord," Nahmanides equates the literal and mystical meaning, particularly with respect to the term *עלה אשה*. Nahmanides takes issue with ibn Ezra's rendering of the expression *אשה* as an adjective describing the word *הכל* in the verse, i.e., the whole—everything sacrificed by the priest—went up in the fire, and suggests instead that it should be taken in the nominative form, i.e., an offering by (or of) the fire.

The whole matter is explained in the Torah in which it is said, "My offering,

Nahmanides . . . understood by *sod* only that which, in their circle, had already become the subject of a kabbalistic tradition." See also D. Horwitz, "The Role of Philosophy and Kabbalah in the Works of Rashba," pp. 100–101, who writes that "the word *sod* according to Rashba (as according to Ramban) had a specific connotation: the sefirotic doctrine of the Gerona school." It can be shown, at least in the case of Nahmanides, that this characterization is not borne out by the textual evidence.

77. The same may be said about Nahmanides' reading of Job 32:3 in his commentary *ad loc.*; see Berger, "Miracles and the Natural Order," p. 112., n. 19. See also Katz, *Halakhah we-Qabbalah*, p. 31.

My food, as offerings by fire” *את קרבני לחמי לאישי* (Num. 28:2), and it says, “the food of the fire [offering]” *לחם אשה* (Lev. 3:12), for they [the sacrifices] are food for the fire (*לחם לאשה*), and from it to the [forces of] fire (*לאש*), and the word *אשה* is from the word *אש*. . . . The word *אשה* is a noun like the word *אש*, and [the expression] *עולה אשה* (cf. Lev. 1:9) is [to be rendered] as *עולת אשה* [i.e., an offering of fire] “of pleasing odor to the Lord” (ibid.), and so are all such expressions, for their meaning is like *לחם אשה* [i.e., the food of the fire offering, the word *אשה* being therefore a noun]. It does not say, however, *אש* but rather *אשה* in accordance with its literal sense (*כמשמעו*), “as you were shown on the mountain” (Exod. 27:8) at the giving of the Torah, and this is the sacrifice with the attribute of judgment.<sup>78</sup>

This complicated exegesis serves as part of Nahmanides’ effort to resolve the apparent tension between those biblical passages related to matters pertaining to sacrifices that employ the name Elohim, or any of its derivatives such as El, Elohekha, Elohehem, and so on, and the rabbinic teaching, attributed to Simeon ben Azai,<sup>79</sup> that in the scriptural mentioning of sacrifices only the Tetragrammaton is employed. The resolution of this conflict involves a kabbalistic truth regarding the unity of the two attributes symbolized by the two names. That is to say, by its nature the sacrifice derives from the side of judgment, referred to by the name Elohim and symbolized by the fire, but the requirement is to sacrifice to the attribute of mercy, referred to by the Tetragrammaton. By means of this kabbalistic notion Nahmanides can resolve the obvious textual inconsistencies with the rabbinic generalization. It is perfectly sensible for Scripture to employ Elohim, or any of the names associated with it philologically, in connection with sacrifices, because the nature of the sacrifice is such that it is related to this divine attribute;<sup>80</sup> on the other hand, the mandate is to sacrifice to the attribute of mercy so that the two attributes will be united.<sup>81</sup> The crucial point for this analysis is that in this context Nahmanides relies on a kabbalistic motif—the essential connection of sacrifice and the attribute of judgment—to explain the literal

78. *Perush*, Lev. 1:9 (p. 13).

79. Cf. b. Menahot 110a; *Sifre Be-Midbar*, pisqa 143.

80. Cf. *Perush*, Lev. 23:17; “for sacrifices are to the will of the honorable name, *שם הנכבד*, [i.e., the *Shekhinah*].”

81. See *ibid.*, where the need to combine the attributes of mercy and judgment is also connected to the act of sacrifices. For a study of a similar motif in much earlier sources, see Y. Baer, “The Service of the Sacrifice in Second Temple Times,” *Zion* 40 (1975): 95–153 [in Hebrew].

meaning of the biblical expression, עולה אשה, and indeed on the basis of it rejects the view proffered by ibn Ezra.

To take a few other examples from the Torah commentary where Nahmanides unequivocally understands the *sensus literalis* of the biblical narrative in terms of kabbalistic theosophy. In his commentary to Exod. 14:19, "The angel of God (מלאך האלהים), who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, now moved and followed behind them," Nahmanides rejects ibn Ezra's explanation that the angel of God refers to the "great prince" (שר הגדול), i.e., the archangel Michael,<sup>82</sup> arguing instead as follows:

In my opinion that which Scripture said, "The angel of God now moved," occurred at the beginning of the night, and "the angel of God who had been going ahead of the Israelite army" alludes to the Court of the Holy One, blessed be He, for the attribute of judgment is called angel in certain places in Scripture. It was this [attribute] which dwelled in the pillar of fire that went before them in the night to give them light. Therefore [Scripture] mentions [in this case] Elohim [the name that denotes the attribute of judgment]. It is possible that [the word angel, מלאך, in the expression מלאך האלהים] is not in the construct state [i.e., the angel of Elohim] but rather is in apposition [i.e., the angel who is Elohim].<sup>83</sup>

We see, therefore, that Nahmanides rejects ibn Ezra's interpretation of the expression מלאך האלהים as a reference to an angelic being because, in his opinion, it refers rather to one of the divine attributes, the attribute of judgment, the *Shekhinah*, also designated the Court of the Holy One, blessed be He, בית דינו של הקב"ה.<sup>84</sup> Hence מלאך האלהים should be read in the appositive, i.e., the angel *who* is Elohim, and not in the constructive, i.e., the angel *of* Elohim,<sup>85</sup> for here, as in several other contexts in Nahmanides' commen-

82. Cf. ibn Ezra's commentary to Exod. 23:20 (ed. Weiser, 2:162); and see Nahmanides' commentary to Exod. 33:12.

83. *Perush*, Exod. 14:19 (p. 351).

84. The notion of the court of God has its origin in rabbinic *'aggadah*. Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 51:2 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 533); *Exodus Rabbah* 12:4. For Nahmanides, as other kabbalists, the reference is to the *Shekhinah*, the attribute of judgment. Cf., e.g., *Perush* to Gen. 19:24, Exod. 13:21, Num. 15:25; Deut. 8:18.

85. Cf. Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 82: מלאך האלהים אינו נסמך לומר מלאך של אלהים אלא מוכרת שהוא ביאור מלאך ומהו מלאך זה האלהים מלאך שהוא אלהים. And see *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN*, fol. 13a; Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, fol. 43b, who adds the numerological equivalence of מלאך and האלהים, i.e., both words equal 91.

tary,<sup>86</sup> the word angel denotes the last of the divine emanations, the *Shekhinah*, rather than some created entity, even if that entity be a separate intellect.<sup>87</sup> When Scripture speaks of the pillar of fire that illuminated the way for the Israelites during the nighttime, it is referring to a physical manifestation of this very attribute of God and not to some symbolic correlate. Analogously, the pillar of cloud which accompanied the people in the daytime refers to the divine attribute of mercy, the Holy One, blessed be He. This is made clear in Nahmanides' commentary to Exod. 13:21, "The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day."

They [the rabbis] have already said that in every place [in Scripture] that it says "And the Lord" (וה') it refers to God and His court (הוא ובית דינו).<sup>88</sup> The Holy One, blessed be He [i.e., the masculine potency or the attribute of mercy], was with them in the daytime and His Court [i.e., the feminine potency or the attribute of judgment] in the night. Thus the explanation of the verse (פירוש הכתוב) is that God [literally, the Name, השם, clearly a reference to the Tetragrammaton or the attribute of mercy]<sup>89</sup> dwelled in the cloud and went before them in the day in the pillar of cloud, and in the night His Court dwelled in the pillar of fire to give them light. . . . In the first redemption the Holy One, blessed be He, was with them in the day and His Court was with them in the night, but in the future the attribute of His Court will ascend in mercy (תעלה מדת בית דינו ברחמים), and the Lord, i.e., the Tetragrammaton (שם המיוחד), will go before them . . . for the All [i.e., the *Shekhinah*]<sup>90</sup> will be united with the attribute of mercy (מיחדת רחמים במדת רחמים).<sup>91</sup>

86. Cf. *Perush* to Gen. 18:1, to be discussed below. In several places the *Shekhinah* is also designated as the מלאך הגדול or מלאך הגואל; see Gen. 22:12, 48:15, Exod. 3:2, 12:12, 23:20, 24:1. In his commentary to Exod. 33:12 (p. 519) Nahmanides refers to the *Shekhinah* as the "first angel" (מלאך הראשון) in whom is the name of God (cf. Exod. 23:21), while in the commentary to Exod. 33:14 She is referred to, on the basis of Malachi 3:1, as the angel of the covenant (מלאך הבְּרִית). See below, nn. 99–100.

87. In several places Nahmanides accepts the philosophical characterization of angels as separate intellects. Cf. *Perush*, Gen. 18:1; Num. 22:23, 23:4.

88. See n. 84.

89. Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 81; Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, fol. 43a.

90. That the expression "the all," הכל, should be taken here as a technical term for the *Shekhinah* (see below, n. 116), and should not be translated simply as "everything" (as has been rendered by Chavel in his English translation of Nahmanides' commentary, vol. 2, p. 179), is evident from the fact that the verb used is the feminine form, מיחדת, rather than מיחד, the masculine form required if the word הכל were to be taken in its normal sense. Cf. *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN*, fol. 13a; Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 81.

91. *Perush*, Exod. 13:21 (p. 348). For a discussion of this passage and its influence on the

The critical point is that this explanation of the biblical narrative concerning Israel's delivery from Egypt is not offered as a kabbalistic explanation supplementing another more literal one; it is indeed the very meaning of the text according to Nahmanides.

Similarly, we find that in the end to the introduction to his *Commentary on Job*, after discussing various passages in Scripture which assume the possibility that angels take the form of men when they appear to human beings, Nahmanides writes: "the matter is true and set according to its literal sense, established and standing according to its plain meaning; but there is a secret to the matter for the (mystical) tradition is the foundation of the true Torah," הדבר אמת ויציב כפשוטו נכון וקיים כמשמעו ויש לענין סוד כי הקבלה לתורה. האמיתית יסוד.<sup>92</sup> In an obvious polemic against the philosophical view, especially espoused by Maimonides, that the appearance of angels in human form in prophetic visions must be treated allegorically,<sup>93</sup> Nahmanides is affirming the literal, factual objectivity of such appearances, but, he adds, to understand these actual events one must know about the kabbalistic secret. Although it is not specified in that context, from other contexts, especially his commentary to Gen. 18:1, it is clear that Nahmanides has in mind the esoteric doctrine of the garment, סוד המלבוש.<sup>94</sup> In the aforementioned context Nahmanides engages in a lengthy critique against Maimonides' view that every prophet, with the exception of Moses, received his prophecy through

author of the Zohar, see E. Wolfson, "Left Contained in the Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics," *AJS Review* 11 (1986): 40–41.

92. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:26.

93. See, e.g., *Guide* I, 49; II, 42. And cf. Teicher, "The Mediaeval Mind," p. 10. It must be said that on noetic grounds there is no difference between a prophetic vision and regular sense experience. On the contrary, as Maimonides states in *Guide* III, 24, one of the signs of genuine prophecy is that "all that is seen by the prophet in a vision of prophecy is, for the prophet, true and certain," for "the prophet has no doubts in any way concerning anything in it, and that, for him, its status is the same as that of all existing things that are apprehended through the senses or the intellect." It is nevertheless the case that Maimonides denies the facticity or objective pole of the images seen by the prophet. That is, the images seen by the prophet occur only within the prophet's mind, with no sense datum in the external world. Maimonides can thus contrast that which is and that which is apprehended in a prophetic state. In terms of this doctrine Maimonides followed the view of Avicenna and not that of al-Farabi. See C. Sirat, *Les Théories des visions surnaturelles dans la Pensée juive du Moyen Age* (Leiden, 1969), p. 142.

94. Nahmanides himself, as far as I am aware, does not use the expression סוד המלבוש, though he does use the word מלבוש; see citation in n. 98. On the former expression, see Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, Deut. 22:5, fol. 88c.

an angel.<sup>95</sup> On the contrary, Nahmanides, in part following the philosophical position, argues that, insofar as angels are separate intellects, when Scripture mentions an angel being seen or heard it must be a vision or a dream and not a prophetic state. Maimonides incorrectly identified prophecy with such visionary experiences. In the case of Scripture's relating that the angel appeared in anthropomorphic form, however, there is an esoteric matter that distinguishes such occurrences from all other angelic visions. In Nahmanides' words: "When [Scripture] mentions angels in the name of men<sup>96</sup> . . . this [involves] the created Glory in [the form of] the angels, referred to by those who know as the garment, which is perceptible to the human eyes of those who are pure as the pious and the sons of the prophets, but I cannot explain," הוא כבוד . . . המלאכים בשם אנשים . . . נברא במלאכים<sup>97</sup> יקרא אצל היודעים מלבוש יושג לעיני בשר בוכי הנפשות כחסידים ובני הנביאים ולא אוכל לפרש<sup>98</sup>. The real meaning of Nahmanides' words has escaped most commentators, with the exception of Shem Tov ibn Gaon, who very cautiously relates some of what he received from his teacher, Isaac ben Todros, regarding this matter.<sup>99</sup> Nahmanides, it seems to me, intends to say that

95. Cf. *Guide* II, 41. And see Sirat, *Les Théories*, pp. 147–149.

96. From Nahmanides' language, "when [Scripture] mentions angels in the name of men," some commentators have explained that he is essentially following Maimonides' view (cf. *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:7 that only angels from the group called אישים could be seen by men. Cf. Meir Aldabi, *Shevilei 'Eminah* (Warsaw, 1887), fol. 13c; Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 49, and Meir ibn Gabbai, *Avodat ha-Qodesh* (Jerusalem, 1973), fol. 162b. See also *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBa'N 'al ha-Torah*, fol. 5d. This interpretation has been recently reiterated by Dorit Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar* (Jerusalem, 1987), p. 30 [in Hebrew]. In fact, however, Nahmanides did not intend this at all. See Nahmanides' explicit critique of Maimonides' position in *Kitvei Ramban* 1:148. Nahmanides was rather speaking generally of the appearance of angels in anthropomorphic forms. That this generic explanation is correct may be proven by the fact that after the relevant remark Nahmanides cites several other examples, one with Lot (cf. Gen. 19:1ff.) and two with Jacob (cf. Gen. 32:25 and 37:15), where the angels are in the form of a man, not specifically from the group of angels called אישים. See also *Perush*, Num. 22:23 (p. 291) where Nahmanides puts the matter as follows: המלאכים הנראים בדמות אנושי.

97. See, however, the reading in the fourth part of Hayyim Vital's *Sha'arei Qedushah*, recently published in *Ketavim Hadashim le-R. Hayyim Vital* (Jerusalem, 1988), part 4, gate 2, p. 14: נברא כמלאכים.

98. See *Perush*, Gen. 18:1 (pp. 105–106).

99. Cf. *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 30b, where ibn Gaon states that the *malbush* refers to *'Ajarah*, i.e., *Shekhinah*, who is called angel, מלאך. On this tradition in Nahmanides' commentary, see

biblical accounts of angels assuming the form of men refer to the anthropomorphic manifestations—or even incarnation—of the created Glory (כבוד, נברא), i.e., the *Shekhinah*,<sup>100</sup> in her descent to the world. Indeed, as we have

references given above, n. 86; cf. *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, chap. 4, fol. 72b, and chap. 13, fol. 185b. On fol. 31a, however, ibn Gaon states, in apparent contradiction to the former view, that Nahmanides "called the angels by the name '*A'arah* . . . because the angels evolve from '*A'arah*.'" On fol. 30b the view is cited in the name of the חכם that God makes a "garment" for his pious ones and at times they come to the world in order to act as God's messengers, i.e., מלאכים. Isaac of Acre reports the same view, in slightly different terminology, in the name of his teacher; see *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 48. See also MS Oxford 1943, fols. 20b–21b. Nahmanides himself briefly alludes to such a view in his commentary to Gen. 49:33 (pp. 276–277). Cf. also Bahya ben Asher, *Kad ha-Qemah*, in *Kitvei Rabbenu Bahya*, ed. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 356. Nahmanides' view on the מלוכוס, if my interpretation is correct, should be distinguished from the view expressed many times in the zoharic corpus as well as in de León's Hebrew theosophic texts regarding the angels being clothed in the form of mortal humans in their descent to the world. Nahmanides was interpreted in this way already by Moses de León; see *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon*, ed. E. Wolfson, p. 316, and references to the Zohar in n. 22 ad loc. (Hebrew section). See also Menahem Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, fols. 24a–b, who combined the two traditions. For a fuller discussion of the zoharic view, see Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar*, pp. 26–44.

100. The term "created Glory" is traceable to Saadya Gaon, where it refers to a created material light, superior to the angels, that appears in various forms to man. See *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. by S. Rosenblatt (New Haven, 1948), pp. 130, 151 ff.; *Saadya's Commentary to Genesis*, ed. by M. Zucker (New York, 1984), p. 9 (Hebrew translation, pp. 175–176); Judah ben Barzilai, *Perush Sefer Yeşirah*, ed. S. J. Halberstam (Berlin, 1885), pp. 31 ff., 234–235; A. Altmann, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, 1969), pp. 152–155. And see, in particular, the language of the responsum of Saadya to a certain heretic (cf. I. Davidson, *The Book of the Wars of the Lord* [New York, 1934], pp. 25–26, who identifies the heretic as Salman ben Yeruham, also known as Ibn Sakawaihi; see however J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* [Philadelphia, 1935], 2:1469–70), preserved in Hebrew translation in Judah ben Barzilai's *Perush Sefer Yeşirah*, p. 21: "Every angel and every form is a created light . . . and the Holy One, blessed be He, created it for His Glory," כל מלאך . . . וכרא הב"ה לכבודו . . . וכל צורה אור ברוא . . . In that context Saadya makes a distinction between two aspects of the Glory: the lower aspect is the created light which is seen by human beings, both prophets and saints, whereas the higher aspect, although also a created light, is only apprehended by the angels. While the former aspect of the Glory is connected with the visionary experience of angels, the latter is connected specifically with the object of mystical vision in the *Shi'ur Qomah* text. Cf. Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidut 'Ashkenaz*, pp. 109–111, and idem, "Kavod Nistar," in *Da'at we-Safah*, ed. by M. Hallamish and A. Kasher (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 73–76. Judah ha-Levi and Maimonides likewise identified the *Shekhinah* with the created Glory that was seen by the prophets; see *Kuzari* IV, 3 (cf. H. Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion* [Cambridge, 1977], 2:93; Efros, *Studies in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, p. 152, n. 50; Y. Silman, *Thinker and Seer: The Development of the Thought of R. Yehuda Halevi in the Kuzari* (Bar Ilan, 1985), p. 178, n. 40 [in Hebrew]); *Guide* I, 11, 25, 46, and 64. For Nahmanides, in contrast to Saadya, ha-Levi, and Maimonides, the created Glory is not really a created entity at all, but is rather the manifestation of the divine, the last of the emanations. See

already seen, the word מלאך on occasion designates the divine attribute of judgment, the *Shekhinah*, in Nahmanides' kabbalah. What is relevant for my purposes is the fact that for Nahmanides, the literal-factual meaning of

in particular Nahmanides' criticism of Maimonides' position in his commentary to Gen. 46:1 (pp. 250–251): "God forbid that the thing which is called *Shekhinah* or created Glory is something distinct from God, blessed be He, as the rabbi [i.e., Maimonides] thought here. . . . And Jonathan ben Uziel translated [Ezek. 3:12, 'Blessed be the Glory from His place'] 'Blessed be the Glory of the Lord from the place of the inhabitation of the *Shekhinah*' (ברוך יקרא דה' מאתר בית) (שכינתיה). If by the [word] glory Scripture here intends the essence and truth of the Creator . . . behold it says 'place' and 'habitation of the *Shekhinah*'. And if you say that the created Glory is like the view of the rabbi . . . how can the [word] blessed be established [in the verse 'Blessed be the Glory of God from its place'], for the one who blesses and prays to the created Glory [understood, that is, in the Maimonidean sense] is like one who worships idols. In the words of the rabbis there are many things that show that the *Shekhinah* is God, blessed be He." In other words, for Nahmanides, the Glory is distinct from the infinite Godhead (what he refers to as the Creator in His essence and truth) but yet is not something created or distinct from God. Cf. Isaac of Acre, *Oṣar Hayyim*, MS Guenzberg 775, fols. 13a, 16b, who distinguishes between the כבוד נברא, i.e., an angel, and the כבוד נאצל, i.e., the divine attribute. Nahmanides' conception has great affinity with that of the German Pietists, particularly from the main school of Judah he-Ḥasid and Eleazar of Worms. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 111–113, and Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidut 'Ashkenaz*, pp. 104–170. See, in particular, the following passage in Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, fol. 223a: "It is customary for God to clothe the thoughts of His decrees, to show [them] to the prophets so that they will know that God has set His decrees. The prophet knows His thoughts according to the vision that he sees. At times this vision is called an angel." Cf. idem, *Sodei Razaya*, ed. I. Kamelhar (Bilgraj, 1936), pp. 3–4, 7–8, 11, 34–35, 51–52. And cf. the text from *Sefer ha-Hayyim* cited in Dan, op. cit., pp. 151–152. The similarity between Nahmanides' discussion of the secret of the garment and the view of R. Eleazar of Worms was already noted by I. Kamelhar, *Rabbenu Eleazar Mi-Germaiza ha-Roqeah* (New York, 1930), p. 52. Mention should also be made of the view expressed in the early Provençal document published by Scholem, "Traces of Gabirol in the Kabbalah," *Me'assef Sofrei 'Ereṣ Yisra'el*, ed. A. Kabak and A. Steinman (Tel-Aviv, 1940), pp. 175–176 [in Hebrew], and in English translation in *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 225. In that text a tradition is recorded according to which the tenth *sefirah* is described as the angelic Prince of the Divine Countenance or Prince of the World who speaks to prophets in God's name. See Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, p. 167, n. 14. On the kabbalistic identification of *Shekhinah* with Metatron, see below, n. 217. Cf. also S. Pines, "God, the Divine Glory and the Angels according to a Second-Century Theology," in "Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 11–12 [in Hebrew]. Pines argues that Nahmanides' conception of the *kavod* as that which is not distinct from God but yet appears to men in various forms is an echo of a presumably Jewish tradition reported by Justin Martyr (110–165). Curiously, Pines does not mention Nahmanides' doctrine of the *malbush* in his commentary to Gen. 18:1 which brings his position even closer to that reported by Justin, for according to that tradition the glory, which is not separate from God, appears to men in the form of angels. This is precisely the essence of Nahmanides' esoteric doctrine of the *malbush*.



these narratives is only upheld by the kabbalistic explanation.<sup>101</sup> In that sense one can speak assuredly of a convergence of *peshat* and *sod*.

The passage wherein this convergence is most clearly expressed occurs in Nahmanides' commentary to the dialogue between Moses and God after the sin of the Golden Calf in Exod. 33:12 ff. After reviewing the interpretations of Rashi and ibn Ezra, Nahmanides forthrightly proclaims:

This section [of Scripture] cannot possibly be explained (להולמה)<sup>102</sup> to one who has not heard the secrets of the Torah (בסתר התורה). And thus is the matter according to the way of truth: Moses said, "You have not made known to me whom You will send with me" (Exod. 33:12). He requested that two things which [God] said to him be fulfilled. Firstly, "I [God] have singled you [Moses] out by name" (ibid.), i.e., the I [God] will be known by My name on your behalf. . . . And secondly [Moses was told by God] "you have, indeed, gained favor in My eyes" (ibid.), i.e., [Moses] will find grace, which is the cleaving of knowledge (דבקות הדעת). And [Moses said to God] "Now if I have truly found favor in Your eyes" (ibid. 13), [i.e.,] through the attribute of judgment (במדת הדין), [then] "pray let me know" the paths of the ways through which You are known by Your name (נתיבות הדרכים כאשר אתה נודע בשמך). "And I will know You" (ibid.), [i.e.,] to unify You "so that I may find" the great grace (החן הגדול). "Consider, too, that this nation is Your people" (ibid.). You are their father and they are Your children. . . . Then the Holy One, blessed be He, answered Moses, "My face will go" (ibid. 14), [i.e.,] "the angel of the covenant (מלאך הברית) that you desire" (Malachi 3:1), for My face is seen in him . . . "for My name is in him" (Exod. 23:21). "And I will lighten your burden" (ibid. 33:14) . . . that he [the angel of the covenant or the *Shekhinah*] should not conduct himself in relation to you with the attribute of severe judgment (במדת הדין עזה), but rather with the attribute [of judgment] contained in the attribute of mercy (במדה כלולה במדת הרחמים). . . . Then Moses responded, "Unless Your face"—[i.e.,] by Yourself and Your Glory (בעצמך ובכבודך)—go in the lead, do not make us leave this place" (ibid. 15), for You must be with us face to face. . . . Thus it is mentioned above, "[Your people whom You deliv-

101. The point is well made by Bahya ben Asher in his commentary to Gen. 18:8 (p. 172): "This section cannot be taught to any intelligent person except by way of the kabbalistic explanation, for the meaning of these angels, referred to as human beings, is that the created Glory [is embodied] in the angels, and the true enlightened ones call this [phenomenon] the garment."

102. For this usage, see A. Even-Shoham, *Ha-Millon he-Hadash* (Jerusalem, 1969), 1:272, s.v. הלם.

ered from the land of Egypt] with great power and with a mighty hand” (ibid. 32:11). Thus [Moses] requested that [God] bring them to the land “with great power and with a mighty hand” (בכח גדול וביד חזקה) just as He brought them forth from Egypt.<sup>103</sup>

Moses’ request to God, and God’s answer to Moses, can only be understood, according to Nahmanides, in terms of the theosophic dynamic of the divine attributes. Moses wanted assurance from God that the attribute of judgment, *Shekhinah*, would lead the people through the desert, but only as it is comprised within, or mitigated by, the attribute of mercy. This is the mystery of the angel of the covenant (*Shekhinah*) in whom is found the name of God (the Tetragrammaton, which symbolizes the masculine potency). It is also the meaning of God’s telling Moses that His face would lead the people, for the face refers to God’s attribute of judgment, *Shekhinah*, but only as it is turned toward the other divine face, the attribute of mercy, the Holy One, blessed be He.<sup>104</sup> The union of these attributes is finally alluded to in the expression “with great power and with a mighty hand” (בכח גדול וביד חזקה), i.e., the former symbolizing the attribute of mercy and the latter the attribute of judgment. Just as the deliverance from Egypt was realized through the combination of these two attributes, so too the entry into the land. In Nahmanides view, then, the biblical text is incomprehensible to one who lacks knowledge of the secrets of Torah, i.e., knowledge of the proper kabbalistic symbolism. One who has such theosophic knowledge, however, understands the text in its plain sense.

Some final examples of the first typology. Commenting on Jacob’s utterance in Gen. 31:42, “and the Fear of Isaac (ופחד יצחק) was with me,” Nahmanides writes:

By way of truth the verse will be explained in its plain and literal sense (בא הלשון כפשוטו ומשמעו), and it [פחד יצחק] refers to the supernal attribute of judgment [i.e., the fifth emanation, *Gevurah* or *Din*]. Concerning it it is written, “Afterward, the Israelites will turn back and will seek the Lord their God and David their king, and they will thrill (ופחדו) over the Lord and His bounty in the days to come” (Hosea 3:5). That is, they will seek [the attribute of] mercy

103. *Perush*, Exod. 33:14 (pp. 520–521). This text was adduced already by Septimus; see above, n. 74.

104. Cf. *Perush*, Gen. 32:2; Exod. 3:2, 20:3, 23:16, 25:30; Lev. 20:3; Num. 15:25; Deut. 4:32.

[the Tetragrammaton] and the lower attribute of judgment [David their king] and they will bring the Fear of Isaac [reading *יפחדו* as a noun, i.e., His Fear, rather than as a verb] to God and to His goodness (*אל השם ואל טובו*) which were mentioned.<sup>105</sup>

The most desirable explanation for the biblical expression, indeed the one that best suits the plain sense, is that which decodes the text as a symbolic reference to the divine attribute, for indeed the expression *פחד יצחק* is used in Scripture as a proper name of God, i.e., the "One whom Isaac feared," which parallels the words that proceed it, "God of my father, the God of Abraham." Using the same kabbalistic motif Nahmanides accounts for the plain sense of Gen. 46:1, where it is stated that Jacob "offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac," *ויזבח זבחים לאלהי אביו יצחק*. According to Nahmanides, the last three words in the verse refer to the attribute of judgment, which was the divine grade especially connected to Isaac. Jacob saw fit to offer sacrifices to this particular attribute because he realized that his journey to Egypt was the beginning of exile, a period when the forces of judgment would prevail. To mitigate that somewhat he thought it appropriate to offer sacrifices to the attribute of judgment, "the God of his father Isaac." The plain sense is therefore completely informed by the mystical nuance.

In a similar fashion Nahmanides reads the events at the Sinaitic revelation purely in terms of a theosophic process—the merging of the attributes of mercy and judgment symbolized as the voice speaking through the fire—for the theophany is explicable on only one level.<sup>106</sup> The decoding of Scrip-

105. *Perush*. Gen. 31:42 (p. 178). Again, this is one of the examples mentioned by Septimus; see n. 103.

106. Cf. *Perush*, Gen. 15:1; Exod. 19:3, 20; Deut. 4:12, 32; 5:5, 19. Cf. Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat Einayim*, p. 102: "Even though from what is apparent (*מן הנגלה*) it seems that [Nahmanides] did not mention this [explanation] here by any allusion to esoteric truth (*כאן בחזרה רמזית*) (*שלא הזכיר זה כאן בחזרה רמזית*), and he said the matter . . . [in a way] that one who sees them thinks that the rabbi [Nahmanides] did not pay attention to them. Yet, all his intention was dependent on them, to allude through them to the wonderful and hidden secrets. Know that if one desires the words of the rabbi then one will find the external [sense] to be 'silver showpieces' (*משכיות כסף*), and if one's heart is burning and inflamed with regard to their inner [sense] then one will find 'apples of gold' (*תפוחי זהב*). The latter reference is, of course, to Prov. 25:11, the verse which Maimonides, in the introduction to the *Guide*, used to express the inner (*baṭin*)—outer (*zahir*), esoteric-exoteric polarity in the text. Cf. Talmage, "Apples of Gold," p. 315.

ture as a map of kabbalistic symbols alone provides the reader with a proper understanding of the text. Similarly, Naḥmanides interprets Exod. 14:31, “And Israel saw the great hand (הַיָּד הַגְּדוֹלָה),” as a reference to the attribute of judgment (מִדַּת הַדִּין) or *Shekhinah*.<sup>107</sup> Although this interpretation is designated as the esoteric one (עַל דֶּרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת), Naḥmanides does not offer an alternative reading which he finds satisfactory. The same may be said with respect to his understanding of Moses’ question in Exod. 3:13, “what is his name,” מַה שְּׁמוֹ. There is, for Naḥmanides, only one way to understand this text, and that is in terms of the kabbalistic system of divine emanations.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, in many instances Naḥmanides’ treatment of the divine names in Scripture—especially YHWH (referred to as שֵׁם הַמְּפֹרֶשׁ or שֵׁם הַגְּדוֹל or שֵׁם הַמִּיּוּחָד) and Elohim (שֵׁם הַנִּכְבָּד)—betrays this convergence of literal and esoteric, for the names cannot by their very nature be taken in any other way except as referring to the respective attributes of God.<sup>109</sup> To cite but one salient example of this. In his commentary to Exod. 6:2 Naḥmanides writes:

By way of truth the verse is explained according to its simple and literal sense (וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת בָּא הַכָּתוּב כְּפִשְׁטוֹ וּמִשְׁמָעוֹ), for it says, “I am the Lord” [i.e.,] I appeared to them through the speculum of El Shaddai [i.e., the *Shekhinah*, the feminine potency]. . . but I the Lord [i.e., the Tetragrammaton or the Holy One, blessed be He, the masculine potency] was not known to them, for they did not gaze upon the speculum that shines [the masculine potency]. . . the Patriarchs did know the Unique Name [שֵׁם הַמִּיּוּחָד, the Tetragrammaton], but it was not known to them through prophecy. . . . The Patriarchs had a revelation of *Shekhinah*, and the [divine] speech was [communicated] through the weaker attribute of judgment. . . . But Moses knew [the divine] through the attribute of mercy, which is the Great Name [the Tetragrammaton].<sup>110</sup>

2. Let me now turn my attention to the second typology concerning the convergence of *sod* and *peshat* in Naḥmanides. In some of the contexts in Naḥmanides’ commentary where *peshat* and *sod* seem to be equated, the two are, in fact, distinct but parallel layers of meaning. I have already touched

107. *Perush*, Exod. 14:31; and cf. to Deut. 5:15.

108. This example was mentioned by Septimus; see reference above, n. 74. Cf. R. Ezra, *Perush 'al Shir ha-Shirim*, *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:477–478.

109. See e.g., *Perush* to Gen. 11:2, 17:1, 18:20, 19:24, 22:2, 46:1, 48:15; Exod. 2:25, 6:2, 13:16, 15:2, 19:3, 19:20, 20:2, 32:10, 11; Lev. 18:2, 19:12; Num. 6:24, 15:25, 20:1, 23:16; Deut. 3:25, 4:12, 21, 32, 8:18.

110. *Perush*, Exod. 6:2 (p. 304); mentioned by both Septimus and Berger (see nn. 74–75).

upon the phenomenon of parallelism and its centrality in Nahmanides' kabbalistic hermeneutics in the first section of this paper. The crucial point to emphasize here is that occasionally Nahmanides will argue that it is only through knowledge of the parallel event in the divine realm that one can truly understand the literal or contextual meaning of the text.<sup>111</sup> It is nevertheless the case that in these instances two levels of meaning, the literal and mystical, are preserved, which do refer to two levels of reality outside the text, the mundane and the divine. To be sure, comprehension of the literal sense is ultimately dependent upon comprehension of the mystical sense, in the same way that a full appreciation of the lower world is dependent upon adequate knowledge of the upper world. In these cases, however, the two levels of meaning in the realm of exegesis are parallel, not identical.

Thus, for example, the following kabbalistic explanation is given as the plain meaning of "And when you sound short blasts (וּתְקַעְתֶּם תְּרוּעָה) a second time those encamped on the south shall move forward. . . . While to convoke the congregation you shall blow long blasts, not short ones (וְחִקְצוּ וְלֹא תְרִיעוּ)" (Num. 10:6–7): the short blast (תְּרוּעָה) alludes to or symbolizes (רִמּוֹ) the attribute of judgment, i.e., the *Shekhinah*, whereas the long or extended blast (חִקְצִיעָה) symbolizes the attribute of mercy, i.e., *Tif'eret*.<sup>112</sup> Although in this case the *peshaṭ* of the text requires knowledge of the theosophic process, it is not Nahmanides' intention to negate the literal sense. On the contrary, he upholds the literal sense of the narrative, thereby maintaining that Moses actually took the silver trumpets and made the appropriate sounds. These latter, however, symbolically corresponded to attributes within the divine realm, and hence the full meaning of the scriptural text—i.e., why these sounds were commanded and not others—can only be ascertained by kabbalistic knowledge of the theosophic realm. The *peshaṭ* in the text, corresponding to an event in the mundane world, refers to a kabbalistic parallel, a *sod*, in the divine world. Here the overlapping of literal and mystical does not imply identification of the two, but only parallelism.

In his commentary to Num. 15:31 Nahmanides rejects Rashi's numerological explanation for why the fringe garment is considered by Scripture to be a memorial (זִכְרוֹן) for all the commandments.<sup>113</sup> According to Rashi's

111. See, e.g., *Perush*, Exod. 20:3; Num. 4:20.

112. *Perush*, Num. 10:6; and cf. to Lev. 23:24.

113. See also Nahmanides' *hassagot* to the "first root" in Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Miswot*,

computation,<sup>114</sup> the Torah commands, “That shall be your fringe, look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them” (Num. 15:39), for the word *ציצית* equals 600, and there are, additionally, eight strings and five knots on each fringe, making a total of 613 corresponding to all the commandments.<sup>115</sup> Naḥmanides raises various problems with this explanation and concludes that the issue of remembrance is connected to the blue thread (חוט התכלת) “which alludes to [or symbolizes: שרמו] the attribute which comprises everything [המדה הכוללת הכל, i.e., the *Shekhinah*], for She is in the All [שהיא בכל, i.e., *Yesod*],<sup>116</sup> and is the completion of all [תכלית הכל].<sup>117</sup> Thus it says, ‘and recall All,’ for it [i.e., the All which is the *Shekhinah*] is the commandment of God [מצות השם].”<sup>118</sup> According to Naḥmanides, then, the

ed. Chavel, p. 4, where he again criticizes this view of Rashi, ending with these words: “I do not know if it is an *aggadah*, but in any event it is not from the Torah.”

114. The earliest source for this computation appears to have been the *Halakhot Qeṣuvot* attributed erroneously to Yehudai Gaon; cf. *Oṣar ha-Ge'onim le-Masekhet Sanhedrin*, ed. Z. Taubes (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 462. The numerology is repeated in several texts deriving from the school of R. Moses ha-Darshan, and these may have been the direct source for Rashi. Cf. *Midrash 'Aggadah*, ed. S. Buber (Vienna, 1894), p. 113; *Numbers Rabbah* 18:21 and parallel in *Tanḥuma, Qorah*, 12. The latter passage has been long recognized as a later addition to the *Tanḥuma* text; cf. S. Buber's introduction to his edition of *Midrash Tanḥuma*, chap. 10, §34, p. 101. See also Tobias ben Eliezer, *Midrash Leqaḥ Tov*, ed. S. Buber, to Num. 15:39, p. 224 (already mentioned by Isaac of Acre in *Me'irat 'Einayim*, ed. Goldreich, p. 194).

115. Cf. Rashi's commentary to Num. 15:39; and his commentary to b. Menahot 43b, s.v. שְׂקִיָּה מְצוּה וזו. See also *Hilkhot Šiṣit le-RaSHI* in *Shibbolei ha-Leqet ha-Shalem*, ed. S. Buber (New York, 1959), 190b; *Sefer ha-Pardes*, ed. H. Ehrenreich (Budapest, 1924), p. 21; *Maḥzor Vitry*, ed. S. Horowitz (Nuremberg, 1923), p. 635; *Tosafot* to b. Menahot 39a, s.v. יִפְחוּת; Abraham ben Nathan ha-Yarḥi, *Sefer ha-Manhig*, ed. Y. Raphael (Jerusalem, 1978), 2: 638; R. Asher, *Hilkhot Šiṣit*, §15 (in the name of the *Tanḥuma*) and similarly in Jacob ben Asher, *Tur, 'Orah Hayyim*, 24; Isaac ben Abba Mari, *Sefer ha-Iṭtur* (Vilna, 1874), *Hilkhot Šiṣit*, 69c; *Perush ha-Roqeah 'al ha-Torah*, ed. Ch. Konyevsky (Benai Beraq, 1981), 3:60 (concerning the authorship of this commentary see J. Dan, “The Ashkenazi Hasidic ‘Gates of Wisdom,’ *Homage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati [Louvain, 1980], pp. 183–189). This numerology was clearly intended to be a support (אסמכתא) for the talmudic dictum that the commandment of the fringe garment is equivalent to all the other commandments. See b. Menahot 43b, Nedarim 25b, Shevu'ot 29a. For an interesting parallel to this theme in Samaritan literature, see A. Loewenstamm, “On the Problem of 613 Commandments in Samaritanism,” *Tarbiz* 41 (1972): 310–312 [in Hebrew]. For an alternative computation intended to link the 613 commandments to the one commandment of the fringe garment, see R. Ezra, *Perush 'al Shir ha-Shirim, Kitvei Ramban*, 2:496. R. Ezra's text is cited anonymously by Isaac of Acre in *Me'irat 'Einayim*, pp. 194–195.

116. Cf. *Perush*, Gen. 24:1; Exod. 13:21.

117. Cf. the exact language in Zohar 3:175b: מאי תכלת תכלית דכלא.

118. *Perush*, Num. 15:31 (p. 254). For a similar critique of Rashi's explanation (cited in the name of the “commentators”), see Todros Abulafia, *Oṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Warsaw,

intent of Scripture's admonition that one recall all the commandments by looking at the fringe garment is centered specifically on the blue thread, for the latter symbolizes the *Shekhinah*, the divine grade that comprises within itself all the other grades and is thus the completion of all.<sup>119</sup> It is thus on account of the symbolic reference—and not the numerological value—that the *šīšit* serve as a token of memorial for all 613 commandments. This view is presented by Naḥmanides without any special introduction, as if it were—as indeed in his mind it is—the *peshat* of the verse.<sup>120</sup> The literal sense of the words “look at it and recall all the commandments” is informed by the kabbalistic understanding of the word “all,” whose symbolic valence is identical to that of the blue thread mentioned in the previous verse (Num. 15:38), i.e., the “all” is the *Shekhinah* which comprises within itself all the commandments and is symbolized by the blue thread. The import of the proclamation, “look at it,” is thus to look specifically at the blue thread, for it is in virtue of the latter that one is reminded of the divine potency referred to as the “all” in the remainder of the verse. Here the convergence

1879), fol. 6a. Naḥmanides' explanation had a decisive influence on subsequent kabbalists, including Moses de León. See Wolfson, *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 234 (Hebrew section) and discussion on p. 19 (English section). On the kabbalistic identification of *Shekhinah* with *mišwah*, a theme that is expressed already in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, see references given in Wolfson, op. cit., p. 18, n. 35, and see pp. 59–61.

119. Cf. C. Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Hozer u-khe-Mequbbal*, pp. 346–350.

120. Cf. J. Katz, *Halakhah we-Qabbalah*, p. 31. In yet another context, in his commentary to Lev. 19:19 (p. 120), Naḥmanides takes issue with Rashi's claim that *ḥuqim* represent divine decrees for which there is no reason. “The statutes of the Holy One, blessed be He (חוקי הקב"ה),” counters Naḥmanides, “are His secrets (סודות) in the Torah, which the people do not appreciate [literally, enjoy, נהנים] through their thinking as they do in the case of *mishpatim*, but yet they all have a proper reason (טעם נכון) and a perfect benefit (תועלת שלימה).” Cf. Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Hozer u-khe-Mequbbal*, pp. 386–394. The specific rationale adduced for the prohibition of mixed species (*kil'ayim*) is that all vegetative and animal forces below are generated by powers that have their origin in the supernal realm; therefore by combining two different species one “changes and defies the work of Creation.” Cf. R. Ezra, *Perush 'al Shir ha-Shirim, Kitvei Ramban*, 2:544. It is interesting to note that Moses de León employs the Geronese formulation but transforms it in light of the Castilian doctrine of dual forces, i.e., the prohibition of mixing the species is construed as the prohibition of mixing the divine and the demonic. See E. Wolfson, *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 41, n. 149 (English section). (The reference there to Naḥmanides' commentary on Lev. 19:9 should be corrected to Lev. 19:19). The critical point in this case, however, is even though Naḥmanides insists that the particular biblical injunction can only be understood in light of the kabbalistic rationale, the latter is in no way connected to a particular term in the text and therefore cannot count as an example of the identity or convergence of *sod* and *peshat* in the realm of exegesis. The formulation of this last point is based on a comment of David Berger to the author.

of meaning between *peshaṭ* and *sod* is made possible by the fact that the blue thread in Scripture has a twofold connotation: it refers to both the actual thread and to the symbolic correlate in the divine world. The full sense of the biblical description of the former can only be gained by knowledge of the latter.

To take another set of examples that will illustrate my point. Naḥmanides clearly states that with respect to various items in the Tabernacle, including the “bread of display” (לחם הפנים) set on a table as well as the candelabrum (מנורה), these phenomena can only be understood by reference to the supernal events which they symbolize.<sup>121</sup> In his commentary to Exod. 25:24, “and make a gold moulding around [the table],” Naḥmanides cites Rashi’s explanation, which is itself based on earlier midrashic sources,<sup>122</sup> that the table is a “sign of the crown of royalty,” סימן לכתר מלכות. In these words Naḥmanides finds a symbolic reference to the last *sefirah*, the *Shekhinah*, which he himself describes as “the secret of the table” (סוד השולחן) upon which the supernal blessing rests.<sup>123</sup> Thus the full comprehension of the literal sense of the words “make a gold moulding around [the table]” is predicated upon an understanding of the kabbalistic symbolism. Although the kabbalistic interpretation does not in this case address a problem that emerges from a straightforward reading of the text, insofar as the *sod* illuminates the *peshaṭ* in such a way that the latter is not understood adequately except by means of the former, it is correct, in my opinion, to speak of an overlapping of the two levels of meaning.

Particularly interesting in this regard are Naḥmanides’ comments on the structure of the cherubim. According to Naḥmanides, the cherubim were constructed “with their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings” (cf. Exod. 25:20), for they actually formed the Throne-seat

121. *Perush*, Exod. 25:30 (p. 463). This kabbalistic orientation is, of course, related to a much older aggadic motif regarding the parallel structure between the terrestrial and celestial Temples. Cf. the comprehensive study of V. Aptowitz, “The Heavenly Temple in the Aggadah,” *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 137–153, 257–285 [in Hebrew].

122. Cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 34:2; *Tanḥuma*, *Vayaqhel*, 8; *Numbers Rabbah* 4:13, 14:10. For a slightly different formulation, but one which expresses the same idea, see b. Yoma 82b and see the commentary of Rashi ad loc., s.v. שלשה זרין. See also commentary of Rashi to m. Avot 4:13, s.v. וסימן לשלש כהנים.

123. *Perush*, Exod. 25:24 (p. 461). Cf. *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 39a; Baḥya’s commentary to Exod. 25:24 (p. 280). For a different explanation, see *Me’irat ‘Einayim*, p. 121.



upon which the divine Glory sat. "Therefore [God] was called '[the one] enthroned on the cherubim,'<sup>124</sup> for they spread out their wings to show that they are the chariot to carry the Glory (שהם המרכבה נושאי הכבוד). . . . And if you consider further why they were facing one another (ibid.), and why they were of 'hammered work' (ibid. 18), you will know that it was appropriate for them to have 'their wings spread out above,' for they are the supreme Throne, shielding the Testimony [i.e., the Tablets of Law] which is the 'writing of God' (cf. ibid. 32:16)."<sup>125</sup> Moreover, according to Nahmanides, the structure of the Ark and cherubim in the Tabernacle was identical to that of the chariot seen by Ezekiel, described by the prophet in one place in the following way: "This is the living creature that I had seen below the God of Israel at the River Chebar, so now I know that they were cherubim" (Ezek. 10:20). The cherubim of the chariot seen by Ezekiel, in turn, were in the image of the higher Cherubim in the divine realm: "And this is the meaning of [the expression] 'the figure of the chariot' (1 Chron. 28:18), for the cherubim carrying the Glory which Ezekiel saw are the figure [or pattern] of the Cherubim which are the Glory and the Splendor (כבוד ותפארת) [i.e., the sixth and tenth *sefirot*, *Shekhinah* and *Tif'eret*],<sup>126</sup> and the cherubim in the Tabernacle and in the Temple were in their pattern." Proper knowledge of the structure of the cherubim described by Scripture can only be gained, therefore, by reference to the symbolic correlate of these cherubim in the divine realm. This does not, however, imply that there were no actual cherubim in the Tabernacle or the Temple. The literal sense of the text describing these

124. Cf. 1. Sam. 4:4, 2 Sam. 6:6, 1 Chron. 13:6, 2 Kings 19:15, Isa. 37:16, Ps. 80:2, 99:1.

125. *Perush*, Exod. 25:21 (p. 460). Cf. the recent analysis, which corroborates Nahmanides' explanation, in T. N. D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series 18, 1982), pp. 19–24.

126. Cf. *Perush*, Num. 11:15, and see Racanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, Exod. 25:10, fol. 49b: "There are those who explain that the cherubim allude to [or symbolize: ירומים] the *du-paršufin* [i.e., *Tif'eret* and *Shekhinah*], and this appears to be the opinion of the RaMBaN, blessed be his memory." For other Geronese kabbalists the cherubim were said to symbolize *Hesed* and *Gevurah*; see Tishby, *Perush ha-'Aggadot le-R. 'Azriel*, p. 11, n. 1. For still other kabbalists, such as Joseph Hamadan, who wrote in the last decade of the thirteenth century, the cherubim symbolized *Yesod* and *Shekhinah*. Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 134. And see Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 121, who reports having received a tradition similar to that of Joseph Hamadan in the name of an anonymous "enlightened kabbalist" (מקובל משיכיל). On p. 123, however, R. Isaac follows the tradition of Nahmanides and identifies the symbolic correspondence of the cherubim as the *du-paršufin*, i.e., *Tif'eret* and *Shekhinah*.

entities has the mundane realities as its referent, whereas the symbolic sense has the divine realities as its referent.

A striking example of this parallelism is to be found in Nahmanides' interpretation of Moses' and Aaron's sin recorded in Num. 20:1 ff. After reviewing various prior attempts to explain the exact nature of their sin, Nahmanides relates that herein is contained "one of the great secrets amongst the mysteries of the Torah."<sup>127</sup> An examination of the esoteric explanation that he offers shows indeed that this explanation alone focuses on the plain language of the text. In particular, Nahmanides' kabbalistic explanation deals with the seemingly innocuous detail of Scripture that Moses and Aaron hit the rock twice (cf. Num. 20:11). This act epitomizes, according to Nahmanides, the essence of their sinfulness, for it represented a lack of faith in God or, when understood in terms of kabbalistic symbols, a lack of faith in the unity of the two aspects of God that corresponds to faith. Nahmanides explains that the first time that Moses was commanded to draw water forth from the rock, God said to him, "I will be standing there before you on the rock at Horeb, and you should strike the rock" (Exod. 17:6). The esoteric meaning of that verse, writes Nahmanides, is: "My Great Name (שמי הגדול) was upon the rock at Horeb, which is 'the Glory of the Lord, a consuming fire on the top of the mountain' (ibid. 24:17)."<sup>128</sup> That is to say, at that moment it was clear to Moses that there was complete unification above between the masculine aspect of God, the attribute of mercy symbolized by the "Great Name" (שם הגדול), and the feminine aspect, the divine Glory (כבוד יהוה), the attribute of judgment symbolized alternatively as the rock or the consuming fire. Insofar as Moses was cognizant of this unity, he only hit the rock once, an act which symbolized that the two divine aspects were united. On the second occasion, however, Moses and Aaron were doubtful about this unification and they therefore hit the rock twice—one strike for each aspect—in order to bring about the unification so that the miracle would occur and the water would overflow from the rock. The double striking thus represents their lack of faith in God, which is to say, their lack of trust that the two divine grades were indeed united. In Nahmanides' words: "Both [Moses and Aaron] agreed to strike the rock twice and this was the sin. Therefore it says, 'You did not trust me,' לא האמנתם בי."

127. *Perush*, Num. 20:1 (p. 276); mentioned by Septimus and Berger (see nn. 74–75).

128. *Ibid.*

(Num. 20:12), i.e., you did not place Faith, אמונה [the *Shekhinah* or feminine aspect] in My Name, שמי [the masculine aspect] and by means of Faith the miracle would occur.”<sup>129</sup> The event below therefore directly corresponded to the theosophic process above, for the rock on the mountain symbolized the *Shekhinah*, and Moses’ or Aaron’s double hitting of that rock reflects the failure to acknowledge the interrelatedness of the two divine potencies. In essence, then, their sin was a sin of misconception, referred to in Scripture as a rebellion (מעילה), directed particularly at the last of the divine grades, the *Shekhinah*.<sup>130</sup> “It says, ‘you disobeyed My command,’ מרייתם פי (Num. 27:14), for ‘they rebelled against His holy spirit,’ מרו את רוח קדשו (Isa. 63:10), [the holy spirit] is called the mouth of the Lord [i.e., the *Shekhinah*] in every place.”<sup>131</sup> Hence, in this case Nahmanides does not establish any theurgical connection between human action and the divine reality, but rather a symbolic affinity such that one’s belief in God—understood in the dynamic categories of the kabbalah—can be ascertained from one’s action. It is in this sense that the literal meaning can only be gathered in light of the appropriate kabbalistic symbolism.

Another clear example of this overlapping of literal and esoteric is to be found in Nahmanides’ commentary to Deut. 32:7: “The explanation for this, as is stated, ‘these the Lord God allotted to other people’ (Deut. 4:19), since for each portion below there is a [corresponding] portion above. And the meaning of ‘[He fixed the boundaries of peoples] in relation to Israel’s numbers’ (Deut. 32:8), for the form of Jacob is carved on the Throne of Glory. This is a great secret.”<sup>132</sup> For Nahmanides, then, one can understand Israel’s chosenness only when one bears in mind the grade above to which Israel corresponds, viz., the central *sefirah* of *Tif’eret*, which is depicted in terms of the old aggadic image of the form of Jacob carved on the divine Throne.<sup>133</sup> More specifically, this image conveys in kabbalistic terms the

129. Ibid. My explication of this passage is based largely on the explanation of Shem Tov ibn Gaon in his *Keter Shem Tov*. See *Ma’or wa-Shemesh*, fol. 49a, and Recanati, *Perush ‘al ha-Torah*, Num. 20:11, fol. 77c.

130. Cf. Isaac of Acre, *Me’irat ‘Einayim*, pp. 200–201, where this aspect of Nahmanides’ explanation is emphasized. See also *Be’ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN*, attributed to ibn Sahula, fol. 27a.

131. *Perush*, loc. cit.

132. Cf. *Perush*, Deut. 32:7 (p. 486). Cf. *ibid.*, Gen 33:20, Deut. 4:15.

133. Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 82:2 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 978). For ben Yaqar’s interpretation of this passage, see above, n. 63.

unity of the masculine and feminine aspects of divinity, the image of Jacob (the masculine) engraved on the Throne (the feminine). Nahmanides utilizes this aggadic image to characterize the special divine providence that pertains to the land of Israel. Thus in his commentary to Gen. 33:20 he writes:

By way of truth it is like the *midrash* of our rabbis who explained in the tractate Megillah [18a], "from where do you know that the Holy One, blessed be He, called Jacob 'Lord' (אל), as it says, 'And he [God] called him [Jacob] Lord, God of Israel' (אל אלהי ישראל)." There is in this matter a great secret, mentioned as well in *Genesis Rabbah* [79:8] in different language: He said to him, "You are Lord amongst the upper ones and I am Lord amongst the lower ones." They alluded to what they always say regarding the image of Jacob that is engraved on the Throne of Glory. And the intention is that the *Shekhinah* rests in the land of Israel. The enlightened one will understand.<sup>134</sup>

The only way to comprehend Nahmanides' juxtaposing of these two rabbinic passages is to consider carefully the reading of Gen. 33:20 offered in b. Megillah 18a: "He, the God of Israel, called him [Jacob] Lord." Understood kabbalistically, the Lord of Israel, who addresses Jacob with the title אל, is the *Shekhinah*. Jacob is so addressed by the *Shekhinah* because he reflects the corresponding divine attribute above, viz., the attribute of mercy. Nahmanides applies this kabbalistic symbolism as well to read the passage from *Genesis Rabbah*, i.e., the *Shekhinah* addresses Jacob: "You are the Lord above and I am the Lord below." The grade to which Jacob refers has dominion over the sefirotic realm, whereas *Shekhinah* has dominion over the mundane realm. The latter is expressed by the rabbinic idea that *Shekhinah* dwells in the land of Israel. Yet, providence in the land of Israel is of a special sort, for it eventuates from the union of the masculine and feminine potencies of the divine. This union is conveyed by the image of the form of Jacob engraved on the Throne as well as by Nahmanides' kabbalistic reading of the two rabbinic texts.<sup>135</sup>

134. *Perush*, Gen. 33:20 (p. 189).

135. See *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBa*n fol. 7b; Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, fols. 31d–32a; Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 62. In the commentary attributed to ibn Sahula a second explanation is given whereby Jacob, or *Tiferet*, is identified with the throne itself, but this does not imply any feminine image of Jacob, for a distinction is made there between a higher and lower Throne, referring respectively to the masculine and feminine potencies of God. Cf. the anonymous commentary on the *sefirot* in MS JTS 8124, fol. 5a: "*Tiferet* is the

It is of interest that Nahmanides uses this very mystical notion to explain the plain meaning of Lev. 18:25, where the punishment for sexual offenses is expulsion from the land of Israel. Nahmanides poses the obvious question: If these laws pertaining to forbidden sexual relations are bodily obligations that are not dependent on the land of Israel for their fulfillment, why then does Scripture connect the two with respect to punishment? Nahmanides answers by showing that the underlying rationale for these sexual prohibitions is connected to the special holiness of the Jewish people, which, in turn, is related specifically to their being in the land of Israel.<sup>136</sup> All other nations are ruled by celestial forces in their lands, but Israel is ruled only by God in the land of Israel. Nahmanides further specifies that although outside the land of Israel the celestial forces have dominion, even these forces derive their power from the *Shekhinah*, referred to as the **שם הנכבד**. In the case of the land of Israel, however, the *Shekhinah* is united with *Tiferet*, and hence Her dominion over the land is qualitatively different. This is alluded to in Nahmanides' comment: "The honorable name [*Shekhinah*] is 'the God of gods and the Lord of lords' (Deut. 10:17) for all the world, but the land of Israel is the center of the settlement. It is the portion of God, unique to His Name (חלת ה' מיוחדת לשמו)."<sup>137</sup> In the last words there is an obvious reference to the masculine potency of the divine, the **שם המיוחד**.<sup>138</sup> The land of Israel is thus the unique portion of God, for it symbolizes the feminine potency, the *Shekhinah*, which is here most fully united with the masculine potency. The sins of sexual promiscuity affect the unity of masculine and feminine forces that is realized within the geographical boundaries of Israel.

attribute of truth . . . and it is called the Throne. . . . And thus Jacob is [the attribute of] truth, and he is called the Throne of Glory. Therefore it is said that the form of Jacob is engraved on the Throne of Glory." See also Zohar 2: 242a.

136. According to Nahmanides, the special holiness of the land of Israel is connected particularly to the fact that in this geographical place all the commandments can be most properly fulfilled. Cf. C.D. Chavel, *Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman* (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 166 [in Hebrew]; Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Hozer u-khe-Mequbbal*, pp. 149–154. See n. 139. With respect to this idea of a "mystical geography" Nahmanides shares much in common with Judah ha-Levi; cf. Silman, *Thinker and Seer*, pp. 138–141; S. Rosenberg, "The Link to the Land of Israel in Jewish Thought," in L. Hoffman, ed., *The Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives* (Notre Dame, 1986), pp. 148–156.

137. See the exact parallel in Nahmanides' sermon for Rosh Hashanah, in *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:250. In that context Nahmanides adds that in the land of Israel the Jewish people will be "especially united with His Name that is there," ונהיה מיוחדים לשמו בה. Cf. Zohar 1:108b.

138. Cf. the usage in Num. 7:23: **כי הברכה במקדש מיוחדת בשם המיוחד**.

There is thus a deep mystical connection between the laws of *'arayot* and the holiness of the land. Consequently, the Torah specifies that the punishment for these offenses is removal from the land. Moreover, as Nahmanides informs the reader, the land of Israel below is a symbol for the higher reality that corresponds to it in the sefirotic realm, viz., the *Shekhinah*.<sup>139</sup> "Permission is not granted to explain in greater detail the matter of the land, but if you merit to understand the first land mentioned in the [opening] verse of Genesis and that which is mentioned in the chapter 'If you follow My laws' (Lev. 26:3), you will know the hidden and exalted secret."<sup>140</sup> The reference is obviously to the *Shekhinah*, which is the sefirotic correlate to the terrestrial land of Israel. He who enters one of the sexually prohibited relations is expelled from the land, which symbolically represents his being cut off from the *Shekhinah*.<sup>141</sup> In a similar vein with reference to the biblical portion concerning manslaughter, Nahmanides sets out to explain why in one verse Scripture emphasizes that these laws are to be applied "throughout the ages and in all your settlements" (Num. 35:29), whereas in a second verse it is especially emphasized that one should not pollute the land of Israel with murder, "for blood pollutes the land, and the land can have no expiation for

139. Cf. Gottlieb, *Mehqarim be-Sifrut ha-Qabbalah*, pp. 93–94; Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Hozer u-khe-Mequbbal*, pp. 147–148, 152–154. This symbolic correlation between *Shekhinah* and the land of Israel may also explain Nahmanides' appropriation of the rabbinic idea concerning the equivalence of Israel to all the commandments (cf. *Tosefta*, 'Avodah Zarah, 5:3; *Sifrei Deut.* pisqa 80, ed. Finkelstein, p. 146); see *Perush* to Lev. 18:25 (p. 112). And cf. Henoch, op. cit., pp. 145–146; M. Idel, "The Land of Israel in Medieval Kabbalah," in *The Land of Israel* p. 178. That is, just as the *Shekhinah* is the divine grade that is equivalent to all the commandments (see above, n. 118), so the land of Israel is the particular commandment that is the basis for, or the ground of, all the other commandments. Cf. *Perush*, Gen. 26:5; Deut. 4:5, 11:18. For a slightly different formulation on the nexus between kabbalah and the commandments, on one hand, and kabbalah and the land of Israel, on the other, in Nahmanides, see M. Idel, "Some Conceptions of the Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought," pp. 131–132. On the nexus between the holiness of the land of Israel, fulfillment of the commandments of the Torah, and the presence of God, see W. D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 18–29, 37–38.

140. *Perush*, Lev. 18:25 (p. 212). Cf. *ibid.*, Gen. 6:13, 7:23, 9:12, 14:18, 24:3, 26:5, 28:17; Lev. 20:3, 26:42. See also Nahmanides' prayer on the ruins of Jerusalem, in *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:424–425 (already noted by Idel, "The Land of Israel in Medieval Kabbalah," p. 185, n. 45).

141. For Nahmanides the locus of *devequt*, or communion, is the *Shekhinah*; see his commentary to Lev. 18:4, Deut. 11:22. A possible source for Nahmanides' particular formulation may have been ibn Ezra's commentary to Exod. 3:15 (ed. Weiser, p. 34): *אז יהיה רבץ בשם הנכבד*. Cf. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), pp. 205–206.

blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it" (Num. 35:33). Clearly, the prohibition against murder belongs to the class of laws, *mishpatim*, that are operative even outside the land of Israel. Nevertheless, Scripture emphasizes the defilement of the land of Israel by bloodshed "on behalf of the Glory of the *Shekhinah* (כבוד השכינה) which is there . . . the matter of impurity is such that if the land is impure the Glory of the Name (כבוד השם) will not dwell there."<sup>142</sup> That is to say, therefore, that the apparent textual problem is resolved by the fact that there is a special degree of holiness connected to the land that is, in turn, related to its being the symbolic correlate—and hence earthly receptacle—for the *Shekhinah*. Scripture thus can single out the defilement of the land of Israel by acts of manslaughter even though it is a law that is assuredly applicable outside the land.

In sum, then, it can be said that the overlapping of *peshat* and *sod* in Nahmanides' exegesis encompasses two distinct typologies. On the one hand, there is the typology of coincidence of the literal and figurative. In such cases there is only one textual dimension and, consequently, the external meaning is identical with the inner, mystical meaning. On the other hand, there is the typology of parallelism. In such cases there is a twofold textual dimension for the text refers simultaneously to two ontic referents, the mundane and the divine; yet in this case too one can speak of an overlapping of *peshat* and *sod*, for the plain sense of Scripture only can be fully deduced by decoding the text in terms of the corresponding events in the divine realm.

### III

In the third and final section of this paper I will investigate one last topic that is critical to an understanding of Nahmanides' kabbalistic hermeneutics, viz., the function of 'aggadah in Nahmanides' kabbalah. An examination of this question is, in my opinion, crucial in evaluating the kabbalistic orientation of Nahmanides and the role that creative exegesis plays in his religious imagination. Only by carefully analyzing the complicated nexus of aggadic ideas and kabbalistic motifs will we be in a position to determine the

142. *Perush*, Num. 35:33 (p. 340).

extent and scope of Nahmanides' conservatism in the realm of kabbalistic exposition.

The relationship between kabbalah and *'aggadah* in the minds of the early kabbalists, especially the Gerona school, has been amply discussed by Scholem and Tishby.<sup>143</sup> Both scholars have exposed the underlying hermeneutical attitude of the kabbalists towards the old *'aggadah*: theosophical ideas were often viewed as nothing but expansions and disclosures of ideas hidden in the aggadic sources. R. Ezra of Gerona's description in his commentary on *Shir ha-Shirim* is indicative of the kabbalists in general: "The rabbis spoke of this wisdom [i.e., kabbalah] in the *midrashim* and the *'aggadot* by means of parables and enigmas (משלים וחידות) to dignify these matters and to conceal them. They scattered them, one here and another there, in order to hide their place."<sup>144</sup> In a similar manner R. Judah ben Yaqar, one of Nahmanides' teachers, explains the rabbinic teaching that through the study of *'aggadah* one comes to recognize the Creator and to cleave to His ways<sup>145</sup> by reference to the fact that contained in the *'aggadot* "in several places are the secrets of secrets, one reveals a bit and the other a bit, then you will understand."<sup>146</sup> It is clear that no kabbalist, including R. Ezra and R. Judah ben Yaqar, held that every kabbalistic idea has its source in rabbinic *'aggadah*. On the contrary, R. Ezra for his part is careful to distinguish between those symbols that he received as a kabbalah and others that he found exegetically in rabbinic texts.<sup>147</sup> It nonetheless seems clear that kabbalists, for the most part, alleged that they were transmitters of ancient lore rather than innovators.<sup>148</sup> Even Moses de León, the innovative kabbalist *par*

143. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 86–87, 373–375; Tishby, *Hiqrei Qabbalah u-Sheluhoteha* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 31–35.

144. *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:479.

145. Cf. *Sifre Deuteronomy*, 'Ekev, piska 49 (ed. Finkelstein, p. 115).

146. *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, pt. 2, p. 23.

147. See, e.g., *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:481.

148. An important exception to this is R. Jacob ben Sheshet. See his comment in *Ha-'Emunah we-ha-Bittahon*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:370: "If I had not originated this [idea] in my mind, I would have said that it is [of the status of] a law given to Moses at Sinai;" אלוני שאני, חידושי מלבי הייתי אומר שהוא הלכה למשה מסיני. Cf. Idel, "We Have No Tradition," p. 68, n. 58. See also Racanati, *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Miswoj*, fol. 3a: "In every place in the Torah where you can elevate an event or a commandment to a thing higher than it [i.e., adduce a symbolic interpretation by connecting the text with the divine realm; see above, n. 29] you must elevate it . . . even though you have not received that explanation [or reason] from a kabbalistic sage or even if you have not seen it in one of the books of the sages." See *ibid.*, fol. 4b, where Recanati, using a



*excellence*—using Idel’s terminology—was committed to the position that kabbalistic ideas were hidden in the aggadic texts of the rabbis. Throughout his Hebrew theosophic writings he expresses this view. To cite but two salient examples. In the introduction to the second part of *Sefer ha-Rimmon* (1287) he writes: “And the sages . . . concealed the matter in the exoteric meaning, but it is hidden, for all their words are within the palace of the king.”<sup>149</sup> In a later work, *Mishkan ha-‘Edut* (1293), de León expresses this view, combining the terminology of Maimonides and R. Ezra. He notes that he is making known “all the matters which the holy ancient sages were preoccupied with all their lives. For they are scattered in the Talmud and in their words and in their hidden sayings, more hidden and precious than pearls. And they have closed the gate behind their words, and have hidden all their profound books, seeing that it was not appropriate to reveal and publish them.”<sup>150</sup>

The kabbalist, then, assumed a hidden dimension within aggadic texts that was known only to the one initiated in the secrets of the tradition. In the ‘*aggadah* were concealed theosophic truths. This assumption regarding an inner or esoteric meaning to rabbinic passages, coexisting alongside the outer or exoteric, is found in medieval philosophical sources as well. As has been shown by Marc Saperstein and Frank Talmage,<sup>151</sup> the motivation for philosophers to seek an esoteric meaning in ‘*aggadah* did not always stem either from an apologetical stance seeking to defend the rabbis against the outside attacks of Karaism, Islam, or Christianity, or from an internal rationalistic critique. On the contrary, some philosophers, including Maimonides, assumed that the rabbis cultivated philosophical truths and hid them in the ‘*aggadah* in order to conceal them from the masses. Yet it seems fair to say that, whatever the theoretical similarity between the philo-

formulation close to that of Jacob ben Sheshet, characterizes himself as follows: “I have not received these reasons [for the commandments] from a kabbalistic sage, for had I received them I would have said that they are a law given to Moses at Sinai” אילו הייתי מקבל אותם הייתי אומר כי הם הלכה למשה מסיני.

149. Cf. Wolfson, ed., *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 256 (Hebrew section). See *ibid.*, p. 270.

150. MS Berlin Quat. Or. 833, fol. 51a (cited by Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 201–202). See *ibid.*, fols. 53a, 57b, 58b.

151. Cf. M. Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis*, pp. 1–20; Talmage, “Apples of Gold,” pp. 333–337. See also Talmage, *David Kimhi*, pp. 77–83.

sophers and kabbalists on this score, in practical terms the mythic consciousness of 'aggadah was much more central to kabbalistic thinking.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, unlike the concepts of Aristotelian physics or metaphysics, or even Neoplatonic ontology, many ideas expressed in the kabbalistic texts, such as speculation on the divine attributes of mercy and judgment and the divine names to which they are correlated, developed organically out of aggadic passages on similar themes.<sup>153</sup> The classical 'aggadah, in all its formulations, was therefore treated as the fountainhead of kabbalistic truths in a way that was not reproduced in philosophical circles. Notwithstanding this fact, a theosophic reading of 'aggadah based on the system of *sefirot*, as proposed and maintained by the kabbalists, simply cannot be upheld as the original intention of the rabbinic texts. Hence, it may be said that the kabbalist, like the philosopher, shared the need and desire to express new ideas in the guise of ancient authorities. Scholem expressed this feature of the kabbalistic hermeneutic in the following way: "I do not hesitate, for my part, to affirm that the literature of the Spanish kabbalah . . . clearly reveals a psychological attitude that, in the Middle Ages, led men to recast ancient talmudic and midrashic material according to an entirely new spirit by means of an exegetical and homiletical method that in its structure was gnostic."<sup>154</sup> Bracketing for the moment the validity of Scholem's historiographical view of kabbalah as the gnostification of aggadic modes of discourse,<sup>155</sup> the critical point in his description is the extent to which medieval kabbalists sought to root

152. Cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 30–32. For a partial critique of Scholem's position, see Saperstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–20. Saperstein criticizes Scholem's statement that philosophers in all cases regarded 'aggadah "as a stumbling-block rather than as a precious heritage." He does not, however, challenge what I take to be the essential point of Scholem's analysis: the kabbalists' employment of mythic structures enabled them to live in a world that is "historically continuous" with that of the old 'aggadah. The same cannot be said about the philosophers. See also Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, pp. 106–110.

153. Cf. E. Wolfson, "Mystical-Theurgical Dimensions of Prayer in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. D. Blumenthal, vol. 3 (Atlanta, 1988), pp. 62–64. See also the suggestive remarks of L. Ginzberg, *On Jewish Law and Lore* (Philadelphia, 1955), pp. 188–191; and cf. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 128–136, 156–172. The notion that mystical ideas were embedded in the aggadic proclamations of the rabbis was also suggested by S. Baron; see *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York, 1958), 8:4–7.

154. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 86.

155. Scholem's position has been challenged most recently by Idel in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 30–32. See also my review of the English translation of Scholem's *Origins of the Kabbalah*, *The Journal of Religion*, 69 (1989): 139–140.

innovative ideas in the sacred texts of the tradition. For Scholem this kabbalistic strategy represents one particular instance of a more general medieval phenomenon referred to by James Preus as the “theological legitimation for innovation.” In Preus’ own words:

One of the first factors that has to be recognized here is that medieval society in general placed a high premium upon stability and order; in the religious realm, innovation and heresy were practically synonymous. . . . Thus, we shall not expect to see innovations advertized when they appear. They often come in disguise, cloaked in the reassuring garb of ancient authority.<sup>156</sup>

Despite their best intentions, then, the medieval kabbalists were engaged in creative exegesis, transforming and transposing older texts in a new key rather than uncovering their historical and literary meaning. The thorny question of whether or not the “origins” of kabbalah are to be sought in some prehistorical or preliterate stage of transmission is besides the point, for even if we grant that kabbalistic ideas did not take shape *ab ovo* in medieval Europe, the fact of the matter remains that the activity of linking kabbalistic ideas to older aggadic sources is a major occupation in the golden period of medieval kabbalah. To understand kabbalah as a literary phenomenon one cannot ignore the programmatic effort of kabbalists to connect theosophical truths with ancient ‘*aggadah*. Even if one argues that this link is to be understood in terms of a rabbinic אסמכתא, i.e., a textual support for an independent proclamation, the need to create such linkage is in itself highly instructive of the innovative approach of kabbalists towards traditional documents, an approach that is often well hid behind the cloak of conservatism. To be sure, a proper understanding of kabbalistic texts demands an emphatic reading, to use the term of earlier hermeneutic theorists like Schleiermacher and Dilthey,<sup>157</sup> by which the interpreter disengages himself—to the extent that this is possible—from his own historical preconceptions and enters imaginatively into the life and time of the authors

156. J. Preus, “Theological Legitimation for Innovation in the Middle Ages,” *Viator* 3 (1972): 2. Concerning a similar phenomenon of cloaking innovation in the guise of conservatism in the German Pietists, see I. Marcus, *Piety and Society* (Leiden, 1981), pp. 65–71, 82–83; R. Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 207.

157. Cf. John Llewelyn, *Beyond Metaphysics? The Hermeneutic Circle in Contemporary Philosophy* (New Jersey, 1985), pp. 161–162.

of the texts he is studying.<sup>158</sup> The critical scholar of kabbalah therefore would be imprudent to cast doubt upon the kabbalists' own admission that the truths they were imparting are of hoary antiquity. This conviction is a key feature that shaped the kabbalists' hermeneutic, and it is therefore incumbent on the modern reader to engage kabbalistic texts on this level. By appropriating this posture, however, one is in a better position to see the mechanism of kabbalistic interpretation for what it truly is: an innovative transformation of aggadic passages in light of a theosophic system that may itself have older roots in Jewish mythologumena, but which is, in most cases, extraneous to the rabbinic material.

A careful examination of Nahmanides proves that he was not different in this regard. The linkage of kabbalistic explanations to aggadic sources is a repeated phenomenon in Nahmanides' literary corpus. There are so many examples of this in the Torah commentary that it would be impossible here to mention even a fragment, let alone all of them. Suffice it to say that in the vast majority of instances wherein Nahmanides introduces a kabbalistic explanation the latter is connected with a midrashic or aggadic text.<sup>159</sup> An examination of Nahmanides' commentary to Gen. 18:20 reveals the complicated interweaving of aggadic and kabbalistic strands in his thought.

I will intimate to you the opinion of those who receive the truth (מקבלי האמת).

158. I am well aware of the critique of empathy advocated by earlier hermeneutic theories in more recent post-Heideggerian hermeneutics. Cf. H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, 1982), p. 221. The critical point is the difficulty in assuming that one can get out of one's mind in order to transport oneself imaginatively into the mind of the author, for this assumption is rooted in oversimplistic ideas about the nature of self-consciousness and intersubjectivity. Nevertheless this disengagement is the *sine qua non* of the scientific attitude towards texts. A discussion about the meaning of texts will, of course, always involve self-understanding on the part of the interpreter, but even this self-understanding is attainable only after one "enters" into the text that one is reading. Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 113: "... if it remains true that hermeneutics terminates in self-understanding, then the subjectivism of this proposition must be rectified by saying that to understand *oneself* is to understand *oneself in front of the text*. Consequently, what is appropriation from one point of view is disappropriation from another. ... What is appropriated is indeed the matter of the text. But the matter of the text becomes my own only if I disappropriate myself, in order to let the matter of the text be. So I exchange the *me*, master of itself, for the self, *disciple* of the text" (author's emphasis).

159. See, e.g., Gen. 1:1, 3, 7, 14, 2:3, 7, 8, 6:4, 6, 13, 8:21, 23, 9:12, 11:2, 14:18, 18:20, 24:1, 26:5, 28:21, 29:2, 33:20, 35:13, 46:1; Exod. 3:13, 14:21, 16:6, 19:5, 13, 25:3, 24; Lev. 1:9, 16:2, 18:25, 20:3, 23:17, 24, 36, 40 (cf. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:181), 26:12, 42; Num. 30:3; Deut. 5:16, 21:22, 33:1. Cf. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:90.

Our rabbis interpreted (דרשו)<sup>160</sup> in connection with the verse, “For lo! the Lord is coming forth from His dwelling-place, He will come down and stride upon the heights of the earth” (Micah 1:3), that [God] goes and comes from attribute to attribute. He goes out from the attribute of mercy and enters the attribute of judgment. And so is this matter, “God [the Tetragrammaton signifying the attribute of mercy or the masculine potency] said to His heart”<sup>161</sup> [i.e., the attribute of judgment or the *Shekhinah*],<sup>162</sup> “the outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great” (Gen. 18:20). I will descend from the attribute of mercy to the attribute of judgment, “and I will see” through mercy if “they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me” through the attribute of judgment; “if not, I will take note” (ibid. 21), and I will have mercy, in the manner [of the scriptural expression] “and Elohim [the attribute of judgment] knew”<sup>163</sup> [i.e., had mercy].<sup>164</sup>

The kabbalistic explanation is here presented as nothing but an expansion of the midrashic comment of the rabbis. Indeed, Nahmanides’ exposition may be called a back-projection of the kabbalistic interpretation into the rabbinic text. Perhaps even more striking is Nahmanides’ commentary to Gen. 6:6, “And the Lord regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened.” At first Nahmanides follows good medieval rationalistic exegetical practice and explains the obvious anthropomorphism as an allegorical utterance, citing as support the rabbinic dictum, “Torah speaks in human language.” God’s heart is to be taken allegorically as a reference to the divine holy spirit,<sup>165</sup> and not literally a physical organ. After explaining the verse in this way, however, Nahmanides refers to a passage in the aggadic compilation, *Genesis Rabbah*,<sup>166</sup> which explains the notion of God’s grieving in His heart by means of the parable of the archi-

160. Cf. j. Ta’anit 2:1, 8b.

161. Cf. Gen. 8:21.

162. Cf. *Perush*, Gen. 6:6 and 8:21.

163. Cf. Exod. 2:25 and see Nahmanides’ commentary ad loc.

164. *Perush*, 18:20 (p. 112).

165. It is interesting to note that some of the commentators on Nahmanides understood the holy spirit as a reference to the *Shekhinah*. Cf. Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 29b; Isaac of Acre, *Me’irat ‘Einayim*, p. 36. By interpreting Nahmanides in this way, however, one fails to grasp fully the two levels of interpretation with which he is operating here, to wit, the allegorical and the midrashic-mystical.

166. Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 27:4. In the critical edition of Theodor-Albeck, pp. 258–259, only the first parable about the architect is given. For the reading of the other parable as well, see editor’s note 6 ad loc.

tect who builds a palace that displeases the king or the business agent who through trading causes a monetary loss to the king. The heart then is compared to an architect or an agent and God to the king. This parable, writes Nahmanides,

is a great secret which cannot be written down. The one who knows it will contemplate why [Scripture] speaks here of the Unique Name (שם המיוחד) [i.e., YHWH which is the attribute of mercy or the masculine potency] and in the rest of the section and the matter concerning the flood [it uses the name] Elohim [i.e., the attribute of judgment or the feminine potency].<sup>167</sup>

Nahmanides, as the supercommentaries rightfully point out,<sup>168</sup> understands the biblical expression “God’s heart,” as well as the midrashic images of the architect and agent intended to explain it, as references to the *Shekhinah*.<sup>169</sup> What is critical is the fact that here two levels of interpretation are offered, the allegorical and the midrashic, the latter being identified further as the mystical.<sup>170</sup> The full implications of Nahmanides’ method are brought to light in Bahya ben Asher’s commentary to this very verse. In the first instance Bahya cites the passage from *Genesis Rabbah* under the heading “according to the way of *midrash*” (על דרך המדרש). He then offers the following mystical explanation: “By way of the kabbalah (על דרך הקבלה), ‘His heart was saddened,’ it [the heart] refers to the architect and the agent mentioned in the *midrash*, and there they [the rabbis] explained the secret of the matter.” Any hard-and-fast line separating *midrash* and kabbalah here breaks down.

To cite but two other typical instances of this in Nahmanides’ Torah commentary: in the commentary to Gen. 33:20 Nahmanides writes: “And by way of truth it [is found] in the *midrash* of our rabbis . . . and there is a great secret in this matter.”<sup>171</sup> In the commentary to Gen. 46:1 Nahmanides puts it this way: “This verse contains a secret which is revealed to us in *Gene-*

167. *Perush*, Gen. 6:6 (p. 50).

168. Cf. Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 29b; Isaac of Acre, *Me’irat ‘Einayim*, p. 36.

169. Cf. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi, *A Kabbalistic Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, ed. M. Hallamish (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 274.

170. Cf. Bahya ben Asher, *Perush ‘al ha-Torah*, Gen. 6:6 (ed. Chavel, p. 102).

171. *Perush*, Gen. 33:20 (p. 189).

*sis Rabbah*.”<sup>172</sup> In this context the line of thinking is rendered more complex by the fact that Naḥmanides includes a citation from *Sefer ha-Bahir*,<sup>173</sup> the influence of which on Naḥmanides I will discuss in more detail further on in this section. That is, from *Sefer ha-Bahir* Naḥmanides derives the symbolic meaning of Isaac as referring to a particular divine attribute, and he then applies this way of reading to Gen. 46:1. Finally, in light of this symbolism he reads theosophic meaning back into the aggadic passage. Naḥmanides, it will be noticed, presents his method in reverse order: the verse in Scripture contains an esoteric truth that is found in *Genesis Rabbah* and further corroborated in *Sefer ha-Bahir*.

On other occasions Naḥmanides simply reads a midrashic source through the lens of kabbalah, without calling the reader's attention to this fact.<sup>174</sup> Clearly, the underlying assumption for him is that theosophic matters are concealed in the words of the talmudic sages. Naḥmanides' commitment to the mystical potential of rabbinic *'aggadah* is made clear in his commentary to Deut. 21:22. Naḥmanides rejects Rashi's figurative reading of an aggadic parable attributed to R. Meir which is intended to explain the scriptural admonition not to leave a corpse hanging on a stake overnight “because an impaled body is an affront to God” (ibid. 22): “This may be compared to twin brothers who are in one city. One of them became king and the other took to thievery. The king gave a command and he [the brother] was hanged. Whoever saw him said, ‘The king has been hanged.’ The king commanded and he was taken down.”<sup>175</sup> According to Rashi, this parable must be interpreted figuratively as referring to the relationship between Israel and God. Naḥmanides opposes this reading in the following cryptic remark: “The parable of the twin brothers contains a secret, and it is not as the Rabbi [i.e., Rashi] thought regarding Israel who are called ‘sons of God’.”<sup>176</sup> For Naḥmanides, Israel below and God above are not brothers only in a figurative sense, but they are so in a mystical sense, for the secret he alludes to here involves the symbolic, and hence ontological, parallelism between the Jewish soul and the divine paradigm.<sup>177</sup> Several of the super-

172. Ibid., Gen. 46:1 (p. 245).

173. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, ed. Margaliot (Jerusalem, 1978), §135.

174. See, e.g., Gen. 2:8; Exod. 21:6.

175. b. Sanhedrin 46b.

176. *Perush*, Deut. 21:22 (p. 446).

177. Cf. Bahya ben Asher, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, Deut. 21:22 (p. 383). Bahya cites the tal-

commentaries on Nahmanides further suggest that there is an allusion here to the kabbalistic secret of *דו פרצופין*, the divine androgyny. That is, the one who commits the capital offense causes the masculine and feminine potencies of the divine to separate, and this results in an “affront to God,” *קללה* *אלהים*, i.e., to the feminine potency.<sup>178</sup> The defilement of the Israelite below is therefore a defilement of the divine above. The force of Nahmanides’ kabbalistic reading of the aggadic parable can be seen when one compares his interpretation with that of his student, R. Solomon ibn Adret. The latter removed the theosophic interpretation and proffered an allegorical or figurative reading which he called “the literal sense of the parable,” *פשוטו של המשל*, viz., the twins are the soul and its angelic counterpart which is of a purely intellectual nature.<sup>179</sup>

Another telling example of the phenomenon of reading rabbinic texts in light of kabbalistic meaning can be found in Nahmanides’ account of the “mystical secret of the Tabernacle” (*סוד המשכן*) in his introductory remarks to his commentary to Exod. 25. After stating that this secret involves the in-dwelling of the *Shekhinah* or the *kavod*, which parallels the in-dwelling of the *Shekhinah* or *kavod* on Mount Sinai, Nahmanides makes the following comparison between the Sinaitic revelation and the theophanous quality of the Tabernacle. Just as at Sinai Moses heard the voice from heaven, so in the Tabernacle he heard that precise voice “addressing him from above the cover that was on top of the Ark of Testimony, between the two cherubim” (Num. 7:89). According to Nahmanides, the kabbalistic secret—viz., that the voice, i.e., the masculine potency of God or the attribute of mercy,

mudic passage under the heading “by way of midrash,” and then explains that the mystical interpretation, “by way of kabbalah,” comprises “an explanation of what is written [in Scripture] and the parable (באור הכתוב והמשל), for the king is the Glory which is called the ‘image of God’ (צלם אלהים), i.e., separated from him, i.e., the servant of God (עבד אלהים). Since the impaled person is in the appearance of the image of God (בדמות צלם אלהים) it is ‘an affront to God’ (*קללה*) (אלהים) if he is not buried during the day and is left there during the night which is the time of the attribute of judgment.” Cf. Judah ben Yaqar, *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, pt. 2, p. 39. See also Recanati, *Perush ‘al ha-Ramah*, ad loc., 88a, who refers to a passage in Zohar 3:143b. On the divine origin of the soul in Nahmanides, see *Perush*, Gen. 2:7; *Kitvei Ramban* 1:103, 134; MS JTS Mic. 1895, fols. 11b–12a. And cf. M. Chaze, “Le sens ésotérique du vœu et du serment selon quelques auteurs des XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles en Espagne et en Italie,” *Revue des études juives* 138 (1979): 250–251.

178. Cf. *Be’ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN*, fol. 29c; Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 52a; Isaac of Acre, *Me’irat ‘Einayim*, pp. 234–235.

179. Cited by Joshua ibn Shu’aib, *Derashot*, fol. 86a. See D. Horwitz, “The Role of Philosophy and Kabbalah in the Rashba,” p. 85.



addressed Moses through the feminine potency or the attribute of judgment—is alluded to in the repetition of the expression “He spoke unto him,” occurring for the first time in the middle of the verse, *מדבר אליו*, and the second time at the end in the form, *וידבר אליו*. Scripture repeats itself, writes Nahmanides, “to indicate that which they [the rabbis] said in the tradition (*קבלה*) regarding the voice that came to Moses from heaven from above the ark-cover and from there it spoke to him.”<sup>180</sup> What is crucial from my vantage point is the fact that the view which Nahmanides cites as something the rabbis “said in the kabbalah” is found in a classical midrashic anthology.<sup>181</sup> This “tradition,” moreover, is understood in light of a theosophic process involving the dynamic of the masculine and feminine potencies of God. Hence, in this instance, it may be said that for Nahmanides the word *קבלה* designates an aggadic tradition whose “real” or implicit meaning is only grasped by reference to a kabbalistic idea. Indeed, on strictly terminological grounds there is evidence that for Nahmanides the word *קבלה* is not always restricted to the limited sense of mystical or esoteric tradition; it refers more generally to the rabbinic oral law that comprises aggadic elements which—in Nahmanides’ mind—are connected with kabbalistic themes.<sup>182</sup>

In the final analysis, I do not think that Nahmanides would have felt the need to distinguish carefully between the aggadic and kabbalistic approaches to Scripture. Naturally, I do not deny that there are instances in his writings where the aggadic or midrashic interpretation is rejected in favor of a kabbalistic one<sup>183</sup> or where the kabbalistic interpretation is offered as an alternative to a more straightforward aggadic one.<sup>184</sup> The point I am

180. *Perush*, Exod. 25 (p. 453).

181. Cf. *Sifre Be-Midbar*, piska 58 (ed. Horovitz, p. 56). Chavel has suggested in the notes to his edition of Nahmanides’ commentary (2:452) that the source for Nahmanides is *Numbers Rabbah* 14:32.

182. Cf. *Perush*, Gen. 46:1 (p. 251) where Nahmanides says the Aramaic translators, Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uziel, were guided in their translations by “things that were known to them by tradition, and their secret is for those who know hidden wisdom.” Cf. commentary to Lev. 18:4 (p. 100) where Nahmanides says about the spiritual state of Elijah: “as it appears from what is written [in Scripture] . . . and from what we know about him in the tradition (*ידיעות*) (ממנו בקבלה).” See also Nahmanides’ introduction to the *Commentary on Job*, *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:23. And cf. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:160, where Nahmanides refers to an aggadic passage in b. Sanhedrin 92a in these terms: *כי כך קבלה רבונו*. See also *Perush*, Gen. 34:12; Lev. 23:24; Num. 11:16, 22:33, 24:20; Deut. 8:3; *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:266.

183. Cf. *Perush* to Exod. 3:2, Lev. 23:40, Num. 20:1 (noted by Septimus, “Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition,” p. 21, n. 37).

making, however, is that, methodologically speaking, Nahmanides did not, so far as I can tell, differentiate between rabbinic and kabbalistic modes of scriptural interpretation. The one as the other assumes, in Septimus' words, a "layer of meaning coexisting but going beyond the plain sense of the text."<sup>185</sup> A key term for Nahmanides that accounts for both aggadic and kabbalistic meaning in Scripture and that bridges the gap between text and interpretation is that of *remez*. Nahmanides uses this term, or any of its derivatives, to indicate the layer of meaning that is implicit or inherent in the text. As he says in his commentary to Num. 3:1, "כי התורה תפרש ותרמו, "the Torah makes explicit and alludes."<sup>186</sup> It lies beyond the confines of this paper to treat in a comprehensive manner the development of this *terminus technicus* from talmudic and midrashic sources to medieval halakhic and kabbalistic texts. Suffice it to say that Nahmanides' usage does have its roots in the earlier usage, specifically in those contexts where rabbinic authors used the word *remez* to refer to an allusion to a certain practice or custom in a biblical text.<sup>187</sup> By utilizing this word Nahmanides is making clear that in his opinion kabbalistic truths—as aggadic explanations—are implicit in the body of Scripture.<sup>188</sup> Paradigmatically, in the introduction to

184. For examples, see Septimus, *op. cit.*, p. 23, n. 41.

185. *Ibid.*, p. 22, n. 41.

186. Cf. *Perush* to Gen. 48:7. And see *She'elot u-Teshuvot le-RaSHBA*, 1:9: "In every thing for which there is a tradition . . . at times the matter is alluded to in Scripture. It is not that this allusion is necessitated [by the text] but only that the tradition necessitates it. And the matter is verified by [both] Scripture and the tradition" ופעמים יהיה בענין ההוא נרמז בכתוב . . . ופעמים יהיה הרמז מוכרח רק תכריחנו כקבלה ויתאמת הענין הכתוב עם הקבלה ולא שיהיה הרמז ההוא מוכרח רק תכריחנו כקבלה ויתאמת הענין הכתוב עם הקבלה. Elsewhere ibn Adret uses the technical expression that the Torah "speaks and alludes," i.e., has both a literal and figurative, exoteric and esoteric, meaning. See *She'elot u-Teshuvot le-RaSHBA*, 1:423: "the words of Torah . . . are revealed and hidden, they speak and allude" נגלה ונסתר אומרים ורמוזין 5:55: "the Torah in its entirety alludes and speaks" שהתורה כולה רמוזה ואומרת.

187. For examples in tannaitic and amoraic literature, see W. Bacher. *Erkhei Midrash*, trans. A. Rabinowitz (Tel Aviv, 1923), pp. 124–125, 295–297.

188. See Septimus, "Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," pp. 22–23, n. 41, and references cited there. To these may be added Gen. 15:7, 20:3, 23:40, 24:1, 26:5; Exod. 12:12, 13:5, 13:8, 14:19, 16:6, 21:2; Lev. 16:8, 25:15; Num. 8:3; Deut. 32:7; *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:161, 2:303. The word רמז also characterizes typological exegesis for Nahmanides; see commentary to Gen. 2:3 and parallel in *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:168; Lev. 26:16 and parallel in *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:262; Deut. 4:30. On this theme in Nahmanides, see Funkenstein, "Nahmanides' Symbolical Reading of History," and esp. the citations in nn. 44–45. And cf. Bacher, "L'Exégèse Biblique dans le Zohar," p. 39, who makes a similar observation with respect to the use of the word רמז in the Zohar as an interpretative method that corresponds to typology in Christian exegesis. Nah-

his Torah commentary Nahmanides writes: "Everything is written in the Torah explicitly (בפירוש) or is alluded to (ברמזיה) in the words, numerical equivalences, the forms of the letters . . . or in the tips of the letters and their crownlets . . . for these allusions are not comprehended except in an oral transmission going back to Moses at Sinai (אלא פה אל) כי הרמזים האלו לא יתבוננו אלא פה אל).<sup>189</sup> Again, in the commentary to Exod. 12:12 he writes, "Scripture hints and deals briefly with hidden matters," והכתוב ירמוז ויקצר. The text thus makes explicit the external aspect while implying the internal aspect through hints and allusions. This assumption is shared, according to Nahmanides, by the *ba'al 'aggadah* and the *mequbbal*, who both set as their task the drawing out of the implied truths embedded in the text.

The central role played by 'aggadah in Nahmanides' kabbalah can also be seen from the fact that he cites *Sefer ha-Bahir* as *Midrash R. Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah*<sup>190</sup> or simply as *midrash*,<sup>191</sup> disclosing the fact that he was of the opinion that this kabbalistic text was not only midrashic in nature but also of tannaitic origin. Thus the same passage cited in the Torah commentary to Gen. 1:1 in the name of the *Midrash R. Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah* is cited in *Torat ha-Shem Temimah* in the name of "our rabbis," רבותינו.<sup>192</sup> In his commentary to Gen. 1:3 Nahmanides cryptically refers to the *Bahir* in these terms: "Our rabbis have in this matter a *midrash* concerning a hidden secret," מדרש בסוד נעלם. Or, again, in his commentary to Gen. 1:8 he thus refers to the *Bahir*: "they have a mysterious midrash," ויש להם מדרש נפלא. Nahmanides' implicit assumption regarding the relationship between the *Bahir*

manides also employs the word רמז or derivatives in the sense of symbol, i.e., a thing below is a רמז for that which is above, for the former is a sign or symbol of the latter. In that sense רמז is equivalent to סוד. Cf. Bacher, op. cit., p. 38 who has noted this equivalence in zoharic terminology. See also idem, 'Erkhei Midrash, p. 125, n. 1. This usage is widespread in medieval kabbalistic sources. The identification of רמז as the allegorical mode of interpretation in the famous acrostic *PaRDeS* is misleading if one does not bear in mind that רמז does in fact function primarily in the kabbalistic sources in the sense of mystical symbol. This point, as far as I am aware, has been largely overlooked in the scholarly literature.

189. *Perush*, Introduction (p. 4).

190. See, e.g., Gen. 1:1, 2:7, 24:1, 38:29, 46:1, 49:24; Exod. 2:25, 15:27, 20:8; Lev. 23:40 (see *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:181), 26:16; Num. 15:31; Deut. 16:20, 22:7, 33:12, 23. See also *Sha'ar ha-Gemul* in *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:306.

191. Cf. Gen. 1:3, 8; Deut. 33:6.

192. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:157.

and the kabbalistic allusions in rabbinic 'aggadah is stated explicitly in a passage from R. Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen of Soria cited by R. Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov: "This is the way [of the rabbis] . . . to allude by means of allusions to a deep, wonderful and hidden secret. And of the allusions which they mentioned in the *haggadot* in the Talmud and the *midrashot*, the one that is [considered] the greatest and most important by the kabbalists . . . is *Sefer ha-Bahir*."<sup>193</sup> According to R. Isaac, therefore, there is no substantial difference between the kabbalistic allusions found in aggadic material in the Talmud or separate midrashic collections and the kabbalistic 'aggadot found in the *Bahir*. From the interweaving of aggadic and Bahiric passages in Nahmanides one can safely conclude that he would have subscribed to R. Isaac's formulation.

This assumption is important for two reasons when evaluating Nahmanides' kabbalistic hermeneutic: first, as a source for citation the *Bahir* was as authoritative as any other standard midrashic collection; second, insofar as he read the *Bahir* as an ancient *midrash* he was able in turn to read midrashic texts in light of Bahiric symbolism. One therefore finds that in many instances where Nahmanides cites the *Bahir* he cites in addition a standard midrashic or aggadic passage.<sup>194</sup> We have already seen one example where Nahmanides reads an aggadic passage in light of the *Bahir*, and this in turn generates a kabbalistic reading of Scripture. Another striking example of this is to be found in Nahmanides' commentary to Gen. 24:1, "And the Lord blessed Abraham with all things," *וַה' בֵּרַךְ אֶבְרָהָם בְּכָל*.<sup>195</sup> In connection with that verse Nahmanides discloses an esoteric truth about the nature of the ninth and tenth divine attributes, *Yesod* and *Shekhinah*, by interpreting the talmudic 'aggadah in light of Bahiric symbolism.<sup>196</sup> By reading the text kabbalistically the word *בְּכָל* becomes a name for *Shekhinah*, who is so called because she is "in the All," *ba-kol*, the All referring in turn to *Yesod*. Hence, through the kabbalistic reading of the aggadic passage one gains a deeper understanding of the biblical passage, i.e., that God "blessed

193. *Sefer ha-'Emunot* (Jerusalem, 1968), fol. 94a, cited by Scholem, *Madda'ei ha-Yahadut* 2 (1927): 277. For discussion of this text and a partially different translation, see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 40–41.

194. Cf. *Perush*, Gen. 24:1, 46:1, Exod. 20:8; Lev. 23:40; Num. 15:31. See *Abudarham ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 127.

195. Cf. Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis*, p. 220, n. 65.

196. Cf. *Perush*, Exod. 19:5, Deut. 5:16.

Abraham with all things” means not only that the latter was the recipient of all sorts of mundane blessings (the literal meaning) but indicates as well (on a symbolic level) the special relationship that Abraham, the mundane correlate of the attribute of *Hesed*, had to the *Shekhinah*. Even a cursory glance at this passage will show how unusual it is, for, instead of giving a sentence or two, Naḥmanides delivers a rather lengthy discourse deciphering the kabbalistic symbolism, utilizing several aggadic texts as well as two key sections from the *Bahir*. Interestingly, Baḥya ben Asher at the end of his commentary on the verse writes: “Understand this principle, for the matter is hidden. The RaMBaN, blessed be his memory, disclosed the matter explicitly, and he extended the explanation beyond what was required.” This is indeed a curious remark, coming as it does from the pen of a writer whose kabbalistic commentary far exceeds that of Naḥmanides in volume and scope.

One must also bear in mind that Naḥmanides was fully committed to the notion that the *'aggadot* themselves, although not necessarily in every case, operated on two levels, the exoteric and esoteric. Thus, for example, in his commentary to Gen. 1:7 he cites an enigmatic saying of Ben Zoma from *Genesis Rabbah* 4:7 and suggests that perhaps he “had a hidden explanation whose secret he did not want to reveal.”<sup>197</sup> In his commentary to Gen. 6:6 (a passage that I have already commented upon above in a different context) he argues in the other direction, assuming that the *midrash* alluded to a secret truth that he cannot elaborate upon further in writing: “In *Genesis Rabbah* with respect to this important matter there is a parable (ענין נכבד) . . . and it is a great secret which cannot be written (והוא סוד גדול לא ניתן) . . . (ליכתב).”<sup>198</sup> In his explanation of the issue of separation mentioned in Gen. 1:14, “God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night,’” Naḥmanides brings together several distinct aggadic traditions by understanding their hidden meaning in light of one kabbalistic explanation: “‘He separated [the light from darkness]’ (Gen. 1:3). R. Judah ben Simon said, ‘He separated it for Himself.’<sup>199</sup> . . . And if you can know their [the rabbis’] intention in saying in the Blessing of the Moon, ‘a crown of splendor (עטרת תפארת) for those borne by Him from birth,’<sup>200</sup> you would

197. Ibid., Gen. 1:7 (p. 19).

198. Ibid., Gen. 6:6 (p. 50).

199. *Genesis Rabbah* 3:6 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 22).

200. Cf. b. Sanhedrin 42a.

know the secret of the primordial light, and that of the hiding and separation [of the light], as it is said, 'He separated it for Himself,' and the secret of the 'two kings who make use of one crown,'<sup>201</sup> for in the end 'the light of the moon shall become like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall become sevenfold' (Isa. 30:26)."<sup>202</sup> The esoteric meaning of the aggadic explanation of God's separating the light for Himself is identical with the meaning of the legend regarding the sun and moon, who were compared—before God diminished the light of the moon—to two kings making use of one crown. In kabbalistic terms, the sun and moon refer to *Tif'eret* and *Shekhinah*, the masculine and feminine aspects of God, alluded to in the Blessing of the Moon in the phrase "crown of splendor" (עטרת תפארת). Hence, that God separated the light for Himself means really that God separated the light from Himself, i.e., there was a separation within the divine between the masculine and feminine, the sun and the moon, the splendor and the crown.<sup>203</sup> Although there was this primordial separation of these forces, in the end there will be unity between them, as was prophesied by Isaiah. The 'aggadah—and ultimately Scripture itself—is here transposed in the key of kabbalistic theosophy.

Naḥmanides similarly assumes an esoteric meaning to 'aggadah in his commentary to Exod. 19:13 where he rejects Rashi's literal reading of a passage from *Pirquei R. 'Eli'ezer*, chap. 31, and proposes that this legend contains an allusion to a kabbalistic secret.<sup>204</sup> Although in this case it is clear that the kabbalistic understanding is offered as an alternative to the midrashic, it is noteworthy that even the former is linked to an aggadic statement. Moreover, as we have seen, in his commentary to Deut. 21:22 Naḥmanides rejects Rashi's figurative reading of an aggadic text and alludes to a kabbalistic interpretation. By contrast in his commentary to Deut. 11:8 Naḥmanides cites Rashi's explanation, which is a paraphrase of the following midrashic comment concerning the bodily obligations that are to be fulfilled outside the land of Israel:

"You will soon perish [from the good land that the Lord is assigning to you].

201. Cf. b. Ḥullin 60b.

202. *Perush*, Gen. 1:14 (p. 23).

203. Cf. *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBa*N, fol. 1c; *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 28b; *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 25.

204. See Septimus, "Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," pp. 16–17, n. 21.

Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart [bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead]" (Deut. 11:7–8): Even though I am exiling you from the land to outside the land, be distinguished [or marked, *מצויינים*] by the commandments, so that when you return they will not be considered novelties for you. This may be compared to a mortal king who got angry with his wife and sent her to her father's house. He said to her, "Adorn yourself with your jewelry so that when you return they will not be novelties for you."<sup>205</sup>

Commenting on this Nahmanides writes, "In this *midrash* there is a deep secret and I have already alluded to it."<sup>206</sup> Nahmanides, as Shem Tov ibn Gaon already noted,<sup>207</sup> refers to his esoteric explanation of the expression "the laws of the God of the land," *משפט אלהי הארץ*, to which he alludes in his commentary to Gen. 24:3 and 26:5. In the latter context he explains that Abraham's fulfillment of the entire Torah, as well as his knowledge of the mystical reasons for the commandments and the secrets of the Torah, was possible only in the land of Israel.<sup>208</sup> Even though there are bodily obligations that are not dependent on the land for their fulfillment, the essence of the commandments is tied to the land, for there is a mystical connection between the land, i.e., the *Shekhinah*, and the commandments.<sup>209</sup> This is the meaning of the expression "the laws of the God of the land," i.e., the laws of that God are particularly bound to the land, and it is the esoteric meaning of the midrashic parable which sees the fulfillment of certain commandments outside the land as a form of adornment which will keep one properly prepared for reentry into the land.

Finally, there is the well-known comment contained in Nahmanides' own account of his disputation with Friar Paul at Barcelona in 1263. Any treatment of Nahmanides' attitude towards 'aggadah, even if limited, as in our case, to the role of 'aggadah in his kabbalistic exposition, must take this comment into account. When presented by his opponent with the aggadic statement that the Messiah was born at the time of the destruction of the

205. *Sifre Deuteronomy*, pisqa 43 (ed. Finkelstein, p. 102).

206. *Perush*, Deut. 11:18 (p. 394).

207. *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 51b.

208. *Perush*, Gen. 26:5 (p. 150).

209. See above, nn. 138–139.

Temple,<sup>210</sup> Naḥmanides at first replied: "I do not believe in that *haggadah*, but it is proof for my words." When Paul retorted, apparently in an outcry, "See, he contradicts their books," Naḥmanides responded more cautiously: "Either this '*aggadah*' is not true, or else it has another explanation according to the mystery of the sages (מסתרי החכמים)."<sup>211</sup> He then stated, as an obvious polemical tactic, that he would accept the '*aggadah*' literally, for it afforded proof for his case, i.e., insofar as Jesus was not born on the day of the destruction of the Temple, he could not have been the true Messiah. Scholem suggested that Naḥmanides' true intention in the remark that the aggadic passage might have "another explanation according to the mystery of the sages" could be gathered from a text by one of Naḥmanides' disciples, Sheshet des Mercadell, concerning the secret of metempsychosis, in which this '*aggadah*' figures as a key proof-text.<sup>212</sup> If Scholem has correctly understood Naḥmanides' allusion, then the first option in Naḥmanides' remark that the '*aggadah*' may not be true should be construed as a rejection of a literal reading of the aggadic text. In effect, the two parts of the statement are not in any way contradictory or incompatible, for the claim that the '*aggadah*' may not be true simply means that a strictly literal reading is not true, and this is precisely what is implied in the suggestion that follows regarding the possible mystical or esoteric reading. It is important to note, moreover, that the Latin protocol of the disputation does not have any mention of Naḥmanides' second alternative concerning the possibility of a secret underlying the aggadic text.<sup>213</sup> Furthermore, there is no other reference to kabbalistic matters in the account of the disputation. It may very

210. j. Berakhot 2:4 (5a). For other references to this legend in rabbinic sources, see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1968), 6:406, n. 53. The use of this aggadic tradition was extended by Friar Raymond Martini in his *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Judeos*. See R. Chazan, "From Friar Paul to Friar Raymond: The Development of Innovative Missionizing Argumentation," *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983): 301–302.

211. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:306.

212. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 459. See the text published by Scholem, "A Study of the Theory of Transmigration in Kabbalah during the XIII Century," *Tarbiz* 16 (1945): 143 [in Hebrew].

213. The Latin text simply states that Naḥmanides denied the authority of aggadic texts because "they were, he claimed, sermons, in which their teachers often lied for the purpose of exhorting the people." I have utilized the English translation in R. Chazan, "The Barcelona 'Disputation' of 1263: Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response," *Speculum* 52 (1977): 836–837. The original text is published in Y. Baer, "The Disputations of R. Yehiel of Paris and of Naḥmanides," *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 187 [in Hebrew].



well be, therefore, that Nahmanides added this one reference for his Jewish audience. In the context of the disputation he only wanted to invalidate the Christological reading of the talmudic legend by either denying the literalness of it or accepting it as literally true for the sake of the argument.

That this interpretation of Nahmanides' remark is plausible may be supported by a second comment of Nahmanides which, to my knowledge, has been overlooked by all writers who have tried to understand Nahmanides' position as expressed in the disputation. I am referring to a statement made by Nahmanides in his commentary to Exod. 24:1, "Then he said to Moses, 'Come up to the Lord.'" Nahmanides interprets the passage attributed in b. Sanhedrin 38b to R. Idi, according to whom the verse must be interpreted as follows: God tells Moses to come up to Meṭaṭron, whose name is like that of his Master.<sup>214</sup> Commenting on this passage Nahmanides notes:

I have already mentioned the [rabbis'] intention with respect to this name [Meṭaṭron], and all their words are true. Yet they spoke in that homily (הגדה) as one who conceals his face (כמסתיר פנים), for R. Idi did not reveal to this heretic (מין) who asked the question the matter of the great Meṭaṭron and his secret, God forbid.<sup>215</sup>

As may be discerned from other contexts in Nahmanides' commentary,<sup>216</sup> it is clear that, according to his kabbalistic system, Meṭaṭron refers to the *Shekhinah*.<sup>217</sup> The latter has Meṭaṭron as one of its names because this divine grade is entrusted with providential care, and the name Meṭaṭron, at least according to the etymology accepted by Nahmanides, means the "guide of the road," מורה הדרך.<sup>218</sup> In any event, it is precisely this mystical explanation

214. Nahmanides ad loc. rejects Rashi's interpretation, according to which Meṭaṭron is the one who told Moses to come up to God. See the commentary of Rashi to b. Sanhedrin 38b, s.v., והוּ מַטְטְרוֹן. Rashi's interpretation is accepted by R. Meir ha-Levi Abulafia; see Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, p. 167, n. 18.

215. *Perush*, Exod. 24:1 (p. 448).

216. Cf. *ibid.*, Exod. 12:12, 23:20.

217. For other references to this tradition in thirteenth-century Catalan kabbalistic sources, see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 187, n. 214, and pp. 214–215, 299. On the identification of *Shekhinah* as an angelic presence, see above, n. 100. See also the anonymous fragment in MS JTS Mic. 1892, fol. 54a, where reference is made to Nahmanides' commentary to Exod. 24:1.

218. The etymology according to this interpretation is derived from the Latin *metator*, meaning a "measurer" or "one who marks out." Such a usage is to be found already in tan-

that, according to Naḥmanides, R. Idi did not want to divulge to the heretic. Is it unreasonable to draw the methodological parallel between this explanation by Naḥmanides of the talmudic discussion and his own experience at Barcelona? Just as the third-century Palestinian rabbi did not wish to expound upon the mystical meaning of Meṭaṭron before the sectarian, so too Naḥmanides refrained from expounding upon the mystical meaning of the 'aggadah about the Messiah before the Christian.<sup>219</sup>

Indeed, on the next day, Naḥmanides returned to the question of this 'aggadah, this time placing it in the context of a longer explanation on the general status of 'aggadot. Here we find again a two-staged approach on the part of Naḥmanides: at first he states that he does not accept as authoritative the legend about the Messiah's birth on the day of the destruction of the

naitic sources, as is pointed out by Naḥmanides himself in the commentary to Exod. 24:1. See *Sifre Deuteronomy*, pisqa 338 (ed. Finkelstein, p. 388), and the editor's note 2, ad loc. The reference there, however, is not to Meṭaṭron the angel. Cf. P. S. Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28 (1977): 164, n. 15. Naḥmanides conflates this supposed Latin etymology with the Greek etymology—which he mentions specifically—of *metator*, which means "messenger." The latter etymology was popularized by the talmudic dictionary 'Arukh of Nathan ben Yehiel of Rome. Such an etymology for Meṭaṭron is found in a citation by R. Ezra of Gerona in the name of Isaac the Blind of Provence; see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 298–299. Cf. also H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (New York, 1973), pp. 127–128 (Introduction). A recent attempt to substantiate the supposed etymology of Meṭaṭron from the Latin *metator* (combined perhaps with the Greek *metron*) has been made by G. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Meṭaṭron and Christ," *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983): 287. For another account of the etymology of Meṭaṭron as deriving from the Greek *synthronos* (which is synonymous with *metathronos*), see S. Lieberman's appendix in I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1980), pp. 235–240.

219. In this regard it is of interest to consider the following words of Yehiel ben Joseph of Paris in his disputation with Nicholas Donin at the court of Louis IX in 1240 (cited from S. Grünbaum, *Wikkuaḥ* [Thorn, 1873], p. 2): "There are in them [the words of the rabbis in the Talmud] matters of 'aggadah to draw the heart of a person [cf. b. Hagigah 14a; *Sifre Deuteronomy*, pisqa 317, p. 359; and see Hillel of Verona, *Sefer Tagmulei Nefesh* (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 181] so that he will understand the external sense (להבין המליצה). And there are in them wonderful [or secret] words (דברי פלא) which are difficult for the infidel, heretic, or apostate to believe. Concerning these there is no need to respond to you. If you want you may believe them, and if not, then do not believe them, for no law is determined by them." These words come strikingly close to those of Naḥmanides (discussed below, see references in n. 222). Cf. J. Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York, 1962), pp. 108–113; R. Chazan, "A Medieval Hebrew Polemical Mélange," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 51 (1980): 110, n. 68; Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, 1982), p. 70; H. Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (London, 1982), pp. 36–37.

Temple because there is another rabbinic tradition which places the birth of the Messiah “shortly before the end of days, when he will come to deliver us from exile.” Immediately after stating this, Naḥmanides, quite remarkably, reiterates his position of the preceding day and asserts that he accepts the *'aggadah* concerning the birth of the Messiah on the day of the destruction of the Temple according to its literal meaning because, when taken as such, it proves that Jesus is not the Messiah, for he was not born on that day: **אני מקבל אותה הגדה כפשוטה כמו שאתם חפצים בה מפני שהיא ראיא מפורשת שאין ישו שלהם משיח . . . שהוא לא נולד באותו היום**.<sup>220</sup> Clearly, the technique used by Naḥmanides is to give in to the Christian demand that he accept the *'aggadah* because he could utilize that very *'aggadah* in a polemical way to undermine the Christological stance. Naḥmanides' acceptance of an *'aggadah* that he ultimately rejects is not a blatant contradiction, but merely points to a stratagem used to counter the claims of the disputant.<sup>221</sup> In this case there is no mention of the other alternative regarding the possibility that the aggadic statement may contain a secret or mystical explanation. There is no mention of this here because at this stage of the argument such a consideration is completely irrelevant. That is, what Naḥmanides wishes to impart to the reader of his account of the disputation is that at this point he was prepared to accept Friar Paul's insistence that he accept the *'aggadah*, for by accepting it he was able to use it to attack his opponent's position.

For the purposes of this paper it is necessary to reflect further on the implications of Naḥmanides' fuller remark made at the disputation concerning the nature of *'aggadah*. Naḥmanides, as I have already mentioned above, stated with respect to *midrash* or *'aggadah* that if one believes it, it is well and good, but if one does not believe it there is no harm.<sup>222</sup> Reflecting on this statement, several scholars in the past had been led to the conclusion that Naḥmanides was arguing against his own belief; the disclaimer must be seen only in the polemical context and not as representative of his true viewpoint.<sup>223</sup> A growing scholarly consensus, however, challenges this interpre-

220. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:308–309.

221. The point is stated clearly in D. Berger's review of H. Maccoby's *Judaism on Trial*, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 76 (1986): 255.

222. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:308. See statement of Yehiel ben Joseph cited above, n. 219.

223. Y. Baer, “The Disputations of R. Yehiel of Paris and of Naḥmanides,” p. 184; idem, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia, 1961), 1:153; C. Roth, “The Disputation at

tation and maintains that what Nahmanides said about 'aggadah is a sincere statement of his belief.<sup>224</sup> One of the more cogent presentations of this line of argument is that of Septimus, who has argued that there is sufficient evidence in Nahmanides' biblical commentary, a nonpolemical context, to show that Nahmanides was indeed prepared to reject outright aggadic statements. Hence, Nahmanides did not only want to undercut the force of the Christian stance to prove the truth of Christianity from aggadic statements, according to Septimus, but this represents, on the contrary, his true position. It will be recalled that Saul Lieberman had already argued that Nahmanides' apparent take-it-or-leave-it attitude towards 'aggadah, or more precisely aggadic passages that have no halakhic implications, had its precedent in geonic traditions such as *אין סומכין על אגדה*.<sup>225</sup> In Septimus' view, however, Nahmanides' attitude towards 'aggadah was somewhere in between the literalist approach of the Franco-German tradition and the Andalusian rationalistic attitude, which saw a need to allegorize 'aggadot in order to make them more feasible. Indeed, in Septimus' opinion, when Nahmanides "resorts to kabbalistic defense it is often of aggadot that are entirely beyond the reach of Andalusian understanding,"<sup>226</sup> i.e., his kabbalistic interpretation of 'aggadot serves first and foremost as a response to rationalist critique. Thus, Septimus calls our attention to "a basic terminological point of contact between Nahmanides' polemical disclaimer and his mature

Barcelona (1263)," *Harvard Theological Review* 43 (1950): 128; M. Cohen, "Reflections on the Text and Context of the Disputation of Barcelona," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 35 (1964): 170–171; H. H. Ben-Sasson, *Peraqim be-Toledot ha-Yehudim bi-Yemei ha-Beinayyim* (Tel-Aviv, 1969), p. 251; R. Chazan, "The Barcelona 'Disputation' of 1263," pp. 836–837; idem, "From Friar Paul to Friar Raymond," pp. 300–301; J. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, pp. 118–119. See also H. Beinart's article on the Barcelona disputation in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 4:214.

224. See H. Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, pp. 44–48, 58–66, 68–74; and the review of Maccoby's book by D. Berger, p. 225. See also the articles of Lieberman, Septimus, and Fox mentioned in the following notes, and cf. the note of Chavel to his edition of Nahmanides' account of the disputation, *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:308.

225. Cf. S. Lieberman, *Shikiin* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 82–83. On the geonic tradition, see Aaron Marcus, *Qeset Sofer*, introduction to *She'elot u-Teshuvot min ha-Shamayim* (Cracow, 1895), pp. 22–23; and cf. S. W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 6:176 ff.

226. Septimus, "Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," p. 19. Cf. S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism* (New York, 1970), pp. 223–224, who thus characterized Nahmanides' presentation of kabbalistic truths: "It was chiefly when philosophy called in question his deep sympathies with even lower humanity, and threatened to withdraw them from those ennobling influences under which he wanted to keep them, that he asserted his mystical theories."

exegesis.” That is, Septimus accepts Nahmanides’ denial of aggadic authority at the Barcelona disputation as his genuine opinion on the basis of the fact that in his commentary “he almost invariably attaches the term *aggadah* to those interpretations about which he seems uneasy, which make sense only when interpreted nonliterally, or whose seriousness and authority he is calling into question.”<sup>227</sup> Although I do not believe that on a purely terminological basis Septimus’ position can be maintained in every case,<sup>228</sup> the main thrust of his argument is well-taken insofar as Nahmanides clearly did not uphold the literal meaning of every aggadic remark. Recently, Marvin Fox has supported Septimus’ position on this score by both locating Nahmanides’ circumspect attitude towards *’aggadah* in the larger context of rabbinic authorities and by establishing various typologies in Nahmanides’ commentary, especially on the book of Genesis, in which aggadic passages are rejected.<sup>229</sup> With respect to this essential issue, then, there can be no argument.

Septimus is therefore correct in pointing out that Nahmanides’ reading of *’aggadot* is not as straightforward and simple as that of Rashi. To be sure, as he indicates, there are sufficient examples in Nahmanides’ commentary where aggadic statements are rejected without any indication that they embrace a deeper, mystical meaning. I thus agree with Septimus’ claim that “Nahmanides did not see kabbalistic interpretation as a universal key to the understanding of all *aggadah*.”<sup>230</sup> Septimus is likewise correct in emphasizing that the view that “because Nahmanides was a kabbalist he must have accepted the authority of all *aggadah*” is patently fallacious.<sup>231</sup> Nevertheless, it seems to me that in his effort to correct a widespread misconception regarding Nahmanides’ attitude to *’aggadah*, Septimus gives insufficient notice to what is in fact the critical issue in determining the role of *’aggadah*

227. Septimus, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

228. See, e.g., *Perush*, Exod. 1:1, 19:13; Lev. 16:8; Num. 1:32.

229. See M. Fox, “Nahmanides on the Status of Aggadot: Perspectives on the Disputation at Barcelona, 1263,” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 40 (1989): 95–109.

230. A similar point has been made with respect to Nahmanides’ disciple, R. Solomon ibn Adret; see the studies of C. Horowitz and D. Horvitz cited above, n. 29.

231. Septimus, “Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition,” p. 21, n. 37. This view is attributed by Septimus to Scholem, but I am unable to locate any passage in Scholem’s writings that would warrant such an attribution. See the claim of Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, p. 37, that R. Yehiel of Paris certainly thought that aggadic passages have an allegorical or mystical meaning, “for Jewish mysticism took much of its sustenance from these very passages, understood in a figurative or coded sense.”

in Naḥmanides' kabbalistic exposition. The real concern is not whether Naḥmanides' posture as a kabbalist forced him to accept as binding every single aggadic statement, but rather the central position accorded to the theosophic reinterpretation and transformation of 'aggadot in Naḥmanides' kabbalistic exegetical activity. When the issue is posed in this way it seems to me undeniably clear that such exegetical activity is beyond doubt the life-blood of Naḥmanides' work in the area of kabbalah. From that perspective it can be said, inverting Septimus' language, that Naḥmanides saw aggadic interpretation as the universal key to the understanding of kabbalah.<sup>232</sup> Moreover, in evaluating Naḥmanides' kabbalah and its relationship to 'aggadah, one cannot simply focus on passages where the author uses the term, for in the majority of cases he cites aggadic texts without labeling them as such. Viewing the matter this way, one is led to the obvious conclusion that aggadic exegesis is central to Naḥmanides' kabbalah. One would be hard-pressed to ignore this dimension when one examines Naḥmanides' kabbalistic statements.

In light of the above it seems to me necessary to qualify somewhat the characterization of Naḥmanides as a conservative kabbalist. It is certainly the case, as Idel points out, that Naḥmanides asserted on various occasions that kabbalah consists of esoteric truths that were received by Moses and have been transmitted orally, and which cannot, therefore, be deduced by reasoning or supposition. The fuller analysis of Naḥmanides' position would require a careful examination of the contexts wherein Naḥmanides employs the distinction between supposition and tradition. It is undeniably true that Naḥmanides had such an image of the mystical tradition. Yet it is somewhat curious that Naḥmanides never, so far as I am aware, mentions a teacher with regard to kabbalistic matters.<sup>233</sup> It is well-known, of course, as I mentioned above, that one of his teachers was Judah ben Yaqar, who in fact was a kabbalist. Naḥmanides mentions ben Yaqar several times in his

232. In this connection it is of interest to note that later Hasidic masters incorporated the study of 'aggadah under the category of the study of kabbalah. See., e.g., R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya*, pt. IV, chap. 23, fol. 137a. And cf. B. Z. Dinur, *Be-Mifneh ha-Dorot* (Jerusalem, 1955), p. 165, n. 37.

233. In the commentary to *Sefer Yeṣirah* which Scholem published in the name of Naḥmanides, we do find the author divulging esoteric matters with the introductory phrase "And I have heard," ושמעתי, thus suggesting that he has received these matters orally from a teacher. But, characteristically, no teacher is mentioned by name. See "The Authentic Commentary of the RaMBaN to *Sefer Yeṣirah*," ed. by Scholem, *Qiryat Sefer* 6 (1929–30): 404 [in Hebrew]. It should also be noted that in at least three of the manuscripts of the same text, p. 406, mention is made of "the Ḥasid," a term usually taken to refer in the writings of the Spanish kabbalists to

halakhic writings,<sup>234</sup> but never with respect to a kabbalistic doctrine. This fact is somewhat puzzling given Nahmanides' own insistence on the necessity to have a teacher in order to understand kabbalistic allusions. In trying to chart out Nahmanides' kabbalah the little we know of ben Yaqar is not terribly helpful.<sup>235</sup> To be sure, it is highly unlikely that Nahmanides did not learn mystical matters from ben Yaqar; indeed, in the writings of R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon, the disciple of R. Solomon ibn Adret and R. Isaac ben Todros, the teachings of ben Yaqar are cited,<sup>236</sup> leaving one with the impression that ben Yaqar's teachings were still revered in Nahmanides' circle. Moreover, in terms of style ben Yaqar's fluid transition from 'aggadah to kabbalah is reminiscent of Nahmanides, though I would maintain that in ben Yaqar it is sometimes more difficult to draw the line between the aggadic and kabbalistic reading of a rabbinic source. The laconic and reserved transmission of esoteric matters is also conspicuous in both authors. Nevertheless, in his presentation of kabbalistic ideas, Nahmanides does not himself rely on tracing his kabbalah to ben Yaqar or to any specific teacher. It seems to me, rather, that in this regard the *Sefer ha-Bahir* is the crucial source which informed Nahmanides' kabbalah.<sup>237</sup>

One could, of course, argue that these alternatives are not mutually exclusive, for perhaps it was from his teachers, such as ben Yaqar, that Nah-

R. Isaac the Blind (see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 254). The reference, though, does not suggest that the author, supposedly Nahmanides, received anything from the Hasid, but merely reflects that he was cognizant of an alternative reading and interpretation. See, however, p. 407 and Scholem's n. 2 ad loc., and cf. p. 410, n. 2. For another discrepancy between Nahmanides' explanation of a passage in *Sefer Yesirah* and that of R. Isaac the Blind, see "The Commentary of R. Isaac of Acre to the First Chapter of *Sefer Yesirah*," published by Scholem, *Qiryat Sefer* 31 (1955–1956); 383 [in Hebrew]. This discrepancy was already noted by Scholem, without relying on the evidence of R. Isaac of Acre, in *Qiryat Sefer* 6 (1929–30): 402, n. 2.

234. Cf. Chavel, *Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman*, pp. 38–44.

235. See, however, Idel, "We Have No Tradition," p. 57. See also E. Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Albany, 1989), pp. 108–111, who has noted the influence of Judah ben Yaqar on Nahmanides with respect to the marital motif connected to the Sabbath. In particular, Ginsburg notes that in three places Nahmanides, like his mentor, interpreted *Genesis Rabbah* 11:8 as an allusion to the divine wedding. Cf. *Perush* to Gen. 2:3, Lev. 23:26, and Deut. 5:15. See also below, n. 237.

236. See, for instance, Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov*, fols. 29a (citing his teacher, i.e., R. Isaac ben Todros, who received from R. Judah, i.e., Judah ben Yaqar), 37b, 44b. The latter two references refer to the same interpretation found in ben Yaqar's *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, p. 89.

237. One problem with this thesis is the fact that Nahmanides' conception of the divine emanations varies from that of the *Bahir*. For Nahmanides the *sefirot* are the divine essence, whereas in the *Bahir* the divine potencies are depicted as instruments or vessels. Cf. Idel, *Kab-*

manides received the *Sefer ha-Bahir*.<sup>238</sup> Interesting in this regard is the following observation made by R. Šadok ha-Kohen of Lublin (1823–1900) in the context of contrasting Naḥmanides' kabbalah with various other types of experience or insights that can be found in Jewish mystical literature: "It appears to me that the kabbalah of the RaMBaN and his teachers and students is a new insight (מראה מחדשה) . . . and its foundation is based on the *Sefer ha-Bahir* of R. Neḥuniah ben ha-Qanah, which was disclosed to them, and from which RaMBaN cites frequently."<sup>239</sup> While the claim that Naḥmanides received the *Bahir* from his teachers is indeed plausible enough, it is almost impossible to evaluate this adequately in light of our scanty knowledge concerning his teachers in kabbalistic matters. In any event, the critical point is that in his own transmission of kabbalistic truths the role played by the *Bahir* is the decisive one. The importance of this source, as I have already indicated, lies in the fact that it represented a *literary* document whose authenticity and traditional authority Naḥmanides accepted. He therefore read the *Bahir* as an aggadic source, and this factor undoubtedly unleashed his creative imagination to recast aggadic statements in the mold of theosophical kabbalah. While other kabbalists before Naḥmanides had reinterpreted aggadic texts in light of kabbalistic symbolism, Naḥmanides was the first to apply this hermeneutical strategy in a biblical commentary intended for mass consumption. Beyond the specific citations from the *Bahir* that one finds scattered in the Torah commentary, the influence of this work upon Naḥmanides can be seen in the frequent linkage of kabbalistic truth to an aggadic text. In Naḥmanides' thought, then, there is a convergence of theosophy and 'aggadah, and it is on this basis and through this medium that Naḥmanides can present kabbalah as the "way of truth" of normative Judaism.

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*balah: New Perspectives*, pp. 137–138. The essentialist view seems to have been taken by Judah ben Yaḳar as well; see *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, pt. 1, p. 22, where we find that God is equated with His name and His attributes. On the relation between the traditional thirteen *middot* and the ten *sefirot* in the Naḥmanidean tradition, see the cryptic remark in *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 31b. See also Todros Abulafia, *Ošar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Warsaw, 1879), fols. 16c–d. For a more general discussion of this problem in the early kabbalah, see J. Dan, *Hugei ha-Mequbbalim ha-Rishonim* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 1–10.

238. In the case of ben Yaḳar there is no direct citation of the *Bahir* by name, though in some cases in his writings a possible influence of it can be detected. Cf. *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, pt. 1, pp. 110–111 to *Sefer ha-Bahir* §§102 and 157, and pt. 2, p. 42 to *Sefer ha-Bahir*, §157. I am indebted to my colleague, Prof. Elliot Ginsburg, for these references.

239. *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, appended to *Divrei Soferim* (Lublin, 1927), fol. 34d.



# CIRCUMCISION AND THE DIVINE NAME: A STUDY IN THE TRANSMISSION OF ESOTERIC DOCTRINE

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## I

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN circumcision and the divine name is first alluded to in the *Midrash Tanḥuma*, where it is stated that God sealed his name *Shaddai* in the children of Israel.<sup>1</sup> There are two passages in *Tanḥuma* which make reference to this notion, one in *parashat Šav*, section 14,<sup>2</sup> and the other in *parashat Shemini*, section 8. From a careful examination of the two contexts it is clear that the former serves as the basis for the latter.<sup>3</sup> It

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Baḥya ben Asher, *Beʿur ʿal ha-Torah*, Gen. 2:7 (ed. Chavel [Jerusalem, 1981], p. 62). Drawing upon this older midrashic motif, Abraham Abulafia asserted that at the time of circumcision the name *Shaddai* is inscribed upon the infant's body; see M. Idel, *Kitve R. ʿAvraham ʿAbulʿafiyah u-Mishnato* (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1976), 1:146 and references on p. 154, n. 29. The specific connection between the name *Shaddai* and circumcision is biblical in origin; see Gen. 17:1. The connection between the *Tanḥuma* passage and the use of *Shaddai* in the biblical context is made by the thirteenth century kabbalist Joseph Hamadan in his *Sefer Taʿame ha-Mišwot*, ed. M. Meier (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1974), p. 242: "'Walk before Me and be blameless' (Gen. 17:1). What is [the meaning of] 'blameless' (תמים)? In the nose is the form of a *shin* and in the hand the form of a *dalet*, thus there are found [the letters which make up the name] דש [demon]. . . . When the *yod*, which is the supernal form, is revealed, the name is completed, and that is the name דש. Thus the verse says, 'I am אלדש; walk before Me and be blameless.'" For a similar use of the *Tanḥuma* passage see *Zohar* 1:95a-b. According to yet another thirteenth century mystical tradition, first expressed by kabbalists like Moses de León, David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid and the anonymous author of *Tiqqune Zohar*, the Tetragrammaton is inscribed or engraved upon a person's face; see Scholem, "Physiognomy and Chiromancy" [Hebrew] *Sefer Assaf*, ed. Cassuto et al. (Jerusalem, 1953), p. 493, n. 55.

<sup>2</sup> This passage is repeated verbatim in some of the printed editions of *Tanḥuma*, *Tazriʿa*, 5. See, however, the editio princeps (Mantua, 1563), p. 59c, where the occurrence of this passage in *Tazriʿa* is lacking.

<sup>3</sup> Specifically, in the passage from *Tanḥuma*, *Shemini*, 8, the tradition concerning the sealing of the name *Shaddai* on the three parts of the body is cited as

will therefore be sufficient for the purposes of this analysis to cite only the former:

All of Israel who are circumcised [upon death] enter the Garden of Eden, for the Holy One, blessed be He, has placed His name in Israel so that they will enter the Garden of Eden. And what is the name and the seal (השם והחותם) which He placed in them? It is [the name] שדי. He placed the *shin* in the nose, the *dalet* in the hand, and the *yod* on the [place of] circumcision. Therefore when a Jew dies there is an appointed angel in the Garden of Eden, who receives every circumcised Jew and brings him into the Garden of Eden.

The conception of the sealing of the name *Shaddai* on the physical human body is based in the first instance on the supposed morphological correspondence between the Hebrew letters which make up the divine name and the given parts of the human anatomy to which they refer.<sup>4</sup> We see, moreover, that in this

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proof of the teaching that the various precepts are connected to the human limbs. Hence the *shin* in the nose teaches us that one should not receive pleasure from something stolen, the *dalet* in the hand teaches that one should not do business by stealing, and the *yod* in the phallus teaches that one should not sin in sexual matters. Clearly this passage is a later reworking of an earlier aggadic conception concerning the correspondence of the 248 positive precepts to the 248 limbs; see B. Mak. 23b. It is also of interest to note that in the same context in *Tanḥuma* the injunction to circumcise the flesh (Gen. 17:1) is set in opposition to the prohibition of cutting gashes on one's flesh in mourning for the dead (Lev. 19:28), implying thereby that the sign of circumcision is a legitimate mark to denote the consecration of the Jew to God, in contrast with other stigmata which may have been employed in pagan rituals (cf. W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, trans. by J. E. Steely [Nashville, 1970], p. 296, n. 186). See also *Lev. Rabbah* 19.6, where the sin of epispasm (שמושך לו ערלה) is cited together with that of tattooing the flesh, and *Exod. Rabbah* 19.5, where the seal of Abraham (חותמו של אברהם), circumcision, is paralleled to the σημάδιον (סימנטר), i.e., the mark of belonging, of an earthly king. Cf. S. Lieberman, "After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature," *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1965), 2:526, n. 91; Betz, Στίγμα, in Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 7:662. See also P. Berakhot 1.4 and *Pesiḳta de-Rav Kahana, Beshallah*, ed. B. Mandelbaum (New York, 1962), p. 181, where *ḥotam* is paralleled to סימנטרין, σημάδιον.

<sup>4</sup> That this is the original intent of the comment is made clear in a later reworking of this midrash in I. Al-Naqawa, *Menorat ha-Ma'or*, ed. by H. Enelow (New York, 1932), 3:470 (and see I. Abuhab, *Menorat ha-Ma'or* [Jerusalem, 1961], p. 183): "Great is circumcision, for by means of it [God] sealed in the flesh

passage the idea of God placing his name or seal, *Shaddai*, in Israel is connected with the view that each circumcised Jew upon death will gain entry to the Garden of Eden. Although the name *Shaddai* encompasses three limbs, the nose, the hand, and the phallus, it is clear that the point of the midrash is to emphasize the imprinting of the divine name, or a letter thereof, upon the male organ, for it is by virtue of circumcision alone that the Jew is ushered by an appointed angel into the Garden of Eden.<sup>5</sup>

Two points related to this text are especially noteworthy. First, the claim that circumcision guarantees the Jew's entry into the Garden of Eden is but the positive expression of the negative

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of Israel his name *Shaddai*, the image of the *shin* in the nostrils, the image of the *dalet* in the arm, and the image of the *yod* in [the place of] circumcision." See D. Kaufmann, *Die Sinne* (Budapest, 1884), p. 156, n. 25. Concerning the reflection of the letter *shin* in the nose, see Eleazar of Worms, *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh* (Jerusalem, 1968), p. 31b. Cf. also the following comment in Menahem Šiyyoni, *Sefer Šiyyoni* (Jerusalem, 1964), p. 10a: "I have found in the *Megillat Setarim* a reason why we recite the benediction 'with the sign of the holy covenant' [on this benediction, see below, n. 7]. Know that [the name] *Shaddai* is the seal (חותמו) of the Holy One, blessed be He. When the head of a man and his two arms are outstretched above, it appears as the likeness of a *shin*; when his left arm is extended and his right is resting [at his side], it appears as the likeness of a *dalet*; and [the place of] the covenant of circumcision is [the likeness of] a *yod*. Thus [is formed the name] *Shaddai*." On the sign of circumcision as the likeness of the letter *yod* see the sources cited below, nn. 21–22.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the tradition reported by M. Grossberg, *Ḥaši Menasheh* (London, 1801), p. 19, in the name of R. Naḥshon Gaon (flourished 9th century) concerning the custom of circumcising an infant who died within the first eight days of his life, so that "he will not go to the world [to come] without the seal from below." And cf. Joshua ibn Shuʿaib, *Derashot ʿal ha-Torah* (Cracow, 1573; reprinted Jerusalem, 1969), p. 7a, who reports a similar geonic tradition of circumcising the infant who died within the first eight days, so "that he may bring the seal with him." (For the fuller context of ibn Shuʿaib's remarks see below, n. 30.) The purported geonic tradition must be seen in the context of the apotropaic function of the seal of circumcision, particularly as it is described in *Tanḥuma*. See, however, S. Lieberman, "After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature," p. 526, n. 97, who concludes that the formulation of "bringing the seal" is of late origin. Lieberman notes a similarity between the use of the seal here and the Christian use of σφραγίς to denote the "seal of salvation . . . with the signet which enables the deceased to be admitted to certain regions in the other world." He does not specify any dates or sources, and it is therefore difficult to determine whether he thought that the use of the seal in the texts attributed to the geonic period should be construed as a later (medieval) addition influenced by Christological ideas.

claim, stated in a host of rabbinic texts,<sup>6</sup> that circumcision provides the Jew with protection from Gehenna. These rabbinic notions, in turn, must be seen as weakened forms of an ancient Near Eastern mythological conception which regarded circumcision as an apotropaic rite.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, however, in the *Tanḥuma* passage the positive entry into the Garden of Eden, and not simply the protection from Gehenna, is made dependent on the name *Shaddai* which is imprinted or sealed within the flesh of

<sup>6</sup> See B. <sup>c</sup>Er. 19a; *Gen. Rabbah*, 21.9 (ed. Theodor and Albeck [Jerusalem, 1965], p. 204), 48.8 (p. 483); *Tanḥuma, Lekh Lekha*, 20; *Ṣav* 14 (= *Tazri'a* 5); *Exod. Rabbah*, 19.4; *Midrash Tehillim*, 6.1 (ed. S. Buber [Jerusalem, 1967], p. 58). The idea had a widespread influence in subsequent Jewish literature. Cf. *Mahzor Vitri*, ed. S. Hurwitz (Nurnberg, 1923), p. 627; *Arugat ha-Bošem*, ed. E. Urbach (Jerusalem, 1939), 1:133; the commentary of Baḥya ben Asher on Gen. 17:13 (ed. Chavel, 1:161), and his *Kad ha-Qemah*, ed. Chavel, p. 248; *Ṭur Yoreh De'ah*, §260.

<sup>7</sup> Evidence of such a belief amongst the ancient Israelites may be gathered from the *ḥatan damim* episode in Exod. 4:24–26. The apotropaic function of circumcision is operative in several rabbinic contexts as well, including the benediction to be uttered at the circumcision ritual as it has been transmitted, with slight textual variations, in Tos. Ber. 7.13, and in the Palestinian (Ber. 9.3) and Babylonian (Shab. 137b) Talmuds: “Blessed be He who has sanctified His beloved from his mother’s womb, who has given a law for his flesh, and has sealed his progeny with the sign of the holy covenant (חַתָּם בְּאוֹת בְּרִית קוֹדֵשׁ). Thus by virtue of this [circumcision] the living God, our strength, has commanded that we deliver the beloved of our flesh from destruction.” For a discussion of this motif in ancient Near Eastern literature and its development in Second Temple and rabbinic texts, see D. Flusser and S. Safrai, “Who Sanctifies the Beloved from the Womb,” *Studies in Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 329–336 [in Hebrew]. It is of interest to note that medieval halakhic authorities interpreted the word שַׁחַת in the benediction, which I have translated as “destruction,” as a reference to Gehenna, thus understanding the benediction as an affirmation of the aggadic theme that circumcision saves one from Gehenna. Cf. Rashi to B. Shab. 173b, ad loc.; *Abudarham ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 351; Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel, *ṾOrhot Hayyim*, ed. M. Schlesinger (Berlin, 1902), 2:10; *Kol Bo*, 42d; R. Ya‘aqov ha-Gozer, *Sefer Zikhron Berit la-Rishonim*, ed. J. Glassberg (Berlin, 1892), p. 91. This interpretation is based, of course, on the rabbinic claim (see B. <sup>c</sup>Er. 19a), that שַׁחַת is one of the seven names for Gehenna. Cf. D. Flusser and S. Safrai, “Who Sanctifies the Beloved from the Womb,” pp. 333–34. The apotropaic power of circumcision to avert danger is brought into clear focus also in *Pirke Rabbi Eli‘ezer*, chap. 10, 26a (and cf. *Midrash Yonah in Bet ha-Midrash*, ed. A. Jellinek [Jerusalem, 1967], 1:98) in a passage dealing with the confrontation between Jonah and Leviathan: “[Jonah] showed him [Leviathan] the seal of Abraham (חֹתָמוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם) and said, ‘Look at the covenant [of circumcision].’ Leviathan saw it and ran away from Jonah a distance of two days.”

every Jew. The full import of this claim may be gathered from the fact that this name, as we know particularly from Geonic sources, was conceived of as possessing a special potency to ward off evil or demonic beings. By virtue of this function as a protective name, *Shaddai* was connected with specific rituals, most notably tefillin<sup>8</sup> and mezuzah,<sup>9</sup> thereby infusing the religious object with

<sup>8</sup> It would appear from one talmudic source, B. Shab. 62a, that Abaye (4th century Babylonian amora) has already affirmed an intrinsic link between the name *Shaddai* and the phylacteries, for he speaks here about the letters *shin*, *dalet*, and *yod* of the phylacteries as being a law given to Moses at Mount Sinai. That there is some difficulty with this reading, however, is attested by the fact that the reference to the *dalet* and *yod* is missing in many of the medieval commentaries, such as those of R. Isaac Alfasi and R. Asher b. Yehiel. Cf. Isaac b. Abba Mari, *Sefer ha-ʿIṭṭur* (New York, 1955), *Hilkhot Tefillin*, p. 117; Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, *ʿOr Zaruʿa* (Zhitomir, 1862), *Hilkhot Tefillin*, §566, 77b. These words are also lacking in MS Munich 95 of the Talmud; see R. N. Rabinowitz, *Diqduqe Soferim* (Münich, 1873), to B. Shab. ad loc. Moreover, the other parallel sources attributed to Abaye the tradition concerning the letter *shin* without mentioning the *dalet* and *yod*; see B. Shab. 28b, Men. 35a; P. Meg. 1.9. Indeed, the specific determination of the *dalet* and *yod* are never given in talmudic or classical midrashic literature. See Michael Levi Rodkinson, *Tefillah le-Mosheh* (Pressburg, 1883), pp. 20, 67, 120. Cf. also Judah b. Elijah Hadassi, *Sefer ʿEshkol ha-Kofer* (1836), p. 35c–d, who in mentioning the various customs related to tefillin mentions only the knot of the head phylacteries which is in the form of a *shin*. For a different view regarding the authenticity of the reading of *dalet* and *yod*, see Solomon ibn Adret, *Novellae* (New York, 1961), to B. Shab. 28b and 62a. We learn only from geonic sources that these refer to the respective knots in the straps of the phylacteries for the head and arm. Cf. *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot*, ed. E. Hildesheimer (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 492; *Shimushaʾ Rabbah*, cited by Isaac b. Abba Mari, *Sefer ha-ʿIṭṭur*, *Hilkhot Tefillin*, p. 117; B. Lewin, *ʿOṣar ha-Geonim* (Jerusalem, 1928), 2:33; Ṣedeqiah b. Abraham ha-Rofeʿ, *Shibbole ha-Leqeṭ ha-Shalem*, ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1886), p. 192a (in the name of R. Natronai Gaon); Rashi to B. Men. 35b, s.v. קשר של תפילין, B. Shab. 28b, s.v. שין של תפילין; Hul. 9a, s.v. קשר של תפילין; Abraham b. Isaac of Narbonne, *Sefer ha-ʿEshkol*, ed. Ch. Albeck (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 228; Maimonides, *Hilkhot Tefillin*, 3.13; *Tur*, ʿOrah Hayyim, 32. To be sure, the knot of the phylacteries itself is mentioned several times in the Talmud (cf. B. Ber. 7a; Men. 35b; ʿEr. 97a; and see P. Meg. 1.9 where the knots of the phylacteries are spoken of in the plural) but never with any specification. Thus cf. Isaac b. Abba Mari, *Sefer ha-ʿIṭṭur*, ibid.; *Tosafot*, B. Ber. 6a and Men. 35b. s.v. אלו תפילין שבראש; R. Moses b. Jacob of Coucy, *Sefer Miṣwot Gedolot* (Jerusalem, 1983), 2:14b; R. Asher b. Yehiel, *Pisqe ha-Rosh* on R. Isaac Alfasi, *Hilkhot Tefillin* (corresponding to B. Men. 35b); Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, *ʿOr Zaruʿa*, ad loc.; *Bet Yosef*, *Tur*, ʿOrah Hayyim, 32, s.v. יעשה קשר קטן.

<sup>9</sup> On the magical implications of the name *Shaddai* in conjunction with mezuzah see V. Aptowitz, “Les noms de Dieu et des anges dans la mezouza,” *REJ* 60

magical significance.<sup>10</sup> The claim in *Tanḥuma* that *Shaddai* is sealed on the flesh must likewise, I submit, be seen in the context of such a magical conception.

This leads me to the second point. It is possible that the specific language of *Tanḥuma* reflects a joining of the older aggadic view with a theurgical conception of the divine names known to us from *merkavah* mysticism. This is suggested to me by the use of the word *hotam*, seal, in apposition to the word *shem*, name. To be sure, the root חתם was used in connection with circumcision from a very early period, dating in fact to the second century B.C.E., as is attested by an Aramaic fragment of the Testament of Levi.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the conceptual link between a name and the root חתם is evident in a host of talmudic contexts where various forms of that root are used in connection with the signing of a contract or document.<sup>12</sup> What is novel in the *Tanḥuma* passage,

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(1910): 41, n. 5; Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York, 1939), pp. 148, 158.

<sup>10</sup> To be sure, the rituals of mezuzah (for sources see Aptowitzer, "Les noms de Dieu," p. 39, n. 1) and tefillin (see Rodkinson, *Tefillah le-Mosheh*, p. 22) were both viewed from a very early period as protective charms, but it is only later, in the geonic period, perhaps under the influence of Jewish mystical trends, that the magical dimension was associated specifically with the name *Shaddai*.

<sup>11</sup> See R. H. Charles, *The Greek Versions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Oxford, 1908), p. 245, cited by D. Flusser and S. Safrai, "Who Sanctifies the Beloved from the Womb," p. 333, n. 14. Cf. also its Greek counterpart, σφραγίς, used by Paul to refer to circumcision in Rom. 4:11; the usage is found also in *Barnabas* 9:6. Cf. *Exod. Rabbah* 19.5 (cited above, n. 4); a fragment from *Midrash Yelammedenu* cited in *Bet ha-Midrash*, ed. A. Jellinek, 5:162: "God loves naught but circumcision, for it is the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He (חותמו של קב"ה)"; Targum to Cant. 3:8: "Each and every one of them had the seal of circumcision [חתומת מילה] on their flesh as it was sealed in the flesh of Abraham." Mention should also be made of the language of the second benediction in Grace after meals, which acknowledges the gift of circumcision as the covenant which God "has sealed in our flesh." Cf. B. Ber. 49a; P. Ber. 1.6. See Fritzer, Σφραγίς, in Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 7:947-48; F. J. Dölger, *Sphragis: eine altchristliche Taufbezeichnung in ihren Beziehungen zur profanen und religiösen Kultur des Altertums* (Paderborn, 1911), p. 80. Finally, it is of interest to note in this connection that in the Qumran scroll 4Q 185, col. II, l. 4 (published in John M. Allegro, *Qumran Cave IV* [Oxford, 1968], p. 85) we read: חתומה חקק לישחק. (I thank Professor Lawrence Schiffman for calling my attention to this passage.) Allegro, op. cit., p. 86, renders this "the formula he inscribed for Isaac." Is it possible that we have here a reference to circumcision in the word חתומה?

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., B. Giṭ. 9b, 19b, Ket. 55a, San. 29b, BB 136a.

however, is the combination of the term *hotam* with a name of God, for indeed according to this source the seal which God places in the Jew is his very name.<sup>13</sup> The notion of a magical seal composed of the letters of a divine name which protects the mystic from potential harm is well known from the *merkavah* texts.<sup>14</sup> In addition, one occasionally finds in these writings, such as the *Merkavah Rabbah*<sup>15</sup> and the text published by Scholem under the name *Ma'aseh Merkavah*,<sup>16</sup> the notion that the letters

<sup>13</sup> See the passage from *Šiyyoni* cited above, n. 4. The notion that the divine name, presumably the Tetragrammaton, is written on each Israelite is affirmed in *Exod. Rabbah* 15.17: "The great ones of the nations will see the smallest one in Israel and will desire to bow down before him because the name is written on each and every one (השם כתוב על כל אחד ואחד)." According to the parable that is given to illustrate the point, the name written on the Jew is comparable to the figure (פירוטמו, προτομή) of the king engraved upon a stick.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1956), p. 50; I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1980), pp. 106–07. The notion of the seal as a name of God is evident as well in the *Odes of Solomon* 4:8; see Dölger, *Sphragis*, pp. 88–89; G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1960), p. 133. An exact linguistic parallel to this notion is found in non-Jewish Gnostic sources of the second and third centuries, although in the latter the magical seal protects the individual from demonic beings and not simply hostile angels as in the more orthodox Judaized form. See sources cited by Fritzer, Σφραγίς, in Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 7:953. Of particular interest for our purposes is a tradition found in Mandaean texts, where the process of sealing (*hatamta*), accomplished through anointing with oil rather than cutting of flesh, is said to protect the initiate against demonic and evil forces. The Mandaeans, in line with a process well attested in early Christian sources, whereby the term "seal," (σφραγίς) came to refer primarily to baptism and not to circumcision (see Fritzer, *op. cit.*, 7:952), viewed the act of sealing as part of the baptismal ritual. See K. Rudolph, *Die Mandaer* (Göttingen, 1961), 2:155–74, 198–201; idem, *Gnosis*, tr. and ed. by R. McL. Wilson (San Francisco, 1983), pp. 228, 361; G. Stroumsa, "'Seal of the Prophets': The Nature of a Manichaean Metaphor," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986): 65. See also *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, ed. H. Betz (Chicago, 1986), p. 134.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. M. Mossayef, *Merkavah Shelemah* (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 5b, and the various manuscript readings in P. Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1981), §708. Concerning this text see Schäfer, "Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Edition und Analyse der Merkava Rabba," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 5 (1977): 65–99.

<sup>16</sup> See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1960), §15, p. 109: "R. Ishmael said: I have sealed myself (חתמתי) with seven seals (חותמות)." As the text continues, the incomprehensible names are attached to the various bodily limbs, the feet, heart, right and left arms,

of a divine name or names are sealed on the limbs of the mystic's body.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the *Tanḥuma* passage concludes by stating that it is an angel who receives the circumcised individual and brings him into the Garden of Eden, a motif which parallels that of the celestial tour guide known from both the apocalyptic and *merkavah* materials. In the *Hekhalot Zutarti*<sup>18</sup> and *Hekhalot Rabbati*,<sup>19</sup> for instance, the one who ascends to the celestial realm must present the appropriate seals to each of the angelic guardians stationed at the various palaces and by so doing is allowed to enter that palace. Analogously, in the *Tanḥuma* passage the individual must have the seal of *Shaddai* in order to enter Paradise. Hence the identification of the seal as the name *Shaddai*, on the one hand, and the apotropaic function which that seal or name plays, on the other, brings this passage into close proximity with the theurgical-magical world of *merkavah* mysticism. Whether or not there is an actual historical connection between the mid-rashic text and the mystical tradition, it is abundantly clear that

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neck, and so on. According to the reading of MS Munich 22 in Schäfer, *Synopse*, §566, the text concludes with the statement "the seven seals that R. Ishmael sealed on his heart." Cf. also Schäfer, op. cit., §625: "he sealed (חתם) himself with the name of the forty-two letters."

<sup>17</sup> A related tradition is the assignment of names to the divine limbs, as we find it in certain sections of *Shi'ur Qomah*. See M. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, 1983), p. 103 and texts on pp. 197–99, 216. However, I am unaware of the usage of the root חתם in these contexts. The connection between these merkavah texts and the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition has already been noted by M. Idel, "Olam ha-Mal'akhim bi-demut 'Adam," *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy, and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* (Jerusalem, 1986), p. 5, n. 14. Mention should also be made of the fact that in the physiognomic and chiromantic texts of the merkavah mystics shapes of certain letters are said to be inscribed on parts of the body. See the article by Scholem referred to above, n. 1, and see also I. Gruenwald, "Qeṭa'im ḥadashim me-sifrut hakkarat panim vesidre sirṭuṭin," *Tarbiz* 40 (1971): 301–19; idem, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, p. 222. For the development of this motif in Zoharic sources see my forthcoming paper, "Dimmuy 'antropomorfiyyut ve-simboliqah shel ha-'otiyot be-Sefer ha-Zohar," to be published in the "Proceedings of the Third International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism." The use of this material in Lurianic kabbalah has been studied by L. Fine, "The Art of Metoposcopy: A Study in Isaac Luria's Charismatic Knowledge," *AJS Review* 11 (1986): 79–101.

<sup>18</sup> See *Hekhalot Zutarti*, ed. R. Elior, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Supplement 1 (1982): 32–33 (in Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§413–17).

<sup>19</sup> See in particular *Hekhalot Rabbati*, chaps. 19–21, ed. Wertheimer, *Batte Midrashot* (Jerusalem, 1980), 1:95–99 (in Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§219–31).



the sign of circumcision functions in the former as the seal functions in the latter, i.e., as a protective mark.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in the comment from *Tanḥuma*, for the first time in rabbinic literature as far as I am aware, a clear connection is made between the apotropaic motif and the divine name, for it is specifically the letter *yod* of the name *Shaddai* imprinted or sealed on the phallus which guarantees the circumcised Jew God's protection and beneficence.

## II

The midrashic identification of the male organ with the letter *yod* had a significant influence on subsequent medieval rabbinic literature, particularly in mystical texts<sup>21</sup> but in nonmystical works as well. Typically, medieval authorities, using the correlation

<sup>20</sup> It is of interest to note that phylacteries, also commonly referred to as an *ṓot* (sign), are connected with the divine name (based on Deut. 28:10) in B. Ber. 6a. On the connection between the phylacteries and the name *Shaddai*, see above, n. 9. The phylacteries are also referred to as a seal (*hotam*), on the basis of a midrashic reading of Song of Songs 8:6; cf. *Song of Songs Rabbah*, ad loc. For a later kabbalistic reworking of this midrashic theme see *Tiqqune Zohar* 22, 65b.

<sup>21</sup> The identification of the *yod* and the place of circumcision, or the *sefirah Yesod* which corresponds to the phallus, is widespread in thirteenth century kabbalistic documents. See, e.g., Isaac the Blind, *Perush Sefer Yeṣirah*, published by Scholem in the appendix to *Ha-Qabbalah be-Provans*, ed. R. Schatz (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 2; *Perush ha-ʿAmiti shel ha-Ramban le-Sefer Yeṣirah*, ed. Scholem, *Qiryat Sefer* 6 (1929–30): 406; Todros Abulafia, *ʿOṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Warsaw, 1879), p. 12b; *Zohar* 1:13a, 56a, 95a; 2:36a; 3:142a (*ʿIdraʿ Rabbaʿ*), 215b, 220a; *Tiqqune Zohar* 22 (66a); *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon*, ed. E. Wolfson (Atlanta, 1988), p. 240 (Hebrew section); Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, ed. A. W. Greenup (London, 1911), p. 63; Joseph Gikatilla, *Shaʿare ʿOrah*, ed. J. Ben-Shlomo (Jerusalem, 1981), 1:118, n. 85; Joseph Hamadan, *Sefer Taʿame ha-Miṣwot*, ed. M. Meier, pp. 242–43, 246; idem, *Sefer ha-Tashaq*, ed. J. Zwelling (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1975), pp. 131–32. For the most part in the *Raʿaya Mehemna* section of the *Zohar* as well as in the *Tiqqune Zohar* the letter *yod*, or the sign of the covenant, symbolizes the aspect of the feminine *Shekhinah* united with the masculine *Yesod*; see *Zohar* 1:93b, 266a; 2:258a; 3:256a, 257a, 263a; *Tiqqune Zohar* §§13 (29a), 21 (62b), 30 (73b), 47 (85a), 70 (120a). The second line of interpretation was accepted by Isaac Luria, at least as we may gather from the writings of Ḥayyim Vital; cf. *Liqqutei Torah*, in *Kitve ha-ʿARI* (Jerusalem, 1963), 12:52–56; and *Shaʿar ha-Miṣwot*, *Kitve ha-ʿARI*, 7:16 (*Lekh Lekha*). The identification of the *ṓot berit* as the letter *yod* is also found in the Pietistic sources; for references see the following note.

established in *Tanḥuma*, understood the biblical expression for circumcision, *ʔot berit* (see Gen. 17:1), “the sign of the covenant,” as well as the liturgical formula *be-ʔot berit qodesh*, “with the sign of the holy covenant,” as referring respectively to the letter of the covenant, i.e., the letter *yod*. As a representative example of this I cite from R. Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarḥi’s halakhic compendium *Sefer ha-Manhig*, written in Toledo in the year 1204: “‘With the sign of the holy covenant (*be-ʔot berit qodesh*),’ this refers to the circumcision which is made like a *yod*.”<sup>22</sup> In addition to this earlier aggadic tradition, however, one finds in twelfth and thirteenth century documents, deriving from both Germany and Spain, an elaborate connection established between circumcision and the most sacred of divine names, the Tetragrammaton. In the writings of the Ḥaside Ashkenaz we thus find for the first time that the older midrashic notion is reinterpreted in light of this new conception, for the letter of the covenant, the *yod*, is taken as a reference to the first letter of the Tetragrammaton itself and not simply the last letter of the name *Shaddai*.<sup>23</sup> The remainder of this study will consist of tracing the transmission of this tradition from the German Ḥasidic texts to the Spanish kabbalah.<sup>24</sup> At the outset it may be said that the esoteric conception suggested in the Pietistic sources was appropriated by the

<sup>22</sup> R. Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarḥi, *Sefer ha-Manhig*, ed. Y. Raphael (Jerusalem, 1978), 2:579–80. Cf. Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel, *ʔOrhot Ḥayyim*, ed. M. Schlesinger, 2:15. See also R. Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, fol. 180b: “Since the *yod* is placed in the man it serves [to denote the] masculine [form], for the flesh that surrounds the corona is like a *yod*. Therefore it is called the letter of the holy covenant (אות ברית קודש).” And see the commentary on *birkat milah* from R. Eleazar’s circle published in the *Siddur of R. Solomon b. Samson of Garmaise*, ed. M. Hershler (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 283: “‘And his descendants will be sealed with the sign of the holy covenant (באות ברית קודש)’ . . . As it is written, ‘It shall serve as a sign of the covenant (לאות ברית)’ (Gen 9:13); this is the holy letter (אות קודש) which surrounds the corona . . . the flesh is crowned like a great *yod*, and the *yod* is from the beginning of the name [i.e., the Tetragrammaton].” Cf. Joseph Hamadan, *Sefer Taʿame ha-Mišwot*, p. 246: “‘באות [ברית קודש]’—the *yod* which is disclosed in the corona, the holy covenant that alludes to the supernal covenant. This is the literal meaning (פשט).”

<sup>23</sup> See the citation from the Pietistic commentary on the benediction of the circumcision ritual cited in the preceding note.

<sup>24</sup> The precise relation between the German Pietists and the Provençal and Spanish kabbalists is a question that has engaged a host of scholars. Cf. A. Epstein, “Le-Qorot ha-Qabbalah ha-ʔAshkenazit,” *Mi-Qadmoniyot ha-Yehudim*:

kabbalists, especially in Castile in the later part of the thirteenth century,<sup>25</sup> and transformed by them into a decidedly mystical conception involving a theosophical experience of God. *Prima facie* it would seem that the Pietist's use of this tradition is strictly in line with the semimagical conception which, as I have noted, underlies the passage in *Tanḥuma*. It will be seen from our textual analysis, however, that already in the Pietistic sources, especially those of R. Eleazar of Worms and his circle, the esoteric tradition concerning the correlation of the divine name and circumcision contains an important theosophical component as well, which involves a mystical experience of *devequt* (communion). The transposition of the magical into a full-fledged mystical notion, a process that is well-attested with respect to several fundamental kabbalistic doctrines, was accomplished only in Spain, where the theosophical conception of the divine physiognomy had crystallized.

The exegetical locus for this correlation in Ashkenazi sources is Deut. 30:12, "Who among us can go up to the heavens," *מי יעלה לנו השמימה*. The interpretation of this verse, which emphasizes the correlation of circumcision and the divine name, is cited in the name of R. Judah ben Samuel he-Ḥasid (d. 1217) by R. Abraham ben Azriel in his *Arugat ha-Bošem*:

Another hint that circumcision saves from Gehenna: it is written, "Who among us can go up to the heavens," *מי יעלה לנו השמימה* (לנו השמימה). The first consonants [spell] *מילה* [i.e., circumcision] and the last consonants *יהוה* [the Tetragrammaton].

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*Kitve R. Avraham Epstein*, ed. A. M. Haberman (Jerusalem, 1957), 2:226–50; Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, 1987), especially pp. 41–42, 97–123, 215–16, 325, n. 261; Joseph Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ἀshkenaz* (Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 97, 118, 128–29; Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society* (Leiden, 1981), p. 22; Moshe Idel, "Ha-Sefirot she-me'al ha-Sefirot," *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 274–77. The question has been most recently treated by Dan, "Ha-Qabbalah ha-Ἀshkenazit: 'Iyyun Nosaf,'" "Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 125–40.

<sup>25</sup> As Dan has noted (*Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ἀshkenaz*, p. 261), the Castilian kabbalists, Jacob and Isaac ha-Kohen, were the main channels for the transmission of ideas derived from German Hasidic sources to kabbalists of the later part of the thirteenth century, including the author of the *Zohar*. On this later influence see already Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 173, 226.

That is to say, whoever is circumcised will ascend heavenward and will not descend to Gehenna.<sup>26</sup>

This comment occurs in the context of a discussion on the various merits of circumcision. One of the proofs which R. Abraham offers to substantiate the rabbinic claim that circumcision saves one from Gehenna<sup>27</sup> is based on R. Judah's interpretation of Deut. 30:12. The verse instructs us that he who is circumcised will ascend heavenward and is thereby protected from Gehenna. That this is so is guaranteed by the assumed correlation between *milah* and the Tetragrammaton derived by means of an exegetical method well known from R. Judah's school,<sup>28</sup> for in the key words "Who among us can go up to the heavens?" the first consonants spell *milah* and the last *YHWH*. The Pietistic view closely follows the midrashic conception enunciated in the passage from *Tanḥuma* which was cited above. According to the *midrash*, the Jew who has the seal of the name *Shaddai* on his body is guaranteed entry into the Garden of Eden when he dies. In the version of the German Ḥasidim the correlation is between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton,<sup>29</sup> and is not simply one of the letters of the name *Shaddai*. Notwithstanding this change in detail, it is clear that the basic theme of the Pietistic eschatology is determined largely by the midrashic passage.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Arugat ha-Bošem*, 1:227. It is of interest to note that in *Yalqut Re'uvani* (Warsaw, 1884), to Gen. 17:12, 1:87a, the correlation of circumcision and the Tetragrammaton based on the Pietistic exegesis of Deut. 30:12 is attributed to the *Sefer ha-Bahir*. Needless to say, no such reference is to be found in the *Bahir* that we have.

<sup>27</sup> See references given above, n. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the tenth of the seventy-three gates enumerated by Eleazar of Worms in his *Sefer ha-Hokhmah*, published by Dan, *Iyyunim be-Sifrut Ḥaside 'Ashkenaz* (Ramat Gan, 1975), p. 53: שער התחלת או סופי תיבות.

<sup>29</sup> The intrinsic connection between Gehenna and the Tetragrammaton is made also by Eleazar of Worms in his *Sod ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, ff. 281a–82a. Eleazar concludes with "And this is [the meaning of] 'to establish His name there' (Deut. 12:11), i.e., to save those who bow down to His name from Gehenna, for Gehenna is for those who profane the name or mention it in vain" (f. 281a). And see already *Ṣṭiyyot de-R. 'Aqiva*, *Batte Midrashot*, ed. S. Wertheimer, 2:366, where it is stated that the Tetragrammaton was not revealed to Abraham or Isaac because the seed of their respective progeny, Ishmael and Esau, were destined to descend to Gehenna.

<sup>30</sup> This point did not escape the notice of Joshua ibn Shu'aib, who cites the Pietistic exegesis of Deut. 30:12 in connection with the aggadic idea that circumcision saves the Jew from Gehenna. See above, n. 5.

The exegesis of Deut. 30:12 is reiterated in a commentary to the Pentateuch which has been attributed to R. Judah's leading disciple, R. Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (d. ca. 1230). Joseph Dan has shown, however, that the author of this work was not R. Eleazar but rather another disciple of R. Judah, who employed the esoteric techniques of the Kalonymide school without relying on the works of R. Eleazar.<sup>31</sup> The fact that this exegesis occurs in this commentary as well as in other passages which can be genuinely attributed to R. Eleazar or his circle, as we shall see, indicates that the teaching was derived in fact from R. Judah himself. The crucial comment occurs in the commentary to Gen. 18:1:

From the [time of the] creation of the world the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to give Abraham [the commandment] of circumcision, as it is written, "If not for my covenant day and night the statutes of heaven and earth I would not have established" (Jer. 33:25). "Who among us can go up to the heavens" (מי יעלה לנו השמימה). The first consonant in each word [spells] מילה and the last [the name] יהוה. That is [the meaning of] "You must be blameless with the Lord your God" (Deut. 18:13). Therefore it is written that [Ishmael and his household] "were circumcised with him [Abraham]" (Gen. 17:27), [followed immediately by the verse] "And the Lord appeared to him" (ibid. 18:1).

In this passage one finds a further application of R. Judah's exegesis: the close relationship between man and God in this world, and not merely that which comes about as a consequence of death, is made dependent upon the act of circumcision. Echoing the talmudic explanation, the anonymous Pietist asserts that a person is complete, expressed biblically in terms of "walking blamelessly" with God, when one is circumcised.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the theophany to Abraham at the terebinths of Mamre is consequent to the act of circumcision; the ritual of circumcision is thus viewed as an initiation into visionary experience.<sup>33</sup> That the

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J. Dan, "The Ashkenazi Hasidic 'Gates of Wisdom,'" *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. by G. Nahon and C. Touati (Louvain, 1980), pp. 183–89. I thank Professor Ivan Marcus for drawing my attention to this article.

<sup>32</sup> This is based on earlier rabbinic exegesis; see, e.g., B. Ned. 32a.

<sup>33</sup> This motif, too, can be traced to earlier midrashic statements. I have discussed the development of this theme in midrashic and Zoharic sources in my

circumcised individual is in a special relationship with, indeed in close proximity to, God,<sup>34</sup> is supported by Deut. 30:12, where the first consonants spell *milah* and the last the Tetragrammaton. Through this exegetical device, examples of which abound in German Ḥasidic sources, the close nexus between circumcision and attachment to the divine is scripturally grounded.

In other contexts which can be genuinely attributed to R. Eleazar or his immediate circle, R. Judah's exegesis reappears. Hence in a commentary on the blessings of circumcision that is extant in several manuscripts,<sup>35</sup> one again finds the by now familiar exegesis of Deut. 30:12. In this context, moreover, the notion of *devequt*, the cleaving of the individual to the divine, implied by the correlation between circumcision and the divine name, is explicitly mentioned:

Thus by the reward of this [circumcision] "the living God is our portion and our fortress." For whoever cleaves to Him is alive, as it is written, "And you shall cleave to the Lord your God, each of you this day" (Deut. 4:4). For they cleave to the throne and are carried by the throne as the stone that draws the straw. For Jacob, who was born circumcised and is engraved upon the throne, draws towards him the righteous who are circumcised, as it is written, "The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord your God" (1 Sam. 25:29) . . . It is written, "Blameless be with the Lord your God" (ibid. 18:13). When you walk before Him you shall be blameless [with respect] to the [covenant of] circumcision. Thus the beginning of these words is *milah* and the end - *YHWH*, *מי יעלה לנו השמימה*.<sup>36</sup>

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"Circumcision, Visionary Experience, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol," *History of Religions* 27 (November, 1987): 189–215.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Perush ha-Roqeah 'al ha-Torah*, 3:261: "Who among us can go up to the heavens': The first consonants of each word [spell] *milah*, and the last *YHWH*. That is to say, a man cannot be next to the *Shekhinah* if he is not circumcised. For it is written in the chapter on circumcision, 'Walk in My ways and be blameless (*tamim*)' (Gen. 17:1), and it is written, 'You must be whole-hearted (*tamim*) with the Lord your God'" (Deut. 18:13).

<sup>35</sup> See M. Hershler, ed., *Siddur of R. Solomon ben Samson of Garmaise*, p. 22 of the introduction and pp. 282–90 of the text. The text is extant in MS Oxford 404 and in MS Munich 393. Hershler published independently the commentary from the Oxford MS in *Sinai* 69 (1971): 105–09.

<sup>36</sup> *Siddur of R. Solomon ben Samson of Garmaise*, pp. 284–85; *Sinai* 69: 108.

An important assumption connected with the eschatological views of R. Judah's school is operative in this context: after the death of the body the individual does not cleave directly to the divine essence or to the *kavod*—the Glory which is the anthropomorphic manifestation of God—but rather to the supernal throne.<sup>37</sup> This claim can be substantiated from a close analysis of the sentence “For they cleave to the throne,” etc. To understand the full import of the proof-text, “The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord your God,” one must bear in mind an interpretation of this verse that is employed in several Pietistic sources based on the numerical equivalence of *בצורר*, “in the bundle,” with *בכסא הקודש*, “in the holy throne,” for both expressions equal 498. Indeed, this numerological interpretation is to be found already in one text that is extant in MS Oxford 1567 and is attributed by Dan to Judah he-Ḥasid himself.<sup>38</sup>

When the spirit leaves a man's body, it endures evil in accordance with its sin; but if the person is completely righteous, the spirit ascends to the throne of Glory and cleaves to the supernal throne. “The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life,” the numerical value of *בצורר* is that of *בכסא הקודש*. And it is written, “God is seated on His holy throne” (Ps. 47:9).<sup>39</sup>

This interpretation is employed by Eleazar of Worms also in his own writings and is cited in other Pietistic texts in his name.<sup>40</sup> The Ḥasidic numerology in this case was no doubt influenced by the talmudic reading of the verse “The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life” (1 Sam. 25:29), as a reference to the place beneath the throne of Glory where the souls of the righteous are hidden.<sup>41</sup> To be bound in the bundle of life, therefore, means to be attached to the holy throne. R. Eleazar, or one

<sup>37</sup> The point has been noted by Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ṭashkenaz*, p. 137.

<sup>38</sup> Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ṭashkenaz*, p. 131; idem, *Ṭyyunim be-Sifrut Ḥaside Ṭashkenaz*, pp. 9, n. 2; 26, n. 2; 134–47, and 148–87 where part of the text is published.

<sup>39</sup> MS Oxford 1567, 8a, cited by Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ṭashkenaz*, p. 137 (= *Ṭyyunim be-Sifrut Ḥaside Ṭashkenaz*, p. 170).

<sup>40</sup> See *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh* 7a, 9a; *Arugat ha-Bošem*, 1:53, 2:109, 3:293.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. B. *Shab.* 152b and parallels. The connection between the Pietistic conception and the talmudic one is made explicitly by Eleazar at the beginning of *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, 1a: “The souls are in the curtain and in the ark which are

of his disciples, adds to the teaching of his master that it is essentially through circumcision that one merits to be conjoined with the divine throne, or to the image of Jacob, that is according to the ancient aggadah engraved upon the throne. The notion of the righteous cleaving to the throne of Glory is reiterated by R. Eleazar in his *Sode Razaya*<sup>2</sup>, both in the *Sod ha-Merkavah* and in *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*. According to the views expressed in these passages, one does not even cleave directly to the throne, but rather each righteous person has his own throne, which in turn cleaves to the throne of Glory. Moreover, there are various levels of righteousness, and hence each *ṣaddiq* cleaves to a specific part of the divine throne in accordance with his individual merit.<sup>42</sup> In the most general terms, however, R. Eleazar would have asserted, as did R. Judah before him, that in virtue of circumcision one is not only protected from descending to hell but also merits to ascend to heaven and to cleave to the throne of Glory.<sup>43</sup> In this respect the Ḥasidim retain and further elaborate upon the original intent of the rabbinic authorities who viewed the sign of circumcision as a protective mark.

Given the stated correlation between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton, on the one hand, and the act of cleaving implied thereby, on the other, it would seem to follow that, for R. Eleazar, there is an intimate connection between the divine name and the

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under the throne, "The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord your God." See *ibid.*, 13c, and Eleazar b. Judah of Worms, *Sode Razaya*<sup>2</sup>, ed. I. Kamelhar (Bulgaria, 1936), p. 19; *Sode Razaya*<sup>2</sup> in *Sefer Raziel*, 11a (noted by Altmann, "Eleazar of Worms' *Hokhmah Ha-Egoz*," *JJS* 11 [1960]: 102); *Perush 'al ha-Merkavah*, MS Paris 850, f. 67a. In at least one recension of *Sod ha-<sup>2</sup>Egoz*, MS Mossayef 1456, the space (*ḥalal*) under the throne is identified as a feminine potency. See Dan, "Le-Toledot ha-tekst shel *Hokhmat ha-<sup>2</sup>Egoz*," *Alei Sefer* 5 (1978): 52; A. Farber, "Tefisat ha-merkavah be-torat ha-sod be-me<sup>2</sup>ah ha-yud gimmel—sod ha-<sup>2</sup>egoz ve-toldotav" (Ph.D., Hebrew University, 1986), p. 105. On the theme of the space under the throne in the writings of the Pietists, see the comprehensive note in Farber, *op. cit.*, pp. 580–601, n. 221. Cf. *Arugat ha-Bošem*, 2:109; and H. Soloveitchik, "Topics in the *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*," *JJS* 18 (1967): 73.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Sode Razaya*<sup>2</sup>, pp. 26–27; *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, 7a–b. See also the text of *Sod ha-<sup>2</sup>Egoz* of R. Menaḥem b. Pinḥas of Mirzburg published by Dan, "*Hokhmah Ha-<sup>2</sup>Egoz*, its origin and development," *JJS* 17 (1967): 81.

<sup>43</sup> See, however, *Sode Razaya*<sup>2</sup>, p. 19, where R. Eleazar writes that righteous women too are guaranteed an ascent to the throne after death, implying thereby that the matter is not exclusively bound up to circumcision.



throne upon which the divine Glory sits.<sup>44</sup> This connection is probably based on earlier *merkavah* traditions concerning the throne's being sealed or engraved with the divine name or names.<sup>45</sup> But is there in the Pietistic writings any intrinsic connection between the throne and circumcision, or any symbolic connection between the throne and the place of circumcision? In the course of my research I have come across one possible link which I here offer as a tentative suggestion. As several scholars, most notably Alexander Altmann<sup>46</sup> and Joseph Dan,<sup>47</sup> have shown, in the writings of the German Pietists are found several versions of the *Sod ha-ʿEgoz*, the "secret of the Nut."<sup>48</sup> These fragments interpret the structure of the divine chariot in terms of the organic structure of the nut. Dan was the first to assume that these texts preserved an esoteric reading of Song of Songs 6:1, 'I went down to the garden of nuts,' that originated in the Orient (i.e., Babylonia) and formed part of the world of ancient *merkavah* mysticism.<sup>49</sup> In all the extant versions of this text the stalk (*ʿoqes*) of

<sup>44</sup> See Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut ʿAshkenaz*, p. 135.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur*, §78 (cf. 3 *Enoch*, ed. H. Odeberg [New York, 1973], p. 176) and §840 (cf. *Seder Rabbah di-Bereshit*, in *Batte Midrashot*, ed. S. Wertheimer [Jerusalem, 1980], 1:24, cited by R. Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, ff. 186a–b), where it is stated that the throne is sealed with the six letters of the two names *Yah* and *YHWH*. Cf. R. Yaʿaqov ha-Kohen, *Perush Mirkevot Yehezqel*, ed. A. Farber (M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, 1978), p. 53. See also *Sefer ha-Shem*, f. 172a, where it is stated that "the names of the Holy One, blessed be He, are written around the throne of Glory." And cf. *Zohar Ḥadash*, 107d (*Tiqqunim*): "The soul comes from the throne and there is the Tetragrammaton who guides everything." For a later theosophic development of this connection between the Tetragrammaton and the throne, see Moses b. Jacob of Kiev, *ʿOṣar ha-Shem*, MS JTS Mic. 1804, f. 60b.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. A. Altmann, "Eleazar of Worms' *Hokhmah Ha-Egoz*," *JJS* 11 (1960): 101–12, reprinted without Hebrew text in Altmann, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, 1969), 161–71.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. J. Dan, "*Hokhmah ha-ʿEgoz*, its origin and development," *JJS* 17 (1967): 73–83; idem, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut ʿAshkenaz*, pp. 207–10, 257–58, and "Le-Toledot ha-tekst shel Ḥokhmah ha-ʿEgoz," *Alei Sefer* 5 (1978): 49–53.

<sup>48</sup> See now the comprehensive treatment of this text in A. Farber's doctoral dissertation referred to above, n. 41.

<sup>49</sup> See references in n. 47. The thesis of an ancient Oriental origin has been further elaborated upon by Farber in the work referred to in the preceding note. According to Farber, the *Sod ha-ʿEgoz* thus represents one of the "proto-kabbalistic" sources that passed to the European kabbalists through the German

the nut, which seems to be interchangeable with the inner core or nucleus (*gar'in*) of the nut, is identified as the throne and in some later versions, definitely known to the school of R. Judah he-Ḥasid, the stalk or nucleus is further described by means of phallic symbolism.<sup>50</sup> Thus, to give a few examples, in one version of the *Sod ha-ʿEgoz*, found in the Rome MS of *ʿArugat ha-Bošem* and attributed to R. Eleazar,<sup>51</sup> we read that “below on the ridge of [the nut] there issues from its compartments a kind of masculine organ (כמו זכרות).” Again, further on in the same text it is stated that “the nut has five segments, four which are female and one being the masculine organ (זכרות).” This later passage parallels the following statement in R. Eleazar of Worms’ *Hokhmah ha-Nefesh*: “The four double-columns of the kernel are round about its stalk, and the stalk is in the center. . . . The nut has four segments like the four celestial beasts (חיות), and the middle one is raised at its ridge (בחרוד), corresponding to the throne.”<sup>52</sup> Although R. Eleazar does not mention the male organ by name, it is obvious that the tradition which identifies the center of the nut with the throne, on one hand, and the phallus, on the other, underlies his remarks. The protruding character of the middle segment, identified here as the throne, is the stalk or nucleus explicitly described in the other text as the phallus. Hence, the *Sod ha-ʿEgoz* material does provide us with an intrinsic symbolic connection between the throne and the phallus, one which was certainly known by R. Judah he-Ḥasid, R. Eleazar of Worms, and their disciples. It may be that this symbolic nexus is the underlying esoteric meaning, not committed to writing, of the correlation between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton, on the one hand, and the cleaving to the throne of the circumcised

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Pietists. See, e.g., “Tefisat ha-merkavah be-torat ha-sod be-meʿah ha-yud gim-mel,” pp. 19–20, 25–26, and *passim*.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Altmann, “Eleazar of Worms’ *Hokhmah ha-Egoz*,” p. 109; and in more detail Farber, “Tefisat ha-merkavah be-torat ha-sod be-meʿah ha-yud gim-mel,” pp. 105–14.

<sup>51</sup> The text was reproduced by E. Urbach in his edition of *ʿArugat ha-Bošem*, 2:168–71, and by Altmann, “Eleazar of Worms’ *Hokhmah ha-Egoz*,” pp. 111–13. According to Dan, “*Hokhmah ha-ʿEgoz*, its origin and development,” p. 74, the passage was copied into this manuscript of *ʿArugat ha-Bošem* from the MS Oxford 1567 (ff. 39a–b) of the “Book of Angels,” or a similar source.

<sup>52</sup> *Hokhmah ha-Nefesh*, 9c. See Altmann, “Eleazar of Worms’ *Hokhmah ha-Egoz*,” p. 103.

male, on the other, which I have been analyzing up to this point.<sup>53</sup>

Be that as it may, the novel element in the texts that I have examined so far involves an aspect of cleaving which is realized in this world by virtue of the correlation between circumcision and the divine name. Not only does he who is circumcised ascend to the throne after death but it is also as if he had been already with God in his bodily existence. This point is made clear in the following passage from *Arugat ha-Bošem*:

It is written, "Be blameless" (Gen. 17:1), and it is written, "Blameless be with the Lord your God" (Deut. 18:13). Whoever fulfills the commandment of circumcision is as if he had been "with the Lord your God." For he fulfills the verse "Who among us can go up to the heavens" (מי יעלה לנו השמימה), the first consonants [spell] מילה and the last the Tetragrammaton. Whoever fulfills the commandment of circumcision will be in heaven with the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said, "The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord your God" (1 Sam. 25:29), i.e., in heaven, for בצרור equals numerically בקטש הקודש.<sup>54</sup>

From this passage it can be argued that although the full cleaving is surely not attained until after death when the soul ascends heavenward, the Pietist teaching implies that through circumcision one achieves some sort of cleaving, no matter how limited, even during one's earthly existence. This is the import of the biblical claim that Abraham walked blamelessly with God, which, according to the standard rabbinic tradition, refers to Abraham's being circumcised. To be blameless, that is, *tamim* (perfect) means

<sup>53</sup> I offer this only as a suggestion that requires further research. Just to mention one problem with my conjecture: in several places, e.g., in the *Sod ha-Merkavah* published in *Sode Razaya*<sup>2</sup>, p. 23, as well as the "Commentary on the Merkavah," extant in MS Paris 850, f. 67a, R. Eleazar develops a comment in *Midrash Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva* which connects the throne with the letter *kaf*. Without going into great detail it is clear from these passages, especially the latter, that the circular nature of the throne, as the letter *kaf*, is related to a feminine characteristic. Given this symbolic connection, cleaving to the throne in Ḥasidic sources may also imply some sexual nuance, but the matter requires a more detailed examination.

<sup>54</sup> *Arugat ha-Bošem*, 3:154.

to be on the level of one who is with God. The person who is circumcised is therefore guaranteed two things: first, that he is with God even as he walks upon the earth, and second, that when he dies he will ascend to heaven and cleave to the throne of Glory. Both aspects result from the exegetical fact that circumcision is correlated with the Tetragrammaton.

### III

The exegesis on Deut. 30:12, which is derived from the German Ḥasidim, was appropriated by the Spanish kabbalists of the latter part of the thirteenth century in Castile.<sup>55</sup> In the first instance, we cite the example of Joseph Gikatilla from his pre-theosophic classic *Ginnat ʿEgoz* (1273–74). In one context Gikatilla sets out to interpret the imagery derived from *Sefer Yeṣirah* 1:3 (cf. 6:4) concerning the “covenant of the tongue and mouth” which is set between the “ten fingers of the hands” and the “covenant of the foreskin” that is between the “ten toes (literally: fingers) of the feet.” Gikatilla comments that the two covenants and their respective fingers add up to the Tetragrammaton. The covenant of the mouth represents the letter *heh*, which numerically equals five, inasmuch as the mouth is divided into five parts: throat, palate, tongue, lips, and teeth. The ten fingers of the hand represent the *yod*, which equals ten. Hence the covenant of the mouth equals *yod heh*, the first two letters of the divine name. The covenant of circumcision, by contrast, is represented by one undivided organ. Together with the ten toes of the feet, therefore, this covenant equals eleven, which is the numerical value of *waw heh* (six plus five), the two final letters of the divine name. “Thus the covenant of the mouth is *yod heh*, and the covenant of circumcision is *waw heh*. It follows that the sacred name [*YHWH*] is divided into two parts, and they are: the covenant of Torah, which is the covenant fixed in the mouth, and the covenant of blood in the phallus.”<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> A possible channel of transmission of these ideas may have been Barukh Togarmi who employs the Pietistic exegesis in his commentary on *Sefer Yeṣirah*. See the relevant text published in G. Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah ve-shel Avraham Abulʿafiyah* (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 232. Mention should be made of the fact that the Pietistic exegesis influenced other Ashkenazi writers. Cf. the comments of R. Asher and of his son Jacob, the *Baʿal ha-Ṭurim*, to Deut. 30:12.

<sup>56</sup> *Ginnat ʿEgoz* (Hanau, 1614), fol. 25b–c.

After reaching this conclusion Gikatilla, clearly relying on the German Pietistic exegesis of Deut. 30:12,<sup>57</sup> goes on to say:

Since [the covenant of] circumcision comprises the final division of the sacred name (*waw heh*), you will find that the sacred name attests to it, as it is said in the Torah, "Who among us can go up to the heavens," (מי יעלה לנו השמימה). You will find that the first consonants [spell] מילה and the last יהוה. . . . When the covenant of circumcision is established in a person, he is worthy that God should attest of him, "Who among us can go up to the heavens," for the name *YHWH* attests to [the act of] *milah*.<sup>58</sup>

For Gikatilla, then, the complete name of God is sealed in the individual by means of the two covenants, that of the mouth (*yod heh*) and that of the phallus (*waw heh*). Yet it is only with respect to the latter that we find scriptural evidence that the divine name is correlated with circumcision. Gikatilla bases his comment on the technique already familiar to us from the writings of the German *Hasidim*.

The influence of the Pietistic exegesis on other Spanish kabbalists writing in the latter part of the thirteenth century, including Moses de León, the assumed author of the *Zohar*, is also clearly discernible. At the outset it will be noted that the author of the *Zohar* nowhere explicitly employs the exegesis of R. Judah. Notwithstanding this fact, which is totally in character with the general tendency in the *Zohar* to refrain from using exegetical techniques that betray a contemporary influence, I suggest that it was through the Pietists' own writings, or perhaps through an indirect channel of transmission such as Gikatilla, that the tradition concerning the correlation of circumcision with the Tetragrammaton reached de León. This correlation is employed in any number of contexts. "Come and see: before one is circumcised one is not united with the name of the Holy One, blessed be He; when one is circumcised one enters the divine name and is united with it."<sup>59</sup> "R. Shim'on said: The infant who is circumcised is

<sup>57</sup> For other examples of the influence of Eleazar of Worms on Gikatilla see S. Blickstein, "Between Philosophy and Mysticism" (Ph.D. dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1984), pp. 93–96.

<sup>58</sup> *Ginnat 'Egoz*, fol. 25c–d.

<sup>59</sup> *Zohar* 1:89a.

bound to the *Shekhinah*<sup>60</sup> which is the opening to all the upper crowns, the opening which is bound to the holy name.”<sup>61</sup> “From the eighth day onwards Israel cleave to His name and are inscribed (ורשימין) with His name and belong to Him... The [other] nations do not cleave to Him and do not follow His laws. The holy sign (רשימא קרישא) is removed from them and they cleave to the Other Side which is not holy.”<sup>62</sup> The holy sign of circumcision is here understood as an inscription of the divine name, indeed of the Tetragrammaton, upon the flesh. The Jew is distinguished from other nations because he is so inscribed, and by virtue of this sign he enters the divine name and cleaves to it. In one passage the *Zohar* addresses a question: Since the Muslims, called by the standard epithet Ishmael, are likewise circumcised, why do they not have a portion in God’s name as do the Jews? To this the *Zohar* responds by making a qualitative difference between the circumcision of the Jews and that of the Muslims. The former are circumcised properly and according to God’s specifications, whereas the latter are not, i.e., Jewish circumcision—as determined by rabbinic law—comprises *milah* and *peri’ah* while the Islamic ritual includes only the former.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, the Jew cleaves to the divine name from the eighth day of his life,

<sup>60</sup> An alternative reading is offered in the printed editions of *Zohar*, “the one who has a son is bound to the *Shekhinah*,” etc. The notion that man is unified with the *Shekhinah* through circumcision is emphasized on several occasions in the *Zohar*. See *Zohar* I, 89a, 91a–b, 93b, 98b; II, 36a; and cf. my study referred to above, n. 33.

<sup>61</sup> *Zohar* 3:14a. Contained here is a reference to the fact that the covenant of circumcision, like the nature of covenant in general, comprises two aspects, masculine (= “the holy name”) and feminine (= *Shekhinah*), which correspond to the ninth and tenth gradations, *Yesod* and *Shekhinah*. The two aspects are correlated with the two procedures which, according to rabbinic law (see B. Shab. 137b), are part of the circumcision ritual, *milah* (cutting the foreskin) and *peri’ah* (pulling down the membrane to fully expose the corona). See *Zohar* I:13a, 32a–b, 47b, 69a, 71b, 72b, 117a; 2:40a, 60b, 125b; 3:14a, 91b, 115b, 163a.

<sup>62</sup> *Zohar* 3:91a–b.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, p. 67. The claim that Muslim circumcision comprises *milah* but not *peri’ah* is also made by Isaac of Acre in *Sefer Me’irat Eynayim*, ed. A. Goldreich (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 113 (of critical edition). For references to the rabbinic ruling regarding the two acts of the circumcision ritual, and the various places in *Zohar* where this ruling is kabbalistically interpreted, see n. 61.

while the Muslim remains at a distance for many years.<sup>64</sup> Therefore only the Jew bears God's name as a seal on his body and thus participates in the divine. For the author of the *Zohar* the sign of circumcision has truly become a stigma, a mark of belonging: "Israel is marked by the holy sign on the flesh, and it is thus known that they are His, among those who belong to His palace. Therefore all those who are not marked with the holy sign on their flesh do not belong to Him; it is known that they are all derived from the side of impurity."<sup>65</sup>

The correlation between circumcision and the name underlies three themes that are central to the theosophy of the *Zohar*. The first consists of the Zoharic reworking of an older aggadic motif which interprets the ritual of circumcision as a sacrificial symbol.<sup>66</sup> In the *Zohar* the sacrificial character of circumcision is again connected to the process of cleaving to, or entering, the divine name. "The one who brings his son for this sacrifice [i.e., circumcision] enters him into the holy name."<sup>67</sup> The Zoharic reading of Exod. 20:21,<sup>68</sup> "Sacrifice on it [on the altar of earth]<sup>69</sup> your burnt

<sup>64</sup> *Zohar* 2:32a. See the passage of Isaac of Acre referred to in the preceding note.

<sup>65</sup> *Zohar* 3:72b–73a.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *Gen. Rabbah* 48:1, ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 479; *Midrash Tehillim* on Ps. 112, ed. Buber, p. 468; *Pirke R. Eli'ezer*, chap. 29. The connection between circumcision and sacrifices, especially from the vantage point of atonement and salvation, is stressed in the Septuagint and targumic version of the narrative in Exodus 4 concerning the circumcision of Moses' son by Zipporah. Cf. G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden, 1983), pp. 178–92. On the possibility that this connection may be biblical in origin see W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, 1961), 1:138, n. 3. The theme is repeated frequently in the *Zohar*, see 1:93a, 94b, 95a, 96b; 2:164a (and cf. the commentary of David Luria to *Pirke R. Eli'ezer*, chap. 29, p. 65a, n. 41); 3:44a, 164a.

<sup>67</sup> *Zohar* 1:96b.

<sup>68</sup> The reading of this verse in connection with circumcision, though not as a direct reference to it, is to be found in classical midrashic sources as well. See, e.g., *Gen. Rabbah* 48:4, ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 480.

<sup>69</sup> In this context the author of the *Zohar* derives the custom for placing the foreskin in a "vessel full of earth" from the fact that circumcision is an act of sacrifice, and sacrifices had to be offered on an altar of earth. See, however, *Zohar* 3:44a (*Piqqudin*), where another reason for this practice is offered: "We set up a vessel full of earth to place the foreskin in it, according to the secret of the verses, 'And the serpent's food shall be earth' (Isa. 65:25); 'And earth shall you eat all the days of your life' (Gen. 3:14)." Insofar as the foreskin is symbolic of the demonic

offerings and your peace offerings in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned," as a reference to circumcision is based on the end of this verse: "What is [the meaning of] 'where I cause My name to be mentioned?' This refers to circumcision, concerning which it is written, 'The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, to them He makes known His covenant' (Ps. 25:14)."<sup>70</sup> Circumcision is thus identified as both the divine name and the secret of the Lord. The element of secrecy (*sod*) is specifically associated by de León,<sup>71</sup> as well as by other thirteenth century kabbalists,<sup>72</sup> with the ninth divine gradation, *Yesod* (Foun-

force which is also symbolized by the serpent, and as the serpent is associated in Scripture with the dust of the earth, it follows that the foreskin must be placed in a vessel full of earth. This interpretation is given as well in *Tiqqune Zohar*, Introduction, 11a; 24, 70a; 37, 78b; *Zohar Ḥadash* 117b (*Tiqqunim*).

<sup>70</sup> *Zohar* 1:95a.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *Zohar* 1:236b. Cf. *Zohar* 1:236b; 2:186b; *Yesod* is the "hidden place that is not revealed and should be hidden"; 3:43b (*Piqqudin*); *Zohar Ḥadash* 2a (*Matnitin*) where the ninth book, i.e., the ninth gradation, is said to be "invisible, hidden in the 248 worlds [corresponding to 248 limbs] that go along with it"; *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon*, pp. 226–28 (Hebrew section); Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, pp. 60–61; Y. Liebes, "Ha-Mashiah shel ha-Zohar," in *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought: A Study Conference in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 138–40. See, however, *Zohar* 3:91b: "R. Shim'on said: 'The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and to them He makes his covenant known' (Ps. 25:14). 'The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him' refers to the Community of Israel [i.e., *Shekhinah*]; 'and to them He makes his covenant known' refers to the Righteous One, Foundation of the world [i.e., *Yesod*]." It should be noted that the "secret of the Lord" in Ps. 25:14 is already interpreted as a reference to circumcision in *Gen. Rabbah*, 49:2 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 488–89); *Tanḥuma, Lekh Lekha*, 19. And cf. M. Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah* (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 23a. The hidden character of the divine grade that corresponds to the phallus may already be implied in *Sefer ha-Bahir* §193 where the Righteous one is identified as the "great hidden light." This kabbalistic idea is, of course, suggested by the older aggadic notion that the hidden light is especially stored up for the righteous; see, e.g., B. Ḥag. 12a.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Jacob b. Jacob ha-Kohen, *Perush ha-ʿOtiyyot*, ed. by Scholem, *Maddaʿe ha-Yahadut* 2 (1927): 207: "[The letter] *gimmel* instructs about the [place of] circumcision. Know that we call the phallus, which is the [place of] circumcision, גיידה, and one cannot say גיידה without the letter *gimmel* at the beginning . . . Thus you see in the form of the *gimmel* an image of a man with the covenant of circumcision. And this is a great, wondrous, and hidden mystery, and it is appropriate to hide it." And cf. Todros Abulafia, *ʿOṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem*, 12b; *Tiqqune Zohar* 19, 39b. On *gimmel* as a phallic symbol in Lurianic texts, see L. Fine, "The Art of Metoposcopy: A Study in Isaac Luria's Charismatic Knowledge," p. 88.



dation) or *Ṣaddiq* (the Righteous One).<sup>73</sup> This gradation, in turn, corresponds to the phallus in the divine anatomy, for its function is to gather all the divine energies from above and pass them along to the tenth gradation, *Shekhinah*, the feminine potency par excellence. That this gradation is further called the divine name, i.e., the Tetragrammaton, can only be comprehended in light of the kabbalistic understanding of this name as the hypostatic concentration of divine power. Put differently, the divine name comprises the totality of the theosophic structure, the ten *sefirot*, which in turn are all centralized in *Yesod*, the gradation which comprises all the upper gradations within itself; hence it is also called the All (*kol*). As such, the divine name is appropriately predicated on this gradation, for it symbolizes the whole sefirotic pleroma. "The eighth [*sefirah*, counting from *Hokhmah*] is [called by the name] the 'Living God' (אל חי) . . . and this is the Righteous One (*Ṣaddiq*), for all life emerges therefrom, and it is called *YHWH*, as it is written, 'The Lord, the Righteous One, seeks out,' etc. (Ps. 11:5)." <sup>74</sup> The import, therefore, of the claim that he who is circumcised enters and cleaves to the divine name is that the Jew, by bearing the sign of circumcision—the Tetragrammaton—on his phallus, participates in that very divine gradation which is in the position of the male organ and which contains within itself all the divine potencies.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Liebes, "Ha-Mashiah shel ha-Zohar," pp. 139–40, n. 204, who suggests that the connection between *Sod* (secret) and *Yesod* (Foundation) may have been inspired by a similarity in sound. It should be pointed out that *sod* and *yesod* are connected on this phonetic basis already in rabbinic sources. See, e.g., B. Hag. 14a: "The Holy One, blessed be He, reveals to them the *secret* (סוד) in the world to come, as it is said, 'and their *foundation* (יסודם) poured out like a river'" (Job 22:16).

<sup>74</sup> *Zohar* 3:11a. The literal translation of the verse from Psalms should read: "The Lord seeks out the righteous man." My rendering reflects the exegetical perspective of the *Zohar*. Cf. Isaac of Acre, *Sefer Me'irat Eynayim*, p. 129 where the connection between the Tetragrammaton (*shem ha-gadol*) and *Yesod* is made.

<sup>75</sup> This precise point is made in slightly different terms by Joseph Hamadan, *Sefer Ta'ame ha-Mišwot*, ed. M. Meier (see n. 1), pp. 243–44: "Circumcision alludes to the chain of the image (שלשלת הדמות) [i.e., the sefirotic pleroma] . . . and the image of the *yod* [of the sign of the covenant] alludes to the ten potencies (מדות). And this one [i.e., the divine gradation which corresponds to the place of circumcision] is the whole perfection (כל השלמות)." And cf. Elijah de Vidas, *Reshit Hokhmah* (Brooklyn, 1965), *Sha'ar ha-Qedushah*, ch. 17, p. 212c: "A blemish of the phallus [literally, (the place) of the covenant] (פגם הברית) harms the whole physical stature (נוגע בכל שיעור קומה), for the phallus, which is the

The second Zoharic theme which is based on the correlation of the phallus with the divine name involves the interpretation of idolatry as a sexual offense.<sup>76</sup> That is, he who is an idolater, according to the *Zohar*, lies with respect to God's name, but inasmuch as this name is identical with the covenant of circumcision, it follows that such an individual lies with respect to the seal of the covenant inscribed on the phallus. "He who lies with respect to the holy covenant sealed (דחתים) on the flesh of man is as if he had lied with respect to the name of the Holy One, blessed be He. He who lies with respect to the seal of the King (חותמא דמלכא) lies with respect to the King."<sup>77</sup> Yet there are two kinds of sexual offense which are commensurate with lying in the name of God: having sexual relations with a non-Jew, which involves entering the place of the covenant (the phallus) in the domain of the demonic Other Side,<sup>78</sup> and committing adultery,

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totality of the physical stature (כלל כל השיעור קומה), comprises the Tetragrammaton. . . . The Tetragrammaton is sealed in the [place of the] covenant, as it is written in the *Tiqqunim* [see references below in nn. 99–100], מי יעלה לנו השמימה, the first consonants [spell] *milah* and the last *YHWH*. Just as the Tetragrammaton is the root of all the names . . . so is the phallus the foundation (עיקר) which establishes the whole body. For he who blemishes it is as if he had actually blemished the Tetragrammaton, for it [the phallus or its correlate in the sefirotic realm, *Yesod*] comprises all the [divine] potencies."

<sup>76</sup> The connection between idolatry and adultery is made already in earlier rabbinic sources; see S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York, 1961), p. 250.

<sup>77</sup> *Zohar* 2:3b.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. *Zohar* 2:87b: "It has been taught: R. Isaac said, 'You shall not make [for yourself a sculptured image, etc.] (Exod. 20:4). One must not lie in the name of the Holy One, blessed be He. And what is this name? The covenant of circumcision, the sign of the holy covenant, for the one who lies with respect to this covenant lies with respect to the name of the Holy One, blessed be He . . . And in what does the lie consist? He should not enter this covenant in the other domain [i.e., he should not have sexual relations with a non-Jew] . . . The one who lies with respect to this covenant lies with respect to the Holy One, blessed be He, for this covenant is united with the Holy One, blessed be He.'" And cf. *Zohar* 3:13b: "He who lies with respect to the sign of the holy covenant (קיימא קרישא) which is inscribed on him is as if he had lied with respect to the name of the King, for the name of the King is inscribed in man . . . In what does the lie consist here? He spread out his hands to the other power [i.e., had sexual intercourse with a non-Jew] and lies with respect to [the place of] this covenant. And thus the Torah is dependent upon this [gradation], for he who guards this covenant is as if he was guarding the entire Torah. And he who lies with respect to it is as if he had lied

which likewise involves lying with respect to the seal which is inscribed on the flesh.<sup>79</sup>

The third theme which is based on this correlation is the Zoharic prohibition, based in turn on earlier midrashic sources,<sup>80</sup> of teaching Torah to the uncircumcised non-Jew.

It is also forbidden to instruct [the uncircumcised] in words of Torah, for the entire Torah is the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and each letter of the Torah is bound to the holy name. It is forbidden to instruct the person who is not marked by the holy sign (רשימא קדישא) on his flesh in the words of Torah.<sup>81</sup>

The full import of the claim that only one marked with the sign of the holy covenant may study Torah can be understood only in light of the explicit identification which is made between the Torah and the divine name in a host of thirteenth century kabbalistic texts and is elaborated upon in the *Zohar*. This theme has been discussed by several scholars<sup>82</sup> and there is no need to dwell

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with respect to the entire Torah.” The equivalence of circumcision to all the commandments is expressed in earlier rabbinic literature; see below, n. 85. See also *Zohar Ḥadash* 21a (*Midrash ha-Ne’elam*), *Zohar* 1:131b, and Hebrew parallel in *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 212–13.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Zohar* 2:90a: “[The commandment] ‘You shall have [no other gods besides Me]’ (Exod. 20:3) corresponds to [the commandment] ‘You shall not commit adultery’ (ibid. 13). For the one [who commits adultery] lies with respect to the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, which is inscribed (ראתרשים) in man . . . And the one who lies with respect to that lies with respect to the King.” See n. 75.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Tanḥuma, Mishpatim*, 5 (see R. Judah bar Yaqar, *Perush ha-Tefillot ve-ha-Berakhot* [Jerusalem, 1979], pt. 2, p. 65); *Exod. Rabbah* 30:12. See the kabbalistic reworking of the later passage in Nahmanides, “Torat ha-Shem Temimah,” in *Kitve Ramban*, ed. H. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1963), 1:155. In light of these passages my comments in “Circumcision, Visionary Experience, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol,” p. 190, n. 3, should be somewhat modified, though it still seems to me correct to say that the talmudic restriction of Torah study to a Jew is not explicitly connected with circumcision.

<sup>81</sup> *Zohar* 3:73a.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1978), pp. 37–44; I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem, 1961), 2:365–66; M. Idel, “Tefisat ha-Torah be-Sifrut ha-Hekhalot ve-Gilguleha ba-Qabbalah,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 49–58. It is of interest to note that the esoteric identification of the Torah and the Tetragrammaton is found also in

on it here. Suffice it to say that the author of the *Zohar* centralizes the Torah-divine name symbolism in the *sefirah* of *Yesod* and thereby establishes an intrinsic relationship between textual study and the phallus.<sup>83</sup> To be sure, in earlier midrashic and aggadic sources one finds an inherent connection between the covenant of circumcision and the covenant of Sinai. In particular, two ideas are significant in this context. First, the idea that the rite of circumcision was given to Israel as a necessary precondition for their receiving the Torah at Sinai,<sup>84</sup> and second, the notion that *berit milah* is equivalent to all the commandments of the Torah.<sup>85</sup> It is only in the *Zohar*, however, that these random and isolated homiletical insights become part of a developed mystical

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R. Eleazar of Worms. Thus in *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, f. 173a, he writes: "[The word] הויה [the letters of the Tetragrammaton] is numerically equivalent to twenty-six, for the Torah, which was given after twenty-six generations [cf. B. Pes. 118a], is dependent upon His great name." See also f. 181b, where he notes, on the one hand, that the Tetragrammaton, when spelled out equals forty-five, and on the other, that the Torah is divided into forty-five. Cf. Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidut Ashkenaz*, p. 124, n. 45 and p. 147; Idel, op. cit., pp. 47–48.

<sup>83</sup> See E. Wolfson, "Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation," pp. 205–15.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *Pesiqta<sup>2</sup> Rabbati* 23, ed. M. Friedmann (Vienna, 1880), p. 117a; *Tanḥuma, Lekh Lekha* 20; *Aggadat Bere<sup>2</sup>shit* 17; *Bere<sup>2</sup>shit Rabbati*, ed. Ch. Albeck (Jerusalem, 1940), p. 73. And cf. *Sifre Num.* 108, ed. H. S. Horovitz (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 108, where it is stated in the name of R. Judah the Prince that before the Israelites received the Torah they had to undergo circumcision and ritual immersion, and offer a sacrifice. In this sense the experience at Sinai is the paradigm for the procedure at all future conversions. See L. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism* (Hoboken, 1985), p. 19; idem, "The Rabbinic Understanding of the Covenant," *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987): 294. According to another view expressed in *Mekhilta de-R. Ishmael, Bo<sup>2</sup>*, 5, ed. H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 14, it was by virtue of the blood of circumcision and the Paschal sacrifice that the Israelite slaves merited to be redeemed from Egypt. See also *ibid.*, *Be-shallah*, 3, p. 98, where it is stated that the Israelites merited the splitting of the sea because of their observance of circumcision.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. P. Ned. 3:9, "Great is circumcision, for it is equivalent to all the other commandments." And cf. *Mekhilta de-R. Ishmael, Ba-hodesh* 2, p. 208, where, according to R. Aqiva, observance of circumcision and abstinence from idolatry are seen as tantamount to observing the entire covenant. On the correspondence between circumcision and all the commandments of the Torah cf. the following remark in *Mahzor Vitry*, p. 628: "*Berit* corresponds to all the commandments. For

theosophy. Specifically, the limitation of Torah study to one who has the sign of the covenant is grounded in the equation of Torah and the divine name, on the one hand, and the place of circumcision and the divine name, on the other. By the principle of transitivity, moreover, the place of circumcision, the divine gradation of *Yesod*, is identical with the Torah. It is therefore forbidden to teach Torah to one who is not circumcised, for such a person does not participate in the divine name:

The Torah was not given [at Sinai] except to him who had the holy covenant [of circumcision]. He who teaches Torah to one who is not circumcised lies with respect to two covenants, he lies with respect to both the covenant of the Torah and the covenant of the Righteous One [*Yesod*] and the Community of Israel [*Shekhinah*]. The Torah was given to this place and to no other . . . “The righteous shall surely praise Your name” (Ps. 140:14). Who are the righteous? The Righteous One and the Community of Israel. The one who is not circumcised and has not entered the covenant shall not praise the holy name which is the Torah.<sup>86</sup>

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the 613 commandments are equal to the numerical value of [the word] ברית [= 612] plus the commandment [of circumcision] itself.” And see Al-Naqawa in *Menorat ha-Maʿor*, 3:475 (cf. Abuhab, *Menorat ha-Maʿor*, p. 183), who combines the older correspondence of circumcision to all the Torah with the Pietistic exegesis of Deut. 30:12, which correlates the divine name and circumcision. Cf. R. Jacob ha-Gozer, *Zikhron Berit la-Rishnonim* (see n. 7), p. 10.

<sup>86</sup> *Zohar* 3:91b. Several kabbalists established the intrinsic connection between circumcision and the Torah on the basis of the correlation of the “covenant of the foreskin” and the “covenant of the tongue” mentioned in *Sefer Yesirah* 1:3. See, e.g., Abulafia, *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, MS Oxford 1580, f. 5a: “If not for the covenant of circumcision one could not fulfill the covenant of the tongue [i.e., the Torah].” Gikatilla, *Shaʿare ʿOrah*, ed. Ben-Shlomo, 1:114–16: “If Israel had not received the covenant of the flesh they would never have merited [to receive] the Torah which is the covenant of the tongue . . . Therefore the Torah is only given to one who has received the covenant of the flesh, and from the covenant of the flesh one enters into the covenant of the tongue, which is the reading of the Torah.” See also Moses of Kiev, *ʿOṣar ha-Shem*, MS JTS Mic. 1804, f. 40b: “There is no way to approach God (*shem ha-meyuḥad*) . . . who is the written Torah except through the gate which is called covenant [of circumcision] (*berit*) . . . Thus one must place the covenant [of circumcision] before the Torah [see B. Ber. 48b; *Zohar* 2:168b]. Whoever does not have this attribute has no way to approach the Torah. It is therefore forbidden to teach Torah to a non-Jew.”

In the theosophic system of the *Zohar*, then, the Sinatic covenant of Torah and the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision coalesce completely: "He who guards the holy covenant is as if he had fulfilled the holy Torah in its entirety, for the covenant [of circumcision] is equivalent to the entire Torah."<sup>87</sup>

## IV

If the author of the *Zohar* refrained from connecting the correlation of the divine name with circumcision to the exegetical technique of the Pietists, although he was surely influenced by them, other thirteenth century Spanish kabbalists were not so reticent. For instance, Bahya ben Asher writes as follows in his commentary to Deut. 30:12:

"Who among us can go up to the heavens?" There is here an allusion to the fact that only Israel, who are circumcised, can comprehend the Tetragrammaton, for they are sealed with the sign of the holy covenant. We have found that only the one who is circumcised can prophecy while standing up<sup>88</sup> . . . And Moses too alluded to this when he said to the Holy One, blessed be He, at the bush: "They will say to me, 'What is His name?' What will I say to them?" (Exod. 3:13). He said that the circumcised will inquire about the Tetragrammaton.<sup>89</sup>

According to Bahya, then, there is an allusion to the correlation between circumcision and the divine name in Moses' request at the burning bush, for the consonants of the words "to me what" (לי מה) in his question are the very consonants of the word circumcision (מילה), and the last letters of the words לי מה שמו מה spell the Tetragrammaton. Although Bahya does not repeat the Pietistic exegesis verbatim, it is fairly obvious that he is dependent upon it in his own commentary on this verse in Deuteronomy.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, the reading of the phrase לי מה שמו מה from

<sup>87</sup> *Zohar* 1:197a. Cf. *Zohar* 2:61a, and above, n. 78.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen. 17:3; *Gen. Rabbah* 46:6 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, pp. 463-64), 47:3 (pp. 472-73); *Tanhuma, Lekh Lekha* 20; *Pirke R. Eli'ezer* 29; *Num. Rabbah* 12:10.

<sup>89</sup> Bahya ben Asher, *Be'ur 'al ha-Torah* (see n. 1), 3:442.

<sup>90</sup> It is also possible that R. Bahya derived this Pietistic exegesis from an alternative source, such as Gikatilla's *Ginnat 'Egoz*. See op. cit., 9a, where Exod.

Exod. 3:13 as a reference to the Tetragrammaton is found in the works of the Pietists of R. Judah's circle, including Eleazar of Worms' *Sefer ha-Shem*.<sup>91</sup> Bahya tacitly assumes therefore that the query in Deut. 30:12, "Who among us can go up to the heavens?" is an allusion to the correlation between the Tetragrammaton and circumcision. However, he has theosophically transformed the esoteric notion found in the Pietistic sources, for his claim that only Israel, who are circumcised, can comprehend the Tetragrammaton means that only he who has the holy seal of the covenant can receive knowledge of the divine pleroma which is comprised within the ineffable name. A similar point, as we have seen, is made by the author of the *Zohar* in slightly different terms. The theosophic limitation of esoteric knowledge to one who is circumcised in both cases, although more explicit in the case of Bahya, is based on the nexus between the divine name and circumcision established by the Pietists. It is clear, moreover, that for Bahya this theosophic knowledge results in an act of cleaving to the divine pleroma realized in this earthly existence. Thus, as he further points out, Scripture mentions the "circumcision of the flesh by means of the sealing of the unique name (בַּחֲתִימַת שֵׁם הַמְּיוּחָד, i.e., the Tetragrammaton)" after it mentions the circumcision of the heart (see Deut. 30:6), "for the circumcision of the heart is the nullification of the evil inclination, and when the evil inclination is nullified, all the limbs of man are drawn after, and cleave to, the unique name. They thus accomplish in nature that which the intellect necessitates." Bahya concludes by asserting that the correlation between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton alluded to here ultimately points to the time of redemption, when all of Israel will be *ba'ale ha-hasagah* (masters of the intellect), and they will consequently cleave with their mind and flesh to the Tetragrammaton.

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3:13 is interpreted in a similar way (see following note for references to the Pietistic literature). The passage from *Ginnat 'Egoz* was already discussed by S. Blickstein, "Between Philosophy and Mysticism," pp. 54–55, and the influence of R. Eleazar of Worms noted on p. 55, n. 57. See *ibid.*, pp. 93–96. For other examples of Bahya's use of this latter work see E. Gottlieb, *Ha-Qabbalah be-Kitze Rabbeni Bahya ben Asher* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 148–55. Another possible influence of R. Eleazar of Worms on Bahya has been noted by Gottlieb, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, ff. 174a, 175a. See also *Perush ha-Roqeah 'al ha-Torah*, ed. Ch. Konyevsky (Bene Berak, 1980), 2:21.

The dependency of the Spanish kabbalists upon the German Pietists is most apparent in the *Tiqqune Zohar*. One passage in particular follows rather closely the exegesis of the German Pietists, especially as employed in the text attributed to R. Judah in the *Arugat ha-Bošem*:

When the soul ascends, as it is written, "Who among us can go up to heaven?" (Deut. 30:12), the Holy One, blessed be He, removes from it all the angels of destruction and the prosecutors, so that they will not come near it. The Tetragrammaton rests upon the soul, as you find the first consonants in the words *השמימה לנו יעלה מי* spell *מילה* and the last consonants *יהיה*. The soul ascends. In that moment the [verse] is established, "All the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of God and they will fear you" (Deut. 28:7).<sup>92</sup>

In this passage we have a slight variation of the Pietistic view that he who is circumcised is saved from the raging fires of Gehenna, inasmuch as the divine name is correlated to circumcision. Here the apotropaic function of circumcision, which, as we have seen, underlies the Pietistic exegesis, is unequivocally affirmed. Yet in another context the anonymous author of *Tiqqune Zohar*, basing himself on the language of the *Zohar* itself, transforms the esoteric doctrine and places it in a new theosophic context:

"Who among us can go up to heaven?" The first consonants [spell] *milah*, and the last *YHWH*.<sup>93</sup> He who guards this sign it is as if he had guarded the holy name, and the one who lies with respect to this sign it is as if he had lied with respect to the holy name. This [sign] is thus called the seal of the signet of the King (*חותמא דגושפנקא דמלכא*).<sup>94</sup>

In the fuller context of this passage the author of *Tiqqune Zohar* equates four signs: circumcision, Sabbath, the festivals, and the phylacteries.<sup>95</sup> For him all these signs have one theosophic

<sup>92</sup> *Tiqqune Zohar* 60, 130b–131a. Cf. R. David b. Zimra, *Mešudat David* (Zolkiew, 1862), 17b. The verse from Deuteronomy concerning the name of God is interpreted as a reference to the phylacteries of the head in B. Ber. 6a, Men. 35b. See above, n. 20.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *Tiqqune Zohar*, *Haqdamah*, p. 2b.

<sup>94</sup> *Tiqqune Zohar* 22, p. 65b.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *Tiqqune Zohar* 19, p. 40a.



correlate in the divine pleroma: that gradation which corresponds to the phallus, the foundation upon which all things depend, the pillar of existence.<sup>96</sup> This gradation is represented by the divine name because it comprises the totality of the sefirotic realm. Thus in place of the midrashic identification of *Shaddai* as the appropriate name affixed to the phallus, the kabbalists identified the Tetragrammaton itself as the appropriate name.<sup>97</sup> Indeed in one passage the author of *Tiqqune Zohar* spells out in detail the correlation of the divine name to this gradation: the *yod* corresponds to the lower Wisdom, i.e., *Shekhinah*, which is the “fruit of the tree” in the “head of the *Ṣaddiq*,” i.e., the corona of the phallus; the *waw* is the body of the phallus; the first and last *heh* are the place of the foreskin and the act of *periʿah*, the pulling down of the membrane. Hence “the four letters are upon the *Ṣaddiq* [i.e., *Yesod*] who is the tree that bears fruit.”<sup>98</sup> It is of special interest to note the manner in which the theosophic correlation of the divine name with the place of circumcision translates here into a graphic depiction of the letters in anatomical images, in a way reminiscent of the passage in *Tanḥuma* wherein the letters of the divine name *Shaddai* correspond to three bodily parts. The kabbalist has thus combined the theosophical posture with a more primitive mystical and mythical conception involving the convergence of anthropomorphic and linguistic symbolism.

By way of conclusion it may be said that the correlation of the divine name and circumcision found in a host of thirteenth century writers is based in part on the midrashic identification of the place of circumcision with the letter *yod* of the name *Shaddai*. In the German Pietistic and Spanish kabbalistic circles the sign of circumcision was still identified with the letter *yod*, but in these cases the correlation was between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton. Appropriating the esoteric tradition of the German

<sup>96</sup> Cf. *Zohar* 3:242b (*Raʿaya Mehemna*) where the righteous person who keeps these four signs—circumcision, phylacteries, Sabbath, and the festivals—is said to receive the “extra soul” (*neshamah yeterah*) of Sabbath from the divine grade of *Yesod*, the *Ṣaddiq* above, whereas all others receive it from *Shekhinah*.

<sup>97</sup> It is of interest to note in this connection that in the continuation of this passage in *Tiqqune Zohar* 21, p. 66a, an effort is made to harmonize the midrashic and kabbalistic traditions: “He who lies with respect to the covenant of circumcision lies with respect to the seal of the King, for he is inscribed with *Shaddai* from without and *YHWH* from within.” Cf. Elijah de Vidas, *Reʿshit Hokhmah*, *Shaʿar ha-Qedushah*, ch. 17, p. 207d.

<sup>98</sup> *Tiqqune Zohar* 61, p. 94a.

Pietists, the Castilian kabbalists, particularly the authors of the *Zohar* and *Tiqqune Zohar*, viewed circumcision as a process by means of which the individual participates in the divine grade which corresponds to the phallus and which is represented by the letters of the Tetragrammaton. In that sense circumcision is best understood mystically as the imprinting of the divine name upon the flesh. "In the place of uncovering of the corona (פריעה) are the letters *yod heh*, and in the place of the cutting of the foreskin (מילה) are the letters *waw heh*. The secret of the matter is 'Who among us can go up to heaven?' (מי יעלה לנו השמימה). The last consonants spell the Tetragrammaton."<sup>99</sup> Again, to cite from *Tiqqune Zohar*, "In the place of circumcision (מילה) and uncovering of the corona (פריעה) [the letters of the] Tetragrammaton rest. And this is [the import of the verse] 'I would behold God from my flesh' (Job 19:26)."<sup>100</sup> That is, from the flesh of the phallus one indeed beholds the divine, for the Tetragrammaton is imprinted on that limb through the twofold task of cutting the foreskin (*milah*) and pulling down the membrane (*peri'ah*) to fully expose the corona.

By the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth centuries this correlation became more widely accepted, as the esoteric theme had penetrated into mainstream halakhic works. Thus we read in the *Shibbole ha-Leqet ha-Shalem* of Zedeqiah b. Abraham ha-Rofe<sup>3</sup>: "I have found [the following interpretation]: "Who among us can go up to the heavens (מי יעלה לנו השמימה) Deut. 30:12). The beginning of it [i.e., the first letters] alludes to circumcision (מילה) and the end [the last letters] to the Tetragrammaton. This is to say, how great is circumcision, for it is, as it were, above His name."<sup>101</sup> In this case the author's dependence

<sup>99</sup> *Zohar Hadash*, p. 117b (*Tiqqunim*).

<sup>100</sup> *Tiqqune Zohar* 24, p. 70a. Cf. *Zohar* 1:94a, and see my discussion of that passage in "Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation." The verse from Job is interpreted in connection with circumcision in a completely non-mystical way in *Gen. Rabbah* 48:1 (p. 479).

<sup>101</sup> Zedeqiah b. Abraham ha-Rofe<sup>3</sup>, *Shibbole ha-Leqet ha-Shalem*, ed. S. Buber (n. 8), pp. 184b–85a. Cf. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, *The Book of Mirrors: Sefer Mar'ot Šove'ot*, ed. D. Matt (Chico, California, 1982), p. 253 (Hebrew text): "'Who among us can go up to the heavens' (מי יעלה לנו השמימה; Deut. 30:12): the first consonants refer to circumcision (*milah*) and the last to the Tetragrammaton (YHWH). This is to say that the Holy One, blessed be He,

on the Ḥaside Ashkenaz is clear. Yet in other cases the dependence on any Pietistic or kabbalistic source is less obvious, although the mystical implication of the correlation between the Tetragrammaton and circumcision based thereon is evident. A striking example of this is to be found in Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel's *ʿOrḥot Ḥayyim*:

Thus you will find in the word *milah* [the letters of] half the name, *yod heh*, and you will find in it the complete name [of the Tetragrammaton], for the [letters] *mem heh* equal [numerically] the Tetragrammaton. How is this so? The *yod* equals twenty, *heh* six, which equals [together] twenty-six, and the *waw* equals thirteen, making a sum of thirty-nine, and the *heh* equals six, thus totalling forty-five, which is [the numerical value] of the name. . . . This covenant [of circumcision] is the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, by means of which He sealed the heavens and the earth, as it is written in *Sefer Yeṣirah*,<sup>102</sup> He sealed the height with *yod heh* and the lower ones with *waw heh*. This is [alluded to] in the verse, "Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exult" (ישמחו השמים ותגל הארץ) (1 Chron. 16:31). With half the name [i.e., *yod heh*, the first two letters of the words ישמחו השמים] He created the upper realities and with half the name [i.e., *waw heh*, the first two letters of the words ותגל הארץ] He sealed the lower ones, and the enlightened one will understand. And this seal He placed in our flesh as an eternal covenant . . . , for the corona [of the phallus disclosed through circumcision] is like a *yod*, which is

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placed circumcision before His name, as it says, 'You have exalted Your word (אמרתך) on Your entire name' (Ps. 138:2; the literal rendering should be 'You have exalted on everything Your name [and] Your word'), for circumcision is called word (אמירה), as it is said, 'I rejoice over your word (אמרתך) as one who obtains great spoil' (ibid. 119:162), and it is written, 'They observed Your word (אמרתך) and kept Your covenant'" (Deut. 33:9). David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid's first-hand knowledge of Ashkenazi sources is a fact well established in the scholarly literature; see D. Matt, *The Book of Mirrors*, p. 1, and references given there in nn. 1–5.

<sup>102</sup> There is no quotation in the extant versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah* which directly corresponds to this citation. See, however, *Sefer Yeṣirah* 1:15, where it is stated that God selected three letters, *yod heh waw*, and sealed the height with them as well as the six directions in accord with various permutations. And cf. *ʿOtiyyot R. ʿAqiva* in *Batte Midrashot*, 2:364.

the first letter of the Tetragrammaton. And in this form it is inscribed on the flesh of the holy nation.<sup>103</sup>

R. Aaron ha-Kohen's discussion of the numerical allusion to the divine name within the word *milah* must be understood against the background of the accepted correlation between the Tetragrammaton and circumcision. Hence the sign of circumcision incised on the corona of the phallus is identified as the *yod* not of *Shaddai*, as in *Tanḥuma*, but of the Tetragrammaton, as it is found in Pietistic sources.<sup>104</sup> The rite of circumcision legitimately functions as the everlasting covenant between God and the Jew, because the seal of circumcision, which is at the same time the seal by means of which God created heaven and earth, is the most sacred of God's names. Circumcision is therefore the inscription of the divine letter, and hence the divine name, upon the flesh of the Jew. In the act of inscribing the physical is transformed into the spiritual, for the bodily limb itself becomes the bearer of the divine letter and is thus the eternal sign of the covenant between God and Israel.

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<sup>103</sup> Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel, *ṢOrḥot Ḥayyim* (see n. 7), 2:15. This passage is transmitted partly incorrectly in the name of R. Solomon ibn Adret in *Ḥiddushe RaSHBA*, 7:436.

<sup>104</sup> See above, n. 22.

*Elliot R. Wolfson*

CIRCUMCISION, VISION  
OF GOD, AND TEXTUAL  
INTERPRETATION:  
FROM MIDRASHIC  
TROPE TO MYSTICAL  
SYMBOL

The use of sexual imagery to depict religious experience is well attested in the history of religions. It should come as no surprise, therefore, to find that the seeing of God, or a Godlike presence, is described in religious texts especially by means of language derived from human sexuality. Such formulation, of course, is not strange to any of the major religious traditions in the Occident or Orient. It is often the case, moreover, that especially the mystics of particular cultures express themselves precisely in this modality. To experience God involves a state of ecstatic union akin to the union of male and female partners in sexual embrace.

This paper will be a study of one particular motif related to this larger issue in the phenomenology of religious experience. We will examine an idea developed in the *Zohar*, the main sourcebook of thirteenth century Spanish Jewish mysticism,<sup>1</sup> concerning the correlation between two apparently unrelated phenomena: circumcision and

<sup>1</sup> The most comprehensive treatment of the *Zohar* in English remains G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3d ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), chaps. 4 and 5. See also D. Matt, *Zohar, the Book of Enlightenment* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), pp. 3–39.

the ability to see the *Shekhinah*, the divine Presence. The causal nexus between these two phenomena is suggested by earlier Rabbinic passages but is given an elaborate treatment in the theosophic system of the *Zohar*. As we shall see, implicit in the Zoharic discussion is the notion that mystical experience involves a type of sexual union between the initiate and the divine. Beholding the face of the *Shekhinah* becomes in the *Zohar* an actual embrace or penetration of the mystic into the divine feminine. Given the normative halakhic sexual mores, it follows that only one who is circumcised can have such a visionary experience.<sup>2</sup> Circumcision is thus an act of opening that not only ushers the circumcised into the covenantal community of God but also places the individual into an immediate—visual—relationship to the divine.

The phenomenological reciprocity between the opening of circumcision and visionary experience of God functions in the *Zohar* as a model for divine-human relations in another way, though in this case as well the sexual implications are evident. It is stated explicitly that only one who is circumcised is permitted to study the Torah.<sup>3</sup> The underlying notion here, as I shall show, is the congruity between textual interpretation and circumcision. Yet, one may well ask, what is it in the nature of hermeneutics that allows the author of the *Zohar*

<sup>2</sup> Conversely, according to the *Zohar*, the Jew who has sexual relations with a non-Jew is guilty of idolatry, i.e., worshiping other gods, which, in Zoharic theosophy, means the forces of impurity. Compare *Zohar Hadash* 21a (*Midrash ha-Ne'elam* on Noah); *Zohar* I, 131b; II, 3b, 87b; III, 84a, 142a (*Idra Rabba*). On the connection between idolatry and adultery in earlier rabbinic sources. cf. S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 250. In the preparation of this study the following editions have been used: *Sefer ha-Zohar*, ed. R. Margaliot, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1984); *Zohar Hadash*, ed. R. Margaliot (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978); *Tiqqunei Zohar*, ed. R. Margaliot (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Compare *Zohar* III, 72b–73a, and, *ibid.*, 91b: “The holy Name, which is the Torah, is not made known to one who is not circumcised and who has not entered (the) covenant”; see also *Zohar* I, 236b, where it is said that Simeon and Levi circumcised the inhabitants of Shechem in order to teach them the secrets of Torah. Mention should be made of the fact that the restriction of Torah-study to a Jew is talmudic in origin; see the statement of R. Yohanan in the Babylonian Talmud (BT) *Sanhedrin* 59a, and that of R. Ami, a disciple of R. Yohanan, in *Hagigah* 13a. As far as I know, however, the rabbinic restriction is in no way connected with the issue of circumcision. More poignant, perhaps, is the remark of the Roman satirist, Juvenal (60–130 C.E.), in his *Saturae*, 14, lines 96–104, cited and translated in Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1980), 2:102–3, concerning Moses’ refusal to disclose the truths of Torah to any but the circumcised. The similarity between the view of Juvenal and that of the *Zohar* was already noted by Y. Liebes, “The Messiah of the Zohar,” in *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought: A Study Conference in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982), p. 140, n. 205 (in Hebrew).

(assumed to be Moses ben Shem Tob de León, c. 1240–1305)<sup>4</sup> to link it specifically with circumcision? Or, to invert the question, what in the nature of circumcision leads the author of the *Zohar* to limit textual study of the Torah to one who is circumcised? Although a complete answer to this will not be forthcoming until the latter stages of this analysis, I will outline in a preliminary fashion the elements that serve as the basis for this conception.

Circumcision is not simply an incision of the male sex organ<sup>5</sup> but is an inscription, a notation, a marking.<sup>6</sup> This marking, in turn, is the semiological seal, as it were, that represents the divine imprint on the human body.<sup>7</sup> The physical opening, therefore, is the seal that, in its symbolic valence, corresponds to an ontological opening within God. Hence, circumcision provides the author of the *Zohar* with a typology of writing/reading<sup>8</sup> that is at the same time a typology of mystical experience understood in a sexual vein. The opening of circumcision, in the final analysis, is transformed in the *Zohar* into a symbol for the task of exegesis. The appropriateness of this symbolization lies in the fact that the relation of the visionary to the *Shekhinah* engendered by the opening of the flesh is precisely the relationship of the critic or exegete to the text engendered by the semiological seal. This relationship is simultaneously interpretative and visionary. Through exegesis, that which was concealed, hidden, closed—in a word, esoteric—becomes opened, disclosed, manifest—in a word, exoteric. The uncovering of the phallus is conceptually and structurally parallel to the

<sup>4</sup> See references given in n. 1 above. To those may be added the discussion in Elliot R. Wolfson, "Sefer ha-Rimmon: Critical Edition and Introductory Study" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1986), 1:1–46.

<sup>5</sup> The biblical injunction for circumcision (see Gen. 17:10–14, Lev. 12:3, cf. Exod. 12:48), and the normative practice derived therefrom, is clearly and unambiguously directed to the male child. There is documentary evidence in the writings of Strabo of Amaseia (first century B.C.E.–first century C.E.) that some Jews practiced not only circumcision on male children but excision on female children as well. See M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1976), 1:300, 315. Compare, however, L. H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1985), p. 84, n. 35.

<sup>6</sup> This is based in part on the fact that circumcision is referred to in the Bible (see Gen. 17:11) as an *'ot*, i.e., a sign. The rabbis thus spoke of a "letter" (a secondary meaning of the word *'ot*) which served as the "seal" of the covenant of circumcision, namely, the letter *yod*. Compare *Tanhuma* (Jerusalem: Lewin-Epstein, 1964), *Šav*, 14, *Shemini*, 8, and see n. 53 below.

<sup>7</sup> On the "seal" as a designation for circumcision, see G. W. E. Nickelsburg, "Stories of Biblical and Early Post-biblical Times," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, ed. M. E. Stone (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 73, and references in n. 218.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth," in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. G. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 307–47.

disclosure of the text. The significance of this dynamic for understanding the literary genesis of the *Zohar* should not be ignored.<sup>9</sup> In the closing section of the paper I shall have more to say about this matter.

# I

The nexus between circumcision and the appearance of God is, to my knowledge, first enunciated in the following comment in one of the earliest midrashic compilations,<sup>10</sup> *Genesis Rabbah*, on the verse, "The Lord appeared to him [Abraham]" (Gen. 18:1):

It is written, "This, after my skin will have been peeled off; but I would behold God from my flesh" (Job 19:26). Abraham said, After I circumcised myself many converts came to cleave to this sign. "But I would behold God from my flesh," for had I not done this [i.e., performed the act of circumcision], on what account would the Holy One, blessed be He, have appeared to me? [As it is written] "The Lord appeared to him etc."<sup>11</sup>

The anonymous author of this passage, an astute reader of the biblical text, has noted that the theophany to Abraham at the terebinths of Mamre is preceded in Scripture by the account of Abraham's and Ishmael's being circumcised.<sup>12</sup> The conjunction of these two episodes has forged in the mind of the midrashist a more than casual connection between the act of circumcision and the appearance of

<sup>9</sup> Compare Liebes, pp. 138–46.

<sup>10</sup> Compare Jacob Neusner, *Midrash in Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> *Genesis Rabbah*, ed. Theodor-Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1965), 48:1 (p. 479), and 48:9 (p. 485). Compare Philo, *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin* (Loeb Classical Library) 3.49, who writes that circumcision is the sign of election for "Israel, that is seeing God." It is difficult to ascertain if Philo had in mind some midrashic tradition akin to what we have found in the Palestinian *Genesis Rabbah*. On the Philonic etymology of Israel as "one who sees God," cf. P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), pp. 115–18 (and other references given there, p. 115, n. 3); G. Dellling, "The 'One Who Sees God' in Philo," in *Nourishes with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel*, ed. F. Greenspahn, E. Hilgert, and B. Mack (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984), pp. 27–49. For Philo's views on circumcision, see R. Hecht, "The Exegetical Contexts of Philo's Interpretation of Circumcision," in Greenspahn, Hilgert, and Mack, eds., pp. 51–79.

<sup>12</sup> The whole problematic is presumably eliminated by the form-critical method of exegesis, which ascribes different authorship to the two literary strata: Gen. 17:23–27 is a Priestly document that supposedly follows Gen. 17:1–14, which is P's instruction for circumcision, whereas Gen. 18:1–6 is a narrative complex derived from J (ending in Gen. 19:38). See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 202–4. Yet, one could argue that the crucial question is not that of disparate textual units but, rather, the literary whole achieved by a process of redaction. From this latter perspective, the conjunction of these passages raises the hermeneutical problem addressed by the ancient Jewish exegetes.



God. In disregard of other biblical contexts to the contrary<sup>13</sup> (e.g., Gen 17:1), the author of this comment wishes to state that it is in virtue of the rite of circumcision that God manifests himself to Abraham. "Had I not been circumcised," wonders Abraham, "on what account would God have appeared to me?" That is to say, by means of what deed would he have merited the epiphany of God? The intent of this passage, then, must be seen in light of an idea emphasized time and again in rabbinic literature: without works there is no reward, or, to invert Paul's locution, one is justified by acts alone.<sup>14</sup> Here, as in many other rabbinic sources, it is particularly the act of circumcision that merits a special favor on the part of God.<sup>15</sup> This interpretation is supported by a similar exegesis of the passage from Job: the first clause refers to the act of circumcision, peeling off the skin (i.e., the foreskin), and the second to the vision of God that follows therefrom. "But I would behold God from my flesh," that is, from the flesh of the phallus,<sup>16</sup> the organ of circumcision.

It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that this is the import of the midrashic statement: by virtue of the merit of circumcision God appeared to Abraham. The divine manifestation demands some prior deed, a *mišwah*, which creates a link between man and God. The rite of circumcision, after all, is the mark of the covenant between God and the (male) children of Israel.<sup>17</sup> Through circumcision, then, one merits to stand in the presence of God, or, to put it differently, the appearance of God is itself the reward for the prior act of fulfilling the divine decree.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This is in keeping with what James Kugel has called the "verse-centeredness" of *midrash*; see his "Two Interpretations of Midrash," in Hartman and Budick, eds. (n. 8 above), pp. 94–95.

<sup>14</sup> A classic study of this rabbinic conception is A. Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits in Old Rabbinical Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1968).

<sup>15</sup> See *ibid.*, s.v. "circumcision"; and cf. J. Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 2:178–79.

<sup>16</sup> The foreskin is referred to several times in the Bible itself as the "flesh of the foreskin"; see Gen. 17:11, 14, 23, 24–25; Lev. 12:3.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion on circumcision as the taxonomy for Judaism in antiquity, see Jonathan Smith, "Fences and Neighbors," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, ed. W. S. Green (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980), 2:9–15; Schiffman (n. 5 above), pp. 23–24.

<sup>18</sup> Compare *Bereshit Rabbati*, ed. C. Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1940), p. 79. See also the commentary of Nahmanides on Gen. 18:1 (ed. H. Chavel [Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1960], 1:106–7): "The disclosure of the *Shekhinah* . . . is a reward for a precept that has already been fulfilled." According to another line of interpretation, the nexus between Abraham's circumcision in Genesis 17 and the theophany at the beginning of chap. 18 is meant to teach us about the virtue of visiting the sick, for God himself in this case serves as the role model insofar as He comes to visit Abraham immediately after the circumcision. See, e.g., BT *Baba Meši'a* 86b, *Soṭah* 14a; *Genesis Rabbah* 8:13 (p. 67).

Yet, there is an additional element alluded to in the above passage from *Genesis Rabbah*. The midrashist asserts that after Abraham was circumcised many converts “came to cleave to this sign,”<sup>19</sup> that is, many desired to convert to the Jewish faith by undergoing the rite of circumcision. We know from other aggadic sources that Abraham and Sarah were viewed as the first proselytizers for God.<sup>20</sup> It may be suggested, however, that in the present context one can find in the portrayal of Abraham as one who encourages conversion through his circumcision a polemic against the dominant claims of Christianity (following Pauline doctrine) that religious conversion is a matter of faith, not works, and that for newcomers into the covenantal community of God (i.e., the Church) circumcision of the flesh was not a necessary initiation rite.<sup>21</sup> Our *midrash* emphasizes, to the contrary, that it was precisely Abraham’s own circumcision that induced more converts into the faith of Judaism. In opposition to the claims of Christianity, the rabbis maintained that the rite of circumcision was not only still viable as a religious duty but was also the central feature of a proper conversion process.<sup>22</sup> The emphasis on Abraham’s circumcision and its drawing forth a horde of potential converts to cleave to that sign can only be seen as a tacit rejection of the Christian position that circumcision of the flesh had been replaced by circumcision of the spirit (enacted in baptism).

<sup>19</sup> See the comment of D. Freedman in *Midrash Rabbah* (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 1:406, n. 4: “Deriving *nikkefu* from *hikkif* [the expression used in Job 19:26], to surround, i.e., proselytes flocked, surrounding him, as it were.”

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen. 12:5 (ed. E. G. Clarke with collaboration by W. E. Aufrecht, J. C. Hurd, and F. Spitzer [New York: Ktav, 1984], p. 13); *Targum Onkelos ad loc.* (*The Bible in Aramaic*, ed. Alexander Sperber [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959], 1:17); *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch*, ed. Michael L. Klein (Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1980), 1:49, 132, 2:11; *Genesis Rabbah* 39:14 (pp. 378–79). For other aggadic sources, see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1913), 1:195–217; M. Kasher, *Torah Sheleimah* (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1949), 3:555, n. 95.

<sup>21</sup> Compare Rom. 2:5–29, 4:9–12; 1 Cor. 7:18; Eph. 2:8–13; Gal. 5:2–6; Col. 2:11; Phil. 3:3. On baptism, or the circumcision of the spirit, as a substitute for circumcision of the flesh, see Col. 2:12–13; Gal. 6:13–14; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 5.48 (ed. H. Chadwick [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953], p. 302); P. Borgen, “Paul Preaches Circumcision and Pleases Men,” in *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honour of C. K. Barrett*, ed. M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson (London: SPCK, 1982), pp. 37–46. It should be noted that some church fathers had trouble explaining the abolishment of circumcision in light of the fact that Jesus himself was circumcised; see Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses Panarium* 28.5.2 (cited in M. Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1965], p. 90). There is ample Patristic evidence, moreover, that certain Jewish-Christian sects, such as the Ebionites and Nazoraeans, still practiced circumcision and kept the Sabbath; cf. A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. 20, 23–24, 29, 35, 37, 39, 42, 44, 51.

<sup>22</sup> See Schiffman (n. 5 above), pp. 23–25; Ginzberg, 5:263–69, n. 318.

That this explanation is indeed plausible is supported by the continuation of this passage in *Genesis Rabbah*, which doubtless was intended by the redactor(s) to drive the point home with ever greater clarity:

1. R. Isaac<sup>23</sup> began/opened [his discourse]: "Make for me an altar of earth etc." (Exod. 20:21). R. Isaac said: If I [i.e., God] appear to the one who builds an altar for my name's sake and bless him, how much more so with respect to Abraham who has circumcised himself for my name's sake. [It is thus written] "And the Lord appeared to him etc."
2. R. Levi began/opened [his discourse]: "An ox and a ram for an offering etc. [for today the Lord will appear to you]" (Lev. 9:4). He said: If I [God] appear to the one who sacrifices an ox or ram for my name's sake, how much more so to Abraham who has sacrificed himself for my name's sake." And the Lord appeared to him etc."

The comments attributed to R. Isaac and R. Levi, both third-century Palestinian Amoraim,<sup>24</sup> underscore the intrinsic connection between the meritorious deed of circumcision and the appearance of God. For both, circumcision is to be understood as an act of sacrifice.<sup>25</sup> If one who builds an altar or sacrifices animals merits the approach (and blessing) of the divine, how much more so Abraham, whose act of circumcision is likened to an act of self-sacrifice.

<sup>23</sup> Compare *Tanḥuma*, ed. Solomon Buber (New York: Sefer, 1946), *Vayera* 4: "R. Isaac Nafḥa." The same reading is found in *Tanḥuma*, *Vayera* 2; *Aggadat Bereshit*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Compare *Genesis Rabbah* 63:13 (p. 698), where it is reported that R. Levi transmitted the following opinion in the name of R. Hama bar Hanina: Esau's rejection of his birthright was tied to his hatred of the blood of circumcision. In this context it is clear that Esau functions as a symbol for the Christian church; see Idris Aminoff, "The Figures of Esau and the Kingdom of Edom in Palestinian Midrashic-Talmudic Literature in the Tannaitic and Amoraic Periods" (Ph.D. diss., Melbourne University, 1981), pp. 131–33. On this midrashic typology, see also Ginzberg, 5:272, n. 19; G. Cohen, "Esau as a Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 27–30, and references given on p. 27, n. 31. Compare also *Genesis Rabbah* 65:9 (pp. 726–27), where R. Levi and R. Isaac are involved in anti-Christian polemics as well; see Aminoff, p. 136, n. 18, and pp. 217–20. On R. Isaac and R. Levi, as well as other third-century aggadists, as defenders of Judaism against the attacks of the Church found in the Syriac Didascalia, see A. Marmorstein, "Judaism and Christianity in the Middle of the Third Century," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 10 (1935): 236, nn. 75–76, 243, nn. 111–12.

<sup>25</sup> On the connection between circumcision and sacrifices, see G. Vermes, "Circumcision and Exodus IV 24–26," in *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983), pp. 178–92. Some scholars have even suggested that infantile circumcision in ancient Israel on the eighth day must be seen as a replacement for child sacrifice (see Exod. 22:29, Lev. 22:27); cf. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 1:138, n. 3.

The nexus of ideas is reiterated in a twelfth-century midrashic compilation, *Numbers Rabbah*, but with a strikingly new twist. In addition to viewing circumcision as the deed by means of which one merits the reward of seeing god, this midrashic pericope affirms an even deeper correlation between circumcision and the visual revelation of God based on the physical purity of the visionary. In this case the matter is not merely deontological but, rather, ontological. That is, circumcision effects a change in the very substance of the individual—and not only in his ethico-religious stature—which prepares him for the visionary experience. I will cite the passage in full, ostensibly an interpretation of Song of Songs 3:11, “O Maidens of Zion, go forth, And gaze upon King Solomon, wearing the crown that his mother gave him on his wedding day, on his day of bliss.” Commenting particularly on the first part of the verse, the anonymous midrashist writes:

It is speaking about the time when the Presence [*Shekhinah*] rested in the Tabernacle [*mishkan*]. “Go forth and gaze,” as it is said, “And all the people saw and shouted, and fell on their faces” (Lev. 9:24). “The daughters of Zion,” those [males] who were distinguished [*ha-mešuyanim*] by circumcision, for if they were uncircumcised, they would not have been able to look upon the Presence. Rather, they would have fallen as Abraham fell, as it is said, “Abram fell on his face, and God spoke to him” (Gen. 17:3).<sup>26</sup> Similarly with respect to Balaam, “[Words of him who hears God’s speech, who beholds visions of the Almighty], prostrate, but with eyes unveiled” (Num. 24:4). And thus it says, “Moses said, This is the thing [*zeh ha-davar*] which the Lord has commanded that you do, that the Glory of the Lord may appear to you” (Lev. 9:6). What was “this thing”? He told them about [the rite of] circumcision, as it is written, “This is the reason [literally, ‘this is the thing,’ *zeh ha-davar*] why Joshua performed circumcision” (Josh. 5:4). “Which God commanded Abraham to do.” This<sup>27</sup> may be compared to a shopkeeper who has a friend who is a priest. He had some unclean thing in his house, and he wanted to bring him [the priest] into the house. The priest said to him: If you want me to go into your house, listen to me and remove that unclean thing from your house. When the shopkeeper knew that there was no unclean thing there, he went and brought the priest into his house. Similarly [with respect to] the Holy One, blessed be He, when He wanted to appear to Abraham, His beloved, the foreskin was hanging from him. When he circumcised himself,

<sup>26</sup> This interpretation can be traced to earlier sources; cf. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen. 17:3 (ed. E. G. Clarke et al., p. 17); *Genesis Rabbah* 46:6 (pp. 463–64), 47:3 (pp. 472–73); *Tanhuma, Lekh Lekha* 20 (p. 23); *Pirquei de-R. Eliezer* (New York: Om, 1946), chap. 29.

<sup>27</sup> The same analogy or parable appears in the lost *Midrash Avkhir* as cited in the midrashic anthology, *Yalqut Shim'oni* (Jerusalem, 1960), vol. 1, sec. 82.

immediately [God] was revealed, as it says, "On that very day Abraham was circumcised" (Gen. 17:26), and afterward "The Lord appeared to him" (*ibid.* 18:1). Therefore Moses said to them, God commanded Abraham, your father, to perform [the act of] circumcision when He wished to appear to him. So in your case, whoever is uncircumcised, let him go out and circumcise himself, "that the Glory of the Lord may appear to you" (Lev. 9:6). Thus Solomon said, "O Maidens of Zion, go forth, And gaze upon King Solomon" (Song of Songs 3:11), the King who desires those who are perfect, as it is written, "Walk before Me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1), for the foreskin is a blemish on the body.<sup>28</sup>

The author of this *midrash*, in a remarkable reversal of the literal sense of the text, interprets the "daughters of Zion" as referring to those [males] marked or "distinguished" (*mešuyanim*, an obvious play on the word *šiyon*) by circumcision.<sup>29</sup> Clearly, daughters cannot be so distinguished; thus the midrashic reading effectively effaces the literal sense. More significantly, the midrashist forges an unambiguous connection between the capability of beholding the Presence or Glory of God and circumcision: he who is uncircumcised will fall on his face—as Abraham himself did prior to his circumcision—in the presence of God's manifestation. The alleged reason for this is given by the *midrash* itself: the foreskin is a blemish that acts as a barrier separating the individual and God.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to the earlier midrashic texts that we examined, there is here an essential link between the act of circumcision and the visionary experience of the divine. Circumcision is not simply one good deed among many in consequence of which the person merits a vision of God. It is precisely and exclusively by means of circumcision that one can see God, for this act removes that potential barrier—symbolized by the cutting of the foreskin<sup>31</sup>—separating human and divine. Circumcision is the vestibule or portal through which one must pass if

<sup>28</sup> *Numbers Rabbah* (Tel Aviv: Moriah, 1960), 12:10; see Marc Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 97–102.

<sup>29</sup> Such an interpretation is found in an earlier midrashic source which doubtless served as the basis for this passage; cf. *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* (Tel Aviv: Moriah, 1960), on Song of Songs 3:11. The connection of this verse to circumcision was probably also suggested to the midrashist by the words "wearing a crown," the latter being a reference to the corona of the phallus disclosed by the act of circumcision (see n. 53 below).

<sup>30</sup> The equation of uncleanness or impurity with uncircumcision is biblical in origin; cf. Isa. 52:1 and Ezek. 44:7. In rabbinic literature one of the names of the evil inclination is "uncircumcised" or the "foreskin"; cf. Schechter (n. 2 above), p. 243.

<sup>31</sup> On the cutting of the foreskin as a symbol for the excision of sensual desires in the writings of Philo, see Hecht (n. 11 above), pp. 51–79. The connection between circumcision and the weakening of sexual desire was affirmed as well by medieval Jewish philosophers; see, e.g., Judah ha-Levi, *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, ed. Y. Even Shmuel (Tel Aviv:

one is to have a visionary experience of God. The opening of circumcision results in an opening up to God, a receptivity, which enables one to stand in God's presence and to behold the Glory.

## II

All that is implied in the midrashic passage from *Numbers Rabbah* is made explicit in the *Zohar*, where it is embellished by an intricate theosophic structure. It is quite clear that in the *Zohar* the nexus between circumcision and the vision of God is reaffirmed and given new layers of meaning. The treatment of this midrashic theme in the *Zohar* must be seen in light of a central category in the kabbalistic (especially Zoharic) conception of religious perfection: man's relation to God, particularly the *Shekhinah*, the feminine hypostasis of God and the last of the divine emanations (*sefirot*), is viewed in a decidedly sexual manner. One who is uncircumcised cannot see God (or the *Shekhinah*), for seeing involves some sort of intimate contact, touching, immediacy, and only one who is circumcised can have such an experience.

The issue of openness/closedness is connected particularly in the *Zohar* with the problem of circumcision and visionary experience. Commenting on Gen. 18:1, "And the Lord appeared to him [Abraham]," R. Abba said: "Before Abraham was circumcised he was closed [*'atim*]. When he was circumcised all was revealed and the Presence rested upon him in its completeness."<sup>32</sup> The closure of Abraham, or, more specifically, Abraham's phallus, has an objective correlate: an obscured vision of the divine. That is, before his circumcision Abraham was closed, and hence God was not fully revealed to him. The act of circumcision, on the other hand, is an opening, a removal of closure, which corresponds objectively to a disclosure of God. The relationship of God to a particular man is dependent upon the physical condition of the latter: if closed (uncircumcised), then the vision is obscured; if opened (circumcised), then the vision is complete. It is highly significant that comprehension is here linked especially to the phallus: when Abraham was uncircumcised, and therefore closed, he lacked comprehension of the divine; when he was circumcised, and therefore opened, all was revealed to him. As Moses Cordovero (1522–70) expressed it in his commentary to this passage in the

Dvir, 1972), 1:115; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, ed. S. Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 3:49.

<sup>32</sup> *Zohar* I, 98b. The nexus of circumcision and cleaving to the *Shekhinah* is alluded to as well in the Zoharic claim that before entering the land of Israel (a symbol for *Shekhinah*) Joshua had to circumcise the people; see I, 93b.

*Zohar*: "Closure brings about the removal of comprehension."<sup>33</sup> (Subsequently, I shall return to the connection between the openness of the phallus and the possibility of comprehension, specifically understood as a hermeneutical mode.)

Even before his circumcision Abraham merited some vision of the divine realm. This is implied in the above passage: "When he was circumcised *all* was revealed to him etc." That is, prior to the circumcision there was, at best, a partial vision of God. This is spelled out in another Zoharic passage, attributed to R. Eleazar, which interprets Gen. 18:1, "And the Lord appeared to him," as referring to a time "after Abraham was circumcised. For before Abraham was circumcised [God] did not speak to him except through the lower gradation, and the upper gradations did not stand over that gradation."<sup>34</sup> In yet another passage the author of the *Zohar* clarifies the difference between Abraham's visionary (prophetic) experience before and after circumcision in more detail:

"The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision [*ba-mahazeh*]" (Gen. 15:1). What is [the meaning of] "in a vision"? This is the vision [or mirror, Aramaic: *heizu*], the gradation in which all images [*deyuqnin*] are seen [*i'hazyān*]. R. Shimeon said: Before Abraham was circumcised, one gradation spoke with him. And which one was it? It was the "vision" [*mahazeh*]. . . . When he was circumcised all the gradations rested on this gradation and then it spoke with him. . . . Before he was circumcised those gradations did not rest upon him to speak [to him].<sup>35</sup>

The divine gradation referred to as the "vision" is the last of the *sefirot*, the *Shekhinah*, so named because this gradation is a prism that reflects all the upper colors or forms. Prior to his circumcision, therefore, God spoke to Abraham through the intermediary of the *Shekhinah*. Indeed, even after the circumcision God continued to speak with Abraham through the *Shekhinah*; however, in the latter case the vision was complete, since all the upper gradations rested upon or stood over the *Shekhinah* in the moment of revelation. While Abraham was uncircumcised his visionary experience was restricted to the lowest emanation. In a subsequent passage de León returns to this distinction in an effort to clarify further the theophanic transformation undergone by Abraham:

<sup>33</sup> Moses Cordovero, *Zohar'im Perush 'Or Yaqar* (Jerusalem: Or Yaqar, 1970), 5:4.

<sup>34</sup> *Zohar* I, 97b.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 88b–89a.

Come and see: before Abraham was circumcised [God] spoke to him exclusively from within the vision [*maḥazeh*], as it is written, "The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision etc." (Gen. 15:1). "In a vision," (i.e.) by means of that vision [*ḥeizu*], the gradation in which all the forms are seen . . . and that vision is the secret of the covenant [*raza di-berit*]. If you say it is called *maḥazeh* because it is the vision, (i.e.) the gradation in which all the forms are seen, did you also not say at the outset that before Abraham was circumcised no one spoke to him but that gradation when no other gradation rested upon it? Yet, you now say that [the expression] "in a vision" [*ba-maḥazeh*] refers to that vision [or mirror] in which [are seen] the other gradations! Before Abraham was circumcised it is written, "And the Lord spoke to Abram in a vision" (Gen. 15:1). Indeed, that gradation is the vision of all the supernal gradations, and it is fixed in the appearance of the supernal gradations. And even though at that time Abraham was not circumcised, that gradation was in the appearance of the supernal gradations, and She existed in all those [upper] colors . . . for She is the vision of all the upper colors that are over Her. And thus in that appearance She stood with Abraham and spoke to him, even though he was not circumcised. When he was circumcised, what is written? "And the Lord appeared to Abram." . . . Thus before Abraham was circumcised that gradation [spoke] to him. When he was circumcised immediately [it says], "The Lord appeared to Abram etc." All the [other] gradations appeared on that gradation, and the latter spoke to him in completeness. And Abraham was bound from gradation to gradation and entered the holy covenant which appeared in its completeness.<sup>36</sup>

One senses the tension in the mind of the author of the *Zohar*, struggling to clarify the difference in vision accorded to Abraham before and after his circumcision. The biblical term used in connection with God's appearance to Abraham (before the circumcision) is *maḥazeh*, vision, which is understood kabbalistically to be a symbol for *Shekhinah*, the prism in which all the forms are reflected. Yet the *Zohar* makes the claim that before his circumcision Abraham did not converse with the *Shekhinah* in Her fullness, that is, as reflecting all the upper lights. This apparent tension has led various commentaries on the *Zohar* to offer several responses,<sup>37</sup> none of which, in my view,

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 91a-b.

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Shimeon Lavi, *Ketem Paz* (Jerusalem: Ahabat Shalom, 1981), 1:224: "Before Abraham was circumcised his prophecy was in that lower vision, the image of an image. However, after he was circumcised his prophecy was in the higher vision, as it says, 'And the Lord appeared to Abram.'" The "lower vision" is identified by Lavi as the realm of celestial palaces below the world of emanation, whereas the "higher vision" is the *Shekhinah*, the last emanation which reflects all the upper ones. In addition to difficulties that one may have fitting this interpretation into the text, Lavi contradicts himself, for prior to this passage he wrote: "All the prophecies of the prophets were from the palaces which are below the hidden emanation, below 'Ateret' [i.e., *Shekhinah*] except for Moses . . . [whose prophecy] was in 'Ateret' itself." An



is sufficient. What is clear is that de León is trying to uphold a qualitative distinction in the nature of the vision that Abraham had before and after his circumcision. There is, on the one hand, something about the act of circumcision that effects a change in the individual resulting in a change in his visionary status. On the other hand, as a result of the circumcision there is a change in the nature of the divine itself, particularly the relation of the last gradation to those above Her. In the latter respect, it may be said that circumcision includes a a theurgical dimension.

In the above passage the nexus between circumcision and theophany is reaffirmed by the introduction of another key concept: the identification of the vision, or *Shekhinah*, as the "secret of the covenant," *raza di-berit*.<sup>38</sup> This should not be construed as an arbitrary or unintentional remark. The biblical term *maḥazeh*, a symbol for the *Shekhinah*, is at the same time the "secret of the covenant." Hence, vision equals Presence equals secret of the covenant; by the principle of transitivity, then, vision equals secret of the covenant. One would therefore not expect this higher gradation to commune with Abraham prior to his circumcision. The symbolic network thus established calls for interpretation.

We may begin to interpret this symbolism by reference to another standard Zoharic notion concerning the twofold nature of the *berit*. According to the *Zohar*, the covenant in its totality comprises two aspects, masculine and feminine, the ninth and tenth *sefirot*, *Yesod* ("Foundation") and *Malkhut* ("Kingship") or *Shekhinah*.<sup>39</sup> The "vision" [*maḥazeh*], spoken of as the *raza di-berit*, "secret of the covenant," corresponds to only one of these aspects, the *Shekhinah*. Prior to Abraham's circumcision he could not possibly have merited a complete theophany, but only a partial one related exclusively to the feminine hypostasis of God: the "secret of the covenant," the

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alternative explanation is offered by Moses Cordovero in his commentary 'Or Yaqar (Jerusalem: Or Yaqar, 1967), 4:181. According to him, the change in the visionary status of *Shekhinah* had nothing to do with the divine potency itself but, rather, with the level of comprehension of Abraham. Cordovero's explanation undermines the theurgical dimension of circumcision stressed by the author of the *Zohar* himself, esp. in I, 97a.

<sup>38</sup> Compare Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, ed. A. W. Greenup (London, 1911), p. 67: "And contemplate that the secret of the covenant (*sod ha-berit*, a translation of the Zoharic *raza di-berit*) is universal faith (*derekh kelal 'emunah*). And when the foreskin is removed from the phallus—this is the secret of faith. Yet the removal of the foreskin to enter into the secret of the faith [is not complete] until one pulls down [the membrane] and the corona is revealed. When one reaches the corona one enters into the mystery of the way of faith and is bound to faith." See below, nn. 44 and 53.

<sup>39</sup> See *Zohar* I, 32a, 47b, 69a, 71b, 72b, 117a; III, 14a, 115b; G. Scholem, "Colours and Their Symbolism in Jewish Tradition and Mysticism," *Diogenes* 109 (1980): 69.

"vision," the "lowest gradation." After the circumcision, however, Abraham experienced the masculine and feminine aspects of God, for by means of circumcision one enters into both gradations.<sup>40</sup> Only by appropriating the two dimensions could Abraham experience the full theophanic image:

Come and see: before one is circumcised one is not united to the name of the Holy One, blessed be He; when one is circumcised one enters the name and is united to it.<sup>41</sup> And, if you say that Abraham was united to it before he was circumcised, indeed he was, but not as it is fitting, for out of the supernal love that the Holy One, blessed be He, had for Abraham, He drew him near. Afterward He commanded him to circumcise himself and gave him the covenant, the bond of all the upper gradations. The covenant: the bond to tie everything together, to contain one in the other; the covenant: the bond in which everything is tied. Therefore, before Abraham was circumcised [God] spoke with him only by means of the "vision."<sup>42</sup>

Abraham's bondedness to the sefirotic realm prior to his circumcision was not "proper" or adequate, for it was only out of God's love for him that he was drawn close to the divine. By means of circumcision, however, one properly merits union with the divine; the phallus is the place of the covenant or the knot in which all the upper grades are united. Whereas before the circumcision Abraham was addressed by the "vision," that is, by the *Shekhinah*, after the circumcision he was himself bound to the covenant that binds together the upper forces in the lower grade, that is, the *sefirah* of *Yesod* as united with the *Shekhinah*. In effect, the claim of the *Zohar* is that only one (in this case Abraham) who is circumcised can be united with the *Shekhinah* in Her state of fullness and thereby cleave to the upper realm of the *sefirot*.<sup>43</sup>

However, the circumcision of Abraham also has a theurgical dimension, for it effects a change in the nature of the divine: just as in the fulfillment of circumcision one joins the masculine and feminine

<sup>40</sup> Compare *Zohar* I, 96b, 98b (*Sitrei Torah*); III, 14a. Kabbalists explained the androgynous nature of circumcision in terms of the two procedures required in the circumcision ritual by rabbinic law (cf. BT *Shabbat* 173b): *milah* (incision of the foreskin) and *peri'ah* (uncovering of the corona), which correspond symbolically to the two divine emanations, *Yesod* and *Shekhinah*. Compare, e.g., *Zohar* I, 13a, 32a-b; II, 40a, 60b, 125b; III, 91b, 163a.

<sup>41</sup> On the connection between the divine name and circumcision, cf. *Zohar* I, 95a, 96b; II, 3b, 32a, 87b; III, 91a; *Tiqqunei Zohar*, secs. 24 (70a), 22 (65b), 61 (94b). The correlation between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton is made in a host of thirteenth-century texts, the development of which I hope to treat in a separate study.

<sup>42</sup> *Zohar* I, 89a.

<sup>43</sup> Compare *ibid.*, II, 61a, 86a, 216a; III, 73a-b.

potencies in oneself, so too one brings about such a unification above. The *Zohar* exegetically connects this mystery to Gen. 18:1 as well:

Come and see: Before Abraham was circumcised nothing but the [lowest] gradation was upon him, as we have said. After he was circumcised, what is written? "And the Lord appeared to him" (Gen. 18:1). To whom? It is not written, "And the Lord appeared to Abram," for if [God] appeared to Abraham, what more praise is there now than in the beginning, before he was circumcised? For it is written, "And the Lord appeared to Abram" (Gen. 17:1) [i.e., before the circumcision]. This is rather a hidden secret. "And the Lord appeared to him," i.e., to that gradation that spoke with him [Abraham], which did not take place before he was circumcised. For now [after the circumcision] the Voice [sc. *Tif'eret*, "Beauty," the sixth emanation, the central pillar in the divine edifice] was revealed and united with the Speech [*Shekhinah*] when the latter spoke to Abraham. "And he sat in the opening of the tent." "And he" [the verse] does not reveal who. The [Torah] here revealed wisdom, for all the gradations [the *sefirot*] rested upon that lower gradation [*Shekhinah*] after Abraham was circumcised.<sup>44</sup>

The secret of the verse alludes to the fact that Abraham's circumcision initiated a change in the *Shekhinah* in relation to the other *sefirot*. Before Abraham's circumcision, only the *Shekhinah* conversed with him; after his circumcision She was united with Her masculine consort, *Tif'eret*, and the latter was revealed to Abraham through the *Shekhinah*. This is the mystical meaning of Gen. 18:1, "And the Lord," *Tif'eret*, the masculine potency or the attribute of mercy, "appeared to him," that is, to that gradation that spoke to Abraham, the feminine *Shekhinah* or the attribute of judgment. The post-circumcision theophany involved the unification of the Voice (*qol*) and Speech (*dibbur*),<sup>45</sup> the masculine and feminine. At that time, therefore, all the upper grades rested upon the lowest one.

In another context the *Zohar* expresses Abraham's transformation in slightly different terms but in a way that further elucidates the conceptual link between visionary experience and circumcision. "Come

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., I, 98a. The connection between circumcision, visionary experience, and theurgy is brought out clearly in the following comment of de León in his *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, ed. J. Wijnhoven (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1964), p. 133: "The foreskin is the shell standing on the outside and the phallus is the core on the inside. . . . This is the secret of the proper matter when a person enters the secret of faith. Concerning this secret it says, 'All your males shall appear before the Lord your God' (Deut. 16:16). For one must cleave [to God] and show that place [the phallus] in its Source, the branch in its Root, to unite everything in the bond of the secret of His unity, with one bond and in one secret, so that 'the Lord will be one and His name will be one' (Zech. 14:9)."

<sup>45</sup> Compare *Zohar* I, 36a, 145b; II, 25b.

and see: when Abraham was circumcised he emerged from the foreskin and entered the holy covenant and was crowned in the holy crown, and entered the foundation upon which the world stands."<sup>46</sup> By circumcising himself Abraham thus departed from the realm of the demonic powers (symbolized by the foreskin) and entered the holy realm.<sup>47</sup> Entrance into the latter comprises two elements: the first gradation is referred to alternatively as the "holy covenant" or the "holy crown," that is, the feminine *Shekhinah*, and the second as "the foundation upon which the world stands," that is, the masculine *Yesod*. The possibility of seeing God is now understood as being dependent upon a transference from the demonic to the sefirotic worlds. Before his circumcision Abraham could not fully apprehend God because his body was still encased in the demonic shell, the foreskin covering the phallus.

Like the midrashist in *Numbers Rabbah*, the author of the *Zohar* here conceives of circumcision as a removal of the impure obstacle (though in the case of the latter this has become a symbol for a satanic force) that separates man from God and prevents a complete visionary relationship. Moreover, circumcision is an opening up of the human body: "R. Yose said, Why is it written, 'And the Lord will pass over the door [*ha-petah*]' (Exod. 12:23)? . . . 'Over the door,' over that very opening [*ha-petah mamash*], that is, the opening of the body [*petah ha-guf*]. And what is the opening of the body? That refers to [the place of] circumcision."<sup>48</sup> The physiological opening, in turn, structurally parallels the opening in the sefirotic realm, the last gradation, *Shekhinah*,<sup>49</sup> through which one enters into relationship with God. This, according to the *Zohar*, is the theosophic significance of the scriptural claim that Abraham—after his circumcision—was

<sup>46</sup> *Zohar* I, 91b. On Abraham's flirtation with the demonic in the *Zohar*, see E. Wolfson, "Left Contained in the Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (1986): 34, n. 34.

<sup>47</sup> Compare *Zohar* I, 103b (and the parallel in de León's *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, pp. 131–32): "Come and see: before Abraham was circumcised his seed was not holy for it emerged from the foreskin and clove to the foreskin below. After he was circumcised the seed emerged from holiness and clove to the holiness above." On the separating of the foreskin from the phallus as an enactment of the separation between the holy and demonic, cf. *Zohar* I, 13a, 95a–b; II, 255b; III, 72b–73a; Wolfson, "*Sefer ha-Rimmon*: Critical Edition and Introductory Study" (n. 4 above), 1:122; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, p. 67 (cited above, n. 38); *Tiqqunei ha-Zohar*, *Haqdamah* (11a), sec. 37 (78a); J. Wijnhoven, "The *Zohar* and the Proselyte," in *Texts and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum N. Glatzer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. M. Fishbane and P. Flohr (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), pp. 124–25.

<sup>48</sup> *Zohar* II, 36a.

<sup>49</sup> On the *Shekhinah* as "the opening," *ha-petah*, or "the gate," *ha-sha'ar*, cf. *Zohar* I, 7b, 11b, 37a, 47b, 54b, 97b, 103a–b; II, 36a, 158a, 237b, III, 14a, 71b, 256.

"sitting at the opening of the tent [*petah ha-'ohel*]" (Gen. 18:1), that is, the *Shekhinah*, "the place which is called covenant, the secret of faith."<sup>50</sup> Circumcision is thus an opening up of the phallus that eventuates in the opening up—the disclosure—of the divine. "Come and see: before Abraham was circumcised he was closed and concealed [*aṭim ve-satim*] from every side. When he was circumcised he was opened with respect to everything and was not closed or concealed as before. This is the mystery, as we have taught, 'And he [Abraham] was sitting at the opening of the tent' (Gen. 18:1), for the *yod* was revealed."<sup>51</sup>

To appreciate fully the import of this passage one must bear in mind that the letter *yod*, already in classical midrashic sources,<sup>52</sup> was conceived of as the letter or mark of circumcision imprinted, as it were, on the phallus. In Zoharic terms, the letter *yod*, the seal of circumcision, the *'ot berit*, corresponds to the *sefirah* of *Yesod*.<sup>53</sup> By disclosing the *yod* on one's body, the corona of the phallus, the *yod* in the upper realm is likewise disclosed. The result of this process is alluded to in the end of Gen. 18:1, "And he [Abraham] was sitting at the opening of the tent." Two meanings are implied here: Abraham below sat at the tent's entrance, which itself reflects the condition of openness he found himself in on account of the circumcision performed on his body. Theosophically, Abraham symbolizes the *sefirah* of *Hesed* (Love) and the opening of the tent, *Shekhinah*. When the *yod* (*Yesod*) is revealed, then *Hesed* is united with the *Shekhinah*, and the forces of judgment are ameliorated.<sup>54</sup>

### III

The Zoharic reworking of the midrashic motif can now be fully outlined. By means of circumcision one is opened up in such a way

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., I, 97b (*Sitrei Torah*) also 103a–b (trans. Matt [n. 1 above], pp. 65–68).

<sup>51</sup> *Zohar* II, 36a.

<sup>52</sup> See n. 6 above.

<sup>53</sup> Compare *Zohar* I, 13a, 56a, 95a; II, 36a; III, 142a (*Idra Rabba*), 215b, 220a; Wolfson, "Sefer ha-Rimmon: Critical Edition and Introductory Study," 2:242; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, p. 63. In some Zoharic contexts the letter *yod* refers to the *Shekhinah*, which is said to correspond to the corona of the phallus. (The later symbolism is based on the fact that the word for the corona, *'atarah*, literally crown, is a technical name for *Shekhinah*.) Compare *Zohar* I, 93b, 255a (*Ra'aya Meheimna*); II, 258a (*Ra'aya Meheimna*); III, 256a (*Ra'aya Meheimna*), 257a (*Ra'aya Meheimna*), 263a; *Tiqqunei Zohar*, secs. 13 (29a), 18 (31b), 19 (39b), 21 (62b), 30 (73b), 47 (85a), 70 (120a).

<sup>54</sup> Compare *Zohar* III, 142a (*Idra Rabba*): "Everything is dependent upon the opening of the phallus which is called *yod*. And when the *yod* is revealed, the opening of the phallus, the upper *Hesed* [Mercy] is revealed . . . and this [gradation] is not called *Hesed* until the *yod* is revealed . . . Come and see: Abraham was not called

that God may be revealed; the physical opening engenders a space in which the theophany occurs. Indeed, only one who is circumcised can withstand the manifestation of God. In the *Zohar*, however, circumcision is not only a prerequisite for the vision of God, but the place of circumcision, the phallus, is itself the locus of such a vision: one sees God from the circumcised flesh or, put differently, from the semiological seal of the covenant imprinted on that flesh. In one passage de León interprets the same verse from Job, "This, after my skin will have been peeled off; but I would behold God from my flesh" (19:26), which was interpreted in an altogether different way in the section from *Genesis Rabbah*,<sup>55</sup> which I discussed at the outset:

He began another discourse and said, "But I would behold God from my flesh" (Job 19:26). Why [is it written] "from my flesh"? It should be rather "from myself"! It is, literally, "from my flesh." What is that [flesh]? As it is written, "The holy flesh will be removed from you" (Jer. 11:15), and it is written, "And my covenant will be in your flesh" (Gen. 17:13). It has been taught: he who is marked with the holy seal of that sign [of circumcision] sees the Holy One, blessed be He, from that very sign itself.<sup>56</sup>

The flesh whence one beholds God, according to the verse from Job, refers to the flesh of circumcision, the seal of the covenant. One is said to see the Holy One from the sign of the covenant inscribed in one's flesh, the letter *yod*. As we have seen, in the case of the *Zohar* the letter *yod* is not understood simply as a sign of the covenant between God and Israel but is the very sign of the Holy One himself. The double function of the word 'ot in Hebrew holds the key to unlocking the meaning of the kabbalistic doctrine: 'ot is both a sign and a letter. One sees God from the sign on one's body, but that sign is nothing other than the letter *yod*. Here we meet a convergence of anthropomorphic and letter symbolism: the physical organ in its essential character is interchangeable with the letter, and the letter with the physical organ. The rite of circumcision thus ushers the individual into a semiological—as well as ontological—relationship with God: the seal of the covenant itself is the divine letter (or sign) inscribed on the flesh. This is the mystical sense of the Jobian claim that from the flesh—that is, from the phallus or place of the covenant—one beholds God.

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complete with respect to this *Hesed* until the *yod* of the phallus was revealed. And when it was revealed, he was called complete, as it is written, 'Walk before Me and be complete.'"

<sup>55</sup> The connection of this Zoharic passage to that of *Genesis Rabbah* was already noted by Lavi (n. 37 above), see n. 29, fol. 230b.

<sup>56</sup> *Zohar* 1, 94a.

The dynamic of circumcision, which I have discussed above—the play of closure/openness—informs us about the nature of mystical hermeneutics as well: that which is hidden must be brought to light, and the medium of disclosure is the seal of the covenant. In various ways the author of the *Zohar* establishes a structural affinity between the act of disclosing esoteric truths and that of sexual ejaculation, or in other words between the phallus and the mouth, the covenant of the foreskin and the covenant of the tongue.<sup>57</sup> Thus, for example, the *Zohar* interprets Eccles. 5:5, “Don’t let your mouth cause your flesh to sin,” as referring either to sins of a sexual nature<sup>58</sup> or to the sin of disclosing esoteric truths that one has not received from one’s teacher.<sup>59</sup> The impropriety of illicit sexual behavior is parallel to the impropriety of revealing hidden truths that one has not properly received.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in one place de León interprets the prohibition

<sup>57</sup> The correspondence between a “covenant of the foreskin” and a “covenant of the tongue” was first articulated in the Jewish mystical and cosmological text, *Sefer Yesirah*, 1:3 (concerning this text, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* [n. 1 above], pp. 75–78). See the reading established by I. Gruenwald, “A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yesirah*,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971): 141, and the English rendering, “Some Critical Notes on the First Part of *Sefer Yesirah*,” *Revue des études juives* 132 (1973): 486: “Ten *sefirot belimah*; ten corresponding to the number of the ten fingers, five against five, and the covenant of the oneness is constituted in the center [as expressed] in the circumcision of the tongue and the mouth and in the circumcision of the foreskin.” Compare further *Sefer Yesirah* 6:4, where it is said that God made a covenant with Abraham “between the ten toes of his feet and it is the covenant of circumcision” and a covenant “between the ten fingers of his hands which is the tongue.” Some scholars assume that the covenant of the tongue or the mouth refers to a vow of secrecy, mentioned explicitly in *Sefer Yesirah* 1:8, not to disclose mystical truths in public; see Gruenwald, “Some Critical Notes,” pp. 487, 490–91; see n. 79 below.

<sup>58</sup> Compare *Zohar* I, 8a.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 87a; cf. *Zohar* III, 79a, 105b, 106b, 128a (*Idra Rabba*). In III, 159a the verse is used to support the view that one must not inquire about certain things that are hidden from finite minds and are known only by God. The last usage may reflect the fact that this verse is applied to the apostate Elisha ben Abuya in the famous rabbinic legend of the “four who entered Pardes”; see BT *Hagigah* 15b and parallels. The emphasis on the need to keep truths hidden and the impropriety of revealing a truth that has not been received directly from a teacher stands in marked contrast to the general impression that one gets from reading de León’s writings, wherein the mystical imagination seems to have had an almost unbounded reign over disclosing esoteric matters. On this “innovative” approach of de León, in contrast to the more “conservative” approach of other mystics, such as Nahmanides, see M. Idel, “We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This,” in *Rabbi Nahmanides: Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 51–73. In his discussion of de León, Idel did not take into account these Zoharic passages, which emphasize secrecy and the esoteric quality of mystical truths; see, in contrast, Liebes (n. 3 above), esp. pp. 138–51. Compare also the passage from de León’s *Mishkan ha-Edut*, cited by Scholem in *Major Trends*, pp. 201–2, and my extended analysis of the same passage (with a fresh translation) in “*Sefer ha-Rimmon*: Critical Edition and Introductory Study,” 1:18–27.

<sup>60</sup> It is impossible to make sense out of this unless one assumes that there is some basic kinship between the phallus and the mouth and that emission through one is like

against idolatry in Exod. 20:4 as the sin of "lying in the name of God."<sup>61</sup> Yet there are two explanations offered for this: one who lies in God's name is either one who reveals secrets of Torah (for Torah equals name of God)<sup>62</sup> or one who has sexual relations with a non-Jew (for phallus equals the name).<sup>63</sup> As Yehuda Liebes has pointed out, the common denominator here can only be that both sorts of sin involve the phallus.<sup>64</sup> Liebes has further shown that, according to the *Zohar*, the mystic exegete below is the symbolic correlate of the *sefirah* of *Yesod* (the phallus) above. When the time is ripe, the exegete, the *Ṣaddiq* in the world, discloses what has been concealed. "It has been taught: In the days of R. Shimeon people would say to one another, 'Open your mouth and illuminate your words' (BT *Berakhot* 22a). After R. Shimeon died, they would say, 'Don't let your mouth cause your flesh to sin.'"<sup>65</sup>

The relation of the phallus and disclosure/concealment of mystical truth is made even clearer in the following remark:

R. Shimeon opened [his exposition] and said, "A base fellow reveals secrets, but a trustworthy soul conceals the matter" (Prov. 11:13). . . . Concerning him who is not settled in his spirit and who is not faithful, the word that he hears goes inside him like that which revolves in water<sup>66</sup> until it is cast

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that of the other. Such a relation was in fact exploited by the kabbalists; cf., e.g., Gikatilla, *Ginnat Egoz* (Hanau, 1614), 25b: "Just as a person has the covenant of the mouth between the ten fingers of his hands, so you will find he has the covenant of the foreskin between the ten toes [literally, fingers] of his feet. . . . Contemplate that *peh* [i.e., mouth] corresponds [numerically] to *milah* [circumcision]." Gikatilla thus interprets the famous passage from *Sefer Yeṣira* (see n. 57 above) in light of a numerical equivalence between the word for mouth, *peh*, and the word for circumcision, *milah*, insofar as both equal eighty-five. See the theosophic reworking of this numerical equivalence in *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 18 (32b): "The Oral Law [*Torah she-be'al peh*] is where the lower *Shekhinah* is. She is called mouth [*peh*] from the side of the *Ṣaddiq* [*Yesod*], for the numerical value of *peh* equals that of *milah*."

<sup>61</sup> *Zohar* II, 87a-b.

<sup>62</sup> Compare Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), pp. 37-44 (and references to the *Zohar* given on p. 39, n. 3).

<sup>63</sup> Compare *Zohar* II, 87b, and n. 41 above. On sexual relations between Jew and non-Jew in the period of the *Zohar*, see Y. Baer, *A History of Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1978), I:246 ff.

<sup>64</sup> Liebes (n. 3 above), p. 136.

<sup>65</sup> *Zohar* III, 79a, 105b. Compare *Zohar Ḥadash, Tiqqunim*, 94b: "The one who reveals secrets of Torah [to the wicked] causes the spring to be removed from the *Ṣaddiq*, who is the foundation of whom it is said 'The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him' (Ps. 25:14), and from the *Shekhinah*, as it is written, 'The waters of the sea fail, and the river dries up and is parched' (Job 14:11). At that time the righteous (*Ṣaddiqim*) below are impoverished from everything, impoverished from secrets of Torah and impoverished in the body. Whoever reveals secrets to the righteous causes the *Ṣaddiq* to shine with secrets of Torah."

<sup>66</sup> Aramaic: *ḥizra be-mayya*. Compare BT *Baba Meṣia* 60b: *mayya de-ḥizra* (see M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumin, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* [New York: Pardes, 1950], s.v. *ḥizra*).



outside. Why? Because his spirit is not a firm spirit [*ruḥa de-qiyyuma*]. But he whose spirit is a firm one, concerning him it is written, "a trustworthy soul conceals the matter." "A trustworthy soul" [*ve-ne'eman ruah*], one's whose spirit is faithful [*qiyyuma de-ruḥa*], as [it is written], "I will fix him as a peg [*yated*] in a firm place" (Isa. 22:23). The matter is dependent on the secret [*be-raza talya milta*]. It is written, "Don't let your mouth cause your flesh to sin." The world only exists through the secret.<sup>67</sup>

The one who keeps the secret is the "trustworthy soul," *ne'eman ruah*, which is rendered by the *Zohar*: *qiyyuma de-ruḥa*.<sup>68</sup> There can be no doubt that this is a reference to the *Ṣaddiq*, the symbolic correlate below to *Yesod*, whose status as a righteous person is particularly related to the phallus.<sup>69</sup> Such a person is here called *qiyyuma de-ruḥa*, which may be translated "the pillar of the spirit,"<sup>70</sup> for he is one who sustains the spirit, holds it in its place. The word *qiyyuma* functions in the *Zohar*, *inter alia*, as a phallic symbol<sup>71</sup> and may have that shade of meaning in this context as well. The faithfulness or steadfastness of one's spirit is therefore a condition especially connected to the phallus. This interpretation is further substantiated by the proof-text from Isaiah wherein the word *yated*, peg, also must be seen as functioning as a phallic symbol. This symbolism, moreover, enables us to decipher the remark that the "matter is dependent on the secret," that is, on the phallus or its symbolic correlate, the *sefirah* of *Yesod*, which is appropriately called secret for it is the divine gradation that is hidden and concealed from the eye.<sup>72</sup> Hence, R. Shimeon admonishes his comrades, "Don't let your mouth cause your flesh to

<sup>67</sup> *Zohar* III, 128a (*Idra Rabba*).

<sup>68</sup> Compare Y. Liebes, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976), p. 377, n. 88, and p. 381, n. 96 (in Hebrew).

<sup>69</sup> It is one of de León's innovations to define the righteous person, the *ṣaddiq*, solely in terms of sexual propriety. Compare *Zohar* I, 59b; Wolfson, "Sefer ha-Rimmon: Critical Edition and Introductory Study" (n. 4 above), 2:232; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, p. 62; *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, p. 74.

<sup>70</sup> On the meaning of *qiyyuma* in the *Zohar* as pillar, see Liebes, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon*, p. 360, n. 20, and "The Messiah of the Zohar" (n. 3 above), p. 138, n. 202.

<sup>71</sup> See Liebes, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon*, p. 358, n. 13, p. 361, nn. 23–24, pp. 371–73, n. 68.

<sup>72</sup> The theosophic connection between the word "secret," the Aramaic *raza*, which is a translation of the Hebrew *sod*, and circumcision is based ultimately on Ps. 25:14, "The secret [*sod*] of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and to them He makes His covenant [*berito*] known." Compare *Zohar* I, 2b, 236b; III, 43b (*Piqqudin*); Wolfson, "Sefer ha-Rimmon: Critical Edition and Introductory Study," pp. 230–31; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, pp. 60–61. See Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar," pp. 138 ff. For the possibility that these two words are in fact etymologically connected, see Jastrow (n. 66 above), s.v. *sod*. Finally, it should be mentioned that already in classical midrashic sources, e.g., *Genesis Rabbah* 49:2 (pp. 488–89), Ps. 25:14 is interpreted to mean that circumcision is the "mystery" of God given to Abraham.

sin,” for the world exists only through the secret, sustained by means of that foundation or pillar (*Yesod*) which must be concealed. Just as the proper disclosure of esoteric truth is bound up with the flesh, with the phallus or the *sefirah* of *Yesod*,<sup>73</sup> so too an improper disclosure is a sin bound up with this limb.

Textual interpretation, as circumcision, involves the dynamic of closure/openness: as the one who is circumcised stands in relation to the *Shekhinah*, so the exegete—through interpretation—enters into an intimate relation with *Shekhinah*. The duplicity of the text as that which simultaneously conceals and reveals—indeed conceals as that which reveals and reveals as that which conceals—is a thoroughly appropriate metaphor to convey the erotic quality of hermeneutical stance.<sup>74</sup> Inasmuch as there is this structural affinity between the interpretative task and the phallus,<sup>75</sup> the exegete must be circumcised, for penetration into the text is itself an act of sexual unification. This dynamic doubtless underlies the Zoharic prohibition of Torah study for the uncircumcised:

R. Abba said: Praiseworthy is the portion of Israel, for the Holy One, blessed be He, desired them more than all the idolatrous nations. And on account of His love for them He gave them His laws of truth, planted the Tree of Life in their midst, and placed His *Shekhinah* amongst them. Why? For Israel are marked by the holy sign [*reshima qadisha*] on their flesh, and it is known that

<sup>73</sup> In this regard it is of interest to note that in one of his Hebrew theosophic works, *Sefer ha-Nefesh ha-Hakhamah* (Basle, 1608), sec. 12, de León refers to the proliferation of kabbalistic lore as the flowing or spreading forth of the “spring of mystery,” *ma’ayan ha-sod*. The text is cited by Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (n. 1 above), p. 396, n. 150, and an English translation appears on p. 201. In the critical edition of the same work, *Sefer ha-Mishqal* (see n. 44 above), the established reading is *me’inyan ha-sod ha-zeh*, “from the matter of this secret,” rather than *ma’ayan ha-sod ha-zeh*, “the spring of this mystery.” Compare Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 201, who interprets this passage as a “veiled reference” to the dissemination of the *Zohar*; and see my criticism in “*Sefer ha-Rimmon*: Critical Edition and Introductory Study,” 1:15–17. In any event, the “spring” is an obvious phallic symbol, which would thus be an appropriate symbol for *Yesod*. It follows, therefore, that even in this passage, if we accept the reading of the *editio princeps*, de León, perhaps unwittingly, links the disclosure of esoteric truth with a phallic symbol, namely, the pouring forth of the fountain or spring.

<sup>74</sup> Compare the famous parable of the Princess (the Torah) and her lover (the mystic exegete) in *Zohar* II, 99a–b, where the hermeneutical relationship is depicted in terms of an erotic game of hide-and-seek. On the erotic quality of reading as a dialectic of concealment and disclosure, see R. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975), pp. 9–10, 14. See also the curious expression of Moses de León in his *Mishkan ha-’Edut, likhtov u-lignoz*, “to write and to conceal.” The expression has been discussed by Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 201–2, and cf. my extended criticism in “*Sefer ha-Rimmon*: Critical Edition and Introductory Study,” 1:18–27.

<sup>75</sup> See Liebes, “The Messiah of the Zohar” (n. 3 above), pp. 138–45.

they are His, from those who belong to His palace.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, all those who are not marked with the holy sign on their flesh do not belong to Him; it is known that they all derive from the side of impurity.<sup>77</sup> It is therefore forbidden to join with them and to converse with them concerning words [or matters] of the Holy One, blessed be He. It is also forbidden to instruct them in words of Torah, for the entire Torah is the name of the Holy One, blessed be He,<sup>78</sup> and each letter of the Torah is bound to the Holy Name. It is forbidden to instruct the person who is not marked by the holy sign on his flesh in the words of Torah. How much more so to be engaged [*le-ishtaddela*] in it!<sup>79</sup>

One who is uncircumcised cannot study Torah, for the Torah is the name of God, and study thereof involves unification with the name. Only one who is circumcised can be united with the name, and hence only such a person can study Torah. The final remark, that it is forbidden to be engaged in the study of Torah with one who is uncircumcised, serves to emphasize that the esoteric dimension of the tradition cannot be divulged to anyone who does not have the holy sign inscribed on his flesh. The aspect of hiddenness or secrecy is indicative of the very essence of the *sefirah* which corresponds to the phallus.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the word *sod*, secret or mystery, is attributed specifically to the divine gradation of *Yesod*. Secrets of Torah, therefore, cannot be transmitted to one who is uncircumcised:

R. Abba opened [his exposition] and said: "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him [to them He makes known His covenant]" (Ps. 25:14).

<sup>76</sup> Compare the parable in *Zohar* I, 245b, and its parallel in Wolfson, "*Sefer ha-Rimmon*: Critical Edition and Introductory Study," 2:304:16–22 (see also 1:113–14, 119).

<sup>77</sup> The ontological distinction between Jew and non-Jew, the soul of the former deriving from the right, holy side, and that of the latter from the left, demonic side, is one of the basic assumptions of de León's anthropology. Compare *Zohar Hadash*, 78d (*Midrash ha-Ne'elam* on Ruth); *Zohar* I, 20b, 131a, 220a; II, 86a; Wolfson, "*Sefer ha-Rimmon*: Critical Edition and Introductory Study," 1:118–20, 2:214–15.

<sup>78</sup> See n. 62 above.

<sup>79</sup> *Zohar* III, 72b–73a. Compare Gikatilla, *Sha'arei 'Orah*, ed. Ben-Shlomo (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1978), 1:114–16: "The covenant of *Binah* [Understanding, the third emanation] is the covenant of the mouth, the covenant of the tongue, the covenant of the lips. . . . And the covenant of the living God [*Yesod*, the ninth emanation] is called the covenant of peace . . . the covenant of Sabbath, the covenant of the rainbow . . . the covenant of circumcision. The covenant of *Adonai* [*Shekhinah*, the tenth emanation] corresponds to the covenant of the Torah. . . . And this is the secret: The covenant of the tongue and the covenant of the foreskin. . . . If Israel had not received the covenant of the flesh [circumcision] they would never have merited the Torah which is the covenant of the tongue. . . . Therefore the Torah is only given to one who has received the covenant of the flesh, and from the covenant of the flesh one enters into the covenant of the tongue, which is the reading of the Torah." Gikatilla's remarks are a theosophic exposition of *Sefer Yeşirah*, 1:3; see nn. 57, 60 above.

<sup>80</sup> See n. 72 above.

"The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him": the Holy One, blessed be He, has not given the upper secret of the Torah except to those who fear sin. To those who do fear sin the upper secret of Torah is disclosed. And what is the upper secret of the Torah? I would say, it is the sign of the holy covenant [*ot qayama qadisha*], which is called the secret of the Lord, the holy covenant.<sup>81</sup>

The secret of the Lord given to those who fear sin is the holy covenant of God, the *berit qodesh*, that is, the *sefirah* that corresponds to the phallus, *Yesod*. The secrecy and concealment of this particular emanation is emphasized by de León in his Hebrew theosophic writings as well. Thus, for example, in *Sefer ha-Rimmon* he writes that *Yesod* is "called secret, *sod*, for its matter is secrecy, a hidden mystery of the Creator."<sup>82</sup> The process of circumcision, the removal of the foreskin and the uncovering of the corona, is a disclosure of the secret. In the disclosure of the phallus, through the double act of circumcision, the union of the masculine and feminine aspects of God is assured. "When the holy sign [*Yesod*] is uncovered it overflows and the bride [*Shekhinah*] . . . then stands in completeness and her portion is illuminated."<sup>83</sup> Circumcision, therefore, is here viewed as a necessary precondition for studying Torah—exoteric and esoteric—just as in other contexts it is depicted as a necessary precondition for visionary experience or prophetic theophany. He who is closed—uncircumcised—cannot open the text just as he cannot behold the divine Presence. The relationship of exegete to text is like that of the visionary to the *Shekhinah*. Indeed, it may be said that, according to the *Zohar*, insofar as the Torah is the corporeal form of the divine, textual study itself is a mode of visionary experience.<sup>84</sup>

The opening of circumcision is thus not only the opening through which one may see God, but it the opening through which one may study the holy text, the Torah. The particular relation between the covenant of circumcision and the activity of Torah study is further brought to light in the following passage:

<sup>81</sup> *Zohar* I, 236b.

<sup>82</sup> Wolfson, "Sefer ha-Rimmon: Critical Edition and Introductory Study," 2:231. And cf. *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, p. 61.

<sup>83</sup> Wolfson, "Sefer ha-Rimmon: Critical Edition and Introductory Study," 2:232.

<sup>84</sup> I have treated this topic at length in "The Hermeneutics of Visionary Experience: A Study in Kabbalistic Symbolism" (1987; typescript). Compare *Zohar* I, 9a, 94b; II, 163b; Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar" (n. 3 above), pp. 98–99, 130–32. The idea that the *Shekhinah* is connected to those engaged in the study of the Torah is a motif found in earlier aggadic sources; see BT *Berakhot* 6a; *Mishnah Avot* 3:6; *Midrash Tehilim* on Ps. 105:1, ed. S. Buber (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 448; *Deuteronomy Rabbah* (Tel Aviv: Moriah, 1960), 7:2; *Zohar* I, 72a, 92b, 115b; II, 200a.

R. Jose asked R. Shimeon: It is taught that words [such as] *va-'agidah*, *va-yaged*, and *va-yagidu*, all [point to] the secret of wisdom [*raza de-hokhmata*]. Why does this word [the root *ngd*] allude to the secret of wisdom? He [R. Shimeon] said to him [R. Jose]: Because [in] this word the *gimmel* and *dalet* are found without any separation [between them]. And this is the secret of wisdom, a word that comes in completeness in the secret of the letters. Thus it is when they [the letters] are in wisdom, but *dalet* without *gimmel* is not completion, and so *gimmel* without *dalet*, for the one is bound to the other without separation. And the one who separates them causes death for himself; and this secret [the separation of *gimmel* and *dalet*] is the [cause and result of the] sin of Adam. Therefore this word [*ngd*] is the secret of wisdom. And even though at times there is a *yod* between the *gimmel* and *dalet*, there is not separation [in that case], for all is one bond.<sup>85</sup>

The root *ngd*, to tell or speak, alludes to the secret of wisdom, for in this word the letters *gimmel* and *dalet* are contiguous. Symbolically, the *gimmel* corresponds to *Yesod* and the *dalet* to *Shekhinah*, for *Yesod* is that which "bestows upon" (*gomel*) the *Shekhinah* who is the "poor one" (*dal*).<sup>86</sup> The secret of wisdom, therefore, involves the unification of the ninth and tenth *sefirot*, *Yesod* (masculine) and *Shekhinah* (feminine). It is this (sexual) unification, moreover, that constitutes the nature of telling, speaking, in a word, discourse. Speech (*ngd*) is thus understood by the same structural dynamic that characterizes the play of divine sexuality and the dual nature of circumcision. By means of circumcision the *gimmel* is uncovered and consequently pours forth to the *dalet*. The *yod* that is between them is the sign of the covenant (corona) that acts as a bridge uniting masculine and feminine. Indeed, the three consonants, *gimmel*, *yod*, *dalet*, spell the word *gid*, which in rabbinic literature<sup>87</sup> is sometimes used as a euphemism for the phallus. This, no doubt, is the underlying meaning of the concluding statement that, "even though at times there is a *yod* between the *gimmel* and *dalet*, there is no separation, for all is one bond." It is from the union of *gimmel* and *dalet*, *Yesod* and *Shekhinah*, that discourse (*aggadah*) proceeds, and the secret is disclosed.

I can now sum up the various steps that have been taken along the way in this analysis. Already in rabbinic *midrash* a clear nexus is established between circumcision and the visualization of God, or a Godlike appearance. In the earlier midrashic passage it seems that

<sup>85</sup> *Zohar* I, 234b.

<sup>86</sup> The letter symbolism is derived from BT *Shabbat* 104b; see *Zohar* I, 3a, 244b; Wolfson, "Sefer ha-Rimon: Critical Edition and Introductory Study," 2:232 and n. 10.

<sup>87</sup> See, e.g., BT *Yevamot* 8b.

this nexus is focused on a deontological conception well known from many rabbinic sources: through the doing of good deeds, that is, through fulfilling God's commandments, one is rewarded. In this particular case the good deed is circumcision and the reward the epiphany of God. In a later midrashic context the nexus is reasserted, this time however based on the ontological criterion that only one whose sexual organ is circumcised can stand in the presence of God's glory. This is because it is necessary for one to remove the unholy foreskin before one can withstand the manifestation of God. The author of the *Zohar* further develops this mesh of ideas in the framework of his theosophical conception. Visualization of God, as study of the Torah, involves the unification of man with the feminine potency of the divine; therefore, only one who is circumcised can be said to either see God or study the Torah. Moreover, just as the act of circumcision itself comprises two elements that correspond to the masculine and feminine dimensions of God, so too an act of seeing God—prophetically or textually—comprises these very elements. The opening of circumcision is an opening of the flesh that is, at the same time, an opening within the divine. When the foreskin is removed and the phallus uncovered, then the corresponding limb above, the divine phallus or *Yesod*, likewise is uncovered. In this uncovering the secret of God is disclosed. The hermeneutical process is a structural reenactment of circumcision, involving as it does the movement from closure to openness.<sup>88</sup> The opening of the flesh eventuates in the opening of God, which is reexperienced as the opening of the text.

In conclusion, it may be said that the writing of the *Zohar* itself, a disclosure of hidden layers of meaning, may be understood in light of the various structures that we have sought to uncover. The particular relation established between the phallus (*Yesod*) and secret (*sod*) lends further support to the view that the very process of textual interpretation undertaken by the author of the *Zohar* was understood in terms of this dynamic of closure/openness. The bringing forth of that which was hidden—which is, after all, the *raison d'être* of this classic of Jewish mysticism—can only be comprehended in light

<sup>88</sup> It is of interest to consider *Zohar* I, 93a, wherein the discussion on the mystical significance of circumcision culminates with an actual visionary experience. After the comrades complete their discussion on circumcision, the man in whose house the discussion ensued says to them: "The completion of what you have said tonight will take place tomorrow. He said to them: Tomorrow you will see the face of the 'master of circumcision' [i.e., the prophet Elijah] . . . for he will come to circumcise my son. . . . R. Abba said: This is a request to [fulfill] a commandment and we shall sit in order to see the face of the *Shekhinah*." In other contexts in the *Zohar* the seeing of the *Shekhinah* is connected particularly with the study of Torah in accord with kabbalistic principles; see n. 84 above.

of this dynamic. Yet, as we have seen, the transition from closure to openness is itself characteristic of divine revelation. It can be assumed, therefore, that the writing of this text proceeded from some such experience of divine immediacy—in a word, exposure to God. Students of Jewish mysticism are apt to lose sight of the deeply experiential character of this work. While it is true that the *Zohar* is nominally and structurally a *midrash*, that is, a commentary on Scripture, I have tried to show that in this text the hermeneutical mode is inseparably wedded to the visionary. This paper has provided one vantage point through which this merging of epistemic modes can be understood. Both visualization of God and the hermeneutical task are predicated upon a physiological opening that corresponds to an ontological opening within the divine. Disclosure of what has been concealed—through the opening of the flesh—is the basic structure common to visionary experience and mystical hermeneutics.

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HAI GAON'S LETTER AND  
COMMENTARY ON *ʿALEYNU*: FURTHER  
EVIDENCE OF MOSES DE LEÓN'S  
PSEUDEPIGRAPHIC ACTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

*In this study I present evidence of yet another literary forgery of the Spanish kabbalist, Moses ben Shem Ṭov de León (ca. 1240–1305). The text that I am presenting as a work of de León consists of two parts: a letter attributed to Hai Gaon concerning the custom of reciting the ʿAleynu prayer on a daily basis, and a kabbalistic commentary on the ʿAleynu itself. Both parts, but especially the second, have striking parallels to the Zohar as well as to the other writings of de León. The pseudo-Hai letter and commentary on ʿAleynu clearly predate the Zohar as there is no reference to it in the usual guised language that de León employs in his other Hebrew theosophic writings. Nevertheless, the zoharic style and technical kabbalistic terminology are apparent in the text. The obvious zoharic parallels in this document provide further evidence that de León—whether as author or editor—later wove into the texture of Zohar passages, themes and exegetical comments from his own earlier writings, sometimes used in entirely different contexts.*

*It is of importance as well that in this text de León, in all probability following the lead of the Castilian kabbalist, Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen and his disciples, Moses ben Simeon of Burgos and Todros ben Joseph Abulafia, attributes kabbalistic lore to certain ascetic figures, R. Josiah and R. Abraham, who are patterned after the life of historical personalities probably living in Provence. In most of his writings de León does not refer to such historical/fictitious characters. This technique, however, was employed in the treatise Sod Darkhe ha-ʿOtiyyot, written either by de León or by another member of a circle of nontheosophic linguistic mystics to which he belonged, and traces of it can be detected in the Zohar as well. In sum, the letter and commentary on ʿAleynu provides us with an early sample of de León's pseudepigraphical activity in which he tried to place kabbalistic ideas in the context of halakhic issues. This tendency continued to mark his literary activity, including his role as author or editor of the classic work of medieval kabbalah, the Zohar.*

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\* After working on this text for some time I was informed by Moshe Idel that M. Kushnir-Oron of Tel-Aviv University had worked on this same text several years ago. I thank Dr. Kushnir-Oron for allowing me to consult her unpublished



## 1. Introduction

Moses de León's (ca. 1240–1305) involvement with pseudepigraphy is best known to scholars from the complex literary problem surrounding the *Zohar*. Whether as sole author (as argued explicitly by Heinrich Graetz,<sup>1</sup> Gershom Scholem<sup>2</sup> and Isaiah Tishby,<sup>3</sup>—though, as Scholem himself remarked, “a whispered tradition of centuries”<sup>4</sup>), or as one member of a circle of kabbalists responsible for the composition of the *Zohar* (as intimated by Adolf Jellinek<sup>5</sup> and argued in detail recently by Yehuda Liebes<sup>6</sup>), it is clear that de León had some responsibility for writing a text that was attributed to an ancient authority.

De León's pseudepigraphic activity, however, is not limited to the *Zohar*. Several other writings have emerged as evidence for this literary posture. First, Scholem was of the opinion that the medieval collection of moral precepts, *ʿOrhot Hayyim*, also called *Ṣawwaʿat R. ʿEliʿezer*, attributed to Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, was the work of de León.<sup>7</sup> The connection between this work and de León is particularly strong in the case of the second part of the text, *Seder Gan ʿEden*, published by Jellinek in *Bet ha-Midrash*, 3:131–140. (Jellinek does not mention de León as the probable author.)<sup>8</sup>

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material. The thesis that I present, however, is my own and I therefore bear full responsibility for the contents of this paper. I would also like to express my gratitude to Neil Danzig for his useful comments pertaining to geonic literature.

<sup>1</sup> H. Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1891–98), 4:10–24.

<sup>2</sup> G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1956), pp. 156–204; idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 233–235, 432–434. I refer in the body of this paper only to Scholem's mature view on the matter, which stands in striking contrast to the earlier position adopted in his lecture published in 1926 (see below, n. 13). Initially Scholem flatly rejected the opinion that de León was the sole author of the *Zohar*, but maintained the possibility that he may have acted like an editor or redactor, putting the text together from earlier sources (while perhaps adding in the process some things of his own) in the form that it presently exists.

<sup>3</sup> I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem, 1971), 1:103–108.

<sup>4</sup> *Major Trends*, p. 159.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Jellinek, *Moses ben Schem-Tob de Leon und sein Verhältnis zum Sohar* (Leipzig, 1851), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Y. Liebes, “How the *Zohar* Was Written,” [Hebrew] *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 8 (1989): 1–71.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Major Trends*, pp. 183, 200; *Kabbalah*, p. 432. Cf. *Sheʿelot u-Teshuvot le-R. Mosheh di Liʿon be-ʿInyene Qabbalah*, in I. Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1982), 1:53.

<sup>8</sup> See *Major Trends*, p. 393, n. 103.

It should be noted that other scholars, including Joseph Dan, have expressed reservation about Scholem's attribution of this text to de León and have suggested that the real author is the eleventh-century talmudist Eliezer ben Isaac, known as Eliezer ha-Gadol.<sup>9</sup> This view was, as far as I am aware, first advanced by Menaḥem ben Judah de Lonzano in the sixteenth century.

Scholem was also the first to recognize de León's pseudepigraphic involvement with another text, the collection of geonic responsa entitled, *Sha'are Teshuvah*, which contains fictitious responsa attributed to Hai Gaon. Indeed, some of these "nonauthentic pieces," as Scholem calls them,<sup>10</sup> have striking parallels to the *Zohar* given under the heading "Yerushalmi."<sup>11</sup> In some cases these "Yerushalmi" passages are stylistically similar to *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, the earliest stratum of zoharic literature. On the basis of these parallel passages, David Luria argued, in the introduction to the Leipzig edition of *Sha'are Teshuvah*, published in 1858, for the antiquity of the *Zohar*,<sup>12</sup> but it is clear that his historical perspective was skewed. Scholem's own view on de León's relationship to this source has gone through a curious development, reflecting, of course, his attitude towards the authorship of the *Zohar* itself. In his lecture published in 1926 on the role of de León in the composition of the *Zohar*, Scholem noted that de León probably had knowledge of the zoharic passages cited as "Yerushalmi" in *Sha'are Teshuvah*, but "there is no reason to suspect that de León himself composed these forgeries," inasmuch as this way of citing the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* stratum of the *Zohar* is known from other late thirteenth-century kabbalists who were somewhat older colleagues of de León, e.g., Isaac ibn Sahula and Ṭodros Abulafia.<sup>13</sup> The view expressed at that time was somewhat

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. Dan, *Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 93–94. See also I. Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills* (Philadelphia, 1926), 1:31–49.

<sup>10</sup> *Major Trends*, p. 200.

<sup>11</sup> On this convention for citing the *Zohar*, see E. Wolfson, *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon* (Atlanta, GA, 1988), pp. 6, n. 17, 49, n. 199 [English section]. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to this volume correspond to the pagination of the Hebrew section.

<sup>12</sup> Reprinted in *Teshuvot ha-Ge'onim Sha'are Teshuvah*, ed. W. Leiter (New York, 1946), pp. iv–xvi. See also D. Luria, *Ma'amar Qadmui Sefer ha-Zohar* (New York, 1951), pp. 42–71.

<sup>13</sup> G. Scholem, "Did R. Moshe de León Write the *Zohar*?" [Hebrew] *Madda'eh ha-Yahadui* 1 (1926): 25.

modified in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (first published in 1941), where Scholem suggested that de León “had a share in the writing of these pseudepigraphic responsa, even if he did not write them all.”<sup>14</sup> Scholem further noted that de León was the first to quote one of these “bogus responsa.” As an example of this, Scholem mentions one of the *sodot* appended to de León’s *Sefer ha-Nefesh ha-Hakhamah* (the reference is to the *sod* of Shabbat).<sup>15</sup> To this one might add two passages from *Sefer ha-Rimmon* which contain matters found in *Sha‘are Teshuvah* but nowhere else as far as I am aware (the first one has to do with *qedushah de-sitra*<sup>16</sup> and the second, with the three paragraphs that begin with the word וּבִכְן in the *Amidah* for Rosh ha-Shanah<sup>17</sup>).

Scholem’s position, as stated in his article on the *Zohar* in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1972, published separately in the volume *Kabbalah*), goes even further than the view expressed in *Major Trends*. De León, writes Scholem, “edited a version of a collection of geonic responsa, particularly those of Hai Gaon, and he added kabbalistic material in the style of the *Zohar*, using particular idioms of zoharic Aramaic, and also in the style of the *Midrash ha-Ne‘elam*, all of which he entitled *Yerushalmi*, or “the ‘*Yerushalmi* version’.”<sup>18</sup> According to this conclusion then, de León not only added passages to the geonic collection but also edited it. This view has recently been substantiated and elaborated upon by Neil Danzig. After examining the various manuscript recensions of this collection of geonic responsa as well as the printed version, Danzig concluded that de León not only added a few pseudepigraphic responsa here and there but in many places added to and changed the original text to serve his own purposes. Danzig also concluded that one version of these responsa, preserved in MS JTS Mic. 1768,<sup>19</sup> represents de León’s second attempt to copy and reorganize

<sup>14</sup> *Major Trends*, p. 200.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396, n. 146.

<sup>16</sup> *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 85, which parallels *Sha‘are Teshuvah*, § 55.

<sup>17</sup> *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 149, which parallels *Sha‘are Teshuvah*, § 297.

<sup>18</sup> *Kabbalah*, p. 231.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 56–57 [English section]. For a fuller description of the manuscript see N. Danzig, “The Collection of Geonic Responsa *Sha‘are Teshuvah* and the Responsa from Heaven,” [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 58 (1989): 23–26. In addition to the halakhic material discussed in detail by Danzig, i.e., the *Teshuvot ha-Ge‘onim* and the *She‘elot u-Teshuvot min ha-Shamayim* (fols. 10a–31b, 163b–174b), this codex contains a lot of kabbalistic material deriving from

the material included in his first collection, with an effort to mix up the pseudepigraphic passages and place them in a different order. Danzig conjectures that de León himself added the title to this collection—as preserved in the JTS manuscript—“These are the responsa of R. Hai Gaon,” in order to give geonic authority to all

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Castilian authors, e.g., *Sefer ha-Mishqal* of de León (fols. 32a–81a), a fragment of Isaac ha-Kohen's *Ma'amar 'al ha-ʿAšilut ha-Semoʿlit* (fols. 81b–84a), passages from Joseph Gikatilla's *Sha'are Sedeq* (fols. 97a–99a), and *Sha'are ʿOrah*, referred to as *Sefer ha-ʿOrah* (fols. 99a–b; see below n. 121), two citations from de León's *Sefer ha-Rimmon* (fols. 81b, 109a–b), and a third passage which is a paraphrase from the aforementioned work (fol. 92a), responsa attributed to the anonymous elder (זקן) (fols. 113b–116a), and Gikatilla's commentary on the Passover Haggadah (fols. 128a–138b, 175a–190b). The *Zohar* itself is mentioned in the following contexts: (1) fols. 93a–94a contains a passage in Aramaic that corresponds to *Zohar* 3:199a–b; (2) fols. 94a–94b likewise contains an actual quote which corresponds to *Zohar* 3:197b–198a; (3) on fol. 96a a passage is introduced as זוהר סודי, דקריש, but this does not correspond to any extant zoharic passage; (4) on fol. 106a–b there is a Hebrew paraphrase of *Zohar* 1:197a; (5) on fol. 108b there is an interpretation of Gen 30:27 which corresponds (more or less) to the interpretation of that verse in *Zohar* 1:139a, 161a, 167a. In that context an alternative explanation of the verse is offered also in the name of the *Zohar*, but to date I have not located any parallel to it in the printed versions of *Zohar*. In the same manuscript I have detected several passages, either anonymous or attributed to Shim'on ben Yoḥai, and in one case to Eleazar the son of Shim'on ben Yoḥai, which have parallels in the *Zohar*. The relevant texts are as follows: (1) on fols. 100a–b an interpretation of Gen 37:22 in the name of Rashbi which has a parallel in *Zohar* 1:185a–b; (2) on fol. 100b a passage on Jacob and Joseph in the name of Rashbi which has a parallel in *Zohar* 1:144b and 185b; (3) on fol. 100b an anonymous interpretation of Num 25:14 which has a parallel in *Zohar* 3:221b; (4) on fol. 100b an interpretation of Ps 89:16 attributed to Rashbi which contains material found in *Zohar* 2:123a and 3:231b; (5) on fols. 100b–101a an anonymous interpretation of Lev 19:4 which has a parallel in *Zohar* 3:83b; (6) on fol. 101a an anonymous explanation concerning Reuben and Joseph which has a parallel in *Zohar* 1:155a–b (*Sitre Torah*), 176b, 222b (see also 236a); (7) on fol. 101a an anonymous commentary on 2 Kings 2:9 which has a parallel in *Zohar* 1:191b; (8) on fols. 101a–b an anonymous commentary on Lam 3:22 which has a parallel in *Zohar* 3:305a; (9) on fol. 101b an anonymous interpretation of Gen 42:9 which has a parallel in *Zohar* 1:199b; (10) on fol. 101b an anonymous interpretation of Isa 4:3 which has a parallel in *Zohar* 2:57b; (11) on fol. 102b an interpretation of Lev 16:1 in the name of Eleazar ben Shim'on ben Yoḥai which corresponds to *Zohar* 3:60a also in the name of Eleazar (cf. *Zohar* 3:57a); and see fol. 106a, where the zoharic interpretation is upheld against the view of Ramban; (12) on fol. 102b an anonymous allusion to the secret contained in Lev 16:21 which has a parallel in *Zohar* 2:237a and 3:63a–b (the secret involves the demonic realm); (13) on fol. 105b an interpretation of Moses' sin at the Waters of Meribah (Num 20:11ff.) in the name of Rashbi, which has a parallel in *Zohar* 1:30b and 2:271b–272a; here too the view of Rashbi is upheld against that of Ramban

the responsa, especially those passages which he himself composed.<sup>20</sup> It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that de León indeed edited these geonic responsa and on occasion added his own innovations. Finally, in an article published in 1988, Israel Ta-Shema called attention to the fact that several passages found in the printed collection of the *She'elot u-Teshuvot min ha-Shamayim* of Jacob of Marvège were in fact composed by de León.<sup>21</sup>

In this study I wish to present evidence for another small treatise which was, in my opinion, also composed by de León but was ascribed to another figure. I refer to a letter and commentary on the prayer *Aleynu* attributed to R. Hai Gaon. Virtually every critical scholar who has examined this text has reached the conclusion that it is a forgery.<sup>22</sup> This possibility has also been entertained

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(for discussion of the latter cf. E. Wolfson, "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic," *AJS Review* 14 [1989]: 148–149); (14) on fol. 106a an aggadic tradition concerning Balaam which is found as well in *Zohar* 3:208a. It must be emphasized that these texts are not literal Hebrew translations of the Aramaic passages in the *Zohar*. In fact, it is difficult to determine whether these passages are based on existing zoharic texts, or represent sources which antedate the *Zohar* and which were incorporated into the texture of that work by de León or by some other kabbalist who belonged to the group that produced the *Zohar*. If the latter, these sources could be explained as evidence for something akin to that which Liebes has referred to as "מדרשו של רשב"י, which may have served as the source for exegetical pieces in the *Zohar*; cf. Liebes, "How the *Zohar* Was Written," pp. 10–12. On the other hand, one cannot rule out the possibility that de León himself may have authored these passages, in some cases attributing them to Rashbi or to R. Eleazar, his son, and then later incorporated them in the *Zohar* in new narrative settings. This would confirm Tishby's thesis that in the 1280's de León worked on pseudepigraphic passages inserted first into his Hebrew theosophic works and later translated into Aramaic in the *Zohar*; cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1:106–107. The matter requires further investigation based on a careful study of all the passages noted above.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Danzig, "The Collection of Geonic Responsa," pp. 26–32, 41–48.

<sup>21</sup> I. Ta-Shema, "Responsa from Heaven: the Collection and its Additions," [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 57 (1988): 51–66.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Goldenthal, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Palatinae Vindobonensis* (Vienna, 1851), p. 23; M. Steinschneider, *Catalogus librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana* (Berlin, 1852–60), col. 1030, n. 16; J. Müller, *Einleitung in die Responsen der Babylonischen Geonen* [Hebrew] (Berlin, 1891), p. 58, n. 4; G. Scholem, "R. Moses of Burgos, the disciple of R. Isaac," [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 3 (1932): 278; S. Assaf, *Gaonica: Gaonic Responsa and Fragments of Halachic Literature from the Geniza and other Sources* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1933), p. 4, n. 7. On kabbalistic material falsely attributed to Hai Gaon, see also the

in the traditional literature. Thus, for example, Israel Moses ben Eliezer Ḥazzan, in his commentary *ʿIyye ha-Yam*, published in the 1869 Livorno edition of *Shaʿare Teshuvah*, already sensed some historical and textual problems with the letter and commentary on *ʿAleynu* and claimed that he almost concluded that the work was a forgery.<sup>23</sup> To take a second example, in his commentary *ʿIyyun Tefillah*, published in *ʿOṣar ha-Tefillot*, Aryeh Leib ben Shlomo Gordon wrote that one who examines the entire responsum (i.e., the first part) will see from its language that “it is not [a work] of R. Hai Gaon but rather of one of the great [rabbis] in the generation of Rashi, and the explanation [i.e., the part that contains the commentary] on *ʿAleynu* [was composed] by one of the kabbalists, and was erroneously attributed to R. Hai Gaon.”<sup>24</sup> It is of special interest that in the above passage the writer sensed a distinction between the two parts of the document, the letter and the commentary, attributing the first to someone in the generation of Rashi—I presume an Ashkenazi authority—and the second to one of the kabbalists. In any event, it is clear that both traditional and critical scholars have expressed doubt about the authenticity of this text. It is thus no surprise that Tsvi Groner, in his “List of R. Hai Gaon’s Responsa” published in 1986, includes this text among those sources which were intended forgeries.<sup>25</sup> Despite the scholarly consensus about this forgery, no one to date has adequately explained its authorship. This paper attempts to fill the gap.

## 2. Description of text

The text is extant in six<sup>26</sup> manuscripts: (1) ms Paris 181, fols. 245b–247a; (2) ms Paris 835, fols. 113b–115b; (3) ms Vatican 195,

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references mentioned in E. E. Hildesheimer, “Mystik und Agada im Urteile der Gaonen R. Scherira und R. Hai,” *Festschrift für Jacob Rosenheim* (Frankfurt am Main, 1931), pp. 275–276, n. 8, and the pertinent remarks of Danzig, “The Collection of Geonic Responsa,” p. 30, n. 30.

<sup>23</sup> *Teshuvot ha-Geʿonim ʿim Haggahot ʿIyye ha-Yam* (Livorno, 1869), fol. 20a.

<sup>24</sup> *ʿOṣar ha-Tefillot* (New York, 1966), p. 433.

<sup>25</sup> T. Groner, “A List of Hai Gaon’s Responsa,” [Hebrew] *ʿAle Sefer* 13 (1986): 119.

<sup>26</sup> Apparently a seventh manuscript exists, as may be gathered from the description of ms 631 in the Günzburg collection in Moscow in the catalogue *Bet Yosef* by Senior Sachs. Unfortunately, I have not been able to examine this manuscript. In the card catalogue at the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in the

fols. 7a–9a; (4) ms JTS Mic. 3216, fols. 1a–3b; (5) ms Oxford-Bodleian 1565, fols. 3b–6a; and (6) ms Vienna 113, fols. 4a–5a. The text was published in a relatively corrupt form by Judah Coriat in his anthology of kabbalistic texts *Maʿor wa-Shemesh* (Livorno, 1839), on the basis of ms Paris 181.<sup>27</sup> The text is also quoted by Ḥayyim Avraham ben Shmuʿel of Miranda in his book, *Yad Neʿeman*, published in Salonika in 1804,<sup>28</sup> and from there it was copied in the commentary *ʿIyye ha-Yam* by Israel Moses ben Eliezer Ḥazzan, mentioned above. The commentary is cited without name in the kabbalistic notes of Moses Keleş to the *Sefer ha-Musar* of his father, Judah Keleş.<sup>29</sup> It is also mentioned in *Shaʿar ha-Kawwanot* of Ḥayyim Vital<sup>30</sup> and in *Maḥaziq Berakhah* of Ḥayyim Yosef David Azulai.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. The Authorship

Turning to the question of authorship, the only serious attempt of which I am aware to trace the provenance of the text was made by Scholem. In a study published in 1927 Scholem refers to the pseudo-Hai commentary in the context of discussing the possible sources for Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen's "Treatise on the Left Emanations." In addition to the apparently pseudepigraphic sources that Isaac himself explicitly mentions (see below, 4.2.3[c]), Scholem assumes that this Castilian kabbalist utilized other sources including "small books belonging to the circle of the *Sefer ha-ʿIyyun* and pseudepigraphic works similar to it. The sources from which the material (Scholem lists the relevant sections in R. Isaac's treatise) was drawn were not far in terms of their literary character from the expansive literature attributed to R. Hai Gaon, which was composed before the disclosure of kabba-

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Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, ms Vat. 285 is listed as containing this text; an examination of the manuscript, however, indicates that this is an error. A kabbalistic commentary on *ʿAleynu* does indeed appear on fols. 177b–178a of this codex, but it is not related to the one attributed to Hai Gaon.

<sup>27</sup> A copy of this version can also be found in I. Weinstock, *Siddur ha-Geʿonim weha-Mequbbalim* (Jerusalem, 1971), 3:777–781.

<sup>28</sup> *Yad Neʿeman* (Salonika, 1804), fols. 40a–b.

<sup>29</sup> *Sefer ha-Musar* (Jerusalem, 1973), pp. 100–101.

<sup>30</sup> *Shaʿar ha-Kawwanot* (Jerusalem, 1902), fol. 50a.

<sup>31</sup> *Maḥaziq Berakhah* (Livorno, 1785), § 132, fol. 27b.

lah in Provence and Spain.”<sup>32</sup> Scholem goes on to specify three examples of pseudo-Hai material, viz., the responsa on questions regarding the emanation (of the *sefirot*), the commentary on *‘Aleynu* printed in the beginning of *Ma’or wa-Shemesh*, and the extensive quotes on cosmogony in the treatise of Moses of Burgos on the forty-two-letter name.<sup>33</sup> In an article published several years later (1932) Scholem concludes that the text under discussion was indeed composed by members of the *‘Iyyun* circle.<sup>34</sup> In passing it should be borne in mind that, according to Scholem, this group of mystics was operative in Provence in the twelfth and in the early part of the thirteenth century,<sup>35</sup> a view which has been challenged by Mark Verman, who argued that the *‘Iyyun* circle is to be located in Castile in the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Scholem was no doubt led to believe that the letter and commentary on *‘Aleynu* were written by members of this circle, on the basis of the fact that other pseudo-Hai kabbalistic responsa derive from them.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that in his list of works belonging to the *‘Iyyun* circle, published in *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* in 1948, Scholem did not mention the text under discussion.<sup>38</sup> While this may be attributed to an oversight, the fact of the matter is that Scholem does include in his list the other pseudo-Hai responsa from the circle described above.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in the *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, published in 1962, Scholem refers to the

<sup>32</sup> G. Scholem, “The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac the Sons of R. Jacob ha-Kohen,” [Hebrew] *Madda’e ha-Yahadut* 2 (1927): 191–192.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192. See below, n. 37.

<sup>34</sup> Scholem, “R. Moses of Burgos,” p. 278; see also p. 283.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *idem*, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 309–364.

<sup>36</sup> M. Verman, *Sifre Iyyun* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1984).

<sup>37</sup> Here I mention two such examples: the responsum on the mystical spelling of the divine name with twenty-four points, and the one on the thirteen *middot* and ten *sefirot*. Cf. *Origins*, pp. 328–329, 349–354. See below, n. 39. Both of these are found in two of the manuscripts which contain the letter and commentary on *‘Aleynu*, MSS Oxford 1565 and Vienna 113.

<sup>38</sup> Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* (Tel Aviv, 1948), pp. 255–262.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 258–259, n. 16. In that context Scholem mentions three such responsa: the one concerning the thirteen *middot* and ten *sefirot*, a different version of the text concerning the three lights above the *sefirot* which make up the thirteen *middot*, and the treatise on the mystical writing of the name in twenty-four points. Insofar as the second is an extension or alternative version of the first, it still is accurate to speak of two pseudo-Hai documents in this circle.



text as a "kabbalistic commentary on the *Aleynu* prayer that was attributed to Hai Gaon but that actually must have been composed at the beginning of the thirteenth century in the south of France."<sup>40</sup> It is curious that Scholem does not mention the *Iyyun* circle by name in that context. Does this signify that he changed his mind about the earlier attribution? To be sure, the time and place that he specified could fit well his view of the *Iyyun* circle as outlined in the same volume; still he does not name them explicitly in the relevant context, and this raises the question of some change of mind on Scholem's part. What is clear, however, is the fact that he did not entertain the possibility which I will suggest in this study.

A close examination of the text proves beyond a shadow of doubt that it was not written by the *Iyyun* circle. There is simply nothing in the text that reflects the unique theosophic posture or style of the writings that make up the corpus of this group of mystics. On the basis of my own study of the text I have concluded that de León, living in Castile in the latter part of the thirteenth century, is its genuine author. The Provençal elements—mostly the names of the personalities mentioned in the second part—were adopted by de León as part of his literary-cum-historical framework. As will be suggested below (4.2.3[c]), de León was in all probability influenced by his Castilian predecessors, mainly Isaac ha-Kohen and his circle,<sup>41</sup> in attributing kabbalistic secrets to fictional characters who are patterned after the lifestyle of actual figures. What is distinctive of de León, however, is his meshing of halakhic and kabbalistic motifs placed within the pseudepigraphical framework. I will now try in the remainder of the paper to prove my hypothesis by a closer textual analysis.

<sup>40</sup> *Origins*, p. 230, n. 65.

<sup>41</sup> It is well known that de León had close personal relations with at least one prominent member of Isaac ha-Kohen's circle, Ṭodros ben Joseph ha-Levi Abulafia. Cf. G. Scholem, "Two Treatises of R. Moses de León," *Kobez 'al Yad* 8 (1976): 327; Y. Liebes, "The Messiah of the *Zohar*," in *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought: A Study Conference in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem, 1982), p. 124, n. 151. See also M. Kushnir-Oron, *Sha'ar ha-Razim le-R. Ṭodros ben Yosef ha-Levi 'Abul'afiyah* (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 35. On Ṭodros' use of zoharic material cf. Scholem, "Did R. Mosheh de León Write the *Zohar*?" pp. 26–27. On the relationship between the mythical Shim'on of the *Zohar* and the historical Ṭodros see also the observations of Liebes, "How the *Zohar* Was Written," pp. 68–71.

This will be divided into two parts: (1) a literary analysis of the structure of the text, which will in turn be divided into two sections, the letter and the commentary; and (2) an examination of the obvious parallels in the text to de León's other Hebrew writings and/or the *Zohar*. I will conclude with a brief statement on the relevance of this text to the larger question of de León and his pseudepigraphic tendencies.

Before proceeding with my analysis a brief statement explaining my methodology is in order. The use of zoharic texts to prove the literary hand of de León requires some justification in light of what appears to be a growing scholarly consensus to the effect that the *Zohar* was not the sole product of de León—the theory that has dominated academic research on the *Zohar* for the better part of this century.<sup>42</sup> While it is entirely possible that de León is not responsible for composing the main sections of the *Zohar* by himself, it still seems valid, from a methodological point of view, to utilize zoharic parallels in order to identify de León's own writings insofar as they clearly reflect an intimate knowledge and intensive use of this material. Furthermore, to date no critical scholar has shown conclusively that de León was not one of the authors of the *Zohar*.<sup>43</sup> I have, therefore, followed this method in identifying the source at hand. Indeed, my approach represents a reversal of that adopted by Jellinek and utilized by Scholem and others who have followed him. That is, instead of identifying the author of the *Zohar* by noting parallels in de León's Hebrew writings, I am using zoharic terminology and concepts to identify a text of de León. Underlying my method, therefore, is the minimalist claim that de León was a member of the circle which produced the *Zohar* in the form in which we have it. In sum, the identification of de León as the author of the letter and commentary on *Aleynu* is based on parallels in his own theosophic writings and in the *Zohar*, and on his obvious tendency to forge halakhic responsa (often with kabbalistic allusions) in the name of geonic authorities.

<sup>42</sup> See the article of Liebes cited above, n. 6; and cf. *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 51–55 [English section]; M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), p. 380, n. 66.

<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, see Liebes ("How the *Zohar* Was Written," p. 6) who still maintains that most of what is included in the *Zohar* was written by de León.

#### 4. Literary Analysis

The text consists of two distinct literary units. The first part is a letter which Hai Gaon reportedly sent to various rabbis concerning the obligation to recite *Aleynu* on a daily basis; the second part is a kabbalistic commentary on *Aleynu*. It is obvious, therefore, that the thread which combines these two units is the emphasis on a particular prayer, *Aleynu*. Apart from this, however, the two parts are really distinct: the first is dedicated entirely to halakhic matters, and the second, to kabbalistic symbolism. Nevertheless, from the opening of the letter and the conclusion of the commentary, as well as from the consistency of style throughout, it is clear that the two parts were written by the same hand.

It would be in order to outline briefly the structure of the text. The two sections can be divided into small subsections, two in the first and three in the second:

(1) the opening, which provides the title of the work: "Perush 'Aleynu le-shabbeaḥ we-nusah ha-<sup>3</sup>iggeret she-shalah Rabbenu Hai Ga'on" (ms Oxford 1565, fol. 3b; ms Vienna 113, fol. 4b). The letter is supposedly sent to a place called אנדלק (according to mss Oxford 1565, fol. 3b; Vienna 113, fol. 4a) or ארנלק (according to mss Paris 181, fol. 245b [= the printed version in *Ma'or wa-Shemesh*, fol. 8b]; Paris 835, fol. 113b; JTS 3216, fol. 1a; Vat. 195, fol. 7a).<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that the name of the place according to the reading in Ḥayyim Avraham ben Shmu'el's *Yad Ne'eman*, and following him in the commentary *Iyye ha-Yam* by Israel Moses ben Eliezer Hazzan, is אנדלוס. The description of this place differs in the various manuscripts and it is worthwhile to present these readings.

(a) ms Oxford, 1565, fol. 3b: אנדלק אשר בסוף ים הודו בסוף ים מערב

(b) ms Vienna 113, fol. 4a: אנדלק אשר בסוף ים מערב בארץ הודו אל יושבי אי אנדלק בסוף ים הודו בסוף ים מערב

(c) ms Paris 181, fol. 245b (= *Ma'or wa-Shemesh*, fol. 8b): ארנלק אשר בסוף ים מערב בארץ הודו אליכם יושבי אי ארנלק בסוף ים הודו ובסוף ים מערב

<sup>44</sup> On the possible emendation of ארנלק to ארטנטו, i.e., Otranto, a town in Apulia, Southern Italy, see Steinschneider, *Catalogus librorum hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana*, col. 1030, n. 16.

(d) ms Paris 835, fol. 113b: ארנלק אשר בסוף ים מערב מארץ הודו: אל יושבי אל אי ארנלק בסוף ים מערב

(e) ms Vat. 191, fol. 7a: ארנלק אשר בסוף ים מערב בארץ הודו אל: יושבי אי ארנלק בסוף ים הודו בסוף ים מערב

(f) ms JTS 3216, fol. 1a: ארנלק אשר בסוף ים מערב מארץ הודו: אליכם יושבי אי ארנלק בסוף ים הודו ובסוף ים מערב

(2) the body of the letter (to be described in some detail in section 4.1)

(3) the opening of the commentary, which begins somewhat enigmatically: "Because we have seen at the close of the letter from R. Kalonymus and R. Natan an allusion to a certain matter, and I saw in the special letter which they sent to us that the wisdom of God is in their hearts. For your honor it should be known that the matter of *Aleynu* was a tradition from our rabbis, hidden and concealed. When R. Yosiyah ha-Parush ha-Levi came from the Land of Israel and passed among us, he said that Abraham ha-Parush, his relative, found this matter in many books and other matters which we do not have, and we will allude to some of it for you" (ms Oxford 1565, fol. 4b).

(4) the body of the commentary (to be discussed below in section 4.2)

(5) the end of the text: "Now we cannot elaborate but only give allusions. And since you said that you would send to us your emissary with the rest of your questions regarding the laws of *niddah*, we will send to you [clarification of] all these matters about which you have doubt, but which are not doubtful at all. God, blessed be he, should assist you and illuminate your eyes with the light of his Torah according to your desire. Yours sincerely, R. Hai ben Sherira Gaon, son of R. Menasheh [ms Vienna 113, fol. 6b and ms Paris 181, fol. 247a (*Ma'or wa-Shemesh*, fol. 10b); the reading in mss Oxford 1565, fol. 6a and Vienna 113, fol. 6b, appears to be corrupt: מנפה; ms Vat. 191, fol. 9a: חנניא; ms JTS 3126, fol. 3b: חנניה; *Yad Ne'eman*, fol. 40b: סעדיא] ben R. Sherira Gaon, may his memory be for a blessing, from the staff [mss Oxford 1565, fol. 6a, Vienna 113, fol. 6b, and Vat. 195, fol. 9a: מרגלי; ms Paris 181, fol. 247a and ms JTS 3126, fol. 3b: מרגלי; *Ma'or wa-Shemesh*, fol. 10b: מרגליא; ms Paris 835, fol. 115b: מרגלי] of Judah the son of Jacob, the Lion." In ms Paris 835, fol. 115b, the signature is: "R. Hai son of R. Sherira Gaon, the son of R. Judah Gaon, from the staff of R. Judah son of Jacob." This

ending is indeed problematic, as the name of Sherira's father was neither Menasheh nor Judah but rather Ḥananyah. Along the way one scribe or another apparently picked up on this, for in two of the manuscripts, Vat. 195, fol. 9a and JTS 3216, fol. 3b, the name Ḥananyah in place of Menasheh or Judah does in fact appear.

#### 4.1 The Letter

I will turn now to a brief discussion of the two main sections of the text: the letter and the commentary.

In the first part of the text, the letter, six names are mentioned: R. Hai, R. Natan, R. Shealtiel, R. Kalonymus, R. Gershom (referring presumably to Gershom ben Judah Me<sup>3</sup>or ha-Golah [ca. 960–1028]), and R. Alfasi. The narrative background of this treatise is that the aforementioned rabbis, i.e., Natan, Shealtiel, and Kalonymus (all, we assume, reportedly of Ashkenazi extraction), sent a letter to Hai Gaon requesting information about the source of the custom to recite the *Aleynu* daily, especially in the Diaspora. Before these rabbis there were letters pertaining to this matter from Alfasi and Gershom. According to the view attributed to Alfasi, even though Joshua composed the prayer when he entered the land of Canaan (I will presently discuss the origin of such a tradition), the custom to recite *Aleynu* in the daily liturgy was instituted by the Geonim (תקנת הגאונים). The view attributed to Gershom is that Yoḥanan ben Zakkai instituted the custom of reciting the *Aleynu* daily. The response of Hai Gaon reportedly is that the view of Gershom should be upheld: “In truth Joshua composed [*Aleynu*] . . . it was the reform of R. Yoḥanan ben Zakkai to make it obligatory [to recite *Aleynu*] every day in order to establish the pillar of faith (לקיים קיום האמונה).” I will return to this critical phrase at a later point in my analysis.

Clearly, there is no reason to assume that this letter was authentically written by Hai, notwithstanding the fact that the “narrative frame” given to this letter suggests some historical truth insofar as there is evidence for direct textual links between Ashkenazi sages and Babylonian Geonim as well as for the transmission of geonic traditions to Ashkenazi sages through intermediary links.<sup>45</sup> First,

<sup>45</sup> Cf. A. Grossman, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 168, n. 242, 303, 427, 433.

from a chronological perspective the whole matter of a letter of Hai Gaon, who died in 1038, addressing a view of Isaac Alfasi, who was born in 1013, is problematic. While such a problem does not affect R. Gershom, who was indeed a contemporary of Hai,<sup>46</sup> no independent evidence exists to support the claim that Hai responded to an opinion of, or corresponded directly with, R. Gershom.<sup>47</sup> Neither is there evidence indicating that either Alfasi or Gershom dealt with the problem of *Aleynu* as discussed in the text before us. Moreover, as far as I was able to detect, Hai's name is mentioned in connection with the *Aleynu* in only two other places. There is a genuine responsum of Hai concerning the *Aleynu*, but only as part of the Rosh ha-Shanah liturgy known originally as part of the Babylonian practice.<sup>48</sup> In another responsum the part of this letter concerning Joshua's composing of the *Aleynu* after capturing the land is repeated. I am referring to a responsum that appears in the collection, *Sha'are Teshuvah*, discussed above. In §44 it is written: "You ask about the matter of *erubin* and *yadayim* which King Solomon instituted. It is well and good that Joshua had instituted *Aleynu le-shabbah*; it is not a reform of the rabbis but rather Joshua instituted it when Israel entered the land. . . . *Aleynu le-shabbah* is the reform of Joshua, for previously they were outside the land [of Canaan], and now that they entered the land—the place which corresponds to the throne of Glory<sup>49</sup>—he had to institute it."<sup>50</sup> יהושע תקן עלינו לשבח ולא הוא מתקנת רבנן . . . אלא יהושע תקנו כשנכנסו ישראל לארץ . . . עלינו לשבח תקנת יהושע שהיו קודם בח"ל [בחוץ לארץ] ועכשיו נכנסו לארץ מקום מכוון לנגד חסד הכבוד והוצרך לתקנו

<sup>46</sup> See the pertinent remarks of A. Grossman, *op. cit.*, p. 166, n. 233.

<sup>47</sup> There is a tradition, evidently spurious, from a source composed in the thirteenth century and included in the responsa (no. 29) of Solomon ben Jehiel Luria (ca. 1510–1574) to the effect that R. Gershom received instruction (קבל) from R. Hai. Cf. Sh. Eidelberg, *The Responsa of Rabbeinu Gershom Meor ha-Golah* (New York, 1955), p. 15; Grossman, *The Early Sages*, p. 110.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. L. Ginzberg, *Geonica* (New York, 1909), 2:46–47.

<sup>49</sup> Based on the midrashic view that the throne below in the Temple corresponded to the supernal throne. Cf. *Mekhilta' de-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. H. S. Horowitz and I. A. Rabin (Jerusalem, 1970), *Masekhta' de-shirah*, 10, p. 150, and other references given there in n. 1. See also A. Aptowitzer, "The Heavenly Temple according to the Aggadah," [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 145-148.

<sup>50</sup> *Sha'are Teshuvah* §44.

another question concerning an innovation on the part of Solomon. Indeed, the end of the passage is strikingly parallel to a statement in the letter: "Joshua the son of Nun instituted [*Aleynu*] . . . when [the people of] Israel entered the land, and they reached the place of the fixed peg (cf. Isa 22:25) which corresponds to the throne of Glory above," *בהכניסו ישראל . . . נון* . . . לארץ הגיעו אל מקום יתד התקועה המכוון כנגד כסא הכבוד למעלה (MS Oxford 1565, fol. 3b). It is important to note, as Ephraim Urbach has done in his edition of Abraham ben Azriel's *Arugat ha-Bosem*, that in all the parallel sources to this responsum on *eruvim* and *yadayim* there is no mention of *Aleynu*.<sup>51</sup> One may conclude, therefore, that the editor of *Sha'are Teshuvah*—i.e., Moses de León—added this part to the original question. This corroborates Neil Danzig's observation, mentioned above, that de León not only added new passages to this geonic collection, but reworked older passages by adding his own views.

The tradition that Joshua composed *Aleynu* upon entering the Land of Israel appears to be Ashkenazic in origin,<sup>52</sup> finding its first expression in such thirteenth-century sources as Abraham ben Azriel's *Arugat ha-Bosem*,<sup>53</sup> the *Siddur Ḥaside Ḥashkenaz*, pub-

<sup>51</sup> *Arugat ha-Bosem*, ed. E. E. Urbach (Jerusalem, 1962) 3:470, n. 31.

<sup>52</sup> The origin of this explanation may be based in part on the talmudic tradition (attributed to R. Nahman) that Joshua composed the blessing of the land in the grace after meals when the Israelites entered the land. Cf. bBer 48b. According to other traditions, the *Aleynu* is ascribed to the third-century amora Rab (based on the designation *teqī'ata' de-ve Rav* for the *malkhiyot* section of the *musaf* service for Rosh ha-Shanah which contains the *Aleynu*; cf. yRH 1.3, mAZ 1.2; L. Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt* [Frankfurt Am Main, 1892], pp. 386–387), or to the Men of the Great Assembly (cf. Manasseh ben Israel in his *Vindiciae Judaearum* [1656], part 4, p. 2). See J. D. Eisenstein, *Ṣōsar Dinim u-Minhagim* (New York, 1938), p. 322; E. N. Adler, *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, 1:337, s.v. *Aleynu*; L. J. Liebrich, "Aspects of the New Year Liturgy," *HUCA* 34 (1963): 159, n. 99; M. D. Swartz, "*Alay le-shabbah*: A Liturgical Prayer in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*," *JQR* 77 (1987): 186, n. 20.

<sup>53</sup> *Arugat ha-Bosem*, 3:469. Cf. MS Paris 1408, fol. 59a. See also the collection of Ashkenazic hasidic material, combined with kabbalistic symbolism, extant in MS JTS Mic. 2430, fol. 77a. Concerning this codex, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 376, n. 122; J. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of the German Pietists* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1968), p. 255; idem, "The Vicissitudes of the Esotericism of the German Hasidim," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on His Seventieth Birthday* [Hebrew section] (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 91.

lished by Moshe Hershler in his *Siddur of R. Solomon ben Samson of Garmaise*,<sup>54</sup> and Nathan ben Judah's *Sefer Maḥkim*.<sup>55</sup> The tradition is mentioned as well in the kabbalistic commentary on prayers by David ben Judah he-Ḥasid, *Or Zarua*,<sup>56</sup> written in all probability in the last decade of the thirteenth century<sup>57</sup> and clearly reflecting Ashkenazic customs and rites.<sup>58</sup> The Ashkenazic tradition had a subsequent influence on Provençal halakhic materials, e.g., Aaron ben Jacob ha-Kohen of Lunel's *Orḥot Hayyim* (citing the tosafist Judah of Corbeil)<sup>59</sup> and the anonymous *Kol Bo*.<sup>60</sup> In addition, it appears that the custom to incorporate *Aleynu* in the daily liturgy, originally as part of the *ma'amadot* prayer, began in select circles in France in the second half of the twelfth century.<sup>61</sup> By the end of that century the custom spread throughout France and Germany, though the *Aleynu* was now placed in the concluding section of the morning prayers.<sup>62</sup> Evidence for such a custom is found, for example, in Eleazar of Worms' *Sefer ha-Roqeah*,<sup>63</sup> in his voluminous commentary on the prayers extant in manuscript,<sup>64</sup> and in the *Siddur Ḥaside Ashkenaz* which presumably reflects the order of prayers promulgated by Judah he-Ḥasid's circle.<sup>65</sup> Mention of this custom is found also in other thirteenth-century sources, such as the commentary on Berakhot of Menahem ben

<sup>54</sup> *Siddur of R. Solomon ben Samson of Garmaise* (Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 124, 126 (in the name of Judah the Pious).

<sup>55</sup> *Sefer Maḥkim*, ed. J. Freimann (Cracow, 1909), p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> See MS JTS Mic. 2203, fol. 34a.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, *The Book of Mirros: Sefer Mar'ot ha-Šove'ot*, ed. D. C. Matt (Chico, CA, 1982), p. 3 (Introduction). See also Isaac of Acre, *Oṣar Hayyim*, MS Moscow-Günzburg 775, fol. 44b.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. A. Marmorstein, "David ben Jehuda Ḥasid," *MGWJ* 71 (1927): 39–48; G. Scholem, "Chapters of the History of Kabbalistic Literature," [Hebrew] *Qiryat Sefer* 4 (1927–28): 305.

<sup>59</sup> *Orḥot Hayyim* (Jerusalem, 1986), 1:fol. 21c. Cf. Abraham Kalfon, *Hayye Avraham* (Livorno, 1861), § 119, fol. 22a.

<sup>60</sup> *Kol Bo* (Tel Aviv, n.d.), fol. 9b, § 16.

<sup>61</sup> I am indebted to Prof. Israel Ta-Shema for this information as communicated to me in a private letter dated July 25, 1990.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. I. Elbogen, *Ha-Tefillah be-Yiśra'el be-Hupathutah ha-Historit* (Tel Aviv, 1972), p. 63; B. Jacobson, *Netiv Binah* (Tel Aviv, 1968), p. 373.

<sup>63</sup> *Sefer ha-Roqeah* (Jerusalem, 1967), § 324, p. 221.

<sup>64</sup> MS Oxford 1204, fol. 120a.

<sup>65</sup> See reference in n. 54.



Solomon Meiri,<sup>66</sup> in Jacob ben Asher's *Tur*, *ʿOrah Hayyim* (§133), the *Sefer Maḥkim*,<sup>67</sup> the *ʿOrhot Hayyim*<sup>68</sup> and the *Kol Bo*.<sup>69</sup> It is of interest to note in passing that in the *Maḥzor Viṭry* of Simḥah ben Shmuʿel, this custom is recorded as well,<sup>70</sup> but the relevant passage is a later addition reflecting late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century practice.<sup>71</sup> By contrast, the custom of reciting the *ʿAleynu* in the daily liturgy is not found in contemporary Sephardic halakhic authorities, e.g., Maimonides and Abudarham.<sup>72</sup> It may be concluded, therefore, that this custom began in the Franco-German orbit and the notion that it was composed by Joshua served to legitimize the change in the ritualistic status of this prayer from the Rosh ha-Shanah liturgy to the daily one. It is clear from the letter attributed to Hai Gaon that at the time of its composition the custom was not yet established as a binding obligation. The author desired to establish it as a received tradition; he thus rests on the great authority of Hai Gaon, who is said to follow the view of R. Gershom that Yoḥanan ben Zakkai instituted the reciting of the *ʿAleynu* in the daily liturgy, and not the view of Alfasi that the *taqqanah* was made by the Geonim. Obviously the conclusion that the custom to recite the *ʿAleynu* daily began in the tannaitic period and not in the time of the Geonim strengthened the effort to establish the custom in a community where it was not yet established. That the author of this letter is indebted to either Ashkenazic or Provençal halakhic sources, or both, can be shown as well from another significant point. In the letter it is specified that

<sup>66</sup> *Bet ha-Beḥirah ʿal Masekhet Berakhot* (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 118.

<sup>67</sup> See n. 55.

<sup>68</sup> See n. 59.

<sup>69</sup> See n. 60.

<sup>70</sup> *Maḥzor Viṭry*, ed. S. Hurwitz (Nuremberg, 1923), pt. 1, p. 75.

<sup>71</sup> See *ibid.*, introduction, p. 177. Ta-Shema suggested to me in a private letter (see n. 61) that given the fact that the custom to recite the *ʿAleynu* was in practice in France in the second half of the twelfth century there is no reason to qualify the reference to this custom in *Maḥzor Viṭry* as a later addition. It must be pointed out, however, that the precise custom attested in *Maḥzor Viṭry* involves the reciting of the *ʿAleynu* at the end of the morning prayers, a custom which did not begin, as Ta-Shema himself informed me, until the end of the twelfth century in France and Germany. I therefore have not corrected my remarks in the body of the paper.

<sup>72</sup> Even as late as the sixteenth century Joseph Caro does not list the custom of reciting *ʿAleynu* at the end of the daily liturgy in the *Shulḥan ʿArukh*. Cf. *ʿOrah Hayyim*, § 132, sec. 2, and see the note of Moses Isserles *ad loc.*, reflecting the Ashkenazi rite.

one should recite the *Aleynu* “with intent, while standing and with the head covered,” בכונה בעמידה בעטיפת ראש (ms Oxford 1565, fol. 4b). The precise source of the custom of covering one’s head is not known, but in both the *Orhot Hayyim* (and from there in the *Kol Bo*) and the *Sefer Maḥkim*, the necessity to recite the *Aleynu* in a standing position (מעומד) is traced to a passage from *Pirque Rabbi Eli’ezer* which, however, is not found in our editions: שבח גדול יש בעלינו לשבח לכך צריך לאומרו מעומד.<sup>73</sup> That the author of the letter attributed to Hai made use of some such source is strengthened by the fact that *Aleynu* is similarly described in the first part of the letter as a “great praise,” שבח גדול (ms Oxford 1565, fol. 3b). The use of the same terminology to describe the *Aleynu*, coupled with the emphasis on standing when uttering it, seems to me to be more than a mere coincidence.

Although the evidence from the letter is not sufficient in and of itself to prove de León’s authorship beyond any shadow of doubt, in my opinion there are several good reasons to suppose that he is in fact the one who composed it.<sup>74</sup> In the first instance the distinctive literary style of de León is evident in the document. I have already mentioned the most conspicuous example, but let me repeat it for the sake of our present discussion. In the letter we find the following statement: “In any event it was the reform of

<sup>73</sup> For references see nn. 55 and 59.

<sup>74</sup> One possible objection to my hypothesis is the fact that in the section dedicated to the daily liturgy in de León’s *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, as well as in his kabbalistic commentary on the prayers, *Maskiyyot Kesef* (ms JTS Adler 1577, fols. 103a–116a; the text was edited and translated by J. Wijnhoven as his master’s thesis at Brandeis University, 1961) no mention is made of the custom to recite the *Aleynu* in the daily liturgy. On the contrary, the only mention of *Aleynu* in *Sefer ha-Rimmon* is in the context of a discussion of the *musaf* prayer for Rosh ha-Shanah; see *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 156–157. There is no mention of the Ashkenazi custom in the *Zohar* either. On the other hand, there are several striking examples which indicate that the authorship of the *Zohar* did follow Ashkenazi customs. Cf. I. Ta-Shema, “*El Melekh Ne’eman*: the Development of a Custom” [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 39 (1969): 184–194; idem, “The Well of Miriam: The Development of an Ashkenazi Custom concerning the Third Meal of Sabbath” [Hebrew] *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 4 (1985): 266–270; idem, “*Ha-Pores Sukkat Shalom*: The Blessing and Its Evolution,” [Hebrew] *Asufot* 2 (1988): 187–189. See also J. Katz, *Halakhah and Kabbalah* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 39–45. Interesting in this regard as well is the following comment of de León introducing one of his *sodot* extant in ms Vat. 428, fols. 38b–39a: לומר האלפא ובשאר ארצות ובשאר ארצות ופרניצה בצרפת המנהגות הזה הוא מנהג חכמים קדמונים ותקן יפה בחכמה גדולה ביאת למפרע והמנהג הזה הוא מנהג חכמים קדמונים ותקן יפה בחכמה גדולה.

R. Yoḥanan ben Zakkai to make obligatory [the recital of *ʿAleynu*] daily in order to establish the pillar of faith," לקיים קיום האמונה (MS Oxford 1565, fol. 4a).<sup>75</sup> This precise expression, לקיים קיום האמונה, is used by de León in some of his writings, including *Sefer ha-Rimmon*<sup>76</sup> and *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*,<sup>77</sup> while the related expression, קיום האמונה, is also characteristic of de León, as we find, for example, in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*<sup>78</sup> and *Sefer ha-Mishqal*.<sup>79</sup> Both expressions have parallels in the *Zohar*. The latter term corresponds to the zoharic expression, קיומא דכל מהימנותא,<sup>80</sup> whereas the usage לקיימא קיומא, corresponding to לקיים קיום, is also found in the *Zohar*.<sup>81</sup> One should not, of course, make too much out of one parallel term, but this usage is unusual and it thus seems to be more than coincidental that it should appear in this letter, in de León's *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, in *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, and in the *Zohar*.

Another feature in this part of the document which is reminiscent of de León is the citation of pseudo-talmudic sources. The author cites two passages ostensibly from the Babylonian Talmud, one from the first chapter of *ʿArakhin* (according to some manuscripts *ʿEruvin*) and the other from *Zevahim*, which are not found in the specified tractates nor anywhere else in BT. In the first instance, it is reported that one of the decrees of Yoḥanan ben Zakkai was to institute the praise of the Land [of Israel], i.e., *ʿAleynu*, after the prayer: רבן יוחנן בן זכאי לבתר צלותא

<sup>75</sup> One may be reminded here of the use of *ʿAleynu* by martyrs, as in the well-known case of the persecution of the Jews of Blois in 1171. Cf. E. N. Adler, *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, 1:337, s.v. *ʿAleynu*. In the context of the pseudo-Hai letter and commentary, however, the establishing of the pillar of faith has a purely theosophical significance, i.e., through the utterance of this prayer the divine emanations, which collectively are the "principle of faith" (כלל האמונה; see MS Oxford 1565, fol. 6a, to be discussed below), are unified and blessed. The identification of the divine grades with faith, כלל האמונה, is found as well in an earlier part of the text; see *ibid.*, fol. 5a.

<sup>76</sup> *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 264.

<sup>77</sup> *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, ed. A. W. Greenup (London, 1911), p. 51.

<sup>78</sup> *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 339.

<sup>79</sup> *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, ed. J. Wijnhoven (Ph.D., diss., Brandeis University, 1964), pp. 52, 98, 106, 109. See also *She'elot u-Teshuvot le-R. Mosheh di Li'on be-ʿInyene Qabbalah*, in I. Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, 1:67.

<sup>80</sup> *Zohar* 3:35a; cf. Liebes, *Peraqim be-Millon Sefer ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 379–380, n. 94.

<sup>81</sup> See, e.g., *Zohar* 1:194b and 3:16b; Liebes, *ibid.*, pp. 364–365, nn. 36–39.

אתקין שבחא דהדורא דארעא (ms Oxford, 1565, fol. 4a). From a comment that immediately precedes the passage just cited it is clear that the author considered the institution of *Aleynu* to be one of the ordinances established by Yoḥanan ben Zakkai after the destruction of the Second Temple. While this motif is known from talmudic sources,<sup>82</sup> it does not appear in the tractate mentioned in the pseudo-Hai text or in this specific context. The second example, an interpretation of Deut 4:39, addresses the question why Moses did not recite the *Aleynu* outside the Land of Israel, by offering the following response: דאין אדם יהיב שבחא על מה דלא דאין לירייה (ibid., fol. 4b). It is known that in his Hebrew theosophic writings de León was prone to either cite a zoharic passage in the name of classical rabbinic sources or invent things in the name of the rabbis which resemble the *Zohar* stylistically and thematically, even though exact parallels cannot be found in the printed versions of that work.<sup>83</sup> The fact that in this document one finds as well pseudo-talmudic texts lends support to the hypothesis that de León is the author. (To be sure, de León is not the only medieval figure to forge rabbinic sources, but the fact that such a feature is characteristic of his work, coupled with the other literary aspects that have parallels in his writings, allows me to use this factor as one of the indicators that de León is the author of the text under investigation.) Interestingly, in the second part of the document—the kabbalistic commentary—one also finds a statement attributed to R. Shim'on for which there is no precise source in the classical rabbinic documents. The statement occurs in the context of divulging a true esoteric tradition (קבלה אמיתית) that equates Israel with the holy side and the nations with the demonic, evil side: ר' אב'ר' סימון בכל מקום צריך להפריש בין ישראל לשאר האומות באמירה בדיבור בלשון בשבח בתפלה (ms Oxford 1565, fol. 6b). The substance of this remark fits well with a basic theme repeated throughout the zoharic corpus and in the writings of de León to be discussed in greater detail below (4.2.1 [c]).

<sup>82</sup> On the various traditions concerning ordinances instituted by Yoḥanan ben Zakkai since the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, cf. tRH 2.9; bRH 29b, 30b, 31b; bBeṣ 5a; bSan 41a.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 34, n. 104, pp. 45–46 [English section]. See also ibid., pp. 89, 115, 312 [Hebrew section]. On de León's tendency to forge rabbinic sources, cf. I. Ta-Shema, "Ha-Pores Sukkat Shalom," pp. 188–189.

## 4.2 The Commentary

The strongest proofs of de León's authorship emerge from the second part of the text, the commentary on *Aleynu*, in accordance with standard sefirotic symbolism. A careful examination of this part proves beyond any doubt that it is the work of de León. This can be shown from several vantage points. Here I will mention three and supply a few examples of each: (1) similarity in technical terms or expressions, (2) identical use of biblical verses to derive a certain theosophical significance, and (3) parallel ideas and motifs.

4.2.1 There are precise terms and symbolic correspondences used in the commentary which are found elsewhere in de León's theosophic works.

(a) To begin with, in this commentary we read: "*Aleynu le-shabbeah*: In every place that you find *aleynu* it signifies a vow . . . And you will find that the vow is the thing which hangs upon the head from above and it is the place from which the life-force derives," עלינו לשבח בכל מקום את מוצא עלינו והוא קבלת נדר . . . ואת מוצא נדר הוא הדבר החלוי על ראש למעלה והוא מקום שהחיים באים ממנו. The precise expression at the end of the passage appears in *Zohar* 3:40a as a description of *Binah*, "the place which is called life and from which life emerges," אתר דאקרי. Moreover, in his writings de León frequently refers to *Binah* as the vow (נדר) and the place out of which the life-force (החיים)<sup>84</sup> emanates. To cite two examples: in *Shushan Edut* we read: "And the vow is above, attached to the eighth sphere [i.e., *Binah*] which establishes and sustains all . . . and the life-force emerges from it," והנדר הוא למעלה ונתלה בגלגל ה' . . . המעמיד הכל ומקיים הכל . . . והחיים יוצאים מתוכה.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, "The vow is above every place and from there is the source of life," נדר הוא למעלה על כל מקום שם תוצאות החיים.<sup>86</sup>

(b) To take a second example, we read in the commentary: "Thus [is the meaning] of *Aleynu le-shabbeah*, we participate in

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, p. 71.

<sup>85</sup> "Two Treatises," p. 361.

<sup>86</sup> *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 222 [Hebrew section]. See also *ibid.*, pp. 6, 148; "Two Treatises," pp. 360, 375; ms Munich 47, fols. 359b, 382b, 384a; *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, p. 72.

the light of life which stands above us . . . *le-shabbeah*, this praise is offered by the sensible light which is upon us, and it is the light of our lives in the pattern of the life-force which is revealed. . . . This is the sensible light, the gathering of the resplendent light above,<sup>87</sup> for it is joined to it with a firm bond," לשבח אור עלינו למעלה . . . לשבח אור חיים העומד עלינו למעלה . . . לשבח אור חיים הגלויים . . . הוא אור בזה אור החיים העומד עלינו למעלה שבת זה והוא שבת המשבח אור מורגש שעלינו והוא אור חיינו כדוגמת החיים הגלויים . . . הוא אור המורגש אסיפת אור הבהיר למעלה שמתקשר בו בקשר אמיץ. In de León's writings the "sensible light" (אור המורגש) is used frequently as a symbol for *Shekhinah*,<sup>88</sup> whereas the resplendent light, אור הבהיר, is used as a symbol for the masculine potency vis-à-vis the *Shekhinah*, usually identified as *Hesed*<sup>89</sup> but sometimes also as *Binah*<sup>90</sup> or *Tiferet*.<sup>91</sup> It is possible that in this context אור הבהיר is equivalent to another expression used by de León in contrast to the "sensible light," אור המורגש, viz., the "intelligible light" אור המושכל, which corresponds either to *Binah* or to *Tiferet*.<sup>92</sup> In at least one passage in his *Shushan 'Edut*, de León equates the term אור הבהיר with the light of the sun, in that context a symbol for *Tiferet*, which illuminates the moon, i.e., *Shekhinah*.<sup>93</sup> The important point is that de León utilizes the image of the two lights to characterize the unification of *Shekhinah*—also called אור החיים—with the upper masculine emanations. This process is implied as well in the image of the union of the sensible and resplendent lights. Furthermore, de León often uses expressions that resemble the end of the passage, שמתקשר בו בקשר אמיץ (this expression is used as well near the end of the text, fol. 6a: והשם המפורש אשר בכאן

<sup>87</sup> It is of interest to compare the expression used here to designate the *Shekhinah*, אסיפת אור הבהיר, and the expression used by de León to refer to *Shekhinah* in another one of his texts, *Mishkan ha-'Edut*, MS Berlin Quat. Or. 833, fol. 4a, אסיפת המשבח.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 27, 129, 169, 179; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, pp. 94, 123; MS Munich 47, fols. 342a, 374b, 375b, 376b, 383b; *Maskiyyot Kesef*, MS JTS Adler 1577, fol. 14b (ed. Wijnhoven, p. 31).

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 196; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, p. 123.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 153.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. MS Munich 47, fol. 376b; *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 109.

<sup>92</sup> See references in n. 87. Cf. G. Scholem, "Eine unbekannte mystische Schrift des Mose de Leon," *MGWJ* 71 (1927): 116. The source for this terminology is apparently Judah ha-Levi's *Cuzari* 1:69, as noted already by I. Tishby in his edition of *Perush ha-'Aggadot le-R. 'Azri'el* (Jerusalem, 1983), p. 34, n. 15.

<sup>93</sup> "Two Treatises," p. 348. See also MS Munich 47, fols. 348a, 376b.

י), to convey the notion of dynamic unity within the sefirotic realm. Thus, for example, in *Sefer ha-Rimmon* it is stated in one passage that “all [the emanations] are alluded to in the mystery of Wisdom and are joined [to it] with a firm bond,” כולם נרמזים בסוד חכמה ונקשרים בקשר אמיץ.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the use of the word קשר to refer to the unity of the sensible and intelligible lights, the feminine and masculine aspects of divinity, is also attested in de León’s writings.<sup>95</sup>

(c) Commenting on the words in *Aleynu*, שלא עשנו כגויי הארצות, the author notes that each nation has a corresponding gradation above whence that nation derives its power. The nations of the world collectively correspond to the demonic realm, whose ways are depicted as the impurity of the *niddah*—a standard zoharic theme<sup>96</sup>—whereas “the souls of Israel derive from the Tree of Life from within the sensible light like a crystal which receives the light of the sun,” שכל אומה אומה יש לה מדרגה וממשלה. למעלה ומשם שואבים האומות נפשותם . . . היתה דרכם כטומאת הנדה ונשמתן של ישראל נשאבת מאילן החיים בתוך אור המורגש כעשיית המקבל אור השמש (ms Oxford 1565, fol. 5a). While the twin themes of Israel’s ontological holiness and the nations’ impurity are quite prevalent in the *Zohar* and in de León’s Hebrew theosophic writings,<sup>97</sup> one zoharic passage in particular is noteworthy for almost the exact language of the above text is used to describe Israel: ישראל כלהון מתתקפין באילנא דחיי כלהו אחידין באילנא ממש.<sup>98</sup> In the commentary the nations are also compared to the branches of the tree whereas Israel is the trunk of the tree or its fruit, images that are utilized in the *Zohar* and by de León in his other writings.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 227; see *ibid.*, p. 41; “Two Treatises,” p. 339, and parallel in *Zohar* 1:89a; ms Munich 47, fols. 336a, 344b; ms Vat. 428, fol. 33b; *Mishkan ha-Edut*, ms Berlin Or. Quat. 833, fol. 23a.

<sup>95</sup> See, e.g., *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 129. See *ibid.*, p. 139. On the wide-ranging use of the root קשר in zoharic literature, see Liebes, *Peraqim*, pp. 394–402.

<sup>96</sup> *Zohar* 1:126b; *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 345.

<sup>97</sup> On the inherent impurity of the nations, cf. *Zohar*, 1:131a–b, 220a; 3:40a; *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 211–212. On the corresponding theme of Israel’s holiness, cf. *Zohar* 1:33a, 184b; 2:121b, 225b; 3:94a, 112b, 296b–297a; *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 89, 312; *Mishkan ha-Edut*, ms Berlin Or. Quat. 833, fol. 26a.

<sup>98</sup> *Zohar* 1:193a. Cf. Liebes, *Peraqim*, pp. 111, n. 21; 119, n. 73.

<sup>99</sup> See, e.g., *Zohar* 2:59a, 64b; 3:103b (*Piqqudin*); *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 177–178, 186; Liebes, *Peraqim*, p. 129, n. 120. On the use of the image of the fruit of the tree for the souls of Israel, cf. *Zohar* 1:226b; Liebes, *ibid.*, p. 126, n. 108.

Alternatively, in the commentary the souls of the nations are said to derive from the realm of impure forces, whereas the souls of Israel are said to derive from the Tree of Life which in the *Zohar* and in de León's Hebrew writings corresponds either to the sixth gradation, *Tif'eret*, or to the ninth, *Yesod*.<sup>100</sup> These souls emerge, however, from the sensible light, i.e., *Shekhinah*, which receives the flow of emanation from the masculine potency, *Tif'eret* or *Yesod*, as a crystal receives light from the sun. The notion of the emergence of souls from *Yesod* via the *Shekhinah* is widely attested in the works of de León and in the *Zohar*.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the latter image used to describe the *Shekhinah*, a crystal receiving light from the sun, is to be found in other writings of de León.<sup>102</sup> Finally, it will be noted as well that the interpretation of this passage from *Aleynu* has a close parallel in de León's *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, even though in that case the prayer is found as part of the Rosh ha-Shanah liturgy rather than of the daily service as advocated in the pseudo-Hai letter: שלא עשנו כגויי הארצות שיש עליהם שרים ממונים שולטים ונשפעים מהם כל אומה ואומה מכח אותה הסבה השולטת עליה והוא ית' נתן לישראל מעלה עליהם והוציאם מתחת ממשלת זרים.<sup>103</sup>

(d) Other terms used characteristically in the *Zohar* or by de León in his Hebrew theosophic works appear in this pseudo-Hai text as well. To name just a few of the more salient examples: the divine emanations, *sefirot*, are referred to collectively as gradations (מדרגות), which parallels the zoharic term דרגין;<sup>104</sup> *Hokhmah* is called המחשבה הסתומה;<sup>105</sup> *Binah* is זוהר החיים,<sup>106</sup> חביון עוזו,<sup>107</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *Zohar* 1:18a, 78b, 35a, 156b, 199a, 209a, 236b; 2:17b; 3:34a, 40a, 41a, 42b, 58b; 3:111a, 170a; *Zohar Hadash*, 87d; ms Munich 47, fol. 335b; "Two Treatises," pp. 330–331, 361, 381; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, pp. 14, 36, 60, 69; *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, p. 41. See Liebes, *Peraqim*, pp. 119–120, nn. 75–76.

<sup>101</sup> See, e.g., *Zohar* 1:13a, 17a, 115a, 186b, 205b; *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 166; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, p. 69; *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, p. 41. Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2:5–6.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. *Zohar* 2:82a.

<sup>103</sup> *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 156–157.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. ms Munich 47, fols. 379a, 381b; *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 20; "Two Treatises," p. 333; Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 400, n. 29.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. "Two Treatises," p. 375; ms Munich 47, fols. 379b–380a; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, pp. 8, 29. Cf. *Tiqqune Zohar*, ed. Margaliot, 5, fol. 19a.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, p. 67.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. "Two Treatises," p. 375; *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 6, 124, 153, 179; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, pp. 28, 31, 61.



and עץ חיים, הכל *Yesod*;<sup>108</sup> שכינת עוזו רוכצת על האפרוחים and ים הגדול;<sup>109</sup> and *Shekhinah* is designated as the מלך שהשלום שלו that gathers within itself the seven rivers corresponding to the seven lower *sefirot*.<sup>110</sup> Another feature found in this text which is known from other works of de León is the use of a symbol for *Binah*—in this case the term סתר הסתרים—which functions in the *Zohar* as a symbol for *Keter*.<sup>111</sup> One final example: towards the end of the document the author refers to the process of unifying all the elements in the secret of the inscribed explicit name (i.e., *YHWH*) whose pronunciation is hidden, and from whose secret all things above and below are created. The unity of these elements (the *sefirot*) within the divine name is referred to as the “principle of faith,” כלל האמונה. This very term is found in other works of de León<sup>112</sup> and an exact parallel, כלל דמהימנותא, occurs in the *Zohar*.<sup>113</sup>

4.2.2 The second area of comparison between this text and de León’s Hebrew theosophic writings and/or the *Zohar* is the use of similar verses in the same symbolic context.<sup>114</sup>

(a) Thus, for example, we read in the commentary: “Therefore one must complete [the prayer] against his will, for it is not to his

<sup>108</sup> Cf. *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, p. 72. Cf. *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 339.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, pp. 60, 69; ms Munich 47, fol. 367b.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. *Zohar* 2:56b.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. *Zohar* 1:15b; 3:128a. For another example of this phenomenon, see *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 52 [English section]. See also E. Wolfson, “Mystical-Theurgical Dimensions of Prayer in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*,” in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. D. Blumenthal (Atlanta, 1988), 3:69, n. 69.

<sup>112</sup> See, e.g., *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 118; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, p. 67.

<sup>113</sup> *Zohar* 3:288b (”*Idra’ Zuta*”).

<sup>114</sup> In one place in the commentary the expression in Ps 84:6, מסלול בלבבם, “whose mind is on the highways,” is understood in the light of Ps 68:5, סלו לרכב, “extol him who rides the clouds, the Lord is his name.” The same exegetical combining of these two verses is found in *Zohar* 1:142a. To take another example of this type of exegetical similarity: commenting on the expression in *Aleynu*, שהוא נוטה שמים, the author interprets the word הוא as a reference to the hidden and concealed gradation, i.e., *Binah*, and states that the symbolic meaning of the term is found in the verses “Only Levites shall perform the services,” הוא עשנו ולא אנחנו (Num 18:23), and “he made us and we are his,” הוא עשנו ולא אנחנו (Ps 100:3). The same two verses are cited together in de León’s *Sheqel ha-Qodesh* (p. 24), whereas the former verse is cited in a similar context, as an explanation of the words הוא אלהינו in the *Aleynu*, in *Sefer ha-Rimmon* (p. 15). The verse from Numbers is interpreted in a similar kabbalistic way in *Zohar* 3:171a.

benefit [not to do so], and if he transgresses it is as if he transgressed against the very nature of God, blessed be he. Concerning such [people] it is said, 'They shall go out and gaze on the corpses of the men who rebelled against me' (Isa 66:24), "על כן יש להשלים" בעל כרחו שלא בטובתו ואם פשע כאלו פשע בעצמו של מקום ב"ה ועל כן נאמר ויצאו וראו בפגרי האנשים (ms Oxford 1565, fol. 4b). The verse is given the same theurgical valence in several zoharic passages, but especially relevant is the following: "All the laws of the Torah are united in the body of the king. . . . Therefore the one who transgresses with respect to any of the commandments, is as one who transgresses with respect to the body of the king, as it is written, 'They shall go out and gaze on the corpses of the men who rebelled against me', . . . כל פקודי אורייתא מתאחדן בגופא דמלכא . . . ובגייני כך כל מאן דפשע בחד פקודי אורייתא כמאן דפשע בגופא דמלכא כמה דכתיב ויצאו וראו בפגרי האנשים הפושעים בו ואם פשע כאלו פשע בעצמו של מקום ב"ה, exactly parallels the zoharic passage מאן דפשע בחד פקודי אורייתא כמאן דפשע בגופא דמלכא, the only difference being that in the case of the latter the principle is applied universally to any transgression whereas in the former it is applied specifically to the case of uttering the prayer *Aleynu*.

(b) In the context of comparing the relationship of Israel to the nations with that of the tree to its branches (see 4.2.1[c]) the author notes that the branches, i.e., the nations, "destroy those who are attached (הנאחזים)<sup>115</sup> above who are the fruit and the tree [i.e., Israel], as it says, 'Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards' (Song 2:15), and it says, 'For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel' (Isa 5:7), until the time of pruning (עת הזמיר) comes (cf. Song 2:12), [the time] to cut down (לזמור) those who surround the tree, then the fruit will be produced as it truly should be and its leaves will be for healing'<sup>117</sup> (cf. Ezek 47:12)" (ms Oxford 1565, fol 5a). The expression עת הזמיר therefore refers not to a time of singing but to a time of cutting, an interpretation which is reflected already in the Targum to the verse, ועדן קטוף, בוכריא מטא, "the time to destroy the first-born [of the Egyptians]

<sup>115</sup> *Zohar* 2:85b.

<sup>116</sup> For parallel expressions in the *Zohar*, see Liebes, *Peraqim*, p. 119, n. 73.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. a similar description of the Tree of Life in *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 1, 108.

has come.”<sup>118</sup> According to the pseudo-Hai commentary, עת הזמיר refers to the time of cutting down the branches which surround the tree (the nations) so that the fruit (Israel) will flourish.<sup>119</sup> This interpretation is suggested in *Zohar* 1:97b: “The time of pruning has come, these are the branches of the forbidden tree” (ענפוי דערלה); literally, ‘branches of the uncircumcised’; cf. Lev 19:23). Although not stated overtly, it is obvious that the implied meaning of עת הזמיר is the time to destroy the nations of the world,<sup>120</sup> the demonic forces who are compared to the branches of the uncircumcised tree. What is implied here is stated more explicitly in *Zohar* 3:4b: “The time of pruning has come: the time to uproot the dominion of the princes of the nations, so that they will not rule over Israel when the Tabernacle is established.” It is interesting to note, moreover, that in another one of de León’s writings, *Mishkan ha-‘Edut*, he utilizes some of the same images removed from any exegetical context to characterize the ontological difference between Israel and the nations: “According to their secret and classification all the families of the earth are divided below. Israel is the unique nation among them, existing in [a state of] holiness and in the secret of the substance of the Holy One, blessed be he [i.e., the *sefirot*], which is extended to them in the secret of their holy form given to them from the river that goes forth incessantly [i.e., *Yesod*]. As there is a separation of the branches and leaves to which are attached the foxes (השועלים באחוז בהם השועלים), so that the

<sup>118</sup> Most of the traditional commentators explain עת הזמיר as a time of singing. Cf. Abraham ibn Ezra’s commentary ad loc. where both possibilities are given.

<sup>119</sup> A similar explanation of the word זמר is employed by Joseph Gikatilla to explain the mystical function of the psalms uttered before prayer, the פסוקי דזמרה. Cf. *Sha‘are ‘Orah*, ed. J. Ben-Shlomo (Jerusalem, 1981), 1:54; see also Isaac of Acre, *‘Oṣar Ḥayyim*, ms Moscow-Günzburg 775, fol. 44a. It is of interest to mention in this context one of the technical terms used by the *Zohar* to refer to kabbalists, “reapers of the field,” מחצרי חקלא. According to the interpretation of some kabbalists, e.g., Ḥayyim Vital, the import of this expression is that the kabbalists cut away the thorns, i.e., the demonic powers, from the field which is a symbol for the *Shekhinah*. For a wide-ranging discussion of this term, see Y. Liebes, “The Messiah of the *Zohar*,” pp. 146–148, n. 224.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Eleazar of Worms’ commentary to Song of Songs ad loc. (*Perush ha-Roqeaḥ ‘al Ḥamesh Megillot*, ed. Ch. Konyevsky [Benai Beraq, 1985], p. 119), where he similarly offers an explanation of עת הזמיר as a time “to cut down and destroy the nations.”

souls of the nations come forth from the place which is separate from that place which is the secret of holiness.”<sup>121</sup>

4.2.3 There is one final area of fruitful comparison, viz., shared ideas or motifs in this document and the rest of de León's corpus. I will present three examples.

(a) The first thing to note in this connection is a certain reticence on the part of the author of this text to divulge matters pertaining to speculation on the demonic realm. Thus, commenting on the words in *Aleynu*, “for they [the nations] bow down to nothingness and emptiness and they pray to a god who does not save,” שֶׁהֵם מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לְהַבֵּל וְרִיק מִתְפַּלְלִין אֵל אֵל לֹא יוֹשִׁיעַ, the author says, “We have received a tradition from R. Yosiyah ha-Parush, but it is inappropriate to put down in writing” (ms Oxford 1565, fol. 5b). The obvious reference here is to the demonic realm, the “alien gods” worshiped by the nations.<sup>122</sup> The notion that discussion of

<sup>121</sup> ms Berlin Or. Quat. 833, fol. 26a.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Scholem, “R. Moses of Burgos,” p. 278, n. 5, who suggests that this passage contains an anti-Christian allusion. Scholem's interpretation can be upheld only if one bears in mind that Christendom in the mundane sphere symbolizes the demonic force. Cf. W. Bacher, “Judaean-Christian Polemics in the *Zohar*,” *JQR* o.s. 3 (1891): 781–784; Y. Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia, 1978), 1:246–247; Liebes, “The Messiah of the *Zohar*,” p. 196; D. C. Matt, *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (New York, 1983), pp. 16–23. The demonic interpretation in the pseudo-Hai commentary should be compared to the more attenuated interpretation of the same passage from *Aleynu* in ms JTS 1768, fol. 99b (concerning this codex, see above, n. 19) in a section copied from *Sefer ha-ʿOrah*, here referring to Joseph Gikatilla's *Shaʿare ʿOrah* (see Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 195). I would like at this opportunity to correct my remarks in *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 57, where I erroneously described this text as a passage from Jacob ha-Kohen's *Shaʿare ʿOrah*. No such text, of course, was written by Jacob ha-Kohen, who did, however, compose a treatise with the title *Sefer ha-ʿOrah*. The use of the same title in the relevant passage from ms JTS 1768 to refer to Gikatilla's *Shaʿare ʿOrah* caused me to err, though my intention was to identify the text as a passage from Gikatilla's work. Cf. *Shaʿare ʿOrah*, 1:209–210, and Ben-Shlomo's introduction, pp. 34–36. The positive role which Gikatilla assigns to the nations of the world is related to his relatively more restrained view of evil as compared to the *Zohar*'s. Cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 239; idem, *Pirke Yesod be-Havanat ha-Qabbalah u-Semaleha* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 204–206; Ben-Shlomo, *Shaʿare ʿOrah*, pp. 36–39. On the other hand, Gikatilla alludes to one of the more daring and striking depictions of evil as originating in the impure forces within the divine thought, mythically portrayed as the primordial Edomite kings. Cf. *Shaʿare ʿOrah*, 2:104, already noted by Scholem, “Did R. Mosheh de León Write the

these powers should be restricted is well known from de León as well as from his Castilian predecessors, such as Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen,<sup>123</sup> Moses ben Simon of Burgos,<sup>124</sup> and Ṭodros ben Joseph ha-Levi Abulafia:<sup>125</sup> the tradition regarding the demonic powers was considered to be one of the most secret aspects of Kabbalah revealed only to the elite.<sup>126</sup> It can be shown that de León similarly considered the doctrine of the demonic side to comprise the most recondite kabbalistic secrets. Therefore, in his Hebrew theosophic writings, in marked contrast to the main body of the *Zohar*, he is extremely cautious about elaborating on this topic in print and often refers to it in language appropriate for the most esoteric part of the tradition.<sup>127</sup>

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*Zohar?*," p. 28 (in that context Scholem discussed also the treatment of this motif in Baḥya ben Asher's commentary on Gen 36:39); see also Liebes, "How the *Zohar* Was Written," pp. 56, 66–67. For the source of the zoharic notion of the Edomite kings in what appears to be a pseudepigraphic midrash used by Ṭodros Abulafia, cf. Liebes, "The Messiah of the *Zohar*," pp. 219–221. (This source too was already noted by Scholem, "Did R. Mosheh de León Write the *Zohar*?," p. 27.)

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Scholem, "The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac ha-Kohen," p. 244. See also "The Commentary of R. Isaac on Ezekiel's Chariot," [Hebrew] ed. G. Scholem, *Tarbiẓ* 2 (1931): 203, and 217, n. 107.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Scholem, "R. Moses of Burgos, the disciple of R. Isaac," [Hebrew] *Tarbiẓ* 4 (1933): 208, 211.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Ṭodros ben Joseph ha-Levi Abulafia, *ʿOṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Warsaw, 1879), fols. 3a, 10c, 11b–c, 12c, 13d, 14c, 17d, 23d; idem, *Sha'ar ha-Razim*, ed. M. Kushnir-Oron, p. 81 (and cf. the editor's remarks, pp. 24–29).

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Liebes, "The Messiah of the *Zohar*," pp. 123–125. See, however, Scholem, "R. Moses of Burgos," p. 280, who contrasts the circle of the Castilian kabbalists (Isaac ha-Kohen, Moses of Burgos, and Ṭodros Abulafia) with that of the *Zohar* on precisely the grounds that the former emphasized the truly esoteric nature of the doctrine, whereas the latter greatly expanded upon it and thereby reduced its esoteric quality. The doctrine of evil in the Castilian kabbalah has been widely discussed in scholarly literature. See G. Scholem, "The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac ha-Kohen," pp. 193–197; idem, "R. Moses of Burgos," p. 282–286; idem, *Pirque Yesod be-Havanat ha-Qabbalah u-Semaleha*, pp. 191–193; Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1:287–307; J. Dan, "Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah," *AJS Review* 5 (1980): 17–41; E. Wolfson, "Left Contained in the Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics," *AJS Review* 11 (1986): 28–32; idem, "Light Through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the *Zohar*," *HTR* 81 (1988): 78–84; M. Oron, "Was the Kabbalah in Castile a Continuation or a Revolution? A Study of the Concept of Evil in Castilian Kabbalah," [Hebrew] *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 383–392.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 42, 74, 77–78, 240–241, 277, 345, *Mishkan ha-ʿEdut*, ms Berlin Quat. Or. 833, fols. 2a, 13a, 19a, 23b, 57b, 58b. I do

(b) The characterization of the relationship between the nations of the world and the Jews in the *Aleynu* commentary has a striking parallel in the *Zohar*. The author compares the nations being sustained by the overflow of the Land of Israel to dogs waiting under the table for a bone to fall which they could lick: לאחר כן מתמצית ארץ ישראל כמה כלבים צועקים זה לזה ואומ' אם גורלך תפיל בתוכנו כיס אחד יהיה לכולנו כדוגמת הכלבים הממתינים תחת השולחנות לגרמא דנפיל ונשיך דא לדא עליה. The precise image is found in *Zohar* 3:197a, where the issue discussed is likewise the sustenance of the nations of the world by the overflow of Israel. In that context the sins of Israel are said to be cast upon the sea for the other nations, who are described as waiting and expecting "the gift from above like dogs before the table," וכי חטאין ישראל חובין, דלהון זורקין ומתפלגין לעמא דלהן אלא אינון מחכאן ומצפאן למתנן דלעילא ככלבי לקמי פתורא. In both instances it is obvious that the image of the dog functions as a symbol for the demonic other side, a standard theme in the kabbalistic symbolism of the *Zohar* and its Castilian sources.<sup>128</sup> The point of the two passages, then, is to say that the nations of the world are sustained by the residual overflow of Israel just like the demonic realm draws its sustenance from the holy realm of *sefirot*.

(c) The third example of this type is another statement in the commentary that has a remarkable resemblance to passages in de León's writings and in the *Zohar*. In the pseudo-Hai commentary we read that "R. Menahem the son of Ishmael said: Great is the praise of Joshua, for he instituted within it [the *Aleynu* prayer] five chariots, in each and every word there is a chariot," אתקין ביה

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not mean to suggest that the doctrine of the demonic plays an insignificant role in de León's kabbalah as it emerges from the Hebrew texts. On the specific role played by the demonic force in de León's *ṭa'ame ha-mišwot* see E. Wolfson, "Mystical Rationalization of the Commandments in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*," *HUCA* 59 (1988): 240–247.

<sup>128</sup> See, e.g., Scholem, "The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac," p. 256; Ṭodros Abulafia, *Ṣṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem*, fol. 3a (explicating a passage in bBQ 60b where a connection is made between the whine of dogs and the approach of the Angel of Death); idem, *Sha'ar ha-Razim*, pp. 88–90; *Zohar* 2:65a, 121b (cf. parallel in *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 313); 3:238a (*Ra'aya Mehemna*), 259b, 282a (*Ra'aya Mehemna*). As my colleague, Richard White, reminds me, the passage from the *Zohar* 3:197a (and the parallel in the pseudo-Hai commentary) comparing the nations of the world to dogs waiting under the table who feed on the crumbs of Israel is reminiscent of a passage in Mark 7:28 (cf. Matt 15:27).

חמש רתיכין בכל מלה ומלה רתיכא (ms Oxford 1565, fol. 5b). The linguistic notion that there is a chariot for each word resembles a position articulated in several of de León's other treatises, including the nontheosophic <sup>129</sup>*Or Zarua*<sup>c</sup> and the untitled fragment extant in ms Munich 47, fol. 370b. In both of these sources the issue concerns the first four letters of the Hebrew alphabet serving as a chariot for the letter *yod* which, in the case of the theosophic work, is identified as the second divine emanation, *Hokhmah*. In another text on linguistic mysticism, the *Sod Darke ha-<sup>3</sup>Otiyyot*, which may have been composed by de León or at the very least is derived from a circle with which he was involved,<sup>130</sup> one finds a similar expression: "each and every one [of the first four letters] produces a chariot of its own according to the secret of the vowel-point."<sup>131</sup> A similar view is expressed in the *Zohar*. Thus, for example, one passage says that "each and every letter is in a chariot that is appropriate to it," כל אות ואות ברתיכא דחזי ליה.<sup>132</sup> In the continuation of the same passage it is said of various letters that they "rise in their chariots," דקא סלקין ברתיכיהו. This linguistic concept is apparent as well in the *Sitre <sup>3</sup>Otiyyot* stratum of the *Zohar*, first printed in the Cremona *Zohar* (1558–60) in the section on Genesis (fols. 12a–14b) and later in the collection *Zohar Hadash* (first edition, Salonika, 1597).<sup>133</sup> That text begins with the following passage: "Within inscribed letters that are incised upon the concealment of the impression [or: side] of existence the chariots ascend as holy chariots, סלקן רתיכין ברתיכין קדישין. Each and every chariot ascends in an inscribed letter, כל רתיכא ורתיכא כל רתיכא באת רשימא . . . Each and every letter stands in the place of the chariot that is appropriate to it, כל את ואת קאים על קיומיה. דההוא רתיכא דאתחזי ליה."<sup>134</sup> I will not enter here into a lengthy

<sup>129</sup> Ed. A. Altmann, *Kobez 'al Yad* n.s. 9 (1980): 282ff.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. A. Farber, "On the Sources of Rabbi Moses de León's Early Kabbalistic System," [Hebrew] in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy, and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 67–96.

<sup>131</sup> ms Vat. 441, fol. 204b.

<sup>132</sup> *Zohar* 2:132a. Cf. the treatise of R. Isaac in "The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac ha-Kohen," p. 256.

<sup>133</sup> A critical edition of this work has been published by S. Wald as part of his study *The Doctrine of the Divine Name: An Introduction to Classical Kabbalistic Theology* (Atlanta, GA, 1988).

<sup>134</sup> *Zohar Hadash*, ed. R. Margaliot (Jerusalem, 1978), p. 1a. Cf. the critical text established by Wald, *Doctrine*, p. 153.

discussion of this linguistic notion to which I have dedicated a separate study.<sup>135</sup> What is essential for my purpose is to argue that the passing remark in the pseudo-Hai text must be seen as an analogue to what we find in de León's Hebrew writings and in the *Zohar*. This similarity is yet another indication that de León is in fact the author of the pseudo-Hai commentary.

Other examples could be adduced to support my claim, but I think that what I have already cited is sufficient to prove the point or at least to present a reasonable argument. The assumption that de León composed the text helps account for one final characteristic of the commentary. In this part of the text several personalities are mentioned who do not figure in the first part. The most important of these names to which I have already alluded are two ascetics said to have come from the Land of Israel, Abraham ha-Parush and Yosiyah ha-Parush. The kabbalistic commentary on *Aleynu* is said to have derived from the former and to have been transmitted through the latter. The use of the term *parush* (as well as its equivalent *nazir*, and to some extent *hasid*) as an epithet to characterize scholars who set themselves off from society is known especially from twelfth-century Provence.<sup>136</sup> To be sure, these terms have a longer history, but what is particularly relevant about the twelfth century is that at that time the ascetics (*perushim*) were also *ba'ale sod* (masters of esoteric lore) or *mequbbalim*. This factor has been documented by Scholem who relied on the work of previous historians.<sup>137</sup> What is critical from my vantage point is that in the twelfth-century material, especially of Provençal extraction, *parush* designates a member of a well-defined social group which had a vocation for the ascetic and contemplative life, somewhat detached from mundane affairs. On occasion the members of these ascetic groups were also expounders of the mystical tradition. In some cases, like Jacob ha-Nazir of Provence, the names refer to actual historical personalities, whereas in other cases, like Yosiyah ha-Parush in our document, they seem to be fictitious personalities appearing only in pseudepigraphic documents, although they may have been based on real characters, as

<sup>135</sup> Cf. E. Wolfson, "Letter Symbolism and *Merkavah* Imagery in the *Zohar*," in M. Hallamish, ed., *Alei Shefer: Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought Presented to Rabbi Dr. Alexandre Safran* (Bar-Ilan, 1990), pp. 195–236 (English Section).

<sup>136</sup> Cf. I. Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières: A Twelfth-Century Talmudist* (Cambridge, MA, 1962), pp. 26–28.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. *Origins*, pp. 229–231.



Scholem indeed has argued with respect to the aforementioned Yosiyah ha-Parush.<sup>138</sup>

As I noted above, in his *Origins of the Kabbalah*, Scholem mentions the commentary on *Aleynu* in his more general discussion of *perushim* in Northern France and Provence, although in that context he does not attribute the text to any particular mystical group or individual kabbalist.<sup>139</sup> In trying to determine the provenance of this text it is essential to bear in mind that one finds a very similar phenomenon in the case of the Castilian kabbalist, Isaac ha-Kohen, who had a decisive influence, conceptually and terminologically, upon the members of the zoharic circle, including de León. Perhaps the most important passage for our consideration is the well-known text in Isaac's *Treatise on Left Emanations*, wherein he describes his receiving from the kabbalistic sages (חכמי קבלה) in Arles, a pamphlet (קונדרט) transmitting secrets in the name of "the rabbi and gaon who was called R. Maṣliaḥ, the son of the elderly gaon, R. Pelatyah, who was from Jerusalem, the holy city." The pamphlet reportedly was brought to Arles by the "great sage and pious one (חסיד), R. Gershom of Damascus."<sup>140</sup> In still other places Isaac traces a particular esoteric tradition to a certain *ḥasid* who is further characterized as an ascetic (*parush*),<sup>141</sup> but the above passage is the one that most resembles what one finds in the pseudo-Hai commentary on *Aleynu*. Mention must also be made of the pseudepigraphic materials cited by two of R. Isaac's disciples, Moses of Burgos and Ṭodros Abulafia. The former reports in one context that Naḥmanides received a tradition concerning the fifth emanation from a certain Yosiyah ha-

<sup>138</sup> Cf. "R. Moses of Burgos," p. 279.

<sup>139</sup> See above, n. 40.

<sup>140</sup> Scholem, "The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac ha-Kohen," pp. 248–249. See also Dan, "Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil," pp. 32–33. In this context it is also in order to recall that according to a tradition reported by Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona, Jacob ha-Nazir, whom he calls Jacob he-Ḥasid, received a certain mystical and angelological tradition from R. Nehorai in Jerusalem. Cf. Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 232–233. In this regard, then, one can detect an interesting shift from what are presumably Provençal traditions to the later Castilian sources: according to the former the pietist travels from Provence to Jerusalem where he receives the mystical traditions, whereas in the case of the latter the mystical traditions are transmitted to Provence from Jerusalem (or, more generally, Israel).

<sup>141</sup> See, for instance, Scholem, "The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac ha-Kohen," p. 263.

Bavli,<sup>142</sup> whereas the latter had before him a tradition attributed to Yehoshiel ha-ʿAshkenazi.<sup>143</sup> Scholem was of the view that these three names, Yosiyah ha-Parush, Yosiyah ha-Bavli, and Yehoshiel ha-ʿAshkenazi refer to one and the same literary persona.<sup>144</sup> Further evidence for the circulation of such pseudepigraphic materials in this circle may be adduced from the relevant writings, one of the more important examples being the Aramaic text attributed to two geonic figures, Naṭronai and Naḥshon.<sup>145</sup> In spite of the obvious similarity between our text and the Castilian sources enumerated above, there is no reason to assume that the document under discussion was composed by Isaac or by someone in his immediate circle. The terminology from a literary and conceptual standpoint is simply not what we find in their writings. Moreover, we have no evidence to the effect that Isaac or his disciples attributed texts of an halakhic import to geonic figures in general and to Hai Gaon in particular.<sup>146</sup> By contrast, both of these conditions are fulfilled in

<sup>142</sup> Cf. G. Scholem, "R. Moses of Burgos, disciple of R. Isaac," [Hebrew] *Tarbiẓ* 4 (1933): 215.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. G. Scholem, "Notes and Addenda to the Catalogue of Hebrew Mss. in Munich (Kabbalistic Mss.)," [Hebrew] *Qiryat Sefer* 1 (1924–25): 291. Initially, Scholem identified the text referred to by Ṭodros Abulafia with a fuller responsum cited in the name of Yehushiel ha-ʿAshkenazi in an anonymous text containing twenty-four kabbalistic secrets. Subsequently, Scholem included these responsa in the list of writings which he attributed to the *ʿIyyun* circle. Cf. Scholem, "R. Moses of Burgos, disciple of R. Isaac," [Hebrew] *Tarbiẓ* 4 (1933): 68–70; idem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, p. 261. On another pseudepigraphic source utilized by Ṭodros Abulafia, see above n. 121. See also Scholem, *Origins*, p. 328, n. 265.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Scholem, "R. Moses of Burgos, disciple of R. Isaac," [Hebrew] *Tarbiẓ* 3 (1932): 278, n. 3.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 283–284. The text is cited as well in Moses of Burgos, *Sefer ha-ʿOrah*, MS Mussayef 145, fol. 60b; MS JTS 1806, fol. 14a. For another kabbalistic responsum (dealing with matters pertaining to the demonic realm) attributed to Naṭronai and Naḥshon, see Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov, *Sefer ha-ʿEmunot* (Jerusalem, 1969), fol. 56a; and cf. G. Scholem, "Kabbalistic Miscellaneous Notes," [Hebrew] *Qiryat Sefer* 1 (1924–25): 165.

<sup>146</sup> To be sure, Hai Gaon was viewed by the circle of Isaac as a master of kabbalistic lore and praxis. Cf. Scholem, "The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac ha-Kohen," pp. 192, 252. In addition, pseudo-Hai material circulated in this circle, as is attested by R. Moses of Burgos' commentary on the forty-two-letter name. Cf. G. Scholem, "R. Moses of Burgos, disciple of R. Isaac," [Hebrew] *Tarbiẓ* 5 (1933–34): 52. On the use of the pseudo-Hai responsum on the thirteen attributes deriving from the *ʿIyyun* circle in the case of Ṭodros Abulafia, cf. *ʿOṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem*, fol. 16c; *Shaʿar ha-Razim*, p. 116 (see editor's remarks on p. 19). Another

the case of de León, for not only are there numerous similarities between the text on *Aleynu* and the Hebrew writings of de León and the *Zohar*, but there is ample evidence indicating that de León did forge halakhic material in the name of geonic authorities. It is, however, plausible, indeed highly probable, that de León was influenced by the pseudepigraphic orientation of Isaac's circle as exemplified in the aforementioned sources.<sup>147</sup>

It must be emphasized that in most of de León's Hebrew writings he does not refer to such historical/fictitious characters. It is of interest to point out, however, that in the text on linguistic mysticism, *Sod Darkhe ha-<sup>3</sup>Otiyyot*, which, as I mentioned above, was in all probability written by de León or by a member of the circle of nontheosophic mystics to which de León at one point belonged, several of these figures are mentioned. Thus, at the beginning of the text, we read about Isaac ha-Parush who "at the time of his death had to reveal to us his [mystical] tradition and proper secrets."<sup>148</sup> The text goes on to describe how various people gathered together at that time to hear the disclosure of mystical secrets—principally concerned with the divine names—by the master, Isaac ha-Parush. The rabbis, who in their gathering are compared to the "great Sanhedrin," included Abraham ben David, Jacob the son of Meshullam of Damascus, Solomon ha-Kohen, and Jacob the Sephardi. One should be reminded immediately of the narrative setting for the concluding part of the *Zohar*, the so-called *<sup>3</sup>Idra<sup>3</sup> Zuṭa<sup>3</sup>*, the "Small Gathering," said to have taken place at the time of Shim<sup>c</sup>on ben Yoḥai's death.<sup>149</sup> It is an interest-

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pseudo-Hai text, perhaps composed by someone in this circle, is in MS JTS 1768, fol. 91a (see above, n. 19), transcribed in Danzig, "The Collection of Geonic Responsa," p. 24, n. 14. My contention is, however, that the pseudo-Hai material in the writings of Isaac and his disciples is never of an halakhic nature, as it is in the case of de León.

<sup>147</sup> See above, n. 41. On Isaac's pseudepigraphic style, see J. Dan, "The Kabbalistic Book *Baddei ha-Aron* and Kabbalistic Pseudepigraphy in the Thirteenth Century," [Hebrew] in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy, and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby on his Seventy-fifth Birthday*, pp. 132–133.

<sup>148</sup> MS Vat. 441, fol. 183a.

<sup>149</sup> *Zohar* 3:287b. It is worthwhile to note in this context that an early account of R. Shim<sup>c</sup>on's death is included in *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* (*Zohar Ḥadash*, 18d–19a) and is alluded to at the beginning of *<sup>3</sup>Idra<sup>3</sup> Zuṭa<sup>3</sup>* (*Zohar* 3:287b); cf. Liebes, "How the *Zohar* Was Written," p. 6, n. 20. See *ibid.*, pp. 68–69, where Liebes suggests a link connecting the fictional death of R. Shim<sup>c</sup>on in the *Zohar* to the actual death

ing fact, never before discussed to my knowledge, that this early text has such a strong literary similarity to the *ʿIdraʿ Zuṭaʿ*. The pretext for disclosure of esoteric doctrine is the imminent death of the master, who gathers together various figures in order to transmit his knowledge before he passes away.<sup>150</sup> What is most significant is the fact that in this early text the mystical knowledge is likewise placed in the mouths of the ascetics, many of whom can be identified as Provençal figures.

## 5. Conclusion

From the evidence that I have marshaled above it is clear to me that the text which I have discussed in this paper represents yet another example of Moses de León's pseudepigraphic activity. The text analyzed above is an important chapter in de León's intellectual career. It represents the period when he began to come under the influence of the theosophic kabbalists in Castile, sometime in the latter part of the 1270's. In all likelihood it was in this period that de León composed similar pseudepigraphic writings like the pseudo-Hai responsa included in *Shaʿare Teshuvah*. At this juncture it appears that one of his main interests was placing kabbalistic ideas within halakhic contexts. It is of special interest that in this treatise de León, perhaps following Isaac ha-Kohen and other

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of R. ʿTodoros Abulafia in 1283. (For the different views regarding the date of R. ʿTodoros' death see Oron, *Shaʿar ha-Razim*, p. 13, n. 1.) In this context mention should also be made of the fact that within the *Zohar* itself one can discern several versions of the *ʿIdrot*. Cf. Liebes, "The Messiah of the *Zohar*," pp. 94–101.

<sup>150</sup> In the *Midrash ha-Neʿelam* narrative of the colleagues visiting R. Shimʿon on his deathbed (see preceeding note) the occasion is not pointed out as the most auspicious time to reveal secrets, though R. Shimʿon himself does ascend heavenward, where he gains knowledge of the place of the souls of the righteous (including Adam) in the world-to-come. On the other hand, towards the conclusion of this account R. Shimʿon offers the following interpretation of the verse "[Go down, warn the people] not to break through to the Lord to gaze, lest many of them perish" (Exod 19:21): "What is the meaning of 'lest many of them perish' (וְנָפְלוּ מֵעַם רַב) (מִמֶּנּוּ רַב)? I have interpreted it thus: the comrade (חֲבֵרָא) who instructs everyone about the holy name will fall and be caught in that sin more than they, as it is written, וְנָפְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ רַב, i.e., the master (הָרֵב) will fall and be caught in that sin." While no disclosure of the secrets connected with the divine names is made in this account, it is noteworthy that the last thing that R. Shimʿon instructs his colleagues and disciples about is the need to exercise discretion and caution in revealing the name of God (presumably the Tetragrammaton).

members of his circle, attributes the esoteric lore (reported by Hai) to fictitious ascetics who are patterned after the historical figures in Provence. The same technique was employed in the nontheosophic text *Sod Darke ha-<sup>3</sup>Otiyyot*, and traces of it can be detected in the *Zohar* as well.<sup>151</sup> The letter and commentary on *Aleynu* thus provide us with important textual evidence for the beginning of de León's shift from early linguistic mysticism to mature theosophic kabbalah. I further assume that this work postdates *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, considered to be the earliest stratum of the *Zohar* proper, insofar as the theosophic symbolism in this text is much more distinctive than it is in *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, including the latter parts of this work, such as the commentary on the Book of Ruth.<sup>152</sup> On the other hand, the commentary on *Aleynu* is, as I have shown, filled with interesting parallels to the main body of the *Zohar*, thematic, stylistic, and exegetical in nature. What is lacking here is any direct citation from the *Zohar* in the fictitious guise of an ancient midrash, a common trait of de León, as may be gathered from his Hebrew writings which may be dated from 1286 to 1293. Nevertheless, the similarities to the *Zohar* are unmistakable. The obvious zoharic parallels in this document provide further evidence that de León—whether as author or as editor—later wove into the texture of the *Zohar* passages, themes, and exegetical comments from his own earlier writings, sometimes in entirely different contexts. The continual study of texts such as the one discussed in this paper, some of which may still be buried in manuscripts, remains a desideratum, for only such study will help clarify with more accuracy the unresolved problem of the process of literary composition of one of the most intriguing books in the history of Jewish spirituality.

<sup>151</sup> See, e.g., *Zohar* 3:186a, where mention is made of R. Shema<sup>c</sup>yah the Pious (שמעיה חסידא). On other fictitious figures who appear as revealers of esoteric truths in the *Zohar*, cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1:26–27.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2:39; Ch. Mopsik, *Le Zohar: Le Livre de Ruth* (Paris, 1987), pp. 6–7. It is, of course, necessary to distinguish different literary strata even within *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* itself, for some parts of the latter contain material that is found in some of the presumably later strata, e.g., *Matnitin*, *Tosefta<sup>2</sup>*, *Sitre Torah*, and the *'Idrot*. See E. Gottlieb, *Mehqarim be-Sifrut ha-Qabbalah* (Tel-Aviv, 1976), pp. 203–204; Liebes, "How the *Zohar* Was Written," p. 6, n. 20.

## APPENDIX

Presented in this appendix is a transcription of the letter and commentary on *Aleynu* attributed to R. Hai Gaon as it appears in MS Oxford-Bodleian 1565, fols. 3b–6a. While this text has been printed several times (see above, nn. 27–29), the version extant in the manuscript which I have selected constitutes a text far superior in most cases to what has been published. In the notes in the critical apparatus I have identified basic biblical and rabbinic sources and have enumerated variant readings only in cases where the other manuscripts may preserve a preferred reading or at least where the reading in the Oxford manuscript is questionable. I have not noted the many kabbalistic parallels in the writings of Moses de León or the *Zohar*, as these are fully annotated in the paper itself.

*Sigla of MSS and Printed Texts*

א = MS Oxford-Bodleian 1565

ב = MS JTS Mic. 3216

ו = MS Vienna 113

ט = MS Vatican 191

י = *Yad Ne'eman* (Salonika, 1804)

מ = *Ma'or wa-Shemesh* (Livorno, 1839) = MS Paris 181

פ = MS Paris 835

## כ"י אוקספורד 1565 דף 3ב-א6

[3ב] פירוש עלינו לשבח ונוסח האגרת ששלח רבינו הא"י גאון ז"ל אנדלק אשר בסוף ים הודו בסוף ים מערב<sup>1</sup> וראשיהם החכמים הנבונים בעלי השכל וחכמה הרב ר' נתן והרב ר' שאלתיאל והרב ר' קלונימוס נר"ו ושאר החכמים הנבונים המשכילים בכל ספר וחכמה. שלום הגיעה אלינו האגרת אשר שלחתם ונועם מליצותיכם ודקדוק שאלתכם ועמדנו על

<sup>1</sup> אנדלק אשר בסוף ים מערב בארץ הודו אל יושבי אי אנדלק בסוף ים הודו בסוף ים מערב ו אנדלק אשר בסוף ים מערב בארץ (מארץ ב) הודו אליכם יושבי אי אנדלק בסוף ים הודו ובסוף ים מערב מב אנדלק אשר בסוף ים מערב מארץ הודו אל יושבי אי אנדלק בסוף ים מערב פ אנדלק אשר בסוף ים מערב בארץ הודו אל יושבי אי אנדלק בסוף ים הודו ובסוף ים מערב ט אנדלוס אשר בסוף ים מערב בארץ הודו י

דבר ודבר אבל מפני עוצם ותוקף השאלות אשר סבבונו מכל פאות ומזרח וצפון ומקצת ארצות אחרות עכבנו את שלוחכם ולא יכולנו להאריך בשלומכם שיגדל השם לעד. אבל מה ששאלתם והודעתם בכתבכם כי יש בידכם אגרות מהרב רבי' גרשום ז"ל והאגרת מרב אלפאסי ז"ל משאלותיכם וענין עלינו לשבח אשר שאלתם. והודע הרב אלפאסי ז"ל כי עלינו לשבח תקנת גאונים היתה לומר' אחר התפלה בכל יום מפני שהוא שבח גדול ומעלת יוצרינו ית' כפי מה שאמ' ותקן יהושע בר נון<sup>2</sup> נר ישראל נר<sup>3</sup> הבהיר בהכניסו ישראל לארץ והגיעו אל מקום יתד התקועה<sup>4</sup> המכוון כנגד כסא הכבוד למעלה. ואשר שאלתם מפני מה אומרים אותו חוצה לארץ הואיל והגיעו ימים ללא אלהי אמת ולא כהן מורה<sup>5</sup> ויהושע לא אמ' ותקן זה אלא בארץ. והשיב הרב ז"ל שאלו היתה מעשה עבודה מעבודת בית המקדש אסור לעשות בחוצה לארץ. אבל עבודה שהיא בדיבור ולא במעשה יש לנו לומר כגון במקדש שהיו אומרים בשעת הקרבן רצה ואשי ישראל. וכבר ראינו שבטלה העבודה ואנחנו בחוצה לארץ ובכל יום חובה עלינו לומר' זה. וכן עלינו לשבח תקנו מתקנות הגאונים לומר' בכל יום אחר התפלה אע"פ שאנו בחוצה לארץ. שבח התלויה בפה הוא ועבודה אמירה הוא עד כאן. ומה שהודעתם תשובת' רבי' גרשום ז"ל

[4א] שאמ' בענין אחר כי עלינו לשבח אמרן לאחר שהנחיל לישראל הארץ וכבר היה להם אלוה בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת אין עוד<sup>6</sup> מה שלא היה כן קודם לכן אע"פ שכל אותם מעלות היה להם בימי משה לא נתקיים דבר זה בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת אלא בארץ הקדושה ואז יתקן עלינו לשבח. ומפני מה אומרים אותו בחוצה לארץ. והודיע תקנה זו תקן רבן יוחנן בן זכאי עם כל התקנות<sup>7</sup> שתקן לומר אותו בכל יום אחר עבודת התפלה לאחר שנחרב הבית מפני שבימיו נחרב והוא היה שם ויצא לאספרייניוס ברוב חכמה ואע"פ שאבא סיקרא בן אחותו היה ראש הפריצים ונחרב הבית והוא תקן תקנות הרבה. ועלינו לשבח לומר בכל יום

<sup>2</sup> ראה סידור רבנו שלמה מיוחס לרבנו שלמה ב"ר שמשון מגרמיזא וסידור חסיד אשכנז, מאת משה הרשלר (ירושלים, תשל"ב), עמ' 124, 126 (בשם ר' יהודה החסיד); ר' אברהם ב"ר עזריאל, ספר ערוגת הבשם, מאת אפרים א. אורבך (ירושלים, תשכ"ג), כרך ג, עמ' 469; ר' נתן ב"ר יהודה, ספר מחכים, מאת יעקב פריימאן (קראקא, תרס"ט), עמ' יג; ר' אהרן הכהן מלונזל, ספר אורחות חיים (ירושלים, תשמ"ו), כרך א, כא ע"ג, הלכות אחר י"ח, סי' ח' (בשם ר' יהודה מקורביל) ומא"ח הועתק בכל בו סי' טז ועיין שם סי' קכב; תשובות הגאונים שערי תשובה, מאת זאב וואלף לייטער (פיטסבורג, תש"ו), סי' מד (בשם ר' האי גאון); קובץ של סודות חסידיים-אשכנזיים בכ"י ניו-יורק בהמ"ל 2430, דף 77 ע"ב; ר' דוד בן יהודה החסיד, אור זרוע, כ"י ניו-יורק בהמ"ל 2203, דף 34 ע"א.

<sup>3</sup> אור ב פ מ י ט

<sup>4</sup> ישע' כב: כה.

<sup>5</sup> דה"ב טו: ג.

<sup>6</sup> דב' ד: לט.

<sup>7</sup> ראה תוס' ר"ה ב: ט; בבלי ר"ה כט ע"ב; סנהדרין מא ע"א; ביצה ה ע"א.

אותו מתקנותיו היה. וגרסי<sup>8</sup> בערכי<sup>9</sup> פ"ק<sup>10</sup> ומני מגזרי רבן יוחנן בן זכאי שבחא דהדורא דארעא לבתר צלותא אתקין. והטעם לומ' אותו בחוצה לארץ לאחר התפלה הוא מפני שכל ישראל צריכין תפלתם וכוונתם לצד הארץ כדאמ' וכוין פתיחן ליה בעלייתיה נגד ירושלם<sup>11</sup> ואלו נצאים בכוונתם לצד המקדש והואיל וכל התפלות עולות כוונת המקדש עלינו לשבח בכוונת המקדש הוא ובארץ הוא ועולה על כל הכוונות שכבר נתקנו במקדש. ע"כ יש להשיב לכם על זה ולברור הדרך הישר ודיין האמת למען לא תהיו נבוכים ומשובשים ברוב הדעות ואע"פ שדעתנו קצרה מלהשיב אומרים ממחשבת דעתנו. אבל יש לאל ידינו במה שקבלנו וראינו ובמה שלמדנו מרביתנו עמודי עולם. ובתחלה יש להשיב כי תשובת רבי' גרשום למעלה מתשובת רב אלפסי ז"ל ובאמת כי תקן יהושע לאחר קדושת הארץ כדברי חז"ל<sup>12</sup> ונתקיים מה שאמ' הרב ז"ל בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת שנמצא או שם<sup>13</sup> אלהות. ועל כל פנים תקנת רבן יוחנן בן זכאי ע"ה הוא שחובה על האדם הוא בכל יום לקיים קיום האמונה. ומאי דרוש וידעת היום והשבות אל לבבך כי יי' הוא

[ב] האלהים וכו'.<sup>14</sup> וגרסי' בזבחים<sup>15</sup> וידעת היום בארץ והשבות אל לבבך בחוצה לארץ. אי הכי משה אמאי לא אמ' בחוצה לארץ אלא משה לא אמ' דאין אדם יהיב שבחא על מה דלא אתי לידיה ואכן אע"ג דהוינא בחוצה לארץ כבר אתי לידן. ויש לומר אותו בכוונה בעמידה<sup>16</sup> בעטיפת ראש מפני שאין שבח כמותו ליצרנו ועולה על כל השבחות שבעולם. ומפני שראינו בשפולי האגרת פייס מהרב ר' קלנימוס והרב ר' נתן יצ"ו לרמוז להם רמז וראיתי בכת' המיוחד אשר שלחו אלינו ראינו כי חכמת אלהים בלבם. יודע לכבודכם כי הענין עלינו לשבח היה קבלה מרבתי' ז"ל בידינו גנוז וחתום וכאשר בא רבינו יאשיה הפי' הלוי בא מארץ ישראל ועבר עלינו אמ' לנו שמצא בספרים רבים אברהם הפרוש קרובו ענין זה והכל אחד ועניינים אחרים שלא היה בידינו קבלנו ממנו ונרמוז לכם מעט. עלינו לשבח בכל מקום את מוצא עלינו והוא קבלת נדר סתם כדגרסי<sup>17</sup>

<sup>8</sup> ליתא.

<sup>9</sup> בתוספתא דערכין י' בערכין ת' בתוספות בערכין ב' בתוספות דערכין ם בעירובין ו'

<sup>10</sup> פוק י' מ ב ט ופוק פ'

<sup>11</sup> דני' ו': יא.

<sup>12</sup> השווה בבלי ברכות מח ע"ב.

<sup>13</sup> ליתא י' ב מ פ ט אז שם ו'

<sup>14</sup> דב' ד: לט.

<sup>15</sup> ליתא.

<sup>16</sup> כך מתפרש במאמר המובא בשם פרקי רבי אליעזר בס' אורחות חיים ומשם בכל בו וכן בס' מחכים. ראה לעיל הערה 2. השווה חיד"א, מחזיק ברכה (ליוורנו, תקמ"ה), סי' קלב; סדר היום לר' משה אבן מכיר (לובלין, תרל"ו), יב ע"ד; ספר שלמי צבור לר' ישראל יעקב אלגאזי (ירושלים, תשמ"ז), עמ' שעז; ספר טהרת הקודש הקדמון (ירושלים, תשמ"ט), עמ' פט.

<sup>17</sup> בבלי מגילה ח ע"א.



מה בין נדר לנדבה עלי להביא קרבן וכו'. ואת מוצא נדר הוא הדבר התלוי על ראש למעלה והוא מקום שהחיים באים ממנו. וגרסי<sup>18</sup> בנדרים נדר כנשבע בחיי המלך. וזהו לשון עלינו שמקום שעומד עליו משותף. והכא עלינו לשבח אנו משתפין בזה אור החיים העומד עלינו למעלה שיש בשיתוף עמנו. לשבח שבח זה והוא שבח שמשבח אור מורגש שעלינו והוא אור חיינו כדוגמת החיים הגלויים. עלינו למלך למעלה וכן בכל מקום עלי עלינו עלי אלהים נדריך<sup>19</sup> הוא אור המורגש אסיפת אור הבהיר למעלה שמתקשר בו בקשר אמיץ<sup>20</sup> באותו דבר. על כן יש להשלים בעל כרחו שלא בטובתו ואם פשע כאלו פשע בעצמו של מקום ב"ה ועל אלו נאמר ויצאו וראו בפגרי האנשים.<sup>21</sup> לאדון הכל זוהר החיים הנקרא חביון עוזו.<sup>22</sup> הכל עץ החיים מלך שהשלוש שלו<sup>23</sup> הוא הכל. לתת גדולה כלל כל שש קצוות. והכי נקטינן רז"ל המדרגות כדי לחבר עמנו בהוא שעלינו כלל כל המדרגות ממדרגה למדרגה כי אין לבוא

[א5] למעלה סתר הסתרים ריקם אלא במדותיו הראויים לו. ליוצר בראשית הרי סתר הסתרים עליו וחובת כל המדרגות שהוא יוצר מחשבותיו הזכה והטהורה והמציא אותה. ועל זה מאחר שהמציא מחשבתו היוצר הכל מיד עלינו במחשבה כדגרסי<sup>24</sup> בתוספת ישראל עלו במחשבה.<sup>25</sup> על כן שבח זה אינו כשאר כל השבחות והתפלות מפני שבכאן נכללין כל עיקרים ויסודות ומדרגות כל האמונה מה שאין הפה יכולה לדבר והלב יכולה להרהר. ר' מנחם בר' ישמעאל אומ' גדולה שבחא דיהושע דהוא אתקין ביה חמש רתיכין בכל מלה ומלה רתיכא ואית ביה עשרה מאמרות דבראשית<sup>26</sup> וחמשה חומשי תורה בכללן. שלא עשנו כגויי הארצות מפני תוקף ועוצם המעלה העליונה הכל בדרך נסתר. שלא עשנו כשאר האומות שכל אומה ואומה יש לה מדרגה וממשלה למעלה ומשם שואבים האומות נפשותם נפרדים אלו מאלו ומשם יפרד בחלוקי יסודות הנפרדים מלמטה למטה היתה דרכם כטומאת הנדה. ונשמתן של ישראל נשאבת מאילן החיים בתוך אור המורגש כעשישית המקבל אור השמש. שלא שם חלקינו בהם דכתיב כי חלק יי' עמו<sup>27</sup> והנחילו לשאר עמים וחלק אותם לשרים ומשרתים בתוך

<sup>18</sup> ספרי במדבר קנ"ג.

<sup>19</sup> תהי' נו: יג.

<sup>20</sup> שמ"ב טו: יב.

<sup>21</sup> ישע' סו: כד.

<sup>22</sup> חבק' ג: ד.

<sup>23</sup> ע"פ שה"ש רבה א: א; במדבר רבה יב: ד.

<sup>24</sup> בתוס' מ' בתוספתא פ' ב' ו' ט

<sup>25</sup> בראשית רבה א: ד.

<sup>26</sup> ע"פ המאמר "עשרה מאמרות שבהן נברא עולם [עין אבות מ"ה פ"א; אבות דרבי נתן נז"א פל"א] . . . בראשית נמי מאמר הוא." ראה בבלי ראש השנה לב ע"א; מגילה כא ע"ב.

<sup>27</sup> דב' לב: ט.

ענפי האילן הנאחזים בתוכו למטה המחבלים אותם הנאחזים למעלה שהם הפרי והאילן כענין אומרו אחזו לנו שועלים שועלים קטנים מחבלים כרמים<sup>28</sup> וכתיב כי כרם יי צבאות בית ישראל<sup>29</sup> עד שיגיע עת הזמיר<sup>30</sup> לזמור אותם סביבות האילן ואז יעשה הפרי לאמתו ועלהו לתרופה.<sup>31</sup> וגורלנו ככל המונם שהם משתחווים להבל וריק בהנחיל עליון שבעה נהרותיו הגנוזים הנעלמים לתוך הים הגדול וכל אותן הנהרות כוונתם אל מקום אחד. ועל ירושלם ידו גורל<sup>32</sup> באהבה ובכוונה שלימה מתנה רחבה ומלאה כי הגורל גורל ליי.<sup>33</sup> לאחר כן מתמצית ארץ ישראל

[ב] כמה כלבים צועקים זה לזה ואומ' אם גורלך תפיל בתוכנו כיס אחד יהיה לכולנו<sup>34</sup> כדוגמת הכלבים הממתינים תחת השולחנות לגרמא דנפיל ונשיך דא לדא עליה ובימי הגלות בעונותינו שגרמו הסעודה אוכלים הכלבים וישראל מתמצית הראשונה ממה שאכלו ניזונו וזהו דכתי' ומשביע לכל חי רצון<sup>35</sup> כתי' ולא כל כי האם הקדושה גונת בין שדיה לבנה ישראל מעט רצון מחפץ עליון שמקבלת לעצמה. ואע"פ שאוכלין הכלבים אינם אוכלי' אלא הלעסט הנמלים ולא מחפץ רצון עליון אלא כשם שמאכיל לחולה שימות ודאי בשר שור בשר כל דבר רע כי כן מות הוא וזהו דכתיב כירק עשב נתתי לכם את כל<sup>36</sup> כי בודאי בן מות אותם. אבל ישראל בני אל חי והוא משביע אותנו רצון השקוי הטוב רפואות לנפש ומרפא לעצם<sup>37</sup> וזהו ומשביע לכל חי רצון. שהם משתחווים להבל וריק ומתפללין אל אל לא יושיע כמה קבלנו קבלה אמיתית מר' יאשיה הפרוש ואין ראוי לכתוב בכתובה כי הנסתרות ליי' אלהינו.<sup>38</sup> אנו משתחווים בלא וא"ו שאין ראוי לומר וא"ו שהוא תוספת על הדבר הראשון.<sup>39</sup> משתחווים להבל וריק כמו מלכים יראו וקמו שרים וישתחוו וא"ו בתוספת על הראשונות בתעלות ובין באהלות.<sup>40</sup> אמ' ר' סימון בכל מקום צריך להפריש בין ישראל לשאר האומות באמירה בדיבור בלשון בשבח בתפלה. ועל כן צריך להתעכב בהם כ"ש במרום הזה והשטן מזומן לקטרג וצריך לשמור כ"ש וכ"ש בשבח

<sup>28</sup> שה"ש ב: טו.

<sup>29</sup> ישע' ה: ז.

<sup>30</sup> ע"פ שה"ש ב: יב.

<sup>31</sup> יחז' מז: יב.

<sup>32</sup> עוב' א: יא.

<sup>33</sup> ויק' טז: ו.

<sup>34</sup> משלי א: יד.

<sup>35</sup> תהל' קמה: טז.

<sup>36</sup> ברא' ט: ג.

<sup>37</sup> משלי טז: כד.

<sup>38</sup> דב' כט: כח.

<sup>39</sup> ראה בבלי פסחים ה ע"א ומקבילות.

<sup>40</sup> בתעלות ובין באהלות ו כדאמרי' בתעניות וכן באהלות י' בתעניות ב' בתעניות וכן

גדול זה שלא יקטרג בו. וקבלנו<sup>41</sup> כי בשעה שישראל אומרי' שבח זה ומשתחוים באימה ביראה ברתת חפוי ראש כל צבא מרום שומעי' והקב"ה עומד עם פמליא שלו וכלם עונים ואומרים אשרי העם שככה לו וגו'.<sup>42</sup> אשרי אדם עוז לו בך מסלות בלבבם.<sup>43</sup> מאי מסלות בלבבם כדאמרי' סלו לרוכב בערבות ביה שמו.<sup>44</sup> לפני מלך מלכי

[6א] המלכים הקב"ה. בכל מקום את מוצא ענין השתחויה לפני יי' ועכשי לפני סתר הסתרים אשר אין ראוי לדבר בפה כי כבר נחעלינו בשאר תושבחות ושירות ותפלות ואנו במדרגה עליונה לפני גנוז הנסתר העליון אשר אין חוש בו מלך עליון בסתר אשר אין נמצא ונחקר בשום צד מלכי מחשבה וחביון עוזו. המלכים כל שאר שש קצוות. הב"ה אור המורגש הב"ה אשר לאהרן.<sup>45</sup> שהוא נוטה שמים מפני שהוא בסוד מדרגה עליונה חוזר הענין על אותו הנסתר הנעלם הנקרא הוא וסודו ועבד הלוי הוא<sup>46</sup> [הוא]<sup>47</sup> עשנו ולא אנחנו.<sup>48</sup> נוטה שמים קרא נטייה והוא<sup>49</sup> ובאמצע שאין כן ביוד שהיא כפופה וזה נטוי באמצע השם. ויוסד ארץ ה"א בסוף אותיות השם מיוסדות על תוכן האמונה מתוך יסוד העולם ולפי' יסוד בארץ הוא. ומושב יקרו יקרו הוא כסא העליון הנעלם היושב על השמים הנזכרים והנטוי ביו"ד וא"ו. וזהו הענין המחשבה הסתומה ולפי' נקרא יקרו כדאמ' ודבר יי' היה יקר בימים ההם.<sup>50</sup> דבר יי' שאינו נמצא כלל הוא יקר ביוקר. ושכינת עוזו הוא חביון עוזו שאמרנו שכינה של מעלה בגובהי מרומים. גובהי מרומים הם נהרי האפרסמון העליונים שאמרנו. ושכינת עוזו רובצת על האפרוחים<sup>51</sup> הבנים על גובה אברתם פורשת כנפיה עליהם. וזהו וגובה להם ויראה להם כי החיות יש להם גובה על הכל בסוד וא"ו למעלה. ומאחר שהזכרון כל עיקרי היסודות כלל האמונה מיחדים הכל בסוד שם החקוק המפורש הנסתר בהגיותיו אשר מסודו נבראו שמים וארץ מעלה ומטה וארבע רוחות העולם. ואמ' הוא אלהינו מקיימי אחדות הכל

<sup>41</sup> ראה ההגהה של ר' אברהם ב"ר ישעיה הורוויץ מספר עמק ברכה לר' אברהם ב"ר שבתי שעפטל הורוויץ בסידור שער השמים לר' ישעיה הורוויץ, עמ' 246, שהביא הלשון של ר' משה כלץ בספר המוסר לאביו ר' יהודה כלץ (ירושלים, תשל"ג), עמ' קא, המבוססת על התשובה המיוחסת לר' האי: "וקבלנו שיש לומר שבח זה ומשתחוה באימה וביראה וברתת ובזיע בשיפוי ראש כי כל צבא השמים שומעים והקב"ה עומד עם פמליא של מעלה וכלם עונים ואומרים אשרי העם שככה לו אשרי העם שה' אלהיו וכו'".

<sup>42</sup> תהלי' קמד: טו.

<sup>43</sup> שם פד: ו.

<sup>44</sup> שם סח: ה.

<sup>45</sup> אשר לאהרן עם הזרועות והלחיים ו כסא הקדש א[שר] לאהרן ב כסא הכבוד אשר

לאהרן ט שלאהרן פ

<sup>46</sup> במ' יח: כג.

<sup>47</sup> ליתא בכ"י א והשלמתי ע" פ פ ו ט וכן הוא עשנו ב מ

<sup>48</sup> תהלי' ק: ג.

<sup>49</sup> וא"ו פ ב מ ט

<sup>50</sup> שמ"א ג: יא.

<sup>51</sup> דב' כב: ו.

והשם המפורש אשר בכאן שלחתי לכם חתום בקשר אמיץ לבלתי ירוץ בו אחר כאשר תמצאו בו בשבועה גדולה וחרם ונדוי לא למעני אני עושה כי אם לשם קדשו ית'. ועכשיו לא יכולנו להאריך אלא ברמז והואיל ואמרתם שתשלחו אלינו שלוחכם בשאר ספקותיכם בהלכות נדה<sup>52</sup> שלחו המסופק לכם ואין בכל זה ספק ודאי. והשם ית' יהיה בעזרכם ובמאור תורתו יאיר עיניכם כחפציכם. וחפץ רב האיי בר רב שרירא גאון בר רב מנפה בר רב שרירא גאון ז"ל<sup>53</sup> מדגלו<sup>54</sup> של יהודה בן יעקב אריה.

<sup>52</sup> ראה תשובות הגאונים שערי תשובה סי' ה.

<sup>53</sup> רב האי בר רב שרירא גאון בר חנינא גאון בר רב יהודה גאון ז"ל ט רב האי בר רב שרירא גאון בר רב חנינה ב רב האי בר רב שרירא גאון בר רב יהודה גאון ז"ל פ רב האי בר רב שרירא גאון בר רב מנשה בר רב שרירא גאון ז"ל ו רב האי בר שרירא גאון בר סעדיא גאון י

<sup>54</sup> מרגליו ב מרגלו פ י

# Hebraic and Hellenic Conceptions of Wisdom in *Sefer ha-Bahir*

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**Abstract** This article explores the question of the Hebraic and Hellenic heritage in the Jewish Middle Ages by examining the portrait of wisdom in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, considered by scholars to be the first kabbalistic work to surface in twelfth-century Provence. In more specific terms, I investigate the interplay of two different depictions of wisdom in the *Bahir* against the complicated cultural composite of Hebraism and Hellenism: the mythically oriented characterizations of wisdom as a divine hypostasis and the philosophic characterization of wisdom as the demiurgical Logos. In the bahiric text, the mythic/Hebraic element becomes entwined in philosophic/Hellenic discourse. Many of the scriptural interpretations in the *Bahir* related to the topic of wisdom reflect the conflation of the mythopoeic and the logocentric orientations. Rather than viewing the kabbalistic doctrine of wisdom as the internal, mythic antidote to the external, philosophical ideal, I propose to examine the more nuanced cultural mix that underlies the speculation on wisdom in the bahiric text. By reexamining this issue, then, we reopen the key question of the relationship of philosophy and mysticism in the period when kabbalistic literary creativity flourished.

## Scriptural Philosophy: Merging of Hebraism and Hellenism

The tapestry of medieval Jewish intellectual history is woven from a variety of different threads. Beyond the mastery of scriptural and Rabbinic

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texts, the Jewish scholar in the High Middle Ages had to be well-versed in theological discourse, which in varying degrees had its roots in the philosophy of Antiquity. The decisive impact of Islamic culture on Jewish literacy, particularly in the Iberian Peninsula, but to an extent in the Franco-German and Provençal contexts as well,<sup>1</sup> greatly altered the perception of what constituted an educated Jew as the base of knowledge was expanded to include some of the philosophical classics of ancient Greece (principally the works of Plato and Aristotle), which had been rendered into Arabic and later Hebrew translations. The medieval Jewish philosopher, like his Muslim and Christian counterparts, sought to synthesize the scriptural heritage, on the one hand, and philosophical wisdom, on the other. The encounter of Hebraism and Hellenism yielded what Harry Wolfson called the “double doctrine of truth” (1973, 1: 583–618), that is, the belief that there are two equally legitimate modes of expressing the single truth, the scriptural and the philosophical. The hermeneutical principle underlying this theory is predicated on the belief that the truth of Scripture is based on faith or revelation but is nevertheless self-evident and rationally demonstrable. Hence, if the claims of Scripture blatantly contradict the dictates of reason, it is necessary to recast those claims in light of what is accepted as logically true. The narrative formulation of truth characteristic of Scripture was viewed as an alternative, but not contradictory, way of articulating the logical postulates of philosophy. Ultimately, there is one truth, but that truth can express itself in two ways. Furthermore, for the medieval Jewish philosopher, the faculty of reason itself was thought to be divine in nature and thus could not contradict what is found in the book of God’s revelation.

This view is the very foundation of the “scriptural philosophy” (in contrast to “pagan Greek philosophy”) that characterized the three revealed religions in the Middle Ages. Harry Wolfson employed this term to designate the belief shared by the religious philosophers of the three monotheistic traditions regarding the symbiotic relationship of the two sources of truth, revelation and reason, an orientation that he traces back to Philo of Alexandria (1965: 1–26). Although Philo clearly recognized that the scriptural conception of God contrasts with that of the Greek philosophers,

1. The impact of philosophy on Jewish thinkers was not limited to Europe, as is attested, for instance, in the pronounced influence of Maimonides on Yemenite Jews from the middle of the thirteenth century. See Langermann 1995, and the relevant scholarly literature that he cites in the notes that accompany his study. For the purposes of my own study I will concentrate on the encounter of Hebraism and Hellenism on the European continent. All references to the Babylonian Talmud are from the Romm edition. All references to the Palestinian Talmud are from the Venice edition. All references to *Sefer ha-Bahir* are from the edition of Reuven Margalio (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978). All references to the *Zohar* are from the 1960 edition of Reuven Margalio, 3 vols (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook).

that revelation surpasses reason, and that philosophy itself is subordinate to Scripture, he was nevertheless committed to the belief that the content of revelation cannot contradict philosophical truth. This commitment is exemplified in Philo's allegorical hermeneutic, which is predicated on the assumption that philosophical wisdom is the handmaiden of Scripture. The inner meaning of Scripture therefore accords with philosophical conceptions, and any problematic passage is to be interpreted in such a way that the potential conflict would be resolved (H. Wolfson 1947: 87–163). The intrusion of Greek philosophical ideas into Jewish thought in the Middle Ages resulted in the formation of a “religious philosophy” that sought to reconcile Judaism and Hellenism in a manner similar to Philo's own exegetical enterprise (H. Wolfson 1973, 2: 127–28).

A number of medieval Jewish philosophers applied this principle of accommodation, but none as boldly as Maimonides did. In a number of his writings, but perhaps nowhere more forthrightly than in his discussion of the problem of creation versus eternity in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides unabashedly draws the logical conclusion implied in this hermeneutic: If reason necessitated the notion of eternity, it would be incumbent on the philosophic exegete to interpret the biblical account of creation accordingly. However we understand Maimonides' true position with respect to this major theological question,<sup>2</sup> the fact is that he has provided an unambiguous statement regarding the subordination of Scripture to reason, as Spinoza correctly noted in his *Theological-Political Treatise*.<sup>3</sup> We may well grant the point made by Leo Strauss: The discussion of the creation of the world versus its eternity demonstrates that Maimonides affirmed “the inferiority of the intellect in comparison with revelation” since he concludes that it is impossible for one to reach a definitive answer to this question by way of science (1995: 91), and hence scientific reasoning illustrates the possibility of revelation by setting its own limits (Strauss 1965: 160–61; see Green 1993: 84–85). Nevertheless, the fact remains that in this context Maimonides confirms the general hermeneutical principle to which he subscribes: The literal sense of Scripture must be interpreted figuratively if it contradicts a demonstrable philosophical or scientific truth, as in the case of biblical anthropomorphisms.

Strauss perceptively notes that the attempt on the part of medieval rationalists (in Judaism and Islam) to explain revelation philosophically, as well

2. A vast amount of scholarly literature deals with the position of Maimonides regarding the creation of the world. For a balanced survey of this topic that reviews many of the major scholarly discussions, see Fox 1990: 251–96.

3. See Strauss 1965: 123, 148–50, 174–76; Polka 1992: 32–37. For a discussion of Strauss's defense of Maimonides' hermeneutics against the critique of Spinoza, see Green 1993: 77–80.

as the political grounding of the act of philosophizing in the revealed law, are based ultimately on the affirmation of the “pre-philosophic premise of the fact of revelation” (1995: 81–82). Notwithstanding the reasonableness of this position, it still can be argued that the law stands under philosophy even though ostensibly philosophy is legitimated as a source of religious dogma because it is commanded by the law. To express the matter in somewhat different terms, it is not the inadequacy of human reason that necessitates revelation, but rather the rational character of revelation that renders philosophy legitimate.<sup>4</sup> Strauss himself acknowledges that Spinoza may have underplayed the extent to which Maimonides’ allegorical orientation was guided by a concern with Scripture, but he is quick to point out that this orientation is based on the supposition that the “original meaning of Scripture is apparently or in fact put aside in favor of philosophemes, i.e. doctrines totally alien to Scripture” (1965: 174). Indeed, even a thinker like Judah Halevi, who passionately opposed the philosophical interpretation of the prophetic-historical basis of Judaism and who drew a sharp contrast between the logical God of Aristotle and the empirical God of Abraham (H. Wolfson 1977, 2: 120–60), would have acquiesced to the hermeneutical claim that nothing in Scripture can contradict reason, as may be gathered, for example, from his acceptance of the incorporeal and transcendent nature of God and the consequent need to explain biblical anthropomorphisms.<sup>5</sup> Revelation supersedes, but does not clash with, rational truth. It is appropriate to consider this hermeneutic as the key to the merging of Hebraism and Hellenism in the Middle Ages.

The significance of the rationalist attempt to harmonize reason and revelation in the history of medieval Jewish thought is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the resistance expressed by several prominent Ashkenazi, Provençal, and Spanish Talmudic scholars and/or pietists to the works of Maimonides in the course of the thirteenth century. Sensing that the integrity of the scriptural foundation of Judaism was potentially undermined by the adoption of the foreign wisdom of the Greeks, the antirationalists directed their attention to the condemnation of Maimoni-

4. Here I take issue with the argument put forth by Strauss (1965: 156–60) that, according to Maimonides, reason needs revelation because the latter alone can offer a solution to the ultimate questions posed by the former, especially concerning the human understanding of God.

5. It is important to emphasize, however, that Halevi’s approach is fundamentally different from the allegorical method adopted by the philosophers, for he accepts the literalness of the anthropomorphic images inasmuch as they may be attributed to the imaginal representations of God in space and not to God in his essence. That is, the invisible God appears in concrete, sensible images apprehended by the imagination in the moment of the theophanic experience. See E. Wolfson 1994a: 163–73; Silman 1995: 188, 226, 246–47, 328–30.



des' philosophical interpretation, which led to the eventual burning of his *Moreh Nevukhim* (*Guide to the Perplexed*) in Montpellier in 1240 by the Christian authorities.<sup>6</sup> The actual controversies that evolved in the thirteenth century around Maimonidean rationalism were, of course, more complex as the claims and counterclaims involved subtler perspectives on the volatile issue of the viability of appropriating the external science and wisdom of Hellenic origin. But, for the purposes of this study, it is valid to portray the debate in these stark (if somewhat undialectical) terms because there is no question that the basis for the Maimonidean controversy was the acceptance or rejection of Greek philosophy as a legitimate tool in the formulation of the theological and anthropological beliefs of Judaism. Solomon ibn Adret stated the point explicitly when he wrote in the ban of 1305, which prohibited the study of works on physics and metaphysics (excluding the treatises of Jewish philosophers) by anyone under the age of twenty-five, "Lest these sciences entice them and draw their hearts away from the Torah of Israel, which transcends the wisdom of the Greeks" (cited in Silver 1965: 41). What this leading medieval Rabbinic figure expressed has been reiterated in a critical fashion by Strauss, who noted that traditionally the essential task assigned to the Jew was to expound and follow the teachings of Torah. In a fundamental sense, then, being a Jew and being a philosopher are mutually exclusive: Jerusalem stands in diametric opposition to Athens.<sup>7</sup> One can be a perfectly competent Talmudist without philosophical training or disposition. From a sociological point of view, philosophy has always had a precarious role in the spiritual economy of Judaism (Strauss 1988: 19–20).

### Kabbalah and the Hebraic-Hellenic Encounter

Another major domain of medieval Jewish thought, the trend in Jewish esotericism known as the theosophic Kabbalah, was beginning to evolve at precisely the time the Hebraism-Hellenism synthesis and its opposition took root among Jewish intellectuals in the European centers of Jewish learning. The main elements of this esoteric tradition include the imaging of God in terms of ten hypostatic powers (most frequently referred to as the *sefirot*), which are divided into a male-female polarity, and the theurgical

6. See Silver 1965: 136–98; Septimus 1982: 61–103; Dan 1992–93.

7. The essentially foreign nature of philosophy in Judaism is underscored by the opening remark of Julius Guttman in his comprehensive history of Jewish philosophy: "The Jewish people . . . received philosophy from outside sources, and the history of Jewish philosophy is a history of successive absorptions of foreign ideas which were then transformed and adapted according to specific Jewish points of view" (1964: 3). See Myers 1995: 101.

understanding of normative religious practice such that fulfillment of the traditional precepts increases the stature of the divine structure and, conversely, failure to do so weakens it. Although it is very likely that the roots of Kabbalah lay in much older sources of both Jewish and non-Jewish provenance, it is clear that this multifaceted phenomenon crystallized in a systematic form only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, primarily in Provence and northern Spain. In great measure, this process of crystallization can be explained as a response to the impact of the rationalist tradition on the Rabbinic elite during this time. This influence can be seen in both a negative and a positive way. Negatively, the Kabbalists provided an alternative hermeneutic and conceptual framework to that of the rationalists. It is thus not a coincidence that some Kabbalists played an active and instrumental role in the Maimonidean controversy (see Graetz 1894: 522–45; Silver 1965: 162–98; Septimus 1982: 104–15). The tendency to draw a sharp line separating philosophy and Kabbalah, which is evident in the writings of some of the mystics themselves, is well attested in contemporary scholarship. Philosophical rationalism and kabbalistic mysticism are typically distinguished along the following binary lines: The former represents the external, intrusive, and logocentric, whereas the latter represents the internal, native, and mythopoeic. From this perspective, the literary emergence of Kabbalah appears as a reaction to philosophy, not in the sense proposed by Heinrich Graetz, who maintained that the Kabbalah was an innovation to counteract the spread of Maimonidean rationalism (1894: 547–57), but in the sense that philosophical interpretations of esoteric topics served as the historical catalyst that forced the Kabbalists to respond by composing treatises that established the true, internal sense of the mysteries of the tradition.<sup>8</sup> The response to what may be called the Hellenization of Jewish esotericism is evident especially in the thirteenth-century kabbalistic commentaries on the account of the chariot (*ma'aseh merkavah*) and on the account of the creation (*ma'aseh bere'shit*), which must be seen as the Hebraic corrective of the philosophical approach to these topics adopted by Maimonides.<sup>9</sup>

The influence of philosophy on Kabbalah, however, can be seen from a positive perspective.<sup>10</sup> As one scholar mused, “What was the early Kab-

8. On this matter, I am in agreement with the position of Moshe Idel. See following note.

9. See Idel 1988: 252–53; 1990: 31–50; E. Wolfson 1990–91: 182–83. Also relevant here is the theory of David Neumark that philosophy and Kabbalah represent two parallel disciplines that explain the content of the Rabbinic esoteric traditions of the account of creation and the account of the chariot (1971: 96).

10. A separate question is the appropriateness of the term *philosophy*, in a somewhat less technical sense, to describe theosophic Kabbalah, as one finds, for example, in the title of

balah but a sophisticated philosophic mysticism in Hebraic dress?" (Silver 1965: 163). Indeed, a distinctive feature of the Kabbalah consists of the obvious tendency on the part of Jewish mystics to clothe their insights and experiences in philosophical modes of discourse. The esoteric teachings of the Kabbalah merge in a dynamic, but not always harmonious, way with the philosophical currents that ran through the intellectual landscape of medieval European centers of Jewish communal life and learning. Even if one were to accept the opinion of Gershom Scholem that at the core of theosophic Kabbalah is a Gnostic orientation whose mythologizing character is to be contrasted in an essential way with discursive rational philosophy (1954: 24–25, 32, 34–37; 1969: 88–89, 96–99, 119; 1987: 67; 1974: 87–88, 115), there is little doubt, as Scholem himself readily admitted, that the mythic teachings of the Kabbalists are expressed philosophically, reflecting in particular the language of Neoplatonism (1954: 166, 175, 203; 1987: 221–22, 228, 316–20, 327–30, 363–64, 389).<sup>11</sup> Beyond the issue of description, however, I would add that the forms of experience are frequently

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Adolphe Franck's classic, *La Kabbale ou la philosophie religieuse des Hebreux*, published in 1843, or in David Joel's *Midrash ha-Zohar: Die Religionsphilosophie des Sohar und ihr Verhältnis zur allgemeinen jüdischen Theologie*, published in 1849. See Neumark 1971: 47. Idel detects in these scholars (as well as in Nachman Krochmal and Elijah Benamozegh) an echo of the "Renaissance philosophization of Kabbalah," which privileged the speculative over the practical or experiential (1988: 13–14). This same bias, writes Idel, is found to a degree among modern scholars, including Scholem, for whom "Kabbalah is less a religious phenomenon using philosophical terminology in order to express idiosyncratic views than a philosophy reminiscent of other brands of speculations, albeit expressed in strange terms." Leaving aside the important question regarding whether or not "religious philosophy" as used by the nineteenth-century scholars implied a dichotomization of the speculative and the experiential, with respect to Scholem the issue is more complex. Consider, for example, Scholem's remark concerning the kabbalistic attitude toward prayer: "There is perhaps no clearer sign that Kabbalism is essentially a religious and not a speculative phenomenon" (1954: 33). Idel's portrayal of Scholem is, however, supported by other comments that he makes in his scholarly writings, which tend to emphasize the theoretical over the practical. For discussion of Scholem's somewhat equivocal attitude with regard to this question, see E. Wolfson 1994a: 278–79.

11. It must also be noted that Scholem occasionally acknowledged the mystical element in medieval Jewish philosophical literature. Consider, for example, his description of prophecy as union with the active intellect both in Isma'ili thought and in the philosophy of Maimonides as a form of *unio mystica* (1969: 10; see also 1954: 23–24; 1974: 44, 50–51). On the relation of philosophy and mysticism in Scholem's understanding of medieval Jewish thought, see Schweid 1985: 41–45, 117–32. The position of Scholem on this score has been more recently reaffirmed by Liebes 1993: 1, 4, although the author presents his view as a radical departing from that of Scholem. In brief, Liebes argues that the mythical element did not erupt in the medieval Kabbalah, but rather it received therein a systematic formulation under the influence of philosophy, which led to a weakening and devaluation of the personal and vital nature of Jewish myth. Philosophical concepts, therefore, had an instrumental role in changing the shape of the myth.

comprehensible only when the formative impact of philosophy on the mystics' way of being in the world is taken into account. Experiences of God, self, and cosmos, attested in medieval kabbalistic sources, were consistently and recurrently mediated by philosophical concepts.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that within the lifeworld of the Kabbalists in Provence and northern Spain no radical differentiation between mythos and Logos exists. To be sure, the expression of truth in narrative form is not treated as equivalent to the expression of truth in logically deduced propositions. My point is, however, that even in the case of Kabbalists such as Nahmanides, who explicitly deny the validity of reason as a tool to ascertain esoteric wisdom, the nature of the theosophic structures and the experiences thereof were conditioned by philosophical conceptions and assumptions based on rational and scientific principles accepted by intellectuals of the medieval period. It is one thing to deny rhetorically the appropriateness of reason, but it is quite another to ignore the ontological and epistemological assumptions that shape one's mode of being in the world.

The historical/textual influences of philosophical sources on medieval Kabbalah have been previously discussed in scholarly literature, but there has been little examination of these influences in terms of the larger question of the Hebraic and Hellenic heritage in the Jewish Middle Ages. No sustained attempt has been made to study the complex and composite nature of these different cultural matrices as they intersect and interact in kabbalistic literature. In this essay, I explore this question by examining the portrait of *hokhmah* in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, considered by scholars to be the first kabbalistic work that surfaced in twelfth-century Provence.<sup>13</sup> The centrality of the figure of wisdom in the theosophy formulated in the *Bahir* and expanded in much greater detail in subsequent kabbalistic texts justifies the use of the phrase "sophianic mysticism"<sup>14</sup> to characterize this major current of Jewish esotericism. In more specific terms, I investigate the interplay of two different depictions of *hokhmah* in the *Bahir* against the complicated cultural composite of Hebraism and Hellenism: the mythically oriented characterizations of *hokhmah* as a divine hypostasis and the philosophic characterization of wisdom as the demiurgical Logos. The first of these

12. A good example of this is the experience of *devequt*, conjunction with the divine, which involved communion or union. The kabbalistic understanding of *devequt* clearly betrayed the influence of philosophical sources. See Idel 1988: 42–49.

13. For a list of relevant scholarly discussions regarding the literary provenance of the *Bahir*, see E. Wolfson 1995a: 187–88 nn. 1–2. See also Abrams 1994: 1–54, and the comprehensive bibliography on 293–336.

14. I have borrowed the expression from Versluis 1994: 157. Note Scholem's use of the phrase "mysticism of the Sophia" to refer to the doctrine of *hokhmah* in the *Bahir* (1987: 88).

depictions falls under the rubric of Hebraism in contrast to the second, which falls under the rubric of Hellenism. By applying the term *Hebraism* to the mythic representations of *hokhmah*, I am deliberately eschewing Scholem's theory regarding the Gnostic origin of the bahiric images of Sophia (Scholem 1987: 91–97; 1991: 162–70). In particular, Scholem related the twofold *hokhmah* either explicitly mentioned or alluded to in the *Bahir* to the double doctrine of Sophia in Valentinian Gnosticism.<sup>15</sup> I do not wish to debate the merit of describing medieval Kabbalah in terms of the syncretistic Gnosticism of late antiquity. Let me point out, however, that Scholem himself equivocated on this issue and at times intimated that the Gnostic motifs that made their way into the *Bahir* and later kabbalistic compositions may have originated in an internal Jewish tradition parallel to the classical systems of Gnosticism, which he even calls on occasion “theosophic aggadah” (Scholem 1987: 91, 234; 1991: 158). Interestingly enough, in one context, Scholem argued that the feminine images of the *Shekhinah* and the identification of the latter with Torah/wisdom either “were taken from the legacy of Gnostic speculation” or “they took shape in course of the creative reflection of anonymous Jewish God-seekers of the twelfth century upon the meaning of the images of their own tradition” (1991: 170–71).<sup>16</sup>

With respect to the question of the provenance of the mythopoeic image of wisdom in the *Bahir*, I adopt a functionalist as opposed to an historicist perspective. That is, I am not concerned with tracing the historical origins of the concept since it may be well-nigh impossible to establish this fact with any certainty. I am concerned with the way that the term functions in the given intellectual environment, which is reflected in a specific literary context. From that perspective the mythical portrayal of *hokhmah* in the *Bahir* should be classified as Hebraic. Even in its most extreme and explicitly transgressive form, which is discussed in more detail below, the dual depiction of *hokhmah* as the father and daughter must be perceived as an exegetical and homiletical elaboration of the ancient Jewish teaching regarding wisdom/Torah. In the late Second Temple and early Rabbinic periods, it can be argued, the identification of Torah as *hokhmah* most likely

15. Briefly, this doctrine is predicated on the idea that the last of the divine potencies or Aeons, Sophia, has two manifestations, one connected to the Pleroma or the divine pneumatic realm of light and one that descends as a result of a crisis (related to Sophia's generative activity without her male consort) into the material world of darkness from which she must be liberated and restored to her source. See Jonas 1963: 181–97; Good 1987: xiv–xv, 16–17, 76–78.

16. The situation is rendered even more complex by the fact that the Valentinian doctrine of Sophia itself may have been derived from Jewish Wisdom literature. See MacRae 1970 and Rudolph 1980.

reflected a merging of the Hebraic notion of wisdom, itself perhaps betraying some influence of the Hellenistic concept of Sophia, and the doctrine of the Logos derived from Stoic philosophy.<sup>17</sup> By the Middle Ages, however, this idea is so fully assimilated in Jewish sources that its mark of identification is Hebraic with all traces of Hellenism obscured. Surely, for the medieval Kabbalists there is no question of appropriating a “foreign” concept when they developed the aggadic notion that Torah is God’s wisdom.

By contrast, the cosmological conception of wisdom as the demiurgical Logos is more aligned with the Hellenic orientation expressed in medieval Jewish philosophic sources, especially of a Neoplatonic orientation, whose terminological and conceptual influence is certainly detectable in the final redactional strata of the *Bahir*. In the bahiric text, the mythic/Hebraic element has thus become entwined in philosophic/Hellenic discourse. Even though the philosophical depiction of *hokhmah* is not fully developed in the *Bahir*, it is misleading to conclude that the ideas expressed in this document are “far removed . . . from the philosophic conceptions that prevailed in the Middle Ages” (Scholem 1987: 67). On the contrary, many of the scriptural interpretations in the *Bahir* related to the topic of *hokhmah* reflect the conflation of the mythopoeic and the logocentric orientations. Rather than viewing the kabbalistic doctrine of *hokhmah* as just the internal, mythic (or what Scholem would have called Gnostic) antidote to the external, philosophical ideal, it is also important to appreciate the more nuanced cultural mix that underlies the speculation on wisdom in the bahiric text. By reexamining this issue, then, we open the key question of the relationship of philosophy and mysticism in the period when kabbalistic literary creativity flourished. The particular analysis of the motif of *hokhmah* provides a window through which to view the central question of the impact of Hebraism and Hellenism on this seminal chapter of medieval Jewish literary and religious culture.

### Secrecy of the Gift: Mythopoeic Depiction of Wisdom/Torah/Shekhinah

The most prevalent mythical description of wisdom that occurs in the *Bahir* is that of the feminine persona that complements the masculine. In line with classical Rabbinic texts, the bahiric author identifies Torah and *hokhmah*, which he further associates with the *Shekhinah*, the feminine hypostasis of the divine pleroma, also characterized as the wellspring (*berekhah*) of God’s blessing (*berakhah*) (*Sefer ha-Bahir* secs. 3, 54–55, 63–65,

17. For a list of some of the relevant scholarly discussions of the identification of Torah and *hokhmah*, see E. Wolfson 1995b: 123–24 n. 1.

77–78, 105).<sup>18</sup> The structure underlying this myth is expressed frequently in the *Bahir* in terms of the symbolic triad of father, daughter, and son (in some passages the latter is identified as Solomon).<sup>19</sup> In a primeval state, the daughter is integrated fully in the father, together constituting the androgynous form of divine wisdom, but in a secondary stage the daughter splits off from the father. In order to restore the original unity, the daughter is given to the son, for she can no longer be united with the father.<sup>20</sup> The dynamic of the mythic structure is particularly transparent in the following passage, which appears early on in the text: “There is no beginning (*re’shit*) except for wisdom (*hokhmah*), as it says, ‘The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord’ (Psalm 111:10), and there is no wisdom except for blessing, as it says,<sup>21</sup> the Lord blessed Solomon, and it is written, ‘The Lord had given wisdom to Solomon’ (1 Kings 5:26). This may be compared to a king

18. See Scholem 1987: 70, 92; Stern 1991: 221; E. Wolfson 1995b: 11–12. In *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 142, which is part of the section in which the ten divine sayings are delineated, wisdom is identified as the second of these hypostases.

19. The relationship of the father and the daughter, the upper and lower wisdom, is a repeated theme in later kabbalistic literature, especially prominent in the zoharic corpus. Of the many passages that could have been cited, I mention only one from *Zohar* 1: 156b (*Sitre Torah*) for it clearly draws on the language of the *Bahir*: “The desire of the father is constantly towards his daughter, for the daughter, his beloved, is always near him since she is the only daughter amongst the six sons.” An even more striking repetition of the structure underlying the bahiric myth is found in *Tiqqune Zohar*, “When [Solomon] ascended in his kingship, it said concerning him, ‘Solomon’s wisdom was greater [than the wisdom of all the Kedemites and than all the wisdom of the Egyptians]’ (1 Kings 5: 10). It increased until it reached that place whence it was taken, the place of the supernal wisdom, for he is the wisdom in the beginning and she is the wisdom in the end” (Margaliot 1978: sec. 64, 95b). Cf. *ibid.*, sec. 21, 44b, where the elevation of the *Shekhinah* to the supernal *yod* or *hokhmah*, which is designated as the father, is related exegetically to the verse, “The Lord founded the earth by wisdom (Proverbs 3: 19).”

20. The relationship of the father and daughter is also expressed in the theosophic reworking of the aggadic motif (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 16b) regarding the daughter given to Abraham in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 78. See Scholem 1987: 87–88; 1991: 168. Consider also the parabolic reference to the signs (*simanim*) of the king and of his daughter in *Sefer ha-Bahir* sec. 93, and the parable in sec. 156 about the prince who hides the riches of his father’s house in the inner chamber where his bride is hidden. In that context, the phallic potency is identified with the east, which stores its semen in the feminine west. On the occultation of the feminine in order to protect her from Satan, compare the parable of the king and his daughter in sec. 162. The restoration of the original unity of the feminine in the masculine is also implied in the symbol of the crown ascending to the head in sec. 91. (Compare also the depiction of the precious pearl, which served as a crown, in sec. 72.) The use of this image to depict the masculine transformation of the feminine became a standard motif in subsequent kabbalistic literature. See E. Wolfson 1994a: 275 n. 14, 362 n. 123, 363; 1995b: 116–20, 231–32 n. 198. I have also explored this symbolism in the writings of Haside Ashkenaz in the concluding part of “Sacred Space and Mental Iconography: Imago Templi and Contemplation in Rhineland Jewish Pietism,” to appear in the *festschrift* for Baruch Levine.

21. As various commentators have pointed out, what immediately follows is not a direct citation of a biblical verse. See Scholem 1923: 6 n. 2; *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 3 n. 6.

who gave his daughter in marriage to his son, and he gave her to him as a gift,<sup>22</sup> and he said to him: 'Do with her as you wish' " (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 3).

Wisdom is thus compared parabolically to the gift bestowed by the king upon his son. But what in the nature of this bestowal of wisdom necessitates its being characterized as the giving of a gift? The clue is provided in the concluding remark: "Do with her as you wish." To appreciate the intent of this comment, it would be useful to recall Jacques Derrida's reflection on the nature of the gift as that which opens the circle of economy, the circular exchange of goods, so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry, for "the *given* of the gift (*that which* one gives, *that which* is given, the gift as given thing or as act of donation) must not come back to the giving (let us not already say to the subject, to the donor). It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. . . . It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible" (1992: 7).

Derrida's account of the gift can be well applied to the bahiric context. The prince is given the princess as a gift by the king, which signifies that the act of giving is not a symmetrical relation: Nothing the son does can reciprocate the action of the father, for there is no exchange of gifts, no reciprocal giving and taking. Moreover, the son who receives the daughter as gift cannot donate this gift to another; the daughter belongs exclusively to the son to whom she has been given as a gift. Finally, in the absence of reciprocity, the recipient of the gift assumes complete control and mastery over that which is given; in the act of giving, the donor relinquishes all claims of ownership and possession with respect to the gift. In the bahiric passage, the power of entitlement is of a decidedly sexual nature—thus, the prince is instructed by his father to do as he pleases with the princess. Indeed, the symbolic import of the parable blatantly contradicts the normative strictures of biblical law, for the taboo of siblings mating (Leviticus 18:9) is undermined by the relationship that is described between the son and the daughter of the king. The secret alluded to here, which later Kabbalists relate to the mystery of illicit sexual relations (*sitre 'arayot*) mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud (Hagigah 11b), is that the sexual prohibitions necessary to preserve the fabric of human society can be transgressed in a symbolic manner in the divine realm (see Stern 1991: 222). In that sense, the gift of wisdom is truly the impossible, that which defies the limits of

22. Here I follow the reading in ms. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 2b (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 118), *bematanah*, "as a gift," rather than the reading in other versions, including the edition of Margaliot, *beḥatunah*, "in the wedding."



temporal possibility. The only time of the gift, therefore, is the present, the paradoxical instant that is an effraction in the circularity of time, the repetitious pattern of the natural cycle (Derrida 1992: 9).

The transgressive element discloses the essential nexus of gift and secrecy. Again, Derrida's language is helpful, for he notes that the paradox of the gift (revealed in the thought of Jan Patočka) is such that it is always "the gift of something that remains inaccessible, unpresentable, and as a consequence secret. . . . The gift is the secret itself, if the secret *itself* can be told. Secrecy is the last word of the gift which is the last word of the secret" (Derrida 1995: 29–30). The very essence of the gift is linked to secrecy, for if the nature of the gift is revealed to the one who is to receive the gift, then the giving of the gift is annulled. To apply this insight to the specific context of the *Bahir*, the giving of the daughter to the son as a gift on the part of the father is the secret of the emanation of divine wisdom. The transgressive nature of the gift precludes the disclosure of the secret. Mystical gnosis, therefore, is predicated on the attribution of an incestuous relationship to God: What is sexually forbidden in the human domain can alone symbolically express the mythic truth of the *hieros gamos* in the divine.<sup>23</sup>

The giving of the gift entails the intentional transgression of a sexual norm, implied as well in the following passage:

What is his heart (*libbo*)? He said to him: If Ben Zoma is on the outside,<sup>24</sup> then you are with him! The heart (*lev*) refers to the thirty-two<sup>25</sup> and they are hidden, and by means of them the world was created.<sup>26</sup> What are the thirty-two? He said to him: The thirty-two paths. This may be compared to a king who was in the innermost of his chambers. The number of chambers was thirty-two and each chamber had a path. Is it fitting for this king to gather everything into his chambers by way of his paths? You would say: No! Is it fitting for him to reveal his pearls, treasures, precious things, and gems? You would say: No! What did he do? He touched the princess and comprised all the paths in her and in her garments. The one who wants to enter should look here. She was married to the king and she was also given to him as a gift. On account of his love for her, he sometimes calls her "my sister," for they are from one place, and sometimes he calls her "my daughter," for she is his daughter, and sometimes he calls her "my mother." (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 63)<sup>27</sup>

23. I owe the formulation of this insight regarding the symbolic meaning of incest to Neumann 1954: 16–17.

24. Based on the statement in Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 15a.

25. That is, the numerical value of the consonants of the word *lev* equals thirty-two, *lamed* (30) and *bet* (2).

26. *Sefer Yesirah* 1:1.

27. I have corrected the text according to ms. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 18a (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 140). See Scholem 1987: 168–69; 1991: 162–63.

The heart of God, associated in other bahiric passages with the feminine,<sup>28</sup> is related specifically to the thirty-two paths of wisdom mentioned at the beginning of *Sefer Yeṣirah*. What is most significant to note in this text is the intricate use of gender symbols to convey the process of emanation of the feminine potency from the masculine. Again, we see that, in open contradiction to the normative sexual taboo, the king “touches” his own daughter, an obvious euphemism for sexual intercourse, and thereby comprises the thirty-two paths within her.<sup>29</sup> The incestuous relationship is conveyed as well by the image of the daughter being given to the king as a gift, which is contrasted with the image of her being married to him. It is likely, moreover, that the paths contained within the feminine potency are related to the phallus.<sup>30</sup> Ontologically, the being of the female is constituted by the phallic energies derived from the male; indeed, the female comprises within herself the thirty-two paths of the masculine wisdom. Finally, based on an earlier midrashic pericope, the love relationship between the king and the princess is construed in terms of three feminine images: sister, daughter, and mother.<sup>31</sup> The image of sister, the reader is told explicitly, indicates that the two derive from the same source and the image of daughter suggests that the female comes from the male. The image of mother at first blush would seem to signify that in some sense the male comes from or is sustained by the female. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that even the image of the mother does not challenge the ontic dependency of the female on the male, for in fact the three feminine images depict different levels or kinds of love that the

28. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 97, 98 (in that context the heart of the tree is identified as the citron, for it comprises the thirty-two paths of mysterious wisdom), 106, 134 (in that context the heart is identified as the glory, based on the numerical equivalence of *lev* and *kavod*). See Scholem 1987: 92; 1991: 162.

29. In light of this obvious sexual innuendo, I cannot agree with Scholem's observation that in the *Bahir* the “explicitly sexual sphere of female symbolism is here quite clearly and visibly rejected” (1991: 163). Scholem notes one exception, a passage that refers to the feminine as the matron of the king (see sec. 131), but he neglects to note the sexual aspects of other feminine images, including most significantly the relationship of the father and the daughter. Incest is also implied in the parable in sec. 181, which explains the sexual praxis related to the Sabbath: The king invites his sons to join him in rejoicing on the day of his joy with his bride.

30. Compare the parable of king's garden with thirty-two paths in sec. 92. The phallic connotation of the paths is suggested by the statement that the king utters to the guard appointed over the paths: “Guard them and traverse them each day, and at any time that you tread through them peace will be upon you.” I assume that “peace” (*shalom*) also has a phallic connotation in this context as it does elsewhere in the *Bahir* and other kabbalistic writings. See below, note 42. On the notion of the thirty-two paths and the forms that guard them, see also *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 98.

31. See *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* (Mandelbaum 1962: 1: 3, 7); *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 3:21; *Shemot Rabbah* 52:5; *BeMidbar Rabbah* 12:8; *Midrash Tanhuma*, Pequde, sec. 8, 133 (Buber 1946).

king has for the princess, as may be deduced from the midrashic tradition that served as the basis for this remark. The original parable, linked exegetically to the verse “O maidens of Zion, go forth and gaze upon King Solomon wearing the crown that his mother gave him on his wedding day, on his day of bliss” (Song of Songs 3:11), is offered as a way of delineating three levels of God’s love for Israel, the highest one being that of the love of the son for the mother. Clearly, the intent here is not to imply that Israel is the mother of God, but only that God can love Israel even as a son loves his mother. The same explanation should be applied to the bahiric text, although the referents in that context are the king and the princess.<sup>32</sup>

The imagery of incest between father and daughter is employed explicitly in another passage. In this context, the divine attributes of mercy and judgment are referred to respectively as silver (*keseḥ*) and gold (*zahav*), based on the verse, “Silver is Mine and gold is Mine—says the Lord of Hosts” (Haggai, 2:8). Focusing on the word *zahav*, the reader is told that the attribute of judgment is called by this name because it is said to comprise three attributes signified by the three letters that make up the word *zahav*, the masculine (*zakhar*) symbolized by the *zayin*, the feminine or the soul (*neshamah*) symbolized by the letter *he*’ (since there are five names for the soul<sup>33</sup> and the letter *he*’ has the numerical value of five), and the foundation (*qiyum*) of the other two designated by the *bet* (since the numerical value of this letter is two and the foundation is the attribute that unites the male and the female) (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 53. See Scholem 1991: 165–66). The function of the *bet* is further elucidated by the following parable:

This may be compared to a king who had a good, pleasant, beautiful, and perfect daughter, and he married her to a prince. He clothed her, crowned her, adorned her, and gave her to him for a lot of money. Is it possible for the king to sit outside his house? You would say: No! Is it possible for him to sit all day with her constantly? You would say: No! What does he do? He places a window between himself and her, and whenever the daughter needs her father or the father the daughter, they join together through the window, as it is written, “The royal princess, her dress embroidered with golden mountings, is led inside to the king” (Psalm 45: 14–15). (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 54).<sup>34</sup>

32. Elsewhere in the *Bahir* (sec. 105) the mother is depicted as the source of the seven hypostases, which are rendered symbolically as the seven sons or the seven days of creation. See also the parabolic use of the symbol of mother to characterize the divine glory in sec. 131. It is not uncommon in the mythic imagination for the mother and daughter to be identified as one persona. See the discussion of the identification of Demeter and Kore in the Eleusian mysteries in Neumann 1963: 142, 197, 305–9, 332, and Kerényi 1967: 32–33, 130.

33. The five names are *neshamah*, *ruah*, *hayyah*, *yehidah*, and *nefesh*. Cf. *Bereshit Rabba* (Albeck and Theodor 1965: 14: 9, 132).

34. The bahiric passage is based on a midrashic parable in *Shemot Rabbah* 33: 1. See Scholem

It would also appear from this tradition-complex that the basic myth involved the division of an androgynous male into a male (*zayyin*) and a female (*he'*) connected in turn by their foundation (*bet*). It is likely that "foundation," *qiyum*, has a phallic connotation (see Liebes 1976: 358 n. 13). The implication of the mythic structure is disclosed by the parable: The king gives his daughter to a prince, but he continues to unite with her indirectly by way of the window. Despite the separation necessitated by the unfolding of the cosmic process, the father and daughter must have a mechanism to unite; these unifications reflect the fact that father and daughter are ontically of the same nature. The father-daughter incest, therefore, functions as a symbol to denote the sacred union above, which entails the reintegration of the lower and upper wisdom.

The giving of the gift is in defiance of the natural order and social convention. The point is substantiated by another passage in which the mythical conception of wisdom is placed by the redactor of the text in a somewhat different context:

There is no judgment if there is no wisdom, for it says, "The Lord had given wisdom to Solomon" (1 Kings 5:26), and afterwards he judged the case [of the two mothers and the one infant] correctly, as it says, "When all Israel heard the decision that the king had rendered, they stood in awe of the king; for they saw that he possessed divine wisdom to execute justice" (3:28).

What is the wisdom that the Holy One, blessed be he, gave to Solomon? Solomon bears the name of the Holy One, blessed be he, as it says,<sup>35</sup> "every Solomon mentioned in the Song of Songs is holy except for one." The Holy One, blessed be he, said: Since your name is like the name of my glory, I will marry you to my daughter. But she is married! Let us say that she was bestowed upon him as a gift, as it is written, "The Lord had given wisdom to Solomon." [The nature of that wisdom] is not explained. Where, then, is it explained? In the continuation when it is written, "they saw that he possessed divine wisdom to execute justice." This refers to the very wisdom that God had given him,<sup>36</sup>

1923: 40 n. 2; 1987: 170; Margalio's note in his edition of *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 54 n. 3; E. Wolfson 1995b: 11–12. For a different interpretation of this parable, see Scholem 1991: 164.

35. Babylonian Talmud, Shavu'ot 35b. According to some versions of the bahiric text, e.g., ms. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 8a (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 140), the Rabbinic comment is transmitted in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan. Concerning this Talmudic text and the possibility that it preserves an older theosophic tradition, see E. Wolfson 1995a: 205 n. 71.

36. Ms. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 8b (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 142) reads: "The very wisdom that was given to God." Scholem prefers this reading and suggests that it was changed in later manuscripts because of the bold theological implication regarding God's union with the feminine *hokhmah* (1987: 92). I am not convinced, however, that this alternative reading actually makes better sense in context.

which is with him in his chamber and in his midst to execute justice. What is [the meaning of] “to execute justice?” Whenever a person executes justice, the wisdom of God is in his midst, to assist him and to draw him near. If not, it keeps him at a distance and even punishes him, as it is written, “I, for my part, will discipline you” (Leviticus 26:28). (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 64–65)

The nature of the gift is explicated in this passage by the contrast that is made between betrothal and the giving of the gift. Wisdom, which is identified as the hypostatic daughter of God, is already married, but she can still be given as a gift to Solomon. Reflecting on this remark, Scholem surmised that since wisdom is already married in the upper spheres, she was offered as a gift to Solomon in the terrestrial world (1987: 92).<sup>37</sup> I would add that this bestowal can take place because of the ontic resemblance between Solomon and God, a resemblance that is depicted in terms of the image of Solomon bearing the name of God. The meaning of this remark can be decoded only in light of two Talmudic traditions: First, the name of God is “peace” (*shalom*) (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 10b, Sanhedrin 55b), and, second, the etymology of Solomon (in Hebrew: *shelomo*) mentioned in Song of Songs is *melekh sheha-shalom shelo*, “the king to whom peace belongs” (Babylonian Talmud, Shavu’ot 35b). The more specific theosophic connotation is related to the fact that in a number of bahiric passages the word *shalom* functions as a technical term to designate the attribute of God that corresponds to the phallus (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 11, 59, 75, 92). This is certainly the import of the statement that the name of Solomon is like the name of the glory. We may deduce from this passage that the technical term for the divine glory, *kavod*, itself has a phallic connotation.<sup>38</sup> Now we can better understand the comment concerning the fact that *hokhmah* was already married and thus had to be given to Solomon as a gift. This does not imply, as Scholem explained, that *hokhmah* is married to the divine potency in the upper sphere and therefore must be given to Solomon as a gift in the terrestrial realm. On the contrary, the feminine wisdom is given as a gift to Solomon precisely because he symbolically represents the masculine potency of the divine.<sup>39</sup>

The interpretation of *kavod* I have offered is supported by a series of passages wherein the nature of the divine glory is explicated in detail:

37. Scholem’s interpretation is accepted by Stern (1991: 222).

38. Compare the use of the term *kavod* in *Sefer ha-Bahir* sec. 50, analyzed in E. Wolfson 1995a: 209 n. 85.

39. I thus take issue with Scholem’s remark that the Solomon to whom Sophia is given as a gift is “the Solomon of history and not a symbolic Solomon” (Scholem 1987: 92). In fact, the bahiric parable (in both secs. 3 and 65) makes little sense if one does not appreciate the symbolic character of Solomon.

What is [the meaning of] “and His glory filled all the earth” (Isaiah 6:3)? The earth that was created on the first day, which is above corresponding to the land of Israel, was filled from the glory of the Lord. And what is it? Wisdom, as it is written, “The wise shall obtain glory” (Proverbs 3:35), and it says, “Blessed is the glory of the Lord from his place” (Ezekiel 3:12).

And what is the glory of the Lord? This may be compared to a king who had the queen in his room and all his troops delighted<sup>40</sup> in her, and she had sons who came every day to greet the king and to bless him. They said to him: Our mother, where is she? He said to them: You cannot see her now. They said: Blessed is she in whatever place she is.

Why is it written “from his place”? On account of the fact that there is no one who knows his place (Babylonian Talmud, *Hagigah* 13b). This may be compared to a daughter of a king who came from afar and they did not know whence she came. When they saw that she was a woman of valor, beautiful and worthy in all her deeds, they said: This one certainly was taken from the side of light, for her deeds illumine the world. They asked her: From where are you? She said: From my place. They said: If so, the men of your place are great. Blessed are you and blessed is your place.

Is this glory of the Lord not one of his hosts? And is it not inferior? Why, then, do they bless it? To what may this be compared? To a man who has a beautiful garden, and outside the garden and close to it there is a beautiful field.<sup>41</sup> . . . At the beginning he irrigated his garden and the water went all over the garden but not upon that field that is not connected, even though everything is one. Therefore he opened a place for it and irrigated it separately. (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 130–33)<sup>42</sup>

The opening exegesis of Isaiah 6: 3 allows the author of the bahiric text to express the idea that the feminine potency, symbolized by the supernal earth that corresponds to the land of Israel, is filled with the masculine glory of the Lord.<sup>43</sup> In the continuation of the text, however, there is an apparent gender reversal: The glory is compared parabolically to the matron

40. The Hebrew translated as “delighted” is *mishta’asha’in*. On the sexual connotation of this and related words, see E. Wolfson 1995b: 70–71, and further references to both primary and secondary sources given on 190–92 nn. 175–80. Compare the use of this term in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 5.

41. On the feminine aspect of the field, with a decidedly sexual component connected to the motif of walking, compare *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 62. See Scholem 1991: 162. On the image of the field as a metaphor for the feminine in classical Greek writings, see duBois 1988: 39–64. See also O’Flaherty 1980: 29–30.

42. For discussion of this passage in light of Gnostic symbolism, see Scholem 1991: 166–67.

43. Cf. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 95–96. In that context, the feminine potency is associated with the following images: the earth that is hewn from heaven, the throne of glory, the precious stone, the sea of wisdom, and the blue thread in the ritual fringed garment.

of the king who is hidden from her children. The feminized portrayal of the glory is enhanced by the second parable wherein the glory is compared to the princess who is exiled from the world of light and inhabits this world of darkness that she illumines (see Scholem 1987: 94–96; 1991: 166–67). Notwithstanding the overtly feminine images of the glory as matron, mother, and daughter, the ontological status of the glory is such that it is both masculine and feminine because the latter is ultimately derived from and dependent on the former. The point is underscored in the final section, in which the glory is compared to a field: Just as the field is unified with yet separate from the garden, so the feminine potency of the divine is distinct from yet unified with the other masculine potencies. The same symbolic structure is expressed in different imagery in another bahiric passage, which is an exposition of the esoteric significance of the letter *dalet*: “The students [of Rabbi Amorai] asked him: What is the *dalet*? He said to them: To what may this be compared? To ten kings who were in one place and all of them were wealthy. One of them was wealthy, but not like the rest of them. Even though his wealth was great, he is called poor (*dal*) in relation to the wealthy ones” (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 27). By an obvious play on the words *dalet* and *dal*, the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet comes to symbolize the divine gradation that is impoverished. In this context, the impoverished gradation is not distinguished in terms of gender from the other potencies that are depicted parabolically as kings. However, in subsequent kabbalistic literature, in some cases based on this very passage, the impoverished one, symbolized by the *dalet*, is associated more explicitly with the feminine *Shekhinah*. The state of poverty is linked essentially to the character of femininity, for the female is portrayed in kabbalistic literature as that which has nothing of her own but only what she receives from the beneficent male. The feminine quality of the *dalet* is implicit in the *Bahir* itself (secs. 28, 36), for there is something distinctive about the potency symbolized by that letter inasmuch as it is both wealthy like the other potencies and poor in relation to them. Structurally, this parallels the image of the field that is connected to yet separate from the garden. The ontic condition of the feminine is that she is a weakened or inferior male.<sup>44</sup>

It may be concluded that, according to the myth proffered in the bahiric text, the upper wisdom is valorized as male and the lower wisdom as female, but even the latter is ultimately masculine. The point is epitomized in the parable of the seven sons of the king:

44. Scholem suggests that the twofold description of the one king who is wealthy but poor signifies the active and passive elements in the *Shekhinah* (1991: 165). Although my formulation differs from that of Scholem, in substance my position resonates with his.

He sat and expounded for them, "There is the *Shekhinah* below as there is a *Shekhinah* above."<sup>45</sup> And what is this *Shekhinah*? I would say that it is the light that emanates from the first light, which is wisdom. This one, too, encompasses everything, as it says, "all the earth is filled with his glory" (Isaiah 6: 3). What is its function here? To what may be this compared? To a king who has seven sons and he placed each and every one in his place. He said to them: Sit one atop the other! The lowest one said: I will not sit below and I will not be far from you! He said to them: Behold, I will rotate and I will see you all day. This is the meaning of "all the earth is filled with his glory." Why is he amongst them? In order to establish and to sustain them. (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 171; see Scholem 1991: 173)

As we have seen, the lower *Shekhinah*, the light that emanates from the first light or wisdom, the upper *Shekhinah*, is often described in feminine images. Here, however, the lower *Shekhinah* is treated parabolically as one of the seven sons of the king. The ontic containment of the feminine in the masculine is reinforced in the continuation of this passage. The seven sons are related to the "seven holy forms," which are the seven limbs that make up the divine image with which Adam was created. The limbs are delineated as follows: two thighs, two hands, the phallus, and the head. The seventh is found in the woman who was constructed from the side (or rib) of the man (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 172; see E. Wolfson 1994b: 171).

The primordial androgyny is further illustrated by a second parable in the same context: "To what may this be compared? To a king who decided to plant in his garden nine male trees, and all of them were to be palm-trees. He said: If all of them will be of the same species, they will not be able to exist. What did he do? He planted a citron-tree (*'etrog*) amongst them, and it is one of the nine that arose in his mind to be male, but the citron is female" (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 172; see Scholem 1991: 169). The imagery employed in this parable is derived from the ritual of the four species (based on Leviticus 23:40) that each Jew is obligated to take on the festival of Tabernacles. The two central species are the palm-branch (*lulav*) and the citron (*'etrog*), which correspond symbolically to the masculine and

45. Based on a passage in *Seder Rabbah di-Bereshit*; see Schäfer, Schleuter, and van Mutius 1981: secs. 440, 745: "Just as his *Shekhinah* is above so it is below." See Scholem 1987: 178–79; 1991: 173, 296 n. 59. On the distinction between the lower and upper *Shekhinah*, see also the magical text *Sidre deShimusha Rabba weSidre Hekhalot*, in A. Jellinek, *Bet Midrash*, previously cited by Scholem (1923: 124 n. 2). Scholem's statement that, according to the doctrine of the *sefirot*, the double *Shekhinah* refers respectively to the third and tenth of the *sefirot*, is valid for later kabbalistic texts, but it does not reflect the approach of the bahiric passage. As I have argued in the body of this paper, in the *Bahir* itself, the upper *Shekhinah* is wisdom or the first light and the lower *Shekhinah* is the light that emanated from that light, the divine glory that is immanent in the world and the aspect of wisdom that is imaged as feminine. The assumption here is that the divine comprises eight powers, the seven sons and the king.



feminine attributes of the divine. The tree that is female was initially one of the males, which symbolizes that the female aspect of the divine pleroma, represented by the image of the garden (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 5, 6, 23, 92, 133), is itself part of the masculine. The point is emphasized once again in the continuation of the *Bahir* where the citron is associated symbolically with the beloved described in Song of Songs 6:10: "What is the splendor (*hadar*)? That is, the splendor of the All (*hadar ha-kol*), and that is the splendor of the Song of Songs concerning which it says, 'Who is it that shines through like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, radiant as the sun, awesome as bannered hosts' (Song of Songs 6: 10). This refers to the feminine and on account of her the female was taken from Adam, for the upper and lower worlds could not exist without the female" (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 173).<sup>46</sup>

Significantly, the feminine potency, related symbolically to the citron, is designated by the expression "splendor of the All," *hadar ha-kol*. Beyond the obvious connection to the biblical idiom, *peri 'es hadar* (Leviticus 23:40), interpreted already in targumic and classical Rabbinic literature as a reference to the citron,<sup>47</sup> this phrase connotes that the feminine is the glory or majesty of the masculine designated by the term *kol*, the All.<sup>48</sup> The splendor of the phallus is indeed the female that is taken from the male inasmuch as the process of creation only unfolds through the agency of the feminine principle. Here the kabbalistic symbol accords with a view expressed in any number of mythical complexes wherein the feminine is associated with the patterns of creation and the rhythms of the natural world. Optically, however, the female is part of the male.<sup>49</sup>

46. My translation follows the reading in ms. Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 23b (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 202). See Scholem 1987: 142.

47. See Targum Onkelos and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan *ad locum*; *Sifra*, 'Emor, 16:4; *Leviticus Rabbah* 30:8; Palestinian Talmud, Sukkah 3:7; Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 35a.

48. Scholem suggests that the expression *hadar ha-kol* may be an ellipsis of *hadar kol ha-'illanot*, "the splendor of all the trees," and thus it has the signification of *hadar 'al ha-kol*, the "most splendid of all" (Scholem 1923: 126 n. 3). Scholem even suggests that the word *kol* in the expression *hadar ha-kol* may be a technical name for the last *sefirah*, the *Shekhinah* (127 n. 1). In support of this claim he refers the reader to sec. 78. In my opinion, however, the term *kol* denotes the male potency, or the phallus, and hence I have rendered the expression *hadar ha-kol* as the "splendor of the All." Similarly, in § 78 the daughter given to Abraham is called *ba-kol* (based on the Talmudic reading of Genesis 24: 1 in Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 16b) and not simply *kol*. That is, the feminine is in the masculine, literally, "in the All," *ba-kol*. The point was well understood by subsequent interpreters of the *bahiric* text. For example, compare the discussion of Nahmanides' commentary to Genesis 24:1 and Numbers 15:31 in E. Wolfson 1989: 134 n. 90, 144 n. 116, 166–67. On the demiurgic and phallic connotation of the term *kol* in the *Bahir*, see E. Wolfson 1995a: 63–88.

49. The androgynous nature of the palm tree, based on earlier Rabbinic texts (compare Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim 56a), is emphasized in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 198: "Why was she called Tamar and not by other names? For she was a female. You think [that this is so] be-

### Home/Coming: Wisdom as the Demiurgical Logos

Up to this point I have explored in detail the mythical portrayal of *hokhmah* in select passages from the *Bahir*, which I have classified as the Hebraic orientation. However, as I have already noted, the Hebraic image of wisdom as God's feminine Torah is suffused with Hellenic elements most likely extracted from Neoplatonic sources. Unlike the attempted synthesis of Hebraism and Hellenism in medieval Jewish philosophical literature, which sought to harmonize two distinct modes of knowledge and authority, revelation and reason, in the case of the kabbalistic texts in general, and in the *Bahir* in particular, the Hebraic-Hellenic synthesis facilitated the bridging of the transcendent and the immanent, the metaphysical and the physical. To express the matter in slightly different terms, the philosophical layer superimposed on the mythopoeic provided the mechanism by which the abstract symbolism could be concretized in the empirical realm of space and time.

The point can be seen in the bahiric passage wherein the mythical portrayal of wisdom (or the *Shekhinah*) is expressed in an idiom drawn from philosophical discourse: The lower wisdom, like the upper wisdom, encompasses everything, *mesovev ha-kol* (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 171). The likelihood that this passage belongs to a later redactional stratum of the *Bahir* is supported by the fact that a similar expression "encompassing everything," *sovevet ha-kol*, is used to describe the attribute of divine wisdom in the writings of the Provençal Kabbalists, Isaac the Blind and Asher ben David.<sup>50</sup> Both of these Kabbalists were, no doubt, influenced by philosophical jargon. What is important to emphasize is that in the *Bahir* the purpose of this image is to underscore the demiurgical role of *hokhmah* as that which provides a sense of the immanent dwelling and localized habitation of the divine in the world. God is made accessible to human beings through the agency of the all-encompassing wisdom. For the human being to exist means to dwell in the shelter of the divine. This is related in the *Bahir* to

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cause she was a female? Rather, she comprised male and female, for all palm trees comprise male and female. How is this? The palm-branch is masculine and the fruit from the outside is masculine, but from the inside it is feminine. How is this? The nucleus of the date is split like a [vagina of a] woman, and corresponding to her is the power of the moon above. The Holy One, blessed be he, created Adam male and female, as it says, 'He created them male and female' (Genesis 1:27)."

50. See Isaac's *Perush Sefer Yesirah* in Scholem 1970: 2 (appendix); Asher ben David, *Perush Shem ha-Meforash*, published by M. Hasidah in *Ha-Segullah* 1 (1934): 11. For discussion of this expression, see Scholem 1970: 177. The relationship of *Sefer ha-Bahir* and strands of theosophic Kabbalah that crystallized in Provence is a complex issue that has been addressed by various scholars. See Scholem 1948: 64–65; 1987: 209–11; Idel 1981: 239; and Pedaya 1990.

the orthographic form of the letter *bet*, which is symbolic of the feminine hypostasis of Torah/wisdom: "Why is *bet* closed on every side and opened from the front? To teach you that it is the house of the world (*bayit le-'olam*), and thus the Holy One, blessed be he, is the place of the world but the world is not his place (*Bere'shit Rabba* 68:9, pp. 777–78). Do not read *bet* but *bayit*, as it is written, 'A house is built by wisdom, and is established by understanding' (Proverbs 24: 3)" (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 14; cf. sec. 55). Sophia is the "house of the world," the space in which the edifice of creation is constructed.

The application of this cosmological function to feminine wisdom is underscored in the following passage, which provides a mystical explanation of the *sukkah*, the temporary booth erected for Tabernacles: "What is *Sukkot*? He said to him: The house (*bayit*), as it is written, 'A house is built by wisdom' (Proverbs 24:3). Whence do we know that *Sukkot* is a house? As it is written, 'But Jacob journeyed on to Sukkot, and built a house for himself and made stalls for his cattle; that is why the place was called Sukkot' (Genesis 33:17)" (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 105). The identification of the *sukkah* with the house built by wisdom is meant to convey the idea that the booth serves as the tangible symbol for the *Shekhinah*. This symbolic association enables one to move from the speculative to the practical, from the theosophical to the mystical. It is not simply the complex symbol of the divine hypostasis that matters, but the concretization of that symbol in a sensible form. The philosophical conception of the immanent Sophia/Logos is precisely what enables the author of the *Bahir* to move in the direction of concretizing the transcendent in the intimacy of the dwelling of the world. To exist means to dwell in God's glory, for the cosmos itself is nothing but the habitation of the *sukkah*, the feminine dwelling in which the *Shekhinah* is empirically manifest.

The substantiation of the symbolic in the concrete can also be seen in the *Bahir*, in that the structure of the divine is imaged in distinctly moralistic terms. From this vantage point, then, it may be said that the synthesis of Hellenism and Hebraism in the Kabbalah was to harmonize the theosophical and the ethical. Here we encounter a fundamental dimension of the theosophic Kabbalah that has not been sufficiently appreciated in the scholarly literature.<sup>51</sup> Building on the biblical and Rabbinic conceptions of an innately ethical God, confirmed as well in the philosophical treatises, the Kabbalists intensified the convergence of theosophy and ethics by

51. A study of the relationship of ethics and mysticism in kabbalistic sources remains a scholarly desideratum. Two preliminary studies on this theme are Dan 1986 and Shokek 1991.

turning the moral attributes into hypostatic emanations.<sup>52</sup> Hence, in one of the bahiric passages cited above, the mythical portrayal of divine wisdom as the daughter given to Solomon is correlated with a pietistic conception of wisdom as that which facilitates the execution of justice. The wisdom God gave to Solomon, therefore, is connected to the specific task of rendering judgments of a just nature. From the perspective of the theosophic symbolism that evolved in the *Bahir* and in later kabbalistic texts, there is no reason to differentiate sharply between the mythical and the ethical. In the realm of the divine potencies, the phallic gradation, which is named Solomon, possesses the feminine gradation of wisdom. Parallel to this in the mundane realm, Solomon is in possession of God's wisdom, which enables him to judge wisely. It is thus no coincidence that elsewhere in the *Bahir*, the *Shekhinah* is identified specifically with the attribute of justice (*sedeq*) (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 75, 120). In one passage, the issue is expressed in gendered terms:

What is the repetition [of the word *sedeq* in the verse] "Justice, justice shall you pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20)? He said to him: As it is written, "Out of the brilliance before him" (Psalm 18:13). The first *sedeq* is the actual justice, and this is the *Shekhinah*, as it is written, "justice dwelt within her" (Isaiah 1:21). What is the second *sedeq*? This is the justice that frightens the righteous. Is this justice (*sedeq*) charity (*sedakah*) or not? He said: No. What is the reason? It is written, "He donned righteousness (*sedakah*) like a coat of mail," and *sedeq* is the "helmet of triumph on his head" (Isaiah 59:17). His head is nothing but truth, as it says, "The beginning of your word is truth" (Psalm 119:160), and truth is nothing but peace, as it says, "There shall be peace and truth in my time" (Isaiah 39:8). (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 75)

The *Shekhinah*, therefore, is the feminine attribute of *sedeq* that complements the masculine attribute of *sedakah*. Significantly, the feminine attribute is depicted in the image of the helmet that sits on top of the male's head, an image that I decode as a reference to the restoration of the feminine to the masculine (see above, note 20). In the posture of sitting as the helmet on the head, the feminine assumes the valence of the attribute of justice. The transvaluation of the feminine Sophia is expressed in slightly different terms in a second passage:

What is [the meaning of] "Though angry, may you remember compassion" (Habakkuk 3:2)? He said: When your children sin against you, and you get angry over them, "may you remember your compassion." And what is "may you

52. This convergence of theosophy and ethics is evident in the correlation in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 135, 137, and 190, of the three patriarchs and the attributes of lovingkindness, truth, and fear (or strength).

remember your compassion"? That of which it is said, "I adore you, O Lord, my strength" (Psalm 18:2). He gave him this attribute, which is the *Shekhinah* of Israel, and he remembers his son who inherited it and to whom he gave it, as it is written, "The Lord had given wisdom to Solomon" (1 Kings 5:26). And he remembers their father Abraham, as it is written, "Seed of Abraham, my friend" (Isaiah 41:8). (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 77)

The ethicizing of the mythopoeic, which results from the mingling of the Hebraic and Hellenic conceptions of wisdom, sheds new light on the transgressive element discussed above. Within the narrative framework of the engendering myth, the *hieros gamos* can only be portrayed in terms of the incestuous relationship of the father and daughter mediated through the union of the son and daughter. The inherently moralistic nature of these very attributes mitigates against the performative application of the transgressive symbol. In the final analysis, the theosophic system developed in the *Bahir* does not allow the separation of metaphysics and ethics. The gnosis of God imparts moral responsibility to the mystic, for the divine gradations are configured as ethical attributes. The point is driven home poignantly in the following passage:

What is [the meaning of] the verse, "Does a wise man answer with knowledge of the spirit?" (Job 15:2). What is the "knowledge of the spirit" (*da'at ruah*)? The knowledge that is proximate to the spirit, as it is written, "The spirit of the Lord should alight upon him; a spirit of wisdom and understanding" (Isaiah 11:2), wisdom and afterwards understanding. And in understanding there is "counsel" and "strength," "knowledge" and the "fear of the Lord" (*ibid.*). You have told us that counsel is lovingkindness, strength<sup>53</sup> is the attribute of judgment, knowledge is truth . . . and the fear of the Lord is the treasure of Torah. . . . The fear of the Lord is above, it is the in the palm (*kaf*) of the Holy One, blessed be he, and it is his might. That palm is called the "scale of merit" (*kaf zekhut*) because it inclines the world towards the scale of merit. Thus it is written, "He shall sense the truth by his fear of the Lord; he shall not judge by what his eyes behold, nor decide by what his ears perceive" (Isaiah 11:3). Rather, he should incline the world towards the scale of merit. From there counsel shall come forth, and from there health shall come forth to the world, "from there, the shepherd, the rock of Israel" (Genesis 49:24). This is the place that is called "there," as it says, "There is the concealment of his power" (Habakkuk 3:4). (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 186–87)

The ultimate task of the master of esoteric knowledge is to emulate the ethical attributes of God. From the selection of verses cited above, it is

53. Here I have followed ms. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 26a (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 212) because it corresponds to the sequence of the attributes listed in the biblical text.

evident that the bahiric author conceived of this gnosis in soteriological terms. The messianic figure embodies the synthesis of the theoretical and the practical, the theosophical and the ethical, the Hellenic and the Hebraic.

### Looking Beyond Jerusalem and Athens

I have explored here the hermeneutical strategies exemplified by the authors of *Sefer ha-Bahir* in their interpretation of concepts and symbols related to the idea of divine wisdom. It is possible to chart these images in binary terms as internal and external. The former is related to the indigenous notion of wisdom (*hokhmah*) that may be extracted from the Hebraic sources themselves, whereas the latter refers to the conception of wisdom (*Sophia*) that is derived principally from external, philosophical sources equated with the Hellenic. Upon further reflection, however, it becomes evident that these are relative judgments: What is "outside" at one historical stage becomes appropriated and assimilated to the "inside" at another. Given the inherent bipolarity of human consciousness, we tend to distinguish the inside from the outside and the outside from the inside, but it would be more accurate to presume that the two are dialectically inter-related at any moment of historical construction. That is, the process of appropriation and internalization of an external influence occurs by means of a creative leap through which the boundaries are traversed, resulting in the destabilization of the inside-outside dichotomy. To the extent that this destabilization is mollified and the outside becomes inside, the cultural balance is regained temporarily so that for the moment one knows one's bearings. To apply this model more specifically to the Hebraic-Hellenic dichotomy: What is inside assumes the position of the Hebraic pole and what is outside, that of the Hellenic pole. But this spatial orientation is always subject to disruption by the creative mind, which challenges the dichotomy by looking outside in (as in the case of the heretic) or inside out (as in the case of the radical believer).

The particular example analyzed here at great length underscores the difficulty of establishing rigorous lines separating the inner Hebraic from the outer Hellenic conception of wisdom. The idea of *hokhmah* in the *Bahir* is colored by a distinctively Hellenic notion of *Sophia*. Thus, wisdom is described as the feminine potency of the divine that imparts gnosis to the one enlightened in her mysterious ways. On the other hand, this Sophianic depiction had already been assimilated as an internal Jewish conception, highlighted by the identification of wisdom as Torah. The portrayal of *hokhmah* in the *Bahir*, which had a major impact on subsequent kabbalis-

tic literature, illustrates the insufficiency of the bipolar approach. What is to be gained by calling the mythical concept of wisdom “Gnostic” or by the more generic adjective “Hellenic?” Do either of these terms accomplish more than illuminating the cultural matrix that may have produced such a complex web of symbols? There can be little doubt that the mythical depiction of wisdom in the *Bahir*, including the blatantly transgressive element of the incestuous relationships implied by the various parabolic clusters surrounding the image of *hokhmah* as the daughter of the king, are products of an originally Hellenic context. However, as it has been appropriated and adapted in the bahiric text, this mythical depiction is presented as an indigenous Jewish idea. Moreover, in compliance with a major concern of the sapiental tradition in Judaism, going back to its biblical roots, the idea of wisdom contains an explicit moralistic dimension. Possession of wisdom is not merely cognitive; it implicates the one to whom it is granted with the imperative to act in the way of God’s wisdom, which is inherently ethical and just. It is precisely this characteristic that bestows upon the ideal of *hokhmah* in the *Bahir* the decisively Hebraic quality that allowed for the assimilation into kabbalistic lore of some of the most daring Hellenic notions about divine wisdom expressed in Jewish sources.

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# LEFT CONTAINED IN THE RIGHT: A STUDY IN ZOHARIC HERMENEUTICS

by

ELLIOT WOLFSON

Although there has been much in modern scholarship written about the historical and theosophical background of the Zohar,<sup>1</sup> scholars have paid little attention to the literary structure of the work and its relationship to the thematic content contained therein. There is, as far as I know, not one in-depth study of such a nature.<sup>2</sup>

This paper will attempt to unfold one recurrent theme which serves as the literary thread connecting the zoharic treatment of Exodus 1–20, i.e., the biblical account of Israel's enslavement in Egypt, their subsequent exodus,

1. See G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1961), pp. 156–243; idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 213–244. Isaiah Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2 vols. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1971) [hereafter cited as *MhZ*]. See also Daniel Matt, *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (Ramsey, N.J., 1983), esp. pp. 3–39.

2. See, however, Yehuda Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar" [Hebrew], in *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought: A Study Conference in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 87–236. This essay, which is rich in textual analyses and has indeed set the standard for all future research into the Zohar, contains many insights which may be useful to one interested in pursuing the issue of literary structure and its relation to thematic content in the Zohar.

and, finally, the Sinaitic revelation.<sup>3</sup> We will suggest that there is a common theme which the Zohar (exegetically) discovers within the biblical text. This theme, in turn, lies at the core of the zoharic understanding of the theological categories of exile, redemption, and revelation.

*Introduction: The "Left" and the "Right"*

As is well known to scholars in the field of Jewish mysticism, amongst the sources which exerted an influence upon the author of the Zohar are to be counted kabbalistic texts which derived from a "gnostic" school of Kabbalah which emerged in the second half of the thirteenth century in Castile.<sup>4</sup> One of the salient features of this school was the positing of a demonic realm morphologically paralleling the realm of the divine:<sup>5</sup> as there are ten holy emanations (*sefirot*), so there are ten "emanations of the left."<sup>6</sup> In the words of one of the members of this circle, Moses of Burgos: "There is a left [side] corresponding to the right, intended to perfect the right, to punish and chastise with 'chastisements of love' those who walk in a bad way in order to purify them."<sup>7</sup> To be sure, as Scholem has already pointed out, this dualism was never presented as absolute, for in order for a text to be accepted within the framework of normative Judaism, the dualistic

3. I am limiting myself in this paper to an analysis of texts which form part of the main body of the Zohar. For a discussion of the various literary strata in the Zohar, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 159–163; idem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 214–220. All citations and references to the Zohar will be taken from *Sefer ha-Zohar*, ed. Reuven Margaliot, 3 vols., 6th ed. (Jerusalem, 1984). References are to volume and page number. References to *Zohar Hadash* are from the Margaliot ed., 2nd ed. (Jerusalem, 1978) [hereafter cited as *ZH*].

4. See Scholem, "Kabbalat R. Ya'akov ve-R. Yizhak ha-Kohen," *Madda'ei ha-Yahadut* 2 (1927): 193–197; Liebes, "The Messiah," pp. 124–128.

5. Scholem, "Kabbalat R. Ya'akov ve-R. Yizhak"; J. Dan, "Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah," *AJS Review* 5 (1980): 17–41.

6. According to R. Isaac, the ten emanations of the left comprise "three worlds which were created and destroyed" (cf. *Gen. R.* 9:2, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 68) and seven archons which do battle against the seven lower holy emanations. See Scholem, "Kabbalat," pp. 194, 248–251. The expression "emanations of the left" was not used by R. Isaac, but rather by his student, R. Moses of Burgos. See Scholem, "R. Moshe, Talmid R. Yizhak," *Le-Heker Kabbalat R. Yizhak b. Ya'akov ha-Kohen*, in *Tarbiz* 4 (1933): 207–225.

7. Scholem, "R. Moshe," p. 209. See also Todros Abulafia, *Ozar ha-Kavod* (Warsaw, 1879; reprint, Jerusalem, 1970), 3a: "Where dogs bark there the Angel of Death is to be seen, for [he] is emanated from the left side, which is an emanation in itself." This should not be understood in any absolute sense, but rather as meaning that the left comprises its own powers which parallel those of the divine. See *ibid.*, 23b, concerning the "worlds created and destroyed" (see n. 6 and below n. 22).

tendency had to be mitigated.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, these kabbalists struggled over the question, Whence arose the demonic, or left, side?<sup>9</sup> While they differed as to the exact moment within the emanative process which would account for the emergence of the left side, all agreed that at some moment this in fact occurred. The demonic side was thus accorded a “quasi” independence, said to have emerged from either the third *sefirah*, *Binah*, or the fifth, *Gevurah* (Strength) or *Din* (Judgment).<sup>10</sup> In either case, according to these kabbalists, the “emanations of the left” have their origin in and are sustained by the left side of the divine realm itself. That is to say, therefore, that the demonic has a root within the divine.

This gnostic theme is developed repeatedly in the Zohar; indeed, it forms one of the essentially characteristic doctrines of the work.<sup>11</sup> Like the kabbalists of the Castilian circle, the author of the Zohar posits a demonic realm, called by him *Sitra Aħra*, the “Other Side,” which structurally parallels the divine realm:<sup>12</sup> both realms are constituted by ten powers.<sup>13</sup> Further-

8. Scholem, “Kabbalat,” pp. 193–194. See also Shulamit Shahar, “Catharism and the Beginnings of the Kabbalah in Languedoc: Elements Common to Catharic Scriptures and the Book Bahir” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 40 (1971), esp. p. 502, and p. viii of the English summary. Shahar concludes that despite the similarities between some of the doctrines of the Catharic sects in Languedoc in the twelfth century and the Kabbalah of the *Bahir*, with respect to the question of evil one must make a clear distinction between the two: the former were “entirely dualistic,” “making an absolute distinction between the good God and the principle of evil,” whereas the latter remained “completely monistic, since God is portrayed as the Creator of Chaos, and Satan is one of His attributes.” See n. 9.

9. Cf. Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:292, 295–298. As Tishby noted, the kabbalists’ concern with discovering the source for the demonic realm within the divine was an effort to mitigate the potential dualism of their doctrine concerning a left emanation. See below n. 12.

10. According to R. Isaac, the ten emanations of the left emerged from *Binah*, the third *sefirah*, whereas, according to R. Moses of Burgos, they emanated from *Gevurah*, the fifth *sefirah*, or the attribute of judgment. See Scholem, “Kabbalat,” p. 194; idem, “R. Moshe,” p. 210. Cf. also, Scholem, “Sitra Aħra: ha-Tov ve-ha-Ra ba-Kabbalah,” in *Pirkei Yesod be-Havanat ha-Kabbalah u-Semaleha* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 191–193. As Scholem points out (pp. 193 ff.), in the Kabbalah before the Zohar there was a third explanation for the origin of evil, viz., the last *sefirah*. This is reflected in the Zohar as well; see Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:298.

11. See Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:288–292.

12. Ibid. 1:288–289. It should be noted that Tishby (p. 292) distinguishes between morphological and ontological parallelism. In other words, while it is true that there is a parallelism of structure between the two realms, they are not of the same ontological standing; the demonic realm is of a secondary nature in comparison with the divine, or, according to one of the metaphors employed in the Zohar, the relation of the two is like that of an ape to a human being (see II, 148b). According to Tishby, this distinction is one of the various attempts to mitigate the potential dualism of the doctrine of two realms. See above n. 9.

13. III, 41b. See also II, 223b–224a; III, 70a. On occasion it is not the entire sefirotic realm but only the seven lower *sefirot* which are said to have a parallel in the demonic realm; see I, 194a. (See above n. 6.) Although there are several names for the demonic forces in the Zohar,

more, the demonic realm, which vis-à-vis the divine is considered to be the left, is itself constituted, as is the divine, by a left and right side, i.e., by a masculine and feminine dimension:<sup>14</sup> in mythological terms, just as there is male (= *Tiferet*) and female (= *Malkhut*) within the sefirotic world, so there is Samael and Lilith in the demonic world.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, just as the upper *sefirot* are arranged by means of three lines, i.e., the right side, or grace (*חסד*), the left side, or rigor (*גבורה*), and the median, or mercy (*רחמים*), so the lower *sefirot* are bound together by three knots.<sup>16</sup> Just as there is a complicated structure of palaces (*היכלות*) below the holy *sefirot*, so there is a corresponding structure below the demonic *sefirot*.<sup>17</sup> Finally, both realms can exert an influence upon and be influenced by human events. The human being stands in a reciprocal relationship to both realms, and it is the intention which directs the channel of energy from below which ultimately distinguishes one's attachment to the divine or to the demonic.

According to intention which one has in this world, so the spirit from above is drawn upon him. . . . If his will intends towards the upper holy matter, then

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the most common are: "lower crowns" (see, e.g., I, 95b, 167a; II, 21b, 35b, 39b, 64b, 85b, 94b; III, 14b, 48b, 69a, 95b, 111b, 119b, 208b, 209b); "lower grades" (see, e.g., I, 133b, 177a [but see remark of Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:288, n. 4], 194a; II, 244b); "impure crowns of magic below" (see, e.g., I, 167a; II, 30b; III, 41b); and, collectively, *Sitra Ahra* (see, e.g., I, 191b, 204b, 228a; II, 69a, and elsewhere).

14. I, 53a, 160a; II, 192b, 194b, 243a; III, 63a, 207a. Even though there is a right and left dimension in both realms, the demonic vis-à-vis the divine is known as the left, while the divine vis-à-vis the demonic is known as the right. See I, 195b; 211b; III, 259b. See Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:289, n. 2.

15. I, 148a (*Sitrei Torah*), 161b (*Sitrei Torah*). Cf. also I, 5a, 64a, 153a, 160b; II, 163b, 236b, 243a; see Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:298–300. The pairing of Samael and Lilith as husband and wife in the demonic realm, corresponding to Adam and Eve, was already made by R. Isaac ha-Kohen in his "Treatise on the Left Emanation"; see Scholem, "Kabbalat," pp. 251–252, 260, 262. For a discussion of R. Isaac's historical and literary sources, see Dan, "Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah," pp. 17–40. (The relevant passage is translated on pp. 18–19.) See below n. 44.

16. II, 38a. (Cf. also I, 166b; II, 40b.) By means of the merit of the "three knots of faith," i.e., the three patriarchs and the *sefirot* which they represent, the Israelites were released from the "three knots of magic" by which the Egyptians had bound them; see below n. 41. Cf. Yehuda Liebes, "Sections of the Zohar Lexicon" [Hebrew] (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1976), s.v. קשרא, n. 2, pp. 394–395, n. 20, p. 400. For an extended discussion of the possible Christian influence on the Zohar with respect to the notion of the trinity, see idem, "Christian Influences in the Zohar" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2, no. 1 (1982/83): 43–74. Cf. also idem, "The Messiah," pp. 130–131, n. 182.

17. I, 211b; II, 244a, 263a.

that thing is drawn upon him from above to below. If his will is to cleave to the Other Side, and he intends it, than that thing is drawn upon him from above to below.<sup>18</sup>

The close affinity of theurgy and magic reflects the structural parallelism of the two realms.

Moreover, the author of the Zohar, like his Castilian predecessors, was concerned with the problem of the origin of evil and the etiological relation of the divine to the demonic. While there are various approaches to this problem in the Zohar, these may be subsumed under two basic categories, the one mythological in nature and the other philosophical. The former, which we may call the cathartic view, posits that evil results as a by-product of the process of elimination of waste from Divine Thought, a process which

18. I, 99b. See *ibid.*, 125b, 161a; III, 112b, 145a. On this basis, e.g., the Zohar (*Midrash ha-Ne'elam*) reinterprets the midrashic comment on Deut. 34:10, "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like Moses": "In Israel none arose, but in the nations of the world there arose; and who was it? Balaam." See *Sifrei Devarim* 34:10, ed. Finkelstein, p. 430; for other rabbinic references, see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1968), 6:125, n. 727. The author of the Zohar writes: "Moses' works are above, Balaam's below. Moses made [theurgical] use of the holy crown of the supernal King above, and Balaam made [magical] use of the lower crowns below which are not holy" (II, 21b). Cf. Moses de León, *Shekel ha-Kodesh*, ed. Greenup (1911), pp. 16–18. Cf. *ZH*, 58b; III, 193b. The motif of Balaam as a chief magician and protagonist of the demonic is repeated often in the Zohar. See e.g., *ZH*, 66a; I, 125b, 126a, 166b; III, 112b, 194a, 207b, 212a. The association of Balaam with magic is found already in rabbinic Aggadah; see Ginzberg, *Legends*, index, s.v. "Balaam, the magical powers of." Moreover, according to earlier sources, Balaam was considered to be the chief magician of Pharaoh; see *Sotah* 11a; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:334–335. See II, 69a. See below, n. 41. The Aramaic *אשתמי*, lit. "made use of," was used technically in a theurgical context already in the Mishnah; see *Avot* 1:13. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 358, n. 17, and *idem*, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1965), p. 54, n. 36. It is of interest to note that in this passage (I, 99b) the mystic (R. Abba) learns his wisdom from a book brought to him by "the children of the East." Now, according to the Midrash (see, e.g., *Eccles. R.* 8:23), the wisdom of the children of the East consisted of astrology and divination. See Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1965), p. 98. Moreover, according to the Zohar itself, the land of the East was the place whence Laban, Be'or, and Balaam learned all their sorcery, for it was the place into which the angels Azza and Azael fell. See I, 126a, 133b, 223a. The children of the East, therefore, were masters of magical knowledge. Yet here they are portrayed as bearers of the correct mystical (theurgical) knowledge. Hence, in this context, the line between theurgical and magical knowledge is difficult to draw. See Tishby, *MhZ*, 2:11, who distinguishes between the two in terms of the ultimate purpose for which the given act was performed, i.e., whether to influence the upper powers or whether to gain benefit for oneself. But see *ibid.*, p. 435, where the distinction is somewhat blurred. Cf. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah* (Tel Aviv, 1948), pp. 143–144; Liebes, "The Messiah," p. 180, n. 319.

occurs during the very first stages of activity, indeed prior to the emanation of the sefirotic world from *Hokhmah* downward.<sup>19</sup> Before the process of emanation could unfold, it was necessary for God to rid Himself of the unbalanced forces of judgment, referred to mythically as "the primordial kings of Edom who died,"<sup>20</sup> or as "the worlds created and destroyed."<sup>21</sup> According to the second category, which we may call the emanative view, the demonic realm as a separate force is viewed as a link in the continuous chain of being. Here too there is no uniformity of opinion in the *Zohar*, for the root of evil is said to be in one of three gradations: *Binah*,<sup>22</sup> *Gevurah*,<sup>23</sup> or *Malkhut*.<sup>24</sup> The common denominator of these views, however, is that the demonic left side has its root in the left side of the divine. Furthermore, it is an imbalance in the sefirotic world, a breaking of the harmony between right and left, which ultimately eventuates in the coming-to-be of an "autonomous" left realm.<sup>25</sup> Hence, while the demonic structurally parallels the divine, the former is ontologically posterior to the latter.<sup>26</sup> In the course of our analysis it will become clear how this question has a bearing upon the thematic under discussion.

19. See II, 254b–255a; III, 292b (*Idra Zuta*). For a discussion of the cathartic view, see Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:150–151, 296; Ephraim Gottlieb, *Mehkarim be-Sifrut ha-Kabbalah* (Tel Aviv, 1976), pp. 178–182; Liebes, "Sections of the Zohar Lexicon," p. 147; Moshe Idel, "Ha-Mahshavah ha-Ra'ah shel ha-El," *Tarbiz* 49 (1980): 356–364.

20. See II, 176b (*Sifra di-Zeni'uta*); III, 128b (*Idra Rabba*), 135a, 142a, 292a (*Idra Zuta*). The biblical basis for this mythical conception is Gen. 36:31 ff. Cf. Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:138, 150. For a discussion of the possible source for this conception in the Castilian circle, and particularly Todros Abulafia, see Liebes, "The Messiah," pp. 219–221. Moreover, as Liebes points out (p. 219), this conception was probably suggested to the kabbalists by the midrashic claim that God at first considered creating the world with judgment and only afterwards decided to combine judgment and mercy together. See, e.g., *Gen. R.* 12:15.

21. See II, 34b. The source for this mythical conception was R. Isaac ha-Kohen; see above n. 6. Cf. Scholem, "Kabbalat," pp. 194–195.

22. See, e.g., I, 31a, 151a; II, 64a, 83a, 175b; III, 15b, 39b, 65a, 99a, 118b, 262b. Cf. Joseph Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Orah*, ed. Joseph Ben-Shlomo (Jerusalem, 1981), 1:235.

23. See Scholem, "Kabbalat," p. 194; idem, "Sitra Ahra," p. 200; Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:296–298.

24. See I, 16a; II, 149b; III, 148a. See above n. 10.

25. See I, 17a–b. With regard to the question, What creates the imbalance in the sefirotic world? there are basically two approaches: it results either from an internal process or as a result of human sin. See Scholem, *Pirkei Yesod*, pp. 202–204.

26. Here I have made use of Tishby's terminology; see n. 12.



*Exile*

The biblical narrative concerning Israel's sojourn in Egypt and its subsequent exodus represents one of the many exegetical bases upon which the author of the Zohar develops the gnostic drama. Egypt, according to the symbolic map of the Zohar, represents the demonic left side.<sup>27</sup> This symbolic correlation is based in the first instance upon a close textual reading of the scriptural account of the first three divine manifestations of power in Egypt. The preliminary miracle performed by Aaron before Pharaoh, the casting down of the rod which was then transformed into a serpent (see Exod. 7:9 ff.) and the first two plagues, the turning of the waters into blood and the spreading forth of the frogs (ibid. 19–22, 8:1–3), it will be recalled, are matched by the magicians of Egypt.<sup>28</sup> It is clear from the Bible, then, that the spiritual power of Egypt was that of magic. This factor was already elaborated upon by the rabbis of the Talmud. Thus in one place we read: "Ten measures of magic descended upon the world; nine were taken by Egypt."<sup>29</sup>

The intrinsic relationship of Egypt to magic was developed at length by the author of the Zohar.<sup>30</sup> The old aggadic theme, however, is transformed by the theosophic symbolism of the Kabbalah. That is, Egypt's special relation to magic underscores Egypt as the seat of demonic power, for according to the Zohar, magic is the force of the demonic, the *Sitra Ahra*,

27. For references, see below n. 31. See Tishby, *MhZ*, I: p. 81 of the Introduction. Tishby suggests that many of the passages in the Zohar which deride Egypt are in reality intended against Islam and the Arabs.

28. The power of the magicians is from the outset rendered impotent in comparison with the power of God. Hence, we are told that the rod which Aaron cast down, and which became a serpent, swallowed up the rods which the magicians cast down (Exod. 7:12). Moreover, the magicians' use of secret arts could match the divine power only for the first two plagues (ibid. 8:18–19). Finally, the magicians themselves are affected by the plague of boils, causing them to disappear. For a succinct discussion of these issues, see M. Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, trans. J. S. Bowden (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 71–72. The impotence of the Egyptian magicians vis-à-vis God was a favorite theme in rabbinic Aggadah. See, e.g., *Sanhedrin* 67b, *Exod. R.* 10:7, *Tanhuma, Va-Era* 14. See also Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:335, 352; 5:429, n. 185.

29. *Kiddushin* 49b. See also *Menahot* 85a, *Exod. R.* 9:6. For other references in aggadic literature to this theme, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, index, s.v. "Egyptians, masters of astrology and magic."

30. See, e.g., I, 81b, 83a, 249a; II, 30b, 35b, 38a, 191a, 192b; III, 50b, 69a, 70a. See below nn. 35–45.

which corresponds to the divine.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the ten lower *sefirot* are called specifically the “ten crowns of magic [of] impurity below.”<sup>32</sup> In another place we read that all the magicians (חרשי) of the world are called נחשים because “all types of magic of the world are bound to and emerge from that primordial serpent [נחש קדמוני] which is the spirit of impurity.”<sup>33</sup>

Employing this symbolic correspondence between Egypt and the demonic, the author of the Zohar interprets the verse “And Abram went down to Egypt” (Gen. 12:10): “This verse hints at wisdom and the levels down below, to the depths of which Abraham descended. He knew them but did not become attached.”<sup>34</sup> The descent of Abraham to Egypt thus symbolizes, as one writer put it, “his exploration of *Sitra Ahra*, ‘the Other Side.’”<sup>35</sup> In yet another place, the Zohar writes that when Joseph came to Egypt, “he

31. See, e.g., I, 167a; II, 30b; III, 41b, 70a, 192a. This is also the underlying meaning of a repeated claim in the Zohar concerning the special relation between the feminine and magic. That is, the demonic realm vis-à-vis the divine is considered to be feminine (although there is both a feminine and masculine dimension within the left side; see above n. 14); accordingly, all magic (i.e., the demonic) is related to the feminine. See *ZH*, 92b; I, 126a.

32. III, 41b. See also II, 223b–224a.

33. I, 125b. See also II, 215b. The “primordial serpent” in the Zohar frequently refers to the feminine counterpart to Samael in the realm of the Other Side (based on the aggadic image that Samael rode upon the serpent; cf. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 13), but it can also refer to this whole realm or to the masculine potency alone. See Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:304–305.

34. I, 83a (trans. by D. Matt, *Zohar*, p. 63). Cf. *ibid.*, 133b, where the author of the Zohar elaborates upon the talmudic interpretation of Gen. 25:6, “And to the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts,” i.e., Abraham transmitted to them a “name of impurity” by which to do magic (*Sanhedrin* 91a, and the commentary of Rashi, *ad loc.*). According to the Zohar, Abraham gave the sons of his concubines the names of the impure forces which are the lower grades; that is to say, Abraham imparted to them knowledge of the demonic realm. See *ibid.*, 223a. This interpretation likewise presupposes that Abraham had significant knowledge of the demonic realm. See below n. 45.

35. See Matt, *Zohar*, p. 220. Matt goes on to say: “This dangerous psychic journey is the crucible of Abraham’s spiritual transformation.” That is, as the passage from the Zohar itself (I, 83a) emphasizes, it was necessary for Abraham to descend into Egypt (the “Other Side”) before entering the land of Israel (the portion of the Holy One) so that he would be purified. That is also the mystical significance of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt: spiritual purification by means of contact with the unholy. See also II, 184a: “The words of Torah reside only there [i.e., in the desert, which is the abode of the demonic force], for there is no light except that which emerges from darkness. When that [‘other’] side is subdued, the Holy One, blessed be He, ascends and is glorified. And there is no divine worship except amidst the darkness, and no good expect within evil. When a person enters an evil way and forsakes it, then the Holy One ascends in his glory. Thus the perfection of all is good and evil together, and afterwards to ascend to the good. . . . This is the complete worship.” See n. 45.

learned their wisdom concerning the lower crowns.”<sup>36</sup> Or again, elaborating upon a saying of the rabbis in the Talmud (see above), the author of the Zohar writes:

It is taught: Ten types of wisdom descended upon the world, and all were absorbed by Egypt except for one, which spread out in the world. And all of these were types of magic, and from them Egypt knew magic [better] than the rest of the world.<sup>37</sup>

Egypt, therefore, epitomized the place of impurity. “R. Yose said: All the streets of Egypt were filled with idolatry; and, moreover, in every house were to be found implements by which they [the Egyptians] were bound to those lower crowns below and which aroused a spirit of impurity amongst them.”<sup>38</sup> Contained here is the mystical explanation for Moses’ command to the Israelites, “And take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin” (Exod. 12:22), namely, “in order to remove the spirit of impurity from amongst them.”<sup>39</sup>

On the symbolic level, therefore, Israel’s being in Egypt represented their being under the force of the demonic: they were bound by “the knots of magic.”<sup>40</sup> Pharaoh, king of Egypt, symbolized in turn the dominating power of this demonic side.<sup>41</sup> The Zohar, accordingly, elaborates upon a metaphor employed in Ezekiel 29:3, “Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the great crocodile that crouches in the midst of his streams.”<sup>42</sup> The

36. III, 207a.

37. Ibid., 70a.

38. II, 35b. Cf. *ibid.*, 38a; III, 50b.

39. Ibid. Cf. *ibid.*, 41a, 80b.

40. II, 25a, 38a, 52b, 69a; III, 212a (it was by means of the magic of Balaam that the Egyptians bound the Israelites; see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6:27, n. 156). On the usage of the word “knot” (קשרא) as a magical bond in the Zohar, see Liebes, “Sections of the Zohar Lexicon,” p. 397. This linguistic association is indeed quite old. For a survey of ancient Near Eastern materials, including relevant biblical texts, relating to magical bonds and knots, see Michael Fishbane, “Studies in Biblical Magic: Origins, Uses and Transformations of Terminology and Literary Form” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1971), chaps. 1 and 2.

41. I, 195a; II, 28a, 37b, 52b, 67b. According to rabbinic sources, Pharaoh was a magician par excellence; see *Moed Katan* 18a (cf. *Shabbat* 75a), *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, Exod. 7:15. See also Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:335, 352, 358; 3:13; 5:428, n. 175.

42. The attribution of the metaphor “the great crocodile” in Ezek. 19:3 to the Pharaoh in the time of the exodus can be found already in the Midrash. See *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, trans. J. Lauterbach (Philadelphia, 1976), vol. 2, p. 175; *Exod. R.* 9:4. Cf. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 3:66, 6:27, n. 156.

“great crocodile” names the demonic force, and “his streams” are “the gradations which emanate from him.”<sup>43</sup> The knowledge of this “great crocodile” is alluded to as well in the verse “Go in to Pharaoh” (Exod. 10:1). That is, the esoteric meaning of God’s injunction to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh,” is that God implored Moses to plumb the inner depths of the divine secrets concerning the demonic side. The Holy One, blessed be He, “must do battle” against this “great crocodile” and “not against another.”<sup>44</sup> Moses, therefore, was granted “the mystery of the wisdom of the great crocodile that crouches in the midst of his streams,” a wisdom that is granted only “to the just who know the secrets of their master.”<sup>45</sup> It was necessary for Moses

43. II, 34a. In the continuation of this section, the Zohar makes use of the rabbinic myth concerning Leviathan and his mate, i.e., a male and a female sea-monster. See *Bava Batra* 74b based on Isaiah 27:1; Ginzberg, *Legends*, index, s.v. “Leviathan.” According to the author of the Zohar, Leviathan and his mate correspond to Samael and Lilith, who, in turn, correspond to the Holy One and the Shekhinah. The Zohar was here influenced by the writings of R. Isaac ha-Kohen; see Scholem, “Kabbalat,” pp. 262–263, and the translation of this passage in Dan, “Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil,” pp. 38–39. See above n. 15. According to this passage (II, 34a–b), there is the great crocodile, i.e., Samael, and ten streams, i.e., vessels which contain the demonic forces: “in each stream there wanders about one crocodile” (ibid., 34b). The ten crocodiles, collectively, are the ten “lower crowns” which correspond to the ten *sefirot*. See Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:303. Cf. also I, 52a. On the historical influence of R. Isaac upon the author of the Zohar, see Scholem, “Kabbalat,” p. 195. According to Scholem, however, the “great crocodile” represents Samael, while the streams, in the midst of which he crouches, are the remaining nine lower crowns. The text, in my opinion, seems to bear out the interpretation of Tishby.

44. II, 34a.

45. Ibid. There is, according to the Zohar, an especially esoteric nature to this knowledge. With regard to this, the author of the Zohar was influenced by the Castilian kabbalists, who were reluctant to elaborate on this topic and who likewise spoke of the secret of the demonic as being known to only a select few. See Liebes, “The Messiah,” pp. 123–124. Thus, after the initial discourse on the “great crocodile” we read: “R. Shimeon said: The Account of Creation—the comrades are busy studying it and they have knowledge of it, but few are they who know how to allude to the Account of Creation according to the mystery of the great crocodile. Thus we learned [cf. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 9] that the entire world evolved only upon the scales of that [crocodile]” (II, 34b). For a discussion of the literary sources and theosophical significance of this passage, see Liebes, “The Messiah,” pp. 123–126. The statement concerning Moses’ attainment of knowledge of the “great crocodile” succeeds a discussion about Job. The error of Job, according to the Zohar, was that he did not give any portion of his sacrifices (which were all burnt-offerings) to the “Other Side,” and thereby aroused its jealousy. The sin of Job is referred to in the Zohar as “not including evil and good together,” for had he given a portion to the demonic realm as well, then he would have comprised the two together. “Thus it is fitting for a person to know good and evil, and then return to the good. That is the secret of faith.” (See above n. 35 and below n. 111.) Job is described in Scripture as being “removed from evil” (Job 1:8), i.e., he had no portion in *Sitra Ahra*. See II, 181b–182a; III, 101b; Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:291. By contrast, Moses, like Abraham (see above n. 34), had a portion in both realms; thus it

to attain such knowledge, for at that time, the people of Israel were under the dominion of the “great crocodile,” the chief power of evil, embodied in the person of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

### *Redemption*

Israel’s exilic state corresponds to an exilic state within the divine realm, viz., the domination of the Shekhinah by Samael.<sup>46</sup> Alternatively expressed, the historical exile signifies a separation above between the Shekhinah and the Holy One (*Malkhut* and *Tiferet*).<sup>47</sup> The redemptive process, as we shall see, is characterized in the Zohar by two stages which, respectively, correspond to the twofold characterization of exile as (1) the subservience of the holy (the right) to the unholy (the left),<sup>48</sup> and (2) the separation of male and female, right and left, within the divine.<sup>49</sup>

The first stage in the redemptive process is the overthrowing of the yoke of Satanic (i.e., Egyptian) rule. Such a power could be overthrown, however, only by the very means through which it governs. In order for God to redeem Israel, therefore, it was necessary for Him to use the tactics of the left against the forces of the left, to fight fire with fire. Thus the author of the

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says “Go to Pharaoh,” i.e., attain knowledge of the demonic realm, a knowledge which Job did not possess. See Liebes, “The Messiah,” p. 126. On Solomon’s being taught from a book of magic by Asmodeus, see II, 128a; III, 19a, 77a. Cf. also III, 233a–b concerning the legend of Solomon riding an eagle to a place in the wilderness called “Tarmod” (see I Kings 9:18: “Tadmor”), where Azza and Aza’el were bound by chains of iron, and where none but Balaam was allowed to enter. From that place Solomon “learnt wisdom.”

46. See Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:224–225, 230–231. “The subservience of the Shekhinah to *Sitra Ahra*,” concludes Tishby, “is the hidden mystery of the exile of the Shekhinah. The upper exile is a disturbance of the order of the divine reality, a closing of the channels of influence and an eclipse of the lights due to the removal of the Shekhinah from the realm of the *sefirot* and her joining with the *Sitra Ahra*. The exile of Israel in the countries of the nations is a process which parallels an event that occurs above.” See n. 48.

47. See Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:225, 229–230; Liebes, “The Messiah,” p. 198.

48. This is expressed in several ways: (1) the submission of the Shekhinah to *Sitra Ahra* (see n. 46); (2) the unification of *Tiferet* with Lilith (see I, 122a–b; III, 69a); (3) the dominion of the other nations over Israel (see I, 84b–85a); (4) Israel’s being nourished by the power of *Sitra Ahra* in place of the power of holiness (see I, 95b; II, 152b).

49. On the analogy between the pair of opposites, male-female and right-left, see, e.g., I, 30a, 70a. See n. 81.

50. I, 211b. Cf. *ibid.*, 201a; II, 29a, 36a. See also Menahem Recanati, *Perush ‘al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1961), Exod. 12:22, 41c–d. On the theme of the Shekhinah employing the forces of *Sitra Ahra* in order to punish the wicked, see Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:224–225.

Zohar interprets the verse “I compare thee, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh’s cavalry” (Cant. 1:9):

Come and see: There are chariots of the left in the mystery of the Other Side and chariots of the right in the mystery of the supernal Holiness. The ones are parallel to the others; the ones of mercy and the others of judgment. And when the Holy One, blessed be He, carried out judgment in Egypt, every judgment that He did was in the very likeness of those chariots [on the left] and in the likeness of that very side. Just as that side kills and removes souls, so the Holy One acted in that very way, as it is written, “And the Lord killed every first-born” [Exod. 13:15].<sup>50</sup>

Nowhere was this more apparent, according to the Zohar, than in the plague of the killing of the firstborn; this event symbolized the wiping out of the demonic power of judgment by means of divine judgment. The Zohar thus interprets the verse “And the Lord will pass through to smite Egypt” (Exod. 12:23): “He will pass through the strict lines of judgment of the [lower] crowns, which are bound to the other crowns above, and He will loosen them from their place. And He will pass over his ways in order to act with judgment to protect Israel.”<sup>51</sup> That God “will pass over” means that God will pass through the domain of the lower crowns, the demonic realm, in order to execute judgment upon them and thereby protect Israel.

Specifically, according to the Zohar, the divine attribute employed by God in carrying out this act of judgment was the tenth *sefirah*, Shekhinah, commonly called the “lesser” or “weaker” attribute of judgment,<sup>52</sup> or “the lower Court.”<sup>53</sup> This is alluded to in Exodus 12:29, “And the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt”: “And the Lord” (׳מ), according to a midrashic comment, refers to the Holy One and His Court, which, in kabbalistic terms, symbolize *Tiferet* and *Malkhut*.<sup>54</sup> The Zohar’s point,

51. II, 36b.

52. I, 261a; II, 187a.

53. II, 231b. Cf. *Shekel ha-Kodesh*, pp. 80–83. See Tishby, *Perush Aggadot le-R. ’Azriel* (Jerusalem, 1945), p. 56.

54. II, 37b (based on rabbinic interpretation of ׳מ as “the Lord and His Court,” see *Gen. R.* 51:3, *Exod. R.* 12:4). See also *ibid.*, 37a; III, 176a. See Moses de León, *Shushan Edut*, ed. Scholem, “Shenei Kuntrasim le-R. Moshe di-Li’on,” *Kovez ’al Yad*, n.s. 8 (1975): 344. It should be noted that, with respect to this very issue, Nahmanides was very careful to emphasize that the plagues in general, and particularly the plague of the killing of the firstborn, were carried out by the Shekhinah in conjunction with the Holy One, i.e., the attribute of judgment together with that of mercy. The motivation here was clearly to avoid the separation of the

therefore, is that the killing of the firstborn (chief power of the demonic) was achieved by means of God acting through "His Court," i.e., Shekhinah. This is further brought out in another passage interpreting the same verse. Here, as elsewhere in the Zohar, Shekhinah is called by the name "Night":<sup>55</sup> "And judgment was carried out on all of them when they all entered their homes . . . and the Night carried out judgment on them all in that time."<sup>56</sup> This too is the underlying intent of the Zohar's comment that the "essence of the redemption of Israel was in the night."<sup>57</sup> Yet this attribute lies in between the right and left sides of the divine, and therefore has the capacity to act with mercy or with judgment.<sup>58</sup> At the moment of the killing of the firstborn, the Shekhinah turned with mercy toward the Israelites, thus expressing her dual nature.<sup>59</sup>

The exile, as we have noted, was a state in which the demonic dominated over the divine; redemption is the restoration of power to its proper domain, viz., the realm of the upper *sefirot*. Such a restoration, however, entailed a twofold process. The first stage was the subjugation of the demonic left by the divine left, which resulted in the freeing of the Community of Israel (= Shekhinah) from under the dominion of Pharaoh (= *Sitra Aħra*). It is this

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Shekhinah from the rest of the divine attributes, a sin which the kabbalists referred to as קיצוץ בנטיעות, i.e., "cutting the shoots," an expression used in the classical Aggadah to refer to Adam (see *Gen. R.* 19:3) or to Elisha ben Abuya (*Hagigah* 14b). (On the kabbalistic meaning of "cutting the shoots," see Scholem, "Te'udah Hadashah, le-Toledot Reshit ha-Kabbalah," in *Sefer Bialik* [Tel Aviv, 1934], p. 153, and Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:221.) Cf. Naḥmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Exod. 12:12 (ed. Chavel, vol. 1, p. 329). Cf. also the supercommentaries on Naḥmanides: Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov*, in *Ma'or ve-Shemesh* (Livorno, 1839), 34a; Joshua ibn Shuaib, *Be'ur Sodot ha-Ramban*, attributed to Meir ibn Sahula (Warsaw, 1875); Isaac b. Samuel of Acre, *Sefer Me'irat Einayim: A Critical Edition*, ed. Amos Goldreich (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 79.

55. On "Night" as a name for Shekhinah, see, e.g., I, 16b, 92b; II, 239b, and elsewhere. See Moses de León, *Shushan Edut*, p. 341.

56. II, 38a. See Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, Exod. 11:4, 41a.

57. II, 38a. Cf. Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, MS Oxford 1607, 54b (a critical edition of the aforementioned work will appear as part of my dissertation).

58. On the dual character of the Shekhinah, see Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:223–228. Cf. also Naḥmanides, Genesis 49:24 (ed. Chavel, vol. 1, p. 273), and *Me'irat Einayim*, p. 83. It should be noted that, according to the Zohar, not only Shekhinah but each of the *sefirot* has the capacity to act with mercy and judgment; see II, 36a; III, 15a, 36b, 146a, 262b. This latter idea can be traced back to the circle of kabbalists in Gerona; see, e.g., Jacob ben Sheshet, *Sefer ha-Emunah ve-ha-Bittahon*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1964), vol. 2, p. 359. Cf. *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 71a; Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Or*, 1: 235.

59. See II, 36a, 37a. This is the esoteric meaning of the killing of the firstborn at midnight, i.e., at a time when the Shekhinah performs two functions reflecting her dual nature: mercy toward Israel and judgment toward Egypt. See II, 37b, 80b.

transformation from the unholy to the holy which, according to the Zohar, is the mystical intent of the twin commandments to remove all leaven prior to Passover and to eat unleavened bread during the seven days of Passover. That is to say, the leaven symbolizes the evil inclination, the "Other Side," foreign gods and idolatry, which must be obliterated, whereas the unleavened bread symbolizes the first gradation in the realm of holiness, i.e., Shekhinah, the dominion of the Holy One.<sup>60</sup>

The second stage involved the beginning of the process of reunification of the left and right within the divine sphere, a unification that was torn asunder by the exilic state. This stage is implicit in the biblical narrative as well. The night on which God smote the Egyptian firstborn is referred to in Scripture as *ליל שמורים*, i.e., "the night of watchfulness" (Exod. 12:42). Commenting on this verse, the Zohar notes, *inter alia*, that the word for "watchfulness," *שמורים*, is in the plural, whereas the word for "night," *ליל*, is in the singular.<sup>61</sup> The plural form, we are told, alludes to the secret of unification between male and female, right and left,<sup>62</sup> which was destined to take place on that very night. The night, *ליל*, is the feminine without her masculine counterpart; when the feminine is joined together with the masculine, then *ליל* becomes *לילה*.<sup>63</sup> Thus the verse continues: "this is the Lord's watch-night" *הוא הלילה הזה לה' שמורים*. The night of redemption is a night wherein the two are united, and hence the form *לילה* is used. This marks the beginning of the second stage in the redemptive process.

This mystery, according to the Zohar, is alluded to as well in Exodus 13:21, "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; that they may go by day and night." Nahmanides had already interpreted the verse in terms of kabbalistic symbolism: the word *וה'*, "and the Lord," as the rabbis had said,<sup>64</sup> always refers to the Lord and His Court, which, understood theosophically, symbolize *Tiferet* and *Malkhut*. Hence the verse comes to

60. See I, 226b; II, 40a, 182a; III, 95b. Cf. *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, MS Oxford 1607, 54a–b. It should be noted that leaven was already used allegorically as a symbol for that which is evil or impure in Greco-Jewish, New Testament, and talmudic sources. See Philo, *Questions on Exodus*, I:15, II:14 (but see *The Special Laws*, II:184); I Cor. 5:6–8; Matt. 16:11–12; *Berakhot* 17a; *Gen. R.* 34:10, p. 320; *Tanhuma*, ed. Buber, *Noah* 15b. And see now B. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984), p. 120, n. 13.

61. II, 38b.

62. See above n. 49.

63. II, 38. Cf. I, 260a; II, 131a; III, 22a.

64. For references, see above n. 54.



tell us, comments Nahmanides, that “the Holy One, blessed be He, went with them by day and His Court by night,”<sup>65</sup> that is to say, the attribute of mercy governed them by day, whereas the attribute of judgment governed them by night.<sup>66</sup> While both attributes were thus operative in the redemption from Egypt, the two were not perfectly united, for each had its allotted time. Yet, contained here is also an allusion to the future redemption in which “the attribute of His Court [i.e., judgment] will ascend to [be united with] mercy.”<sup>67</sup> This is the secret of the word *וְיָ*: the Holy One and His Court will be united as one, and redemption will be complete.

The author of the Zohar clearly develops the interpretation of Nahmanides, but he does not accept the latter’s distinction between the redemption from Egypt and the future redemption.

“And the Lord went before them by day.” The Holy One, blessed be He, and His Court. R. Isaac said: It has been taught: The Shekhinah travels with the patriarchs.<sup>68</sup> “He goes before them by day,” that [refers to] Abraham. “In a pillar of cloud,” that [refers to] Isaac. “To lead them the way,” that [refers to] Jacob. “And by night in a pillar of fire to show them the way,” that [refers to] King David. . . . And it is written, “And the Lord went, etc., that they may go by day and by night.” Now why did they go by day and by night? . . . So that the highest perfection [lit. the perfection of all] should be found amongst them, for there is no perfection without day and night.<sup>69</sup>

The “highest perfection,” *שלימותא דכלא*, is found only where there is “day” (masculine potency of the divine) and “night” (feminine potency) united as one. There is here an echo of one of the theosophic principles which the Zohar establishes in connection with the creation account. In response to the question, Why does the Bible record with respect to each day, “And it was evening and it was morning”? the author of the Zohar writes: “To teach that there is no day without night, nor night without day, and they should not be separated.”<sup>70</sup> In the event of redemption, as in that

65. Nahmanides, Exod. 13:21 (ed. Chavel, vol. 1, p. 348).

66. See Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat Einayim*, p. 81; Recanati, Exod. 13:21, 43a.

67. Nahmanides, loc. cit.

68. The notion of the fourfold unity between the Shekhinah and the patriarchs (i.e., the *sefirot Hesed, Gevurah, and Raḥamim*) is repeated often in the Zohar. It is related, alternatively, to the four components of the Chariot or to the four legs of the Throne. See I, 60b, 99a, 120b, 150a, 237a, 248b; III, 174a, 182a, 262b. See Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:516.

69. II, 46a–b. Cf. also III, 191b.

70. I, 46a. Cf. also, *ibid.*, 5b, 32a; III, 93b, 134b.

of creation, we find a unification of day and night, masculine and feminine, the Holy One and the Shekhinah.

This second stage of redemption is expressed in somewhat different, but not unrelated, terms in the climactic event of the miracle of the sea. It is in his exegesis of this portion that the author of the *Zohar* is able to develop most fully his theosophic understanding of redemption and to introduce his unique parlance: the containment of the left within the right.

Commenting on the verse "And Israel saw the great work [lit., the great hand, *היד הגדלה*] which the Lord wrought against the Egyptians" (Exod. 14:31), the author of the *Zohar* writes:

R. Ḥiyya said: The Hand and all the fingers were here perfected. The Hand was perfected for it was contained within the right, for it has been taught, "All is contained within and depends upon the right."<sup>71</sup> Thus it is written, "Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy" [*ibid.*, 15:6].<sup>72</sup>

The attribute by means of which the divine redeemed Israel and at the same time destroyed Egypt, as we have said above, was the Shekhinah, here referred to by the expression "the great Hand."<sup>73</sup> This is made explicit in another zoharic passage: "What is the meaning of 'the great Hand'? That is to say, 'hand' [*יד*] is not less than five fingers. 'The great' [*הגדלה*] contains five other fingers; then it is called 'great.'"<sup>74</sup> The "great Hand" is a composite of both hands, the term "great" (*הגדלה*) referring to the five fingers of the right hand,<sup>75</sup> and the term "hand" (*יד*) referring to the five on the left.<sup>76</sup> Shekhinah, insofar as it is the *sefirah* which comprises all ten gradations

71. See I, 17a, 253a.

72. II, 52b.

73. See Nahmanides, Exod. 14:31 (ed. Chavel, vol. 1, p. 353); Ibn Shuaib, *Be'ur Sodot ha-Ramban*, 13a; *Me'irat Einayim*, p. 82; Bahya ben Asher, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, ed. Chavel, 5th ed. (Jerusalem, 1981), vol. 2, p. 121. See also Recanati, 43b.

74. II, 53b. Cf. the commentaries of R. Moses Cordovero and R. Abraham Galante to the *Zohar*, ad loc., cited by Abraham Azulai, *Or ha-Hammah* (Benei-Berak, 1973), vol. 2, 43b–44a.

75. The word *גדולה* is a common name for the attribute of *hesed* or the right hand; see, e.g., II, 59b, 286b; III, 277a, 302a.

76. The word *יד* by itself refers to the left hand; see III, 142b. See also *Sefer ha-Bahir*, ed. R. Margaliot (Jerusalem, 1978), § 163 (Scholem, *Das Buch Bahir*, § 109, p. 116), where the principle of evil is said to have the "form of a hand."

corresponding to the ten fingers,<sup>77</sup> is called the “great Hand.” Put differently, Shekhinah is called “the great Hand” because She is the hand which contains both the left and right hands as one. Concerning the latter image, we read:

Come and see: It has been said that all ten plagues which God performed in Egypt were [wrought by] one hand, for *the left was contained in the right*. The ten fingers, contained one within another, correspond to the ten sayings by means of which the Holy One, blessed be He, is called. In the end, corresponding to them all, is the great and mighty Sea.<sup>78</sup>

The ten plagues were performed by ten fingers which correspond to the ten sayings, i.e., the ten *sefirot*. Yet all the plagues were wrought by the “one Hand,” i.e., Shekhinah, for the fingers of the left (= *sefirot* aligned on the side of Rigor or Judgment) were contained in those of the right (= *sefirot* aligned on the side of Mercy or Love). Moreover, as the miracle at the sea was the culmination of the plagues—in the Zohar’s language “corresponding to them all”—so Shekhinah, symbolized as “the great and mighty Sea,”<sup>79</sup> contains within itself the whole sefirotic order.<sup>80</sup> This is the meaning of R. Hiyya’s comment: “the Hand and all the fingers were here perfected.”

The containment of the left within the right which characterizes the state of the Shekhinah at the climax of the redemptive process reflects a higher process within the divine, a process which is exegetically connected in the Zohar to the verse “Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy” (Exod. 15:6). The right hand symbolizes the divine attribute of love, whereas the left hand symbolizes the attribute of judgment. One would expect, therefore, that Scripture should describe the left hand of God as being “glorious in power” and as the one which “shat-

77. On the correspondence of the ten fingers to the ten *sefirot*, see *Sefer Yezirah* 1:3; *Sefer ha-Bahir*, § 124 (Scholem, § 87, p. 94), § 132 (Scholem, § 94, p. 101). See Nahmanides, Exod. 17:12 (p. 372); II, 75b.

78. II, 56b.

79. Cf. I, 19b, 86a, 236b, 241a, 267b; II, 19b, 226a; III, 58a, 150b.

80. This description of the Shekhinah is to be found already in the *Bahir* and in other early kabbalistic sources. See Scholem, “Ha-Shekhinah,” in *Pirkei Yesod be-Havanat ha-Kabbalah u-Semaleha*, p. 276. Cf. also Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:219. A related idea, also found in the earlier sources, is that the whole sefirotic order is reflected in each of the *sefirot*. See Tishby, *Perush ha-Aggadot le-Rabbi 'Azriel*, p. 15, n. 2.

ters the enemy.” For what reason is the right hand so described in the above passage? Addressing this issue, the Zohar notes:

“Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.” What is the meaning of נאדר? It should be written נאדר! When the left comes to unite with the right, then it is written נאדר [i.e., is glorious], and תערך [i.e., shatters]. It is always like this, for *the left is found in the right and is contained therein*. R. Shimeon said: It is as we have explained, for a man is found divided. What is the reason? In order that he may receive his mate, and they will make one body.<sup>81</sup> So [it says] ‘Thy right hand,’ i.e., it is divided. What is the reason? In order to receive the left hand with it. Thus is everything: one [part] with another. Therefore, with one hand He strikes and heals, as it is written, “Thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.”<sup>82</sup>

The right hand of God is described as the one “glorious in power” and as the one which “shatters the enemy,” for the right hand contains within itself the left hand as well. When there is harmony in the sefirotic realm, then the left is united with, nay contained in, the right—as male united with female—and all acts, including those of the left, are carried out by the guidance of the right: “with one hand He strikes and heals.”

Come and see: From the right hand of God all light, blessings, and happiness are aroused. Within the right the left is contained, just as there is in a human being a right and left hand, and *the left is contained in the right*. . . . When the right is aroused the left is aroused with it, for the left is held and contained within the right.<sup>83</sup>

81. This clearly reflects the aggadic myth that Adam was created as androgynous and was then separated into man and woman. For references, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:88–89, n. 42. Cf. I, 35a, 37b, 165a; II, 55a, 231a–b; III, 10b, 19a, 44b; *ZH*, 55c–d, 66c. According to the Zohar, not only Adam but the soul of each person was originally made androgynous, and only upon descent to the world is divided into male and female; at the time of marriage the original unity is restored (see *Yevamot* 63a). See I, 85a, 91b, 108a; II, 246a; III, 43a–b, 283b; Tishby, *MhZ*, 2:608. The one who remains single is called by the Zohar פלג גופא, i.e., “half-a-body.” See III, 7b, 57b, 296a, (*Idra Zuta*); Liebes, “Sections of the Zohar Lexicon,” pp. 277–278; Matt, *Zohar*, p. 217. The kabbalists applied the aggadic myth to the divine: as the complete human personality is to be found only in the unification of male and female, so too the divine being is only complete when male (*Tif'eret*) and female (*Malkhut*) are united. See Tishby, *Perush ha-Aggadot le-Rabbi 'Azriel*, p. 86; idem, *MhZ*, 1:139, 148–149. Cf. also Liebes, “Sections of the Zohar Lexicon,” p. 33, n. 26, and idem, “The Messiah,” p. 202.

82. II, 57b. See also III, 37a.

83. II, 57a. Cf. *Shekel ha-Kodesh*, p. 39. See Tishby, *MhZ*, 2:341. Cf. I, 230b; II, 162b, 223a, 263a; III, 17b, 80b, 118b, 176b. Cf. *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. Lauterbach, vol. 2, p. 41.

The removal of the right hand, by contrast, summons separation and division, the domination of the left hand of the divine, and with this comes the danger of the left resulting in an “autonomous” demonic realm: “When the right hand is found, the left is found with it, and acts of judgment do not dominate in the world. . . . But if the right is removed and the left is summoned, then acts of judgment are stirred up in the world and judgment rests upon all.”<sup>84</sup>

Hence, the divine act of redemption can be viewed from two vantage points: the subjugation of the demonic left by means of the divine left, and the containment of the divine left within the divine right. While it is the case that the word “left” is used with two distinct meanings, there does not seem to be any equivocation on the part of the Zohar, for the apparent tension is resolved by a proper understanding of the dialectical relation between the demonic and the divine. That is, the subjugation of the unholy left is accomplished by means of the divine left, which, unlike the former, is contained within the right. Whereas exile represents the domination of the (demonic) left, redemption represents the containment of the (divine) left within the (divine) right. Put differently: exile is a condition of pure judgment, redemption one of mercy balanced with judgment. The severing of this balance is, in the first place, one of the causes for the emergence of an independent demonic realm.

### *Revelation*

In Egypt Israel was under the dominion of the “Other Side.” The exodus represented a transference of power from the unholy to the holy. This process reached completion only at the theophanous event of Sinai. Before Israel could receive the Torah, however, two other significant events in their history were recorded in Scripture.

The first was the war with Amalek (Exod. 17:8–16). The Zohar, building upon a midrashic theme,<sup>85</sup> maintains that Israel was attacked because they

84. II, 57a. The notion of the left hand over the right signifying misfortune is reflected in *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. Lauterbach, vol. 2, p. 41: “When the Israelites do the will of God, they make His left hand to be like the right, as it is said, ‘Thy right hand, O Lord . . . Thy right hand, O Lord’—two times. And when the Israelites fail to do the will of God, they make His right hand to be like the left, as it is said, ‘He hath drawn back His right hand’ [Lam. 2:3].” See Judah Goldin, *The Song at the Sea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 149.

85. Cf. *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, vol. 2, p. 139; *Berakhot* 5b; *Tanḥuma*, *Beshallah* 25; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 13.

had forsaken the ways of God.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, Amalek, says the author of the Zohar, is "the prosecutor of the Holy One, blessed be He, above,"<sup>87</sup> i.e., *Sitra Aħra*. Hence, the theosophic significance of the war with Amalek is equivalent to that of the destruction of the Egyptians: the wiping out of the demonic by the divine. This dynamic, according to the Zohar, is to be found in the verse "And when Moses raised his hand Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed" (Exod. 17:11): "'When he raised,' i.e., when he lifted the right hand on top of the left, and he prayed [lit. intended] by means of the spreading of his hands."<sup>88</sup> But here too, as in the case of the splitting of the sea, the subjugation of the demonic left is achieved by means of the divine right, which in itself contains the divine left. Indeed, in one passage, the Zohar interprets the verse concerning the raising of the right hand of Moses in light of the verse concerning God's right hand shattering the enemy.<sup>89</sup>

The second event preceding the account of the Sinaitic revelation which the Zohar makes special note of is the meeting of Moses with his father-in-law, Jethro, in the wilderness (Exod. 18:1 ff.). The section of the Zohar on Jethro begins with an exegetical comment concerning Aaron's lifting up of the right hand over the left.<sup>90</sup> The relevancy of this remark can be under-

86. II, 65b. Such an interpretation is, of course, suggested by the juxtaposition of verse 7, "And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the faultfinding of the children of Israel, saying, Is the Lord among us or not?" with verse 8, "Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim." See Rashi's commentary, Exod. 17:8.

87. Ibid. See I, 29a; II, 65a, 194b–195a; III, 175a, 281b.

88. II, 66a. The lifting of Moses' hands, i.e., the raising up of the right hand over the left, is here interpreted as an act of prayer. See *Sefer ha-Bahir* 138; II, 57a. Cf. Todros Abulafia, *Oẓar ha-Kavod*, 29b. Abulafia, like the author of the Zohar, interprets this passage as the joining together of the left hand with the right. This, notes Abulafia, is the supreme act of faith. See below n. 111. It is the ultimate task of "homo religiosus" to contain the left within the right. See II, 26b, 32a; III, 39b, 178a. See Menahem Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, 14:121, n. 106. It especially characterizes the mystical import of prayer; see II, 57a. Cf. Moses de León's "Untitled Commentary on the *Sefirot*," MS Munich 47, 340a–b. Concerning this work, see Scholem, "Eine unbekannte mystische Schrift des Mose de Leon," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 71 (1927): 109–123. In terms of prayer, this is alternatively expressed (based on Ps. 100:2) as the placing of Shekhinah between the right and left as a preparation for the ultimate unification between her and the Holy One; see I, 229b, III, 8a–b, and cf. to Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, MS Oxford 1607, 14b, 24b. See also the interpretation of Cant. 2:6 in I, 163b; II, 138b, 238b; III, 118b, 119b (cf. Menahem Recanati, *Ta'amei ha-Mizvot* [Basel, 1581], 8a), 148b.

89. II, 66a. On the mystical significance of the war with Amalek as the wiping out of the left by the right, see II, 65b, 194b; III, 281b.

90. Ibid., 67a. See *Sefer ha-Bahir* 124; II, 57a, 225a; III, 92b. Cf. MS Munich 47, 340b; *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 111b.

stood only in light of the symbolic correspondence of Aaron, high priest of the Israelites, to the divine right side, the attribute of love, and of Jethro, priest of Midian, to the demonic left. The Zohar explicitly states that the “Other Side,” like the side of holiness, has two forces, a king and a priest: “In the ‘Other Side,’ which is not the side of holiness, there is the secret of the king, and it has been explained that he is called ‘the old and foolish king’ [Eccles. 4:13]. And beneath him is the priest of On.”<sup>91</sup> The Zohar goes on to say:

when that king and that priest are subdued and broken, then all the other forces [of the demonic] are subdued and they acknowledge the Holy One, blessed be He. Then the Holy One, blessed be He, alone governs above and below. . . . In the manner of this very secret the Holy One, blessed be He, acted in the land [below], for He broke the “old and foolish king” who was Pharaoh. When Moses came to Pharaoh and said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us” [Exod. 5:3], he opened up and said, “I know not the Lord” [ibid. 2]. . . . When He smote him and his people, he came and acknowledged the Holy One, blessed be He. Afterwards that priest of On, Jethro, who served under him, was broken and subdued until he came and acknowledged the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, “Blessed be the Lord who saved you, etc. Now I know that the Lord is great” [ibid. 18:10–11]. . . . When that king and priest acknowledged the Holy One, blessed be He, and were broken before him, then the Holy One, blessed be He, ascended in His glory upon everything above and below.<sup>92</sup> And until the Holy One, blessed be He, ascended in His glory when those [two] confessed before Him, the Torah was not given.

The conversion of Jethro, like the overthrowing of Pharaoh, was a necessary stage in the redemptive process. Only when the subjugation of these two demonic powers was completed could the revelatory process ensue.

The giving of the Torah, according to the Zohar, likewise symbolizes the containment of the left within the right, but in two senses. The first is the one with which we are already familiar: the unification of the left within the right in the realm of divinity. This is expressed in several ways in the Zohar. There is, first of all, the kabbalistic interpretation of Exodus 19:16, “And it came to pass on the third day,” the day in which the revelation took place: “On the third day precisely, for it is mercy [רחמי],”<sup>93</sup> i.e., the balance between

91. Ibid., 67b. See Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:288–289.

92. Cf. II, 184a (cited above in n. 35).

93. II, 81a. So too, according to the Zohar, the third day of creation stands for mercy (*Tiferet*), which is the balance between *hesed* (the right) and *gevurah* (the left). See I, 17a. See

love (חסד) on the right and strength (גבורה) on the left. Moreover, the Zohar interprets the biblical theme concerning the appearance of lightning and fire at Sinai in the following manner:

It has been taught: R. Judah said: The Torah was given on the side of strength. R. Jose said: If so, then it was on the left side! He said to him: It was restored [אתהדר] to the right, as it says, "From His right hand a fiery law unto them" [Deut. 33:3], and it is written, "Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, etc." We find that *the left is restored* [דאחזור] *to the right, and the right to the left.*<sup>94</sup>

The verse describing the Sinaitic revelation, Deuteronomy 33:3, is here compared to the verse describing the miracle at the sea, Exodus 15:6, for both verses, according to the Zohar, instruct us about the mystery of the containment, or restoration, of the left within the right. The redemptive act in the one case, and the revelatory act in the other, are achieved by means of the right hand which contains within itself the left.

With respect to revelation, the Zohar repeats this theme by reinterpreting a midrashic motif,<sup>95</sup> viz., the primordial Torah was written as black fire upon white fire.

R. Isaac said: The Torah was given as black fire upon white fire in order to contain [לאכללא] *the right in the left, so that the left would be restored* [דאחזור] *to the right*, as it says, "From His right hand a fiery law unto them." . . . R. Abba said: The tablets were before their eyes, and the letters that were flying about were visible in two fires, white fire and black fire, to show that the right and left are one.<sup>96</sup>

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also I, 120a, with reference to the "third day" in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac; see below n. 111. The third day was the appropriate one for the event of giving the Torah, for the latter symbolically represents *Tiferet*, which is the balance between right and left. See below n. 101.

94. Ibid.

95. See Talmud Yerushalmi, *Shekalim* 6:1, *Sotah* 8:3; *Cant. R.* 5:11. Cf. *Tanḥuma*, introduction, where the reading is slightly different. See also *Midrash Konen*, in Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 4th ed. (Jerusalem reprint, 1982), 2:23, and *Midrash Eser ha-Dibrot*, in Jellinek, op. cit., 1:62, where the anthropomorphic element (i.e., the arm of God) is added. Cf. Scholem, "Shi'ur Komah—ha-Demut ha-Mistit shel ha-Elohut," in *Pirkei Yesod be-Havanat ha-Kabbalah u-Semaleha*, p. 164, n. 18. According to Scholem, one must view these midrashic statements in the context of the anthropomorphism of the *Shi'ur Komah* tradition. Cf. also Moshe Idel, "Tefisat ha-Torah bi-Sifrut ha-Heikhalot vi-Gilguleha ba-Kabbalah," in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 43–45.

96. II, 84a. This midrashic theme was interpreted in various ways by kabbalists of the thirteenth century. In one passage, attributed by Scholem to R. Isaac the Blind, a Provençal



The Torah “comes from strength [the left] and is contained [ומתכלילת] in the right.”<sup>97</sup>

This containment of the left within the right is reflected, according to the Zohar, in the alignment of the people at the moment of revelation: five groups on the right and five on the left.<sup>98</sup> It is reflected, moreover, in the very structure of the tablets which Moses received.

It has been taught: Five voices [i.e., commandments] were on the right, and five on the left. *Those on the left were contained in the right*, and from the right those on the left were revealed. And here everything was [contained in] the right, and those [on the left] were contained in those [on the right]. The one who stood on one side and saw the other side could read those letters [on the other side]. For we have learnt that the left was restored to the right, as it is written, “From His right hand a fiery law unto them.”<sup>99</sup>

Finally, the very object of revelation, the Torah, embodies the mystery of the left being contained in the right. This can be explained in one of several ways: (1) The written Torah corresponds symbolically to *Tiferet*, which is the balance between the right and the left.<sup>100</sup> (2) There are two aspects to the Torah, the written and the oral. The former represents the right, and the latter the left,<sup>101</sup> or, alternatively, *Tiferet* and *Malkhut*.<sup>102</sup> Hence, the day of the Sinaitic revelation, the one source for both aspects of Torah, is the wedding day of the masculine and feminine potencies of the divine.<sup>103</sup> (3)

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kabbalist, the white fire refers symbolically to *Tiferet*, the written Torah, and the black fire to *Malkhut*, the oral Torah. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York, 1978), pp. 48–49. For other references, see Tishby, *Perush ha-Aggadot le-Rabbi Azriel*, p. 77, n. 7. The midrash was used in an altogether different manner by Nahmanides in the introduction to his commentary on the Torah; see p. 2 of the Chavel edition. Cf. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, p. 38, and Idel, “Tefisat ha-Torah,” p. 45.

97. II, 84a. See I, 48b.

98. II, 82a (based on Deut. 29:9–10). Cf. MS Munich 47, 341a, where de León refers to this passage as “our rabbis, may their memory be blessed, alluded to, etc.” The exact date of this work is still unclear, but from this passage it would appear to have been composed after the author had worked on the Zohar. See, however, A. Farber, “On the Sources of Rabbi Moses de Leon’s Early Kabbalistic System” [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984): 87–88.

99. II, 84b, 98. See II, 90a. Cf. Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, MS British Museum 759, 41a.

100. See I, 64a; II, 60a. Cf. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, p. 49.

101. See III, 153a, 257a.

102. See II, 161b; III, 264a. Cf. Tishby, *MhZ*, 2:366.

103. See I, 8a.

The Torah comprises 613 commandments, 248 positive and 365 negative. The former derive from the right side of the divine, the masculine זכור, and the latter from the left side, the feminine שמור.<sup>104</sup> Insofar as the Torah given at Sinai includes all 613, it symbolizes the balance of positive and negative, right and left.

The event of revelation as understood by the Zohar thus represents the complete containment of the left within the right in the divine sphere. Apart from this, however, there is another nuance to this motif in the Zohar, viz., the reintegration of the demonic left into the divine right. The exodus from Egypt was the first step in Israel's spiritual odyssey out of the realm of the unholy; hence, the evil inclination, the left side, symbolized by the leaven, had to be totally removed. At Sinai not only did the left side not have to be removed, it had to be reappropriated. This, according to the Zohar, is the mystical intent of the biblical injunction to bring leavened bread as the first fruits of the Lord on Pentecost.

"You shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves [of two tenth measures; they shall be of fine flour and shall be baked with leaven]" [Lev. 23:17]. This is the bread by which Israel got wise, the supernal Wisdom of the Torah, and they entered its ways. Now we must look carefully. On Passover Israel went out from the bread which is called leaven [חמץ], as it is written, "You shall not see any leaven" [Exod. 13:7], and "Whoever eats that which is leavened" [ibid. 12:19]. What is the reason? On account of the honor of that bread which is called unleavened [מצה]. Now that Israel merited the highest bread, it was not appropriate for the leaven to be wiped out and not seen at all. And why was this sacrifice [of the bread of the first fruits] from leaven, as it is written, "they shall be of fine flour and shall be baked with leaven"? Moreover, on that very day [when the Torah was given] the evil inclination was wiped out,<sup>105</sup> for the Torah, which is called freedom, was to be found! This

104. See II, 70b, 91a, 162a–b, 165b, 275a; III, 92b (*Ra'aya Meheimna*), 264a; *ZH* 54b. Cf. Tishby, *MhZ*, 2:432.

105. The Zohar here reflects a statement made by the rabbis to the effect that the pollution (זומא) by means of which the serpent inseminated Eve ceased when Israel stood at Mount Sinai; see *Shabbat* 146a, *Yevamot* 103b, *Avodah Zarah* 22b. The Zohar connects this idea with another rabbinic notion, viz., the cessation of the evil inclination at the moment of revelation. Specifically, according to one tannaitic source (R. Nehemiah), there was a temporary uprooting of the evil inclination from the hearts of the Israelites when they heard the commandment "Thou shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3) at the event of revelation; see *Cant. R.* 1:2. According to the zoharic sources, the evil inclination returned on account of the sin of the golden calf. See I, 36b, 52b, 63b, 70b, 126b, 228a; II, 94a, 168a, 193b, 236b, 242b; III, 97b. The

may be compared to a king who had an only son who was sick. One day the son desired to eat. They said to him: The king's son should eat this medicine, and until he eats that no other food will be found in the house. So it was done. When he ate the medicine, he said to him: From now on you may eat whatever you desire, and it will not harm you. Similarly, when Israel left Egypt, they did not know the essence or secret of Faith. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Israel shall eat medicine, and until they eat the medicine no other food shall be shown to them. When they ate the unleavened bread, which was medicine, in order to enter and to know the secret of Faith, the Holy One said: From now on leaven shall be shown to them, and they can eat it, for it cannot harm them. And all the more so on the day of Shavu'ot, which is a complete medicine.<sup>106</sup>

In this passage the author of the Zohar makes two statements which, *prima facie*, are contradictory. On the one hand, he says, "it was not appropriate for the leaven [symbolic of the evil inclination] to be wiped out and not seen at all," while on the other hand, relying on rabbinic sources, he asserts that on the very day that the Torah was given "the evil inclination was wiped out." This apparent tension can be resolved only if we understand the two assertions in a dialectical relation: "it was not appropriate for the leaven to be wiped out" because "the evil inclination was wiped out." When Israel left Egypt it was necessary to remove all leaven, for at that time they were comparable to a sick child who could consume only the prescribed medicine, i.e., the unleavened bread, symbolic of the entry into the realm of holiness, the beginning of faith. After they received the higher type of bread, viz., the bread of wisdom embodied in the Torah,<sup>107</sup> this was no longer necessary. On the contrary, the very leaven which was forbidden on Passover was required on Shavu'ot. At the moment of revelation the left side was once again appropriated by Israel, for at that time it presented no danger to the people, its efficacy being undermined by the Torah, the most perfect antidote to the malady of the evil inclination.<sup>108</sup> In the presence of the "complete medicine," the unholy is restored to its source in the holy.

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final and ultimate destruction of the evil inclination is to occur at the advent of the Messiah; see *Sukkah* 52a. For other references, see Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York, 1961), p. 290, n. 3; Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 416–417, n. 2.

106. II, 183a–b. See also III, 97a.

107. See II, 40a, 61b (see Matt, *Zohar*, pp. 113–116, 245–247), 183a. See Tishby, *MhZ*, 2:391. On the unleavened bread as a symbol for the Shekhinah, the beginning of faith, see above n. 60.

108. This too is based on a midrashic motif. For references, see Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, pp. 273–275.

### Conclusion

We have attempted to trace a common theme that runs through various portions of the Zohar. This theme serves as the exegetical axis upon which the zoharic understanding of exile, redemption, and revelation turns. The historical movement of Israel from Egypt to Sinai is, at the same time, a spiritual movement from the dominion of the left to that of the right. The ultimate stage of this process, the revelation of the Torah, is one in which we find the containment of the left within the right. Such a process began in Egypt but reached completion only at Sinai. The perfect state is not one in which evil is entirely obliterated,<sup>109</sup> but rather one in which it is contained within the good. Only the sick soul must eliminate all traces of the left; the healthy soul, by contrast, can reappropriate the left and thereby unite it with the right. Indeed the essence of divine worship is to worship God with both hearts,<sup>110</sup> i.e., to contain the evil inclination within the good, the left within the right.<sup>111</sup>

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109. See III, 63a (*Pekudim*), where it is stressed that evil should not be completely eliminated, for it is as necessary in the world as is the good. The ideal of spiritual perfection in the Zohar is one in which the person achieves holiness through contact with the unholy, and by means of such contact the unholy itself is transformed or contained within the holy. See above nn. 35, 45 and below n. 111. The notion that the evil inclination (i.e., the sexual desire) should not be eradicated, on account of its necessity for the begetting of life in the world, can be found in several rabbinic sources. See, e.g., *Yoma* 69b; *Gen. R.* 9:7, pp. 71–72. Cf. also *Lev. R.* 14:5.

110. See *Berakhot* 54b. Cf. I, 155b, 178b; III, 80b, 267a; and *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 39b.

111. See II, 26b (with reference to Deut. 4:39), and *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, ad loc. Cf. II, 161b and III, 264a. The wicked, according to the Zohar, cause a blemish (פגם) above by causing a separation of right and left, i.e., by not containing the left (evil inclination) in the right (good inclination). See II, 26b. This too was the sin of Job: by not giving the realm of the “Other Side” its proper due, he did not contain the left within the right; see n. 45. On the nature of פגם in the Zohar as the separation of male and female, see Tishby, *MhZ*, 2:607; Liebes, “The Messiah,” esp. p. 198. The notion of the containment of the left in the right is a pivotal idea upon which much of the theosophical hermeneutics in the Zohar turns. It would be impossible to give all the contexts in which such an idea occurs. Worthy of mention, however, are (1) the zoharic interpretation of the act of creation; see Tishby, *MhZ*, 1:133, 219–220, 269–270, 381–382; (2) the building of the Tabernacle; see *ibid.*, 2:188–189; (3) the Akedah; see I, 119b, 133b, 230b; II, 257a; cf. *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 78b, and Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Orah*, 1:224–225; (4) the love of God, אהבה רבה, which contains both sides, *hesed* and *din*; see I, 11b–12a; (5) faith itself, insofar as it is the union of male and female; see I, 49b, 55b, 160a, 172b; II, 89a, 92a, 161a.

## LIGHT THROUGH DARKNESS: THE IDEAL OF HUMAN PERFECTION IN THE ZOHAR

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the perennial, and more vexing, problems in religious thought and philosophy has been the question *unde malum*. In ancient, medieval, and modern thought, the issue has been viewed mostly in its theological context. From the perspective of traditional monotheistic theology, the problem thus presents itself: If God is truly all good and all powerful, then why would God cause or even allow evil, whether natural (e.g., earthquakes, floods, human disease) or moral (murder, rape, and the like), to exist? Inasmuch as the existence of evil, at least from the phenomenological point of view, is an indisputable fact, it would seem that either divine omnipotence or benevolence must be limited.<sup>1</sup>

This question, when examined from the divine axis, has prompted various responses in the religious consciousness of the West ranging from the neo-Platonic denial of the reality of evil<sup>2</sup> on the one hand, to the dualist affirmation

<sup>1</sup> The scholarly literature on this issue is vast. As a representative philosophical treatment of the problem, see H. J. McCloskey, "God and Evil," in Nelson Pike, ed., *God and Evil* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964) 61–84.

<sup>2</sup> The classical formulation of evil as the privation of the good are to be found in Plotinus *Enn.* 1.8 (the following citations are taken from the Loeb edition of Plotinus translated by A. H. Armstrong). Cf. *Enn.* 1.8.1: "evil . . . appears in the absence of every sort of good"; "the better [i.e., the good] is Form, and the worse [i.e., evil] is nothing but privation (στέρησις) of form." See *Enn.* 1.8.3: "evil cannot be included in what really exists [i.e., Intellect or Soul] or in what is beyond existence [the One], for these are good. So it remains that if evil exists, it must be among non-existent things, as a sort of form of non-existence (εἰδός τι τοῦ μὴ ὄντος)." Plotinus further identifies matter as the principle of absolute evil insofar as the quality of formlessness or privation essentially characterizes matter; all bodies, on the other hand, which participate in matter are said to be "secondary" evil. See *Enn.* 1.8.6: "But when something is absolutely deficient—and this is matter—this is essential evil without any share in good." See, however, *Enn.* 5.8.7: "Then matter too is a sort of ultimate form (εἰδός τι ἑσχατόν)." A key Platonic text for the Plotinian conception

of opposing forces eternally struggling in a cosmic process<sup>3</sup> on the other. In the former case, the whole problem of evil is rendered logically fallacious insofar as evil is not a real entity but merely the absence of good, just as darkness is not considered a positive state but merely the absence of light. Technically speaking, one does not cause darkness, for darkness comes about simply when light is removed. Similarly, one cannot legitimately ask, does God create evil, for evil as such is a privation and consequently has no direct cause. While the metaphysician, with cunning ratiocination, may be satisfied with this approach, the psychological dimension of evil as an immediate and direct experience for the individual is hardly addressed by such philosophic gymnastics.<sup>4</sup> In the case of

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is *Theaetetus* 176a: "Evils . . . can never be done away, for the good must always have its contrary, nor have they any place in the divine world; but they must needs haunt this region of our moral nature. . . . In the divine there is no shadow of unrighteousness, only the perfection of righteousness." On the view that only good can be attributed to God, see further below, n. 6. The Plotinian position became the most widely accepted view in subsequent Christian writers. See Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology* (trans. John Jones; Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980) 73–88, 148–62 = *Divine Names* 4.18–35; J. B. Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) 109–12, 128–29, 202–3; Régis Jolivet, *Le problème du mal d'après Saint Augustin* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1936) 28–43, 131–62; Jacques Maritain, *Saint Thomas and the Problem of Evil* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942). For a parallel to this line of reasoning in the medieval Jewish tradition, cf. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (trans. S. Pines; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) III. 10. 438–40.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the best known form of this dualism is that of Iranian Zoroastrianism, which sets a good and evil at the beginning of world history. Yet, as scholars have argued, even the dualism of Sassanian and Gathic Zoroastrianism was qualified inasmuch as the "Wise Lord" is both ontologically superior and chronologically prior to the evil spirit. See S. Shaked, "Some Notes on Ahreman, the Evil Spirit, and His Creation," in E. E. Urbach, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, and Ch. Wirszubski, eds., *Studies in Mysticism and Religion presented to Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 227–34. And see the comprehensive study by R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan, A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955). A species of this type of dualism, in one form or another, characterizes the syncretistic phenomenon of Gnosticism which flourished in the first centuries of the Common Era. Various explanations for the origin of Gnostic dualism have been given by scholars, most notably Hans Jonas, who distinguished between two kinds of Gnostic dualism: (1) the "Iranian," represented by the Mandaean and Manichaean writings, which affirmed an eternal opposition between the forces of good and evil; and (2) the "Syro-Egyptian" strand, represented by the Nag Hammadi texts and the systems described by the Church Fathers, in which evil—the material world—derives from a "tragic split" in the godhead, a fall within the divine realm. Cf. Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939) 1. 256–67, 328–31. For a succinct summary of the different Gnostic views, see Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (trans. R. McL. Wilson; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 59–67. And see also G. G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (NHS 24; Leiden: Brill, 1984) 17–34, who traces the basis of the "Gnostic mythological consciousness of evil" to a "radical transformation" of the Jewish apocalyptic myth of the Fallen Angels.

<sup>4</sup> See the description of evil in J. B. Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) 17–35.

the dualist position, on the contrary, the real life struggle with evil as a positive and immediate force is not only not undermined, but maintained on a cosmic level. The consequence of this posture, however, is that God can be said to have control over only part of existence,<sup>5</sup> even if in a modified dualist position, such as the Qumran community in the Dead Sea,<sup>6</sup> the one God is the ultimate cause

<sup>5</sup> The view that God is the author only of the good can likewise be traced to Plato; cf. *Republic* 379c: "for the good we must assume no other cause than God, but the cause of evil we must look for in other things and not God." See also the citation from *Theaetetus* given above, n. 2. According to Philo *Quod omnis probus liber* 12.84, the Essenes maintained "the belief that the deity is the cause of all good, but of no evil." On several occasions Philo himself maintains that God is the cause only of the good, and evil is caused by the powers or subordinates to God; see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947) 1. 272–73.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. Licht, "An Analysis of the Treatise of the Two Spirits in DSD," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 4 (1958) 88–99; A. R. C. Leane, *The Rule of Qumran and Its Meaning* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 37–56; P. Wernberg-Möller, "A Reconsideration of the Two Spirits in the Rule of the Community (1QS III, 13–IV, 26)," *RevQ* 3 (1961–62) 413–41. See also J. Gammie, "Spatial and Ethical Dualism in Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic Literature," *JBL* 93 (1974) 356–85. Some scholars have argued that even Zoroastrian dualism is not absolute "metaphysical dualism" inasmuch as the evil spirit, as the good spirit, derives from the one "Wise Lord"; see above, n. 3. In a certain respect there is a fundamental inconsistency in the Qumran doctrine for, on the one hand, God is said to be the creator of both spirits, evil and good, yet, on the other hand, the eschatological culmination of history is envisioned as a time when the sons of light would rise up and conquer—indeed destroy—the sons of darkness. (For a similar tension in Zoroastrianism, see R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* [New York: Putnam's, 1961] 308–16.) If one begins from the monotheistic premise that God creates both good and evil, then the rabbinic ideal that one must worship God with both the good and evil inclinations (cf. *m. Ber.* 9.5; *Sifre Deut.* piska 32, p. 55) must be seen as a more logically consistent doctrine. For the rabbinic affirmation of God as creating the good and evil inclinations, a form of ethical dualism not unrelated to the Qumran doctrine, cf. *Bereshit Rab.* I, 14.4, p. 128; *Tg. Ps-Jonathan* on Gen 2:7; *Sifre Deut.* piska 45, p. 103; S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken, 1961) 290 n. 3; E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978) 416–17 n. 2. And cf. the interpretation of Eccl 7:14, "God has made one even as the other," attributed to R. Akiba in *b. Hag.* 15a: "He created the righteous and he created the wicked, he created the Garden of Eden and he created Gehinnom." For an analysis of this text, see A. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) 22. See also the interesting parallel to this passage in *Pesiqa de-Rav Kahana*, piska 28, p. 426: "'God has made the one even as the other,' God has made the righteous and the wicked, as it is written 'Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esau' (Gen 25:26). R. Pinhas [in the name of] R. Hilkiah in the name of R. Simon said: not even a rib was between them, and the one emerged righteous and the other wicked." In this case the wicked created by God has been subsumed typologically under the figure of Esau and the righteous under the figure of Jacob; see below, n. 34. On the appellation "wicked" for Esau in rabbinic sources, see I. Aminoff, "The Figures of Esau and the Kingdom of Edom in Palestinian Midrashic-Talmudic Literature in the Tannaitic and Amoraic Periods" (Ph.D. diss., Melbourne University, 1981) 15–17, 27–28, and passim. It must be pointed out, however, that certain rabbinic statements reflect the apocalyptic view that posited an abrogation of the evil inclination at the end of time; see below, n. 11. Cf. also the following interpretation of Ps 5:5, "evil cannot abide in You," in *Midrash Tehilim* 5.7: "For You do not dwell by evil nor evil by You." Though the fuller context of this passage is not clear, it would seem that the

of both good and evil, light and darkness. Hence, in the dualistic model, unlike the neo-Platonic, the soul's existential grappling with evil is affirmed, but at the expense of severely limiting divine omnipotence and restricting God's control over history.

Alternatively, the problem of evil can be viewed from the vantage point of religious anthropology. That is, in what sense and to what degree does the person of faith appropriate the evil dimension of experience—whether it be understood as an internalized principle of will or as an objective cosmic force—in his or her spiritual quest? It is with the latter that the focus of this paper is concerned. I will analyze this problem specifically in terms of the theosophic symbolism of the crowning work of medieval Jewish mysticism, the Zohar, pseud-epigraphically attributed to the second-century Palestinian rabbi, Simeon bar Yoḥai, though actually written in the last decades of the thirteenth century in northern Spain.<sup>7</sup>

This article will examine an ideal of human perfection that is found in the Zohar<sup>8</sup> according to which one must incorporate evil, even the demonic side, into one's spiritual path. I will suggest that there are two distinct typologies in the Zohar, one positive and the other negative, that both assume this to be the case. In the one case appropriation of the demonic is viewed only as a means for purgation and refinement, whereas in the other it is a means for containment and unification. Common to both is the assumption that one can achieve holiness only through the unholy, that one can see the light only through darkness. The role of the former in the context of the Zohar's struggle with dualism has already been discussed by Isaiah Tishby.<sup>9</sup> As Tishby concludes after surveying the relevant sources, this notion of incorporating the demonic into the religious

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midrashist wants to remove evil from God in a way that would be analogous to the Platonic tradition.

<sup>7</sup> On the author of the Zohar, assumed by scholars to be Moses ben Shem Tov de León (ca. 1240–1305), see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961) 156–204; idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972) 213–42; I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1971) 1. 103–8; D. Matt, *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983) 3–10; and my dissertation, “*Sefer ha-Rimmon*: Critical Edition and Introductory Study” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1986) 1–43.

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this study I am limiting my analysis to the main body of the Zohar. On the various literary strata which make up the Zohar, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, 159–62. The editions used in preparation of this article were *Sefer ha-Zohar*, (ed. R. Margaliot; Jerusalem: ha-Rav Kook, 1984); *Zohar Hadash* (ed. R. Margaliot; Jerusalem: ha-Rav Kook, 1978); *Tiqunei Zohar* (ed. R. Margaliot; Jerusalem: ha-Rav Kook, 1978). Citations refer to volume and page number.

<sup>9</sup> Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 294–95. The problem of evil in the Zohar was also discussed briefly by Scholem in *Major Trends*, 235–39, and more fully in idem, “Sitra achra: Gut und Böse in der Kabbala,” in idem, *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit* (Zürich: Rhein, 1962) 49–82. Like Tishby, Scholem also tended to emphasize the “gnostic” or dualistic dimension of the Zohar's treatment, though he too noted that at times the author of the Zohar affirmed a more monistic, even pantheistic, approach, stressing that there is only one continuous reality in existence.



life is a tacit affirmation of the Gnostic position by the author of the Zohar for, in the final analysis, spiritual perfection is achieved only after one wins the battle against the forces of evil and darkness. While this may be the case, Tishby does not take into account the second typology that I will discuss. Regarding this latter notion, however, the Zohar makes its most innovative contribution, and, in my opinion, provides us with an *Aufheben* of the gnostic position. At the outset I should like to note that these are not the only ideals that one can discover in the Zohar. Indeed, at times the Zohar stresses that one should avoid all contact with evil,<sup>10</sup> while at other times the author envisions a messianic future in which the demonic shell, to use a Zoharic metaphor that became central in later Jewish mysticism,<sup>11</sup> will be broken.<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding this qualification, the theme that I have selected warrants special treatment for it is, in my view, the ethical doctrine most consistent with the mythological and theosophical assumptions of the Zohar.

<sup>10</sup> This theme is especially emphasized in connection with certain commandments whose purpose is to separate the divine and demonic realms. Furthermore, the position of Israel vis-à-vis the other nations is viewed in terms of this separation of demonic and divine realms. Cf. Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961) 1. 246–47; Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 290–92; Morris Faierstein, “‘God’s Need for the Commandments’ in Medieval Kabbalah,” *Conservative Judaism* 36 (1982) 50–51; Jacob Katz, “Halakhic Discussions in the Zohar,” in idem, *Halakha and Kabbalah: Studies in the History of Jewish Religion, its Various Faces and Social Relevance* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984) 44. In my dissertation on “*Sefer ha-Rimmon*,” 1. 118–23, I have discussed this motif specifically as it appears in that work; see my article, “Mystical Rationalization of the Commandments in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*,” *HUCA* 59 (1988).

<sup>11</sup> See Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 298–301; idem, *The Doctrine of Evil and the ‘Kelippah’ in Lurianic Kabbalism* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984). For a discussion of the possible literary sources for this imagery, see Alexander Altmann, “The Motif of the ‘Shells’ in Azriel of Gerona,” in idem, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969) 172–79.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. e.g., Zohar 2.41a, 108b [see below, n. 63], 199b, 258a; 3.54a. The Zoharic view is based on the rabbinic legend, itself based on earlier apocalyptic sources, mentioned in *b. Sukk.* 52a concerning the complete obliteration of the evil inclination in the messianic era. Cf. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 290 n. 3; Urbach, *The Sages*, 416–17 n. 2. It should be noted, however, that it is possible to interpret the Zoharic idea concerning the annihilation of the demonic in the messianic future as an affirmation of the reintegration of the demonic into the divine rather than an affirmation of the dualistic stance. See in particular the interpretation of Deut 32:39 in Zohar 2.108b: “In that [messianic] time it is written, ‘See, then, that I, I am He, there is no God beside Me’ . . . The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Then you will see that which you could not see beforehand. ‘That I, I,’ why is [the pronoun repeated] two times? To emphasize that at that time there will be no God but Him . . . the Other Side [the demonic realm] will be removed . . . for nothing of the pollution [with which, according to rabbinic tradition, the serpent inseminated Eve; cf. *b. Šabbat* 16a and parallels] will be left in the world and the world will be one.” In this regard it is interesting to further note that in his Hebrew theosophic writings de Léon sometimes stresses the pantheistic view, particularly in contexts where the demonic realm is discussed; see Wolfson, “*Sefer ha-Rimmon*,” 2. 268:7–14, 301:6–10, 313:11–13.

## THE "GNOSTIC" INFLUENCE

Among the most important sources that informed the theosophic outlook of the author of the *Zohar* are kabbalistic texts derived from what Scholem has called the "gnostic" school that emerged in the second half of the thirteenth century in Castile.<sup>13</sup> The essential doctrine of this school that distinguished it from earlier kabbalistic currents such as the Gerona school<sup>14</sup> was the affirmation of a demonic force that structurally parallels the divine: as the one is constituted by ten "holy" emanations (*sefirot*) on the right so the other is constituted by ten "unholy" emanations on the left. Already in the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, the first literary source based on a theosophic doctrine of emanations to emerge in medieval Europe,<sup>15</sup> Satan is identified as one of the divine "attributes," the

<sup>13</sup> See Gershom Scholem, "The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac Kohen," *Madda'ei ha-Yahadut* 2 (1927) 193–97 (in Hebrew); idem, *Les origines de la Kabbale* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1966) 310–16; idem, *Kabbalah*, 55–57.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the following remark of the late thirteenth-century kabbalist, Isaac of Acre: "For aliens entered the sacred areas of the Lord's House' (Jer 51:51)—'Aliens' alludes to the outer gradations [sc. the demonic realm] . . . This is the way of the kabbalists of Sefarad [i.e., Castile] who merited to receive the kabbalah of the outer gradations. However, the kabbalists of Catalonia [i.e., Gerona] received a proper kabbalah concerning the ten *sefirot belimah* [the holy emanations] but did not receive anything with respect to the outer gradations." The passage is cited by Ephraim Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbala Literature* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1976) 341–42. See also Yehuda Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar" in *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought: A Study Conference in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Gershom Scholem* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982) 124–25. Yet, as Scholem noted (*Les origines*, 306–16), already in the writings of Isaac the Blind of Provence, one can discern a doctrine of dual forces, the holy and the unholy, albeit in a very rudimentary form. This accords with the testimony of Isaac ha-Kohen that he found in Arles ancient documents espousing the Gnostic doctrine.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Scholem, *Les origines*, 59–211; idem, *Kabbalah*, 42–44. According to Scholem, the work, pseudographically attributed to R. Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah of second-century Palestine, actually appeared in Provence sometime in the second half of the twelfth century. Scholem did not, however, rule out the possibility of earlier sources for the *Bahir* originating in the East, such as the *Raza Rabba* ("Great Mystery") dating from the ninth or tenth century and preserved in the writings of the thirteenth-century German pietists. See Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1948) 41–49, 195–238; idem, *Les origines*, 194–201. Other scholars have substantiated Scholem's claim that the *Bahir* appeared in Provence by drawing attention to similarities between it and certain Catharic doctrines that surfaced in that area during that time. See O. H. Lehmann, "The Theology of the Mystical Book Bahir and its Sources," *StPatr* 1 (1957) 477–83; Shulamit Shahar, "Catharism and the Beginnings of the Kabbalah in Languedoc: Elements Common to Catharic Scriptures and the Book Bahir," *Tarbiz* 40 (1971) 483–509 (in Hebrew). Cf. also Joseph Dan, "Midrash and the Dawn of Kabbalah," in G. Hartmann and S. Budick, eds., *Midrash and Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 127–40. When evaluating Scholem's hypothesis one should keep in mind that the other major school of mystical speculation in Provence during this time, the school of Abraham ben David and his son, Isaac the Blind, developed a kabbalistic terminology that is almost entirely independent of the theosophy of the *Bahir*. If the latter work did emerge at this time and place, one would expect to find some influence of it upon these other mystics. Scholem argued (*Les origines*, 224 n. 17, 225), however, that in several cases the influence of the *Bahir* on

“left hand” “whose name is evil” and “who is set on the north side of God.”<sup>16</sup> In the kabbalistic circles of Castile, however, the demonic is presented not simply as one of the powers of God but rather as a realm fully complementing that of the divine. In the words of Moses of Burgos, a member of the circle, “There is a left [side] corresponding to the right, intended to perfect the right side, to punish and chastise with ‘chastisements of love’ those who walk in a bad way in order to purify them.”<sup>17</sup> Or, as expressed by another member of the circle, Todros Abulafia: “Where dogs bark there the Angel of Death is to be seen, for [he] is emanated from the left side which is an emanation in itself.”<sup>18</sup> It must be emphasized, however, that the dualistic posture in this circle is not of an ontological or metaphysical sort. That is, the kabbalistic conception as it developed in Castile did not posit two absolute cosmic powers. R. Moses and R. Todros quite explicitly state that the one God makes both good and evil, light and dark, the good and evil impulses of the human individual.<sup>19</sup> Against this conceptual background we must understand these kabbalists’ concern with the question of the genesis of the demonic left side. The underlying assumption here is that even the demonic derives from a stage in the emanative process. The demonic

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Provençal kabbalists, such as Jacob the Nazir, was evident. In addition, Scholem noted that some of the fragments attributed to the *Ḥasid*, i.e., Isaac the Blind, in the supercommentary on Nahmanides’ commentary on the Pentateuch attributed to Meir ibn Sahula contain citations from the *Bahir*; see *Les origines*, 53. The first to make extensive use of the *Bahir*, as far as I am aware, are Isaac’s disciples, the Spanish kabbalists who wrote in Gerona in the first part of the thirteenth century. See the comments of Moshe Idel, “The Sefirot above the Sefirot,” *Tarbiz* 51 (1981) 239 (in Hebrew); and Joseph Dan, “Mysticism in Jewish History, Religion and Literature,” in idem and Frank Talmage, eds., *Studies in Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1982) 11–12. Cf. also the following remark of Isaac of Acre in his *Ozrot Hayyim* (MS Jewish Theological Seminary Mic. 1674 [ENA 1589] fol. 133b: “The sages of Catalonia [sc. Gerona] rely on a strong foundation which is the *Sefer Bahir*, and the sages of Sefarad [sc. Castile] rely on a firm foundation which is the *Sefer ha-Zohar*.” The specific distinction which Isaac of Acre draws between the two schools centers around the tradition concerning demonic forces: whereas the kabbalists of Castile received such a tradition, the kabbalists of Gerona did not; see preceding note. What is of interest to emphasize for our purposes is the particular connection made between the Geronese kabbalists and the *Bahir*.

<sup>16</sup> See *Sefer ha-Bahir* (ed. Reuven Margaliot; Jerusalem: ha-Rav Kook, 1978) §§ 162–63. According to one fragment attributed to Isaac the Blind by ibn Sahula (see n. 15), the former likewise identified the forces of impurity as emanating from the left side of God, the *sefirah* of *paḥad* or *gevurah*; see Scholem, *Les origines*, 310.

<sup>17</sup> Moses of Burgos, “The Left Pillar,” ed. Scholem, *Tarbiz* 4 (1933) 209.

<sup>18</sup> *Ozār ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem: Maqor, 1970) 3a.

<sup>19</sup> “The Left Pillar,” 209; *Ozār ha-Kavod ha-Shalem*, 24a.

is thus depicted as an extension of a divine attribute, usually identified as judgment,<sup>20</sup> rather than an autonomous power.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, these very same kabbalists insisted on an ongoing cosmic struggle between the domains of light and darkness, sometimes pictured as a mythical war between the seven forces on the right and seven demonic archons on the left. Indeed, for R. Moses, it would appear that this struggle is a fundamental, enduring ontological principle: "All reality," he wrote, "is dependent on peace and war which are opposites."<sup>22</sup> "And this is an established tradition handed over to all masters of the hidden wisdom . . . that reality in general could not exist except through the existents that do good and [those] that do evil, [those] that establish and sustain, [and those] that exterminate and destroy, [those that] give reward and [those] that punish."<sup>23</sup> In contrast, R. Moses' teacher, R. Isaac ha-Kohen, imagines a time when the demonic will be uprooted. Thus he ends his "Treatise on the Left Emanations" with an apocalyptic description of the time-to-come (based on legends recorded in *b. B. Batra* 74b) when Gabriel, the angel of judgment, together with Michael, the angel of love, will descend to destroy the powers of Samael and Lilith: "And when it is willed the emanation which comes from the side of Samael and Lilith through the blind angel will be diminished and weakened in utter destruction by means of Gabriel, the angel of strength, who stirs up a war with them with the help of the angel of love."<sup>24</sup> When the emanations of the left are destroyed, then once again "the bride [i.e., *Shekhinah*] will rejoice with her groom [*Tif'eret*] and the righteous will take pleasure" in the salty flesh of the slain Leviathan.<sup>25</sup>

The gnostic theme of competing cosmic forces is likewise one of the essential doctrines of the Zohar. Like his Castilian predecessors, the author of the Zohar posits a demonic realm, *Sitra Aħra*, the "Other Side," which parallels the divine.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the author of the Zohar similarly was concerned with the problem of the origin of evil. Elsewhere I have discussed the two basic approaches to this problem in the Zohar, which I have termed respectively the

<sup>20</sup> According to some kabbalists, e.g., R. Isaac ha-Kohen, the left emanations derived from the third divine gradation, *Binah*, whereas according to other kabbalists, e.g., R. Moses of Burgos, the demonic powers derived from the fifth emanation, *Din* or *Gevurah*. Cf. Scholem, "Sitra achra," 54–57.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 292, 295–98.

<sup>22</sup> "The Left Pillar," 211.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 208–9.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Scholem, "The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac Kohen," 263.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 288–89. I have discussed the various nuances of the structural parallelism between the holy and satanic realms in the Zohar in my essay, "Left Contained in the Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics," *AJS Review* 11 (1986) 29–30.

cathartic and the emanative views.<sup>27</sup> According to the former, evil is the waste eliminated from divine Thought, a process that occurs during the first stages of activity before the emanative process.<sup>28</sup> The primary act is conceived of as an excretion of the unbalanced forces of judgment, referred to as the “glowing sparks in divine Thought”<sup>29</sup> or mythically as the “primordial kings of Edom who died” (based on Gen 36:31)<sup>30</sup> or the “worlds created and destroyed.”<sup>31</sup> As a result of the divine catharsis two sides emerged: the side of happiness (the holy realm) and the side of sadness (the demonic).<sup>32</sup> The source of evil, then, is

<sup>27</sup> Wolfson, “Left Contained in the Right,” 31–32.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Gottlieb, *Kabbala Literature*, 178–82; Y. Liebes, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976) 147; M. Idel, “The Evil Thought of the Deity,” *Tarbiz* 49 (1980) 356–64 (in Hebrew). Idel compares the Zoharic notion of the emergence of the demonic powers as a result of the purgation of evil from the divine thought to the Zervanite myth of the birth of the evil Ahriman from the evil thought of Zurvan.

<sup>29</sup> See Zohar 3.292b (*Idra Zuta*); 2.254b; and cf. 3.48b, where the primordial forces of judgment, the 325 sparks that emerge from the “flame of darkness” (*bozina de-qardinuta*), are identified as the hairs which are on the head of supernal Man; when the hairs are removed, then the forces of judgment are ameliorated and the Man is purified. As a result the “man of war” (Exod 15:3) becomes the “perfect and upright man” (Job 1:1), the “righteous one” (Gen 6:9). It is significant that in this context it is one being—and not two—who is transformed from a state of impurity to purity, an idea substantiated by Job 14:4; see below, n. 46, where the relevant portion of the text is translated. From the further description of the head of this Man as being “red like a rose” and of the hair likewise being red, it is clear that the proto-demonic force is being portrayed in accordance with the scriptural account of Esau (see Gen 25:25). Cf. Zohar 1.153a where Esau is described in almost the exact terms as the primal Man is in this context. Similarly, the Bible (Gen 27:11) describes Jacob as being “smooth-skinned” in comparison to Esau who is hairy. Hence, just as Esau emerges before Jacob, the hairy one before the smooth-skinned one, so the forces of judgment, whence come the lower forces of impurity, emerge before the forces of mercy. On Esau as a symbol for the demonic, see further below, n. 35. On the Zoharic conception, *bozina de-qardinuta*, see Liebes, *Zohar Lexicon*, 145–51, 161–64; Matt, *Zohar*, 207–8.

<sup>30</sup> See Zohar 2.108b, 176b (*Sifra di-Zeni'uta*); 3.128b (*Idra Rabba*); 142a (*Idra Rabba*); 292a (*Idra Zuta*). Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 138, 150; Liebes, “Messiah of the Zohar,” 219–21. As Liebes points out (219), the kabbalistic conception was probably influenced by the midrashic idea (cf. *Bereshit Rab.* 12.15) that initially God wanted to create the world with judgment but then combined mercy and judgment together. See following note.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Bereshit Rab.* 9.2, 68; see Zohar 2.34b. The source for this mythical image is R. Isaac ha-Kohen, according to whom the ten emanations of the left comprise “three worlds which were created and destroyed,” corresponding to the three upper divine gradations and seven archons which do battle against the seven lower divine gradations. See Scholem, “The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac Kohen,” 194–95, 248–51. Cf. additional texts cited by Idel, “Evil Thought,” 359–60.

R. Eleazar of Worms likewise connects this midrashic image of “worlds created and destroyed” with God’s attempt to create the world exclusively by means of the evil inclination; see Joseph Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkhenazi Hasidim* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1978) 210–11; idem, “Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah,” *AJS Review* 5 (1980) 32–37.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Zohar 2.254b–55a; 3.292a. See Wolfson, “*Sefer ha-Rimmon*,” 2. 268:20, where the worship of idolatry or the belief in other gods (i.e., the demonic realm of the Other Side) is said to derive from the “refuse of Thought.” It is clear, moreover, from that context (ibid., 269) that the belief in

in the dross contained in divine Thought.<sup>33</sup> For the purposes of this analysis it is important to bear in mind that the sphere of untempered judgment precedes that of the balanced and harmonious cosmos, the "Edomite" kings before the "Israelite" kings,<sup>34</sup> the destroyed worlds before the worlds that are sustained.

the other gods is identical with philosophical reasoning. Cf. Zohar 2.124a: "R. Hiyya said, '[Make no mention of the] names of other gods' (Exod 23:13). This refers to one who is occupied with other books which are not from the side of Torah." It seems to me that "other books" here is a reference to books of philosophy. Yet, see Zohar 2.237a, and *Zohar Hadash*, 38a, where Greece is identified as that kingdom which is in closest proximity to the way of faith, i.e., Judaism. I assume that in these contexts there is a positive evaluation of philosophy. On the Zohar's complicated relationship to philosophy, see the remarks of Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières: A Twelfth-Century Talmudist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962) 300 n. 65. See also Scholem, *Major Trends*, 173, 183, 194, 203, and the text from *Sefer ha-Rimmon* cited on 397–98 n. 154; Matt, *Zohar*, 22–23.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 296; Liebes, *Zohar Lexicon*, 320.

<sup>34</sup> It should be pointed out that in one passage the Zohar (2.108b) tries to uphold the ontological priority of Israel as against the chronological priority of Esau: "Israel is the upper kernel [literally, brain] of the world. Israel arose in the [divine] Thought first [cf. *Bereshit Rab.* 1.4, 6]. The idolatrous nations, which are the shell, preceded [Israel], as it is written, 'And there are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites.'" It is quite possible that the Zoharic interpretation of Gen 36:31ff. is a symbolic depiction of the historical relationship between the Church and the Synagogue, i.e., Christianity, which is symbolically Edom or the demonic power, reigns before Judaism. Cf. Baer, *Jews in Christian Spain*, 1. 246–47; Liebes, "Messiah of the Zohar," 196–97. On the symbolic correlation of Edom and Christianity, cf. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968) 5. 272 n. 19; G. Cohen, "Esau as a Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in A. Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) 27–30. On Esau (= Edom) as a symbol for the demonic power, see Zohar 1.137b–38a, 138b, 139a, 142b, 143a, 171b, 177a; 2.163b, 167a, 188b; 3.48b (see n. 29), 124a (*Ra'aya Meheimna*), 185a, 197a, 246b; *Tiqunei Zohar*, § 59 (93a). Cf. the following text from MS Paris 859, fol. 16a, cited by Idel, "Evil Thought," 358: "The forces of impurity emanate before the forces of purity, for at first the refuse is purified, and afterwards the forces of purity emerge. Thus it says, 'The dross having been separated from the silver, a vessel emerged for the smith' (Prov 25:4). So it is by Cain and Abel, Cain came out first from the refuse which is on the left side, and afterwards Abel who is from the side of mercy. And similarly by Esau and Jacob. And [it] says: Esau emerged from the dross of the gold. Therefore, Isaac loved Esau for he came from his dregs." As Idel pointed out (*ibid.*, n. 8), the expression "dross of gold" betrays a Zoharic influence; cf. Zohar 3.50b. On the statement "Isaac loved Esau etc.," cf. Zohar 1.137b, 139a. The temporal precedence of the demonic over the holy is reflected as well in the Zoharic interpretation of the rite of circumcision whereby the unholy foreskin is removed and the holy corona disclosed; see Zohar 1.13a, 32a–b, 95a–b; 2.40a, 255b; 3.72b–73a; *Tiqunei Zohar*, "Introduction" (11a) and § 37 (78a). In this context, finally, it is of interest to consider the following fragment of the Ebionite *Kerygmata Petrou* that is extant in the Jewish-Christian Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, cited in *NTApoc.* 2. 121: "As in the beginning the one God, being as it were a right hand and a left, created first the heavens and then the earth, so also he assembled in pairs everything that follows. In the case of man, however, he no longer proceeded in this way, but he reversed every pair. For whereas he created what was stronger as the first and what was weaker as the second, in the case of man we find the opposite. . . . Thus from Adam . . . there sprang as the first the unrighteous Cain, as the second the righteous Abel. . . . And from Abraham . . . there issued two first, Ishmael first and then Isaac, who was blessed of God. From Isaac again there originated two, the

According to the second category, the demonic realm is viewed as a link in the continuous chain of being. There are no absolute gaps in nature and hence no complete break between the divine and the demonic. Indeed, in one place<sup>35</sup> the Zohar describes all of reality in terms of the image of a nut which is composed of the shell and the kernel: one grade is a shell to the grade above which, in relation to the grade below, is the kernel but in relation to the grade above a shell, and so on. This conception is clearly philosophic in nature, reflecting particularly, as Alexander Altmann has shown,<sup>36</sup> the neo-Platonic idea of the continuity of being that was well known to the kabbalists from various sources. Insofar as all of reality is one, the demonic cannot be viewed as being in absolute opposition to the divine. On the contrary, the former must derive from the latter. It is thus that the author of the Zohar, following the precedent set by other kabbalists, locates the source for evil in the left side of the divine.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, an imbalance in the sefirotic world, a breaking of the harmony between right and left, ultimately eventuates in the coming-to-be of an "autonomous" left realm. With respect to the question, what creates this imbalance, again two lines can be drawn: the imbalance results from an internal process but can be reinforced as a result of human sin.<sup>38</sup> Hence, while the demonic structurally parallels the divine, the former is ontologically posterior to the latter.

Thus far there is a clear line of development from the earlier sources to the Zohar. In one pivotal notion, however, the Zohar went beyond these sources. As mentioned above, although the Castilian mystics affirmed that God created both the right and left, they posited no mediating principle by which the dark force could be incorporated into the path of light. In the case of R. Isaac, it

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godless Esau and the pious Jacob." In the fuller version of the text (*ibid.*, 545–46) it is clear that the firstborn is identified as the feminine which derives from the "feeble left hand of God," i.e., the evil one. The chain of associations is very close to the later kabbalistic model. On the possible Jewish influence on the Pseudo-Clementine literature, see the references cited in Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 30 n. 51, and Segal, *Two Powers*, 256–57. The correlation between the left hand of God and weakness and the right hand and strength is made in the following midrashic comment on Exod 15:6: "Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, Thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the foe," in *Mekhila de Rabbi Ishmael*, 2. 41: "When the Israelites do the will of God, they make His left hand to be like the right, as it is said, 'Thy right hand, O Lord . . . Thy right hand, O Lord'—two times. And when the Israelites fail to do the will of God, they make His right hand to be like the left, as it is said, 'He has drawn back His right hand' (Lam 2:3)." See Judah Goldin, *The Song at the Sea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) 149.

<sup>35</sup> Zohar 1.19b–20a; See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 239, and references given on 406 n. 114.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Altmann, "Motif of the 'Shells,'" 117.

<sup>37</sup> There are basically three opinions in the Zohar as to the exact source of evil in the divine: *Binah*, *Gevurah*, or *Malkhut*. For references, see my "Left Contained in the Right," 32 and nn. 22–24.

<sup>38</sup> See Scholem, "Sitra achra," 69–72.

seems clear that the emanations of the left are accorded no place in the religious life. The demonic, though originating in the divine, remains outside it until such time that the emanation of the left will be altogether annihilated. In the case of R. Moses, while it is true that the forces of evil and darkness are accorded a place in the divine scheme as instruments through which the wicked are punished, he still does not assign to these forces any role whatsoever in the devotional life of the saintly or pious. The author of the Zohar, in contrast, does assign such a role to the underworld of darkness. Moreover, he provides us with a mediating principle, the containment of the left in the right, in virtue of which the demonic is restored to the right. This notion is an exegetical axis upon which much of Zoharic hermeneutics turns.<sup>39</sup> In many cases the reference is to an inter-divine process—the containment of the divine attribute of judgment in the attribute of love, the left hand within the right. However, it can also refer to the containment of the demonic left within the divine right. As we shall see, these two uses are dialectically interrelated in the Zohar.

#### DESCENT AS SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

The incorporation of the “Other Side” in the religious life is unequivocally affirmed by the Zohar in several contexts. There is, first of all, the Zoharic claim that the path of the spiritual adept is one of descent followed by ascent, that is, before one achieves the status of holiness one must descend into the realm of evil.<sup>40</sup> There is a clear connection, as Tishby has noted,<sup>41</sup> between this theme and the idea later developed by Sabbatian theology on the basis of Isaac Luria’s teaching concerning the necessary descent into the demonic shells or, as formulated subsequently by the Hasidim: “descent for the sake of ascent.”<sup>42</sup> In the Zohar the purpose of the descent, however, is not to raise the fallen sparks, to use the standard Lurianic term, but rather to purge the soul of all its impurities. It seems to me that the analogue for this notion of purgation in the Zohar is the cathartic view of the divine mentioned above: just as God had to discharge the impure forces in divine Thought before God could emanate the holy forces, so too the human soul must refine itself and remove all dross before it can attain the level of holiness. This image of spiritual transformation drawn from

<sup>39</sup> See my article cited above, n. 26.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Zohar I.83a.

<sup>41</sup> *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, I. 295.

<sup>42</sup> On the Lurianic and Sabbatian roots of this idea, cf. Tishby, *Doctrine of Evil*, 88; Joseph Weiss, “Reshit Zemihatah shel ha-Derekh ha-Hasidit,” *Zion* 16 (1951) 73–75; Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971) 78–141. For the development of this idea particularly in the school of Ḥabad Ḥasidism, see Rachel Elior, *The Theory of Divinity of Ḥasidut Ḥabad: Second Generation* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982) 262–64. For Rabbi Naḥman of Bratslav’s particular use of this notion, see Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Naḥman of Bratslav* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1979) 67, 264, 308.



alchemy is related by the Zohar to the verse "And Abram went down to Egypt" (Gen 12:10):

R. Simeon said, Come and see: Everything has secret wisdom. This verse hints at wisdom and the levels down below, to the depths of which Abraham descended. He knew them but did not become attached. . . . Come and see the secret of the word: If Abram had not gone into Egypt and been refined there first, he could not have partaken of the Blessed Holy One. Similarly with his children, when the Blessed Holy One wanted to make them unique, a perfect people, and to draw them near to Him: If they had not gone down to Egypt and been refined there first, they would not have become His special ones. So too the Holy Land: If she had not been given first to Canaan to control, she would not have become the portion, the share of the Blessed Holy One.<sup>43</sup>

The esoteric meaning of Abram's descent into Egypt, as that of the children of Israel in the time of Moses, is spiritual purification by means of contact with the demonic (symbolized by Egypt). Moses Cordovero (1522–70) in his commentary to this section in Zohar says: "As silver is refined in lead, so holiness is refined through the power of the demonic."<sup>44</sup> Before partaking of holiness, of entering the sefirotic realm, it is necessary to go down to the depths of the unholy. Indeed, the land itself, according to the Zohar, could not become holy unless it was first inhabited by Canaan, the force of the unholy. This last sentence is all the more daring inasmuch as the "Land of Israel" is a mystical symbol for the *Shekhinah*. The Zohar's point then, is that even the *Shekhinah* must be purified through contact with the demonic.

In the passage above the role accorded to the demonic in the religious life is negative—one enters the world of darkness merely to purge one's own impurities, to remove the dross from the silver. The dialectic of the spiritual path, however, is established by the Zohar in various other ways. In one place it is related to the close proximity which the *Shekhinah*, the last of the holy emanations, has to the demonic world. Much of the struggle between the demonic and divine is played out with respect to the *Shekhinah* for She is the divine power

<sup>43</sup> I have used the translation of Daniel Matt in his *Zohar*, 63–64. The Zohar's identification of Egypt with the earthly representation of the demonic is based ultimately on the scriptural and rabbinic conception of Egypt as the seat of magical power (cf., e.g., Exod 7:12; 8:3, 14, 18–19; 9:11); *b. Sanh.* 67b; *b. Qidd.* 49b; *b. Menah.* 85a; for other references see Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, s.v. "Egyptians, masters of astrology and magic") understood in the Zohar to be the force of the demonic. Cf. Zohar 1.81b, 83a, 249a; 2.30b, 35b, 38a, 191a, 192b; 3.50b, 69a, 70a, 207a. See my "Left Contained in the Right," 33–37, where I have worked this out in detail.

<sup>44</sup> Cited by Matt, *Zohar*, 220.

that borders on the demonic, indeed is a bridge between light and darkness.<sup>45</sup> She is thus described in the very first lines of the Zohar as a rose surrounded by thorns. This point is made clearly in the Zohar's commentary on Exod 3:2, "And the angel of the Lord [sc. *Shekhinah*] appeared to him [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a thorn-bush":

The thorn-bush [i.e., the demonic potency] was surely within that holiness [i.e., *Shekhinah*] and cleaving to it, for everything cleaves together, the pure and the impure; there is no purity except from within impurity. This is the mystery, "Who can bring a pure thing from what is impure" (Job 14:4). The shell and the kernel are together.<sup>46</sup>

Just as the realm above shell and kernel, evil and good, are bound together, so too below in the human domain: the sacred emerges out of the profane.

Another hermeneutical context in which this dialectic is established is the Zohar's comment in response to the question, why was the Torah given in the desert, the place where the force of the demonic dominates:

The words of Torah reside only there, for there is no light except that which emerges out of darkness. When that [Other] Side is subdued the Holy One, blessed be He, ascends and is glorified. And there is no divine worship except amidst darkness, and no good except within evil. When a person enters an evil way and forsakes it, then the Holy One, blessed be He,

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 223–26. A striking description of this is given in *Zohar Hadash*, 1c (*Sitrei Otiyot*): "In the mystery of Enoch [it is said]: There is another *heh* below [the demonic] which is bound to this *heh* [i.e., *Shekhinah* symbolized by the last letter of the Tetragrammaton, the letter *heh*; in this context the *Shekhinah* is said to be symbolized by a *heh* for She is a point that is surrounded by four camps of angels, and the letter *heh* numerically equals five], and they correspond one to the other. Then it is time to cry [cf. Eccl 3:4]. The sign for this is אהה [i.e., an expression of grief; cf. Jer 1:6, and note that there is a dot in the second *heh*], for all the surrounding evil encloses [them] below in the form of a *dalet* [i.e., on all four sides, *dalet* = four]. It surrounds these four and the point [i.e., *Shekhinah*]. And the point stands within a hard shell which encloses it [symbolized by the dot in the second *heh* of the word אהה]. Then the Moon [*Shekhinah*] is eclipsed and its light is covered, and permission is given to judge the world with evil judgments."

<sup>46</sup> Zohar 2.69b. Cf. Zohar 3.48b: "From the 'flame of darkness' [see above, n. 29] there emerged three hundred and twenty-five inscribed sparks, and they were united in the side of Strength [the left side of Judgment] . . . and when they entered in a body they were called Man (אדם) . . . the 'Man of War' [Exod 15:3]. . . . Since the lower judgments are united and joined to the hair of this one, it is called the severe Judgment. And when the hair on his head is removed, [the judgment] is ameliorated [literally, sweetened] and the judgments below are not summoned. And then he is called pure, as it is written, 'Who can bring a pure thing from what is impure' (Job 14:4). From the impure certainly!" Concerning this text, see n. 29. Whereas in Zohar 2.69b, the unity of the divine and the demonic is perceived from the perspective of the lowest divine gradation and its proximity to the unholy realm, in Zohar 3.48b, this unity is perceived from the perspective of the very first stages of emanation. It is noteworthy that the same text is cited as a scriptural locus in both cases.

ascends in His glory. Thus the perfection of all is good and evil together, and afterwards to ascend to the good. . . . This is complete worship.<sup>47</sup>

The most perfect divine worship is only that which emerges out of darkness for only when one returns to the good from evil is the Other Side “subdued” and the Holy One “glorified.” Tishby sees in this passage a tacit affirmation of the Zohar’s dualistic stance, for the ultimate worship entails the victory of the human over the demonic.<sup>48</sup> It seems to me, however, that the notion of subduing the Other Side entails not the eradication but rather the reintegration of demonic energy to its divine source. I shall return to this point later.

#### CONTAINMENT OF THE DEMONIC IN THE DIVINE

The inclusion of the demonic in the spiritual path is also affirmed in connection with Job, whose fatal flaw, according to the Zohar, was that he separated good and evil instead of containing them together. Here the Zohar uses slightly different terminology which, as we shall see, holds the key to understanding the Zohar’s unique principle of mediation or synthesis:

Job never gave any portion to [the Other Side], as it is written “he offered up burnt-offerings according to the number of them all” (Job 1:5). The burnt-offering rises upward. He did not give any portion to the Other Side for had he given him a portion he could not have overcome him afterwards. . . . Come and see: Just as he separated and did not contain the good and evil [together], so in the exact manner he was judged: [God] gave him good and then evil and then returned him to the good. Thus it is fitting for a person to know good and to know evil, and then return to the good. That is the secret of faith.<sup>49</sup>

In the Zohar the *mizwot* have one of two purposes: either to strengthen and sustain the realm of holiness by maintaining the flow of divine light from the uppermost grades to the lowest, or to neutralize the forces of evil so that they do not interfere with the unity of the holy realm.<sup>50</sup> Sacrifices in particular, according to the Zohar, are an instance where we quite literally “give the devil his due.” That is, a portion of every sacrifice is set aside for *Siṭra Ḍhṛa*, the one exception being the *‘olah*, the burnt-offering, which according to Scripture is

<sup>47</sup> Zohar 2.184a.

<sup>48</sup> *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1.295.

<sup>49</sup> Zohar 2.34a.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Faierstein, “‘God’s Need for the Commandments,’” 50–51; Daniel Matt, “The Mystic and the Mizwot,” in Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 387–88. See above, n. 10.

burnt entirely for God. Job, however, offered up only burnt-offerings, thus depriving the demonic of its proper share.

The sin of Job is referred to as “not including evil and good together,” for had he offered a sacrifice with an allotted portion to the demonic he would have comprised the two together in one act. Job is, accordingly, described in Scripture as being “removed from evil” (1:8), that is, he had no portion in the Other Side.<sup>51</sup> Paradoxically, by not participating in evil Job was overcome by evil; by separating evil from good Job strengthened the former. From the case of Job we can learn, therefore, the “secret of faith”: “one should know good and evil” and only then “return to the good.” This parallels the description of the “perfection of all” examined above: “good and evil together, and afterwards to ascend to the good.” But here, in contrast to the other passages we have cited, the Zohar speaks about containment.

The ideal state is one in which evil and good are contained together as one and not one in which evil and good are separated. Had Job contained good and evil together—in one sacrifice—then evil as an autonomous force would have been subdued, or, in the language of the Zohar, Satan would have been removed from the sanctuary (sc. the *Shekhinah*) and the side of holiness would have ascended upwards. The removal of Satan from the sanctuary cannot come about, however, by means of the total divorce of the demonic from the holy, for such a divorce is precisely what Job sought to accomplish. Satan is removed from the holy only when the demonic and holy are combined together by means of the proper human intention. The one who separates good and evil sustains the “quasi” independence of the demonic realm, whereas the one who contains the two together restores the demonic to its divine root. An act of separation or division merely increases evil, which by definition is separation and division.

It is interesting to note that this exegetical comment on Job occurs as part of the section of Zohar on Exod 10:1, “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go in to Pharaoh.’” According to the Zohar, the esoteric meaning of this verse is that God implored Moses to plumb the inner depths of the divine secrets concerning the demonic, symbolized by the kingdom of Egypt and especially its chief power, Pharaoh. Moses, unlike Job, did not flee from evil; rather he was commanded specifically to acquire knowledge of it. Such knowledge was considered by the Castilian kabbalists and by the author of the Zohar to be the most esoteric of all kabbalistic wisdom.<sup>52</sup> It seems to me that, in the case of the Zohar, the claim that this knowledge holds the key to divine secrets can be explained by the fact that only one who knows both the demonic and the divine

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Zohar 2.181b–82a; 3.101b; Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 291.

<sup>52</sup> See Liebes, “Messiah of the Zohar,” 125–26.

can understand the underlying unity of the two realms.<sup>53</sup> And only one who knows this can unify God, for by uniting the left with the right one regains an original wholeness or unity of opposites that is present in the Godhead before the process of differentiation unfolds. As it is expressed in one place in the Zohar:

R. Isaac said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world and wanted to reveal the depth out of the hiddenness and the light from within the darkness, they were contained within one another. Therefore out of darkness emerged the light and out of the hiddenness emerged and was revealed the depth. One emerged from the other. . . . And all things were contained one with another, the good inclination and the evil inclination, right and left, Israel and the nations, white and black. All things were dependent on one another.<sup>54</sup>

The ethical demand that evil be contained in the good mirrors the ontological principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*. To separate good and evil is ultimately to deny the unity of the divine.

The containment of the evil inclination in the good is developed most fully in the Zohar's interpretation of Deut 4:39: "And know this day, and consider it in your hearts, that the Lord is God." Here too, as we shall see, this idea has a direct bearing on the notion of *yihud*, unification of the divine:

R. Eliezer began to expound: It is written, "And know this day, and consider it in your hearts, that the Lord is God" (Deut 4:39). This verse should have been written as follows: "And know this day that the Lord is God, and consider it in your hearts." Moreover, it should have said "consider it in your heart" לבך. Yet Moses said: If you want to understand this and know that the Lord is God, then consider it in your hearts, לבבך, and you will know it. "Your hearts"—the good inclination and the evil inclination,<sup>55</sup> for one is contained in the other and they are one. Then you will know that the Lord is God for one is contained in the other, and they are one. Thus it is written "consider it in your hearts" in order to know the matter. Moreover, R. Eliezer said: the wicked make a blemish above. What [is] the blemish? For the left is not contained in the right, the evil inclination is not contained in the good inclination on account of the sins of

<sup>53</sup> See above, n. 29 and below, n. 73.

<sup>54</sup> Zohar 3.80b.

<sup>55</sup> This is based on the rabbinic interpretation of Deut 6:5, "And love the Lord with all your heart," לבבך, which they read in the plural, i.e., "hearts," and as a reference to the two inclinations, the good and the evil; see references above, n. 6.

humanity. . . . And thus it says, "And consider it in your hearts," to contain them as one, the left in the right.<sup>56</sup>

The secret knowledge alluded to in Deut 4:39 concerns the unification of the two names of God: YHWH and Elohim. In kabbalistic terms, these two names correspond to the two divine attributes *Tiferet*, the Holy One, the sixth *sefirah*, and *Malkhut*, or *Shekhinah*, the tenth *sefirah*. This kabbalistic interpretation is based, in the final analysis, upon the rabbinic explanation of these names: YHWH referring to the divine attribute of *Raḥamim*, mercy, and Elohim to the attribute of *Din*, rigor or stern judgment.<sup>57</sup> It is clear that in this passage the two names refer to the male and female potencies within the sefirotic world: the male vis-à-vis the female is merciful (overflowing, gracious), whereas the female vis-à-vis the male is judgmental (limiting, restricting). To know that the attributes of mercy and judgment are contained one within the other, that YHWH is Elohim—that is the esoteric knowledge imparted by this verse.

But how is such knowledge possible? The key to attaining this lies in the "consideration" of one's hearts, the two inclinations of the human spirit. When one examines the hearts within, one will discover that the two hearts, the good and evil inclinations, are contained one within another. It must be pointed out, however, that the two inclinations in the Zohar do not merely represent psychological principles of will or impulse as they do in the classical rabbinic sources;<sup>58</sup> they correspond respectively to the ontological forces of the divine and the demonic. The good inclination on the right side symbolizes the force of holiness rooted in the sefirotic realm, whereas the evil inclination symbolizes the force of impurity rooted in the demonic realm.<sup>59</sup> The point of this passage, however, is to establish the principle that the two forces are to be contained one within the other. Indeed, the wicked cause a blemish above for by doing evil

<sup>56</sup> Zohar 2.26b–27a. Moses de León refers to this Zoharic interpretation in his *Sefer ha-Rimmon*. See my "Sefer ha-Rimmon," 2. 100. It is interesting to note that de León gives two interpretations to the verse: according to the former the unity implied by Deut 4:39 involves the attributes of judgment and mercy, whereas according to the latter it involves the evil and good inclinations. In the Zohar both interpretations are combined. See my "Sefer ha-Rimmon," 1. 45.

<sup>57</sup> See, e.g., *Sifrei Deut.* pisqa 26; *Bereshit Rab.* 12.14. For a summary of the rabbinic doctrine, see Urbach, *The Sages*, 396–407. For a comparison of the Philonic and rabbinic views, see N. A. Dahl and A. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God," *JSJ* 9 (1978) 1–28, and references to other scholarly literature cited there, 2 nn. 5–6.

<sup>58</sup> See references to studies by Schechter and Urbach cited above, n. 6. It should be pointed out that in some rabbinic statements, most notably that of the Resh Lakish (third-century Palestine), the evil inclination seems to be more than merely a psychological impulse. Indeed, in the case of the aforementioned rabbi, the evil inclination is identified with Satan or the Angel of Death; see *b. Baba Batra* 16a, and cf. Urbach, *The Sages*, 149, 416.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2. 88–90.

they cling exclusively to the evil inclination and consequently do not contain the left within the right.

The containment of the evil inclination within the good not only reflects the containment of Elohim within YHWH, but it serves as a foundation for deriving this higher esoteric knowledge, a knowledge described elsewhere in the Zohar as the "secret of faith."<sup>60</sup> The verse thus reads, "And know this day, and consider it in your hearts that the Lord is God," for in order to know that the Lord is God, that mercy and judgment are one, the person must consider the unity of his hearts, the evil and good inclinations. The containment of the demonic left within the divine right is thus an essential component of *yihud*, the unification of the divine left and right. In mythic terms, it is the feminine aspect of the divine that unites with the masculine. This unity, however, is threatened by the forces of evil, *Sitra Ahra*, which try to capture the *Shekhinah* and thereby cause a separation between the masculine and feminine. The one who does not unite evil with the good allows the evil to remain autonomous and, consequently, disrupts the unity of male and female within the divine. The ideal for the righteous is therefore to contain the left within the right; the wicked, by contrast, "separate the evil inclination from the good, and cleave to evil."<sup>61</sup> According to the Zohar, as we have seen, the sin of Job likewise was that he separated good and evil, not however by clinging to evil but rather by fleeing from it. Hence, to exclude evil absolutely is in effect the same as exclusively cleaving to evil: both bring about the separation of forces that should be united.

That the ideal state is one of containment rather than eradication of the demonic is suggested to me by two other passages. The first is the Zohar's interpretation<sup>62</sup> of Ps 51:20: "Do good in thy favour to Zion, build the walls of Jerusalem." The verse refers to the restoration of Zion and the building of the temple in the future. The Zohar notes that at first God shall do good to Zion, the inner city, and only afterwards build up the walls of Jerusalem. This is a reversal of the ordinary human process in which the building of the wall (the shell) precedes that of the sanctuary (the kernel) so that the former can protect the latter. Why do we find a reversal here? The Zohar responds: "In the case of the building of the temple when the evil side will be removed from the world it will not be necessary [for the wall to precede and thereby protect the sanctuary] because the kernel and shell shall belong to Her [sc. the temple = *Shekhinah*]." Note carefully the exact language of the text: on one hand we are told that the evil side is removed from the world, *יחעבר מעלמא*, while on the other hand we are told that the shell and the kernel belong to the temple, *דהא מוחא* וקליפה די ליה הוי. When the temple is not standing and the evil side has dominion

<sup>60</sup> See, e.g., Zohar 1.12a.

<sup>61</sup> Zohar 2.26b.

<sup>62</sup> Zohar 2.108a–b.

in the world, then there is a separation of inner and outer, the kernel and the shell; when, however, the temple is rebuilt and evil is removed from the world, then inner and outer both belong to the holy. The Zohar does not conclude by saying that there is no longer any shell in the time of the restoration of Zion;<sup>63</sup> it says rather that in that time the shell itself as the kernel will be part of the holy temple (symbolic of the *Shekhinah*). This is, according to the Zohar, the intent of the biblical expression, “the walls of Jerusalem,” that is, “that wall on the outside which is the shell verily belongs to her,” *היא חומה דלבר דאיהי קליפה* *דרלילה היא ממש*.

There is finally an extraordinary passage that again affirms the ideal of the reintegration of the demonic in the divine. In Lev 23:17 it says that the people of Israel were ordered to bring as the firstfruits of the Lord on Pentecost two wave loaves baked with leaven. The author of the Zohar wonders: why is the biblical injunction to bring specifically leavened bread on Pentecost, the day that commemorates the Sinaitic revelation, the very ingredient forbidden on Passover, the day that commemorates the exodus from Egypt? To this query the Zohar responds:

Now we must look carefully. On Passover Israel went out from the bread which is called leaven, as it is written, “You shall not see any leaven” (Exod 13:7). . . . What is the reason? On account of the honor of that bread which is called unleavened. Now that Israel merited the highest bread, it was not appropriate for the leaven to be wiped out and not seen at all. And why was this sacrifice from leaven. . . . For on that very day [Pentecost] the evil inclination was wiped out because the Torah, which is called freedom, was to be found.<sup>64</sup>

The Zohar goes on to give a parable in order to elucidate the point.<sup>65</sup> A king had an only son who was sick. When the son desired to eat it was necessary to give him only the prescribed medicine; after he ate the medicine and became healthy he could eat whatever he desired. “Similarly,” continues the Zohar,

when Israel left Egypt they did not know the essence or secret of Faith. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Israel shall eat medicine, and until they eat the medicine no other food shall be shown to them. When they ate the unleavened bread, which was medicine in order to enter and to know the

<sup>63</sup> Yet, it must be pointed out that in the continuation of the text the Zohar contrasts the original process of emanation in which the shell, the kings of Edom, preceded the kernel, Israel, and the future restoration when the Holy One, blessed be He, “will put first the kernel without any shell.” For the background of this passage, see above, n. 34. For other contexts wherein the Zohar affirms the annihilation of the demonic in the future, see above, n. 12.

<sup>64</sup> Zohar 2.183a–b.

<sup>65</sup> For a variation of this parable, see Wolfson, “*Sefer ha-Rimmon*,” 2. 133.



secret of Faith, the Holy One said: from now on leaven shall be shown to them and they can eat it for it cannot harm them. And all the more so on the day of Pentecost which is the complete medicine.

In this passage two statements would appear to contradict one another. On the one hand, the author of the Zohar states that on Pentecost "it was not appropriate for the leaven [symbolic of the evil inclination]<sup>66</sup> to be wiped out and not seen," while on the other hand, relying on rabbinic sources,<sup>67</sup> he states that on that very day "the evil inclination was wiped out." This apparent tension can be resolved only if we understand the two assertions in terms of the dialectic that we have examined in the course of this paper. Upon leaving Egypt, where the people of Israel were immersed in the demonic shells,<sup>68</sup> they had to remove all vestiges of evil and enter the way of holiness. Hence the leaven, symbolic of the Other Side, had to be removed, and unleavened bread, symbolic of the first gradation of faith, the *Shekhinah*, had to be consumed.<sup>69</sup> After they received the higher type of bread, the bread of wisdom embodied in the Torah,<sup>70</sup> symbolic of *Tiferet*,<sup>71</sup> this was no longer necessary. At the Sinaitic revelation the left side was reappropriated by Israel, for at that time it presented no danger to the people, its efficacy being undermined by the Torah, the "complete medicine."<sup>72</sup> By means of the "higher bread" the unholy is restored to its source in the holy and no longer need be destroyed.

## CONCLUSION

From all the texts that we have examined a clear pattern has emerged. The spiritual path that is most complete is one that incorporates evil as well as good. The conceptual framework for this ideal in the Zohar is the dialectical relation that pertains between the demonic and the divine. That is, the former is rooted and sustained by the latter. We have seen above, however, that there are basically two ways to explain this in the Zohar: the cathartic and the emanative

<sup>66</sup> Leaven was used allegorically as a symbol for that which is evil or impure in Jewish and Christian sources dating from the Greco-Roman period; see sources cited in Baruch Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 120 n. 13.

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., *Cant. Rab.* 1.2.

<sup>68</sup> See above, n. 43.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Zohar 1.226b; 2.40a, 182a; 3.95b; Wolfson, "Sefer ha-Rimmon," 1. 121 and 2. 136, 328–29.

<sup>70</sup> The symbolic correlation of bread and Wisdom is an ancient haggadic tradition. See in particular the comparative study of the concept of manna in the Gospel of John and the Philonic corpus in Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (NovTSupp 10; Leiden: Brill, 1965).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Zohar 2.40a, 61b, 183a; Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2. 391; Matt, *Zohar*, 113–16, 245–47.

<sup>72</sup> On the notion of Torah as a medicine or drug, especially against the malady of the evil inclination, see Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 273–75.

views. In either case the ethical ideal of inclusion of the left in the spiritual path follows logically. Yet, in one case the ideal is merely negative and in the other positive.

According to the cathartic view, just as in the divine the forces of impurity emerged prior to those of holiness, so too in the life of the human spirit the evil inclination precedes the good. Moreover, just as the initial stage in the divine process is a purging of evil so too by the human spirit purification of the impure is the preliminary stage in the path. This purification is achieved exclusively by means of contact with the impure. In terms of the Zohar's own symbolic language: one must go down to Egypt before one can enter the Holy Land.

According to the emanative view, on the other hand, the demonic force is said to have emanated from one of the grades in the upper realm. To contain evil in the good—that is the true affirmation of divine unity for in its ontic root the evil is bound to the good.<sup>73</sup> It follows therefore that even in the darkness there is a spark of light. This notion, which became a central motif in the kabbalah of Isaac Luria and subsequently in the writings of the Ḥasidim, is not stated explicitly in the Zohar, although it is implicit in various contexts, some of which we have already mentioned. In contrast to later sources, however, the task of *homo religiosus* in the Zohar is not the separation of the holy spark from the demonic shell<sup>74</sup> but rather inclusion of the latter in the former. Evil has no absolute existence in itself; it is ontologically posterior to the divine, for the life-force of evil derives from the divine attribute of judgment. The realm of evil is constituted by the unbalanced force of judgment that has, as it were, assumed an unwarranted autonomy. Hence the religious and moral task of the human being is to restore that energy to its divine source, to balance judgment with mercy, to temper the untempered force of severity with the effluence of love—to contain the left in the right.

The Gnostic sources imparted to the kabbalah the idea of two forces, light and dark, right and left, that structurally parallel each other. Both these forces have their origin in the one God. According to these sources, however, there is no principle by which to reintegrate the demonic into the divine. At best, there is an affirmation of the old apocalyptic idea, albeit in new symbolic terms, of the eventual uprooting of evil by the good. Even the characterization of the

<sup>73</sup> See in particular Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, ed. J. Wijnhoven (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1964) 148–49: “Good and evil are two causes, separate and distinct one from another. Yet the mystery of the Tree is one. . . . Thus it is a religious duty and obligation to know and seek out that very matter [sc. the forces of the demonic] to distinguish between good and evil but not to cleave to it.”

<sup>74</sup> Cf. I. Tishby, “Gnostic Doctrines in Sixteenth Century Jewish Mysticism,” *JJS* 6 (1955) 152. For a later kabbalistic development which, like the Zohar, emphasizes the incorporation of evil within the good, see B. Zak, “Ha-Qelippah Zorekh ha-Qedushah,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1983/84) 191–206.

demonic as God's instrument in punishing and purifying the wicked does not imply a restoration of the evil forces to their source in the divine. The Zohar, in contrast, although accepting the gnostic typology, introduced into the discussion a mediating principle, "the left contained in the right," and by doing so moved beyond gnostic dualism into theosophical monism. The theosophical doctrine, moreover, is reflected in the moral and religious sphere. That is, the ethical task of the human being is to contain the left in the right and thereby restore the former to its source in the latter. The idea of spiritual perfection as it is developed in certain Zoharic texts is one in which the person achieves holiness through contact with the unholy, and by means of such contact the unholy is transformed and contained in the holy. The purpose of religious life is not to liberate the spark of light from its demonic shell in order to separate the two realms. On the contrary, the one who separates the two, like Job, creates a blemish above. The goal, however, is to contain the left in the right. To see the light through darkness—that, according to the Zohar, is the ultimate perfection.

## “MERKAVAH TRADITIONS IN PHILOSOPHICAL GARB: JUDAH HALEVI RECONSIDERED”

ELLIOT R. WOLFSON

### I

It is generally agreed that the twelfth century was a critical time when both philosophy and mysticism began to have a greater impact on the intellectual development of Jews living in central Europe. On the one hand, ancient Jewish mystical speculation on the divine chariot (*merkavah*) cultivated in the Talmudic and Geonic periods was joined together with a “new” theosophic conception of divinity, and kabbalah took its place on the stage of literary history. It is assumed, for instance, that sometime in this century the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, held by Scholem and others to be the first text fully dedicated to theosophical kabbalah, appeared in Provence.<sup>1</sup> It was also in this very geographical region during this century that other, apparently autonomous, circles of kabbalists appeared on the scene, the most well-known being the circle of R. Abraham ben David of Posquières and his son, R. Isaac the Blind.<sup>2</sup> In this same period

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 49–198. See also M. Idel, “The Problem of the Sources of the *Bahir*” [Hebrew] *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 55–72; idem, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), pp. 122–127.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 199–309. Thus Scholem concludes his survey of the kabbalah of RABaD and R. Isaac the Blind: “For our analysis it suffices to have demonstrated that in the fragments from Isaac a specific and completely independent form of the Kabbalah, very different from the world of the *Bahir* as we have learned to know it, can be localized and identified in Provence. The seed of the *Bahir*, landing in Provence, germinated in a singular manner.” See also M. Idel, “The Sefirot above the Sefirot” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 239; idem, *New Perspectives*, p. 136.

the *merkavah* corpus began to have a profound influence on the emerging theosophical speculations of Pietistic circles in Northern France and the Rhineland who not only faithfully copied the older materials but creatively developed ideas contained therein which in some cases have strong phenomenological similarity to mainstream kabbalistic conceptions.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, it was in this century that in the European continent Jewish philosophy — an amalgam of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism<sup>4</sup> — had gained an increasing audience, largely due to the composition of original texts in Hebrew and the translation of older texts from Arabic into Hebrew.

<sup>3</sup> The relationship of German Pietistic speculation to the theosophic kabbalah which flourished in Provence and Northern Spain has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. Cf. A. Epstein, *Mi-Qadmoniyot ha-Yehudim: Kitve R. Avraham Epstein*, ed. A.M. Habermann, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1957), p. 226; M. Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Kultur der Juden in Frankreich und Deutschland*, vol. 1 (Vienna, 1880), pp. 121–124; S.W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 8 (New York, 1958), p. 42; G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1956), p. 117; idem, *Origins*, pp. 41–42, 97–123, 180–198, 215–216, 325, n. 261; J. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of the German Pietists* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 116–129; idem, “A Re-evaluation of the ‘Ashkenazi Kabbalah’” [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 125–140; Idel, “The Sefirot above the Sefirot,” pp. 274–277; *New Perspectives*, pp. 130–132; A. Farber, “The Concept of the Merkavah in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Esotericism: Sod ha-’Egoz and its Development” [Hebrew], (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1986); and E.R. Wolfson, “The Image of Jacob Engraved on the Throne: Further Speculation on the Esoteric Doctrine of the German Pietists” [Hebrew] to be published in the *Ephraim Gottlieb Memorial Volume*. See also E. Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Albany, 1989), p. 169, n. 189 and p. 176, n. 231. On the possible connections between ancient mystical techniques preserved by the German Pietists and the ecstatic kabbalah expounded by Abraham Abulafia, cf. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, 1988), pp. 22–24; idem, *New Perspectives*, pp. 98–102.

<sup>4</sup> In the twelfth century we can also speak of a flourishing of Jewish Neoplatonism in the Oriental Islamic world. See G. Vajda, “Le néoplatonisme dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age,” *Rendiconti Lincei, Serie Ottava*, XXVI (1971): 320 and references given there in n. 11 (reprinted in *Melanges Georges Vajda*, ed. G.E. Weil [Hildesheim, 1982], p. 418, n. 11).

No one would argue, then, with the claim that the twelfth century was one in which philosophy and mysticism flourished as two distinct disciplines. Through the work of several scholars, however, we have come to appreciate the extent to which philosophical texts in and of themselves should be considered as important sources for the preservation of earlier mystical ideas that may have, in turn, helped to generate the literary renaissance of kabbalah.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it would be wrong to assume that the philosophical personalities of medieval Jewry, before the thirteenth century, were devoid of mystical tendencies or influences. It seems to me that any such bifurcation is largely colored by the writings of Maimonides (1135–1204) which, in spite of any formal similarity to medieval kabbalistic hermeneutics, have little to do with the positive content of earlier Jewish mystical documents.<sup>6</sup> That Maimonides was familiar with at least some of these we know with certainty from the fact that he had occasion to refer to the *Shi'ur Qomah* both in an earlier work, the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, and in a later responsum. Whereas in the former he showed a positive disposition towards this text, calling for the need of an extended commentary, in the latter he not only concluded that the treatise was a Byzantine forgery but equated the study of it with idolatry.<sup>7</sup> It can also be safely assumed that Maimonides had access to *Sefer Yeşirah*, though he does not mention it by name.<sup>8</sup> Finally, it has been demonstrated that Maimonides had

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Y. Liebes, "Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol's Use of the Sefer Yeşira and a Commentary on the Poem 'I Love Thee'," in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 73–124 (in Hebrew). See also article by Moshe Idel cited below, n. 29.

<sup>6</sup> This point was made by A. Altmann, "Das verhältnis Maimunis zur jüdischen Mystik," *Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 80 (1936): 305–330.

<sup>7</sup> A. Altmann, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, 1969), pp. 186–187. See also Baron, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–30, 287, n. 32.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. 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

knowledge of at least some ancient Jewish esoteric terms, though it is readily admitted that he radically altered the meaning of these terms.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps more significantly, however, is the almost total absence of any of the *merkavah* imagery or motifs in Maimonides' literary corpus. He even has little, if any, use to make of standard aggadic texts which strike of a *merkavah* character. Those who would like to appropriate Maimonides as a Jewish mystic by seeing him as a figure who combined philosophy and mysticism — espousing therefore a type of intellectualist mysticism<sup>10</sup> — miss the essential point, in my opinion. The mystical dimension of Neoplatonism is indisputable, as is the historical claim that this school of philosophy influenced Maimonides, primarily through Arabic writers who had assimilated Neoplatonic texts.<sup>10a</sup> The critical question from my vantage point is Maimonides' relation to *Jewish* mystical doctrine as expressed in a given literary corpus determined not by scholars but by the community of mystics themselves. When the question is phrased in this way, I find the evidence wanting. Indeed, it seems to me that one could make a very good case

Homilies," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 7 (1989): 127–132.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. M. Fishbane, "Some Forms of Divine Appearance in Ancient Jewish Thought," in *From Ancient Judaism to Modern Israel: Intellect in Quest of Understanding: Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, ed. J. Neusner, E.S. Frerichs, N.M. Sarna, 4 vols. (Atlanta, 1989), 2:261–270.

<sup>10</sup> See D.R. Blumenthal, "Maimonides' Intellectualist Mysticism and the Superiority of the Prophecy of Moses," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. D.R. Blumenthal, vol. 1 (Chico, Ca., 1984), pp. 27–52; idem, "Maimonides: Prayer, Worship, and Mysticism," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. D.R. Blumenthal, vol. 3 (Atlanta, 1988), pp. 1–16. The same critique, in my opinion, may be levelled against those who would impute to Maimonides the mystical elements that emerge more overtly in the Jewish Sufism of his son, Abraham, and grandson, 'Obadyah. I do not mean to deny the mystical element in the Sufi piety cultivated by Jews, but only question the validity of identifying this as a factor in determining the relationship of Maimonides himself to the esoteric traditions of Jewish mysticism.

<sup>10a</sup> See now A. Ivry, "Neoplatonic Currents in Maimonides' Thought," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, ed. J. Kramer (Oxford, 1991), pp. 115–140.

that Maimonides is aware of the earlier esoteric traditions and exerted much effort to subvert them by utilizing the key terms such as *ma'aseh bereshit* and *ma'aseh merkavah* but investing them with radical new meaning, viz., Aristotelian physics and metaphysics.<sup>11</sup> The same may be applied to Maimonides' treatment of *ta'ame ha-mišwot*, "reasons for the commandments," which are related in his view to the category of *sitre Torah*, "mysteries of the Law."<sup>12</sup> A careful scrutiny of Maimonides' account of each of these subjects reveals that there is very little that is esoteric in the true sense of that term for him; what is esoteric is the style of presentation and the claim that certain matters have been concealed from the public, matters that Maimonides, on account of an intellectual need and religious obligation (notwithstanding the explicit rabbinic injunction to the contrary), must disclose in the appropriate manner. The content of the mysteries of *ma'aseh bereshit* (physics) and *ma'aseh merkavah* (metaphysics), however, is very much determined by philosophic notions that are exoteric in nature, ascertained by the use of natural reason. Moreover, the utilitarian-instrumental approach to the commandments that underlies Maimonides' discussion of *ta'ame ha-mišwot* is completely exoteric in its orientation.<sup>13</sup> Kabbalists in the thirteenth century were well aware of this subversion and attempted to counter it by composing what they considered to be authentic — i.e., indigenously Jewish — commentaries on Genesis and Ezekiel's chariot as well as propagating the mystical reasons for the commandments.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Cf. M. Idel, "Sitre 'Arayot in Maimonides' Thought," in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. S. Pines and Y. Yovel (Boston, 1986), pp. 79–91; idem, *New Perspectives*, p. 252.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. I. Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven, 1980), pp. 397–398.

<sup>13</sup> As noted already by Twersky, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

<sup>14</sup> It is of interest to note in this connection that in one place Eleazar of Worms enumerates three types of *sodot* or esoteric subjects as follows: the secret of the chariot (סוד המרכבה), the secret of the account of creation (סוד מעשה)



The aim of this paper is to show, however, that in the pre-Maimonidean philosophical thought<sup>15</sup> of Judah Halevi (ca. 1075–1141) ancient Jewish chariot-mysticism, especially as it was interpreted in the Geonic literature, had a decisive influence.<sup>16</sup> To this end I will focus on some of the themes connected with Halevi's understanding of prophecy and revelatory experience, for it is with respect to these key issues that one can most readily discern the centrality of earlier *merkavah* traditions. That Halevi knew some of these texts is beyond question as is attested by the fact that in the *Kuzari* he mentioned several of the relevant documents by name. Thus in

(בראשית), and the secret of the commandments (סוד המצות; cf. the reading in MS Paris 850, fol. 118a: the secret of the performance of the commandments, סוד (מעשה המצות). Cf. *Sefer Razi'el* (Amsterdam, 1701), fol. 7c. The text has been printed as well in *Sode Razaya*, ed. S. Weiss (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 1. See, by contrast, Eleazar's enumeration of esoteric disciplines in *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, ch. 2 (Bene Beraq, 1987), p. 14: the secret of the chariot (סוד המרכבה), the secret of creation (סוד מעשה בראשית), and the secret of unity (סוד היחוד). The latter is known by one who knows the secret of the wisdom of the soul (סוד חכמת הנפש).

<sup>15</sup> In using the expression "philosophical thought" in relation to Halevi I do not wish to take issue with the claim of those who would not regard the *Kuzari* as a philosophic book. Cf. L. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (New York, 1952), p. 98. Strauss is right to characterize Halevi's dialogue "primarily as a defence of Judaism against philosophy" (p. 103), and in that sense it is a work of kalâm (pp. 99–100). It is nevertheless appropriate, in my view, to refer to the philosophical thought of Halevi, by which I mean his overall religious philosophy. The latter, while in some fundamental ways at odds with the leading philosophic positions of Halevi's day, is expressed at times in terms and modes of discourse derived from philosophy proper, a point well-made in the scholarly literature.

<sup>16</sup> The complicated relationship between philosophy and mysticism in Jewish sources — mostly in a period later than that of Halevi — has been studied most thoroughly by Alexander Altmann and Georges Vajda. For the former, see the essays collected in Altmann, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, 1969). For the latter, see the studies referred to in G. Vajda, "Recherches sur la synthèse philosophico-kabbalistique de Samuel Ibn Moqat,," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* (1960): 29, n. 1 (= *Melanges Georges Vajda*, p. 661, n. 1).

III:65 Halevi identifies the tanna, R. Ishmael ben Elisha the High Priest, as the one who is mentioned in the "*Hekhalot*, *Hakkarat Panim*, and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. He knew all these secrets to the point that he merited a grade proximate to prophecy" (דרגה קריבה מן אלנובה).<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy that Halevi compares knowing secrets of the *merkavah* to prophecy, a point to which I will return at a later stage in this analysis. What needs to be emphasized here is that the three items listed above are references to specific literary works. In the case of the first two, *Hekhalot* and *Hakkarat Panim*, this is fairly obvious, the former referring in all probability to one of the main and most widely disseminated texts of the *merkavah* corpus, *Sefer Hekhalot* also known as *3 Enoch*,<sup>18</sup> in which R. Ishmael figures prominently, while the latter refers to a chapter on chiromancy entitled *Hakkarat Panim le-Rabbi Yishma'el*, also part of the same corpus.<sup>19</sup> The same can be said with respect to the third reference given by Halevi, *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. As Scholem has already pointed out, this title was used by medieval authors in basically three ways: (a) to cover a general collection of *Hekhalot* books, (b) to refer specifically to either *Hekhalot Rabbati* or *Shi'ur Qomah*, or (c) to name another *Hekhalot* text which Scholem himself published from manuscript and called by this

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Kuzari*, I:103, where one is said to come close to the degree of prophecy through the doing of good deeds, sanctification, purification, and being close to the prophets. See also V:12 where the *hasid* is depicted as being one level below the prophet. Halevi's association of pious behavior and the attainment of a degree which approximates that of the prophets had an impact on the Jewish-Sufi Pietism of Abraham Maimonides and his circle. Cf. P. Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool, al-Maqāla al-Hawdiyya* by 'Obadyah b. Abraham b. Moses Maimonides (London, 1981), pp. 8–9, 58, n. 42; idem, *Deux traités de mystique juive* (Paris, 1987), pp. 75, n. 158, 77, n. 163.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Judah Moscato, *Qol Yehudah*, ad *Kuzari*, III:65.

<sup>19</sup> The text was published by Scholem, "Physiognomy and Chiromancy" [Hebrew], *Sefer Assaf*, ed. M. Cassuto, J. Klausner, and J. Guttman (Jerusalem, 1953), pp. 480–487. Scholem mentions the passage from the *Kuzari* on p. 465.

title.<sup>20</sup> In IV:3 Halevi again mentions *Ma'aseh Merkavah* but this time together with *Shi'ur Qomah*,<sup>21</sup> thereby eliminating the possibility that for him *Ma'aseh Merkavah* refers to *Shi'ur Qomah*. It must be concluded, therefore, that Halevi had in mind either the general collection of *Hekhalot* books or another particular *Hekhalot* treatise. Given the fact that Halevi enumerates *Ma'aseh Merkavah* together with *Hekhalot* and *Hakkarat Panim* in one instance and with *Shi'ur Qomah* in the other, I am inclined to accept the latter possibility. Halevi's intimate knowledge of early Jewish mysticism is attested as well by his elaborate commentary on *Sefer Yeşirah* in IV:25–27. References to that work are also to be found in III:17 and V:14. Furthermore, Halevi's religious poetry abounds with images taken from the *merkavah* literature as will be shown in the relevant places in the present analysis.<sup>22</sup>

That Halevi's writings — both the speculative dialogue and the religious poems — reflect a mystical strain should come as

<sup>20</sup> Cf. G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1965), pp. 101–102. Curiously, in this context Scholem did not mention Halevi in his discussion of the medieval authors who refer to *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. Concerning the use of this title see also the remarks of P. Schäfer, "Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature," reprinted in idem, *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen, 1988), p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Altmann, *Studies*, p. 188.

<sup>22</sup> To be sure, the influence of *merkavah* imagery on liturgical poetry (especially the classical 'ofan form) is not unique to Halevi or even to Andalusian Hebrew poets. On the contrary, this is a common feature found in medieval poets in Spain, Northern France, Germany and Italy, Cf. E. Fleischer, *Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in the Middle Ages* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 454; idem, *The Yozer Its Emergence and Development* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 252–267, 522, 620, 671. The relationship between *Hekhalot* hymns and formalized Synagogue prayers, especially the *qedushah*, has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Cf. I. Gruenwald, "Angelic Songs, the Qedushah and the Problem of the Origin of the Hekhalot Literature," in idem, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), pp. 145–173, and references to other scholarly literature on pp. 145–146, nn. 3–7. See also Meir Bar-Ilan, *The Mysteries of Jewish Prayer and Hekhalot* [Hebrew] (Bar-Ilan, 1987).

no surprise to the historian of medieval Jewish thought. The possible influence of Islamic mysticism, especially in the form of Isma'ilism, on Judah Halevi has been suggested by several scholars, most notably, David Kaufmann,<sup>23</sup> Ignaz Goldziher,<sup>24</sup> Israel Efros<sup>25</sup> and Shlomo Pines,<sup>26</sup> while others have readily acknowledged the more general influence of Arabic Neoplatonism upon his thought.<sup>27</sup> Scholars have also noted the mystical tendencies in Halevi's poetry.<sup>28</sup> Halevi's indebtedness to Jewish mysticism, however, and, in particular, *merkavah* traditions, has been less frequently noted in the scholarly literature, the one major exception being Moshe Idel.<sup>29</sup> In the following sections I

<sup>23</sup> D. Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre in der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie von Saadia bis Maimuni* (Gotha, 1877), pp. 166, 177, n. 135, 202, n. 180, 220–221, n. 205, 232, n. 221.

<sup>24</sup> I. Goldziher, "Le *Amr ilahi* (*ha-'inyan ha-'elohi*) chez Juda Halévi," *REJ* 50 (1905): 32–41.

<sup>25</sup> I. Efros, "Some Aspects of Yehudah Halevi's Mysticism," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 11 (1941): 27–41, reprinted in idem, *Studies in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (New York, 1974), pp. 141–154.

<sup>26</sup> S. Pines, "Shi'ite Terms in Judah Ha-Levi's *Kuzari*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 165–251. On the relation of Halevi's *amr ilahi* to Isma'ili doctrine, see also idem, "La longue recension de la théologie d'Aristotle dans ses rapports avec la doctrine ismaélienne," *REI* (1955): 7–20. For another possible influence of this literature on Halevi, see idem, "On the Term *Ruhaniyyut* and its Origin and on Judah Halevi's Doctrine" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 57 (1988): 511–540.

<sup>27</sup> See J. Schlanger, "La doctrine de la hiérarchie dans le Livre du *Kuzari* de Jehuda Halevi," in *Le Néoplatonisme, Colloque de Royaumont, 9–13, juin 1969* (Paris, 1971), pp. 339–353; Vajda, "Le néoplatonisme dans la pensée juive," pp. 319–320, n. 10 (= *Mélanges Georges Vajda*, pp. 417–418, n. 10); H. Greive, "Jehuda Halevi und die Philosophische Position des Abraham Ibn Ezra," *Judaica* 29 (1973): 141–148.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. A. Komem, "Between Poetry and Prophecy: Studies in the Poetry of Judah Halevi" [Hebrew], *Molad* 2 (1969): 676–698.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. M. Idel, "The World of Angels in Human Form" [Hebrew], in *Studies in Philosophy, Mysticism, and Ethical Literature presented to Isaiah Tishby on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 15–19. See also H. Sérouya, *La Kabbale* (Paris, 1947), pp. 148–151, and the passing remark of Altmann,

wish to concentrate on some aspects of Halevi's thought which derive from *merkavah* speculation in both its classical and Geonic formulations. To be sure, as will be shown in the course of my analysis, these older mystical themes were combined with more contemporary Neoplatonic ideas and structures of thought, in some cases perhaps filtered through Sufi channels. It is nevertheless the case that Halevi was utilizing ancient Jewish mystical doctrine. The blending of *merkavah* imagery with Neoplatonism represents an important stage in the evolution of medieval Jewish thought. A fresh analysis of this dimension in Halevi's writings will undoubtedly enhance our appreciation of the soil that nurtured the intellectual roots of kabbalah.<sup>30</sup>

## II

The influence of the *merkavah* traditions upon Halevi is brought out most clearly in the *Kuzari*, IV:3.<sup>31</sup> In a lengthy passage on the various divine names and the nature of prophetic revelation, Halevi notes, *inter alia*, that the verse, 'And under His feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire' (Exod. 24:10), alludes to the fact that the nobles of Israel "perceived a spiritual form" (אלצורה אלוהאנייה) which is called

*Studies*, p. 188, while discussing Halevi's positive evaluation of *Shi'ur Qomah* in *Kuzari*, IV:3: "Jehuda Ha-Levi need not, of course, have expressed here his entire view of the work. Close as he was to Jewish mysticism, he might have regarded it as a repository of profound mysteries."

<sup>30</sup> A separate question, not the subject of this inquiry, is that of the affinity of later kabbalists for Halevi and their borrowing from or dependence upon his writings. Cf. Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre*, pp. 166–167, n. 120, and references to other scholarly literature given there. For Halevi's particular influence on the Gerona kabbalists, see Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 410–411, and references given in n. 107.

<sup>31</sup> In preparation of this paper the following editions have been consulted: *Kitāb al-Radd wa-'l Dalil fi 'l-Din al-Dhalil*, ed. D. Baneth and H. Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem, 1977); *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, trans. Yehudah ibn Tibbon; *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, trans. Yehudah Even-Shmu'el (Jerusalem, 1972).

the "God of Israel." In the continuation of the same passage we are told that this "divine form" (אלא צורה)<sup>32</sup> appears to human imagination in the most noble image, viz., that of a human being. In yet another comment in the same context there is a remark to the effect that in the time of Moses the vision of the spiritual form or light was available to persons other than prophets. Indeed, in a subsequent section of the *Kuzari* (IV:11) Halevi contrasts Moses' spiritual leadership with that of others on the grounds that Moses did not seek to limit prophetic revelation to the isolated few. On the contrary, Moses made the people stand near Mount Sinai "to see the light that he had seen ... and afterward he called the seventy elders and they saw it, as it says, 'They saw the God of Israel.'" The visible pole of revelation is therefore identified by Halevi as the God of Israel.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ibn Tibbon translates Halevi's expression 'alā ṣurah in a somewhat ambiguous manner as דמותו, i.e., "his image." For a more literal rendering see Even-Shmu'el, *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, p. 162: צורת האלוה.

<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that the expression 'God of Israel' occurs in several biblical passages where some visionary experience of the divine is posited, most notably Exod. 24:10. Presumably, based on this usage Ezekiel adopted the terminology "glory of the God of Israel" (כבוד אלהי ישראל) to refer to the object of his vision. Cf. Ezek. 8:4, 10:19, 10:20, 11:22, 43:2, 44:2. The technical signification of the term אלהי ישראל in a theophanic context was not lost to subsequent generations of Jewish writers. Thus, for example, the term is used frequently in the textual units comprised within the corpus of *Hekhalot* literature. Cf. P. Schäfer, *Konkordanz zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1986), s.v. ישראל, pp. 322–324, where numerous occurrences of the epithet "God of Israel" are recorded in the various manuscript codices in which these texts have been preserved. The *merkavah* mystics consciously chose this expression to refer to the aspects of God which were apprehended through the ecstatic-mystical experience. I would suggest that the verse in Exodus regarding the seeing of the God of Israel at Sinai, as well as its reflex in Ezekiel's vision of the glory of the God of Israel, probably informed the *merkavah* mystics' choice of this epithet to serve as a *terminus technicus* for the visible aspect of the divine glory. Analogously, as I will set out to demonstrate, in the case of Halevi the God of Israel is not merely a descriptive term qualifying the proper name of

The spiritual form (*al-ṣurah al-rûḥāniyyah*) which, as we have seen, Halevi equated with the biblical "God of Israel," is further identified by him as the world of the *merkavah* and all that is comprised in this world: the various classes of angels, the throne, and the visible aspect of the glory itself. That Halevi interpreted the throne-world of ancient Jewish mysticism in these terms is evident from his description of R. Aqiva as one "who approached the level of prophecy until [the point that] he had contact with the world of the spiritual entities (עאלם אלוהאניין), as it says, Four entered the Pardes ... one entered in peace and exited in peace. Who was it? R. Aqiva" (III:65).<sup>34</sup> Pines suggested that this passage must be understood against the background of the term *pneumata* derived from Greek magical-theurgical texts of Late Antiquity which was rendered in Arabic philosophic sources as *al-ruḥaniyyat*.<sup>35</sup> While this etymology may be correct, as seems to be supported by other passages in Halevi, in this specific context it is important to emphasize that which Pines failed to note, viz., here the world of spiritual entities, *'alām al-rûḥāniyyan* (*'olam ha-ruḥaniyyim*), is identified with the aggadic Pardes which is understood by Halevi as the celestial throne-world. That is to say, therefore, that in this case at least the spiritual entities comprise

God, but is rather a technical expression used to characterize the visible forms of divinity. In my opinion this is no mere coincidence, but represents a discernible philological link that connects Halevi with the Jewish mystical texts of which he was certainly aware. See also Judah Hadassi, *'Eshkol ha-Kofer* (Eupatoria, 1836), 27b.

<sup>34</sup> In the continuation of this passage Halevi describes Aqiva as one "who had contact with [or made use of] the two worlds without any danger. It has already been said concerning him, 'he was worthy to have the *Shekhinah* rest upon him like Moses but the time was not appropriate'." Cf. Israel of Zamosc in his commentary *'Oṣar Neḥmad ad loc.* who notes that a saying similar to this is found in B. Sanhedrin 11a but with reference to Hillel and Shmu'el ha-Qadan, and not R. Aqiva. He also suggests *Numbers Rabbah* 19:6 as a possible source: דברים שלא נגלו למשה נגלו לר"ע וחביריו.

<sup>35</sup> Pines, "On the Term *Ruḥaniyyut*," p. 525.

the array of objects known from the pleroma of the *merkavah* mystics: the glory, the attendant angels, the chariot, and the throne. To be sure, the philosophical interpretation of this older motif is evident in the continuation of this very passage when Halevi describes the fate of another rabbi who entered the Pardes, Elisha ben Abuyah, as degrading the commandments “after contemplating the Intellects (אלעקליאת).” From this context, then, it may be concluded that Halevi identified the mystical Pardes with the realm of spiritual beings which are the immaterial Intellects. In yet another passage in the *Kuzari* (II:4), where the merging of ancient Jewish theosophy and contemporary philosophical terminology is evident as well, Halevi notes that the “spiritual forms” (אלצור אלרוחאניה) are called the “glory of the Lord” (כבוד יהוה) and, metaphorically, simply the Lord (יהוה).<sup>36</sup> In that same passage we are told that the *kavod* refers to “spiritual forms” that “are formed from the subtle spiritual substance (אלגסם אללטיף אלרוחאני) called the Holy Spirit (רוח הקדש).” In another context (IV:25) the Holy Spirit, identified as the Spirit of God (רוח אלהים) mentioned in *Sefer Yeşirah* 1:9 as the first of the ten *sefirot*, is described as the

<sup>36</sup> This is also reflected in the view of Abraham ibn Ezra that the entire upper world is the glory, וכל זה העולם כבוד. See Standard Commentary *ad* Exod. 3:15 (ed. A. Weiser, 3 vols. [Jerusalem, 1977], 2:34), and cf. to Halevi’s formulation in *Dīwān des Abu-l-Hasān Jehuda ha-Levi*, ed. H. Brody, with introduction, bibliography, additions and indices by A.M. Habermann, 4 vols. (Westmead, England, 1971), 3:69 (poem no. 36): מרומים מלא כבוד. Cf. ibn Ezra’s statement in the Short Commentary *ad* Exod. 33:18 that “every glory is conjoined to God,” כל כבוד רבך בשם (ed. Weiser, 2:343), i.e., every angel in virtue of its incorporeality cleaves to the divine essence. The use of the term כבוד (or the related terms נכבד and כבודים) as a generic name for the immaterial angelic realm or the soul that derives therefrom is found frequently in ibn Ezra’s writings. See, e.g., Commentary *ad* Gen. 3:24; Exod. 19:20; Deut. 30:15; Ps. 14:2, 24:4, 36:9, 66:2, 76:5, 91:16, 103:1. Cf. Naḥman Krochmal, *Moreh Nevukhe ha-Zeman*, in *The Writings of Nachman Krochmal*, ed. S. Rawidowicz (Waltham, 1961), ch. 17, p. 288; M. Friedländer, *Essays on the Writings of Abraham ibn Ezra* (London, 1877), p. 15.



source “whence the angels, which are spiritual beings (אלמלאיכה),<sup>37</sup> are created, and to which the spiritual souls (אלאנפס), are conjoined.”<sup>38</sup>

It has been suggested by Harry Wolfson that Halevi’s conception of a “subtle spiritual substance” which is acted upon by a ray of divine light reflects a Neoplatonic view, traceable to Plotinus himself, regarding the light (φῶς) that proceeds from the One and acts upon the intelligible (νοητή) or divine (θεία) matter (ύλη) or substance (οὐσία).<sup>39</sup> It was Wolfson’s opinion,

<sup>37</sup> Cf. IV:3 where Halevi concludes that the word *mal’akh* can refer either to an entity created temporally from the subtle elements or to one of the incorruptible angels which may be further identified as the spiritual realities (אלרוחאניון) of which the philosophers speak. Halevi informs the reader that one is not obligated to reject or accept this philosophical position. Indeed, with respect to the angels seen by Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, Halevi flatly states that “it cannot be decided if they were from that which is created or from the enduring spiritual forms.” The identification of the angels as incorruptible spiritual beings or forms finds expression as well in the writings of Halevi’s contemporary, Abraham ibn Ezra, who likewise uses the term *šurot* to refer to the angelic beings whom he further identifies as the separate intelligences. Cf. ibn Ezra’s Commentary on Dan. 2:11, 10:21. See below n. 90.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Diwān*, 3:257 (poem no. 138): ברכי [נפשי] אצולה מרוח הקדש; ibid., 4:188 (poem no. 86): רדשה נשמה רבך בכסאך / כי רמתה אל כרוב ומלאך. (On the association of the intellect and the cherub, on one hand, and the imagination and an angel, on the other, cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II:6, interpreting *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 10:20.) The theme of the soul deriving from the throne of glory is found in other poets influenced by Neoplatonic trends of thought. See, e.g., *The Liturgical Poetry of Rabbi Solomon ibn Gabirol*, ed. D. Jarden, 2 vols. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1977), 1:52; *The Religious Poems of Abraham ibn Ezra*, ed. I. Levin, 2 vols. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1976–80) 1:114 (poem no. 63). Elsewhere (*Kuzari*, V:23) Halevi speaks of an aspect of the *Ruah ha-Qodesh*, which is continuously with every member of Israel in any geographic area, as the “spiritual hidden Presence” in contrast to the aspect of the Presence “revealed to the eye” exclusively in the land of Israel. Cf. H. Davidson, “The Active Intellect in the Cuzari and Hallevi’s Theory of Causality,” *REJ* 131 (1972): 388. See also Halevi’s discussion of the biblical appellation for God, קדוש ישראל, in IV:3.

<sup>39</sup> H.A. Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1973), 2:89.

moreover, following the view of David Kaufmann,<sup>40</sup> that Halevi's conception shared much in common with Saadya's doctrine of the "second" and "first" air developed in his *Tafsir Kitāb al-Mabādi*.<sup>41</sup> According to Saadya, the first air is a visible air which permeates all beings, whereas the second air is a more subtle and reified air, though it too is described as a created light. The second air, God's intermediary in creation, is identified as the Throne, the biblical *kavod* and the rabbinic *Shekhinah* or Holy Spirit. Out of this second air are produced the various forms that appear to the prophets, in a way analogous to Halevi's conception of the spiritual forms apprehended by the prophets being produced by the light of the Holy Spirit. The significant factor that Wolfson did not dwell upon is Halevi's indebtedness to older forms of Jewish mysticism. This indebtedness is highlighted if one compares his notion of *šurot ruhaniyyot* with the cognate notion in standard Neoplatonic works. To take one example from a key medieval Neoplatonic text that may have been an important source for Halevi, the Pseudo-Empedoclean *Book of Five Substances*. In that text one reads about an "intellectual vision" (הראות השכלי) through which one can know the spiritual or intelligible forms (צורות שכליות) which are the "impressions (or traces) of God" (רשומי רוחניות) within the world of the Intellect (עולם השכל).<sup>42</sup> These forms are akin to the Plotinian conception of intelligibles (τα νοητά) within the second hypostasis, *Noûs*, that make up the intelligible world (κοσμός νοητός). Yet, for Halevi, the spiritual forms are not simply the intelligible ideas within the mind of God; they assume the character of the entities known from the

<sup>40</sup> Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre*, p. 183, n. 146.

<sup>41</sup> Wolfson, *Studies*, p. 93.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Kuzari*, I:77, but there the divine traces of which Halevi speaks are in the physical world.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. D. Kaufmann, *Studien über Salomon ibn Gabirol* (Budapest, 1899), pp. 18–19.

world of ancient Jewish throne-mysticism.<sup>44</sup> These forms collectively make up the visible glory.

The understanding of the *kavod* as comprising the entities of the chariot is affirmed as well by Halevi when he discusses the term *kevod YHWH* in IV:3. According to one opinion, the divine glory (כבוד יהוה) is a "subtle body (אלגסם אללטיף) which accomplishes the will of God, and assumes every form that God wills to make visible to the prophet," whereas, according to a second view, the glory refers to the "totality of angels and spiritual intermediaries: throne, chariot, firmament, ophanim, wheels, and other imperishable beings."<sup>45</sup> In still another sense the terms "glory of the Lord," "Angelhood (מלאכות) of the Lord,"<sup>46</sup> and "Presence of the Lord," can be applied metaphorically to natural phenomena, as in the verse, 'the whole earth is full of His glory' (Isa. 6:3), to indicate the immanence of God.<sup>47</sup> However, insofar as the third usage does not represent a distinct theory or doctrine of the *kavod* but merely accounts for one of its semantic applications, it may be concluded that reflected in Halevi's words are two differing conceptions of the *kavod*. It is

<sup>44</sup> To an extent this is true of other Jewish Neoplatonists, most notably, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Abraham bar Hiyya, and Abraham ibn Ezra.

<sup>45</sup> *Kuzari*, IV:3.

<sup>46</sup> See below, n. 53.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Dîwân*, 3:150–151, 232; 4:194; Silman, *Thinker and Seer: The Development of the Thought of R. Yehuda Halevi in the Kuzari* [Hebrew] (Bar-Ilan, 1985), pp. 167–171. The connection of the glory with divine immanence is expressed especially in Halevi's interpretation of a passage in *Sefer Yeşirah* where the seven double letters are said to correspond to the six directions and the holy Palace (היכל קדש) in the middle. Concerning this seventh entity, the holy Palace, Halevi writes: "'Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place (Ezek. 3:12),' He is the place of the world but the world is not His place [cf. *Genesis Rabbah*, 68:10]; this alludes to the divine matter (*al-amr al-ilahi*) which joins the opposites" (IV:25). Halevi's interpretation is apparently based on Saadya's commentary to *Sefer Yeşirah* 2:3, ed. J. Kafih (Jerusalem, 1972), p. 80; cf. Judah ben Barzillai, *Perush Sefer Yeşirah*, ed. S.J. Halberstam (Berlin, 1895), pp. 231ff.

generally assumed that the first view corresponds to the notion of the created glory, first formulated by Saadya Gaon (882–942),<sup>48</sup> and the second to the Karaite view as expressed, for instance, by Judah Hadassi (12th century) who identifies the *kavod* with the sum of angels and divine beings (sometimes referred to in the plural form *kevodot*) including the throne itself.<sup>49</sup> In the opinion of several scholars Halevi accepted the validity of both views,<sup>50</sup> though according to at least one traditional commentator, Israel ben Moses Halevi of Zamosc

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Efros, *Studies*, p. 152, n. 50; Altmann, *Studies*, pp. 140–160. It should be noted that Altmann considered the Jewish mystical tradition of *ma'aseh merkavah* as a possible source for Saadya's doctrine of *kavod nivra'*. See *loc. cit.*, pp. 153–154. Altmann reached this conclusion on the basis of the fact that for Saadya the *kavod* is mentioned together with the throne and the attendant angels. It must be emphasized, however, that the very notion of a created glory, the central pillar of Saadya's theory of revelation, is not found in the ancient Jewish mystical tradition. Moreover, in other respects a tendency to transpose the earlier mystical ideas in a philosophical or scientific vein is discernible in Saadya's writings, as has been shown, for example, by H. Ben-Shammai, "Saadya's Goal in his *Commentary on Sefer Yesirah*," in *A Straight Path Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, ed. R. Link-Salinger (Washington, D.C., 1988), pp. 1–9. On the philosophical orientation of Saadya's commentary, see also G. Vajda, "Sa'adya commentateur du 'Livre de la Création'," *Annuaire de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Sciences Religieuses* (1959–60): 5 (*Mélanges*, p. 39). For a possible Aristotelian interpretation of the opening passage of *Sefer Yesirah* in the *Kuzari*, see R. Jospe, "The Superiority of Oral Over Written Communication: Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* and Modern Jewish Thought," in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism*, 3: 131–133.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Altmann, *Studies*, p. 155, n. 66; D. Lasker, "The Philosophy of Judah Hadassi the Karaite" [Hebrew], in the *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 7 (1988): 487–488; idem, "Judah Halevi and Karaism," in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism*, 3: 115. On the interchange between the angel and the glory in Karaite theology, cf. Jepheth ibn Ali, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. and trans. D.S. Margoliouth (Oxford, 1889), pp. 56–57.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Wolfson, *Studies*, 2:90–95; Lasker, "Judah Halevi and Karaism," p. 115. See also Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre*, pp. 185–186.

(ca. 1700–1772), Halevi preferred the first view.<sup>51</sup> I would like to suggest that from other discussions in the *Kuzari* it can be shown that Halevi's own orientation was closer to the second view which for him resonated with ancient Jewish mystical speculation on the chariot and the enthroned glory.

The Saadianic influence in the first view has been noted already by several scholars:<sup>52</sup> the *kavod* or *Shekhinah* is a created light made visible to the prophets in multiple forms in order to substantiate the divine veracity of the revealed word. Prophetic visions, according to this position, are not visions of God at all, but rather of a created luminous substance called by a host of names culled from the Bible and rabbinic writings. Confirmation of this view is to be found in a previous part of IV:3, where Halevi writes that the intermediary through which the divine is revealed is called by various names, to wit, glory (כבוד), Presence (שכינה), Kingship (מלכות),<sup>53</sup> fire and cloud, image and form, and appearance of the rainbow.<sup>54</sup> All of these phe-

<sup>51</sup> Cf. 'Oṣar *Nehmad* ad *Kuzari*, IV:3, already noted by Lasker, *op. cit.*, p. 115, n. 17.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Wolfson, *Studies*, 2:93; the studies of Efros and Altmann referred to in n. 48; Silman, *Thinker and Seer*, p. 178, n. 40.

<sup>53</sup> At the end of IV:3, Halevi speaks of "the glory of God, the angelhood (מלאכות) of God, and the *Shekhinah*." Cf. II:7. Similar terminology can be detected in his poetry as well; see, e.g., *Dīwān*, 3:123 (poem no. 64): "And they will see your kingdom (מלכות) and by means of your messengership (ובמלאכות) they will go." See *ibid.*, p. 262 (poem no. 138) where *shem*, *malkhut*, and *kavod* are used interchangeably and are further identified as the light of God's countenance. And see *ibid.*, p. 292 (poem no. 145), and 4:145 (poem no. 62). Cf. Wolfson, *Studies*, 2:86, n. 89; Efros, *Studies*, pp. 151–153. According to Efros, the confusion between the usage of these two words is explained by the fact that both terms derive from the Arabic conception of 'ālam al-malakūt, i.e., the changeless world of angels. There is an obvious similarity between Halevi's terminology and subsequent kabbalistic doctrine concerning the last *sefirah* which is called by the names *kavod*, *Shekhinah*, and *malkhut*. Cf. Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-'Iqqarim* (Warsaw, 1877), II:11.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Kuzari*, II:26 where Halevi distinguishes between three kinds of light: the known revealed fire (אלמשהורה), the subtle hidden fire (פלנאר הי)

nomena “were proof that the [prophetic] word [or speech] came from God to those individuals [i.e., the prophets], and they called it the ‘glory of the Lord’ (כבוד יהוה), and sometimes simply ‘Lord’ (יהוה).” This formulation indeed bears a strong resemblance to the doctrine of the created glory of Saadya Gaon who likewise maintained that the purpose of the visual appearance of the glory was to establish the ultimate authenticity of the divine word.

Yet, some of the other comments made by Halevi suggest that he may have been reflecting an understanding of the *kavod* that is essentially at variance with Saadya’s doctrine of the created glory. That is, the *kavod* is not a created entity that is manifest at given intervals of time, but is rather an incorruptible spiritual form — a “spark of divine light”<sup>55</sup> — that can assume the diverse shapes of the entities that occupy the throne-world. These spiritual forms, in turn, express the tangible or visible manifestation of the divine reality which is *per se* incorporeal and invisible. The possible relation of Halevi’s usage of the term “spiritual forms” to refer to the whole range of entities in the throne-world, to wit, the glory of God, the angels, the chariot, the firmament, the ophanim, and the wheels, and the occurrence of the term “holy forms” (צורות קדושות) in the *Sefer ha-Bahir* to refer to spiritual entities connected to the throne has been noted by Idel.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, from a terminological standpoint it can be shown that Halevi’s usage of *kavod* reflects

נור אלחכמָה ואלאהאם) and the light of wisdom and knowledge (אכמִי ואלטף), and the light of wisdom and knowledge (נור אלחכמָה ואלאהאם). These three correspond to the burnt-offering altar, the altar of gold, and the candelabrum. In Halevi’s own terms, the purpose of the three objects is to enable the person to cleave to each of the respective luminous entities. In the continuation of that passage Halevi adds yet another light which is manifest through the Urim and Tummim, viz., the light of prophecy (נור אלנבִיָּה).

<sup>55</sup> *Kuzari*, II:8. Cf. *ibid.*, II:50.

<sup>56</sup> See Idel, *New Perspectives*, pp. 124–125. Another parallelism between an image in the *Kuzari* and *Sefer ha-Bahir* was noted by Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 78–79.

well the way that this term was used in the ancient Jewish mystical speculation. That is, in the texts that make up the *Hekhalot* corpus the word *kavod* functions as a generic name that embraces all the constituent elements in the heavenly realm that are visually apprehended by the mystic in his ecstatic ascent: the chariot, the celestial chambers, the different angelic hosts,<sup>57</sup> the throne and the glory itself. From that perspective the word *kavod* is interchangeable with *merkavah*, so that it may be said that the one who has seen the chariot has seen the glory.<sup>58</sup> Given this usage in Jewish mystical texts, as well as other Jewish literature influenced by the former, it seems to me necessary to qualify the generally accepted assumption that the second view of the *kavod* espoused by Halevi in IV:3 simply reflects the Karaite position. I do not mean to suggest that there is no similarity between Hadassi's understanding of the *kavod* and Halevi's description. The point that I wish to emphasize is that Halevi's own characterization of this second view, an alternative to the Saadianic one, is colored by the descriptions of the chariot known from the Jewish mystical literature which are, at least in part, exegetical elaborations of the relevant biblical material.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, assuming that the second view refers to the Karaite notion, then I would suggest that what allowed Halevi to cite this position, and in fact to espouse a view quite similar to it in other contexts, is the proximity of it to what he

<sup>57</sup> This semantic usage is attested, for example, in an early *piyyut* attributed to Yose ben Yose, published by E. Fleischer, *Qoveš 'al Yad* 7 (1968): 70: "The beasts, the cherubim, and the holy seraphs [are] His glory, they shine and rejoice in glorifying His glorious name, וְזוֹרִים וְשִׁמְיָחִים / וְחַיִּית וְכְרוּבִים וְשִׂרְפֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ כְּבוֹדוֹ / לְפָאֵר שֵׁם כְּבוֹדוֹ."

<sup>58</sup> Cf. G. Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 46, 358, n. 16; idem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 67–68; R. Elior, "The Concept of God in Hekhalot Mysticism" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 34–35.

<sup>59</sup> See Efron, *Studies*, p. 152, n. 48, who commented on the link between Halevi's second use of *kavod* and the theophanic sense of this term in Hebrew sources, beginning already with the Bible. He did not, however, focus especially on the Jewish mystical tradition.

considered to be the authentic *merkavah* tradition. That Halevi's understanding of the visual *kavod* is influenced by the *Hekhalot* texts is supported by the concluding remark of *Kuzari*, IV:3, wherein he notes that biblical anthropomorphisms and theophanies, e.g., Exod. 24:10 and Num. 12:8, as well as *Ma'aseh Merkavah* and even *Shi'ur Qomah* must be understood in light of the doctrine of *kavod* or *Shekhinah*. That is, that which Scripture refers to as the "God of Israel" or the "image of God" is identical with the visible glory of the *Hekhalot* text as well as the measurable Demiurge of the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition. Halevi adds that the ethical-religious value of these visionary claims is to instill fear in the hearts of believers. It is clear, however, that the true significance of his position is the interpretation of both the prophetic and mystical traditions in light of his doctrine of *kavod* as comprising the spiritual forms of the chariot realm.

The influence of *merkavah* imagery in Halevi's conception of the *kavod* can be seen from another vantage point as well. For Halevi the spiritual forms in the throne-world are not discrete entities but constitute one organic or anatomical unity visualized or imagined in the prophetic eye as an anthropos. In this regard it is of interest to consider the fact that in the throne speculation of the German Pietists the various beings that make up the chariot world are not discrete entities but rather constitute an organic unity. Thus, for example, in his commentary on Ezekiel's vision of the chariot Eleazar of Worms writes: "All the beasts, the ophanim and wheels are one body like branches of a tree."<sup>60</sup> In another work, his voluminous commentary on the mystical aspects of the liturgy, Eleazar makes a similar point: "Zion and Jerusalem are close, all is one [just as] the beasts and wheels are one body, for the spirit of the beasts is in the wheels, and the beasts have four heads and one body."<sup>61</sup> The position is

<sup>60</sup> MS Paris 850, fol. 50a.

<sup>61</sup> MS Paris 772, fol. 109b.



stated even more precisely by the Castilian kabbalist of the second half of the thirteenth century, Moses of Burgos, a student of Jacob and Isaac ha-Kohen who were greatly influenced by the writings of Eleazar. In his *Sefer ha-'Orah* he notes: "The eight beasts, the eight chariots above the highest firmament, and the eight wheels of the chariot and the four ophanim of the chariot, are all set in one body."<sup>62</sup> In other passages Eleazar maintains that the four beasts who bear the throne comprise one body which is likened to a cherub or an anthropos.<sup>63</sup> Evidence for a similar tradition is to be found in the texts that derived from the independent group of Pietists, the *Hug ha-Keruv ha-Meyuḥad* ("Circle of the Special Cherub").<sup>64</sup> Without entering here into the complex intricacies of these different theosophies, suffice it to say that in the Ashkenazi *merkavah* speculation the chariot realm was viewed as one organic whole whose different parts were thought to be attached one to another like limbs of a human body. Indeed, the throne-world was imagined as an anthropomorphic body.<sup>65</sup> I assume that this tradition, shared by the two Pietistic circles, was not innovated by either of them, but rather derives from a common source that has its roots in much older speculation on the chariot in Jewish esotericism. It is plausible that some such tradition influenced Halevi as well.

That Halevi knew of and utilized such a tradition is evident in another passage in IV:3, which has been discussed most

<sup>62</sup> MS JTS Mic. 1806, fol. 18a.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Sode Razaya'*, ed. I. Kamelhar (Bilgoraj, 1936), p. 33; *Sode Razaya'*, ed. S. Weiss, p. 141; Farber, "The Concept of the Merkabah," pp. 424, 553.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Baraita' de-Yosef ben 'Uzi'el*, MS Paris 770, fol. 33a; Elḥanan ben Yaḳar, *Sod ha-Sodot*, in *Tekstim be-Torat ha-'Elohut shel Ḥasidut 'Ashkenaz*, ed. J. Dan (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 19. Concerning this circle, cf. J. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 52–55, 156–164, 255–258; idem, *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan, 1976), pp. 89–111.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Farber, "The Concept of the Merkabah," p. 421.

recently by Idel. Halevi distinguishes two senses in which we can understand the anthropomorphic tendency to compare the Creator to a human being. On the one hand, there is the philosophic or rationalistic conception according to which the anthropomorphism is rooted in the comparison of God to the rational soul. That is, just as man, who is the microcosm, comprises a soul and body, so too the soul of the macrocosm (the world) is the divine being. In this very limited sense God is figuratively likened to a human. There is, however, an alternative explanation, one that is based on a prophetic-visionary experience as contrasted to rational comprehension. Here it would be in order to cite Halevi's own language:

Do not question that the image of man has been [attributed to the Creator]... For God is the spirit of the world, its soul and intellect, its life... Thus the image has been clarified according to the intellect. How much more so, according to prophecy, whose vision is greater than logic. The vision comprehends the upper multitude [i.e., the world of angels] directly and sees the host of heavens, the spiritual entities close [to God] and the other ones apart from them, in the image of man. These are alluded to in the verse, 'Let us make man in our image and likeness' (Gen. 1:26).<sup>66</sup>

Prophetic vision, in contrast to philosophic ratiocination, apprehends the multiplicity of spiritual entities which together comprise the form of an anthropos. Idel has argued that Halevi's account must be understood in light of an earlier *merkavah* tradition concerning the configuration of the world of angels as an anthropomorphic structure. Idel further suggested that the spiritual form which Halevi identified as the biblical God of Israel likewise must be understood in the context of this *merkavah* tradition. Hence, for Halevi, the "visible" glory of God is the totality of spiritual forms which together constitute the form of a human being. This anthropos, in turn, is the measurable being of the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition, now under-

<sup>66</sup> Kuzari, IV:3.

stood not as the Godhead but as the totality of angelic beings that comprise the divine back. Indeed, according to Halevi, it is this vision of the chariot and angelic world which Moses wanted to attain in his request of God, 'Show me Thy glory' (Exod. 33:18). Moses was granted to see God's back, i.e., the "glory which prophetic vision alone can bear," but not the face which "no mortal creature has the power to endure." The back of the glory included those theophanic elements related in the chariot visions of the prophets and mystics. Again we see that the doctrine of *kavod* implied here must be distinguished from the Saadianic conception. For Saadya, the object of *Shi'ur Qomah* speculation was a created light apprehended only by the angels, distinct from the light apprehended by the prophets;<sup>67</sup> for Halevi, the object of both prophetic and mystical visions, including therefore the measurable form in the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition, is a spiritual form which is, in truth, multiple in its manifestations, comprising nothing less than the totality of the angelic realm that is visible to human beings through a special means of vision.

The identification of the *kavod* as the back of the divine, which encompasses the angelic hosts of the chariot realm seen by the prophets, is implied as well in the following stanza from Halevi's poem, אלהים אל מי אמשילך:<sup>68</sup>

אלהים אל מי אמשילך	אלהים אל מי אמשילך
ואל אלהותך שני לא יחבר	ואל אלהותך שני לא יחבר
וכמה אחורים לאחורים הנראים	וכמה פנים לפנים הנוראים
כי הדבר מאת יי צבאות	כי הדבר מאת יי צבאות
גבורי כח עושי רצונך	גבורי כח עושי רצונך
הם הנראים לעיני נביאיך	הם הנעלמים מעיני ברואיך

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Judah ben Barzillai, *Perush Sefer Yeşirah*, pp. 20–21. Concerning the critical distinction between two aspects of the glory in Saadya, cf. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 109–111; idem, "Kavod Nistar," in *Dat we-Safah*, ed. M. Hallamish and A. Kashner (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 73–76.

<sup>68</sup> *Dîwân*, 3:288–289 (poem no. 145).

In the first part of this poem Halevi states categorically that God has no image to which He may be compared, or which may be comprehended by the heart or seen by the eye. The “pure souls,”<sup>69</sup> however, are said to see the divine, although not by means of the eye,<sup>70</sup> ולא נצרכו למאורות / ואך הנשמות טהורות, and to hear God through an inner ear, or literally, the ear of their thoughts, for their ears are deafened,<sup>71</sup> כי / שמעוך באוני רעיוניהם. תחרשנה אוניהם.<sup>72</sup> The invisible face of God, described as awesome, is contrasted with the back which is visible, the poet skillfully playing on the words awesome, הנוראים, and visible, הנראים. This visible aspect is further characterized as comprising the camps of angels surrounding the chariot which are hidden from the eyes of all but the prophets.

### III

Another aspect of Halevi's discussion of prophecy may also have its origin in Jewish speculation on the vision of the chariot. I refer to Halevi's claim that the spiritual forms can assume diverse shapes within the prophetic imagination — also identified by Halevi as the “inner” or “spiritual” eye and the heart (to be discussed more fully below) — which collectively express the tangible or visible manifestation of the divine

<sup>69</sup> From the context it would appear that these “pure souls” are angelic beings; Cf. J. Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 2 vols. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1961), 1:533, n. 20 (poem no. 237). It is possible, however, that this expression also refers to human souls which are bound to the throne in the angelic realm, a usage attested in other Andalusian poetry such as that of Solomon ibn Gabirol; cf. *The Liturgical Poetry of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi*, ed. D. Jarden [Hebrew], 4 vols. (Jerusalem, 1978–1986), 1:105, n. 20 (poem no. 36).

<sup>70</sup> On the rhetorical use of the word מאורות for eyes, see the example of Samuel ha-Nagid cited by A. Even-Shoshan, *Ha-Millon he-Ḥadash* (Jerusalem, 1980), s.v., מאור.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Micah 7:16.

<sup>72</sup> *Dīwān*, 3: 288 (poem no. 145).

reality.<sup>73</sup> The spiritual forms are thus configured symbolically within the prophet's imagination. In IV:3 Halevi informs the reader that the most perfect of forms (אכמל אלצור) apprehended by the inner eye of prophetic vision is that of the king or judge sitting on the throne of judgment. In his lengthy disputation on *Sefer Yeşirah* in IV:25 Halevi comments that the statement, גלגל בשנה כמלך במדינה לב בנפש כמלך במלחמה תלי בעולם כמלך על כסאו (*Sefer Yeşirah* 6:2), refers to three symbolic depictions of the 'inyan ha-'elohi, for the *teli* symbolizes the intelligible world (עאלם אלעקל), the *galgal* the extended sphere of the sun (פלך), and the *lev* the realm of animate beings (אלחיזאן). The figurative expressions thus represent the providential role of the 'inyan ha-'elohi in each of the realms of being. What is most important for this discussion is the fact that for Halevi the cosmological role of the 'inyan ha-'elohi in the highest realm, that of the Intellects (= תלי), is symbolized by the image of the king on the throne — the same image that serves as the highest form within the prophetic imagination. This point is reiterated in slightly different terms in one of Halevi's poems, יה שמך ארוממך.<sup>74</sup>

באהלו שת שכינתו	וברצותו בכך ביתו
להביט אל תמונתו	ושם מראות לנבואות
ואין קץ לתבונתו	ואין תבנית ואין תכנית
כמלך רם מתנשא	רק מראיו בעין נביאיו

When He desired his servant,<sup>75</sup>  
 In His tent He set His Presence<sup>76</sup>  
 He placed the visions for the prophets,  
 To look upon His image;<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> In IV:3 Halevi compares the prophet's vision of the spiritual forms to the aggadic tradition concerning Moses' vision of the heavenly Tabernacle before the building of the earthly one. See also I:99 (discussed below).

<sup>74</sup> *Dīwān*, 3:231 (poem no. 128).

<sup>75</sup> The reference is to Moses (see the next note) though the scriptural basis for the terminology is clearly Gen. 15:3.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Exod. 33:7–11.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Num. 12:6–8; *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:14.

There is no form<sup>78</sup> or measure,<sup>79</sup>  
 Nor a limit to His understanding,  
 Only His appearance in the eyes of the prophets,  
 Like an exalted and elevated king.

The image of God visualized in the prophet's eye is thus that of an exalted and elevated king, viz., the enthroned anthropos known from biblical theophanies and developed further in the chariot mysticism. The "eye of the prophet" is not simply a figurative expression but must be construed as a technical reference to the imaginative faculty which Halevi likewise designates in a key passage in *Kuzari*, IV:3 as the "inner" or "spiritual" eye.<sup>80</sup>

Here we would do well to pause to consider more carefully Halevi's notion of prophetic vision and the specific role of imagination, for through such a consideration we can appreciate better Halevi's indebtedness to the *merkavah* traditions, especially as they were interpreted in Geonic literature. Halevi rejects the standard medieval philosophic interpretation of prophecy as a state produced by the Active Intellect operating upon the human intellect and imagination.<sup>81</sup> Thus in *Kuzari*, I:87 Halevi writes that according to Jewish belief "prophecy did not (as philosophers assume) burst forth in a pure soul, become united with the Active Intellect (also termed Holy Spirit<sup>82</sup> or Gabriel), and be then inspired."<sup>83</sup> Moreover,

<sup>78</sup> Cf. *Dīwān*, 3:5 (poem no. 4).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Ezek. 43:10.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Dīwān*, 3:75 (poem no. 38): יחו / לשון / חזות אישון / אשר יחזו / פלאיד.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Davidson, "The Active Intellect in the Cuzari," pp. 366–367. For the intellectual background of this view of prophecy, see F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (Chicago, 1958), pp. 30–91.

<sup>82</sup> Halevi here is following a view expressed in both Alfarabi and Avicenna; see Efros, *Studies*, p. 142, n. 4.

<sup>83</sup> See, by contrast, *Kuzari*, V:12 where Halevi presents a more straightforward philosophic account of prophetic illumination arising from the conjunction of the human intellect with the Universal Intellect (אלאמצאל באלעקל אלכלי). In that passage the philosopher of Halevi's exposition represents the opinion of Avicenna; cf. Pines, "Shi'ite Terms and Conceptions," p. 211.

continues Halevi, Jews do not believe that "Moses had seen a vision in sleep, or that someone had spoken with him between sleeping and waking, so that he only heard the words in fancy [i.e., the imagination], but not with his ears, that he saw a phantom, and afterwards pretended that God had spoken with him." The implication of Halevi's rejection of the standard philosophic view is that from the Jewish perspective, as he presents it, the object of prophecy is a real entity, albeit spiritual in nature, that is apprehended by the individual.<sup>84</sup> The content of prophecy does not result from the prophet's intellectual conjunction with the Active Intellect as mediated through his imaginative faculty; it is rather an objectively verifiable datum,<sup>85</sup> although the means of verification may exceed the bounds of the normal processes of sense or intellection. For Halevi, that is, prophecy is more than a mere psychological state; it entails the same presumption of veridicality as normal sense experience, but in the case of prophecy the objective correlate of the vision is a spiritual form that, in the prophetic state, becomes tangible.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, for Halevi, the fundamental

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Davidson, "The Active Intellect in the Cuzari," pp. 389–390. See also C. Sirat, *Les Théories des visions surnaturelles dans la pensée juive du moyen-âge* (Leiden, 1969), pp. 86–87. With respect to this theme Halevi shares a basic orientation with theosophic kabbalists who similarly emphasize the "objective" pole of prophetic vision as opposed to the more psychologically-oriented explanation of the philosophers; see E. Wolfson, "The Hermeneutics of Visionary Experience: Revelation and Interpretation in the *Zohar*," *Religion* 18 (1988): 315; and idem, "The Secret of the Garment in Nahmanides," *Da'at* 24 (1989–90): XXV–XLIX.

<sup>85</sup> See Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, p. 38, who draws a distinction between the views on prophecy of Alfarabi and Avicenna on the basis that the former, unlike the latter, tried to maintain the objective correlate for the psychological state of prophecy.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Davidson, "The Active Intellect in the Cuzari," p. 389, who tries to uphold a distinction between the "tangibility" of the *Shekhinah* and its "corporeality." That is, according to Davidson, Halevi's view that the *Shekhinah* is the tangible aspect that provides the visible element in prophecy does not nec-

paradox of prophetic revelation, that which the believing Jew cannot explain but must accept, is predicated on the fact that in the moment of prophecy the spiritual, incorporeal intention of God becomes tangible in both a visible and audible form known scripturally as the God of Israel.<sup>87</sup>

The means to ascertain this form are decidedly mental or spiritual, i.e., the prophet hears and sees in a way quite distinct from the physical senses.<sup>88</sup> Halevi also contrasts prophetic vision with the process of rational insight or discursive reasoning.<sup>89</sup> Thus, in IV:3, as I have already noted above, Halevi asserts that the prophets have an "inner eye" (אלעין) or "spiritual eye" (אלעין אלרוחאניה) through which they see the spiritual forms.<sup>90</sup> Halevi goes on to identify this "inner

essarily entail that for him the *Shekhinah* is a physical body. It is clear that one of Halevi's main preoccupations is affirming the joining or conjunction of the incorporeal with the corporeal; see, e.g., *Kuzari*, I:25, 68.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Kuzari*, I:89, IV:17; Sirat, *Les Théories des visions surnaturelles*, p. 87.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *Dīwān*, 3:288–289 (poem no. 145).

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *Kuzari*, I:95 where Halevi speaks of the divine faculty which is above the intellect, the attainment of which enables one to be conjoined with God and the spiritual entities. In such a state, moreover, one comprehends the intelligible truths without inquiry or study. In that context the imagination is not mentioned.

<sup>90</sup> In a way strikingly close to Halevi, Abraham ibn Ezra in one place describes the angelic hosts that inhabit the third world as the "wonderful forms and awesome visions" (צורות מופלאות ומראות נוראות) which one beholds with the "inner eye" (בעיני קרבד) or "eye of the heart" (ובאישוני לבבד) as opposed to the physical eye. Cf. *Iggeret Hay ben Mekitz*, ed. I. Levin (Tel Aviv, 1983), pp. 82–83. See also Short Commentary to Exod. 23:20, and Commentary to Exod. 33:21; Ps. 139:18. On the use of the term *šurot* in ibn Ezra, see above, n. 37. The motif of the eye of the heart is repeated often in ibn Ezra's poetry. See, e.g., *The Religious Poems of Abraham ibn Ezra*, ed. I. Levin, 1: 26 (poem no. 2), 67 (poem no. 38), 69 (poem no. 39), 97 (poem no. 54), 112 (poem no. 62), 120 (poem no. 66), 126 (poem no. 69), 480 (poem no. 243), 515 (poem no. 258). Cf. A.M. Habermann, "Ten Poems of Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra" [Hebrew], *Sefer Hayyim Schirmann*, eds. S. Abramson and A. Mirsky (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 84, poem no. 4, n. 4. Despite the closeness in terminology between ibn Ezra and Halevi (for similar terminology in other Andalusian Jewish poets, see below, n. 134), the



eye" as the "internal sense" (אלחם אלבאטן) which in turn may be identified with the imagination (אלמתכילה)<sup>91</sup> through which the prophet apprehends the spiritual or incorporeal form.<sup>92</sup> With

role of the inner eye is quite different in the two thinkers, though scholars have tended to treat the two as espousing the same view; cf. Levin, 1:26 (poem no. 2, n. 3), 112 (poem no. 62, n. 4). That is, for ibn Ezra, in marked contrast to Halevi, the heart's eye is the rational faculty in a human being seemingly unrelated to the imagination. Thus, on occasion ibn Ezra uses the expression "eye of the intellect" (עין השכל) instead of "eye of the heart" (עין הלב) indicating that the two terms have the same meaning. Cf. Levin, 2:449 (poem no. 404): אחוז בעין שכלי. In numerous other poems of ibn Ezra it is evident that the heart (sometimes he uses the expression "splendor of the heart," יקר הלב) is identical with reason which is the highest aspect of the human soul; see, e.g., Levin, 1:51 (poem no. 27), 110 (poem no. 61), 113–114 (poem no. 63), 125 (poem no. 68), 127 (poem no. 70), 462 (poem no. 237), 483 (poem no. 244); 2:180 (poem no. 309), 215 (poem no. 325), 220 (poem no. 327). This usage is reflected as well in ibn Ezra's biblical commentaries. See, e.g., Commentary to Gen 1:1 (ed. Weiser [Jerusalem, 1977], 1:12): בעבור היות הלב מרכבת ... וכן נשמת האדם העליונה תקרא לב ... Deut 6:5 (ed. Weiser, 3:235): הלב הוא הדעת והוא כנוי לרוח המשכלת כי הוא המרכבה הראשונה.

<sup>91</sup> For an historical survey of the relevant terminology, see Wolfson, *Studies*, 1:250–314.

<sup>92</sup> It is of interest to compare the role accorded the imagination in Halevi's theory of prophecy with the description of the prophetic state found in Hayyim Vital, *Sha'are Qedushah* (Vilna, 1834), Part 3, Gate 5, fol. 26a: "The *Ruah ha-Qodesh* rests on a person when he is awake, when the soul is in his body and does not leave it [as in sleep]. But [the prophetic state involves] the matter of separation [of the soul from the body] for he removes [from his mind] all [mundane] thoughts entirely. And the imaginative faculty in him, which is a faculty that derives from the elementary animal soul, prevents him from imagining or thinking about any matter pertaining to this world as if his soul left him. Then his imaginative faculty transforms his thoughts such that he imagines that he ascends to the upper worlds to the roots of his soul ... and the forms of all the lights will be strengthened in his thought as if he imagined and saw them as is the way of the imaginative faculty to imagine in his mind things of this world even though he does not [actually] see them... Within his imaginative faculty these [spiritual] matters assume a corporeal form so that [the prophet] can comprehend them as if he actually saw them with the [physical] eye (ושם יצטיירו העניינים ההם ציור גשמי בכחו המרמה ואז יבינם כאלו רואה אותן)

respect to the relationship of this imagination to reason, Halevi appears to espouse two opposite views. On the one hand, he seems to allot a secondary role to reason, for he states that reason brings proofs for that which the spiritual eye has already seen, presumably in a direct, intuitive way, a view found elsewhere in Halevi.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, he follows philosophic convention when he states explicitly in this very passage that the inner eye, the imaginative faculty, sees the spiritual forms only when "it is subject to the rational faculty," thereby implying that the imagination is secondary. From an examination of other passages in the *Kuzari*, not to mention his poetry, it may be concluded that the former represents the opinion he accepts in the vast majority of instances. That is, the imagination is the spiritual faculty through which one can discern that which is unavailable to reason.

It is likely, as scholars have pointed out, that Halevi's conception of the inner eye is based on precedents in Islamic philosophy.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, his identification of the faculty which apprehends incorporeal spiritual forms as the imagination (*mutakhayyilah*) can be traced to earlier philosophical discussions within the Neoplatonic tradition. A clear example of this can be found, for instance, in the *Kitâb al-Ustūqussât* of Isaac Israeli (ca. 855–ca. 955). In Israeli's view the mechanics of

ממש (בעין ממש). For discussion on the role of imagination in Lurianic texts, cf. R. Meroz, "Aspects of the Lurianic Doctrine of Prophecy," M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, 1980 [Hebrew], pp. 10–20.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *Kuzari*, I:15, 95; II:48; IV:15; V:15; Silman, *Thinker and Seer*, pp. 161–163.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. A. Ivry, "The Philosophical and Religious Arguments in Rabbi Yehuda Halevy's Thought" [Hebrew], in *Thought and Action: Essays in Memory of Simon Rawidowicz on the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of his Death*, ed. A.A. Greenbaum and A. Ivry (Tel-Aviv, 1983), p. 28. On possible Sufi connections, see Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre*, pp. 177, n. 135, and 202, n. 180 where Halevi's conception of the inner eye is traced specifically to al-Ghazzâlî (see *ibid.*, pp. 166, 220–221, n. 205, 232, n. 221); and Davidson, "The Active Intellect in the *Cuzari*," p. 367, n. 4.

prophetic vision are as follows: during sleep the spiritual forms (הצורות הרוחניות), which are intermediate between corporeality and spirituality, are impressed upon the *sensus communis* which is itself intermediate between the corporeal sense of sight and the imagination proper (*fantâsiya*) which is said to reside in the anterior ventricle of the brain. The *sensus communis* then transmits these forms, clarified by the intellect, to the imaginative faculty which receives them in a more subtle way. "We mentioned that the forms with which intellect clarifies the spiritual forms are intermediate between corporeality and spirituality because they result from the imaginative representations of the corporeal forms, and are more subtle, spiritual, and luminous than the latter, which are found in our waking state and are full of darkness and shells."<sup>95</sup> The imaginative faculty transfers the images to the memory where they are stored. In a state of wakefulness the person seeks to comprehend the spiritual meaning of these imaginative forms (רמיונות) through the cogitative faculty and will thus completely purify the forms of all vestiges of corporeality.<sup>96</sup> From Israeli's description it is evident that the intellect plays a critical role in the production of these imaginative forms; indeed, it seems that the imagination itself serves the rational soul, a point implied in Halevi's remarks as well. The intermediate role accorded to the imagination between sense perception and reason can be traced back to Neoplatonic sources and ultimately goes back to some Aristotelian ideas.<sup>97</sup>

The doctrine of "imaginative revelation" is found as well in the writings of Alfarabi (ca. 870–950) and taken over with some

<sup>95</sup> A. Altmann and S.M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* (Oxford, 1958), p. 136.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135–137.

<sup>97</sup> As has been pointed out with respect to Alfarabi by R. Walzer, "Al-Fârâbî's Theory of Prophecy and Divination," in *idem, Greek into Arabic Essays on Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford, 1962), p. 211. See also Wolfson, *Studies*, 1:315–330; Altmann and Stern, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–143; C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 64–65.

modification by Avicenna (980–1037). According to Alfarabi, the imaginative faculty has, in addition to the standard functions of retaining impressions of things apprehended by the physical senses and constructing new images on the basis of the sensory impressions, a third function consisting of the figuration of the intelligible forms received from the Active Intellect in terms of perceptual symbols. The symbolic images produced in the imagination in turn impress themselves upon the perceptual faculty and the images are apprehended as sensible realities.<sup>98</sup> In similar fashion Avicenna distinguishes between two forms of prophetic experience, intellectual and imaginative: in the case of the former the universal intelligibles are received directly from the Active Intellect, whereas in the latter the prophet receives images from the celestial souls by means of his imagination.<sup>99</sup> The key difference between the view of Alfarabi and Halevi is that the latter eliminates the role of the Active Intellect bestowing these intelligibles on the imagination. For Halevi the prophet looks directly into the spiritual forms which are experienced in corporeal terms within the imagination.

In the context of IV:3, in marked contrast to some other sections of the *Kuzari*,<sup>100</sup> the function which Halevi attributes to

<sup>98</sup> See Walzer, "Al-Fârâbî's Theory of Prophecy and Divination," pp. 211–216; Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, pp. 36–45; M.W. Ur-Rahman, "Al-Farabi and his Theory of Dreams," *Islamic Culture* 41 (1967): 149.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. M.E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Psychological Proof of Prophecy," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29 (1963): 51.

<sup>100</sup> In V:12 Halevi, consciously portraying the philosophical view, depicts the common sense as the faculty that stores images of sensible objects after they have disappeared, whereas the imagination is described as "the faculty which combines all the images united in the common sense, and which separates them, and adds changes to them without removing at all the images of the common sense." Further on in the same section of the *Kuzari* Halevi notes that the highest function of the rational soul is such that the spiritual forms or intelligibles replace the images which the vital soul had formed by means of the imaginative faculty. Cf. III:5. For the philosophical background of these passages, see Wolfson, *Studies*, 1:285–286.

the imaginative faculty is apprehension of that which is incorporeal. A similar function is given in III:5 where Halevi describes one of the stages of the pietistic life<sup>101</sup> as the exercise of the imaginative faculty to conjure images of certain major events and/or items stored in the memory, such as the attempted sacrifice of Isaac, the Sinaitic theophany, the tabernacle of Moses, the sacrificial cult, the indwelling of the Presence in the Temple, in order "to represent figuratively the divine matter." According to that passage, the symbolization of the *'inyan ha-'elohi* in concrete images occurs within the imaginative faculty, but those images are supplied to the imaginative faculty by the memory which retains select received traditions. In the case of IV:3 Halevi expresses the matter in somewhat different terms, asserting that the relation of the inner sense to the incorporeal entity is parallel to the relationship between the outer sense and the sensible (physical) object. To be sure, Halevi emphasizes that in gazing upon these spiritual forms with the inner eye the prophet sees forms appropriate to his nature and in accord with what he is accustomed. Consequently, when the prophet describes the visionary experience he uses corporeal attributes, such as the image of God as the king or judge sitting on the throne. The image is appropriate from the perspective of the seer but inappropriate from the perspective of that which is seen: the spiritual form is not in its essence an enthroned king but only appears as such in the mind of the prophet. Nevertheless, the experience is not purely subjective, for there is a correlation between the spiritual form and the mental image constituted within the imaginative consciousness of the people of Israel collectively (at Sinai) or the individual prophet. To take another example from a different domain that sheds light on Halevi's conception of prophetic vision. In I:99 Halevi employs the midrashic motif that God showed Moses on Mount Sinai the prototype of the Tabernacle

<sup>101</sup> See above, n. 17.

and all its parts. According to Halevi this means that God showed these forms to Moses “in a spiritual manner and he made them physically.” Similarly, continues Halevi, David had a spiritual vision of the First Temple and Ezekiel of the last. This spiritual vision is contrasted sharply with the natural capacities of estimation, syllogism and ratiocination. The critical point is that spiritual vision — the act of imagination — has an object that is outside the mind, an object that is incorporeal but which assumes tangible shape within the particular imagined form.

While the Islamic influence on Halevi’s notion of prophetic imagination is clear enough, I would like to suggest another possible source that has been less readily acknowledged, viz., the theory of prophecy and mystical vision of R. Hai ben Sherira (939–1038), the gaon of Pumbedita, as transmitted especially by R. Hananel ben Hushiel of Kairouan (d. 1055/56) and R. Nathan ben Yehiel of Rome (1035–ca. 1110).<sup>102</sup> In this context it is of importance to note that David Kaufmann suggested that Halevi’s views regarding the distinctiveness of the Jewish people vis-à-vis the other nations in terms of their immediate knowledge of God based on revelatory experience and the historical truth of prophecy should be compared to similar ideas expressed by R. Nissim ben Jacob of Kairouan (ca. 960–1062).<sup>103</sup> R. Nissim singles out the prophets of Israel and the Jewish people collectively (specifically at the Sinaitic theophany) as possessing certain knowledge of God through direct experience, whereas the other nations acquire this knowledge only indirectly through rational proofs and syllogistic reason-

<sup>102</sup> The possibility that Halevi’s notion of prophecy as mental vision was influenced by R. Hananel’s commentary on B. Berakhot 6a was already noted by Even-Shmu’el in his translation of *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, p. 364.

<sup>103</sup> See Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre*, pp. 167–168, n. 121; S. Abramson, “Sefer Megillat Setarim,” in *R. Nissim Gaon Libelli Quinque* (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 334.

ing.<sup>104</sup> The knowledge of God, which is unique to the Jews, is referred to periodically in the extant Hebrew translation of *Megillat Setarim* as ידיעת ההרגשות, i.e., sentient knowledge.<sup>105</sup> Interestingly enough, the translator himself informs the reader in one place that this term is a rendering of the Arabic *al-'ilm al-darûrî* (necessary knowledge).<sup>106</sup> For R. Nissim, then, prophecy entails the immediacy of sentient experience and this alone constitutes necessary knowledge which is absolute and irrefutable.<sup>107</sup> It is evident that Halevi shares much in common with

<sup>104</sup> Cf. S. Poznanski, "Extracts from the Book Megillat Setarim of Rabbi Nissim ben Jacob of Kairouan" [Hebrew], *Ha-Šofeh le-Hokhmat Yisra'el* 5 (1921): 177–180. See also the fragment published by Abramson, *op. cit.*, pp. 344–345.

<sup>105</sup> See Abramson, *op. cit.*, p. 344, who renders הרגשית as אפריורית (*a priori*). This rendering is totally unsatisfactory as it misses the very point of R. Nissim's claim, i.e., apriori knowledge is prior to or independent of experience, and for R. Nissim, the superiority of prophecy consists precisely in the fact that it is firsthand knowledge of an empirical, indeed sensuous, nature. The latter is the force of the expression ידיעת ההרגשות which is consistent with its usage in other medieval Hebrew philosophical texts. Cf. Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre*, p. 167, n. 121, who accurately refers to R. Nissim's notion as "sinnlichen Wahrnehmung."

<sup>106</sup> The reading in the text published by Poznanski, *op. cit.*, p. 180, אלעלם, is corrupt. I have corrected it to אלעלם אלצוררי according to the emendation suggested by D. Kaufmann, *Die Sinne* (Leipzig, 1884), p. 56, n. 53. See also S. Abramson, *op. cit.*, p. 193. The expression *al-'ilm al-darûrî* is used by Saadya to refer to the third of the four sources of knowledge which he enumerates in the introduction to *Kitâb al-Amânât wa-al-I'tiqādât* (ed. J. Kafih [Jerusalem, 1970], p. 16), viz., inferential knowledge based on data supplied by the senses or reason.

<sup>107</sup> To be sure, R. Nissim certainly denied that God possesses a body. What, then, is the object of this prophetic experience that is described as knowledge through the senses? In line with his Geonic predecessors, R. Nissim offered two possible explanations for passages that relate a visionary experience of the divine: either they are to be taken metaphorically or the object of the prophetic experience is in fact an angel which is a form created by God. Cf. Poznanski, *op. cit.*, pp. 184–187.

the views espoused by R. Nissim. Yet, in at least one fundamental respect Halevi's description of the prophetic-mystical vision is closer to the position adopted by R. Hai, R. Ḥananel and R. Nathan. That is, for Halevi, as for these figures, the locus of the vision is the imagination, a point not developed by R. Nissim. It thus seems to me that Halevi's position represents a kind of synthesis, or merging, of the respective views of R. Hai (and those who elaborated on his doctrine, especially R. Ḥananel) and that of R. Nissim: on the one hand emphasis is placed on the heart as the spiritual organ of vision, while on the other the sensuous character of prophecy is underscored as the distinctive feature of the Jewish people. Insofar as Kaufmann has already duly noted the importance of R. Nissim for understanding Halevi's doctrine of prophecy, I will concentrate on the impact that R. Hai's interpretation of the chariot vision may have had on Halevi.

The starting-point of our analysis is the claim that prophetic and mystical vision — they are treated as one by R. Hai and his followers<sup>108</sup> — is a vision of the heart, ראיית הלב.<sup>109</sup> It is clear from the relevant sources that the latter conception is based on the talmudic expression, “understanding of the heart,” אובנתא דלבא, utilized by the anonymous redactor in B. Megillah 24b to explain R. Judah's view on the nature of the vision of the

<sup>108</sup> Cf. R. Hai's responsum concerning *merkavah* mystical praxis in 'Oṣar ha-Ge'onim to Ḥagigah, ed. B. Lewin (Jerusalem, 1984), “Responso,” p. 15, where he argues against the view of R. Shmu'el ben Ḥofni that the vision and miracles are restricted to the prophets. According to Hai, the miracles performed by the righteous and the visions perceived by them are identical to those of the prophets. A polemic against the position of Hai can be found in Judah ben Barzillai, *Perush Sefer Yeṣirah*, p. 22, where the author makes a clear distinction between prophets and *merkavah* mystics on the grounds that the vision of the former (ראיית הנביאים) approximates an “actual seeing” (קרובים לראייה ממש) whereas that of the latter (הראיית צופי מרכבה) is purely mental (אובנתא דליבא).

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Eccles. 1:16 where the phrase, “my heart has seen,” ולבי ראה, connotes mental comprehension.



*merkavah*.<sup>110</sup> Following R. Hai's interpretation, the ecstatic ascent described in the *Hekhalot* texts consisted of a mental vision — contemplation of the heart — rather than a physical journey. This is implied, as Idel has argued,<sup>111</sup> in R. Hai's famous responsum on mystical praxis from which I will cite only the most relevant part: "When one desires to see the chariot and to gaze upon the palaces of the angels above, he has various ways to accomplish this: he should fast for several days, place his head between his knees, and whisper to the ground songs and many explicit praises. Thus he will gaze inward and into the chambers [of his heart] (מציץ בפנימי ובחדרי) as one who sees with his eyes the seven palaces, and he sees as one who enters from palace to palace."<sup>112</sup> R. Hai's view is transmitted as well by R. Nathan of Rome in his lexicon of the Talmud and Midrashim, the *'Arukh*, who describes the descenders to the chariot as follows: "They did not ascend on high, but rather in the chambers of their heart they saw and contemplated (בחדרי) as a person who sees and contemplates something clearly with his eyes, and they heard and spoke with a seeing eye by means of the Holy Spirit" (בעין הסוכה ברוח הקודש).<sup>114</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Cf. D. Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven, 1980), p. 174; idem, *The Faces of the Chariot* (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 318–319, 335. Cf. the Hebrew parallel to the Aramaic phrase, אֹכְנֵתָא דְלִבָּא, in the *Haggadat Shema' Yisra'el*, in A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (Jerusalem, 1967), 5:166, בִּינָתָא לִבְנָכֶם, already noted by Halperin.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Idel, *New Perspectives*, p. 90; see also M. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, MD, 1983), pp. 5–6. For a different understanding of R. Hai's statement, cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 49; Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature*, pp. 3, 88–89, 177; idem, "A New Edition of the Heikhalot Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1984): 544, 547, 550–551; idem, *Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 5–6, 32, 359–360.

<sup>112</sup> *'Oṣar ha-Ge'onim to Ḥagigah*, ed. B. Lewin, "Responso," p. 14.

<sup>113</sup> R. Nissim Gaon uses a similar expression חָדְרֵי לִבּוֹ; cf. Poznanski, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. *Aruch Completum*, ed. A. Kohut (Vienna, 1926), 1:14, s.v. אֲבֵי שֵׁשׁ טָהוֹר.

It is noteworthy that in this passage R. Hai interprets the mystical vision of the chariot with terms used in *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:3 to refer to prophecy: נביאים שסוכים ברוח הקודש.<sup>115</sup> The same attempt to understand the vision of *merkavah* mysticism in light of prophetic vision is to be found in R. Ḥananel's commentary on B. Ḥagigah 14b concerning the four who entered Pardes: "They did not ascend to heaven but they contemplated and saw by means of the understanding of the heart (באובנתא דלבא) as one who sees and looks through a speculum that does not shine."<sup>116</sup> In this case R. Ḥananel has combined two rabbinic idioms, אובנתא דלבא, which describes the chariot vision, and אספקלריא שאינה מאירה, which is used to describe prophetic experience.<sup>117</sup> The clearest application of this category to prophetic vision occurs in R. Ḥananel's commentary to B. Berakhot 6a and Yevamot 49b. In the case of the former, commenting on the aggadic statement that God wears phylacteries, R. Ḥananel writes:

The Holy One, blessed be He, makes His glory visible to those who fear Him<sup>118</sup> and His pious ones through a comprehension of the heart (באובנתא דליבא) in the image of an anthropos sitting, as it is written, 'I saw the Lord seated upon His throne, with all the host of heaven standing to His right and left' (I Kings 22:19), and it is written, 'I saw God sitting on the high and lofty throne and the skirts of His robe filled the Temple' (Isa. 6:1). [The glory appears] as one that has feet, as it is written, ['They saw the God of Israel] and under His feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire' (Exod. 24:10)... It is clear to us that the vision spoken of here is a vision of the heart (ראיית הלב) and not a vision of the eye (ראיית העין). It is impossible to say with

<sup>115</sup> On the use of the verb סכי with the object רוח הקודש, see also B. Megillah 14a.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. *Oṣar ha-Ge'onim to Ḥagigah*, p. 61.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. B. Yevamot 49b.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. the reading in *Perushe Rabbenu Ḥananel le-Masekhet Berakhot*, ed. D. Metzger (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 10: "to His prophets," לנביאי.

respect to a vision of the eye that an image of God (רמות להב"ה) was seen ... It is possible to say that one sees through a vision of the heart the image of the glory (רמות כבוד) ... but not through an actual vision of the eye, for the verse states explicitly, 'When I spoke to the prophets ... and was imagined by the prophets'<sup>119</sup> (וביר הנביאים ארמה) (Hosea 12:11). This teaches that [God] showed to every prophet an image (רמיון) that he could see.<sup>120</sup>

The same point is reiterated in R. Ḥananel's commentary to the statement in B. Yevamot 49b to the effect that all the prophets gazed within the speculum that does not shine while Moses gazed within a speculum that shines: "All the prophets saw the glory from within the speculum that does not shine ... And this is what is written, 'and was imagined by the prophets' (וביר הנביאים ארמה) (Hosea 12:11), i.e., the vision that they saw was an image (רמיון) and not the essential sight. Moses, our master, gazed upon the glory and the splendor of the *Shekhinah* (הוד השכינה) through a speculum that shines from behind the splendor of the *Shekhinah*."<sup>121</sup>

While no definitive proof can be adduced to demonstrate conclusively that these sources influenced Halevi directly, the common elements at least make the suggestion plausible. For Halevi as well the mystical vision of the chariot approximates the prophetic experience, and both involve mental vision through images which is depicted further as a seeing by means of *Ruah ha-Qodesh*. In suggesting that the Geonic interpretation of the *merkavah* texts is a possible source for Halevi's notion of internal vision or the imaginative seeing of the heart (the crucial term employed by Halevi in his poems as will be seen in detail below), I do not want to rule out the likelihood

<sup>119</sup> I have rendered this verse in accordance with the interpretation of R. Ḥananel.

<sup>120</sup> *'Oṣar ha-Ge'onim to Berakhot*, ed. B. Lewin (Jerusalem, 1984), Appendix, p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> *'Oṣar ha-Ge'onim to Yevamot*, ed. B. Lewin (Jerusalem, 1984), "Responsa," pp. 123–124.

that he may also have been influenced directly by Islamic, especially Sufi, sources.<sup>122</sup> Similar theories of inner illumination of the heart to explain manifestations of the divine can be found in both Mu'tazilite literature and Islamic mysticism.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, one should not ignore the possibility that figures such as R. Hai and R. Ḥananel were themselves influenced by Islamic thought in their interpretations of the *merkavah* tracts.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, the role accorded the heart in the passages from R. Hai and R. Ḥananel is similar to the function of the heart (*qalb*) in Sufism as the seat of spiritual gnosis (*ma'rifa*) and internal vision (*baṣīra*).<sup>125</sup> The Hebrew idiom used by R. Ḥananel in

<sup>122</sup> See references to Kaufmann and Davidson given above, n. 94, and see below, nn. 133, 154, 170. It would be of particular interest to compare Halevi's notion of the heart, or inner eye, as the locus of the imaginative form of the divine glory — the most perfect shape being that of an anthropos — with the role of theophanic imagination and the creativity of the heart in the thought of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī (1165–1240). For a detailed analysis of the latter, see H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. R. Manheim (Princeton, 1969), pp. 216–245.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Altmann, *Studies*, p. 145, and references given there to other scholarly literature in nn. 26–27.

<sup>124</sup> The possibility that R. Hai's spiritualistic understanding of the vision of the chariot was influenced by Sufi mysticism (and particularly related to the function of the heart as the seat of mystical gnosis) was suggested by A. Jellinek, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kabbala* (Leipzig, 1852), Zweites Heft, pp. 15–16, n. 22. See also P. Bloch, "Die מרכבה ויררי, die Mystiker der Gaonenzeit und ihr Einfluss auf die Liturgie," *Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 37 (1893): 69–72. For the more general view that *Hekhalot* mysticism, dated to the latter part of the Geonic period, was derived from Islamic sources, cf. H. Graetz, "Die mystische Literatur in der gaonischen Epoche," *Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 8 (1859): 115–118, 140–144. On the relationship between members of the Geonic academy in Iraq and Muslim pietists, see also the evidence adduced by D. Ariel, "'The Eastern Dawn of Wisdom': The Problem of the Relation Between Islamic and Jewish Mysticism," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, vol. 2, ed. D.R. Blumenthal (Chico, Ca., 1985), pp. 155–156.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. L. Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris, 1922), pp. 172, 263; idem, "Le 'coeur' (*al-qalb*)

explicating the view of R. Hai Gaon, *re'iyat ha-lev*,<sup>126</sup> which renders in turn the talmudic '*ovanta' de-libba*', exactly parallels the commonplace Sufi term *ru'yat al-qalb* which likewise connotes understanding of the heart.<sup>127</sup> There is evidence as well that the motif of the heavenly journey (*mi'râj*), attributed in the first instance to Muhammad<sup>128</sup> (perhaps stemming from the influence of Jewish apocalyptic or mystical sources<sup>129</sup>) and secondarily to other adepts, was interpreted by Sufis not simply as a physical ascent from the sublunar world to the celestial throne but rather as a spiritual descent into the recesses of the inner self — the seven heavens corresponding to the *maqâmât*, the stages of the Sufi path.<sup>130</sup> Thus, on a deeper level the vision

dans la prière et la méditation musulmane," *Études carmélitaines* 9 (1950): 96–102; P. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique* (Beirut, 1970), s.v. *qall*; R.A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (New York, 1975), pp. 50–53, 68–70; I. Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton, 1981), p. 147.

<sup>126</sup> For the biblical precedent see reference above, n. 109.

<sup>127</sup> To be sure, there is evidence for the psychologistic or spiritualistic understanding of the vision of the chariot in earlier, pre-Islamic, sources. An interesting example of this approach, as noted already by Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*, pp. 174–175, n. 136, is found in Origen's *First Homily on Ezekiel* (J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Graeca*, XIII [Paris, 1857], col. 675) where the exiles are said "to have contemplated with the eyes of the heart" (*cordis oculis*) that which the prophet "observed with the eyes of the flesh" (*oculis carnis*). For the possible Jewish background of this passage, which may provide evidence for a psychological interpretation of the chariot vision in ancient Judaism, see Halperin, "Origen, Ezekiel's Merkabah, and the Ascension of Moses," *Church History* 50 (1981): 273–274; idem, *Faces of the Chariot*, p. 335. See also Idel, *New Perspectives*, pp. 90–91 and the relevant notes.

<sup>128</sup> On the basis of the traditional account of the nocturnal journey (*isrâ'*) in Qur'ân 17:1; cf. also 53:4–18.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. J. Horowitz, "Muhammeds Himmelfahrt," *Der Islam* 9 (1919): 159–183. See also G.D. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia From Ancient Times to Their Eclipse Under Islam* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1988), pp. 62–63. For possible later reflections of *merkabah* traditions in Islamic sources, cf. Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 467–490.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. N. El-Ama, "Some Notes on the Impact of the Story of the Mi'râj on Sufi Literature," *The Muslim World* 63 (1973): 93–104; M. Sells, "Bewildered

of the throne is an internal image in a manner that parallels the psychologistic or spiritualistic interpretation of R. Hai who spoke of the mystic gazing into the chambers of his heart. Even if we bracket for a moment the possible influence of Sufism on the Geonic interpretation of the *Hekhalot* praxis, the likelihood that Sufism had an impact on Halevi's notion of the heart as a spiritual organ for vision — the term used on occasion in the *Kuzari* (cf. II:24, 54)<sup>131</sup> and frequently in his poetry which parallels the inner or spiritual eye mentioned in the former<sup>132</sup> — should not be underestimated.<sup>133</sup> It is important here to recall as well that the expression “eye of the heart” (עַיִן הַלֵּב) is a commonplace in Andalusian Hebrew poetry of the Golden Period (10th–12th centuries).<sup>134</sup> It is necessary to view Halevi, as any

Tongue: The Semantics of Mystical Union in Islam,” in *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith*, ed. M. Idel and B. McGinn (New York, 1989), pp. 101–108. For other sources see Altmann, *Studies*, pp. 42–44 and references to scholarly literature in nn. 11–18.

<sup>131</sup> It may be suggested that this understanding of the heart as the organ of spiritual vision underlies Halevi's famous analogy comparing Israel to the heart of the nations; cf. *Kuzari*, II:36. As Halevi repeats over and over again, only Jews possess the divine matter which allows them to transcend the human species and become angelic or spiritual.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre*, p. 202, n. 180; “Jeuda Halewi,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main, 1910), pp. 114–117 (Hebrew translation in idem, *Studies in Hebrew Literature of the Middle Ages* [Jerusalem, 1965], pp. 177–179); Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 1:516–517, poem no. 222, n. 3; E. Hazan, *The Poetics of the Sephardi Piyyut according to the Liturgical Poetry of Yehuda Halevi* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 210–211.

<sup>133</sup> On the possible Sufi influence on Halevi's poetry, cf. Kaufmann, “Jehuda Halewi,” p. 114, n. 4 (Hebrew translation, p. 177, n. 52). Regarding the Sufi influence concerning Halevi's notion of the inner eye, see above, n. 94.

<sup>134</sup> I mention here only a modest sampling of the many possible references. Cf. Samuel ha-Nagid, in Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 1:113 (poem no. 32); *The Liturgical Poetry of Rabbi Solomon ibn Gabirol*, ed. D. Jarden, 2 vols. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1979), 2:333 (poem no. 102), 462 (poem no. 135), 465 (poem no. 140), 516 (poem no. 176), 593 (poem no. 230); Isaac ibn Ghayyat, in Schirmann, 1:304 (poem no. 114) [partially cited below, n.

thinker or writer, in his proper historical, cultural, and literary context. Accordingly, we may say with confidence that Halevi adopted this terminology from his predecessors and peers. Yet, I would argue that Halevi's particular use of these expressions is to be distinguished from what is found in the other sources.<sup>135</sup> For these poets, who embraced the general philosophical orientation of the Hispano-Arabic culture of their time, the heart's eye is the means to attain an intellectual seeing of God or other immaterial entities (such as the angels and the rational soul). That is to say, in the Islamic-Jewish Neoplatonic tradition the vision of the heart is an intellectual intuition of that which is incorporeal and thus invisible in a physical sense. The eye of the heart (עין הלב) is synonymous with the eye of the intellect (עין השכל). A classical example of this is to be found in a passage from the *Rasâ'il* of the *Ikhwân as-Şafâ'*, a tenth-century Neoplatonic text (possibly deriving from Ismâ'îlî circles<sup>136</sup>) which had a wide influence upon Muslim and Jewish writers in Arabic-speaking lands. According to the relevant passage the

180]; Moses ibn Ezra, *Shire ha-Hol*, ed. H. Brody, 2 vols. [Hebrew] (Berlin, 1934), 1:23 (poem no. 17), 59 (poem no. 60), 66 (poem no. 74), 86 (poem no. 85), 207 (poem no. 207), 134 (poem no. 131). See also the poems of Moses ibn Ezra in Schirmann, 1:412 (poem no. 169) [recently discussed in R.P. Scheindlin, "Redemption of the Soul in Golden Age Religious Poetry," *Proof-texts* 10 (1990): 57–59] and 414 (poem no. 170). In the latter case ibn Ezra refers to the inner eye of the intellect as the "eye of knowledge" (עין הדעת) which sees the "splendor of the glory." On the expression "eye of your intellect" (עין שכלך) in which one is said to conceive of the spiritual powers, cf. L. Dukes, "Extracts from the Book 'Arugat ha-Bosem of R. Moses ibn Ezra" [Hebrew], *Zion* II (1842): 121. For pertinent examples in the case of Abraham ibn Ezra, see above n. 90 and the reference to Habermann given there.

<sup>135</sup> See, by contrast, Y. Razhabi, "Borrowed Elements in the Poems of Yehudah Halevi from Arabic Poetry and Philosophy" [Hebrew], *Molad* 5 (1975): 173, who treats Halevi's notion of internal vision performed by the heart's eye in terms of Arabic philosophical precedents (and Sufi texts influenced thereby) without noting what I consider to be the key difference.

<sup>136</sup> For a review of the scholarly discussion, see S.H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Boulder, 1978), pp. 25–40.

believers, the sages, and the prophets are said to separate from the physical world and contemplate the spiritual world with the "eye of their hearts (עין קלובהם) and the light of their intellects (נור עקולהם)."<sup>137</sup> The standard viewpoint is reflected succinctly by Maimonides in the following statement in the *Mishneh Torah*: "The forms which are incorporeal are not seen by the eye but rather they are known through the eye of the heart (עין הלב), just as we know the Lord of everything without vision of the eye."<sup>138</sup> The eye of the heart is thus a figurative expression for the intellect by means of which one acquires knowledge (either discursively or intuitively) of that which is without body.<sup>139</sup> It is precisely such a conception which underlies the usage of this term in Andalusian Hebrew poetry. This does not, however, accurately reflect the usage of Halevi, for the vision of the heart of which he speaks is not intellectual but rather imaginative, and the object that is seen is not the Neoplatonic form (or Aristotelian universal) but rather a spiritual entity that is constituted within the imagination (i.e., seen by the inner eye) as a tangible, almost sensuous, shape. Halevi, in contrast even to his Muslim predecessor, Abû Hâmid al-Ghazzâlî (1058–

<sup>137</sup> *Rasâ'il*, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1928), 4:141 (cited by Razhabi, "Borrowed Elements in the Poems of Yehudah Halevi," p. 173).

<sup>138</sup> *Yesode ha-Torah*, 4:7 (also mentioned by Razhabi).

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I:4: From still other medieval sources it is evident that heart refers to the rational soul or the intellect, a usage related to, but divergent from, both biblical and rabbinic sources which treat the heart as the seat of thought and emotions. (The same connotations are implied in the Arabic *lubb*.) Of the many examples that could be cited I will mention one of the more striking ones, viz., Bahya ibn Paquda's *Kitâb al-Hidâya ilâ Farâ'id al-Qulûb*. The identification of the heart and the intellect is evident from the introduction (ed. J. Kafih [Jerusalem, 1973], p. 14) where Bahya describes knowledge (*'ilm*) as the "life of their hearts and light of their intellects (לעקולהם חיהם לקלובהם וסראג'א). Concerning this statement and parallels in other Arabic texts, cf. F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden, 1970), p. 321. See also the poem written by Bahya in Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 1:348 and 351 (poem no. 139).



1111), to whom his thought has often been compared,<sup>140</sup> sharply contrasts the function of the heart and that of the intellect.<sup>141</sup> The former, and not the latter, is the faculty which allows one to have direct gnosis of God and the world of spiritual realities. It seems likely to me that Halevi's identification of the heart or the inner eye as the imagination may indeed reflect the Geonic tradition recorded in the rabbinic materials discussed above. Specifically, the interpretation of prophetic experience and its application to *merkavah* mysticism that is found in Halevi has its precedent in the view espoused by Hai and those who elaborated his doctrine. These sources therefore must be seen as an important channel for Halevi, perhaps supplying him with the basis to appropriate and transpose the Sufi notions that parallel the ideas found in the Jewish texts. Scholars have tended to focus on the external influence without giving sufficient attention to the internal sources which may have

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre*, pp. 119–140; idem, “Jeuda Halewi,” pp. 123–124 (Hebrew translation, pp. 184–185). Cf. the criticism of Kaufmann's position in D. Neumark, *Essays in Jewish Philosophy* (Cincinnati, 1929), p. 227; J. Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism* (New York, 1964), p. 493, n. 137. For a more balanced approach to Halevi's relationship to al-Ghazzālī, see D.H. Baneth, “Rabbi Judah Halevi and al-Ghazzālī” [Hebrew], *Kenesset* 2 (1942): 311–329; J. Guttman, “Religion and Knowledge in Medieval Thought and the Modern Period” [Hebrew], in idem, *Religion and Knowledge* (Jerusalem, 1955), pp. 21–23.

<sup>141</sup> See Baneth, “Rabbi Judah Halevi and al-Ghazzālī,” p. 316, n. 4, who points out that for al-Ghazzālī the heart is identified as the intellect or a power within the intellect; see *ibid.*, pp. 323–324. Indeed, according to al-Ghazzālī, soul (*nafs*), spirit (*ruh*), intellect (*‘aql*), and heart (*qalb*) denote different states (*ahwāl*) of one spiritual entity (*al-latifāh al-rūhāniyyah*); cf. M.A. Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany, 1975), p. 25. By contrast, Guttman, “Religion and Knowledge,” p. 21, asserts that Halevi, like al-Ghazzālī, distinguishes between the heart as the seat of religious knowledge and the intellect. Cf. *Kuzari*, II:26, where Halevi speaks of the heart as the locus of the external and internal senses. In IV:3 Halevi speaks of the intellect being in the heart of the brain, but only in a metaphorical sense insofar as the intellect cannot be found in physical place.

allowed for the assimilation, appropriation and transposition of foreign materials or concepts.<sup>142</sup>

Support for the claim that this Geonic interpretation of prophetic and mystical vision had a decisive influence on Halevi may be gathered especially from his religious poetry where he states on numerous occasions that the seeing of the glory is performed by the heart or the heart's eye which I take to be another way of describing the imagination. The first example is drawn from his poem, *יעירוני בשמך רעיוני*. Let me note, parenthetically, that the word *רעיון* in Halevi's poetry is often used synonymously with *דמיון* and therefore should be translated in such instances as mental image or vision rather than rational thought or concept.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, the use of the meta-

<sup>142</sup> The question of the transposition or transmutation of one cultural-literary form into another is especially acute with respect to Halevi's poetic composition as it is for the Andalusian Hebrew poets in general. A typical account of this process is found in Razhabi, "Borrowed Elements in the Poems of Yehudah Halevi," p. 165, who thus describes the Jewish poet in Spain during the Golden Age: "In his soul there was no barrier between the Jewish culture and the secular culture, and at times there escaped from his pen, whether intentionally or not, foreign ideas and words." However, in many of the examples that Razhabi gives, especially in the case of Halevi, he shows that the ideas borrowed from Arabic texts resonated with ideas found in the traditional Jewish literature. For recent treatments of this problematic, see R.P. Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, & Death: Medieval Hebrew Poems on the Good Life* (Philadelphia, 1986); R. Brann, "Judah Halevi: The Compunctious Poet," *Prooftexts* 7 (1987): 123–143, esp. 128–129; and idem, "Andalusian Hebrew Poetry and the Hebrew Bible: Cultural Nationalism or Cultural Ambiguity?," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, vol. 3, ed. D.R. Blumenthal (Atlanta, 1988), pp. 101–131.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Hazan, *The Poetics of the Sephardi Piyyut*, p. 210. Halevi may have been influenced by the conjunction of the words *רעיון* and *לב* in Eccles. 2:22 and Dan. 2:30. Cf. *Dīwān*, 4:235 (poem no. 124): *את נתיבי רעיון אכונן*. See also 3:164 (poem no. 89): *בלבי ורעיוני*; 182 (poem no. 99): *ועד לבי ומשאלו*. Similar forms of expressions are used by other Andalusian Hebrew poets; see, e.g., Isaac ibn Ghayyat, in Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 1:320 (poem no. 124), where *רעיוני לבבה* parallels *חיוני כתבה*; 324 (poem no. 127): *רעיוני חדלו* parallels *נסתמו חיוני*. See also Moses ibn Ezra, in Schirmann, 1:412

phor of the heart's awakening to depict the prophetic vision is attested in the *Kuzari* as well. Thus, for example, in II:24 Halevi offers the following interpretation of the verse, "I was asleep, but my heart was wakeful" (Song of Songs 5:2): "He [Solomon] designates the exile by the term sleep<sup>144</sup> and the continuance of prophecy among them by the wakefulness of the heart."<sup>145</sup> Halevi's exegesis of the expression "my heart was wakeful" turns upon the identification of the heart as the locus of prophetic vision. Halevi expresses the matter in the poem *יעירוני רעיוני בשמך* in the following way:<sup>146</sup>

ולבי ראך ויאמן בך  
כאלו מעמד היה בסני  
דרשתיך בחיוני ועבר  
כבודך כי וירד בענני

My heart has seen You<sup>147</sup>  
And believes in You

As if I had stood at Sinai;

I have sought You in my visions,<sup>148</sup>

(poem no. 169): *יעירוני שעפי לחוותך / ויראוני בעין לב נוראותיך*. It is important to note in this context that in medieval Hebrew philosophical terminology the word *רעיון* is generally used to translate the Arabic *khatir* which can denote either the compositive animal imagination (sometimes rendered as *takhayyul*) or the faculty of estimation or cogitation (*wahm*). Cf. Wolfson, *Studies*, 1:286–287. See, however, Samuel ibn Tibbon's translation of the *Moreh Nevukhim*, I:46, where *רעיון* is identified as *דמיון*, i.e., imagination. Cf. Wolfson, *op. cit.*, p. 255, n. 27; idem, *Philo Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), 2:289, n. 39. See also the usage of the word *רעיון* in Eleazar of Worms, *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, chap. 3, p. 15.

<sup>144</sup> This part of Halevi's interpretation reflects standard rabbinic exegesis on the verse. Cf. Targum *ad loc.*; *Song of Songs Rabbah* 5:2.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. *Dīwān*, 3:67 (poem no. 34): *ישן ולבו ער / בוער ומשתער / צא נא והנער* / ולכה באור פני.

<sup>146</sup> *Dīwān*, 3:65 (poem no. 32). Cf. *ibid.*, 66 (poem no. 33) where Halevi speaks of the oppressed and the poor as receptacles for the divine and thus compares them to Mount Sinai and the burning bush.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Eccles. 1:16.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Ps. 119:10.

Your glory passed over me,<sup>149</sup>  
 Descending upon the clouds.

It is significant that here the poet's spiritual vision of God is likened to the prophetic theophany of the glory at Sinai; indeed, the poem is technically a *reshut* for the prayer of *barkhu* on the holiday of Pentecost which celebrates, according to rabbinic interpretation, the Sinaitic revelation.<sup>150</sup> The ultimate purpose of the visionary arousal, i.e., the stirring of the heart to conjure an image of the divine, is to enable one to bless the name of the glory,<sup>151</sup> as the poem itself ends:

הקימוני שעפי מיצועי  
 לברך שם כבודך אדני

Similarly, in another *reshut* written for *barkhu*, the poet boldly declares about God:<sup>152</sup>

כן לו דמות עין לא ראתה בלתי  
 נפש בלב תכיר אתו ותצפהו

He has an image which the eye does not see,<sup>153</sup>  
 Yet the soul in the heart discerns Him and gazes upon Him.

In this case too the seeing of God is placed in a liturgical context: one visualizes the divine image so that one may bless it, and thus the poem concludes, באי והורי את אדני וברכהו. Other examples could be adduced to show that for Halevi the poetic experience — much like his remark concerning R. Ishmael's knowledge of *merkavah* secrets and R. Aqiva's contemplation of the Pardes — approximates the prophetic state.<sup>154</sup> A

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Exod. 34:5–6.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Y. Levin, "The Poetry of Judah Halevi in Relation to Earlier Hebrew Sources" [Hebrew] (Ph.D., Hebrew University, 1944), p. 53.

<sup>151</sup> On the intrinsic connection between the inner vision and the act of praising God, cf. *The Liturgical Poetry of Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol*, 2:464 (poem no. 138): הגיג לבי בהביטי בקרבי / בכל עת ברכי נפשי אדוני.

<sup>152</sup> *Dīwān*, 4:194 (poem no. 91).

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Isa. 64:3.

<sup>154</sup> See now D. Pagis, "The Poet as Prophet in Medieval Hebrew Literature," in *Poetry and Prophecy*, ed. J. Kugel (Ithaca, 1990), pp. 140–150, esp. 142. Cf.

common denominator to the prophetic, mystical and poetic consciousness is the notion of the glory as a spiritual form which assumes tangible shape within the imagination, the *visio spiritualis*, the seeing of the heart (ראיית הלב).

ונלאו ראות אורו בעינים וחפשו  
לככם וראו אור כבודו ונבהלו

Unable to see His light with their eyes, their hearts  
Searched<sup>155</sup> and they saw the light of His glory,  
They were frightened<sup>156</sup>

מזן בהמה אין ומותר האדם  
ראות לב לא ראות עין רק לראות צור כבודם

the comprehensive study of A. Komem referred to above, n. 28. While the author documents fully the mystical tendencies of Halevi's poetry, specifically in terms of visionary experience, he does not mention early *merkavah* sources. It should be noted that for Halevi the fulfillment of the traditional commandments is also a means, indeed the only legitimate means, for the people of Israel to attain an angelic state which is likened to prophecy. The key difference is that in the discussion of normative practice the visionary element is not central. Cf. *Kuzari*, I:79, 98; II:34, 48; V:20; Silman, *Thinker and Seer*, p. 182. On the relationship between the gradation of the angel and that of the prophet in Halevi, see the sources cited by Silman, *op. cit.*, p. 251, n. 27. Other forms of pietistic behavior, especially song and dance, are likewise upheld by Halevi as means for cleaving to the divine matter; see *Kuzari*, II:50. With respect to these forms Halevi may have been influenced by Sufi sources which likewise emphasized dance as a means to induce mystical ecstasy. Cf. F. Meier, "Der Derwischtanz," *Asiatische Studien* 8 (1954): 107–136; M. Molé, "La danse exstatique en Islam," *Sources orientales* 6 (1963): 145–280; A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975), pp. 179–186. On the other hand, Halevi could have drawn from earlier Jewish sources as the use of dance in religious worship is attested in pre-Islamic Jewish texts including the Bible. Especially interesting is the statement in M. Sukkah 5:4 to the effect that the pious (חסידים) and the men of action (אנשי המעשה) danced before the priests at the celebration of the water-drawing festival. For a discussion of these and other relevant sources, cf. A. Caquot, "Les danses sacrées en Israel et à l'entour," *Sources orientales* 6 (1963): 121–143.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Ps. 77:7.

<sup>156</sup> *Diwân* 3:4 (poem no. 2).

Man has no superiority over the beast,<sup>157</sup>  
 But that he may see their glorious Rock,  
 A vision of the heart and not of the eye.<sup>158</sup>

Even more poignantly, in another poem Halevi comments:

לחזותו עין כלה  
 ומבשרי ללבי נגלה

To behold Him the eye fails,  
 But from my flesh<sup>159</sup> He is revealed to my heart.<sup>160</sup>

To cite two other illustrations of this motif:

הצור נסתר ובלב נראה

The Rock is hidden, but seen in the heart.<sup>161</sup>

יוצר המציא כל מאין  
 נגלה לללב לא לעין

The Creator, who brought forth everything from nothing,  
 is revealed to the heart but not to the eye.<sup>162</sup>

From these examples (and others that could have been cited<sup>163</sup>) it may be concluded that in Halevi's poems the "eye of the heart"<sup>164</sup> assumes the role of the "inner eye" described in the *Kuzari*,<sup>165</sup> such that the vision of God located in the heart amounts to that which is conjured in the poet's imagination. Indeed, in the poem that begins אהבים העלו בלב להבים, Halevi mentions the "tablets of my heart," (לוחות לבבי) which are compared to the "tablets [of the Pact] which were inscribed on

<sup>157</sup> Eccles. 3:19.

<sup>158</sup> *Diwân* 3:204 (poem no. 113).

<sup>159</sup> A play on Job 19:26: ומבשרי אחזה אלוה.

<sup>160</sup> *Diwân* 3:6 (poem no. 5).

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:201 (poem no. 97).

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 189 (poem no. 87).

<sup>163</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 3:272 (poem no. 144): הנגלה בלב / מי כמוך יחיד הנסתר מאישון; 288 (poem no. 145), cited above at n. 72.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 4:209 (poem no. 101): בעין הלב ומחשבותיו / מה נפלא והוא נגלה. See also 3:159 (poem no. 86): ובעין לב שרתיד.

<sup>165</sup> See above, n. 132.

the one side and on the other” (cf. Exod. 32:15).<sup>166</sup> The point of the poem, alluded to in the biblical phrase which serves as its prelude, *מבשרי אחזה אלוה* (Job 19:26), is to emphasize the extent to which the locus of one’s knowledge and vision of God is centered in one’s own physical and spiritual being. Thus Halevi maintains that one can “see” God from one’s spirit which is created from the spirit of God’s mouth, from one’s limbs which are formed by God’s hands, and from the tablets of the heart which are likened to the tablets of the Pact, *luhot ha-’edut*, inscribed from both sides. In still another poem, *יאתו לך*,<sup>167</sup> Halevi compares the heart of God’s servants (*לבב* עבדיך) to the tablets upon which are carved the inerasable divine laws. In that context the heart which bears the imprint of the divine below is also compared to the throne that bears the glory above:<sup>168</sup> just as God dwells in the heart of the faithful, the faithful dwell alongside the throne of glory.<sup>169</sup> In Halevi’s own words:

ועלי לבב עבדיך  
לוחות ושם עריך  
כי באצבעות יריך  
חקות אשר לא נמחות

חקות על הלוחות

דרך נפשות קרבה  
לדרך בכס מרכבה  
כי ברוחך הטובה  
על מי מנחות מונחות

וסביביו מנחות

<sup>166</sup> *Dīwān*, 2:272 (poem no. 51).

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:67–68 (poem no. 35).

<sup>168</sup> On the correlation of the heart and the throne, and the possible Sufi influence, see discussion below. The association of the tablets and the throne in Halevi may be derived as well from the aggadic tradition that the tablets were hewn from the sapphire stone of the throne or a quarry beneath the throne. For references see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 8 vols. (Philadelphia, 1968), 6:49–50, n. 258, 59, nn. 305–306.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. E. Fleischer, “Reflections on the Religious Poetry of Rabbi Yehudah Halevi” [Hebrew], in *Mishnato he-Hagutit shel Rabbi Yehudah Halevi* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 179–180.

One may infer, then, that for Halevi the heart, compared to the tablets, is the divine essence, the *'inyan ha-'elohi*, that is embedded in the Jewish soul. This heart, moreover, is the inner eye or the imagination upon which are written the images — in the way that the commandments are inscribed on the tablets — from which one sees God or the divine form in a concrete, tangible manner.<sup>170</sup> This imaging of the formless God is the ultimate goal — and challenge — of the poetic dwelling.<sup>171</sup> To express the matter differently, the imaginative visualization of God for Halevi is a manner of expressing the sense of being filled with the immediacy of the divine presence — the *'inyan ha-'elohi* — in one's heart.<sup>172</sup> Thus in one of his poems, the *baqashah* which begins with the words *אברך את אדני אשר יעצני*, Halevi compares the “fear and trembling” of the process of poetic composition to various biblical accounts of visionary

<sup>170</sup> It is possible that with respect to this image, *luhot levavi*, Halevi was influenced by a Sufi conception as found, for example, in the *Ihyâ 'ulûm ad-dîn* of al-Ghazzâlî, wherein the heart is said to reflect the truths contained in the Well-Guarded Tablet, *al-lawh al-mahfûz*, mentioned in the Qu'rân 75:22 and identified in the mystical literature with the Active Intellect or the Universal Soul. Cf. Baneth, “Rabbi Judah Halevi and al-Ghazzâlî,” p. 325, n. 2. For the influence of al-Ghazzâlî's passage on the Jewish Sufi, ‘Obadyah Maimonides, see Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, pp. 43, 71, n. 43, and text cited on p. 92: “When thou wilt have persevered in this effort, thine imaginative faculty will be purified and all that is graven on the ‘well-guarded Tablet’ will be manifest to thee.” It is of interest that in this text the heart, which reflects what is written on the Well-Guarded Tablet, is also identified as the imaginative faculty, a point that concurs with what we have found in Halevi.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. *Dîwân*, 4:258 (poem no. 134): בלב רגו לראותך ונפשי לראותך חררה; 263 (poem no. 135): עיני הדרך נכספה לראות / אך זאת כמוני בלי יאות. Cf. *ibid.*, 2:306 (poem no. 89). See also the poem attributed to Halevi, though with a measure of reservation, in Jefim (Ḥayyim) Schirmann, *New Hebrew Poems from the Genizah* (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 251: יקר עצמך נעלה מראות... ואם על מרומים שכינתך — בחדרי לבנות תמונתך. Here too the divine image is said to be lodged in the chambers of the heart, i.e., the imagination. Cf. the language of R. Hai as cited in Nathan of Rome's *Arukh* above n. 114.

<sup>172</sup> See article of Fleischer referred to above n. 169.



encounters with God, the glory, or an angel. Indeed, in the same poem Halevi implores the divine:<sup>173</sup>

ותן חלקי עם חסידך התמימים ... ותעדנני  
בויו שכינתך — ואשבעה בהקיץ תמונתך

Place my portion with Your unblemished saints...  
Let me delight  
in the splendor of Your Presence,  
'Awake, I am filled with [the vision] of Your image'  
(Ps. 17:15)

In this context we again see a clear connection between the *ḥasid* and visionary experience of the image (תמונה) of God also referred to as the splendor of the *Shekhinah*.

One of the essential images that informs this mental vision is that of the enthroned glory. The point is evident from the poem,  
מירך היתה ללבי:<sup>174</sup>

יום בו אחפש היש אדני  
כי נעלה מראות בעיני  
שבתי ללבי ורעיוני  
ואמצאה כסאך לעד בי טמון בחובי

One day I sought if the Lord was present,<sup>175</sup>  
For He transcends my physical sight;  
Returning to my heart and my thoughts<sup>176</sup>  
I found Your throne as a witness,  
hidden within my recesses.

In the above stanza God's throne, which ultimately is the locus of the numinous presence of the deity, is interiorized as an image within the poet's heart or imagination.<sup>177</sup> It is possible

<sup>173</sup> *Dīwān*, 4:155 (poem no. 62).

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 186 (poem no. 84).

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Exod. 17:7.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Eccles. 2:22.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. *Dīwān*, 4:233 (poem no. 122): עיני אל כסאך תלויה. It seems to me that the reference to the "eye" here should be construed in a technical sense, i.e., the inner or spiritual eye which is the imaginative faculty.

that in this case Halevi may have been influenced by the correlation or identification of the heart (*qalb*) and throne (*'arsh*) common in Sufi literature.<sup>178</sup> From the continuation of the poem, however, it is evident that Halevi draws upon another motif found as well in other medieval Jewish poets who were also influenced by Islamic Neoplatonism,<sup>179</sup> concerning the identification of the throne as the ontic source of all souls.<sup>180</sup> Thus Halevi writes: *הוא כסאך מחצב נשמה*. Insofar as the throne is the "quarry of the soul," in Halevi's language, it follows that the soul is the locus for the imaging of that throne. The form of the throne is the objectivized self-image of the heart projected outwardly.<sup>181</sup>

In one of his most elaborate and personal accounts of the poetic experience Halevi describes the state of ecstatic rapture

<sup>178</sup> Cf. G. Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sūfi Sahl At-Tustarī* (d. 283/896) (Berlin, 1980), pp. 163–164, 191–193, 239, 253; Ibn 'Atā' Allāh, *Traité sur le nom allāh*, introduction, translation, and notes by M. Gloton (Paris, 1981), pp. 196–197; R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 114, citing a passage from Al-Jili (1365–1406). On the correlation of the throne in the cosmic plane to the heart in the spiritual, see also the passage from Muhyī al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī's *Al-futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*Meccan Revelations*), discussed in F. Meier, "The Mystery of the Ka'Ba: Symbol and Reality in Islamic Mysticism," in *The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, ed. J. Campbell (Princeton, 1955), p. 163. The correlation of the throne and the heart seems to be implied as well in the statement of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 874) cited by ibn al-'Arabī in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (English translation by R.W.J. Austin, *The Bezels of Wisdom* [New York, 1980], p. 101): "If the Throne and all that surrounds it, multiplied a hundred million times, were to be in one of the many chambers of the Heart of the gnostic, he would not be aware of it." For a slightly different rendering see *ibid.*, p. 148, and cf. Massignon, *Essai sur les origines*, p. 249.

<sup>179</sup> See above n. 38.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. *Dīwān*, 4:188 cited above n. 38. See also the poem of Isaac ibn Ghayyat, in Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 1:304: *חקרתך / והנה בין זממי / בעין לב אמצאה אותך ואראה: קשורת כסאך נפש נפחתה*.

<sup>181</sup> My formulation here is based on Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*, p. 224 (see above n. 122).

in terms that deliberately echo the experience of the *merkavah* mystic:<sup>182</sup>

ברכי נפשי את אדני והתחברי עם מלאכיו ... ותני לך מהלכים — בין המלאכים —  
במושב עבדיו ובמעמד משרתיו משרתי מלכותו — ושלוחי מלאכותו ועושי  
מלאכתו ... הביטי אל צור אשר ממנו חצבת ... שאי עיניך — והסבי פניך — אל  
המנרה הטהרה אשר לפני אדני אשר ממאורה תאירי ... ויאר אדני פניו אליך —  
ויפרש כנפיו עליך ... אז תראי האור הבהיר אשר חשך לא ישופהו.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,<sup>183</sup> and join with the angels...  
Give her passage<sup>184</sup> amongst the angels — in the dwelling of  
His servants and in the station of His angels, the servants of  
His kingdom, the messengers of His angelhood, and those  
who do His work... Gaze upon the Rock from which you  
have been hewn<sup>185</sup>... Lift your eyes and turn your face to  
the pure candelabrum<sup>186</sup> which is before the Lord, from  
whose light you will be illuminated... And the Lord will  
shine His countenance upon you<sup>187</sup> and spread His wings  
over you<sup>188</sup>... Then you will behold the resplendent light<sup>189</sup>  
which darkness cannot dim.

In this passage the basic themes of the mystical experience described in the *Hekhalot* are all appropriated by Halevi (sometimes expressed through biblical idioms) in order to describe his own experience in the moment of ecstasy induced by poetic composition. He joins, indeed becomes one with, the angels and utters hymns before God, and ultimately has a vision of the divine form characterized as the resplendent light of the divine countenance. While much of the language here is a paraphrase of scriptural texts, the frame which holds together the discrete parts seems to be the mystical experience known from the

<sup>182</sup> *Diwân*, 4:145 (poem no. 62).

<sup>183</sup> Ps. 103:1, and elsewhere.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Zech. 3:7.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Isa. 51:1. Cf. *Diwân*, 4:263 (poem no. 138): את צור לבבי את מקור חיי.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Exod. 31:8, 39:37, Lev. 24:4.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Num. 6:25.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Ezek. 16:8.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Job 37:21.

extant *merkavah* tracts. From all the textual evidence that I have adduced, therefore, it may be concluded that the language and motifs of ancient Jewish mysticism were utilized by Halevi and set in his own Andalusian cultural milieu. Most importantly, the description of the visionary experience of the mystic was considered to be, phenomenologically speaking, on par with prophecy and poetic inspiration. In all three cases the inner vision consisted of an imaging of an incorporeal light in corporeal forms within the imagination.

#### IV

At this juncture I will discuss another motif in Halevi that has great affinity with an idea expressed in Jewish esoteric sources, viz., the conception of prophecy as the apprehension of the divine name.<sup>190</sup> It is well-known that the names of God occupy a central place in the world of ancient Jewish speculation on the chariot.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, in the *Hekhalot* texts the *nomina barbara* assume both theosophical and magical-theurgical significance.<sup>192</sup> That is to say, on the one hand the names are said to reveal the nature of the divine essence, but, on the other, they serve as the principle means for the heavenly ascent to the throne as well as being an essential part of the hymns uttered by the angels and the mystic before the glory.<sup>193</sup> These two functions cannot be separated for the effectiveness of the names as

<sup>190</sup> On the relation of the name and prophecy, cf. *The Religious Poems of Abraham ibn Ezra*, 2:220 (poem no. 327).

<sup>191</sup> Cf. K.E. Grözinger, "The Names of God and the Celestial Powers: Their Function and Meaning in the Hekhalot Literature," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 53–70 (English section).

<sup>192</sup> On the magical-theurgical significance of the divine names in the *Hekhalot* literature, cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 56; idem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 54–55, 75–83; I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1980), pp. 104–107.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Elior, "The Concept of God," pp. 17–18, 20–24.

magical-theurgical means is linked to the operative belief that the names indicate something of the divine (or angelic) essence. Insofar as the name of God reflects the essence of God — epitomized, for example, in the famous statement, “He is His name and His name is He”<sup>194</sup> — it follows that the knowledge of God granted to the mystic in his ascent to the throne and vision of the glory will consist of knowledge of the names.<sup>195</sup> The “seeing of the king in his beauty” is, in effect, a mystical vision of the letters that make up the divine names. Although Halevi does not discuss the actual *merkavah* texts, it seems to me that his understanding of prophecy as the comprehension of the divine name is connected to this Jewish mystical tradition. Indeed, as will be seen further on in this section, Halevi on occasion employs precise terminology from the *Hekhalot* texts to characterize his conception of the name as a luminous substance. I will attempt to show that for Halevi the name is identical with the divine glory which is characterized as light. These associations are standard themes in ancient Jewish mystical literature that were expressed in both kabbalistic and Pietistic literature of the High Middle Ages.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the mystical conception of the name in Halevi, it must be noted that evidence for the cultivation of such an idea is found in the writings of other medieval Jewish Neoplatonists. In this context I will mention three examples. In the poetry of Solomon ibn Gabirol (ca.

<sup>194</sup> Schäfer, *Synopsis*, §588. Cf. G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1969), p. 44.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. R. Elior, “Hekhalot Zutarti,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Supplement I (1982): 5; idem, “The Concept of God,” pp. 21–22. The mystical identification of the name and the glory is based on earlier traditions attested in the Bible itself. Thus the name is used as a substitute for the glory and assumes the characteristics applied to the latter as, for example, in the Deuteronomist’s repeated claim that the name dwells in the Temple. Cf. Deut. 12:5, 11, 21; 14:23, 24; 16:2, 6; 26:2. Interestingly, the targumic authors render the reference to God’s name in these contexts as God’s Presence, שכינתו.

1020–ca. 1057) the name is identified as the power of the Creator manifest in being through the divine Will.<sup>196</sup> In Pseudo-Baḥya's *Kitāb Ma'ānī al-Nafs* it is stated that the first of the entities that emanates from the One is called by the Greeks Active Intellect and by the Torah glory, *Shekhinah*, and the name.<sup>197</sup> Even closer to Halevi's formulation is Abraham ibn Ezra who speaks of the souls being conjoined to the angelic realm, i.e., the separate Intellects, and thereby they cleave to the glorious name, *shem ha-nikkhad* (the Tetragrammaton).<sup>198</sup> From these examples, and others that could have been cited, it is evident that Halevi's utilization of the ancient speculation concerning the name within a Neoplatonic context is not an isolated phenomenon but rather represents a discernible pattern in medieval Jewish Neoplatonism.

In IV:15 Halevi writes that in the moment of prophecy, when the prophet achieves a state of being separated from his bodily existence by "cleaving to the angelic species," he is cloaked in the *Ruah ha-Qodesh* (elsewhere described as *al jism al-laṭīf al-ruhānī*, the subtle spiritual substance) and by means of a prophetic vision apprehends the Tetragrammaton.<sup>199</sup> The latter, Halevi notes, "is the specific and definite name which instructs about the relation between God and His most perfect creatures on the face of the earth, viz., the prophets, whose souls are pure, and they receive the light which penetrates them like the light of sun in a crystal... The explicit name instructs about

<sup>196</sup> Cf. A. Parnes, "The Mentioning of the Name in the Poetry of Solomon ibn Gabirol" [Hebrew], *Kenesset* 7 (1942): 280–293; I. Levin, *Mystical Trends in the Poetry of Solomon ibn Gabirol* [Hebrew] (Lod, 1986), pp. 80–91. On the influence of *merkavah* mysticism on ibn Gabirol, see also F.P. Borgebuhr, *Salomo Ibn Gabirol Ostwestliches Dichtertum* (Wiesbaden, 1976), pp. 74–76, 523–524, 565–567, 614.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, p. 84.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. ibn Ezra's *Commentary* ad Exod. 3:15; *Yesod Mora'*, chap. 7, p. 13. And see E. Wolfson, "God, the Demiurge, and the Intellect: On the Usage of the Word *Kol* in Abraham ibn Ezra," *REJ* 149 (1990): 77–111, esp. 101–106.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre*, pp. 165–176.

the light that penetrates, and [it] attests that the light of God cleaves to men and penetrates them... The matter of the Tetragrammaton cannot be comprehended by logic, and of it there is no proof except through prophetic vision (אלבצר אלנביר).<sup>200</sup> The prophet, cloaked in the light of the *Ruah ha-Qodesh*, apprehends the divine name which is a light that cleaves to the soul. This gnosis of the name, Halevi tells the reader in IV:3, can be attained only through "the evidence of prophecy (אלמשהדרה אלנוביה) and internal vision" (אלבצירה).<sup>201</sup> Underlying Halevi's remarks is a decidedly mystical notion of the divine name which has its roots in the *merkavah* texts. Accordingly, one can find in Halevi a correlation between the Tetragrammaton, on the one hand, and the luminous substance of the *kavod*, on the other. This correlation is especially apparent in several of Halevi's poems. Thus, for example, in the poem, איש אלהים גבר, a retelling of the Sinaitic revelation in alphabetic acrostic, Halevi discusses the second commandment, "You shall not take the name in vain," in the following way: "Do not take in vain that which is hidden from His holy ones [i.e., the angels] ... the splendor of the glory of His name called upon the multitude ... kindling flames of fire"<sup>202</sup> לא תשא לשוא גנוז לקדשיו ... הוד יקר השם הנקרא על המוני ... חצב להבות אש.<sup>203</sup> In this case Halevi has characterized the name as a luminous substance by substituting the name for the voice of God which is described as kindling flames of fire in Ps. 29:7. Specifically, there is a connection made between *hod* and *yaqar*, terms designating the luminosity of the glory, and the name. In another poem, ברכי נפשי את אדני, the mystical conception of the name as a luminous Presence is evident as well:<sup>204</sup>

ברכי  
את שם      זהר העולם איום ונורא

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Efros, *Studies*, pp. 147–148.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. *Kuzari*, II:54.

<sup>202</sup> Ps. 29:7.

<sup>203</sup> *Dīwān*, 3:100 (poem no. 49).

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 258 (poem no. 138).

Bless the name — everlasting splendor,<sup>205</sup>  
 awesome and terrible.<sup>206</sup>

At the conclusion of that very poem Halevi equates the divine name (שֵׁם), Kingdom (מַלְכוּת) and glory (כְּבוֹד), all of which are identified as the light of God's countenance.<sup>207</sup> As we have seen above, in the *Kuzari* as well the terms כְּבוֹד and מַלְכוּת (or מְלָאכָה) both designate the visible form seen by prophets. On occasion Halevi describes his own state of ecstatic inspiration in terms appropriate to the state of prophecy, as for example in the poem יִירָדֵעִי יִגְוִנִי:<sup>208</sup>

וּשְׁמוֹ בִּקְרִבִּי	כֹּאֵשׁ בְּכִלְיוֹתַי
קְשׁוּר בְּלִבִּי	עֶצוֹר בְּעֲצָמוֹתַי

His name is in me<sup>209</sup>  
 Like fire in my kidneys,<sup>210</sup>  
 Bound to my heart,<sup>211</sup>  
 Shut up in my bones.<sup>212</sup>

In the above poem Halevi obviously draws upon the prophet's description of God's word "like a raging fire in my heart, shut up in my bones" (Jer. 20:9). For Halevi, however, the subject is not the prophetic word of God, the divine speech, but rather the very name of God, presumably the Tetragrammaton. The first words, "His name is in me," וּשְׁמוֹ בִּקְרִבִּי, echo the biblical passage describing the angel of the Lord: "for My name is in him," כִּי שְׁמִי בִּקְרִבּוֹ (Exod. 23:21). This very verse played a crucial role in ancient Jewish esotericism where it was read exegetically as a reference to Meṭaṭron also known as *Yah ha-Qadan*, for he was

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Isa. 60:19.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. Hab. 1:7.

<sup>207</sup> *Dīwān*, 3:262 (poem no. 138).

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 89 (poem no. 47).

<sup>209</sup> Based on Exod. 23:21.

<sup>210</sup> On the conjunction of kidney and heart, used to designate one's inwardness, cf. Ps. 26:2, 73:21.

<sup>211</sup> Cf. Ps. 73:21.

<sup>212</sup> Jer. 20:9.



thought to have borne the Tetragrammaton within himself.<sup>213</sup> Halevi combines this image from Exodus 23 with that of Jeremiah 20 to create the notion of the name being inscribed on his heart<sup>214</sup> and innerparts like flames of fire. The name of God is itself the luminous substance that is within the poet. Thus, in another poem, Halevi writes:<sup>215</sup>

שמך נגדי ואיך אלך לבדי  
והוא דודי ואיך אשב יחירי  
והוא נרי ואיך ידעך מאורי  
ואיך אצען והוא משען בירי

Your name is before me, how can I walk alone?  
It is my beloved, how can I sit lonely?  
It is my lamp, how can my light go dim?  
How can I wander with it as a staff in my hand?

Here the name of God is characterized in several ways which all tend to underscore the fact that it is a personalized dynamic entity, a point made as well by Halevi in the *Kuzari* (IV:1, 3) when he states that the Tetragrammaton is the *nomen proprium* which designates the divine reality in its particularity and specificity as is the function of proper names. The first verse brings to mind the passage in Psalm 16:8, "I have set the Lord before me always." In the case of Halevi, however, it is the name of God that is set before him. This name is the constant companion of the poet, indeed his beloved, as well as his lamp, the ontic source of the poet's soul characterized as a light, and, finally, the staff which supports the poet in his earthly peregrinations. In a recent discussion of this poem Raymond

<sup>213</sup> Cf. B. Sanhedrin 38b; I. Gruenwald, *Re'uyot Yehezqel*, in *Temirin*, vol. 1, ed. I. Weinstock (Jerusalem, 1972), p. 130, and see editor's n. 119; Schäfer, *Synopsis*, §387.

<sup>214</sup> A similar notion is expressed, for instance, by the thirteenth-fourteenth-century kabbalist, Isaac of Acre, *Oṣar Ḥayyim*, MS Guenzberg 775, fol. 54b: "The name of the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, is inscribed on the heart of the enlightened ones from Israel, the pure souls upon whom He dwells."

<sup>215</sup> *Dīwān*, 2:221 (poem no. 10).

Scheindlin astutely observed: "This 'name of God' represents not merely the thought of God, but rather something divine that the poet feels to be an integral part of himself."<sup>216</sup> Indeed, the name of God for Halevi is an hypostatic entity, identical with the glory, that is the ontological source of the soul of every Jew. The name is inscribed within the soul, for the soul is of the same substance as the name. Because of this consubstantiality the poet can be unified with the name. Thus in the poem, *ירשו למצער אהוביך*, Halevi boldly claims: "Cleave to the name of God, Your strength, and hold fast to it," *רבקי בשם אל אילותך ובו אחי*.<sup>217</sup> In the moment of poetic composition, therefore, the poet, like the prophet, is cloaked in the Holy Spirit and apprehends the Tetragrammaton.<sup>218</sup> The object of the vision described in some contexts as the anthropomorphic configuration of the spiritual form within the imagination is here characterized as the mystical apprehension of the name. In the final analysis, for Halevi the visible glory, the aspect of the *Shekhinah* "revealed to the eye," is identical with the divine name which is the light that emanates from the Holy Spirit, the "spiritual, hidden *Shekhinah*,"<sup>219</sup> and which comprises the totality of spiritual forms known from chariot speculation.<sup>220</sup>

Reflected in Halevi's writings is an older doctrine concerning

<sup>216</sup> Scheindlin, "Redemption of the Soul," p. 64.

<sup>217</sup> *Dīwān*, 3:88 (poem no. 46).

<sup>218</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 261 (poem no. 138): *ברכי... את שם קדוש ומקדש בפי כל חיה*.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. *Kuzari* V:23, and discussion in Davidson, "The Active Intellect," p. 388.

<sup>220</sup> It is of interest to note as well that approximately a century later, the Castilian kabbalist, R. Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen of Soria, reports in his *Perush Mirkevet Yehezqel* what appears to be an older Jewish mystical tradition that has great affinity with the views of Halevi: R. Jacob makes a distinction between an upper and lower glory, the former corresponding to the *sefirot* whereas the lower comprises the throne of glory, the encompassing electrum, seven seraphim, the cloud of glory, and eight cherubim. Cf. R. Ya'aqov ha-Kohen, *Perush Mirkevet Yehezqel*, ed. A. Farber (M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, 1978), p. 8. See p. 96, n. 11, where Farber already notes the resemblance of this passage to Halevi's view. See also the article of Idel cited above, n. 29.

the *kavod* that has its roots in the Jewish mystical tradition. To be sure, Halevi's philosophical formulation advances considerably beyond the more mythical presentation in the *merkavah* texts, but there can be no doubt regarding the direct influence of the latter upon the former. The 'God of Israel' as it is used in the *merkavah* literature refers to the manifest forms in the world of the throne that constitute the revealed aspects of the divine in the mystical vision. Halevi similarly maintains that the 'God of Israel' is a spiritual form, expressed in the shape of the various inhabitants of the throne-world that are apprehended in a prophetic vision. In one place, as I have indicated, Halevi even describes this prophetic vision in terms of a person's cleaving to the angelic species (i.e., one strips away one's body and becomes a purely spiritual entity), being cloaked in the Holy Spirit, and comprehending the most sacred of divine names, the Tetragrammaton. While there is no exact parallel to Halevi's formulation in the *merkavah* texts, it can easily be shown that each of the critical elements has a basis in the early forms of Jewish mysticism. Central to the latter is a visionary ascent which leads to a temporary transformation of the human being into an angel; this transformation, moreover, is often described in terms of the mystic being surrounded or cloaked in the light of the *kavod*. Finally, the culminating stage in the ecstatic vision is a mystical apprehension of the divine names — many of which are various permutations of the Tetragrammaton — as they are correlated with limbs of the divine body. In the case of Halevi we have a striking example of a medieval Jewish intellectual who sought to incorporate early forms of Jewish mysticism in the texture of a more sophisticated philosophical approach largely indebted to Islamic influences, especially Sufi and Isma'ili thought. In great measure this tells the story of the literary profile of medieval Jewish mysticism which took shape in Provence and Northern Spain. At the very least this study points again to the complicated interweaving of two of the threads of medieval Jewish intellectual history, philosophy and mysticism, which by no means are easily disentangled.

## THE MYSTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TORAH STUDY IN GERMAN PIETISM\*

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the mystical significance that the ritual of Torah-study assumes within the overall theosophic orientation of the Kalonymide circle of German Pietists active in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This particular ritual is presented as one example of a much larger phenomenon alluded to in this corpus, namely, the esoteric nature and mystical efficacy of the performance of traditional commandments. My analysis focuses on three critical aspects of the Pietists' view of Torah based on earlier aggadic or mystical texts: (1) Torah as the divine names; (2) Torah as the singular divine name (the Tetragrammaton); and (3) Torah as the divine glory. It is shown in this paper that for the Pietists the notion that the Torah comprises the divine names is related to the identification of the Torah and the glory. Indeed, this identification provides the ideational basis for the mystical experience that underlies this most central ritual of normative rabbinic Judaism: the study of Torah provides the occasion for the visualization of the luminous glory or the divine name. This nexus of motifs is epitomized in Eleazar of Worms' statement that the one who studies Torah has the effect of mentioning the name which is understood in the Pietistic writings as a technical mystical praxis that results in a contemplative vision of the luminous glory.*

### A. Introduction

While much has been written about the pietism (*ḥasidut*),<sup>1</sup> the esoteric theosophy (*torat ha-sod*), especially the doctrine of the

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<sup>1</sup> Some representative studies include: M. Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesen und der Cultur der Abendländischen Juden* (Wien, 1880), vol. I, chaps. 5–8; Y. N. Shimoni, "German Pietism in the Middle Ages" [Hebrew], *Ha-Ṣefirah* (1917), nos. 12, 13, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, republished in I. Marcus, ed., *The Religious and Social Ideas of the Jewish Pietists in Medieval Germany* (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 47–81; Y. Baer, "The Socio-Religious Orientation of *Sefer Ḥasidim*" [Hebrew], *Zion* 3 (1938): 1–50 (English translation in *Binah: Studies in Jewish*

*kavod*,<sup>2</sup> as well as the magical and folkloristic traditions<sup>3</sup> cultivated by the Ḥaside Ashkenaz active in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, relatively little attention has been paid to their treatment of ritual from a decidedly mystical vantage point.<sup>4</sup> This is all the more surprising insofar as Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (ca. 1165–ca. 1230), one of the central figures in the main circle of Pietists

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*History, Thought, and Culture*, ed. J. Dan [New York, 1989], 2:57–96; I. G. Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden, 1981); idem, "The Devotional Ideals of Ashkenazic Pietism," in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Green (New York, 1986), pp. 356–366; P. Schäfer, "The Ideal of Piety of the Ashkenazi Ḥasidim and Its Roots in Jewish Tradition," *Jewish History* 4 (1990): 9–23.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Epstein, *Mi-Qadmoniyot ha-Yehudim*, ed. A. M. Haberman (Jerusalem, 1957), pp. 226–248; G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1954), pp. 80–118; idem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 41–42, 97–123, 180–198, 215–216; J. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of the Ashkenazi Ḥasidim* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1968); A. Farber, *The Concept of the Merkabah in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Esotericism: Sod ha-ʿEgoz and its Development* [Hebrew], Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1986; M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), pp. 130–132; E. R. Wolfson, "The Image of Jacob Engraved upon the Throne: Further Speculation on the Esoteric Doctrine of the German Pietists" [Hebrew], in *Ephraim Gottlieb Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York, 1939); G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1969), pp. 158–204; J. Dan, *Studies in Ashkenazi-Ḥasidic Literature* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan, 1975), pp. 9–25, 34–43; idem, "Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah," *AJS Review* 5 (1980): 25–40; M. Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany, 1990), pp. 54–80.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Scholem (*Major Trends*, p. 90) who notes that one of the subjects cultivated by the German Pietists and neglected by the old *merkavah* mystics was "an extensive speculation concerning the 'reasons of the Torah,' i.e., above all the true motives of the commandments." See also idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 41–42. In spite of his calling our attention to this important aspect of the pietistic worldview, Scholem in fact spends little time discussing it in any detail. An exception worth noting is his discussion of the German Pietists' treatment of prayer; cf. *Major Trends*, pp. 100–103; J. Dan, "The Emergence of Mystical Prayer," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan and F. Talmage (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 85–120. See also the discussion of fear and love of God in the thought of the German Pietists in Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 95–96; G. Vajda, *L'Amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du moyen âge* (Paris, 1957), pp. 149–162. Vajda briefly discusses (pp. 154–155) the mystical intention (*kawwanah*) of prayer according to the Pietists. On pietism as a preparation for mystical experience in prayer in the case of Eleazar, see the perceptive comments of Marcus, *Piety and Society*, pp. 117–118. On the fear and love of God in Ḥaside Ashkenaz, see Marcus, *Piety and Society*, pp. 28–36; M. Harris, "The Concept of Love in *Sepher Hasidim*," *JQR* 50 (1959): 13–44.

led by Judah ben Samuel he-Ḥasid of Regensburg (ca. 1150–1217), in one place includes *sod ha-miṣwot* (the secret of the commandments) in his enumeration of the three esoteric disciplines within Judaism, the others being *sod maʿaseh bereshit* (the secret of the account of creation) and *sod maʿaseh merkavah* (the secret of the account of the chariot).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in one passage from *Sefer Ḥasidim* the requirements specified for one “who wishes to enter into the depths of piety, the depths of the laws of the Creator, and the depths of his glory” include the conditions mentioned in the Mishnah (Ḥag 2.1) in connection with one who wishes to study matters pertaining to the chariot.<sup>6</sup> In a second passage from *Sefer Ḥasidim*, the disclosure of the reasons for the commandments (*taʿame torah*)<sup>7</sup> is treated as an esoteric matter (*sod*) to be revealed only to one who is worthy.<sup>8</sup> The centrality of the fulfillment of the commandments as well as an understanding of their reasons for the proper gnosis of God is underscored by Eleazar in a passage from his commentary on the prayers:

A person is obligated to perfect himself by establishing the commandments of his Creator and arranging his actions; then he will know his Creator. . . . We have received all the commandments from the holy sages, and there is no difference with respect to

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Sefer Raziʿel* (Amsterdam, 1701), 7c. The text has been printed as well in *Sode Razaya*<sup>2</sup>, ed. S. Weiss (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 1. Cf. the enumeration of supernal secrets (סְתֵרֵי עֲלִיּוֹנִים) in the version of Eleazar’s *ʿEser Hawwayot* (derived from his *Sefer ha-Shem*) in MS Munich 43, fol. 225a: *maʿaseh merkavah*, *maʿaseh bereshit*, and *sode taʿame ha-torah* (on this locution see below nn. 7–8). See, however, MS British Museum 737, fol. 178a, where the last item is given as *sode torah*. Cf. Eleazar’s enumeration of esoteric disciplines in *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, chap. 2 (Bene-Beraq, 1987), p. 14: the secret of the chariot (*sod ha-merkavah*), the secret of creation (*sod maʿaseh bereshit*), and the secret of unity (*sod ha-yihud*). See also *Sefer ha-Roqeah* (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 23: “The Book of the Chariot (*Sefer ha-Merkavah*), the Book of the Account of Creation (*Sefer Maʿaseh Bereshit*), the Book of Formation (*Sefer Yeṣirah*), the Book of [Divine] Names (*Sefer Shemot*), and the Book of the Glory (*Sefer ha-Kavod*) should not be written in this book, as well as the secrets of the fifty gates of wisdom and the Alef-Bet . . . ‘The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him’ (Ps 25:14).”

<sup>6</sup> *Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. J. Wistinetzki and J. Freimann (Frankfurt am Main, 1924), §984. This passage is mentioned by Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. bPes 119a; bSan 21b.

<sup>8</sup> *Sefer Ḥasidim*, §1477; cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 371, n. 30; idem, *Kabbalah*, p. 41.

the commandments between their words and the words of the Torah, for these too were given to us, and they received them from their fathers and their fathers from the prophets, and everything is [received] from God through Moses, the reason and how to perform it.<sup>9</sup>

In this study I shall focus on the treatment of one *mišwah* in particular in the writings of the Pietists belonging to the Kalonymide circle, namely, Torah study. It is not my intention to present a comprehensive treatment of *talmud torah* in all of its relevant aspects in the thought of Ḥaside Ashkenaz; rather I am interested specifically in the mystical significance which this ritual assumes within their overall theosophic orientation.

Let me begin by noting that in the two major discussions of *talmud torah* in the Pietists' corpus, the *Sefer Ḥasidim*,<sup>10</sup> the bulk of which is generally attributed to Judah,<sup>11</sup> and *Sefer ha-Roqeah* of Eleazar,<sup>12</sup> there are hardly any esoteric or mystical implications ascribed to this most basic of Jewish rites. Whatever innovative ideas are expressed by the Pietists with respect to the significance accorded to *talmud torah* within their system of religious and social values, especially in reaction to the emerging Tosafist movement of northern France and Germany,<sup>13</sup> the approach is, on the surface,

<sup>9</sup> MS Paris 772, fol. 21a.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Sefer Ḥasidim*, §§747–856.

<sup>11</sup> It is assumed that sections 1–16 of *Sefer Ḥasidim* (ed. Wistinetzki and Freimann, pp. 1–22) are part of the *Sefer ha-Yir'ah* of R. Samuel the Pietist, R. Judah's father. Cf. Friemann's introduction to *Sefer Ḥasidim*, pp. 12–14; Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 56–57, n. 24; and the convenient review of the *status quaestionis* in S. Kogut, "The Language of 'Sefer Ḥasidim,' Its Linguistic Background, and Methods of Research," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 2, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 95–96; and Ivan Marcus' introduction to the facsimile edition of *Sefer Ḥasidim* MS. Parma H 3280, *Quntresim: Meqorot u-Meqarim*, 66–67 (Jerusalem, 1985), pp. 13–21.

<sup>12</sup> *Sefer ha-Roqeah*, pp. 11–13. A possible exception is Eleazar's description of the wisdom of Talmud (חכמת התלמוד) in the introduction to *Sefer ha-Hokhmah*, according to which Talmud encompasses "great penetration" (עומק גדול), i.e., esoteric traditions derived from that which is encoded in Scripture. For discussion of this text, see Marcus, *Piety and Society*, pp. 69–70.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. H. Soloveitchik, "Three Themes in the *Sefer Ḥasidim*," *AJS Review* 1 (1976): 311–357; I. Ta-Shema, "The Practice of *Talmud-Torah* as a Social and Religious Problem in *Sefer Ḥasidim*" [Hebrew], *Bar-Ilan* 14–15 (1977): 98–113; Marcus, *Piety and Society*, pp. 102–105. On the educational theory and practice in the teachings of the German Pietists, see now E. Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Detroit, 1992), pp. 86–99.

entirely normative, drawing extensively from talmudic, midrashic, and earlier halakhic literature. Despite surface appearances, however, a careful study of the writings of the Ḥaside Ashkenaz, many of which are still available only in manuscript, indicates that a mystical conception of Torah study does indeed underlie many of their theosophical and pietistic remarks. This conception, needless to say, is rooted in the Pietists' view of Torah. Hence, to appreciate the treatment of the study of Torah as a mystical praxis in the thought of the German Pietists it is necessary to have a clear understanding of their conception of Torah. My analysis will focus on three critical aspects of the Pietists' view of Torah, which are to an extent based on earlier aggadic or mystical texts: (1) Torah as the divine names; (2) Torah as the singular divine name (the Tetragrammaton); and (3) Torah as the divine glory. Only by analyzing these issues in a thorough manner will we be in a position to uncover the mystical significance accorded to Torah study in the esoteric teachings of the German Pietists.

Before proceeding with an analysis of these three motifs, a brief methodological observation will be in order. Like many other ideas that are essential to the Pietists' religious and spiritual outlook, their idea of Torah is never stated in a systematic manner. On the contrary, this idea is alluded to in many places, expressed through such hermeneutical techniques as numerology, letter associations, permutation of letters, and so on. It is the task of the reader to employ these devices as a means to decode the esoteric meaning embedded in the literary works of Ḥaside Ashkenaz, just as they felt that the application of these methods to traditional texts, scriptural, rabbinic, and liturgical, was necessary to ascertain their inner sense. A systematic presentation of the theosophy of Ḥaside Ashkenaz is helpful, although not decisive, as a tool to uncover the doctrines which informed their esotericism and which they considered to be the ancient truths of Judaism. Consistency is rarely the measure of human creativity, and it is surely not so in the case of Judah the Pious, Eleazar of Worms, and other colleagues or disciples who belonged to their circle.

### *B. Torah as the Divine Names*

I begin with an idea whose precise origin is still somewhat uncertain, but which was expressed centuries before the rise of the Pietists in medieval Europe, the notion that, in addition to the



normative reading of Scripture as narrative and code of law, the Torah yields an alternative reading, one that is essentially magical in nature, i.e., different names of God may be extracted from select verses through various hermeneutical devices.<sup>14</sup> While this idea may have originated in late antiquity, influencing specific magical and incantational practices, it is articulated as a distinct principle in the introduction to the work *Shimmushe Torah*, published separately under the title *Ma<sup>c</sup>ayan Hokhmah*, which is to be placed in the gaonic period. The text relates that when Moses ascended to heaven to receive the Torah, each of the angels befriended him and “transmitted to him a cure and the secret of the names (*sod ha-shemot*) which may be derived from each and every section [of the Torah], and all [the ways] that they are used [theurgically].”<sup>15</sup> Moshe Idel has argued that this conception of Torah is the underlying intent of several aggadic or midrashic sources and is found as well in the literary compositions belonging to the *Hekhalot* corpus, the Jewish mystical speculation dated to the talmudic and post-talmudic eras. More specifically, Idel suggested that the esoteric sense of Torah, referred to frequently as *raz* (mystery or secret),<sup>16</sup> consisted of reading Torah as an amalgam of names, and in some cases these names were connected to the measurements or dimensions of God’s limbs, fully articulated in the *Shi<sup>c</sup>ur Qomah* material.<sup>17</sup> Thus, verses of Torah are transformed into the anthropomorphic shape of the deity, an idea formulated explicitly by thirteenth-century theosophic kabbalists who interpreted the words of Torah as symbols for the divine pleroma which is characterized, *inter alia*, as the macroanthropos. Idel suggests, moreover, that precisely some such conception is operative in the Ḥaside Ashkenaz,

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 37–39; idem, “The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala,” *Diogenes* 79 (1972): 76–77; M. Idel, “The Concept of Torah in the Hekhalot and Its Evolution in the Kabbalah” [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 23–49.

<sup>15</sup> MS Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Plut. 44. 13, fol. 71b; and the printed version in Adolf Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (Jerusalem, 1967), 1:61. The text was already cited by Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 38, and by Idel, “The Concept of Torah,” p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> For discussion of this critical term in the *Hekhalot* corpus, see R. Elior, “The Concept of God in Hekhalot Mysticism” [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 20, 35–36 (English translation in *Binah: Studies in Jewish History, Thought, and Culture*, ed. J. Dan [New York, 1989], 2:101, 111–112).

<sup>17</sup> See reference in n. 14.

for whom the older mystical traditions developed within a new context informed in part by the philosophical or scientific writings of Saadiah Gaon, Shabbetai Donnolo, and Abraham ibn Ezra.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, as Idel noted, a somewhat different idea to the effect that the Torah in its entirety (and not simply select verses) can be transmuted through a new division of letters into names of God was expressed in Eleazar's time by authors living in different geographical areas, for example, in Italy by Šedeqiah ben Abraham Anav, author of the halakhic compendium *Shibbole ha-Leqet*, and in Spain by Naḥmanides in the introduction to his commentary on the Torah and in his sermon *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*.<sup>19</sup> Internal evidence may be adduced as well to support the contention that the Pietists cultivated such a tradition regarding the Torah. Thus, in the introduction to the pseudo-Hai commentary on the forty-two letter name of God, included in Eleazar's *Sefer ha-Ḥokhmah*,<sup>20</sup> there appears to be a reference to this idea: "The holy Torah is one Torah without separation, and all the names of the Holy One, blessed be he, for this name too derives from Genesis, and this one from Exodus."<sup>21</sup> The critical passage in the extant manuscripts is *הוא תורה אחת בלי פירוד וכל שמותיו של הקב"ה*. Joseph Dan already suggested that perhaps the latter part of the text should be emended to *וכלה שמותיו של הקב"ה*, i.e., the Torah in its entirety consists of the names of God,<sup>22</sup> a formulation which is very close to that used by Naḥmanides, *כל התורה כולה שמותיו*

<sup>18</sup> Idel, "The Concept of Torah," pp. 47–48. Cf. P. Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 291–292, who seems to suggest that in the relevant textual units of the *Hekhalot* literature, the word *raz* (mystery or secret) is used to designate the esoteric knowledge of the names of God or of the angels; knowledge of Torah results from the proper use of these names but is not itself necessarily these names. Hence, the divine (or angelic) names provide the esoteric keys which help one gain knowledge of Torah, but are not themselves depicted as the content of that knowledge.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Idel, "The Concept of Torah," p. 54, n. 102.

<sup>20</sup> For discussion of this text, see Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 98, 184–185; Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 118–129; Idel, *New Perspectives*, p. 195; Farber, "The Concept of the Merkabah," pp. 231–244, especially 236–237.

<sup>21</sup> MSS Oxford 1568, fol. 1b and 1812, fol. 54a; the text is cited as well in Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, p. 124.

<sup>22</sup> *The Esoteric Theology*, p. 124, n. 45. See also M. Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This," in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Literary and Religious Virtuosity*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, 1983), p. 54, n. 10.

של הקב"ה.<sup>23</sup> It is clear that the meaning of the passage is in accord with this suggested textual emendation, even if at present no manuscript evidence has surfaced to support it. That is, the intent of this passage is that the divine names can be extracted from Scripture, for the latter is made up of these names. Confirmation of such a tradition is found in various passages of Eleazar's writings, although I have not been able to locate this exact formulation.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, as I will suggest below, the claim that the Torah comprises the divine names in the case of Ḥaside Ashkenaz is related to the theosophic identification of the Torah and the glory.

### C. Torah as the Singular Divine Name

In addition to the tradition that the Torah is made up of divine names or that these names may be extracted from the Torah, there is evidence in the pietistic writings of another tradition, also found in kabbalistic works from the period under discussion, that the Torah is the one name of God, the Tetragrammaton.<sup>25</sup> This tradition is expressed, for example, in the following passage which

<sup>23</sup> *Perush ha-Ramban 'al ha-Torah*, ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1984), 1:6. A similar formulation occurs in the introduction to the gaonic magical work *Shimmushe Tehillim*; cf. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, p. 109. It is likely, however, that this statement is a later addition to the text; cf. Idel, "The Concept of the Torah," p. 54, n. 102. See also the formulation in *Sefer Razi'el*, 25c, alluded to by Trachtenberg, p. 314, n. 4.

<sup>24</sup> In this context it is of interest to note that Joseph ben Meir Teomim (ca. 1727–1792), in his supercommentary, *ʿEshel Avraham* (part of the *Peri Megadim*) on the commentary of Abraham Abele ben Hayyim ha-Levi Gombiner (ca. 1637–1683), *Magen Avraham*, to *Shulḥan ʿArukh*, *ʿOrah Hayyim* 139:6, after referring to a citation from Eleazar of Worms' *Sefer ha-Roqeah* by Elijah ben Benjamin Wolf Shapira (1660–1712) in his *ʿEliyahu Rabbah* (Sulzbach, 1757) 44b, concerning the necessity to bow down before the Torah scroll, remarks: "One bows down to the Torah, for it is [made up of] the names of God, blessed be he." This text is cited by Idel, "The Concept of the Torah," p. 54, n. 102, but he inadvertently gave the source as Abraham David Oppenheim's commentary on *ʿOrah Hayyim* also entitled *ʿEshel Avraham*. The comment is not part of the citation from Shapira but is rather an interpretative gloss of Teomim. What is most striking is that the passage from *Sefer ha-Roqeah*, in fact a tradition which Eleazar brings in the name of Hizqiyah, the brother of Raban (see below, n. 115), is actually a tacit polemic against the view that the Torah can in any way be identified with God.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 39–44; I. Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1975), 2:372; Idel, "The Concept of the Torah," pp. 49–84.

preserves a teaching stemming from the Kalonymide circle of the Ḥaside Ashkenaz:

תורה is numerically equivalent to שמו [his name].<sup>26</sup> There are those who say that [the first two commandments of the Decalogue] “I [the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage]” and “You shall have [no other gods besides Me]” (Exod 20:2–3) were heard from the mouth of God.<sup>27</sup> “The Lord’s name is proclaimed over you” (שם יהוה) נקרא עליך, Deut 28:10).<sup>28</sup> The initials [of the words: שם יהוה נקרא] are ש״ן.<sup>29</sup> This refers to what is said regarding the ש״ן of the phylacteries, that it is a tradition given to Moses at Sinai.<sup>30</sup> The four-letter name [יהוה] according to א״ת ב״ש<sup>31</sup> is מצפ״ן, which equals ש״ן [i.e., 40 + 90 + 80 + 90 = 300].<sup>32</sup>

According to this text the Torah is identified with the divine name which is further associated with the letter *shin* of the phylacteries,

<sup>26</sup> The numerical equivalence here eludes me, as the word תורה = 611 whereas שמו = 346. Ivan Marcus suggested to me that perhaps in this context the word שמו actually stands for one of the names which through some numerical device may come close to the value of the word Torah. Indeed, as will be seen below, the hidden letters (נעלם) of the name אדני equal 606. If we then add the four letters of the name אדני to 606, we get the sum of 610 which is one short of the desired 611, the numerical value of the word Torah.

<sup>27</sup> bMak 24a; bHor 8a.

<sup>28</sup> The association of the name of God mentioned in this verse and the phylacteries is found in earlier sources. Cf. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Deut 28:10; bBer 6a.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Jacob ben Asher, *Perush Ba'al ha-Turim 'al ha-Torah*, on Deut 28:10 (Bene-Beraq, 1985), p. 431; *Perush ha-Roqeah 'al ha-Torah*, ed. Ch. Konyevsky (Bene-Beraq, 1986), 3:251. Regarding the attribution of this text to Eleazar, cf. J. Dan, “The Ashkenazi ‘Gates of Wisdom’,” in *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati (Louvain, 1980), pp. 183–189.

<sup>30</sup> yMeg 1.9; bShab 28b, 62a; bMen 35a. For other relevant references, cf. E. R. Wolfson, “Circumcision and the Divine Name: A Study in the Transmission of Esoteric Doctrine,” *JQR* 78 (1987): 81, n. 8.

<sup>31</sup> That is, the method of interchanging the first letter (א) of the alphabet with the last (ת) and the second (ב) with the next to last (ש), and so on. Using this method the letters יהוה = מצפ״ן. This tradition occurs frequently in German pietistic literature; cf. Abraham ben Azriel, *Sefer Arugat ha-Bošem*, ed. E. E. Urbach (Jerusalem, 1947), 2:154, n. 1. See also *Perush Haftarah*, MS Berlin Or. 942, fol. 154a. Regarding the use of this name in earlier Jewish mysticism cf. K. Herrmann, “Die Gottesnamen כד״ץ und מצפ״ן in der Hekhalot-Literatur,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 16 (1988): 75–87.

<sup>32</sup> MS Oxford 1408, fol. 48d.

inasmuch as the *atbash* of the Tetragrammaton is מַצַּפ"ן which equals 300, the numerical value of *shin* as well.<sup>33</sup> The latter tradition appears in a variety of contexts in the German pietistic writings which indicate clearly that the *shin* of the phylacteries assumes hypostatic dimensions.<sup>34</sup> What is distinctive about the text cited above is the specific correlation of the name and the Torah.

Reference to the identification of the name and the Torah is also found in the anonymous theosophic work extant in MSS Oxford 1566 and 1567, entitled *Sefer ha-Kavod*, which Dan attributed to Judah the Pious, although he insisted that this text is not to be identified with the *Sefer ha-Kavod* of Judah cited in other sources.<sup>35</sup> The specific context in which this idea appears is a rather complicated numerological exegesis (*gematriyah*) which sets out to prove that the 613 commandments are comprised within the divine name (יהוה) and within the appellation (אדני): when the hidden letters (נעלם) of the word אדני (i.e., the inarticulate letters which spell each of the pronounced letters in full; e.g., the ל and פ of אל"ף) are added, the sum equals 606 (i.e., ל, פ, ל, ת, ו, ו, ו, ד = 30 + 80 + 30 + 400 + 6 + 50 + 6 + 4 = 606). To this sum one must add the נעלם of the two letters of the Tetragrammaton which have not yet been counted, the ה and the ו, which equal 7 (i.e., א and ו, 1 + 6 = 7). The total of the two computations is 613 corresponding to the 613 commandments. It should be evident that the Pietists have come up with a *gematriyah* in order to substantiate an already existing tradition regarding the inclusion of the Torah, or its 613 commandments, within the divine name. Thus, in the aforementioned text, it is stated explicitly:

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<sup>33</sup> Another tradition which may be of relevance here is the association of the letter *shin* with Jacob. Cf. *Sefer Razi'el*, 8a–b; *Sode Razaya*<sup>2</sup>, ed. Weiss, pp. 4–5; *Sefer ha-Hokhmah*, MS Oxford 1812, fol. 62a; *Perush ha-Merkavah*, MS Paris 850, fol. 69a. I have discussed at length these and other relevant sources in my study referred to above, n. 2. According to several pietistic sources, the name Jacob symbolizes the Torah which is said to be comprised within the Decalogue, for the latter itself is represented by the name Jacob: the first letter of this name, י, represents the ten commandments, and the remaining three letters, עקב, correspond to the 172 words contained in the Decalogue. Cf. MS Oxford 1566, fol. 168a; *Perush ha-Tefillot*, MS Paris 772, fols. 28a–b, 84a; MS Cambridge Add. 644, fol. 19a.

<sup>34</sup> See references in the previous note.

<sup>35</sup> Dan, *Studies in Ashkenazi-Hasidic Literature*, p. 136.

And why are the 613 [alluded to] in the name? On account of the fact that it is written, "If you fail to observe faithfully all the terms of this teaching that are written in this book, to reverence this honored and awesome name, the Lord your God" (Deut 28:58). Thus the entire Torah is made dependent on the glorious name . . . and He considered [literally, weighed] the whole Torah equal to the name. . . . And this [is the meaning of the verse] "[From there the ark of God to which the name was attached], the name of the Lord of Hosts enthroned on the cherubim" (2 Sam 6:2). The explicit name is written on the forehead of the cherubim, and this is "the name of the Lord enthroned upon the cherubim."<sup>36</sup>

The full implication of this text may be gathered from a second passage in the same composition which also draws upon the numerical equation of the two names and the 613 commandments:

All the *mišwot* are alluded to in the explicit name [יהוה] and in the appellation [אדני] to indicate that his name and the appellation are resting in the ark, and the cherubim are above [it], one corresponding to the name and the other to the appellation, and the commandments are in the ark, and the Torah scroll is there. . . . Therefore one who studies all the *mišwot* and fulfills them, his soul is bound under the throne of glory,<sup>37</sup> as it is written, "The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life" (1 Sam 25:29).<sup>38</sup>

The point is made in yet a third passage from the same work:

The hidden letters [of יהוה and אדני] equal 613, corresponding to the positive and negative commandments, for the one who keeps the commandments has a God, and the names [are united] through his assistance. . . . These two names were on the foreheads of the cherubim, one on the forehead of one cherub and the other on the second.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> MS Oxford 1566, fol. 42a.

<sup>37</sup> A view frequently expressed in pietistic writings based on bShab 152b and its parallels. For references to primary and secondary literature relevant to this theme, cf. Wolfson, "Circumcision and the Divine Name," pp. 91–92, n. 41.

<sup>38</sup> MS Oxford 1566, fol. 38a.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., fol. 87b.

The idea expressed in these texts is found also in Eleazar's *Sefer ha-Shem* in language that almost exactly parallels the second text cited above:

אֲדֹנִי [are the letters of] אֱלֹהֵי יְיָ נִוּן יוֹד [Do not consider the first [of the letters: אֲדֹנִי] but that which results from them [i.e., the hidden letters that make up each letter]: לִיף לִ"ת ו ו"ן לִיף [= 110 + 430 + 6 + 56 + 10 = 612] . . . And if you add to them א [= 1] from the [letter] ה [i.e., ה"א of יהוה] then the sum will be 613, corresponding to the 613 commandments, 365 prohibitions and 248 proscriptions. That is to say, the reason why the name is written יהוה and pronounced אֲדֹנִי is because together they bear the 613 commandments. . . . Why are all the commandments alluded to in the explicit name [יהוה] and the appellation [אֲדֹנִי]? To inform one that his name and its appellation were resting in the ark, and the cherubim were above, one corresponding to the name and the other to the appellation. And the commandments were in the ark, and the Torah scroll is there, as it is written, "[From there the ark of God to which the name was attached], the name of the Lord of Hosts enthroned on the cherubim" (2 Sam 6:2). Therefore, the one who studies all the commandments and fulfills them, his soul is bound to the bundle of life under the throne of glory.<sup>40</sup>

The pietistic teaching is based on an earlier rabbinic idea found in several sources, e.g., tSoṭ 7.17 and ySoṭ 8.3, to the effect that the name of God was placed in the ark, a view which complements the notion that the Torah, or the tablets, were placed in the ark between the two cherubim.<sup>41</sup> According to one source, bBB 14b, this view is linked exegetically to 2 Sam 6:2, the verse which figures prominently in the pietistic exegesis. More importantly, we find the following interpretation of the verse attributed to R. Shim'on bar Yoḥai: "This teaches that the name and all of its appellations were placed in the ark."<sup>42</sup> According to the pietistic transformation of

<sup>40</sup> MS British Museum 737, fol. 212b.

<sup>41</sup> The correlation of the Torah scroll and the tablets in the ark is evident as well in *Sefer Ḥasidim* §§695–696, 698.

<sup>42</sup> See also bSoṭ 42b–43a; *NumR* 4.20. Cf. the statement from Ludwig Blau's *Das altjüdische Zauberwesen* (Strassburg, 1898), cited by Scholem, "The Name of God," p. 66.

this earlier tradition,<sup>43</sup> the Torah contained in the ark is linked specifically to the name יהוה and to its appellation אדני, which in turn correspond to the two cherubim above the ark. From other contexts in the pietistic writings it is evident that the cherubim represent the visible manifestation of the glory, a point often made through the numerical equivalence of the word כרובים and מראה כבוד.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, in other passages we find that R. Judah and/or his disciples note that the title “Lord, God of Israel” (יהוה אלהי ישראל), one of the names of the glory, equals 613, for the glory assumes or receives this name as a result of Israel’s fulfillment of the commandments. For example, in one text we read: “Therefore [the expression] יהוה אלהי ישראל is numerically equal to 613 [ $10 + 5 + 6 + 5 + 1 + 30 + 5 + 10 + 10 + 300 + 200 + 1 + 30$ ], for he is the God of those who receive the Torah in its entirety.”<sup>45</sup> The point is made more explicitly in a second passage: “Thus says the Lord, God of Israel. This name יהוה אלהי ישראל numerically equals 613. [The name] includes Israel, for [the glory] is not called by this name except when they fulfill the 613 commandments.”<sup>46</sup> Given the correlation of the number 613 with the name and the appellation, which correspond to the cherubim, on the one hand, and the title of the glory, “Lord, God of Israel,” on the other, it is possible that implied in these passages is some form of identification of the Torah and the glory, a point to which I will return in the final section of this study. In any event, it is evident that the Pietists identified the Torah and the name (in its orthographic and phonetic forms), and further correlated the latter with the cherubim. It is possible that such a tradition underlies the following statement in *Sefer Hasidim*:

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, fol. 190a: “Thus the tablets were 216 handsbreadths, each tablet was [in length] six handsbreadths by six, equalling 36, and its width was 3 handsbreadths.  $3 \times 36$  equals 108. Thus was the [measure] of the second one as well. The sum, then, is 216, for the name was placed in the ark together with its appellations.” See *ibid.*, fol. 189b. On the measurements of the tablets in older rabbinic sources, cf. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1968), 6:60, n. 308.

<sup>44</sup> See, e.g., *Sefer ha-Roqeah*, p. 22.

<sup>45</sup> MS Oxford 1566, fol. 38a. Cf. Isaac ben Judah ha-Levi, *Sefer Pa'aneah Raza* (Amsterdam, 1867), 63a: “Turn from your blazing anger” (Exod 32:12): When this is said in the synagogue it should be prefaced with [the expression] יהוה אלהי ישראל, for this numerically equals 613. When the 613 are mentioned, God, blessed be he, causes his Presence to dwell and turns away from his anger.”

<sup>46</sup> MS Oxford 1566, fol. 100b.



Why were there two cherubim and the word [of God] between the two cherubim? To teach that two should be occupied with [the study of] Torah together, as it says, "In this vein have those who revere the Lord been talking to one another . . . and a scroll of remembrance has been written at his behest concerning those who revere the Lord and esteem his name" (Mal 3:15). [The expressions "those who revere" and "those who esteem" לִירְאֵי וְלִחוֹשְׁבֵי] are numerically equal to the 613 commandments.<sup>47</sup>

More explicit references to the identification of Torah and the name are to be found in Eleazar's writings. Thus, for example, in his *Sefer ha-Shem*, the text that deals with different interpretations of the divine names and which is, consequently, the most esoteric writing in the pietistic library, Eleazar writes: "יהוה" is numerically equal to twenty-six, for the Torah, which was given after twenty-six generations,<sup>48</sup> is dependent upon the great name."<sup>49</sup> In a second passage from this work the Tetragrammaton, which when spelled out in full numerically equals forty-five (י"ד ה"א ו"א ו"ד ה"א), is connected with both the forty-five righteous ones upon whom the *Shekhinah* dwells and with the Torah which is said to be divided into forty-five.<sup>50</sup> The latter idea involves both a complicated numerical sequence which I will not discuss here, and a simpler computation, namely, the Torah comprises five books and was given to Moses in the course of forty days.<sup>51</sup> The same tradition figures in yet another passage from *Sefer ha-Shem* wherein the correspondence of the Torah and the name is given a decidedly mystical valence:

The four letters יהוה:<sup>52</sup> [the letters יהו] numerically equal 21, and when one considers the pronunciation with an א the sum is

<sup>47</sup> *Sefer Hasidim*, §780.

<sup>48</sup> For references to this idea in rabbinic literature, see Ginzberg, *Legends* 6:30, n. 177.

<sup>49</sup> MS British Museum 737, fol. 173a; MS Munich 43, fol. 223b.

<sup>50</sup> MS British Museum 737, fol. 181b.

<sup>51</sup> For references, cf. Ginzberg, *Legends* 6:49, n. 255, and 6:51, n. 264.

<sup>52</sup> This form may have been suggested by Qoh 11:3; cf. M. Reisel, *The Mysterious Name of Y.H.W.H.* (Assen, 1957), pp. 39–41, 60–61, and other references given on p. 104, n. 206. It should be noted that these four letters were considered by various medieval writers to constitute one of the forms of the Tetragrammaton, indeed the

22, corresponding to the 22 letters of Torah. This indicates that [with respect to] the one who studies Torah it is as if he mentioned the name (הלומד תורה כאלו מזכיר השם).<sup>53</sup>

To appreciate what is contained in the epigrammatic formulation which concludes the above citation, הלומד תורה כאלו מזכיר השם, it is necessary to point out that the expressions *le-hazkir ha-shem*, or *hazkarat ha-shem*, are employed in the writings of Eleazar in a technical sense, following the usage in rabbinic sources and several *Hekhalot* compositions, especially the unit published by Scholem, *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, and the *Merkavah Rabbah*, both of which exerted an important influence on Ḥaside Ashkenaz. To mention the name is to utter the Tetragrammaton (or perhaps another one of God's names) in some mystical or theurgical context. More importantly, Eleazar considered *hazkarat ha-shem* to be part of the esoteric transmission of the name which required a specific ceremony involving various rituals and techniques. Thus, in one place in *Sefer ha-Shem* he says, "The one who studies the name (הלומד מן השם) must wear nice clothing, for the name is not mentioned (אין מזכירין את השם) except by one who wears nice clothing."<sup>54</sup> It can be shown, moreover, from a comparison of the description of the ceremony required for transmission of the name

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hidden name of God. In thirteenth-century mystical literature this tradition especially informed the *Hug ha-Iyyun* as well as Abraham Abulafia. Cf. G. Scholem, "Śeridim Ḥadashim mi-Kitve R. 'Azri'el mi-Geronah," *Sefer Zikaron le-Asher Gulak weli-Shemu'el Klein* (Jerusalem, 1942), p. 219, n. 2; idem, *Origins*, p. 315, nn. 238–239, and p. 337; M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, 1988), pp. 18, 22, 31 (and see especially Abulafia's *Sefer Ḥayye ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, MS Oxford 1582, fol. 47a). A possible polemic against this view in the writings of the Provençal kabbalist R. Isaac the Blind has been noted by H. Pedaya, "'Flaw' and 'Correction' in the Concept of the Godhead in the Teachings of Rabbi Isaac the Blind" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 182. On the tradition regarding the four vowel letters, אהי"ו functioning as a divine name, cf. Abraham ibn Ezra, *Sefer Šaḥot* (Fürth, 1827), 4b, 47b; idem, *Sefer ha-Shem*, ed. G. H. Lippmann (Fürth, 1834), 6b–7a; idem, *Perush ha-Torah* on Exod 3:15, ed. A. Weiser (Jerusalem, 1977), 2:27; Judah Halevi, *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, IV, 3 (ed. Even-Shemuel [Tel-Aviv, 1972], p. 157). For a mystical treatment of this tradition, which may reflect some ashkenazi influence as well, cf. R. Asher ben David, *Perush Shem ha-Meforash*, ed. M. Hasidah, *Ha-Segullah*, 2 (1934): 3.

<sup>53</sup> MS British Museum 737, fol. 190b.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., fol. 172a. Cf. *Ešer Hawwayot*, MS Paris 825, fols. 193a, 199b.

which begins *Sefer ha-Shem*<sup>55</sup> and the parallel description of the ceremony required for transmission of knowledge concerning the chariot found in Eleazar's *Perush ha-Merkavah*,<sup>56</sup> that for Eleazar study of the *merkavah* is identical with knowledge of the name.<sup>57</sup> In the relevant passage from the latter work Eleazar links together the one who is occupied with the chariot or the glorious name, העוסק במרכבה או בשם הנכבד.<sup>58</sup> It is thus evident that mentioning the name provides the occasion for a contemplative vision of the name which is comparable to, indeed identical with, a vision of the luminous glory.

Any number of texts could be cited to prove the point, but it will suffice here to recall one idea repeated on various occasions in the writings of the Pietists: mentioning the divine name had the theurgical impact of creating a luminous garment for the glory, made up of the four letters of the divine name. I will cite one representative text from Eleazar's commentary on the liturgy:

When Israel blesses the name of his glory, the glory is increased.<sup>59</sup> . . . It is written, "Your glorious name" (1 Chron 29:13), for [the name] is clothed and glorified in splendor. [The expression] "Your glorious name" [לשם תפארתך] is numerically

<sup>55</sup> MS British Museum 737, fols. 165b–166a.

<sup>56</sup> MS Paris 850, fols. 165b–166a. Cf. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 74–76; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 136.

<sup>57</sup> The association of the chariot vision and knowledge of the name is found in ancient Jewish mystical sources as well as in gaonic literature. Cf. Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 14–17; idem, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, 1989), pp. 49–53. This association is also well attested in northern French authors who may have influenced the German Pietists; see Pedaya, "Correction' and 'Flaw'," pp. 157–158.

<sup>58</sup> MS Paris 850, fol. 59a.

<sup>59</sup> This formulation (כבוד מתרבה) occurs several times in Eleazar's writings. Cf. *Sode Razayya*<sup>2</sup>, ed. I. Kamelhar (Bilgoraj, 1936), p. 41; *Perush ha-Tefillot*, MS Paris 772, fol. 38b (הדר הכבוד מתרבה), 39a (הכבוד והמלכות מתרבה); MS Oxford 1204, fols. 11b, 112b; *Perush ha-Merkavah*, MS Paris 850, fol. 122a (הכבוד והזהר מתרבה). Cf. Judah ben Barzillai, *Perush Sefer Yeşirah*, ed. S. J. Halberstam (Berlin, 1885), p. 37, where the expression הכבוד המרובה occurs. See also *NumR* 14.22. See also the *yoşer* for Rosh ha-Shanah in the *Liturgical Poems of R. Shim'on bar Yishāq* [Hebrew], ed. A. M. Haberman (Berlin-Jerusalem, 1938), p. 48, where those who observe the commandments are said to increase God's glory, להרבות כבודך (cf. E. D. Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-Yamim ha-Nora'im*, vol. 1: Rosh ha-Shanah [Jerusalem, 1970], p. 47).

equivalent to the four letters [ארבעה אותיות]<sup>60</sup> which is the Tetragrammaton [יהוה]. When Israel mentioned the name in the Temple “his glory filled the whole world, amen and amen” (Ps 72:19).<sup>61</sup>

A careful examination of the two passages referred to above, which describe respectively the rituals connected to the transmission of the name and the study of the chariot, indicates that Eleazar's conception of the divine name is based heavily on some of the *Hekhalot* compositions, specifically *Hekhalot Zutarti* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. An outstanding feature in the case of both of these textual units is the emphasis placed on the divine name as the concentration of power as well as the focus of mystical vision.<sup>62</sup> The liturgical formula proposed by Eleazar concerning the different aspects of the name is reminiscent of passages found in the aforementioned *Hekhalot* texts. Indeed, one of the expressions used by Eleazar in both contexts, “You are one and your name is one” (אתה אחד ושםך אחד) is found verbatim in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, it is evident from other passages in his own writings that Eleazar assigns a theurgical significance to the knowledge of the name, a motif that is prevalent in *Hekhalot Zutarti* and to an extent in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. It follows that, insofar as the name represents the power of God, indeed in a sense is interchangeable with the glory, the one who acquires knowledge of the name is imbued

<sup>60</sup> In fact, the numerical equivalence is between תפארתך and ארבעה אותיות, both equal 1101.

<sup>61</sup> MS Paris 772, fol. 110a. Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 50b; *Eser Hawwayot*, MS Paris 825, fol. 197a. See also MS Oxford 1638, fol. 51b and parallel in *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, fol. 169a; MS JTS 2430, fol. 67a; *Arugat ha-Bosem*, ed. Urbach, 2:154. I have discussed these texts at length in a chapter on the German Pietists included in a forthcoming monograph on visionary experience in medieval Jewish mysticism.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. P. Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1981), §§337, 347, 351, 362–363, 548, 588. On the names of God in *Hekhalot* literature, see K. E. Grözinger, “The Names of God and the Celestial Powers: Their Function and Meaning in the Hekhalot Literature,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 53–69 (English section); Elior, “The Concept of God,” pp. 20–24 (English translation, pp. 103–105); *idem*, “Hekhalot Zutarti,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Supplement 1 (1982): 5.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Schäfer, *Synopse*, §589. The formulation is based on Zech 14:9. The influence of another passage in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, *Synopse* §586 is discernible in Eleazar's *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, fol. 199b: והקב"ה הוא שמו ושמו הוא.

with the power to perform magical acts and adjurations. The emphasis on the need to conceal the name resonates with a distinctive element of *Hekhalot Zutarti*, namely, knowledge of the name is treated as esoteric lore that cannot be readily disseminated.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, as will be discussed more fully below, in Eleazar's writings it is evident that the name is depicted as a fiery or luminous substance, a conception which is particularly striking in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, where the name assumes hypostatic dimensions.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, in at least one passage from that textual unit the divine name is characterized as being "kindled in burning fire," חצוב באש להבה,<sup>66</sup> terms that echo the verse, "the voice of the Lord kindles flames of fire," קול יהוה חצב להבות אש (Ps 29:7). One may detect from the two relevant texts of Eleazar mentioned above that he too identified the voice of God described in Ps 29 as the name of God, an identification which allowed for the liturgical use of that very psalm in the techniques required for transmission of the name and/or the secret of the chariot.

With this background information we can now return to Eleazar's comment in *Sefer ha-Shem* that the one who studies Torah is as one who mentions the name, הלומד תורה כאלו מזכיר השם. This is not the appropriate place for a lengthy discussion on the expression, כאלו, but inasmuch as it is a critical part of this statement I shall briefly comment on its usage. It is clear from a perusal of many tannaitic and amoraic sources in both halakhic and aggadic contexts that the meaning of this term is "it has the effect of," i.e., the expressions on either side of the qualifier are semantically equivalent. Thus, to do X has the effect of Y. In the case of Eleazar's comment: to study Torah has the effect of mentioning the name.<sup>67</sup> And what effect does the mentioning of God's name have according to Eleazar? As I have noted above, mentioning the name

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Synopse*, §§335, 337.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, §§548, 568, 589–590, 592, 596.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, §549 (according to MSS JTS 8128 and Oxford 1531).

<sup>67</sup> In a response to my oral presentation of this paper at the Sorbonne in Paris, Prof. Roland Goetschel observed that there may be an implicit critique in Eleazar's formulation, "The one who studies Torah is as one who mentions the name," of the view suggested by the Sar-Torah section of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, to the effect that by mentioning the proper names one gains knowledge of the Torah (see above, n. 18). This is a useful comment that merits a more careful investigation.

results in the vision of the luminous form of the glory. Study of Torah, therefore, is viewed by Eleazar as an occasion for mystical illumination. The point is made as well in another passage in *Sefer ha-Shem*: “The glorious name is with those occupied [in the study of] Torah, and it illumines their eyes.”<sup>68</sup> To be sure, Eleazar’s idea draws upon much earlier sources, both biblical and rabbinic, which describe the luminous nature of Torah. Even more to the point are the many passages in talmudic and midrashic texts which connect Torah study and the visible manifestation of the *Shekhinah*.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, it seems to me that there is a more technical mystical connotation in Eleazar’s words: the Torah is identical with the name, and the name with the glory.<sup>70</sup> Thus, study of Torah has the effect of mentioning the name which eventuates in the visible presence of the glory.

That Torah study provides the occasion for the visible manifestation of the glory or Presence is a point made in several passages in the pietistic writings. Thus, for example, in *Sefer Ḥasidim* reference is made to a fellowship (חברים) of Pietists who “study together before the glory, as it is written, ‘Let the pious exult in glory’ (Ps 149:5).”<sup>71</sup> According to a second passage in this work, “Whoever is occupied [with Torah study] out of love sits in the shade of the Presence and derives pleasure from the splendor of the glory.”<sup>72</sup> In my view, these statements are not simply a rhetorical reworking of the standard rabbinic conception that those occupied

<sup>68</sup> MS British Museum 737, fol. 178a.

<sup>69</sup> See, e.g., mAvot 3.2, 3.6; bBer 6a; bSanh 39b; Targum to Ps 82:1; *Midrash Tehillim* on Ps 105:1, ed. S. Buber, 224b; *DeutR* 7.2.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Eleazar’s *Perush ha-Tefillot*, MS Paris 772, fol. 84a: “The light of His countenance’ corresponds to the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, and it is written, ‘and the teaching (תורה) is a light’ (Prov 6:23).” Although Eleazar does not here equate the Torah (in the extended sense of Scripture) with either the glory or the name, it seems to me that implied in this passage is a hypostatic characterization of Torah which is identified with the light of the divine countenance. See *ibid.*, fol. 64a: “[The hymn] אל בריך is based on the alphabet, for in it are [found the words] מאורות נהן, and the lights (מאורות) are compared to the Torah, as it is written, ‘He placed in them a tent for the sun . . . nothing escapes his heat. The teaching of the Lord (תורה) is perfect’ (Ps 19:5–8). The Pentateuch [corresponds to] the five [occurrences of the word] ‘light’ in [the first chapter of] Genesis.” See also the tradition cited by Urbach in his edition of *Arugat ha-Bošem*, 2:155, n. 2, and 3:34–35. See also *Sefer Paʿaneah Raza*<sup>2</sup>, 6b.

<sup>71</sup> *Sefer Ḥasidim*, §1052.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, §753.

in the study of Torah are before the divine Presence, but refers rather to a technical appearance of the glory induced by the study of Torah. Such an interpretation is suggested by more explicit claims found in Eleazar's works. For example, in one passage in his *Sha'are ha-Sod ha-Yihud we-ha-ʿEminah*, Eleazar discusses the necessity to select a fixed place for prayer where the Creator will make his glory visible. In the context of that discussion he notes: "In the place that [Torah] is studied, it is good for prayer, as it is written, 'in every place where I cause my name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you' (Exod 20:21)."<sup>73</sup> The proof-text is unintelligible unless one assumes an identification of the name and the Torah, on the one hand, and the Torah and the visible glory, on the other.

That study of Torah results in some sort of ecstatic visionary experience, expressed as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is explicitly affirmed in a passage from Eleazar's *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, where he sets out to explain how Abraham and David gained knowledge of events that occurred in the celestial court:

All day they would study the Torah of the Lord, and they would praise and glorify the Holy One, blessed be He, with songs and hymns, to raise the voice in joy. As a result He emanated from the voice of His word and His good sense,<sup>74</sup> and sent the Holy Spirit within him, and his heart is joyous and filled with the love of the Holy One, blessed be He. His soul is bound to the joy, and he reveals to him the secrets and innovations from above.<sup>75</sup>

Here Torah study is joined together with prayer, or more specifically, the act of uttering praises and hymns, as a means to cause the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a process which is connected as well with the disclosure of secrets and hidden knowledge.

#### *D. Torah as the Divine Glory*

It is appropriate at this point to examine in greater depth the identification of Torah and the glory. This identification will provide us

<sup>73</sup> J. Dan, "The Book *Sha'are ha-Sod ha-Yihud we-ha-ʿEminah* of R. Eleazar of Worms" [Hebrew], in *Temirin*, ed. I. Weinstock (Jerusalem, 1972), 1:155.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Ps 119:66.

<sup>75</sup> *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, chap. 7, p. 21. This source was drawn to my attention by my student, Joel Hecker.

with yet another conceptual component that serves as the background for the mystical valorization of Torah study in the religious outlook of the German Pietists.

As I mentioned above, in various classical rabbinic sources (including the Mishnah) a connection is made between Torah study and the visible appearance of the *Shekhinah*.<sup>76</sup> In most of these cases there is no suggestion that the Torah should be identified ontologically with the *Shekhinah*, yet in some sources the language is vague enough so that one could readily see how subsequent authors interpreted the texts in precisely this way. Thus, for example, in *SongR* 8.11 one finds the following view of R. Joshua ben Levi, cited by R. Shim'on: "In every place that the Holy One, blessed be he, placed his Torah, he placed his *Shekhinah*." In an oft-cited passage from *Midrash Tanhuma* the Torah is compared to a king's daughter (one of several very common images used in rabbinic literature to describe the Torah in female characteristics)<sup>77</sup> set within seven palaces. The king reportedly says, "Whoever enters against my daughter, it is as if he enters against me." The meaning of the parable is explained immediately in the continuation of the text: "The Holy One, blessed be he, says: If a man desecrates my daughter, it is as if he desecrates me; if a person enters the synagogue and desecrates my Torah, it is as if he rose and desecrated my glory."<sup>78</sup> As I have noted elsewhere,<sup>79</sup> the possible dependence of this statement on ancient Jewish mystical speculation is suggested by the fact that the Torah is compared parabolically to a princess hidden behind seven *hekhlot* (palaces). More importantly, a link is made between the Torah and the divine glory, so that the former hidden within the ark in the Synagogue is compared to the latter which is said to be located in the ark of the covenant which was kept in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. The parallel between the throne of glory, the dwelling of the Presence in between the cherubim on the ark of the covenant, and the scrolls

<sup>76</sup> See above, n. 69.

<sup>77</sup> I have studied the development of this motif in midrashic and kabbalistic sources in detail in "Female Imaging of the Torah: From Literary Metaphor to Religious Symbol," in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism, Intellect in Quest of Understanding: Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, ed. J. Neusner, E. S. Frerichs, and N. M. Sarna (Atlanta, 1989), 4:271–307.

<sup>78</sup> *Tanhuma*, Pequde 4.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Wolfson, "Female Imaging," pp. 279–280.



kept in the Torah shrine is an ancient one in Jewish sources, expressing itself in a particular way in early Jewish mysticism.<sup>80</sup>

It is evident that such sources influenced the formulation of subsequent medieval authorities who explicitly identify Torah and the glory or Presence, a motif that was particularly important in both pietistic and kabbalistic speculation. One interesting example that may reflect an early attestation in medieval Jewish sources to the identification of the Presence and the Torah, or Wisdom, is found in the following comment of Sherira ben Ḥanina Gaon (ca. 906–1006), elaborating on the statement attributed to R. Isaac in bSoṭ 11a which applied Exod 2:4, “And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him,” to the divine Presence:

Know that the Presence (שכינה) is [found] with the students [of Torah], and a light dwells among them; that light is called Presence . . . and Wisdom itself is one of the Presences (שכינות), and thus it is written, “The Lord created me at the beginning of his course . . .” (Prov 8:22). “I was with him as a confidant” (Prov 8:30). Regarding each verse it says the [name of the] Lord, which is one of the Presences, and she is called a sister to the sages, and consequently she is a sister of Moses standing from a distance.<sup>81</sup>

Wisdom is thus identified by Sherira as the Presence, or to be more precise, one of the Presences (שכינות), a usage that is found as well in one of the responsa of Sherira’s son, Hai Gaon. The expression occurs in the context of Hai’s discussion of various esoteric works of a magical or mystical nature: “We have heard strong rumors [to the effect] that some people who have been occupied with these [books] immediately perished, and all of this is on account of the holiness of the [divine] name, and the holiness of the Presences (שכינות) and the angels which surround them, and the holiness of the chariot.”<sup>82</sup> It thus follows from Hai’s comment

<sup>80</sup> Cf. G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1965), pp. 20, n. 1, 24–25; E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York, 1954), 4:115–116, 130–136; P. Prigent, *Le Judaïsme et l’image* (Tübingen, 1990), pp. 55–59.

<sup>81</sup> *ʿOṣar ha-Geʿonim*, ed. B. M. Lewin, vol. 11: Tractates Nedarim, Nazir, and Soṭah (Jerusalem, 1942), p. 235.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4: Tractates Yom-Ṭov, Ḥagigah, and Mashqin (Jerusalem, 1931), p. 21 (Ḥagigah).

that the term שכינות in these gaonic texts denotes a multiplicity of powers in the divine realm, the exact nature of which is not fully articulated. Returning to the case of Sherira: while the further identification of the Presence and the Torah is not stated explicitly, it is implied by the fact that Wisdom in standard rabbinic thinking is identical with the Torah. The verses cited in the above passage are often applied by the sages to the primordial Torah. It is likely, therefore, that this is the underlying mystical intent of the opening statement which clearly draws upon older sources to the effect that the light, which is the *Shekhinah*, dwells with those who study the Torah, i.e., the light itself is the divine Wisdom which is the Torah in some hypostatic sense.

In this context I would like to mention a twelfth-century author whose influence on Ḥaside Ashkenaz has been noted in the scholarly literature,<sup>83</sup> Judah ben Barzillai of Barcelona. A close study of his major speculative work, the commentary on *Sefer Yeṣirah*, has led me to the conclusion that in some passages he moves in the direction of a decidedly mystical conception regarding the Torah as the embodiment of the *Shekhinah*. This is particularly evident in Judah's exegesis of the talmudic passage interpreting the verse, "In that day there shall be neither sunlight nor cold moonlight" (Zech 14:6): "What is [the meaning of] 'sunlight and cold moonlight' (אור יקרית וקפאון)? R. Eleazar said: The light that is heavy (יקר) in this world shall be light (קפרי) in the world to come."<sup>84</sup> Judah cites two contemporary interpretations of R. Eleazar's explanation. The first one, found in Ḥananel ben Ḥushiel's talmudic commentary, identifies the light of which R. Eleazar spoke as a reference to the Torah, while the second opinion maintains that the light is the *Shekhinah* disclosed to the prophets. From his own vantage point Judah combines the two interpretations, "For the reward of the light of Torah is a vision of the splendor of the Presence (ראיית הוד השכינה) . . . the one occupied with [the study of] Torah and who meditates upon it merits to see the light of the *Shekhinah*."<sup>85</sup> Judah thus combines the two interpretations, for the light of Torah, also equated with Wisdom or the Holy Spirit (רוח הקודש),<sup>86</sup> is

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 18, 29.

<sup>84</sup> bPes 50a.

<sup>85</sup> *Perush Sefer Yeṣirah*, ed. Halberstam, p. 25; cf. p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 67, 72, 75, 83, 92, 96.

the light of the *Shekhinah* that is manifest in prophetic visions; consequently, those who study Torah are accorded a vision of the splendor of the *Shekhinah*, the same terminology which he employs to characterize prophetic vision. Interestingly, in another context, one of the reasons Judah gives to explain the fact that God manifested his glory to Israel at Sinai in the specific form of fire is that those who study the Torah merit the light of the *Shekhinah* which is characterized as “fire consuming fire.”<sup>87</sup>

The most interesting evidence for a mystical conception of Torah is found in Judah’s interpretation of the talmudic explanation<sup>88</sup> of Zechariah’s vision of the flying scroll (מגלה עפרה) as a vision of the folded Torah scroll:

This vision which Zechariah saw was a visual image and not an actual thing, but it was rather as if the Holy One, blessed be he, gave him power in his eyes and heart to see the measurement of Wisdom, which is the Torah. . . . The Holy One, blessed be he, gave him power to see with his eyes as if he saw with a vision of his eyes and imagined in his heart a scroll 3,200 times greater than the whole world. Thus no human possesses knowledge to conjecture if the Holy One, blessed be he, created the place of the Torah above the seven heavens in this measurement. [The Torah scroll] is an entity that is not [materially] real as is the world, but is rather a form with measurements and dimensions in the manner that [the glory] was shown to Isaiah.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, according to Judah’s interpretation, Zechariah had a contemplative or mental vision of the Torah scroll which assumed enormous proportions. While no explicit mention is made here of the *Shi’ur Qomah*, one is reminded of precisely that tradition, although it is the Torah and not the Demiurge who is being measured.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. bGiṭ 60a; see also b’Eruv 21a. See Idel, “The Concept of Torah,” p. 43.

<sup>89</sup> *Perush Sefer Yeṣirah*, p. 67. It is of interest to note that in *Sefer ha-Roqeah* (p. 109) Eleazar refers to the Torah under the throne of glory as the flying scroll (מגלה עפרה). This would seem to reflect the influence of Judah ben Barzillai. See also the material discussed by Idel, *ibid.*, p. 42, n. 53.

<sup>90</sup> As various scholars have noted, in Eleazar Qallir’s *silluq* for *Sheqalim* the Torah (referred to as the Princess, *bat melekh*) is characterized in terms reminiscent of the *Shi’ur Qomah* measurements. Cf. Idel, *ibid.*, p. 40, n. 49; Wolfson, “Female Imaging,” p. 279.

Moreover, the identification of the Torah and the luminous glory is suggested by the fact that Judah compares Zechariah's vision of the Torah with Isaiah's vision of the glory. This comparison is not meant merely to convey the fact that the means of vision in both cases are identical, but rather to suggest that the object of vision as well is similar in the visions of the two prophets.

The German Pietists appropriated and elaborated upon these traditions as well. Thus, for example, in an anonymous commentary on the seventy names of God, deriving from the Pietists, the identification of Torah and the glory is made explicitly: "the Torah [is] the glory of the Holy One, blessed be he" (הַתּוֹרָה—כְּבוֹדוֹ שֶׁל הַקָּבִי"ה).<sup>91</sup> In a somewhat more elliptical way, Eleazar refers to a similar tradition in his commentary on the prayers. The relevant context is an explanation of the prayer uttered on Rosh ha-Shanah after each blowing of the shofar, הַיּוֹם הַרַח עוֹלָם הַיּוֹם יַעֲמִיד מִשְׁפָּט:

[This prayer] has thirty-two words corresponding to the thirty-two paths [of wisdom] by means of which the world was created. . . . Therefore the name [i.e., יְהוָה] is written י"י with three יו"ד, which equal thirty, and the crown is like a כ [which equals two];<sup>92</sup> thus there are thirty-two, corresponding to the numerical value of כְּבוֹד (glory). . . . May God have mercy on us through the merit of Torah which begins with the כ of בְּרֵאשִׁית (Gen 1:1) and ends with the ל of כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל (Deut 34:12).<sup>93</sup>

<sup>91</sup> MS Sasson 290, p. 585, cited by Idel, *ibid.*, p. 42, n. 53.

<sup>92</sup> Concerning this scribal tradition and discussion of some of the sources which may have influenced Eleazar's formulation, cf. the note of M. Steinschneider, *MGWJ* 40 (1896): 130–132, and J. Z. Lauterbach, "Substitutes for the Tetragrammaton," *PAAJR* 2 (1930–31): 46, n. 22; 54–55, no. 59–61. For additional sources see the Introduction of B. Lewin to his edition of the *Ḥggeret R. Sherira Ga'on* (Haifa, 1929), pp. xxxi–xxxii. On Eleazar's designation of the *bet* as a crown, see Steinschneider, pp. 130–132 and Lauterbach, p. 61, n. 44. The tradition of writing the Tetragrammaton with three *yods* was appropriated and reinterpreted by Provençal and Spanish kabbalists as well. See, e.g., R. Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen's *Perush Mirkevet Yehezqel*, published by G. Scholem, "An Inquiry in the Kabbala of R. Isaac ben Jacob Hakohen" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 194, and further references provided on p. 204, n. 8. See also M. Idel, "The Sefirot above the Sefirot" [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 245–246; idem, "Kabbalistic Material from the School of David ben Judah he-Ḥasid" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2 (1983): 176, n. 26.

<sup>93</sup> MS Paris 772, fol. 163b.

The chain of images is reiterated by Eleazar in a second passage related to the opening words of the three verses of the Priestly Blessing in Num 6:24–26:<sup>94</sup>

יִבְרַךְ יְאֵר יִשָּׂא [comprise] three יוֹדִין which correspond to the ten *sefirot*, the ten *ma<sup>2</sup>amarot* [i.e., the ten sayings through which the world was created],<sup>95</sup> and the ten *dibberot* [the ten commandments]. Therefore there are three יוֹדִין in the name יִי [i.e., the name can be represented as such] and the כ surrounding [them]. Thus there is [a sum of] thirty-two [לכ] which corresponds to the thirty-two paths by which the world was created.<sup>96</sup> Thus [the Torah] begins with the כ of בְּרֵאשִׁית (Gen 1:1) and ends with the ל of לְעֵינֵי כָל יִשְׂרָאֵל (Deut 34:12).<sup>97</sup>

Eleazar thus draws upon the correspondence between the thirty-two paths of wisdom through which the world was created, an idea first articulated in *Sefer Yeṣirah*, the glory (*kavod* whose numerical value is 32), and the Torah which begins with the letter *bet* and ends with the letter *lamed*, whose sum is 32). This is represented orthographically as well through the scribal tradition of marking the Tetragrammaton by three *yods*, which equal 30, and a half-circle extending from the last *yod* over all three, which is designated as the crown and is compared to a *bet* whose numerical value is 2.

In a parallel to this text in *Sefer ha-Shem* the ontic identification of the Torah and the glory is rendered even more explicitly:

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Tobiah ben Eliezer, *Midrash Leqaḥ Ṭov*, ed. S. Buber (Wilna, 1884), p. 185. A similar linkage of the three *yods* of the name and Num 6:24–26 is found in a passage of Menahem ben Solomon's *Midrash Šekhel Ṭov*, cited in the *Sefer Ṭassufoṭ* of R. Eliezer ben Joel Halevi (Rabiah); cf. *Midrash Šekhel Ṭov*, ed. S. Buber (New York, 1959), Introduction, p. xxxix, and Lauterbach, "Substitutes for the Tetragrammaton," pp. 60–61.

<sup>95</sup> mAvot 5.1.

<sup>96</sup> Eleazar briefly alludes to this tradition in *Sefer ha-Roqeah*, Hilkhot Berakhot, p. 207: לִכְךָ אֲנִי כוֹתֵבִין הַשֵּׁם בְּג' יוֹדִין יִי יִבְרַךְ יְאֵר יִשָּׂא. Cf. the passage in the *Sefer Ṭassufoṭ* of Rabiah, published by M. Gaster in the *Report of the Judith Montefiore College* (London, 1893), pp. 61–62, cited by Steinschneider (n. 92 above), p. 131, and Lauterbach, "Substitutes for the Tetragrammaton," p. 60.

<sup>97</sup> MS Paris 772, fol. 84b. Cf. *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, fol. 203b. Concerning the tradition of writing the name with three *yods* together with a *bet*, thereby attaining the sum of thirty-two, cf. *Perush ha-Qaddish* in MS Paris 850, fols. 14b–15a. On the tradition regarding thirty levels of kingship (מַלְכוּת) related to the Torah, see *Arugat ha-Bošem*, ed. Urbach, 2:155.

In [the first word of the verses Exod 14:19–21] **ויסע ויבא ויט** there are three *yods* in one name [i.e., the seventy-two letter name<sup>98</sup>]. Therefore the name [יהוה] must be written with three *yods*, **י**, and the crown is like a *bet*. Thus there are thirty-two [three *yods* = 30 + *bet* = 2], to inform us that [God] created the world by means of thirty-two paths. Thus the Torah begins with **בראשית** and ends with **ישראל**. Thus there is thirty-two (**לב**) which is the numerical value of **כבוד** (glory). There is no glory but the Torah (**אין כבוד אלא תורה**).<sup>99</sup>

The final statement is derived from earlier sources, e.g., the comment in mAvot 6.3, where it signifies that honor must be paid to the scholar. It is evident that Eleazar has theosophically recast the rabbinic saying such that the Torah itself is identified as the very glory of God. The Torah in its entirety comprises the *kavod*, and this is symbolized by the fact that the first and last letters of the Pentateuch are respectively *bet* and *lamed*, which equal thirty-two, the same numerical value of the word *kavod* (glory).

Given the correlation of the Torah and the name, on the one hand, and the name and the glory, on the other, it follows that Torah is to be correlated with the glory. In a passage from the pietistic work *Sefer Tagi*, the different viewpoints are brought together: “Three things require water: the explicit name, i.e., the Tetragrammaton, is not transmitted except over water.<sup>100</sup> . . . A

<sup>98</sup> According to one widespread tradition in medieval Jewish literature, the 72-letter name of God is derived from Exod 14:19–21, for each verse consists of 72 letters. Hence the 72-letter name actually comprises 216 letters divided into 72 groups of three. The connection of the tradition of writing the name with three *yods* and the 72-letter name of God seems to be implied in the reference to a kabbalist in Menaḥem Šiyoni’s commentary on Num 6:24; cf. *Sefer Šiyoni* (Lemberg, 1822), 60d, cited by Steinschneider (n. 92 above), p. 131.

<sup>99</sup> MS British Museum 737, fol. 203a. Cf. *ibid.*, fols. 205b–206a: “י”, three *yods* and the *bet* on their back, which is its crown. Thus there are thirty-two. Therefore the *Sefer Yeširah* begins [with a reference to the] thirty-two paths [of wisdom] . . . Why thirty-two? For the Torah begins with **ב** and ends with **ל**. To teach you that everything is alluded to in the Torah, but it is hidden from people, and the secrets of Torah were not transmitted except to those who fear Him.” See also *Paʿaneah Raza*<sup>2</sup>, 4b, and the statement of Baḥya cited below, n. 121.

<sup>100</sup> This formulation is reported in the name of the mystics (literally, sages of the truth, **חכמי האמת**) by Baḥya ben Asher, *Commentary on the Torah*, Lev 16:30, ed. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1981), 2:505: “It is a tradition of the mystics that the name is not transmitted except over water, as it says, ‘The voice of the Lord over the waters’

king is not anointed except over water. One studies Torah over water. Therefore [the glory] is made visible to the prophets over water.”<sup>101</sup> The textual bases for this comment are a passage in *QohR* 3.15 that explicitly states that the divine name is only transmitted in a pure place and over water<sup>102</sup> and a passage in bHor 12a, which mentions the law concerning the anointing of a king by water,<sup>103</sup> as well as a tradition relating that R. Mesharsheya would advise his sons to recite their learning by a stream so that they would be prolonged as the continual flow of running water.<sup>104</sup> The only way to understand this is by reference to the mystical idea that I have been discussing: Torah should be studied by water, for the esoteric dimension of Torah is the divine name which is, at the

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(Ps 29:3).” As we have seen, this verse is also interpreted by Eleazar as a reference to the divine name. Cf. Scholem (*On the Kabbalah*, p. 136, n. 1) who already suggested that Eleazar was the probable source for Bahya. The text that I have cited, however, contains the exact phrase cited by Bahya.

<sup>101</sup> MS Oxford 1566, fol. 233a. On water as the appropriate medium for visual experience in the writings of the German Pietists, cf. M. Idel, “On the Transmission of an Ancient Technique of Prophetic Vision in the Middle Ages” [Hebrew], *Sinai* 86 (1979): 1–7. Finally, it should be recalled that Eleazar reports in both his *Perush ha-Merkavah* (MS Paris 850, fols. 58a–58b) and *Sefer ha-Shem* (MS British Museum 737, fols. 165b–166a) an elaborate ceremony for transmission of the divine name and the esoteric gnosis of the chariot which involves a body of water. Cf. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 74–76; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 136.

<sup>102</sup> This midrashic passage as a possible source for the German Pietistic practice of transmitting the name was already noted by Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, p. 75, n. 10.

<sup>103</sup> The biblical precedent for this law is 1 Kings 1:32ff. See tSanh 4.10; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Kele ha-Miqdash 1.11; Melakhim 1.11; R. Pattai, *Water: Research into the Knowledge of the Palestinian Land and Folklore in the Biblical and Mishnaic Periods* (Tel-Aviv, 1936; Hebrew), p. 11.

<sup>104</sup> In light of this source Scholem’s remarks in *On the Kabbalah*, p. 137, that the magical significance of water as an appropriate medium for initiation (as described in *Sefer ha-Malbush* and *Sefer ha-Shem*) does not occur in talmudic literature or any other Jewish traditions, should be slightly modified. On the *topos* of the Torah as a body of water and the transformative power of Torah study to turn the sage into a fountain or spring, see M. Fishbane, “The Well of Living Water: A Biblical Motif and Its Ancient Transformations,” in *Sh’arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. M. Fishbane and E. Tov with assistance of W. W. Fields (Indiana, 1992), pp. 3–16, esp. 14ff. See also the passage from *Sefer ha-Melammed* on the comparison of Torah to water extant in MS Vatican 300, fols. 23a–23b. It is recommended that the text should be studied on the seventh day of Passover which commemorates the splitting of the Red Sea.

same time, the luminous glory that appeared in prophetic vision by a body of water. It is thus no mere coincidence that in the text from *Sefer Tagi* mention is made of both the transmission of the name and the vision of the glory. It should be noted as well that the idea that the glory appears on or near a body of water is based on much older sources including apocalyptic, midrashic, and mystical texts.<sup>105</sup> The Pietists have combined the various traditions, for the name, the glory, and the Torah are identical.

The mystical correlation of the divine name and the glory or the Presence, on the one hand, and the Torah, on the other, is implicit as well in a passage in *Sefer Hasidim*. After noting the standard talmudic idea that one should have the *Shekhinah* before oneself when one prays,<sup>106</sup> Judah the Pious comments:

Similarly, the one who reads the Torah on the seventh, second, or fifth day, when he reaches a name [of God], if he can have the intention, he should [cast his] intention toward him. The one who sits in the east should consider in his heart as if the *Shekhinah* were facing west and his face is opposite him.<sup>107</sup>

In the continuation of that passage Judah goes on to say that when the cantor says *Qaddish*, and specifically the opening words, יתגדל ויתקדש שמו רבה, “magnified and sanctified be his great name,” the congregants

should turn toward the Torah scroll, and if he [the cantor] is worthy, he should take hold of the Torah, and the people should direct their hearts toward the Torah. Therefore, [the congregation should] say, “Exalt [the Lord our God] and bow down to his footstool” (Ps 99:5), for the Torah is his footstool. [The expression] הדרום רגליו [his footstool] is written five times in Scripture corresponding to the Torah scroll which comprises

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Gruenewald, “The Visions of Ezekiel: Critical Edition and Commentary [Hebrew],” *Temirin*, vol. 1, ed. I. Weinstock (Jerusalem, 1973), pp. 112–113.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. bSanh 22a.

<sup>107</sup> *Sefer Hasidim*, §1585. The identification of Torah as the glory may also be implied in other sections of this work; see, e.g., §§1638–1639. Perhaps there is some such theosophic notion underlying the statement in §1591 that an elderly righteous person (הזקן הצדיק) should tie up the Torah scroll before it is returned to the ark. Cf. Marcus, *Piety and Society*, p. 100.



the Pentateuch, and the two staves in the Torah scroll correspond to “his legs are like marble pillars” (Song 5:15).

Underlying the remark that when the cantor recites the *Qaddish*, in which the name of God is sanctified, the congregation should turn to the Torah scroll, is the identification of the Torah and the name. In addition, the Torah is identified as the footstool of God which provides the ideational basis for the ritual of bowing down to the Torah. One can find further evidence for these ideas in Eleazar’s commentary on the liturgy. Thus, in the context of discussing the prayer uttered when the Torah is taken out of the ark, which includes the recitation of Ps 99:5, he notes:

“His footstool” (הָדוֹם רִגְלִי) refers to the Torah and this is [the import] of what R. Shim<sup>c</sup>on [bar Isaac] wrote in the *yoṣer* for Shavu<sup>c</sup>ot [describing the primordial Torah]: “I approached his feet, I dwelt in his shadow.”<sup>108</sup> Thus [the expression] הָדוֹם רִגְלִי occurs five times in Scripture,<sup>109</sup> corresponding to the five [occurrences of] מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד<sup>110</sup> (the glorious king).<sup>111</sup>

In a second passage from the same work, Eleazar offers a similar mystical explanation for the *Qaddish*, but in this case the principal focus is on the visualization of the *Shekhinah* in the ark, the place in which the Torah scroll is enshrined: “When [the cantor] says יתגדל he should cast his eyes to the holy ark, for the *Shekhinah* rests in it, as it says, ‘I constantly place the Lord before me’ (Ps 16:8).”<sup>112</sup> A parallel idea is expressed in yet another passage in a commentary on the prayer book deriving from the circle of German Pietists: “Our teacher Eleazar wrote in the name of our teacher R. Judah the Pious: When the cantor begins to say יתגדל

<sup>108</sup> I have discussed this poem by Shim<sup>c</sup>on bar Isaac in my study, “Images of God’s Feet: Some Observations on the Divine Body in Judaism,” in *People of the Book: Jews and Judaism in Embodied Perspective*, ed. H. Eilberg-Schwartz (Albany, 1992), p. 154.

<sup>109</sup> Isa 66:1; Ps 99:5; 132:7; Lam 2:1; 1 Chron 28:2. In a sixth occurrence, Ps 110:1, the reference is not to the Temple or the earth as the locus of the divine Presence.

<sup>110</sup> Ps 24:7, 8, 9, 10 (2x).

<sup>111</sup> MS Paris 772, fol. 135a; see also *Siddur Mal’ah ha-ʿAreṣ Deʿah* of R. Naftali Herz Treves (Thiengen, 1560), section on the *yoṣer* of Sabbath, s.v. גדלו ליהודה אתי ונרוממה שמר יחדיו.

<sup>112</sup> MS Paris 772, fol. 62a. Cf. MS Oxford 1097, fol. 17a.

וַיִּתְקַדֵּשׁ, he should intend with all his heart, and cast his eyes upon the holy ark.”<sup>113</sup>

In this connection it is of interest to consider the following tradition reported by Eleazar in *Sefer ha-Roqeah* in the name of Hizqiyah, the brother of R. Eliezer ben Nathan of Mainz (ca. 1090–ca. 1170):<sup>114</sup>

When the Torah scroll is returned to its place [in the ark], and when one bows down to it, the verse “Exalt the Lord, our God, [and bow down to his footstool]” (Ps 99:5) is said. In the blessings of the Torah as well we bow down to the glory of the Torah. When we return [the Torah], “Let them praise [the name of the Lord, for his name alone is sublime; his splendor covers heaven and earth]” (Ps 148:13) is said, to indicate that one does not bow down because of the divinity that is in the Torah (אלהות שבִּתּוֹרָה), but rather he bows down to the Holy One, blessed be he, for his Presence rests upon it [the Torah], and not because it too is a god, for “his name alone is sublime.”<sup>115</sup>

This tradition rejects the explanation that one bows down to the Torah because it is divine in the normative sense of comprising the words of God or in the mystical sense of being identical with the glory. Rather the reason for bowing down is that the *Shekhinah* itself dwells upon the Torah and is thus located in the ark which contains the scrolls. We may detect in this explanation a polemical statement against the full identification of Torah and the divine glory, a position articulated in pietistic sources, including Eleazar himself. Indeed, the Torah shrine in the thought of Ḥaside Ashkenaz is comparable to either the ark in the Temple or the throne of glory (the correlation of the two is biblical in origin; cf. Jer 17:12). This nexus of symbols is evident in one passage in *Sefer Ḥasidim*

<sup>113</sup> *Siddur of R. Solomon ben Samson of Garmaise, including the Siddur of the Ḥaside Ashkenaz* [Hebrew], ed. M. Hershler (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 76. Cf. MS Oxford 1102, fol. 14b.

<sup>114</sup> See *Sefer ha-Raban*, §73, cited by Urbach in his edition of *Arugat ha-Bošem* (Jerusalem, 1963), 4:52, n. 76.

<sup>115</sup> *Sefer ha-Roqeah*, p. 108. See discussion above, n. 24. Cf. the formulation in *Sefer ha-Roqeah*, p. 109, where Eleazar notes that on Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur an infant is circumcised after the reading of the Torah “because the Presence is near the Torah, as it is written, ‘I wanted to build a resting place for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, for the footstool of our God’ (1 Chron 28:2).”

where we find the following sequence of ideas: the Sabbath corresponds to the seven heavens, or alternatively, the seven thrones.<sup>116</sup> Thus the throne is mentioned seven times in the Sabbath liturgy, "for in each of the heavens there is a throne, one corresponding to the other." The numerological equivalence of the seven references to the throne (כסא [= 81], כסאו [= 87], כסא [= 81], כסאך [=101], וכסאו [= 93], כסאו [= 87], כסא [= 81] totals 611, which is the numerical value of the word "Torah." Having established these correspondences the author of *Sefer Ḥasidim* concludes:

There is no throne without the Torah, and this is [the import of the poem] "At the time before creation he established the Torah and the throne."<sup>117</sup> Therefore the Torah is read on the Sabbath. And there occurs seven times in Scripture [the expression] "enthroned on the cherubim" (יושב הכרובים).<sup>118</sup> Therefore seven [sections in the Torah] are read, [on the Sabbath], and it is as if the *Shekhinah* were placed on the throne of the cherubim.<sup>119</sup>

The correlation of the Torah and the throne is not to be taken in a merely figurative way. On the contrary, the force of these images is that they function as religious symbols: just as the Presence dwells (ontically and not metaphorically) upon the throne, so it rests upon the Torah scroll encased in the holy ark. The full significance of the symbolic understanding of Torah, and its implicit function as a theurgical means, is made evident in the concluding

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<sup>116</sup> The correlation of heaven and throne is linked exegetically to Isa 66:1, "The heaven is my throne." On the tradition of the seven thrones corresponding to the seven heavens, cf. *Sode Razayya*<sup>2</sup>, ed. Kamelhar, p. 16; *Perush ha-Tefillot*, MS Paris 772, fol. 123a, where this tradition is cited in the name of a midrash. The idea of a throne located in each of the seven heavens is already found in the apocalyptic text *Ascension of Isaiah*, and has a reflex in the Jewish mystical tract, *Re'uyot Yehezqel*; cf. I Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1980), pp. 59, 137. On the tradition regarding thrones in each of the heavens, see also A. Farber, "The Commentary on Ezekiel's Chariot by R. Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen of Castille," M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, 1978, pp. 92–93, n. 25; 156–157, n. 19.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. E. D. Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-Yamim ha-Nora'im* (Jerusalem, 1970), vol. 2: Yom Kippur, p. 408. As Goldschmidt notes, this poetic image is based on earlier aggadic sources wherein the Torah and throne are listed among the various things created before the world.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. 1 Sam 4:4, 2 Sam 6:2, 2 Kings 19:15, Isa 37:16, Ps 80:2, 99:1, 1 Chron 13:6.

<sup>119</sup> *Sefer Ḥasidim* §637.

statement that by reading the seven sections of Torah on Sabbath it is as if one places the *Shekhinah* upon the throne of cherubim. Again we confront the “as if” construction, a term that lexically empowers the religious imagination with the ability to traverse spatial and temporal boundaries; the reading of Torah has the (theurgical) effect of enthroning the *Shekhinah*. That this is so is based on the fact that the ontic status of the Torah is that of the throne. Above I noted that in both *Sefer Hasidim* and Eleazar’s *Perush ha-Tefillot* one finds the explicit identification of the Torah as the divine footstool. The more specific correlation of the Torah and the throne appears in a pietistic text to which I have also already referred, *Sefer Tagi*: “The Torah and the throne of glory are one pair (זוג אחד), for the tablets were taken from the throne of glory.<sup>120</sup> . . . Just as the *Shekhinah* is upon the throne so it is upon the Torah and upon the ark in which there is the Torah and the tablets. Thus the Torah is his throne.”<sup>121</sup> Eleazar alludes to such a notion as well when he writes that “the Torah is in his throne as it is in the ark.”<sup>122</sup> In one text Eleazar expresses the consubstantiality of the Torah and the throne in an eschatological context:

The fire of the throne serves the supernal ones, and the fire before the throne of glory serves the lower ones; for just as the Torah was given in fire, so the sacrifice is burnt in fire, and before the soul that ascends enters beneath the throne the angel purifies it by the fire that is before the throne . . . and they place it under the throne, and there one sees the secrets and mysteries of Torah. . . . The tablets are from the throne; [the word] לַחַת

<sup>120</sup> Cf. *Tanḥuma*, <sup>c</sup>Egev, 9. For other references to the aggadic motif of the tablets being hewn from the sapphire stone of the throne of glory, see Ginzberg, *Legends* 6:49–50, n. 258 and 59, nn. 305–306.

<sup>121</sup> MS Oxford 1566, fol. 224b. Cf. Eleazar’s *Perush ha-Tefillot*, MS Paris 772, fol. 90b. An influence of Eleazar may be detected in Bahya ben Asher’s commentary on Exod 31:8, ed. Chavel, p. 327: “The word לַחַת according to the [technique of] כִּסֵּא אֵלֹהִים בִּישׁ. Thus the *Shekhinah* dwells upon them as on the throne of glory, and insofar as the tablets were taken from the throne of glory the Torah is called glory, as it says, ‘The wise shall obtain honor’” (Prov 3:35). Bahya goes on to say that the throne is also the source of the intellectual soul, an idea found in other medieval Jewish writers, e.g. Solomon ibn Gabirol, Abraham ibn Ezra, and Judah Halevi. Cf. *Zohar* 1:126b (*Midrash ha-Ne’elam*). For discussion of the Bahya source, cf. Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 168–169, n. 77.

<sup>122</sup> *Sode Razayya*<sup>2</sup>, ed. Kamelhar, p. 38.

[written in a defective form without a *waw*] through א"ת ב"ש is כסא [throne], for the tablets and the Torah were in the throne.<sup>123</sup>

The point is reiterated in another passage as follows:

The word לחת is written without a *waw*, for through א"ת ב"ש this equals numerically the word כסא, to indicate that they were given from underneath the throne, and the one who fulfills the Torah is placed under the throne, as it says, "The teaching of the Lord (תורת יהוה) is perfect, restoring life" (Ps 19:8) [of the soul] to dwell under the throne of glory, and this is [the meaning of] "the life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life" (1 Sam 25:29)."<sup>124</sup>

From these texts we may postulate that the mystical import of the verses from Psalms uttered by the congregants when the Torah is taken out of, and returned to, the ark is that the Torah is identical with the name or the glory that is upon the throne.

Perhaps one of the most important texts which incorporates the identification of Torah and the *Shekhinah* or *kavod* appears in Eleazar's *Sefer ha-Hokhmah*:

And so ראש בת [בראשית] is for the Presence of the Creator (שכינת הבורא) is called בת (daughter) . . . and she is called the tenth *sefirah* and *malkhut*, for the crown of royalty (כתר מלכות) is upon his head. And [she is also called] יראת שב [i.e., the letters of בראשית] which is the Torah, as it says, "The fear of the Lord is pure" (Ps 19:10).<sup>125</sup>

In this context, then, the *Shekhinah* is identified as the בת, the tenth ספירה, מלכות or כתר מלכות, יראת שב, and תורה. Some of these images, which have a striking resemblance to kabbalistic terminology, appear in the pseudo-Hai commentary on the forty-two letter name

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 19. And cf. the text from *Sefer ha-Kavod* cited in Abraham ben Azriel, *Arugat ha-Bošem*, ed. Urbach (Jerusalem, 1939), 1:161. On the numerical equivalence of כסא and לחת, based on the technique of א"ת ב"ש, in the writings of Abraham Abulafia, cf. Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>124</sup> MS Vatican 460, fol. 18a. The correlation of the soul and the throne is drawn explicitly in *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, chap. 54. One of the points that Eleazar makes is that insofar as the Torah and the soul share one ontic source in the throne, the soul can be compared to the Torah.

<sup>125</sup> MS Oxford 1568, fol. 25a. See Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 98, 185–186.

of God contained in the first part of *Sefer ha-Hokhmah*.<sup>126</sup> Most notably, the *Shekhinah* is there identified as the tenth kingship (מלכות עשירית) and the daughter of the king (בת מלך). It is possible that the latter reference is to the Torah which is frequently called in midrashic and aggadic texts, as well as in *piyyuṭim* (e.g., the famous *silluq* of Qallir to *parashat Sheqalim*),<sup>127</sup> the *bat melekh*. It is evident that Eleazar himself interpreted the reference in this way, as he explicitly identifies the *Shekhinah*, or *bat*, as the Torah. We may thus conclude that for Eleazar the Torah is the *Shekhinah* which is characterized in decisively feminine terms.<sup>128</sup> That the Torah assumes a feminine character is an ancient motif in Jewish sources, going back ultimately to the feminization of Wisdom.<sup>129</sup> What is novel for the Pietists is the combination of the different streams, aggadic and mystical-magical, such that the Torah is the feminine Presence as well as the divine name. As Asi Farber pointed out, the feminine characterization of Torah in the pietistic literature is another indicator that places the theosophy of Ḥaside Ashkenaz in close proximity to the *Bahir* which likewise identifies the Torah in one of its aspects as a feminine hypostasis.<sup>130</sup>

In conclusion, while the Pietists do not discuss in any systematic way the mystical significance of Torah study, they offer enough allusions to allow us to reconstruct their attitude on this subject. In the final analysis, they combine the aggadic tradition of the Torah as a feminine persona with the esoteric idea expressed in some of the *Hekhalot* texts to the effect that the glory is the name. Insofar as the glory is depicted as the female *Shekhinah*, it follows that Torah is the glory. Moreover, the glory is identical with the

<sup>126</sup> See references above, n. 20.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Wolfson, "Female Imaging," pp. 278–279.

<sup>128</sup> It is possible that the identification of *Shekhinah* and Torah is implicit in another passage contained in Eleazar's *Sefer ha-Hokhmah*, MS Oxford 1568, fol. 23b, where the *Shekhinah* is described as having seventy aspects corresponding to the numerical value of the word סוד, "mystery," as well as the word ונוגה, "the splendor," which has the same characters as דגון, "the color." Cf. MS JTS 1786, fol. 43b; Farber, "The Concept of the Merkabah," p. 410. It is evident that this is an echo of the rabbinic notion that the Torah has seventy aspects alluded to in the word סוד; cf. *NumR* 13.15. See Eleazar's description of Torah in his *Perush ha-Tefillot*, MS 772, fol. 89b.

<sup>129</sup> See my study, "Female Imaging" (above, n. 77). The relevant *bahiric* texts are discussed on pp. 285–291.

<sup>130</sup> Farber, "The Concept of the Merkabah," pp. 236, 242, 609.

Name; hence the Torah is identical with the name. The study of Torah, therefore, may provide an occasion for the visualization of the Name or the luminous glory. This, I surmise, is epitomized in Eleazar's statement, הלומד תורה כאלו מזכיר השם, "The one who studies Torah has the effect of mentioning the name."

## MYSTICISM AND THE POETIC-LITURGICAL COMPOSITIONS FROM QUMRAN

A Response to Bilhah Nitzan

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In spite of the fact that the academic study of Jewish mysticism has proliferated in this century, indeed represents one of the fastest growing subdisciplines of Jewish studies on the university scene, the fact is that there still is no satisfactory definition of the term. As is well known, Gershom Scholem, the scholar most responsible for the legitimacy and credibility accorded Jewish mysticism in the world of the academy, never attempted to provide a general definition of this phenomenon (if one can properly speak of a singular phenomenon at all) and thus left open the question of what is the common thread that links together the different systems of thought that he grouped together under the rubric of the major trends in Jewish mysticism. No scholar to date has attempted to provide a definition of Jewish mysticism that is both comprehensive and exclusive; we continue to use the term mysticism to refer to the personalities and texts discussed by Scholem without clarifying the use of this terminology. The situation is no more satisfactory with respect to the term "mysticism" in general. A growing consensus has emerged in the last several decades that one should speak only of mysticism in a particular religious context, but there is little agreement regarding the precise nature of the phenomenon that is manifest in the various socio-cultural settings. Definitions of key terms in the history of religions, such as mysticism, messianism, apocalypticism, gnosticism, magic, and so on, are notoriously difficult to determine with any precision. What a scholar can best hope for is a measure of internal consistency, i.e., one must determine how one is using a given term with respect to the limited corpus of material that one has isolated for study.

In my comments on Bilhah Nitzan's paper, "Harmonic and Mystical Characteristics in Poetic and Liturgical Writings from Qumran," I shall focus on the relationship of the word "mystical" and the word "Qumran." That is, in what particular sense is the author using the term "mystical" and how is it appropriate to the body of



writings that represent the sectarian community at Qumran? For the purposes of this response, I am accepting Nitzan's view that the texts she has discussed represent material derived from the community itself and not simply literary sources that were found in the caves of Qumran.

The task of responding to this paper has afforded me the opportunity to raise a larger methodological issue: Do the Qumran sources, together with the more or less contemporary apocalyptic texts to which they are somehow related, provide the scholar with a typology of mystical experience that informs a variety of later trends of Jewish mysticism? Does the spiritual mentality underlying the relevant Qumran and apocalyptic sources offer an alternative to the experience of *unio mystica* that has dominated scholarly examinations of the phenomenon of mysticism in both Western and Eastern religions?<sup>1</sup> In the final analysis, the emphasis on mystical union so frequently invoked by scholars as the *sine qua non* of mysticism represents a tendency rooted in Neoplatonic ontology and epistemology: contemplation of God results in a form of union whereby the soul separates from the body and returns to its ontological source in the One. Insofar as the One is beyond intellect and being, the return to the One is depicted in figurative terms as a mystical merging of the soul in the Godhead. The Jewish sources, beginning with the apocalyptic and Qumran texts, may provide a different model based not on *henosis*, but rather on the "angelification" of the human being who crosses the boundary of space and time and becomes part of the heavenly realm, a motif that likely has its roots in ancient Near Eastern and Mesopotamian mythology.<sup>2</sup> The mystical experience in this framework involves as well a closing of the gap separating human and divine, not, however, by the return of the soul to the One, but rather by the ascension of the human into the heavens. This ascension occasions two experiences that must be viewed as phenomenologically distinct: participation in the angelic liturgy that is accomplished in a standing posture and enthronement in the celestial realm. The latter rep-

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent representative study, see N. Pike, *Mystical Union: An Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism* (Ithaca, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> On the transformation of human beings into angels in apocalyptic literature, see the recent analysis in M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York and Oxford, 1993), pp. 47–71.

resents the fullest expression of the mystical experience, an eschatological ideal of deification that may be realized in this world through the exercise of proper techniques. In my opinion, the word “mysticism” should be used only when there is evidence for specific practices that lead to an experience of ontic transformation, i.e., becoming divine or angelic. Accordingly, it is inappropriate to apply the word “mystical” to the unison or harmony of human and angel if there is no technique or praxis that facilitates the idealization of a human being into a divine or angelic being in the celestial abode.

I should like to determine in the first instance precisely what Nitzan intended by the word “mystical” in her paper. According to Nitzan, in Qumran poetry one finds clear statements concerning the religious experience of spiritualized communion between human beings and the celestial entourage. Such a religious experience, which is characterized by the desire of the pious to bridge the existential distance between human and divine, is considered mystical. In the author’s own words: “In cutting themselves off from worship in the earthly temple . . . and in considering themselves to be like pure priests, they claimed that their praise of God resembles that of the angels and is in unison with them. This manner of approaching God may indeed be considered mystic” (p. 165). For Nitzan, therefore, the mystical dimension in the poetical and liturgical writings from Qumran, which she has isolated for discussion, involves the harmony of communion of human beings and angels expressed in terms of the participation of individuals or the community at large in the angelic choir, which utters hymns and praises before God in the heavenly temple.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in a second passage the “mystical approach” is described as including two aspects—the celestial approach and the communionist approach. The former involves the elevation of the praises and prayers uttered by the celestial entourage above those recited by earthly beings (p. 166). The latter “acknowledges the possibility that those human beings who are righteous and free of transgression (in other words, people who are cut off from the sinful nature of human beings) may recite praises in company with the angels, and thus attain a spiritual experience of communion with the celestial entourage”

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<sup>3</sup> The same point is made in B. Nitzan, “Biblical Influence in Qumran: Prayer and Religious Poetry [Hebrew]” (Ph.D. diss., Tel-Aviv University, 1989), p. 293.

(p. 167). The inclusion of these two aspects under the rubric of "mystical approach" is somewhat puzzling insofar as it is clearly only the second that has any direct bearing on the question of mystical experience. Indeed, the so-called "celestial approach" is completely irrelevant to the question of mysticism as it has been understood by historians of religion. To be sure, the status of angelic worship is relevant to the study of mysticism, but this is so only when such a matter is related more directly to questions pertaining to the religious experience of an individual or community. In terms of Nitzan's own classification, this is the second aspect of the mystical approach. In my opinion, therefore, it would have been more appropriate to collapse the two aspects of the mystical approach into one, which essentially involves the participation of human beings in the angelic liturgy and the ontic transformation implied by the participation. The mystical experience entails the "experience of harmony of communion between the chosen earthly and heavenly worshippers" that is "reached through hymns recited by his pure and perfect worshippers" (p. 168).<sup>4</sup>

This motif, as Nitzan notes, is expressed as well in apocalyptic literature and later Hekhalot texts. Focusing especially on the cosmological blessings in 4QBerakhot, Nitzan finds support for her contention insofar as these liturgical hymns and praises are based on the assumption that "all of the created beings in the heavenly and earthly realms are unified and harmonized in blessing God" (p. 174). This harmony is reflected syntactically, philologically, and structurally in the blessings preserved in 4QB<sup>a</sup> (4Q286) and 4QB<sup>b</sup> (4Q287). This idea of harmony of the heavenly and earthly worshipper, angels, and righteous members of the sect, provides the conceptual justification for the use of the word "mystical" in this study. Hence, interpreting a passage in 4QB<sup>a</sup> 7 i 2–7, which asserts that the chosen people, or those who know eternal things, and the

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<sup>4</sup> In the original draft of her study Nitzan explicitly used the expression "mystical experience of communion" in conjunction with the phenomenon of angels and humans worshipping in harmony. In the revised version she has deleted the phrase "mystical experience" in an apparent attempt to avoid problems of taxonomy, which I raised in my oral response to her paper at the Qumran conference delivered on May 11, 1993. In spite of her effort to circumvent the problem of definition by eliminating these words, the fact is that she continues in the final draft of the study to identify this experience of harmony and communion as mystical. My original criticism therefore still stands. See following note.

angels of purity, who have knowledge of the appointed times (*qışse mo<sup>c</sup>ed*) in which to utter true blessings (*berakhot* <sup>2</sup>*emet*), in unison bless the glorious name in all the heavens of God's kingdom, Nitzan states that "the text of 4QBerakhot reaches a mystical height in its climax" (p. 176). She concludes that the status of the chosen heavenly and earthly creatures is to be considered mystical in two respects: in their superiority over all other worshippers and in their communion (*ibid.*).<sup>5</sup> Here too one wonders about the appropriateness of this distinction, for the first criterion in and of itself can hardly be considered an indicator of mystical experience in isolation from the second. That is, the superiority of the worshipper in this case is totally dependent on the phenomenon of communion, and it is the latter that justifies the use of the term "mystical" for Nitzan. The parallel description of the heavenly and earthly worshippers suggests a communion of human and angel that bridges the ontological distance between the two realms. The overcoming of this chasm through harmonistic prayer is considered by Nitzan the distinguishing feature of the mystical element in Qumran liturgical poetry.

The same understanding of the term "mystical" is proposed by Nitzan for the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice whose relationship to 4QBerakhot on linguistic and thematic grounds was already noted by John Strugnell and subsequently by other scholars, especially Carol Newsom. Previous scholarship has well noted the influence of merkavah speculation on these hymns that describe in detail the liturgy of the different angelic classes, from the lowest group to the angelic high priesthood, as well as the structure of the heavenly temple, from its outer features to the holy of holies wherein was lodged the divine chariot. Nitzan follows the line of research first suggested by Gershom Scholem and elaborated upon by Lawrence Schiffman and other scholars, that the *shiroṭ* <sup>c</sup>*olat shabbat* have deep affinities with the merkavah images derived exegetically from Ezekiel 1 and 10 and the liturgical hymns employed in later Hekhalot

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<sup>5</sup> In the original draft Nitzan employed both the expressions "mystical experience" and "mystical communion" to refer to the experience of harmony between angelic and human worshippers related in 4QB\*7 1 2–7. Although she has eliminated these more definitive phrases in the revised version of her study, it is evident that she has not altered her view in any substantial way. That is, she continues to use the term "mystical" to describe this experience of harmony. See previous note.

literature.<sup>6</sup> Acknowledging the striking absence of the recitation of the Qedushah of Isaiah 6:3 in the Sabbath Songs, Nitzan nevertheless concludes that “the descriptions of the heavenly sanctuaries, the chariots, the Throne of Glory, and the angelic hosts may be considered mystical,” for they are “described in sublime and numinous wording and style, related mostly to the merkavah vision of Ezekiel, thereby reflecting the mysterious exalted atmosphere of the heavenly kingdom of God” (p. 178). Nitzan provides as an example several phrases from the song of the twelfth Sabbath that describes the cherubim and other elements of the chariot realm, obviously based on Ezekiel’s visionary account. Deflecting the potential criticism that these hymns do not relate a mystical vision per se but are merely descriptions of the angelic liturgy based on the language of Ezekiel, Nitzan observes that “a serene and sublime atmosphere is created by such numinous terms and style” (p. 178). Even in the absence of a specific praxis to achieve a visionary ascent, Nitzan is prepared to consider the interpretation of Ezekiel’s chariot vision as mystical to the extent that it creates an other-worldly atmosphere.

Underlying this comment is the perspective on the mystical character of the Hekhalot texts enunciated by Scholem who borrowed the term “numinous” from Rudolph Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy* to characterize the Hekhalot hymns.<sup>7</sup> By using the word “numinous” to describe the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, Nitzan implies that

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<sup>6</sup> G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1965), p. 128; idem, “Judaism and Gnosticism” [Hebrew] in *Explications and Implications: Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance*, vol. 2, ed. A. Shapira (Tel-Aviv, 1989), pp. 177–178 (L. H. Schiffman, “Merkavah Speculation at Qumran: The 4Q Serekh Shirot ‘Olat ha-Shabbat,” in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, ed. J. Reinharz and D. Swetschinski, with the collaboration of K. P. Bland (Durham, 1982), pp. 15–47; idem, “Hekhalot Mysticism and the Qumran Literature” [Hebrew], in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, 1–2 (1987): 121–138; C. Newsom, “Exegesis in the Qumran Sabbath Shirot,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38 (1987): 11–30; D. J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel’s Vision* (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 49–55. Mention should also be made of the study by J. M. Baumgarten, “The Qumran Sabbath Shirot and the Rabbinic Merkavah Traditions,” *RQ* 13 (1988): 199–213; and D. Dimant and J. Strugnell, “The Merkavah Vision in Second Ezekiel (4Q385 4),” *RQ* 13 (1988): 331–348.

<sup>7</sup> See *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1954), p. 57; *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 21. Nitzan (p. 23, n. 5) refers to the latter source, and in that context she also mentions explicitly Otto’s work. Nitzan also refers to Otto in the third footnote of her study.

they too attempt to reproduce in language the *mysterium tremendum* that surrounds the glory of God and hence presuppose the mystical experience of ascent even if it is not specified explicitly. Nitzan also considers the possibility that the use of particular numerical structures and sequences—what she calls “typological numbers”—could be seen as mystical and magical. That is, the liturgical repetition of typological numbers, especially the number seven, can be viewed as the means that elevate the spiritualized admiration and exaltation of God through the heavenly kingdom. Nitzan refers to this act alternatively as mystical or magical, without really providing an adequate definition of either term. In the final analysis, according to Nitzan, the Sabbath Songs should be considered “as a medium for creating an experience of mystic communion between the earthly and the heavenly worshippers” (p. 183). The “mystical experience” of harmony and communion between the earthly and heavenly kingdoms of God is reached either through the liturgical compositions such as 4QBerakhot or the angelic liturgy of the *shiroi* <sup>c</sup>*olat shabbat*.

The theoretical model for Nitzan is the description of the mystical experience offered by Scholem in the opening pages of *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. It will be recalled that the mystical experience, according to Scholem, involves a direct and intimate consciousness of the divine Presence that, in the most extreme cases, eventuates in union with God. Despite his typological classification of mysticism as the romantic restoration of the broken unity of mythic consciousness, Scholem expressed doubt regarding the place of mystical union in the various historical manifestations of Jewish mysticism. The logical implication of this is that from Scholem's own standpoint the vast majority of Jewish mystical sources fall somewhat short of the ideal that he himself set up, which involves unitive experience. The point is particularly relevant with respect to Hekhalot mysticism, which after all has served as the model for all those who would employ the word “mystical” to characterize the blessings and hymns in the Qumran fragments. The mystical aspect of Hekhalot literature, according to Scholem, involves the “ascent of the soul to the celestial throne where it obtains an ecstatic view of the majesty of God and the secrets of His realm.”<sup>8</sup> Scholem placed the visionary ascent at the center of the

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<sup>8</sup> *Major Trends*, p. 5.

Hekhalot literature, viewing it as the most essential and primary element in this corpus. For the present purposes we may bracket the critique of Scholem's position by several scholars, including, most importantly, Peter Schäfer and David Halperin, who have challenged what they contend is Scholem's privileging of the mystical-visionary over the magical-adjuratory component. What is critical to stress here is that Scholem refers to this corpus by two names: "merkavah mysticism" and "Jewish gnosticism." Scholem's contention that the merkavah visionaries cultivated a "rabbinical gnosticism," i.e., a "form of Jewish Gnosticism which tried to remain true to the Halakhic tradition,"<sup>9</sup> is based on his understanding of gnosticism as a "religious movement that proclaimed a mystical esotericism for the elect based on illumination and the acquisition of a higher knowledge of things heavenly and divine."<sup>10</sup> That is to say, therefore, that the term "gnosticism" denotes for Scholem knowledge of a supranatural illuminative character. Similarly, the appropriateness of the term "mystical" relates specifically to the visionary encounter between man and God. Hence, according to Scholem, in some fundamental sense the terms "gnosticism" and "mysticism" as they relate to the Hekhalot literature bear the same connotation. The experiential (and decidedly visual) underpinning of the esoteric knowledge bestowed upon the *yorde merkavah* no doubt explains Scholem's referring to Hekhalot material as a Jewish gnosis or a Jewish concomitant to Gnosticism.<sup>11</sup>

The ecstatic vision of the glory functionally replaces the ideal of union as the peak mystical experience. Scholem thus emphasized that in the Hekhalot texts there is no experience of *unio mystica* whereby the ontological gap separating human and divine is overcome.<sup>12</sup> It is certainly the case that in the Hekhalot sources there is no union of man and God in the way that Scholem described it. However, as I noted above, this typology of unitive experience has

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. "Judaism and Gnosticism," p. 181. In that context Scholem draws three major parallels between the Hekhalot texts and gnostic sources, to wit, the pleroma, the visionary ascent, and the magical practices necessary for the ascent to the pleroma. It is evident, therefore, that the visionary experience is seen as central in both merkavah mysticism and Gnosticism. Scholem equates the expressions "Jewish gnosticism," "Jewish esotericism," and "mysticism of the *yorde merkavah*."

<sup>12</sup> See *Major Trends*, pp. 55–56.

its intellectual roots in Neoplatonism, which is completely irrelevant to the corpus of Hekhalot mysticism. If one applies the Neoplatonic idea of union to the Hekhalot, it is obvious that one will not succeed in finding any passage to confirm such an ideal. I submit, however, that there is another model of mystical experience that is germane to Jewish and later Christian apocalyptic as well as the Hekhalot sources, a model that from its own vantage point involves the narrowing of the gap between human and divine. The model to which I refer is that of the ascension to heaven and transformation into an angelic being who occupies a throne alongside the throne of glory. The apocalyptic tradition of the ideal human becoming an angel reaches its logical conclusion in 3 Enoch where the prototype of the merkavah mystic, Enoch, is transformed into Metatron, the vice-regent of God who sits upon a throne adjacent to God. The mystical experience expressed in the Hekhalot, which of course varies widely from one textual unit to another (or what Schäfer calls macroforms that are made up of smaller tradition-complexes called microforms), involves ascension and enthronement. In a separate study I have argued that in the three major textual units in the Hekhalot corpus that describe the visionary ascent, Hekhalot Rabbati, Hekhalot Zutarti, and the genizah fragment called by the scribe Ḥotam ha-Merkavah and by scholars the Ozhayah text, a critical part of the ascent experience is the enthronement of the *yored merkavah*, either on the chariot itself or on a throne alongside the throne of glory. Despite the slight differences in detail between these three literary witnesses, there is a common core to the experience as it is related textually: the heavenly ascent culminates in the enthronement of the mystic that transforms him into an angelic being, a transformation that facilitates his vision of the glory and the hypostatic powers of God that are active before the throne.<sup>13</sup> The extent to which this aspect of the mystical experience was neglected by Scholem can be gauged from the following comment that comes right after his statement that the gap separating man and God is not bridged or blurred in the experience of the merkavah mystic related in the Hekhalot literature: "The mystic who in his ecstasy has passed through all the

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<sup>13</sup> E. R. Wolfson, "Yeridah la-Merkavah: Typology of Ecstasy and Enthronement in Ancient Jewish Mysticism," in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and Typologies*, ed. R. A. Herrera (New York, 1993), pp. 13–44.



gates, braved all the dangers, now stands before the throne; he sees and hears—but that is all.”<sup>14</sup> Well not exactly; Scholem has forgotten one small item: according to the major texts in this corpus that describe the ascent, the mystic is said to be seated in the seventh palace before the throne of glory. Essentially, Scholem has obscured the most important detail of the mystical experience reported in these sources, indeed the detail that in my opinion most precisely qualifies these texts as mystical. The vision of the glory and the divine attributes normally withheld from both angelic and human creatures results from the enthronement of the mystic. In that sense one can speak of the enthronement as a quasi-deification or angelification that renders possible the mystical vision.

I submit that it is this enthronement and the consequent vision that justifies the use of the term “mystical” to characterize the ascent experience of the Hekhalot texts. The narrative description of the glory, throne, attendant angels, and the rest of the celestial realm is not in and of itself sufficient to be classified as mystical. The use of the latter term should be reserved for texts that describe the experience of ascent, enthronement, and vision. Are such factors operative in the Qumran material discussed by Nitzan? While it is certainly plausible and likely that the motif of angelic transformation would have been known by members of the Qumran community as is attested by the experience of relevant apocalyptic fragments in their library (even though the critical passage of Enoch’s transformation at the end of the Parables [1 Enoch 70–71], has not been documented at Qumran),<sup>15</sup> the question before us is, do the texts discussed by Nitzan indicate unequivocally the belief in the translation to heaven and consequent transformation into an angelic being either by participating in the heavenly liturgy or actually sitting upon a throne? Most important, do we have any indication in these documents of a mystical praxis that would bring about these extraordinary experiences?

*Prima facie*, it would appear that lacking in the Qumran texts is anything remotely resembling a visionary ascent to the throne culminating in the enthronement of a mystic in the celestial realm.

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<sup>14</sup> *Major Trends*, p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> See J. T. Millik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford, 1976) and F. García Martínez, *Qumran and Apocalyptic: Studies on the Aramaic Texts From Qumran* (Leiden, 1992).

That Nitzan is acutely aware of this major discrepancy between the sectarian literature and later Hekhalot texts is evident from the following observation: "There is no such descent to the merkavah in the Qumran writings, nor recitation of the Qedushah before the heavenly throne and among the earthly worshippers. However, an experience of harmony and of communion between the chosen earthly and heavenly worshippers is reached through hymns recited by his pure and perfect worshippers" (p. 168). Toward the end of her study Nitzan reiterates this critical point: "Indeed, the religious experience of the people who wrote or used the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice was not analogous to that of the mystic experience of the later descenders to the merkavah" (p. 183).<sup>16</sup> In spite of this difference Nitzan insists that the experience of communion between the earthly and the angelic worshippers related in the Qumran fragments may be considered mystical insofar as this experience presupposes the bridging of the ontological gap that separates human and angel. In support of this contention it might be recalled that on several occasions in the Hodayot scrolls the possibility of the worshipper taking his place among the angels so that he may praise God's name in the heavenly realm is affirmed; the members of the sect see themselves as liturgical partners with the angels (see 1QH 3:22; 11:13; fragment 2:10; 10:7). In a similar fashion in several passages in 1QSb the priests are blessed with the blessing that they join the angelic priesthood in the heavenly abode (iii 25–26; iv 24–26). On the other hand, it should be noted that other passages in Qumran writings suggest that the sectarians believed that angels joined their earthly community (1QS 11:7b–9a); indeed, the community was envisioned as a kind of temple wherein the divine Presence dwelt in the form of angels or the singular angel attached to the "sons of light," i.e., Michael, the Prince of Light (1QS 3:20; 1QM 17:6b–8a).

The belief in an angelic presence in the midst of the community necessitated, from an halakhic perspective, that those with either physical deformities or ritual impurities had to be removed from the congregation (see 1QSa ii 8b–9a; 1QM 7:6; 1QH 6:13). Terms used to refer to the community such as the "holy council" or the

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<sup>16</sup> This comment did not appear in the original draft of Nitzan's study and, I believe, it was added in response to my initial criticism regarding this point presented orally at the conference.

"eternal fellowship" indicate, as Michael Knibb pointed out, that "the members believed that their life already formed a part of the life of God's heavenly council."<sup>17</sup> This observation is very important as it underscores a significant element in the spiritual composition of the sect, one that is immediately relevant to evaluating the extent to which implicit in these writings is the belief that human beings were translated to heaven and transformed into angels. It would appear from the literary remains that there was a genuine confusion of time and space in the religious beliefs of the sectarians. I note parenthetically that Ben Zion Wacholder discussed a similar blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries, the present and the eschatological endtime, on the one hand, and the heavenly and earthly domains, on the other, in the book of Ezekiel which he claimed served as the major source for many ideas and terms found in the sectarian literature.<sup>18</sup> The eschatological future had not yet come, but to some extent it was already being enacted in the ritual life of the community.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the space of the earthly community was clearly distinguishable from the celestial retinue of angels; however, the lines were blurred both by the fact that the community believed that the angels were joined to their mundane dwelling and that they in some sense had already been transformed into angelic beings. Nitzan has proposed that the means for that transformation consisted of liturgical recitation of blessings and hymns. The point is expressed as well by Newsom: "It is in relation to the idea of the community as a temple that the allusions to communication with the angels are primarily to be situated. The nature of that communion is conceptualized in various places as common worship and as shared priestly service."<sup>20</sup>

According to Newsom the description of the angelic liturgy in the Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice should be taken as prescriptive of an experience of translation to the heavenly temple realized through recitation of hymns. In addition to being midrashic elaborations of

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<sup>17</sup> *The Qumran Community* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> B. Z. Wacholder, "Ezekiel and Ezekielianism as Progenitors of Essenianism," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, ed. D. Dimant and U. Rappaport (Leiden and Jerusalem, 1992), p. 188.

<sup>19</sup> See L. H. Schiffman, *The Eschatological Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Atlanta, 1989); idem, *Law, Custom and Messianism in the Dead Sea Sect* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1993), pp. 268–311.

<sup>20</sup> *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (Atlanta, 1985), pp. 62–63.

the chariot-vision in Ezekiel as well as Ezekiel's description of the future temple,<sup>21</sup> these songs seem to have provided the sectarians with a vehicle to be translated heavenward to participate in the angelic liturgy, an experience alluded to in other Qumran documents as I noted above.<sup>22</sup> The position articulated by Nitzan basically accords with the view expressed by Newsom: the subject matter of the Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice is the liturgical worship of the angelic priests in the celestial temple that parallels the priestly sacrificial rite in the earthly temple. In lending expression to this heavenly worship, the sectarians forged an experiential link with the angels. In short, these hymns are a liturgical-ritualistic substantiation of the theoretical and abstract idea expressed in other sectarian literature concerning the participation of the community with the angels.<sup>23</sup>

The orientation of Newsom challenges the interpretation expressed by earlier scholarship, e.g., Strugnell and Schiffman,<sup>24</sup> that the angelic liturgy involved no heavenly ascent or visionary journey, but consisted rather of a speculative description of the events in heaven without any necessary link between the celestial and earthly liturgies. Reflecting on the two fragments published by Strugnell, Schiffman concluded that this material is derived primarily from "an exegesis of the merkavah visions of Ezekiel and related biblical texts," but there is no indication of an "incubation or preparation for a mystical journey." The songs of praise described in the Qumran texts are uttered in the heavenly abode and thus do not function as the "means to bring about ecstasy or mystical experience."<sup>25</sup> By contrast, Newsom, who of course had the advantage of utilizing all the relevant fragments, emphasizes the

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<sup>21</sup> See *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 64. See M. Weinfeld, "The Heavenly Praise in Unison," *Meqor Hayyim: Festschrift für G. Molin* (Graz, 1983), pp. 427–437, and idem, "Prayer and Liturgical Practice in the Qumran Sect," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, p. 244: "a liturgical composition called Song of Sabbath *Olah* . . . centers around the mystical idea of the joining of the congregation of Israel in the singing of the angels in the heavenly Temple."

<sup>23</sup> See "Biblical Influence in Qumran," pp. 302, 306, 307–308.

<sup>24</sup> See J. Strugnell, "The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran—4Q Serek Sirôt 'Olat Hasabat," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 7 (1960): 318–345, esp. 320 and 335; Schiffman, "Merkavah Speculation at Qumran," pp. 18–19.

<sup>25</sup> "Merkavah Speculation at Qumran," p. 45.

ecstatic and visionary implications of the Sabbath hymns. "The entire composition seems at times to be a rhapsody on the sacred number seven, so that one may simply have in the *Shirot* a fluctuation between a vision of heaven as one and as seven holy sanctuaries."<sup>26</sup> While Newsom too would acknowledge that the Sabbath Songs do not amount to a visionary tour as one finds in the apocalyptic and *Hekhalot* sources, she notes that the last five songs describe a progression through the structure of the heavenly temple and thus presuppose some element of an ecstatic journey. Indeed, Newsom characterizes the cycle of the *Sabbath Shirot* as a "quasi-mystical liturgy designed to evoke a sense of being present in the heavenly temple."<sup>27</sup> In these Songs, according to Newsom, "one does finally encounter something like the cultivation of a mystical communion with the angels."<sup>28</sup> From a formal perspective these texts should not be understood as a revelation of secrets about the heavenly realm, as one finds typically in apocalyptic materials, but rather as an act of worship.<sup>29</sup>

Newsom in a sense follows the suggestion of Johann Maier that the Qumran Sabbath Songs should be understood in the context of priestly self-understanding,<sup>30</sup> i.e., the social context that best explains this liturgical cycle is the need for the members of the priesthood at Qumran, the *bene šadoq*, to justify their claims to being the legitimate heirs to the high priesthood outside the confines of the Jerusalem temple.<sup>31</sup> This need for legitimacy would also explain the main purpose of the Songs according to Newsom, i.e., the cultivation of the experience of being present in the heavenly temple in order to stand together with the angelic priests who serve there. Newsom puts the matter as follows: "It is, I suspect, in order

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<sup>26</sup> *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> See C. Newsom, " 'He Has Established for Himself Priests': Human and Angelic Priesthood in the Qumran Sabbath *Shirot*," in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. L. H. Schiffman (Sheffield, 1990), p. 114.

<sup>30</sup> J. Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis* (Salzburg, 1964), pp. 133–135.

<sup>31</sup> *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, pp. 65–72; " 'He Has Established for Himself Priests'," pp. 114–115. On the cultic substitution of prayer in the community of the Covenanters for the sacrificial worship of the Jerusalem Temple, see S. Talmon, "The Emergence of Institutionalized Prayer in Israel in Light of Qumran Literature," in *The World of Qumran From Within: Collected Studies* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1989), pp. 200–243.

to create and maintain this sense that the text avoids explicit reference to the human community after one brief reference early in the cycle. The result, then, is to provide the community that recites and hears these songs not only with a model for their priesthood but also with an experiential validation of their legitimacy as those permitted to share in the experience of heavenly worship.”<sup>32</sup> This experience does not entail the obliteration of the earthly liturgy nor the merging of the human and angelic communities. It signifies rather a symbolic relationship between the two realms and maintains the possibility that man legitimates his worship by being present with the angels in their worship. Although the Songs do not explicitly speak of actual co-participation in the conduct of the cult of the heavenly temple, it is presumed that the language of the Songs and their recitation invokes and makes present the angelic worship. The liturgy, therefore, creates the virtual experience of being present in the heavenly temple and thereby mutes the religious anxiety associated with the inadequacy of human worship. The experience provided by these hymns serves to authenticate human worship and allows for a proleptic transcendence of its limits.<sup>33</sup>

It must be noted that, for the most part, this remains a conjecture that is not fully supported by the extant texts. Newsom does cite one passage from the early part of the cycle, 4Q400 2 b, to support her contention that the effect of the Songs was the translation of the worshipper to the heavenly temple: “How shall we be considered [among] them? And how shall our priesthood (be considered) in their habitations?” It is probable that this passage expresses the same sentiment that is found in other documents concerning the desire of the sectarians to join the angelic hosts above. Nevertheless, the comments of Schiffman are still valid and ought to be kept in mind: in these Songs there is no explicit description of a mystical journey and no self-conscious articulation that the recitation of the hymns serves as the practical means to achieve such a journey. Indeed, in another study Newsom herself rejects the label “mystical” for these songs in a statement that basically concurs with the formulation of Schiffman: “While there is much to be explored in the relationship between the *Sabbath Shirot* and *merkavah* traditions, the differences are as important as the similarities. For all their

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<sup>32</sup> “‘He Has Established for Himself Priests,’” pp. 115–116.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

vivid evocation of the heavenly realm, the *shiroi* do not speak of ascents or use the technical vocabulary of mystical praxis.”<sup>34</sup> As much as I am inclined to see the cycle of Sabbath Songs as a kind of visionary recital, some caution seems to me to be in order.

It must be noted, moreover, that in none of the sources discussed by Nitzan is there evidence for the other essential component of the mystical experience—the enthronement in the heavenly realm. Interestingly enough, however, there is one Qumran fragment—col. 1 of 4Q491—which according to the reconstruction of Morton Smith does in fact relate the ascension and enthronement of a select individual of the sect. Smith challenged the identification of this text as a “canticle of Michael” and argued instead that the speaker was one of the sectarians who claimed to have been taken up and seated in heaven like one of the angels. In short, Smith sees in this fragment “the influence of speculation or deification by ascent towards or into the heavens, speculation which may have gone along with some practices that provided extraordinary experiences understood as encounters with gods or angels.”<sup>35</sup> In a second study Smith reiterates his view in a slightly more colorful and playful tone: “Now, to my amazement, the Qumran fragments have provided a little poem by some egomaniac who claimed to have done just what I conjectured Jesus claimed, that is, entered the heavenly kingdom and secured a chair with tenure, while yet commuting to earth and carrying on his teaching here.”<sup>36</sup> Assuming the correctness of Smith’s reconstruction, this fragment does indeed affirm, in far more explicit terms than any other Qumran text that has yet surfaced, the transformation of a human into a semi-divine or angelic being. The passages in other Qumran writings that intimate the joining of the sectarians with the angelic hosts never use the image of occupying a throne. On the contrary, the prevalent image is that of standing together with the angels—hence the verb that is frequently used is *yašav* or *lehityašsev*, which has the connotation of standing together. This is entirely appropriate to the liturgical context insofar as the angels, like their human counterparts, utter

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>35</sup> “Ascent to the Heavens and Deification in 4QM<sup>a</sup>,” in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 187–188.

<sup>36</sup> “Two Ascended to Heaven—Jesus and the Author of 4Q491,” in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (New York, 1992), pp. 294–295.

praises, hymns, and blessings in a standing position. In the text discussed by Smith, by contrast, the image is that of sitting above: “<sup>2</sup>El <sup>c</sup>Elyon gave me a seat among those perfect forever, a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods.” The seated posture indicates full deification or angelification, a motif that is found as well in apocalyptic sources and figures prominently in the Hekhalot corpus, as I have remarked above.

In summary, it is evident that chariot speculation was an essential aspect of the religious worldview of the Qumran sect. This interest should be seen as part of a much larger phenomenon that involves the profound impact that the book of Ezekiel had on the sectarians. The particular interest in the chariot vision of Ezekiel is attested as well in Second Ezekiel (4Q385 4), which, as Deborah Dimant and John Strugnell have shown,<sup>37</sup> is rich in exegetical elaborations of the biblical text, in a way reminiscent of the tannaitic *ma<sup>c</sup>aseh merkavah*. The major methodological question is, however, was this interest in the chariot merely speculative or mid-rashic in nature? Or was it, by contrast, related to very specific liturgical practices that enabled the sectarians to bridge the gap between human and angel? Was this gap closed in the minds of the sectarians by the angels descending to join their camp or by the humans ascending to join the angels in the heavenly heights? The study of Nitzan suggests that the merkavah speculation at Qumran had a deeply mystical component linked especially to the liturgical act, but the extant sources do not demonstrate conclusively that the recitation of the hymns facilitated the translation of the worshippers to heaven and their translation into angels. On the other hand, the Qumran fragment as reconstructed and analyzed by Smith tends to support this approach insofar as the heavenly ascension culminates in the enthronement of the adept. If the reconstruction and interpretation of Smith be accepted, then we have a text that should be labelled “mystical” in the technical sense that I described above. In the absence of these two essential elements, ascension and enthronement, I would refrain from using the word mystical to describe any of the Qumran texts.

In spite of my misgivings, the importance of the Qumran material in the history of Jewish mysticism cannot be overstated. There can be no greater evidence that the hymns embedded in the Hekhalot

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<sup>37</sup> See reference cited above in n. 6.



compositions have their roots in late Second Temple Judaism. Recent attempts to assign the Hekhalot to a later date in Jewish history may be valid from a redactional point of view, but this should not blind us from the fact that incorporated in these texts are much older materials. A sophisticated form-critical approach to the Hekhalot literature demands a nuanced distinction between the older textual units and the later redactional setting. In particular, the role of hymns in Qumran literature, discussed by Nitzan in this study and in her other work,<sup>38</sup> provides an important perspective for the evaluation and dating of the Hekhalot texts. Finally, the connection between the priestly ritual and the angelic liturgy that is made in the Qumran texts is a very important piece of evidence that may help us discern the provenance of the later Hekhalot writings. As a variety of scholars, including Johann Maier and Ithamar Gruenwald,<sup>39</sup> have already noted, there is a strong priestly component in the Hekhalot compositions. Future research should continue to exploit this connection in an effort to determine who the *yorde merkavah* were within Jewish society in the tannaitic and/or amoraic periods. Despite the rabbinic attribution in the Hekhalot sources it seems fairly obvious that the visionary ascent to the heavenly throne and the participation in the angelic liturgy would have been a preoccupation of a priestly group who, in the absence of an earthly temple, turned their attention to its celestial counterpart. The philological similarities of the Qumran hymns and the liturgical poems contextualized in the larger redactional settings of the Hekhalot corpus may provide important clues for determining the identity and social standing of the composers of the latter. On the other hand, a comparison of the two bodies of literature underscores the significant difference between them: no mystical praxis is related explicitly in the Qumran material. The fragments redeemed from the caves of Qumran supply scholars of Jewish mysticism with keys to open some doors and to lock others.

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<sup>38</sup> Nitzan, "Biblical Influence in Qumran," pp. 175–202, esp. 189–197; idem, "Hymns from Qumran—4Q510–4Q511," *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, pp. 53–62.

<sup>39</sup> See the work of Maier cited above in n. 30 and I. Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), pp. 125–173. On the priestly character of the heavenly ascent in apocalyptic literature, see Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, pp. 29–46.

Elliot R. Wolfson

*Tiqqun ha-Shekhinah:*  
REDEMPTION AND  
THE OVERCOMING OF  
GENDER DIMORPHISM  
IN THE MESSIANIC  
KABBALAH OF MOSES  
HAYYIM LUZZATTO

REDEMPTION AS UNION OF MASCULINE AND FEMININE

It is commonplace in scholarship to assume that the distinctive feature of the kabbalistic idea of redemption involves the reunification of the masculine and the feminine aspects of the divine. Historical exile is understood widely in the theosophic kabbalistic tradition as a reflection of a fissure or an imbalance within the nature of God that results from the separation of the male and the female, the holy King (Tif'eret) and the Matrona (Shekhinah). The redemptive moment is marked by the rectification of this condition, which again is operative in both the divine and the human spheres.<sup>1</sup>

One must naturally avoid the temptation to treat the kabbalah as a monolithic phenomenon in the religious history of Judaism,<sup>2</sup> but it is nevertheless accurate to isolate certain patterns of thought and symbolic

<sup>1</sup> See G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (New York, 1971), p. 343, n. 32, and *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and trans. A. Arkush (Princeton, N.J., 1987), p. 142; C. Mopsik, *Lettre sur la sainteté: Le secret de la relation entre l'homme et la femme dans la cabale* (Paris, 1986), pp. 214–15; M. Idel, "Typologies of Redemptive Activity in the Middle Ages," in *Messianism and Eschatology: A Collection of Essays* (in Hebrew), ed. Z. Baras (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 266–75; and Y. Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. A. Schwartz, S. Nakache, and P. Peli (Albany, N.Y., 1993), pp. 55–63, 67–74.

<sup>2</sup> G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. R. Manheim (New York, 1965), p. 89, cautions the reader against treating the kabbalah as a "unified system of mystical and specifically theosophical thinking." See also E. R. Wolfson, "From Sealed Book to Open Text: Time, Memory, and Narrativity in Kabbalistic Hermeneutics," in *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*, ed. S. Kepnes (New York, 1996), p. 146.

structures (enhanced by specific ritual practices) that recur in this massive corpus in more or less similar ways. The issue of exile and redemption is one such recurring theme that intertextually links kabbalists in different historical periods and geographical regions. Whatever the complicated layers of theosophic speculation that evolved in the course of the centuries, particularly in the doctrines promulgated by Isaac Luria (1534–72) and his disciples in sixteenth-century Safed, the basic idea of the harmony of masculine and feminine potencies in the divine lies at the foundation of the kabbalistic idea of redemption.<sup>3</sup>

In support of this claim a plethora of texts could have been cited, but for the purposes of this introductory comment it will be sufficient to mention one passage from Moses Cordovero (1522–70), who expressed the idea succinctly in his interpretation of the verses, “He shall come as a redeemer to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn back from sin declares the Lord. As for Me, this shall be My covenant with them, said the Lord” (Isa. 59:20–21):

“He shall come as a redeemer,” the Messiah (*šemah ge’ullah*) is in Yesod who causes the redemption to overflow below. “To those in Jacob who turn back from sin,” they reflect the blemish from the aspect of repentance, which is Binah. “Declares the Lord,” Tif’eret and Malkhut. “As for Me, this shall be My covenant,” the bond of Malkhut in Tif’eret. “As for Me” (*wa-ani*), [the word] *ani* refers to Malkhut below and the *waw* to Tif’eret above. “This” (*zo’r*) refers to Malkhut below and “My covenant” (*beriti*) to Yesod. Thus are the two aspects, Malkhut in Tif’eret and Malkhut in Yesod.<sup>4</sup>

Cordovero captures an essential aspect of the kabbalistic idea of messianic redemption: The primary locus of the redeemer is Yesod, the attribute that corresponds to the divine phallus, for this gradation is the conduit that connects the masculine and the feminine. The moment of redemption thus entails the unification of Tif’eret and Malkhut through the phallic Yesod.<sup>5</sup>

The explicit statements of the kabbalists depicting the redemption in terms of the motif of the *hieros gamos* have led a variety of scholars to affirm that the messianic ideal in kabbalistic literature is predicated on the conjunction of the masculine and the feminine rather than the neu-

<sup>3</sup> This is the conclusion reached in the most recent comprehensive studies of the messianic elements in Lurianic kabbalah. See R. Meroz, “Redemption in the Lurianic Teaching” (in Hebrew) (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1988); Y. Liebes, “Two Young Roes of a Doe’: The Secret Sermon of Isaac Luria before His Death” (in Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 10 (1992): 113–69.

<sup>4</sup> Moses Cordovero, *Tefillah le-Moshe* (Przemysl, 1892), 141a. All translations of Hebrew sources are my own.

<sup>5</sup> The abiding concern of Cordovero with the issue of exile and redemption, viewed particularly from the vantage point of the Shekhinah, has been well studied by B. Sack, *The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 249–78.

tralization of the one by the other. A typical statement to this effect is offered by Gershom Scholem in his brief account of the doctrine of redemption according to the *Zohar*: In the present state of exile, there is the disjunction of the bride and the groom in the Godhead. With the advent of the messianic redemption the perfect unity of the sefirotic realm is reestablished and "the Shekhinah will be restored to perpetual union with her husband."<sup>6</sup> In several publications, I have argued that the image of heterosexual pairing is appropriate only in the first stage of the redemptive process in which the exilic condition of separation and fragmentation begins to be overcome. The consequence of the unification, however, is the restoration of the feminine to the masculine. This restoration does not entail, as Scholem would have it, the perpetual union of the Shekhinah and her husband, but the ontic assimilation of the former in the latter. That this reintegration involves the subjugation of the female to the male is expressed in the repeated claim of the kabbalists that the attribute of judgment (linked to the feminine) is ameliorated by the attribute of mercy (linked to the masculine). Although mercy itself is obviously transformed by its union with judgment, the effect of the transformation is not reciprocal, for the union of male and female results in judgment being overwhelmed by mercy, which translates into the masculinization of the feminine rather than the feminization of the masculine. In the union of the sexes, therefore, the binary opposition is transcended by the restoration of the female to the male. The most telling symbolic depiction used by kabbalists to convey the ontological transmutation of the feminine into the masculine is the identification of the feminine as the corona of the phallus (*'ateret berit*). The image of the phallic crown, also depicted in terms of the rabbinic eschatological motif of the crown worn by the righteous in the world to come, conveys the idea of the stabilization of the feminine, the overcoming of female otherness and the consequent reconfiguration of the androgynous unity of the divine. The ontic restoration of the feminine to the masculine is expressed as well in terms of the biblical locution, "a capable wife is a crown for her husband" (Prov. 12:4). Redemption in its ultimate sense does not signify the perpetual pairing of male and female, but the reconstitution of androgyny in the Godhead in which the gender dimorphism is superseded.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, N.J., 1973), p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> See E. R. Wolfson, "Woman—The Feminine as Other in Theosophic Kabbalah: Some Philosophical Observations on the Divine Androgyne," in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, ed. L. Silberstein and R. Cohn (New York, 1994), pp. 166–204, *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany, N.Y., 1995), pp. 79–121, and "Re/membering the Covenant: Memory, Forgetfulness, and the Construction of History in the *Zohar*," to appear in the festschrift in honor of Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi.

*Tiqqun ha-Shekhinah* AND THE MESSIANIC TASK IN  
LUZZATTO'S KABBALAH

In this study, I propose to test my paradigm by examining in detail the status of the feminine in the soteriological idea of *tiqqun ha-shekhinah*, "rectification of the Presence," articulated by Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto (1707–46).<sup>8</sup> The messianic dimension of Luzzatto's writing has been well documented in scholarly literature, particularly his complex relationship to the heretical theology of the Sabbatian movement.<sup>9</sup> The centrality of the motif of *tiqqun ha-shekhinah* in Luzzatto's eschatological

<sup>8</sup> My purpose in this study is not to trace the literary sources that either influenced Luzzatto or were influenced by him. I am concerned rather with analyzing Luzzatto's thought on the basis of his own writings. Moreover, I am deliberately avoiding the important question of Luzzatto's understanding of the anthropomorphic images used by kabbalists in their description of the divine. Luzzatto saw his major task as providing an alternative to the literalist and the metaphorical approaches. According to Luzzatto, the divine gradations are spiritual forms that assume visual shape only within the imaginative faculty, which is the psychic agency correlated with the Shekhinah. Compare Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot*, in his *Ginze Ramhal*, ed. H. Friedlander (Bene Beraq, 1984), pp. 80–82, 138, *Ma'amar ha-Wikkuaḥ*, in his *Ša'are Ramhal*, ed. H. Friedlander (Bene Beraq, 1986), sec. 68, pp. 60–61, *Qelaḥ Pithei Hokhmah*, ed. H. Friedlander (Bene Beraq, 1992), sec. 7, pp. 20–25, *TQT"V Tefillot*, ed. M. Chriqui (Jerusalem, 1996), sec. 15, pp. 9–10, and *Derekh ha-Shem* (Jerusalem, 1996), pt. 3, chap. 3, pp. 83–84; and see Y. Avivi, "Ma'amar ha-Wikkuaḥ of Ramḥal" (in Hebrew), *Ha-Ma'ayan* 15 (1974–75): 49–58, esp. 52–53; J. Hansel, "Défense et illustration de la cabale: *Le philosophie et le cabaliste* de Moïse Ḥayyim Luzzatto," *Pardès* 12 (1990): 66, n. 18; R. Schatz, "Ramḥal's Metaphysics in Its Ethical Context (a study in *Qelaḥ Pithei Hokhma*)" (in Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 9 (1990): 361–96, esp. 371–73. Schatz, p. 373, n. 26, remarks that the imaginative function is attributed to the Shekhinah as well in Abraham Cohen Herrera's *Ša'ar ha-Shamayim*, which she assumes had a major impact on Luzzatto. (Regarding this influence, see also N. Yosha, *Myth and Metaphor: Abraham Cohen Herrera's Philosophic Interpretation of Lurianic Kabbalah* [in Hebrew] [Jerusalem, 1994], pp. 357–58.) It must be pointed out, however, that in earlier kabbalistic literature, especially the later strata of the zoharic corpus, the same function is assigned to the Shekhinah. See E. R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J., 1994), pp. 312–16. The relevant zoharic material undoubtedly influenced Luzzatto. I note, finally, that the claim of G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1954), p. 272, that Luzzatto's theistic interpretation of the Lurianic doctrine of the *paršufim* was "designed to strip it of its obvious mythical elements," is far too simplistic an assessment of the symbolic approach of Luzzatto. In my opinion, Luzzatto does embrace the mythical core of the earlier theosophic kabbalah, expressed in the zoharic and Lurianic materials, but he locates the structure of the myth in the human imagination. On the nexus of exile, dream, and imagination, see Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom* (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 281: "The aspect of dream is also in the exile, and it is not from the secret of this awakening, for its secret is the imagination. The soul that sees what it sees outside the body depicts these things in the imagination." See the recent analysis in J. Hansel, "La cabale et la philosophie dans l'oeuvre de Moïse Ḥayyim Luzzatto (1707–1746)" (Ph.D. thesis, Sorbonne, 1996), pp. 178–81.

<sup>9</sup> To date, the most comprehensive treatment of Luzzatto's messianic posture and its relation to Sabbatianism can be found in the various essays by I. Tishby collected in his *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches: Researches and Sources* (in Hebrew), vol. 3 (Jerusalem, 1993). See also J. Almanzi, "The Biography of Rabbi Moshe Ḥayyim Luzzatto of Padua" (in Hebrew), *Kerem Hemed* 3 (1838): 114–15; S. Ginzburg, *The Life and Works of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto* (Philadelphia, 1931), pp. 5–6, 20–22, 27–34; Y. Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar," in *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought: A Study Conference in*

thinking has also been sufficiently noted by scholars.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, one of the main reforms (*taqqanot*) that bound together the members of Luzzatto's secret circle of illuminati, the *hevrat mevaqshe ha-shem*, the "fraternity of those who seek the Lord,"<sup>11</sup> which were formulated in the contract of unity (*sheṭar ha-hitqashrut*) drafted in all probability in 1731,<sup>12</sup> involved the study of kabbalistic lore "for the sake of the rectification of the holy Shekhinah and the rectification of all of Israel."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in 'Adir ba-Marom, his lengthy commentary on the 'Idra' Rabba', one of the most recondite sections of the *Zohar*, composed in the early months of 1731,<sup>14</sup> Luzzatto remarks that "the first principle of everything and the foundation of everything is that study should be only for the sake of the rectification of the Shekhinah."<sup>15</sup> In another passage from this work, Luzzatto makes an even more general statement in the context of commenting on the description of the enlightened kabbalists, the *maskilim*, as "reapers of the field" (*meḥašde ḥaqla*'), at the beginning of the 'Idra' Rabba' (*Zohar* 3:127b):

You must know that the essence of a person's action is to direct his ways and his conduct for the sake of rectifying the Shekhinah. . . . A person must take upon himself the rectification of the Shekhinah, and thus is called in truth the "reapers

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*Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Gershom Scholem* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 111–13, and *On Sabbateanism and Its Kabbalah: Collected Essays* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 59–60, p. 66, pp. 314–15, n. 112, p. 316, n. 119, p. 398, n. 18, E. Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies* (New York, 1990), pp. 195–255; Z. Rubin, "The Zoharic Works of R. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and His Messianic Attitude" (in Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 8 (1989): 387–412. For a critique of Tishby's position, see M. Benayahu, "The Maggid of R. Moses Hayyim Luzatto" (in Hebrew), *Sefunot* 5 (1961): 320–23, and *Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto: Studies and Texts* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 142–43, n. 13; and B. Gallant, "The Alleged Sabbateanism of Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto," *Tradition* 22 (1986): 44–53.

<sup>10</sup> Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, p. 627, n. 16; M. Benayahu, "Poetry, Prayer, and Confession from Ramhal Recited by the Fraternity on the Rosh ha-Shanah of Its Establishment" (in Hebrew), *Sinai* 82 (1977–78): 43–45; and Carlebach, pp. 201–2.

<sup>11</sup> See Almanzi, p. 114; Benayahu, "Poetry, Prayer, and Confession," p. 42, *Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto*, p. 57, n. 23 and p. 117; and "The Character of Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto as Reflected in New Sources" (in Hebrew), *Italia Judaica* (Rome, 1989), pp. 11–25 (Hebrew section).

<sup>12</sup> See S. Ginzburg, *Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and His Generation: A Collection of Letters and Documents* (in Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv, 1937), p. 179, n. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ginzburg, *Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and His Generation*, pp. 8–9, nos. 4 and 9, and the reiteration of this motif in the "additional reforms" (*taqqanot nosafot*), p. 10, nos. 1 and 2. See Ginzburg, *Life and Works of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto*, pp. 29–31. The *tiqqun* for all of Israel refers to the male Jews who make up the community of Israel, the earthly manifestation of the divine feminine. See Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, p. 984.

<sup>14</sup> According to a letter that Luzzatto wrote to Isaiah Bassan, dated on Lag ba-Omer 1731, the composition of the commentary to this part of the *Zohar* was already completed. See Benayahu, *Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto*, pp. 173–79.

<sup>15</sup> Luzzatto, 'Adir ba-Marom, p. 39.

of the field.” The secret of the matter is that the mystical intent of all the acts of worship (*avodah*) that men perform for the Holy One, blessed be He, is that they constitute the working of the field (*avodat ha-sadeh*), and this is the esoteric significance of “a king is enslaved to the land” (*melekh le-sadeh ne’evad*) (Eccles. 5:8), for just as there are many different types of work that pertain to the field, and all are necessary to bring about the improvement (*tiqqun*) that is required by it, so too the Shekhinah has such a need. These acts of labor are verily the *mišwot*, for they, too, are of varied species. Thus it is written, “Though you take much seed out to the field, you shall gather in little” (Deut. 28:38), and it is also written, “You have been sowing, but have nothing to reap” (Micah 6:15). The secret of this is that the *mišwot* act by way of planting, for the lights are sown in Nuqba’, which is the field. When the [time of] reaping has been reached, that is, to bring out of the Nuqba’ for those that are below, it says, “Sin couches at the door” (Gen. 4:7). Siṭra’ ’Aḥra’ grows stronger to take this light. If there is no one who knows how to harvest the field properly, the light does not spread forth so as not to be given to Siṭra’ ’Aḥra’ in the secret of “He has withdrawn His right hand in the presence of the foe” (Lam. 2:3). Yet, he who receives upon himself the matter of the rectification of the Shekhinah, he ascends to take the light from the place that Siṭra’ ’Aḥra’ does not reach and he brings it below. When it is taken from the man it is guarded, for all of the danger is in the dissemination from Malkhut to humanity. And this is in truth the matter of the students of the academy of Rashbi, may peace be upon him, constantly going out on journeys and studying the secrets, for this is verily the true way to perform this rectification. This is a matter that Rashbi taught them.<sup>16</sup>

The true end of all human action, and not just the study of Torah, is the messianic task of *tiqqun ha-shekhinah*. More specifically, Luzzatto identifies the traditional commandments (*mišwot*) as the different forms of labor that one performs in the field. Through ritual acts one sows seeds of light into the feminine like the farmer who plants different crops in the ground. The theurgical significance of the act of sowing seeds into the earth is implied in Luzzatto’s citation of the verse, “a king is enslaved to the land,” *melekh le-sadeh ne’evad* (Eccles. 5:8). The labor of the righteous below in working the field through ritual observance stimulates the labor above performed by the king working the field, which is symbolic of the sexual union of Tif’eret and Malkhut.

In the time of reaping, however, the task is to draw out the light from the feminine to benefit those below her. At this moment of liminality, the demonic “other side” is strengthened in its effort to take the light, a mythic drama that Luzzatto links to the verse, “Sin couches at the door” (Gen. 4:7). The kabbalists are the “reapers of the field,” for they know how to ascend to the place beyond the reach of the other side to harvest the light (*’or*) from the ether (*’awir*) of the supernal Garden of Eden. The activity associated with reaping the field is the exposition of the secrets

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

of Torah, particularly as they are studied in proximity to open spaces as one journeys on the way in the pattern of the disciples of Simeon bar Yoḥai described in the *Zohar*. The *tiqqun* is achieved, therefore, by the *maskilim* who depart in a state of ecstasy from the world and ascend to the Shekhinah in order to draw forth the light that is hidden therein, a light that is contained as well in the secrets of Torah.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the *maskilim* are on a par with Moses, who is also identified with the soul of the Messiah,<sup>18</sup> for "they are established in the secret of Yesod to overflow afterward to others, and this is [the intent of the verse] 'And the enlightened will shine like the splendor of the firmament and those who lead the many to righteousness [will be like the stars forever and ever]' (Dan. 12:3), for the Messiah is called righteous, in the secret 'he is righteous and victorious' (Zech. 9:9), and those who are strengthened in his power are called righteous. This is [the meaning of] 'This is the gateway to the Lord, the righteous shall enter through it' (Ps. 118:20)."<sup>19</sup> Esoteric gnosis is thus considered the "true way" (*derekh ha-'amiti*) to effect the *tiqqun*, for this form of study facilitates the union of the Shekhinah with the upper masculine potencies by means of the *maskilim* who are in the position of Yesod.<sup>20</sup> The process of enlightenment (*haskalah*) is compared to the flame glowing from the coal, the latter serving as the material base for the former. The flame in all of its colors is identified as the

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 44, where Luzzatto expresses this idea in terms of a well-known numerology used by kabbalists, 'or (light) = *raz* (secret).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 43. In many of his works, Luzzatto repeats the identification of Moses and the Messiah, an identification that underscores his own messianic pretensions as well as his belief that he was the reincarnation of Moses in his generation. Compare Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah* (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 24, 96–97. On other occasions, Luzzatto speaks of the triad of Moses and the two messianic figures, Messiah son of David and Messiah son of Joseph. For example, cf. Moses Hayim Luzzatto, introduction to his *Shiv'im Tiqqunim* (Jerusalem, 1991), p. 10, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot* (n. 8 above), p. 98, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, p. 68, and *TQT"V Tefillot* (n. 8 above), sec. 199, p. 186; sec. 460, p. 372; Israel Ḥezekiah Trevis, *Razin Genizin* (Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 181, 250; and Moses David Valle, *Shiv'im Panim*, in *Megillat Setarim* (Warsaw, 1889), 2b (according to that passage, Moses effects the unity of the two messianic figures by uniting the left hand, which corresponds to the Messiah son of Joseph, and the right hand, which corresponds to the Messiah son of David); see Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, p. 764. Luzzatto's belief that he was the reincarnation of Moses betrays, no doubt, the idea expressed in earlier sources regarding the identification of Luria as the reincarnation of Moses, the first deliverer of Israel and hence the prototype of the messianic figure. Moreover, in the Lurianic texts, Simeon bar Yoḥai of the *Zohar* is identified as the reincarnation of Moses. Hence, a clear nexus is drawn between Moses, Simeon bar Yoḥai, and Luria. See Liebes, "Two Young Roes of a Doe" (n. 3 above), pp. 116, 123–24, 132, 145–47; and Rubin, "Zoharic Works of R. Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto," pp. 390–95, 399–404. On the relationship of Luzzatto and Simeon bar Yoḥai, see also M. Chriqui, *Rekhev Yisra'el* (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 285–302, and 'Or ha-Ganuz: *be-Qelaster Panav shel ha-Ramḥal* (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 63–78.

<sup>19</sup> Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom* (n. 8 above), p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> On the identification of the *maskilim* and the gradation of Yesod, see Luzzatto, introduction to *Shiv'im Tiqqunim*, p. 5. This motif, which is a central tenet in early kabbalistic sources, especially the zoharic material (see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*



first three letters of the tetragrammaton (YHW), the masculine aspect of the divine, and the coal as the last letter of the name (H), the feminine aspect.<sup>21</sup> As Luzzatto expresses the matter in another passage from this composition:

The secret of worship (*'avodah*) is to rectify Malkhut, to bring [her] close to the king, and the secret of the matter is "a king is enslaved to the land" (Eccles. 5:8), and this is the secret of "And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken [from the man into a woman]" (Gen. 2:22).<sup>22</sup> Understand this matter well for this is in truth the entire secret of worship. The Nuqba' must be constructed from 'Abba' and 'Imma' so that she would be worthy to come to Ze'eir 'Anpin, to unite with him. Her unification with him is the secret of unity (*sod ha-yihud*), for then the four letters of the tetragrammaton are bound together in one unit . . . and this is the secret of the providence and the governance of all the worlds.<sup>23</sup>

In a letter that Luzzatto wrote (in Padua on the first and second of the intermediate days of Passover, 1732), to his teacher, Isaiah Bassan, he elaborated on the same motif, emphasizing that the task of man is to provide satisfaction for the Creator, which entails "rectifying the holy Shekhinah and building her as it has been transmitted to Israel, the 'people close to Him' (Ps. 148:14)."<sup>24</sup> Luzzatto goes on to distinguish two kinds of love that the Jewish male has in relation to God, the "love of the Holy One, blessed be He" and the "love of the Shekhinah." The former is described as the love found in all the pious ones of Israel who guard the divine by scrupulously observing the commandments, whereas the latter is characterized as the "desire and passion to rectify the Shekhinah," a rectification that is portrayed as an act of constructing the different entities that constitute the various gradations of the Shekhinah. The two acts of worship, moreover, have their source in the feminine elements of the divine, Leah (or Binah) and Rachel (or Malkhut). With

[n. 8 above], pp. 383–92), is a cornerstone of Luzzatto's messianic kabbalah, related particularly to the ontological root of the *Zohar* itself. Luzzatto's words to Benjamin Cohen on this score are most revealing. See Ginzburg, *Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and His Generation*, p. 37, no. 15: "The *Zohar* is precisely the aspect of the drop that comes forth from Yesod, and thus it is called the 'splendor of the firmament' (Dan. 12:3)." See Rubin, "Zoharic Works of R. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto" (n. 9 above), pp. 396–97, 400.

<sup>21</sup> Luzzatto, *'Adir ba-Marom*, p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> The "land" to whom the king is enslaved according to Eccles. 5:8 is symbolically equivalent to the woman fashioned from the rib of Adam according to Gen. 2:22. That is, both refer to the feminine potency of the Shekhinah in the divine realm. See the commentary on Ecclesiastes written by Moses David Valle, *Be'ur Sefer Qohelet* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 62–63.

<sup>23</sup> Luzzatto, *'Adir ba-Marom*, p. 215. Compare Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 149, p. 114.

<sup>24</sup> Ginzburg, *Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and His Generation* (n. 12 above), p. 239, no. 89.

respect to the former, which is also referred to as the "worship of the king in the Shekhinah that is perpetual," the interiority of the feminine (*penimiyyut ha-nuqba'*) is emphasized, a term that signifies that the status of the female does not fluctuate but remains equilibrated so that she may complete the ten *sefirot* of the male Ze'ir 'Anpin. Thus, the masculine can address the feminine as "bone of my bones" (Gen. 2:23); that is, male and female are constructed from one substance. By contrast, Rachel, the "childless woman of the house" (cf. Ps. 113:9), is described as the flesh (an allusion to the continuation of Gen. 2:23, "and flesh of my flesh"), which is sometimes fat and other times thin, sometimes in a state of repair (*tiqqun*) and other times in a state of damage (*qilqul*). Summing up the discussion, Luzzatto writes:

Those who serve with the general worship are rooted in Leah, the secret of the bone, while those who serve by way of the rectification of the Shekhinah are rooted in the flesh, which is Rachel. . . . This is the sum total of a man's existence, that his worship be in the love of the Shekhinah, which is added to the love of the Holy One, blessed be He. Hence, the words of the Ari, may his memory be for a blessing, are correct when he said that the essence of a man's occupation should be the inwardness of Torah, for this alone illuminates the Shekhinah, as it says in the *Zohar* and in the *Tiqqunim* that only with respect to the secrets of Torah is it proclaimed, "I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant" (Gen. 9:16).<sup>25</sup>

*Tiqqun ha-shekhinah* is achieved most perfectly through the study of the secrets of Torah, which results in the remembering of the covenant. As I shall argue in the final section of this essay, the act of remembering the covenant entails the phallicization of the feminine, which marks the climactic phase of redemption.

Reflecting previous kabbalistic sources, especially the zoharic and Lurianic texts, Luzzatto repeatedly emphasized the fact that exile is a condition of restriction and limitation that results in the separation of male and female. Exile, therefore, is the constriction of the masculine potency of beneficence and the domination of the feminine force of judgment. This separation is not absolute, however, for if it were the world could not endure. In a composition that deals extensively with themes related to the redemption, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, composed sometime in 1729,<sup>26</sup> Luzzatto expresses the matter as follows: "The great pipe [i.e., Yesod] that overflows to the Shekhinah is at first hidden. It is not hidden

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> In a letter to Isaiah Bassan, written on the eighteenth of Kislev 1729, Luzzatto mentions *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah* as one of several texts that he has already written. See Ginzburg, *Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and His Generation*, p. 31, no. 14; Benayahu, *Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto* (n. 9 above), pp. 48 and 227.

entirely . . . but the opening is compressed, and that which descends from it descends in a great concealment."<sup>27</sup> The reception of a diminished flow of energy on the part of the feminine Shekhinah from the phallic Yesod marks the first of four damages caused by the exile.<sup>28</sup> The enfeebled condition of the Shekhinah is portrayed by Luzzatto (on the basis of earlier sources) by several other mythical images. Thus, for example, in the state of exile, the Shekhinah is stripped of the glorious and splendid garment that Binah, the divine mother, bestowed upon Tif'eret and Shekhinah, the son and the daughter, and in its place she is adorned with the dark and lowly clothes of the weekday (*bigde ḥol*).<sup>29</sup>

In the exile the garments were garments of darkness and gloom in the secret of the shell that surrounds the core . . . but in the time of the redemption the garments will be "garments of salvation" (*bigde yesha'*) (Isa. 61:10), and the [attribute of] strength is called in this way as is Binah since she is to the left, and in truth these garments come out from her. Regarding all of this [it is written] "He wrapped me in a robe of righteousness" (*me'il ṣedaqah*) (ibid.), this is the splendid and glorious robe that is given to her from the king, and since it is given in the time of union it is called the "robe of righteousness," for righteousness signifies the supernal union.<sup>30</sup>

According to another image employed by Luzzatto, in the exile the Shekhinah is sullied by the blemish of the "flooding of the feet" (*shittuf ha-raglayim*), a state of impurity linked to the verse, "Her feet go down to death" (Prov. 5:5). The rectification of this condition, which I surmise

<sup>27</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 4–10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 16. In *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot* (n. 8 above), p. 93, Luzzatto similarly describes the Shekhinah divesting herself of the "weekday garments" (*malbushe ha-ḥol*) when the time of redemption arrives. In that context, Luzzatto elaborates on the motif of the Shekhinah being garbed in the demonic shells during the exile on account of the sins of Israel (pp. 91–92; cf. pp. 129–30). Alternatively, this idea is expressed as the Shekhinah descending to the realm of the shells in order to perfect the feminine potency of the demonic. This is related to the mystery of the intentional transgression (*averah lishmah*), whose purpose it is to elevate the Shekhinah from her entrapment in the shells. Interestingly enough, Luzzatto speaks of the disclosure of the masculine Ze'eir 'Anpin immediately after the sin is committed, which results in the reinstitution of traditional rituals. The messianic discarding of the law is thus only a temporary action. Moreover, Luzzatto emphasizes that the antinomian act, which is characterized more specifically as the breaking of sexual taboos (*arayot*), applies only to women (pp. 97–98). On the positive valorization of *halakhah* as the means of walking (*halikhah*) by which the Shekhinah in exile rules over the nations of the world, cf. Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 507, p. 410. In *Shiv'im Panim* (n. 18 above), 18a, Valle describes the change of the garment of Yesod, which marks the transition from the exilic to the redemptive state. On the donning of the Shekhinah in garments of the attribute of judgment in order to subjugate the demonic power, cf. Valle, *Shiv'im Panim*, 18b–19a.

<sup>30</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah* (n. 18 above), p. 90.

involves a sin of a sexual nature,<sup>31</sup> will come about through the arrival of the two messianic figures, the Messiah son of Joseph and the Messiah son of David, who are identified as the feet of the Shekhinah.<sup>32</sup> Another symbolic depiction of exile involves the image of the Shekhinah laying in the dust, which represents the realm of demonic shells, and thus the holy union is not consummated. The beginning of redemption, which Luzzatto designates by the term *peqidah* in contrast to the second stage referred to as *zekhirah*,<sup>33</sup> is signaled by the rising of the Shekhinah from

<sup>31</sup> I suggest that *shittuf ha-raglayim* refers more specifically to the spilling of semen in vain through masturbation or involuntary nocturnal emissions. It is possible, however, that this term refers more generally to sexual licentiousness. In any event, it seems clear to me that the reference is to illicit sexual behavior on the part of Jewish males. The nexus of sexual impurity, exile, and the separation of the male and the female aspects of the divine is underscored in Luzzatto's decoding of the expression 'erwah in *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 27, p. 16: The word *ra'*, the evil that is related to illicit sexuality, separates the *waw* and the *he'*, the masculine and feminine aspects of the divine. Compare *ibid.*, sec. 53, p. 30, and sec. 192, p. 177. Already in the Lurianic material, the principal function attributed to the messianic figure was to rectify the sin of spilling semen in vain, which was understood as the primordial sin of the supernal Adam above and of the first Adam below. See Meroz, "Redemption in the Lurianic Teaching" (n. 3 above), pp. 328–35; and Liebes, "Two Young Roes of a Doe" (n. 3 above), p. 141. Let me note, finally, that in the poem attributed to Luzzatto, which begins "qawweh qawweh libbi qawweh 'ohilah," the expression *shetef mayim*, "flood of water," is one of several images used to describe the exile. The text is published in Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches* (n. 8 above), p. 704. In Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom* (n. 8 above), p. 16, the floodwaters in the biblical story of Noah are interpreted as symbolic of the demonic other side. Compare Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 109, p. 74.

<sup>32</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, pp. 16–17. From that context it would appear that the two messianic figures correspond to Neṣaḥ and Hod, which are called the "feet of the Shekhinah." Compare Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 513, p. 416. For a slightly different explanation of the messianic symbolism of the feet, compare *ibid.*, sec. 292, p. 256; sec. 456, p. 370; and Trevis, *Razin Genizin* (n. 18 above), p. 187. Regarding Luzzatto's identification of the messianic figures as the divine feet, see E. R. Wolfson, "Images of God's Feet: Some Observations on the Divine Body in Judaism," in *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*, ed. H. Eilberg-Schwartz (Albany, N.Y., 1992), p. 172. On the symbolic correspondence of the two messianic figures, see Luzzatto's letter (written in Padua on the eighteenth of Shevat 1730) to Bassan in Ginzburg, *Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and His Generation*, pp. 66–67, no. 30: "Indeed, the secret of the messiahs is dependent on Malkhut . . . the Messiah son of Joseph is in the secret of Yesod and the aspect of Malkhut is in the secret of Rachel. . . . Thus, with respect to David it is written, 'May the Lord make the woman who is coming [into your house] like Rachel and Leah' (Ruth 4:11). The truth is that this is the secret of 'Who will go first? The son of Jesse is first' (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 102a), for he is the secret of Leah who comprises Rachel as well. This is related to the fact that he takes the aspect of Malkhut, and the Messiah son of David is in the aspect of Yesod. Therefore the rectification of Malkhut is in David." The identification of Yesod as the ontological root of the messianic figures occurs frequently in Luzzatto's writings or those that were written by members of his circle. Compare Luzzatto, introduction to *Shiv'im Tiqqunim* (n. 18 above), p. 9; Trevis, *Razin Genizin*, pp. 180, 182.

<sup>33</sup> On the possible Sabbatian background to Luzzatto's notion of two stages of redemption, see Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, pp. 780–808; and Liebes, *On Sabateanism and Its Kabbalah* (n. 9 above), p. 319, n. 119. According to both Tishby and

her downtrodden state, followed by the unification with her lover, a secret alluded to in the verse, "I rose to let in my beloved" (Song of Songs 5:5).<sup>34</sup> The initial stage of redemption involves the reunion of the male and the female achieved by the opening of the phallic channel that was blocked in the exile: "When the power that emanates from the perfect root will reach the Šaddiq, who is called in the Torah *mal'akh ha-go'el*,<sup>35</sup> then this light will descend and will be revealed to the Shekhinah who is his partner, and he will give her power that he has not given her from the day of the exile of Israel until that day. . . . When this Šaddiq will arrive and will be united with the Shekhinah, that which was initially concealed on account of the exile will be opened . . . and there will be no more hiding of the face as in the beginning."<sup>36</sup>

The two phases of redemption correspond to different degrees of unification in the sefirotic realm.<sup>37</sup> According to one formulation of this idea, *peqidah* is described as a time when the attribute of Hokhmah illuminates Malkhut from behind, whereas *zekhirah* is portrayed as a moment in

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Liebes, underlying Luzzatto's distinction of a two-staged redemption is the identification of *peqidah* as the Messiah son of Joseph, associated with the level of Yesod or Sabbatai Ševi (Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, pp. 764–69, 797–807; and Liebes, *On Sabbateanism and Its Kabbalah*, p. 66), and *zekhirah* as the Messiah son of David, associated with Tif'eret. Liebes mentions that this distinction is found as well in the 'Or ha-Shem of Hasdai Crescas. One must also bear in mind, however, that in the *Zohar* itself the words *peqidah* and *zekhirah* connote two aspects of memory, which are related to stages of the redemptive process. Cf. *Zohar* 1:115a, 119a, 159b–160a; 2:222a (in that context Moses is depicted as bringing the Shekhinah out of exile by the act of remembering her; the word *peqidah* clearly is a euphemism for intercourse, albeit of a spiritual nature; on the euphemistic use of the root *pqd*, cf. Judges 15:1; Babylonian Talmud Yevamot 62b); and discussion in Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant" (n. 7 above). It is also possible that Luzzatto was influenced in this regard by non-Sabbatian kabbalistic sources such as Cordovero or Luria. Regarding the dual messianic figure in the former, see Sack, *Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero* (n. 5 above), pp. 291–98, and in the latter, see Liebes, "Two Young Roes of a Doe," pp. 130–64.

<sup>34</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, p. 19. Compare the words of the Maggid to Luzzatto from Rosh Hodesh Sivan, 1727, recorded in Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, *Ošerot Ramhal*, ed. H. Friedlander (Bene Beraq, 1986), p. 256.

<sup>35</sup> Gen. 49:16. Compare Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 434, pp. 354–55. In that context, Luzzatto describes the *mal'akh ha-go'el*, the phallic force of Yesod, that opens the closed door (*delet sagur*), which is the aspect of Malkhut during the exile. The opening of the door occurs through the disclosure of the secrets of the Torah. Compare Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 340, p. 286.

<sup>36</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, p. 12. On the hiding of the divine face and the exilic condition of the Jewish people, cf. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, *Da'at Tevunot*, ed. H. Friedlander (Bene Beraq, 1989), sec. 40, pp. 30–31.

<sup>37</sup> In Trevis, *Razin Genizin*, pp. 236–37, the unification associated with *peqidah* is described as the beginning of the rectification, the first intercourse from the left side related to the Messiah son of Joseph, whereas the unification associated with *zekhirah* is the completion and perfection of the rectification, the second intercourse from the right side related to the Messiah son of David. On the correlation of the two messianic figures with the right and the left side of the divine, see the comment of Valle mentioned above in n. 18.

which *Hokhmah* and *Binah* together illumine the face of the *Shekhinah*.<sup>38</sup> Alternatively expressed, *peqidah* derives from *Yesod* and *zekhirah* from *Tif'eret*.<sup>39</sup> Thus, from an historical perspective, *peqidah* precedes *zekhirah*, but from an ontological perspective, *zekhirah* precedes *peqidah*.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, even in the first phase of redemption *Tif'eret* is the motivating force that activates *Yesod* to unite with the *Shekhinah*.<sup>41</sup> Luzzatto alludes to this dynamic in his description of *zekhirah* as the illumination of the upper and lower *mazzal*, represented respectively by the names YHWH (written as YO"D H"Y WY"W H"Y, which equals 72) and Ehyeh (written as AL"F H"Y YW"D H"Y, which equals 161). The numerical sum of the permutations of the two names is 233, which is also the value of the word *zakhor*, "remember."<sup>42</sup> The secret of the redemption is thus related to the verse, "God remembered His covenant" (Exod. 2:24); that is, redemption is dependent on memory, which is linked especially to the disclosure of the phallic covenant.<sup>43</sup>

When *Yesod* overflows without obstruction onto the *Shekhinah*, the act of *zekhirah* comes to fruition and the redemption is complete. Thus, in one of his 515 messianic prayers, the *TQT"W Tefillot*,<sup>44</sup> Luzzatto implores God to dispel the demonic darkness that separated the sixth and seventh of the lower emanations, that is, *Yesod* and *Malkhut*, and to restore the rest and peace taken away from her by uniting the two gradations in the messianic Sabbath.<sup>45</sup> In the state of exile, the eschatological opening of the channel of *Yesod* to irrigate the *Shekhinah* is facilitated by the expositions of the secrets of Torah on the part of the kabbalists, whose mystical enlightenment derives precisely from that gradation

<sup>38</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21 and 24. Elsewhere, Luzzatto affirms the view expressed in the Lurianic material, which in turn is based on earlier sources, regarding the role of the feminine as that which stimulates the male in sexual union. For example, see Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, *Pithe Hokhmah wa-Da'at*, in *Sha'are Ramhal* (n. 8 above), p. 195. As I will argue below, however, this function has the effect of transforming the gender of the feminine. That is, the elevation of the feminine to stimulate the masculine results in the actualization of the phallic potency within the female. On the elevation of *Malkhut* to *Da'at*, cf. Luzzatto, *Pithe Hokhmah wa-Da'at*, p. 207, and *Kelale Hokhmat ha-'Emet*, in *Sha'are Ramhal*, sec. 32, pp. 317–18. The transformation of *Malkhut* from the point beneath *Yesod* to an aspect that is rooted in *Da'at* is indicative of the condition of the aggrandized feminine in the messianic state.

<sup>42</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah* (n. 18 above), p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> A similar point is emphasized in a fragment on the nature of the redemption by one of the members of Luzzatto's circle, Israel Hezekiah Trevis, published by Benayahu, *Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto* (n. 9 above), p. 277. Compare Luzzatto, *Shiv'im Tiqqunim* (n. 18 above), sec. 30, pp. 71–72.

<sup>44</sup> The *TQT"W Tefillot* was composed in 1731. See Benayahu, *Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto*, p. 192.

<sup>45</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT"W Tefillot* (n. 8 above), sec. 380, pp. 314–15.

of the divine.<sup>46</sup> Study of the esoteric content of Scripture provides the means by which the male mystic is erotically bound to the feminine Shekhinah, a spiritual intercourse that takes the place of the mystic's conjugal intercourse with his earthly wife.<sup>47</sup> For Luzzatto in particular, prior to his marriage in 1731, the rectification of the Shekhinah was realized, based on the model of Moses according to the *Zohar*,<sup>48</sup> by leading a life of asceticism and participating in the fraternity of kabbalists.<sup>49</sup> His wedding day, however, signaled a turning point, as the erotic conjunction with the divine was no longer predicated exclusively on sexual abstinence. On the contrary, the final *tiqqun ha-shekhinah* was occasioned by Luzzatto's consummating his marriage by engaging in physical sex.<sup>50</sup> Luzzatto alludes to this secret in his interpretation of the words, "here in Padua," included in the marriage certificate (written on the twenty-seventh of the month of Av, 1731) in which he portrays his marriage to Zipporah, the daughter of David Finzi, as the wedding of the biblical Moses (symbolic of Tif'eret) to the Shekhinah: the word *poh*, "here," can be vocalized as *peh*, "mouth." On the day of the wedding, therefore, Padua is described as the "place in which the mouth was opened," which I decode as a reference to the opening of the phallic

<sup>46</sup> See n. 20 above, and cf. Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 42, pp. 23–24; Trevis, *Razin Genizin* (n. 18 above), pp. 240–41.

<sup>47</sup> On the nexus of asceticism and eroticism in the zoharic kabbalah, which served as the basis for subsequent kabbalistic sources, see E. R. Wolfson, "Eunuchs Who Keep the Sabbath: Becoming Male and the Ascetic Ideal in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism," in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Cohen and B. Wheeler (New York, 1997), pp. 151–85. The erotic nature of man's attachment to God is also evident in Moses Hayyim Luzzatto's description of the pietistic ideal of *devequt*, "conjunction," in his *Mesillat Yesharim*, ed. A. Shoshana (Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 288–91.

<sup>48</sup> *Zohar* 1:21b–22a, 152b, 236b, 239a; 2:5b, 222a, 245a; 3:4b, 148a, 180a, 261b; Scholem, *Major Trends* (n. 8 above), pp. 226–27; I. Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, trans. D. Goldstein (Oxford, 1989), p. 1333; M. Idel, "Sexual Metaphors and Praxis in the Kabbalah," in *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory*, ed. D. Kraemer (New York, 1989), p. 206; and Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar* (n. 1 above), p. 15, and "Zohar and Eros" (in Hebrew), *Alpayyim* 9 (1994): 102. Compare Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot* (n. 8 above), p. 126.

<sup>49</sup> On the ascetic dimension of Luzzatto's life and the specific connection to his involvement with the mystical fraternity, cf. the comment of Rafael Israel Kimḥi in his letter to the rabbis of Venice (dated 3 Kislev 1730), in Ginzburg, *Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and His Generation* (n. 12 above), p. 21, no. 8. In this connection it is of interest to note that, in one of his letters to Benjamin Cohen, Luzzatto remarks that ascetic practices prepared Luria for his role in the redemptive process. See *ibid.*, p. 38 (no. 15). In *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 446, pp. 362–63, Luzzatto links ascetic practices to the exile when the Shekhinah is subject to the impurity of the demonic shells. An extended discussion of asceticism (*perishut*) and its connection to piety (*ḥasidut*) appears in Luzzatto's *Mesillat Yesharim*, pp. 135–43.

<sup>50</sup> See Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches* (n. 9 above), pp. 730 and 748, n. 18. See, however, n. 173 below.

Yesod.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the Shekhinah became *kallat moshe*,<sup>52</sup> the “bride of Moses,” for by means of his unification with Zipporah below, Luzzatto assisted in the unification of the Shekhinah and Moses above: “He said to the virgin whom no man had known,<sup>53</sup> the bride of Moses, ‘Be my wife in a perfect union to arouse the coupling above until there is no end and there is no limit.’ . . . From the mouth of our sages, may their memory be for a blessing, we certainly learn how to serve (*la'avod*) the Shekhinah through various laws and decrees. . . . And thus all of the worship (*avodah*) of the lower beings causes the king to perform another service (*avodah*) above, ‘a king is enslaved to the land’ (Eccles. 5:8), for everything is from the arousal below.”<sup>54</sup> The sexual consummation of the marriage of Luzzatto and his wife thus served as the stimulus to arouse the union above between the male and female attributes of God, a union that is portrayed in explicitly messianic language.

#### ESCHATOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION OF EVIL INTO GOOD

In addition to the ideal of the unification of male and female, the messianic task of *tiqqun ha-shekhinah* can be viewed as the restoration of the demonic to the divine.<sup>55</sup> These two vantage points are, of course, interrelated, for the union of the male and the female cannot be actualized until the demonic is reintegrated into the divine. Thus, toward the very end of his marriage contract, Luzzatto comments on the words, “everything is firm and abiding” (*we-hakol sharir we-qayyam*): “Now Yesod becomes erect in order to copulate for he rules (*shorer*) and dominates over all the shells. ‘And abiding,’ this rectification will endure

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 740. Tishby (ibid., p. 753, n. 126) interprets this as a reference to the mouth of the angelic Maggid, but it seems to me that my interpretation better suits the context. On the significance of the mouth in the final messianic *tiqqun*, cf. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, *Be'ur Zayin Melakhim*, in *Adir ba-Marom* (n. 8 above), pt. 2 (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 128–30. On Moses' union with the two feminine forms of Binah and Shekhinah, one from the right and the other from the left, cf. Valle, *Shiv'im Panim* (n. 18 above), 4a, 4b–5a.

<sup>52</sup> The expression is derived from the midrashic tradition—attributed in some sources to Joshua of Sikhnin in the name of R. Levi—to read the words *kallot moshe* in Num. 7:1, “On the day that Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle,” as *kallat moshe*, the bride of Moses. For references, see Wolfson, *Circle in the Square* (n. 7 above), p. 127, n. 24.

<sup>53</sup> Based on Gen. 24:16.

<sup>54</sup> Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, pp. 740–41.

<sup>55</sup> See Y. Avivi, “The Intention of Creation in the Compositions of Ramhal” (in Hebrew), *Ha-Ma'ayan* 25 (1984–85): 1–18. See also Y. Jacobson, “Moses Hayyim Luzzatto's Doctrine of Divine Guidance and Its Relation to His Kabbalistic Teachings” (in Hebrew), in *Italia Judaica* (Rome, 1989), pp. 27–46 (Hebrew section). A useful discussion of the problem of good and evil in Luzzatto's thought can be found in Chriqui, *Rekhev Yisra'el* (n. 18 above), pp. 229–81. On the messianic role assigned to evil in Luzzatto's thinking and the possible influence of Sabbatian theology, see Liebes, *On Sabbateanism and Its Kabbalah* (n. 9 above), pp. 59–60, 314–15, n. 112.



forever.”<sup>56</sup> In the exilic condition, the desire of the demonic force is to prevent good by blocking the dissemination of light. “Israel stand in the midst of darkness from the aspect of Samael and his female . . . concerning whom [it is written] ‘He has made me dwell in darkness, like those long dead’ (Lam. 3:6), on account of the ‘alef, which is the light (‘or), that disappears . . . and from [the word] ‘emet [truth] there remains *met* [deceased].”<sup>57</sup> Luzzatto characterizes the control of judgment over mercy and the consequent weakening of the divine emanation by the biblical notion (Deut. 27:17) of overstepping one’s boundary (*hassagat gevul*). That is, as a consequence of Israel’s sinfulness, the power of the divine light is diminished and the shell arrogantly and impudently seeks to cleave to the place of holiness to which it does not belong.<sup>58</sup> Sin not only creates a blemish above by separating the male and the female in the divine realm, it allows for the demonic side to draw from and be sustained by the overflow of the holy gradations as it is channeled through the Shekhinah.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, in the time of the “great rectification” (*tiqqun gadol*), there will be an expansion of the boundary (*har-havat gevul*), which signifies the overpowering of judgment by mercy.<sup>60</sup> “The boundary derives from the power of strength, but when peace is greatly strengthened, mercy overpowers strength, and then all the lights draw close to one another in a great affinity, for the power of closeness and unity grows strong in the lights. . . . Every power draws close to its neighbor and there is no great need for boundary. . . . The power of peace that is strengthened unifies everything in a complete unity.”<sup>61</sup> The state of unity that is described here in terms of the augmentation of the phallic aspect of God, designated by the technical term “peace,”<sup>62</sup> is

<sup>56</sup> Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, p. 744. Compare Valle, *Shiv'im Panim*, 19b.

<sup>57</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 22, p. 13. On the essential connection of darkness (understood as the concealment of divine light) and the demonic force, a theme reiterated in many of Luzzatto's texts, see *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot* (n. 8 above), p. 121.

<sup>58</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah* (n. 18 above), p. 88. In *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot*, p. 114, Luzzatto asserts that the characteristic of going beyond an allocated boundary is bestowed upon the demonic from the diminution of the moon.

<sup>59</sup> Compare Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot*, pp. 128–30. The attachment of the demonic to the Shekhinah is the esoteric significance of the symbol of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which is applied to the Shekhinah.

<sup>60</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, pp. 82–83. Compare Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 261, p. 238. In that context, Luzzatto contrasts the boundlessness of divine unity and the restrictiveness of the demonic force.

<sup>61</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, pp. 83–84.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78, where two aspects of peace (*shalom*) are distinguished, the upper and lower. From the context it appears that the upper peace refers to Binah and the lower peace to Yesod. The latter receives the name *shalom* when it is united with the former, an idea exegetically linked to the repetition of the word *shalom* in Isa. 57:19. On p. 79, the Shekhinah is identified as the “time of peace,” *‘et shalom*, which stands in opposition to the “time of strife,” *‘et milhamah* (Eccles. 3:8), and on p. 81, the Shekhinah is given the title

predicated on the overcoming of the duality of good and evil, light and darkness. In the state of exile, the demonic shell causes the separation of the male and the female and thereby prevents the rectification of existence on all levels of being. By contrast, in the messianic state of *tiqqun*, evil will be annihilated and the good that is within the evil, the spark of light trapped in the shell, will be restored to the realm of holiness.<sup>63</sup> The full disclosure of divine unity is predicated on the subjugation and ultimate transmutation of the impure into the holy. In *TQT" W Tefillot*, Luzzatto expresses the perfection of unity (*shelemut ha-yihud*) as follows: "You placed all the impure gradations beneath the feet of your holy Shekhinah, as it says concerning her, 'His kingship (*malkhut*) rules over all' (Ps. 103:19). When you concealed your unity, the impure ones ascended and descended upon her in their impudence. . . . As soon as your unity will be revealed upon her, all of them will be subjugated and enslaved beneath her. Immediately, 'laying the world at his feet' (ibid. 8:7)."<sup>64</sup> The removal of deception (*sheqer*) from the world is dependent on the bond (*qesher*) of holiness through which Israel is conjoined to the divine from above and below.<sup>65</sup>

Time and again, Luzzatto affirms the complete obliteration of the demonic force in the messianic age, an idea linked especially to two biblical verses, "I will give the land respite from vicious beasts" (Lev. 26:6) and "He will destroy death forever" (Isa. 25:8).<sup>66</sup> The original function of the demonic shells was to test human beings so that they would merit a just reward by overcoming temptation. The desire of the shell was to be conjoined to holiness, but a boundary was set between the two to prevent a mixing of the forces.<sup>67</sup> In the time of redemption, however, the shell will no longer stand opposite the side of holiness, for it will be destroyed. In Luzzatto's own words:

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"sword of peace," *herev shel shalom* (cf. Tosefta, Ta'anit 2:10; Palestinian Talmud, Ta'anit 3:6, 66d; Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 22a), for it is the attribute of judgment (symbolized as the sword) that derives from the attribute of peace or Yesod. Consequently, the Shekhinah can combat the force of demonic impurity, which is at odds particularly with the phallic gradation of the divine. On the explicit identification of the *ṣaddiq*, which corresponds to the divine phallus, as *shalom*, cf. Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 178, p. 156, sec. 164, p. 184.

<sup>63</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, p. 46.

<sup>64</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 2, p. 2. Compare ibid., sec. 495, p. 389, where the messianic era is described in terms of the serpent being subdued under the feet of the Shekhinah.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., sec. 7, p. 6; sec. 91, p. 57; sec. 105, p. 70; sec. 209, p. 205.

<sup>66</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, pp. 80–81, 91–92. Compare pp. 99–100, where the obliteration of the demonic shell in the messianic era is exegetically linked to Isa. 27:13.

<sup>67</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, p. 60. The proof text that Luzzatto cites to characterize the relationship of the forces of holiness and impurity is Eccles. 7:14. Compare Luzzatto, *Derekh ha-Shem* (n. 8 above), pt. 3, chap. 2, pp. 80–81.

Thus [Scripture] says, "in that day there shall be one Lord with one name" (Zech. 14:9), and in truth this is speaking about Tif'eret and Malkhut. . . . At present there is "another god" (*elohim 'aḥerim*) in the world, for even though in truth nothing can be done that the king did not command, they act in their strength and in their pride as if there were, God forbid, another source distinct from the true one. In truth, holiness separates and distances itself from impurity, and thus they are called "other gods." When the creation in its entirety is rectified, the evil that is in the shell will be annihilated and the good will be drawn after the holiness as is appropriate.<sup>68</sup>

Returning to this theme in another passage, Luzzatto remarks that "in that time the shell is already annihilated, for the good is removed from the impurity and it is drawn after the holiness, and the evil is pushed below. The remainder [of the impurity] attaches itself to the idolaters who have already died and who are in Gehenna. . . . In the end of days there will be a day of great judgment to complete the purification of all the souls and all of creation. . . . As a result of that judgment all of creation will be completely pure and all of the evil will be destroyed and consumed."<sup>69</sup>

In spite of these passages, which suggest a more dualistic approach based on the notion of the absolute separation of the forces of holiness and impurity and the need to obliterate the latter in its entirety in the messianic future, Luzzatto rejects the positing of absolutely distinct forces in existence, for in his opinion, following a longstanding kabbalistic tradition, the demonic power ontically derives from and thus ultimately must be restored to the Godhead.<sup>70</sup> Thus, for example, in his main systematic treatise on the theoretical principles of theosophic kabbalah, *Qelāḥ Pitḥe Ḥokhmah*, written in 1732,<sup>71</sup> Luzzatto presents the metaphysical reasoning underlying the eschatological goal of the transmutation of evil into good: "The will of the Emanator, blessed be his name, is only good, and thus nothing exists but his goodness. All that is evil in the beginning does not derive from another authority, God forbid, that could exist in opposition to him, but its end is certainly good. Then it will be known that there is no authority but him."<sup>72</sup> "If evil were to rule entirely without any other authority over it, evil would be called an authority unto itself. But since we know that the existence of Ein-Sof is necessary, there is no

<sup>68</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, p. 28.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.

<sup>70</sup> See E. R. Wolfson, "Left Contained in the Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 11 (1986): 27–52, and "Light through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the Zohar," *Harvard Theological Review* 81 (1988): 73–95.

<sup>71</sup> Benayahu, *Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto* (n. 9 above), p. 135.

<sup>72</sup> Luzzatto, *Qelāḥ Pitḥe Ḥokhmah* (n. 8 above), sec. 2, p. 5.

place for complete evil to rule at all. Thus when you consider any evil in the world, it is impossible not to comprehend that there is an existence that is good, which is the necessary of existence."<sup>73</sup> Similarly, we read in the *'Iggerot Pithe Hokhmah wa-Da'at*: "When we ascend more to the root of things, we comprehend how the essence of all is the unity of the Ein Sof, blessed be he. . . . And the essence of the unity is that even evil itself is evil only in its beginning, for in the end everything will be transformed into good."<sup>74</sup> The same theme is expressed in *Da'at Tevunot*: "The principle is: [God] hides his face and gives a place for evil to exist until he returns and reveals his goodness, and evil will no longer exist, and the unity of his dominion will be seen."<sup>75</sup> The manifestation of divine unity in the world is predicated on the ontic transmutation of evil into good.<sup>76</sup>

What Luzzatto intends by the rhetorical flourishes describing the annihilation of the shells, therefore, is the ontological reintegration of the demonic into the divine, since he categorically rejects an absolute metaphysical dualism.<sup>77</sup> Thus, Luzzatto contrasts the role of the shell in the current condition of the world and in the messianic future: At present the shell is impure and its function is to protect the core, but in the future the shell itself will partake of holiness and it will be restored to the attribute of divine judgment, providing the limit and boundary necessary for the creative balance that sustains the world. "This is [the intent of] 'Your teacher will no longer be covered' (Isa. 30:20), for when the shell was impure it darkened the light . . . but when the shell is the secret of [the attribute of] strength, then it too illumines and does not darken, and its task is only to give boundary, even though a great expansion will be

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., sec. 30, pp. 96–97.

<sup>74</sup> Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, *'Iggerot Pithe Hokhmah wa-Da'at*, sec. 19, in *Sha'are Ramhal* (n. 8 above), p. 376. Compare *ibid.*, sec. 54, p. 404: "The Emanator, blessed be his name, desires to reveal his unity . . . and every curse will be transformed into a blessing and all evil will change into good." Compare Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 253, p. 233.

<sup>75</sup> Luzzatto, *Da'at Tevunot* (n. 36 above), sec. 42, p. 31. Compare *ibid.*, sec. 36, pp. 15–16; sec. 40, pp. 28–29, and Luzzatto, *Qelah Pithe Hokhmah*, sec. 81, p. 262: "Concealment itself causes the rectification by means of the cycle of the restoration of evil to good."

<sup>76</sup> See Avivi, "The Intention of Creation in the Compositions of Ramhal" (n. 55 above).

<sup>77</sup> The same claim may be made regarding the status of the body in general according to Luzzatto's eschatology: In the messianic future the physical is not eradicated but sanctified, and the human being assumes the ontic level of an angel. There is thus a retrieval of the pure body that was soiled on account of the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Compare Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, *Kelalim Ri'shonim*, in his *Sefer ha-Kelalim*, ed. H. Friedlander (Bene Beraq, 1989), sec. 23, pp. 271–72, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ulah* (n. 18 above), pp. 39, 96–97, *Da'at Tevunot*, sec. 40, pp. 25–26, and *'Adir ba-Marom* (n. 8 above), pp. 4, 266. In Luzzatto, *Mesillat Yesharim* (n. 47 above), pp. 320–22, the spiritualization of the physical is the level of holiness (*qedushah*) attributed to one who cleaves constantly to God. Regarding such a person it can be said that "it is as if he were joined to the supernal angels" (p. 321).

found.”<sup>78</sup> In a passage from *Qelah Pithe Hokhmah*, Luzzatto asserts that in the final *tiqqun*, all nations, and not just Israel, will be rectified, and in this state death, impurity, and the evil inclination will all be completely eradicated.<sup>79</sup> Even the subjugation of the demonic to the holy, which has been attained in previous historical moments such as the Sinaitic theophany, is a lower level of achievement, for the ultimate redemption is the act of perfection (*pe'ulat ha-shelemut*), which entails the transformation of evil itself into good and the restoration of all things to their supernal source, the “unity that acts according to itself” (*ha-yihud ha-po'el lefi 'asmo*).<sup>80</sup> Thus, Luzzatto explains that the verse “He will destroy death forever,” signifies that “the evil is absorbed in its root. . . . And in the perfect rectification (*tiqqun ha-shalem*) the existence of evil per se is abolished.”<sup>81</sup> In a most daring passage in *Hoqer u-Mequbbal*,<sup>82</sup> Luzzatto writes:

Had the holiness not been there [in the demonic shell] it could not have existed even for a moment, as the verse says, “You keep them all alive” (Neh. 9:6), even the pig and the insect. Why is [the pig] called *hazir*? Because in the future it shall revert (*lahazor*) [to holiness] and it shall be permissible for the aspect of the shell and the desire, and even the archon of Esau, who is the angel of death and the evil inclination, shall be abolished, and death shall be destroyed forever, and the holiness shall be purified from the shell, “in that day there shall be one Lord [with one name]” (Zech. 14:9).<sup>83</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, pp. 62–63. In his mystical *ketubah*, Luzzatto speaks of the subjugation of the demonic shell in the messianic future in terms of the image of the servant who is enslaved to his master. See Tishby, *Studies in Kabbala and Its Branches* (n. 9 above), p. 743.

<sup>79</sup> The proof texts that Luzzatto cites to signify the eschatological eradication of death, impurity, and the evil inclination are, respectively, Isa. 25:8, Zech. 13:2, and Ezek. 36:26. On other occasions, Luzzatto, following earlier kabbalistic sources, associates Israel with the right side of holiness and the nations with the left side of impurity. The messianic hope is thus framed in terms of the obliteration of the nations or their subordination to Israel. Compare Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 5, p. 5; sec. 32, pp. 18–19; sec. 80, p. 49; sec. 98, p. 62; sec. 137, p. 100; sec. 163, p. 138, and *Derekh ha-Shem* (n. 8 above), pt. 2, chap. 4, pp. 54–59.

<sup>80</sup> Luzzatto, *Qelah Pithe Hokhmah*, sec. 30, pp. 95–96. Compare sec. 47, pp. 171–74, and sec. 49, pp. 179–89.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>82</sup> *Hoqer u-Mequbbal* was composed in 1733. See Benayahu, *Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto* (n. 9 above), p. 150.

<sup>83</sup> Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, *Hoqer u-Mequbbal* (Lemberg, 1800), 22a. The transformation of the pig from an unholy to a pure animal is alluded to in Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 176, p. 153. The connection between the word *hazir*, “pig,” and the verb *lehahazir*, “to restore,” is found in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:9 (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 8; *Leviticus Rabbah* 13:5, ed. M. Margulies (New York, 1993), p. 295, and see n. 2, for reference to other relevant sources. The closest parallel to Luzzatto’s explanation of the word *hazir* that I have found is in Abraham Galante’s *Qol Bokhim* on Lam. 4:21, cited in Isaiah Horowitz, *Shene Luhot ha-Berit* (Frankfurt, 1717), 20b: “This is the secret of why [the pig] is called *hazir*, for in the future it will be restored (*she'atid lehahazir*).” In the same context (20a), Horowitz himself cites the rabbis as the source for the statement that “in the future the pig will be

Perhaps the most sublime expression of the idea of the subjugation of evil to good in the messianic era is Luzzatto's conception of the transformation of the serpent into the rod,<sup>84</sup> which symbolizes the reintegration of the demonic force into the attribute of judgment associated with the Shekhinah. In the state of exile, impurity has dominion over holiness and the rod is transformed into the serpent. Related to this complex of symbols is the idea of the Messiah himself being garbed in the demonic shells, particularly those of Esau and Ishmael, which represent Christianity and Islam, in order to accomplish the *tiqqun* by purifying the sparks of light from the realm of darkness.<sup>85</sup> Luzzatto anchors the esoteric notion of the descent of the messianic redeemer to the demonic realm—an idea that he relates to the aggadic motif of the Messiah sitting at the gates of Rome (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a)—in the numerological equivalence of the Hebrew terms *naḥash* (serpent) and *mashiah* (savior).<sup>86</sup> In particular, the Messiah son of Joseph, who is from the left side of judgment, is given the task of rectification of the external (*tiqqun ha-ḥṣoniyyut*) and thus must stand in the secret of the serpent, whereas the Messiah son of David, who is from the right side of mercy, is assigned the task of rectification of the internal (*tiqqun ha-penimiyyut*).<sup>87</sup> In the messianic redemption, the demonic force is

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pure.” For a recent English rendering of these passages, see Isaiah Horowitz, *The Generations of Adam*, trans. M. Krassen (New York, 1996), pp. 218–20.

<sup>84</sup> The image is derived from Exod. 7:10–12.

<sup>85</sup> Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot* (n. 8 above), p. 132; and Trevis, *Razin Genizin* (n. 18 above), pp. 187, 189. The task of the Messiah to descend to the demonic shells in order to redeem the sparks is in emulation of the Shekhinah, who is also described as descending to the shells in order to purify the souls of Israel who have fallen there. Insofar as the souls are themselves the female waters of the Shekhinah, the liberation of the souls from the shells is ultimately a form of self-emancipation. Compare Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot* (n. 8 above), pp. 129–30 (see n. 28 above), and *Hozer u-Mequbbal*, 22a–23a. In his mystical *ketubah*, Luzzatto describes the redemption (based on Deut. 21:11) as a war against the demonic shells with the stated aim of bringing out the Shekhinah who has descended into that realm in the course of the exile. See Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, p. 740. The descent of the *šaddiq* to the demonic realm for the purpose of elevating the entrapped sparks is repeatedly emphasized by Valle, *Shiv'im Panim* (n. 18 above), 7a, 9a, 9b–10a, 10a–b, 12a, 12b, 13a–b, 14b–15a, 15b, 16a, 16b, 18a, 19b, 20a, 21a, 22a.

<sup>86</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 58, p. 37. The possible Sabbatian influence on Luzzatto's idea of the transformation of the Messiah into a serpent as part of the process of rectification has already been noted by Tishby, in *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, pp. 762–63. In *Adir ba-Marom*, pp. 338–39, Luzzatto mentions together with the numerical equivalence of *naḥash* and *mashiah* the identification of *ha-saṭan* and *ha-mashiah*, for *ha-saṭan* equals 364 and *ha-mashiah* equals 363, to which is added the extra one corresponding to the word itself in order to get the desired sum of 364. Luzzatto goes so far as to say that “in the secret of her exteriority she becomes Satan and in the secret of her interiority she becomes Messiah.” Hence, the demonic and the divine are two aspects of one reality. Regarding the boldness of this numerology, see Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, p. 775, n. 66.

<sup>87</sup> Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot*, p. 100. The placing of Messiah son of Joseph in the realm of the demonic is related by Luzzatto to the ten sparks (i.e., drops of semen) that he emitted when he was tempted by the wife of Potiphar, which are related to the ten

subjugated by the attribute of judgment and the serpent is transformed back into the rod. This secret is alluded to in the verse, “Dan shall be a serpent by the road” (Gen. 49:17), for the name “Dan” is made up of the letters *dalet* and *nun*, which denote the attribute of judgment (*din*). These letters, moreover, are comprised within the name ‘Adonai, which signifies that the demonic is rooted in and comes out from the attribute of judgment. When the serpent is subdued under the rule of the Shekhinah, the locus of divine judgment, it is transformed back into the rod, an idea buttressed by the fact that the word for rod, *maṭṭeh*, is numerically equivalent to the word *dan*.<sup>88</sup>

The ontic transmutation of the demonic serpent into the divine is reiterated with a slightly different emphasis by Luzzatto in *TQT”W Tefillot*.<sup>89</sup> From this context we learn that the rod is symbolic of Yesod.<sup>90</sup> By means of this phallic rod or, more specifically, the rite of circumcision, the restoration of the serpent to the divine is actualized.<sup>91</sup> The shattering of the three shells, which correspond to the three acts in the rite of circumcision—cutting the foreskin, splitting and pulling down the membrane, and dripping the blood<sup>92</sup>—results in the remembering of the covenant of Jacob, which comprises in itself the covenants of Abraham and Isaac (linked exegetically to Lev. 26:42), in a manner that is analogous to the containment of the attributes of love and judgment in the attribute of mercy. The transformation of the serpent into the rod thus signifies the sanctification of the phallus and the consequent removal of the demonic force. When that is achieved, the feminine Shekhinah itself

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rabbinic sages killed by the Romans (*‘asarah haruge malkhut*). For elaboration of this theme, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 102–3; Luzzatto, *TQT”W Tefillot*, sec. 27, p. 16; sec. 399, p. 330. On the task of Messiah son of Joseph to be submerged in the demonic shells in order to subdue them, cf. Luzzatto, introduction to *Shiv'im Tiqqunim* (n. 18 above), p. 13. In *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot*, pp. 125–26, Luzzatto explains the burial of Moses outside the land of Israel in terms of a similar motif, i.e., in the postmortem state Moses suffers for the sake of the *tiqqun* of Israel.

<sup>88</sup> Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot*, pp. 98–99. Luzzatto also relates the idea of the subjugation of evil by good to the image of the serpent shedding its skin (p. 100). On the image of the transformation of the serpent into the rod, which is identified with the attribute of judgment by means of which the Messiah son of David controls the demonic power, cf. Trevis, *Razin Genizin*, pp. 185 and 232.

<sup>89</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT”W Tefillot*, sec. 1, pp. 1–2. Compare sec. 49, p. 27; sec. 59, p. 37; sec. 153, p. 126; sec. 310, p. 268; sec. 389, pp. 321–22; sec. 495, p. 398.

<sup>90</sup> In *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot*, p. 117, Luzzatto interprets the scepter that comes from Israel (mentioned in Num. 24:17) as a symbolic reference to Yesod.

<sup>91</sup> On the redemptive power of circumcision to abolish the effect of the foreskin, which is the “strange god,” cf. Luzzatto, *TQT”W Tefillot*, sec. 464, pp. 375–76.

<sup>92</sup> In *TQT”W Tefillot*, sec. 34, pp. 19–20, Luzzatto links the three cardinal transgressions of idolatry, illicit sexuality, and bloodshed with the three demonic shells, which are also associated with three acts in the rite of circumcision, cutting the foreskin, splitting and pulling down the membrane, and dripping the blood. By removing these shells, the deceit (*sheqer*) of the demonic side gives way to the knot (*qesher*) of unity and the covenant is disclosed in the world (according to Gen. 9:16 and Lev. 26:42). Compare *ibid.*, sec. 132, p. 94.

is transformed from the menstruant forbidden to her husband to a pure woman prepared to engage in conjugal intercourse.

Against this background one can understand Luzzatto's assertion that the hope of redemption is tied especially to the letter *waw*, the "sign of truth," which overcomes the falsity of the demonic power.<sup>93</sup> The meaning of this association is disclosed in another passage wherein Luzzatto explicitly identifies the "sign of truth" (*'ot 'emet*) as the "sign of the covenant" (*'ot berit*),<sup>94</sup> an identification that confirms a point repeatedly asserted by him: Redemption comes about primarily through the divine phallus for it serves as the antidote to counteract the poisonous effects of the demonic in the world. Hence, in another one of his messianic poems, Luzzatto addresses God in the following way:

Your light shines from the source of all, and this is the *yod* that goes down vigorously, concerning which it says, "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen. 1:3), and these are the five lights.<sup>95</sup> This light emanated in the five configurations,<sup>96</sup> which are the totality of holiness, and through them all the blemishes are removed so that all will be established in Your unity. This is the *he'*, and immediately everything is bound in one river, and this is the righteous one (*ṣaddiq*) who stands on behalf of Israel, and concerning him [it says] "A river issues forth from Eden to water the garden" (ibid., 2:10), and this is the *waw*, and it spreads forth through Israel, which consists of the four divisions, the four camps of the Shekhinah, and when the righteous stands amongst them, the *he'* is completed through them,<sup>97</sup> and this is the perfection of Your holy name. . . . As soon as the righteous one stands in Israel, all evil is removed from them.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 8, p. 6; sec. 233, pp. 221–22.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., sec. 25, p. 15; sec. 403, p. 333; sec. 494, pp. 397–98.

<sup>95</sup> That is, the word *'or*, "light," is mentioned five times in the creation narrative in Gen. 1:3–5.

<sup>96</sup> That is, the five *parṣufim* of the Lurianic kabbalah, which are the five configurations of the divine light that take shape after the fracture in the primordial macroanthropos (*adam qadmon*).

<sup>97</sup> That is, the *dalet*, which represents the four divisions of Israel, the earthly embodiment of the four camps of the Shekhinah, and the *waw*, symbolic of the phallic Yesod, together take the form of the *he'*, the last letter of the tetragrammaton. The representation of the Shekhinah by the *he'* therefore signifies the phallic transformation of the feminine. Compare Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 482, p. 388: "Your holy Shekhinah is the 'bread of affliction' (Deut. 16:3), a morsel of unleavened bread [cf. Babylonian Talmud Pesahim 115b], for the Shekhinah is [represented by the letter] *he'*, but she is a *dalet* in her own secret for she is poor (*dallah*) and impoverished (*'aniyyah*). [The letter] *waw* [joins the *dalet*] when the eternally living righteous one (*ṣaddiq hei 'olamim*) is united with her, and immediately, [she is characterized as] 'a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing' (Deut. 8:9)." The addition of the *waw* of Yesod to the *dalet* of the Shekhinah results in the formation of the *he'*, which symbolizes the state of the fullness of which it says that the earth lacks nothing, *lo' teḥsar kol bah*, which can be read as the All, i.e., Yesod, is not lacking from her. Compare ibid., sec. 195, p. 181; sec. 340, p. 286.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., sec. 17, pp. 17–18.



Expanding on a theme well established in older kabbalistic sources, Luzzatto portrays the demonic force as principally in opposition to Yesod. Sinfulness in its most elemental form is the vitiation of the phallus brought about by sexual improprieties.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, insofar as the mystical secrets are contextualized in the phallic aspect of the divine, and the kabbalist who can elicit these mysteries from Scripture is the earthly manifestation of that gradation, it follows that esoteric study affects the transformation of the demonic serpent into the rod.

Concerning the messianic king it says, "I shall not die but live" (Ps. 118:17), and this is the mark of life,<sup>100</sup> and this mark is the Shekhinah, for in another time it says, "Her feet go down to death" (Prov. 5:5), but through the secrets of Your Torah it says regarding her, "I will see it and remember [the everlasting covenant]" (Gen. 9:16). Immediately [it says] "He drew his feet into the bed" (ibid. 49:33), this [word *miṭṭah*, "bed," numerically equals] *dan* [i.e., the letters *dalet* and *nun*] of 'Adonai, for it is the rod (*maṭṭeh*) that was changed into a serpent (Exod. 7:15) and returned to being a rod, concerning which it says, "This is Solomon's bed" (Song of Songs 3:7) and immediately "He drew his feet into the bed!"<sup>101</sup>

By playing on the words *maṭṭeh* (rod) and *miṭṭah* (bed), which are made up of the same Hebrew consonants, and assuming further the numerical equivalence of these words and the letters *dalet* and *nun* from the name 'Adonai, Luzzatto is able to string together different biblical verses to express the idea that the demonic force is transposed into the attribute of divine judgment. As a consequence of this transposition, the Shekhinah itself undergoes a change from being submerged in the realm of impurity (conveyed by Prov. 5:5) to becoming the vessel (related in the image of the bed) that receives the overflow from the masculine aspect of the divine (alluded to in Gen. 49:33<sup>102</sup> and Song of Songs 3:7). In

<sup>99</sup> Compare Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot* (n. 8 above), pp. 102–3, 106–9.

<sup>100</sup> Literally, *taw ḥayyim*, based on Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 55a.

<sup>101</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 468, p. 478. Compare *ibid.*, sec. 432, p. 353; sec. 451, p. 366.

<sup>102</sup> Compare *ibid.*, sec. 29, p. 17, where Jacob's drawing his feet into the bed, an obvious euphemism for sexual intercourse, is described as saving the feet from deceit. It is likely that the word "feet" in these contexts denotes the feet of the Shekhinah to which are attached the deceitfulness of the demonic. Luzzatto's comment reflects the motif expressed in *Midrash 'Otiyyot de-R. 'Aqiva* (in *Batte Midrashot*, ed. S. Wertheimer [Jerusalem, 1980], 2:397–98) to the effect that "deceit has no feet." For discussion of this text and its impact on *Sefer ha-Bahir*, see E. R. Wolfson, *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism, and Hermeneutics* (Albany, 1995), pp. 74–77. In *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 176, p. 153, Luzzatto asserts that "deceit stands on one foot but truth on two feet." Compare *ibid.*, sec. 58, p. 37; sec. 98, p. 62; sec. 131, p. 93. On the attachment of the serpent to the foot of the Shekhinah, cf. *ibid.*, sec. 171, p. 147. The motif of the serpent's attachment to the heels of holiness is related to the divine proclamation to the serpent in Gen. 3:15, on the one hand, and to the notion of the footsteps of the Messiah, on the other. Compare Valle, *Shiv'im Panim* (n. 18 above), 2a–b.

the transition from exile to redemption, the feminine Shekhinah is conjoined to the male and is thereby assimilated into the phallic gradation of Yesod, a theme linked exegetically to the remembering of the covenant mentioned in Gen. 9:16. In the profoundly complex symbolism of theosophic kabbalah, heterosexual union results in the reconstitution of the androgynous phallus.

#### ESCHATOLOGICAL ELEVATION AND AUGMENTATION OF THE SHEKHINAH

The unity of all things, achieved by the union of male and female, is the most basic feature of the redemption: "[And the Lord shall be king over all the earth;] in that day there shall be one Lord with one name' (Zech 14:9): Understand that all of the rectification (*tiqqun*) depends on the secret of unity such that everything is one bond without separation, for all the lights are bound and united one with the other."<sup>103</sup> The period of redemption, therefore, is a "time of pleasure" in which "the king will stroll in his garden with great joy," and "from the abundance of the light of his countenance the garden will shine with a great light."<sup>104</sup> The strolling of the king in the garden and the consequent illumination of the latter by the former are symbolic depictions of the *hieros gamos* that is consummated in the redemption.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, the latter is characterized by Luzzatto as a time in which this union is not interrupted on account of the "great desire" and the "overpowering love" that the female has for the male. The intensification of heterosexual passion appropriate to the messianic era is thus described by Luzzatto: "This is what it says, 'the time of singing has come' (Song of Songs 2:12), for the Shekhinah serenades her husband. 'The song of the turtledove is heard in our land' (ibid.), for the king does not depart from the garden, but he strolls in it, and all of the righteous and all of Israel who have been redeemed from their exile take pleasure in him. This is the great joy that shall be for Israel perpetually from the time of the redemption and onward."<sup>106</sup>

The arousal of heterosexual eros marks the shift in the ontic status of the Shekhinah brought about by the coming of the messianic era. Exile is the period of separation or incomplete union of male and female, and the desire to overcome that condition is expressed primarily as the lusting of the male for the female other, although that passion is portrayed

<sup>103</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah* (n. 18 above), p. 28. On the concept of unity in Luzzatto's kabbalah, see Chriqui, *Rekhev Yisra'el* (n. 18 above), pp. 167–228.

<sup>104</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah* (n. 18 above), p. 32.

<sup>105</sup> On the euphemistic use of the image of strolling to connote sexual activity, see Wolfson, *Along the Path*, p. 242, n. 114, and *Circle in the Square* (n. 7 above), pp. 191–92, n. 180.

<sup>106</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, p. 33.

typically in kabbalistic literature as the masculine right being stimulated by the feminine left, or as the male waters being aroused by the female waters.<sup>107</sup> As a consequence of the heterosexual bonding, the Shekhinah is adorned, embellished, and augmented. Prima facie, it would seem that the aggrandizement of the Shekhinah signifies the leveling of gender hierarchy in the time of redemption. And, indeed, Luzzatto at times expresses his view in this manner. Closer examination of the relevant passages, however, indicates that this process in fact signals the masculinization of the feminine. By way of illustration, let us consider the following citation:

Now I will explain to you one principle and you will comprehend the rectification of the world. . . . The governance of the lower entities is always by means of Tif'eret and Malkhut . . . and it is known to us that in the future her rectification will be the great rectification and her light will be very strong. . . . Concerning this matter it is said, "And the light of the moon shall become like the light of the sun" (Isa. 30:26), for she will no longer be smaller than he is but she will be equal to him. Then the two kings will make use of one crown.<sup>108</sup>

The messianic rectification of the Shekhinah involves the augmentation of her illumination to the degree that her light will be equal to the light of the masculine, expressed in the prophetic image of the light of the moon becoming like the light of the sun.<sup>109</sup> Insofar as the sun is symbolic of the masculine and the moon of the feminine, it is evident that implicit in the prophetic description of the eschaton is the gender metamorphosis of the female into the male. Thus, in *'Adir ba-Marom*, Luzzatto contrasts the diminution of the moon, which is related to the shattering of the primordial kings,<sup>110</sup> and the augmentation of the light of the moon in the messianic redemption:

<sup>107</sup> Compare Luzzatto, *Pitḥe Hokhmah wa-Da'at* (n. 41 above), p. 228: "Know that the elevation of the female waters of Nuqba' is by means of the offspring that derive from her, for she gathers into herself these branches, and by this power she arouses the male so that he will be stimulated to overflow. . . . It follows from this that the desire of the one who receives is first in the copulation, and this is the matter of 'Yet your urge shall be for your husband' (Gen. 3:16). Afterwards she receives the power to elevate the female waters, and it is the spirit that is given to her in the first intercourse, for its secret is in the secret of the corona (*'atarah*) where there are the forces of strength. Then she elevates the female waters by means of the gathering of her branches in her, for then she draws forth the new power from above in accordance with this arousal."

<sup>108</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, p. 72.

<sup>109</sup> On the periodic shifts in the illumination of the moon as symbolic of the different states of the Shekhinah in relation to the world, and particularly with reference to the relationship of the Jewish people to the faiths of Islam and Christianity, cf. Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot* (n. 8 above), pp. 112–14, 117–19.

<sup>110</sup> On the nexus of the dominion of the demonic serpent and the diminution of the light of the moon, cf. Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 110, p. 76.

"And the light of the moon shall become like the light of the sun," for the overflow of which she is in need emanates upon her and it does not stop. . . . For, in truth, the Nuqba' is made only to receive from the male and to overflow to the lower beings. Hence, the perfection of her existence is the reception from the male and the emanation. . . . Even though it appears that this matter is outside her, for her light is from the male, it is not so, but it is the perfection of the Nuqba', for a part of her is the masculine influx that emanates upon her and joins her to overflow in her, and through this aspect she is rich and she has a great light. . . . This is the secret of the unleavened bread (*maṣṣah*) and the commandment (*miṣwah*), for the unleavened bread is the "bread of affliction" (Deut. 16:3), and this is the aspect of her being alone and not the aspect of perfection from the side of Ze'eir 'Anpin. The commandment is perfection in the secret of "And the light of the moon shall become like the light of the sun." Therefore it says, When she is conjoined to the male, she is called *miṣwah* with the additional *waw*. It does not say that the male and female together are called *miṣwah*, *maṣṣah waw*, but the Nuqba' is called *miṣwah* when she is joined to the male, for the perfection of the female is her unification with the male.<sup>111</sup>

Luzzatto elaborates on this theme in a passage in *Qin'at ha-Shem Seva'ot*, where he similarly notes that in her diminished state the moon is prototypically feminine inasmuch as she has no light of her own and passively receives all illumination from the active male. In this state, the judgmental aspect of the feminine is ameliorated (or sweetened)<sup>112</sup> by the masculine attribute of mercy, and hence the latter rules over the former. In the messianic state, however, the female moon is equal to the male sun in stature and thus she is "in the secret of the male" (*be-sod zakhar*) or, more specifically, "in the secret of the strength of the masculine (*be-sod gevurat ha-zakhar*), which is verily the aspect of the sun, the aspect of the burning fire (*'esh ha-soref*)."<sup>113</sup> Luzzatto thus speaks of two aspects of the Shekhinah. The first is the state of imperfection in which the male rules over the female, and the second is the state of perfection in which the female is rectified by the male and the forces of strength are mitigated. "Therefore the face of the sun and the face of the moon are together, for the aspect of the face of the moon is also contained in it in the secret of this mitigation. However, the face of the moon is alone when the acts of strength (*gevurot*) are not rectified, and there is naught but the domination of the male (*sheliṭat ha-zakhar*), and not the aspect of the mitigation of the acts of strength (*mittuq ha-gevurot*)."<sup>114</sup> Alternatively expressed, the *tiqqun* of the Shekhinah

<sup>111</sup> Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom* (n. 8 above), pp. 4–5. Compare Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 173, pp. 149–50; sec. 321, p. 274; *Shiv'im Tiqqunim* (n. 18 above), sec. 27, p. 65.

<sup>112</sup> For the proposed origin of the Hebrew expression *hamtaqat ha-din* in the Spanish *endulzar*, see Scholem, *Major Trends* (n. 8 above), p. 388, n. 44.

<sup>113</sup> Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Seva'ot*, p. 118.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

involves the transformation of the feminine potency from the fire of darkness to the "fire of radiance," *nogah la-'esh* (Ezek. 1:13), which is the '*esh nogah*, the secret of the synagogue.<sup>115</sup> That this transformation involves the phallicization of the feminine is intimated in the following remark of Luzzatto: "The Shekhinah is called a 'radiant fire' (*esh nogah*) in the secret of the synagogue (*bet ha-keneset*), for she is the synagogue from the aspect of Yesod, for in her the lights are gathered (*shebah mitkannesim ha-'orot*)."<sup>116</sup>

The increased luminosity of the moon entails the masculinization of the feminine. This is implied, moreover, in Luzzatto's deliberate inversion of the rhetorical question placed in the mouth of the moon in the talmudic legend regarding the diminishing of her light: "Can two kings make use of one crown?"<sup>117</sup> According to Luzzatto, the positive image of two kings making use of one crown denotes the sexual union of the male sun and the female moon.<sup>118</sup> That this union transforms the latter is made clear in the continuation of the passage, which describes the eschatological ascent of the Shekhinah to and unification with Hokhmah, the second of the divine hypostases:

Understand this matter well for it is thus written, "The Mount of the Lord's House shall stand firm above the mountains" (Isa. 2:2), this refers to Hokhmah, which stands above the mountains, and to there Malkhut ascends, as a result of which Binah dwells upon her children, "like an eagle who rouses his nestlings" (Deut. 32:11). She will be there a crown upon the head [of Hokhmah], one together with and equal to the other. It is known that the male will be more hidden and internal than the female, for the order will not change, but the two will be perfected as is appropriate.<sup>119</sup>

Despite the fact that the power of the feminine Shekhinah is augmented in the time of redemption, the gender hierarchy remains intact and the

<sup>115</sup> The basis for Luzzatto's chain of associations is *Zohar* 3:282a (*Ra'aya' Mehemna'*): "The Shekhinah is the radiance (*nogah*) and the 'radiance of fire' (*nogah la-'esh*), and from here they called the synagogue (*bei kenishta'*) a 'radiant fire' (*esh nogah*)." Compare Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, introduction to *Tiqqune Zohar*, 7a. For discussion of the philological background of the term *esnoga* in the aforementioned sources, see A. Goldreich, "An Iberian Phrase in an Unknown Fragment by the Author of *Tikunei Zohar*" (in Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 8 (1989): 92–94.

<sup>116</sup> Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot*, p. 119. On the role of the synagogue and the schoolhouse to house the Shekhinah during the exile, cf. Luzzatto, *TQT"W Tefillot*, sec. 168, p. 143; sec. 192, pp. 177–78.

<sup>117</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Hullin* 60b.

<sup>118</sup> Luzzatto's kabbalistic interpretation of the aggadic passage is based on the fact that the word *lehishtammesh*, "to make use of," is also used to denote sexual intercourse (hence the word *tashmish* and the more common predicate form employed for this purpose *shim-mesh*). The expression "to make use of the crown of royalty" is employed to denote sexual union with the Shekhinah in Luzzatto, *TQT"W Tefillot*, sec. 42, p. 24.

<sup>119</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*, p. 72.

male is given priority over the female. In that state, the feminine is transposed into the crown of the male, the esoteric significance of which I shall discuss below.

Luzzatto depicts the ontic change in the status of the Shekhinah in several other images. For example, in one passage he relates this phenomenon to the verse, "Come, my beloved, let us go into the field" (Song of Songs 7:12): "The Shekhinah speaks this verse to the Holy One, blessed be He, and what does she say? 'Come, my beloved,' she speaks in this way when she has not yet come out from exile, but in the time of the redemption when her lover is with her, she says to him, 'let us go,' let us go out from exile, 'let us go to the field,' this is the supernal place, the place of joy and pleasure, 'the field that the Lord has blessed' (Gen. 27:27)."<sup>120</sup> What is implied here is made explicit in other passages from the writings composed by Luzzatto and other members of his circle: Redemption entails the reintegration of the son and daughter (Tif'eret and Shekhinah) in the womb of the mother (Binah). Luzzatto's commentary on the continuation of the verse in Song of Songs, "Let us lodge in the villages," makes the point even more emphatically:

This is the secret of what is written "Jerusalem shall be peopled as a city without walls" (Zech. 2:8) . . . the emanation will be in great abundance, and this is called the "property without boundaries,"<sup>121</sup> [she will be] like Binah. The secret of this matter [is alluded to in the words] "Who is she" (*mi zo't*) (Song of Songs 8:5), the one<sup>122</sup> is already rendered equal to the other<sup>123</sup> on account of the manifold tranquility and the great perfection. . . . In the time of redemption, Binah, Tif'eret, and Malkhut are all joined together in a firm bond. . . . "It was there your mother conceived you" (ibid.). Comprehend that [the word *hibbelatkha*, "conceived you"] is [related to] the word *hevel* [literally, "rope" or "cord"], which connotes the bond of a great union, for there is the place of the joining together of Binah and Tif'eret, and Malkhut is joined to them so that they are one.<sup>124</sup>

Drawing upon much earlier kabbalistic sources, Luzzatto assigns a special role to Binah, the divine mother, in the redemptive process.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, the eschatological status of this attribute is alluded to in some of the standard names associated with it in a plethora of kabbalistic texts,

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>121</sup> The expression *naḥalah beli meṣarim* is used in rabbinic sources to denote the eschatological reward. Compare Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 51a; Shabbat 118a; Luzzatto, *TQT"W Tefillot*, sec. 58, p. 36.

<sup>122</sup> Malkhut is symbolized by the word *zo't*.

<sup>123</sup> Binah is symbolized by the word *mi*.

<sup>124</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah* (n. 18 above), pp. 50–51. Compare *TQT"W Tefillot*, sec. 99, p. 63; sec. 106, p. 71; sec. 107, p. 72; sec. 234, p. 222.

<sup>125</sup> Compare Luzzatto, *TQT"W Tefillot*, sec. 88, p. 54; sec. 149, p. 114; sec. 282, p. 316; sec. 393, p. 328; sec. 395, p. 327; sec. 408, p. 336; sec. 452, p. 367. See Rubin, "Zoharic Works of R. Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto" (n. 9 above), p. 396.

to wit, the world to come, jubilee, and the great Sabbath. The special role assigned to Binah in fostering the union of the son and the daughter is conveyed in the following remark that Luzzatto reports having received from his angelic guide (*maggid*): "Regarding this secret it is written, 'I will make a fitting helper for him' (Gen. 2:18), for until male and female were found [as one] the supernal mother did not rest upon him, but when the female was aroused in relation to the male, the mother dwelt upon them."<sup>126</sup> The soteriological task of Binah is affirmed in slightly different terms in this passage:

From there wisdom shall go out to Israel in a river that is full, concerning which it says, "A river issues forth from Eden" (Gen. 2:10), from the side of the righteous one who is the foundation of the world, and Jerusalem shall be built in several wondrous names . . . and Your unity shall forever be known through it from the side of the supernal mother, for she is the canopy about which it says, "God restores the lonely to their homes" (Ps. 68:7), and similarly "over all the glory shall hang a canopy" (Isa. 4:5), so that each one in Israel shall draw close to his spouse.<sup>127</sup>

In the time of redemption, however, the union of male and female is so complete that it is portrayed not only as the conjugal intercourse of husband and wife, but as the return of the son and daughter to the mother's womb, the place where the offspring were originally conceived. This is the esoteric significance of the biblical injunction, "If, along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young" (Deut. 22:6). "The messianic king waits for the bird's nest, to ascend to there . . . when he ascends there, with him ascends the power of all the rectifications that Israel rectified in the exile. . . . When he reaches there, the Shekhinah immediately dwells on them all, on each one according to his labor. In that very time 'the mother sits over the fledglings.'"<sup>128</sup> In his mystical *ketubah*, Luzzatto describes the final redemption in precisely these terms: "All of the rectifications reach the one light above that stands in the secret of the mother whose name is the 'end of days.' In the

<sup>126</sup> Luzzatto, *ʿOṣerot Ramḥal*, p. 256 (see n. 34 above). Compare Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 450, p. 365.

<sup>127</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 466, p. 377. Compare *ibid.*, sec. 508, pp. 411–12, where it is emphasized that the construction (*binyan*) of the destroyed Temple in the messianic age ensues from the phallic gradation of Yesod, stimulated by the exposition of kabbalistic secrets.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 37, p. 21. Compare *ibid.*, sec. 179, p. 157. On the ascent of Shekhinah to Binah as a sign of the eschatological redemption, cf. Valle, *Shiv'im Panim* (n. 18 above), 21b. It should be noted that in another passage in this work, 19b–20a, the elevation of Tif'eret, the son, to Binah, the mother, assumes a negative connotation.

time of the ascent of this bride above, all of these rectifications emerge and they become her dowry, for they are not lost, God forbid."<sup>129</sup> Redemption, therefore, may be viewed as the reversal of the birthing process in which the womb is opened. The eschatological return of the son and the daughter to the mother's womb is symbolized by Yom Kippur, which is another standard designation of Binah in kabbalistic literature.<sup>130</sup> Specifically, the prohibition of sexual intercourse and the liturgical recitation in the afternoon service of the section of Torah that deals with uncovering the nakedness of the mother and of the father (Lev. 18:7) underscore the fact that on that day the union of male and female transcends gender binaries.<sup>131</sup> The ritualized asceticism of Yom Kippur anticipates the behavior that best assists in the reunion of mother and children characteristic of the messianic era. In one passage, Luzzatto describes the assembly of the (male) souls of Israel in the Temple as a symbolic enactment of the union of these souls and the Shekhinah, which serves as the means for the unification of the masculine and feminine potencies of the divine:

Just as Ze'ir 'Anpin does not draw close to the Shekhinah above until she is one in all her branches so that all are contained within her, so the supernal Patriarchs do not draw close to the Community of Israel, which is the kingdom of the

<sup>129</sup> Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches* (n. 9 above), p. 741.

<sup>130</sup> Compare *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 111, pp. 76–77. Particularly interesting is the description of Yom Kippur in Moses Hayyim Luzzatto's *Qisṣur ha-Kawwanot* (Bene Beraq, 1988), p. 123: "On Yom Kippur there is another specific matter and it is the disclosure of the interiority of the mother (*penimiyyut de-'imma*'). This is the time of the purification of the sanctuary (*taharat ha-miqdash*), for in truth a disclosure like this is not found in the other days of the year. This disclosure, however, is exclusively in the mother. This is the matter of the inner incense in the Holy of Holies. The outer sanctuary is the Nuqba' [Shekhinah], the inner sanctuary is the mother [Binah], but the Holy of Holies is the interiority of the mother, and there is the rectification (*tiqqun*) on Yom Kippur. In the secret of this rectification, the father and Ze'ir 'Anpin [i.e., the son] enter, but the disclosure is in the mother."

<sup>131</sup> See Wolfson, *Circle in the Square* (n. 7 above), pp. 102–3; pp. 219–20, n. 128. In Luzzatto's writings, following zoharic and Lurianic sources, Sabbath also represents the reintegration of the feminine to the masculine in a manner that overcomes gender dimorphism. This motif is related to the name *Shabbat*, which is decomposed into the *shin*, symbolic of the masculine potency or the three patriarchs, and *bat*, the feminine Shekhinah. See Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar* (n. 48 above), pp. 1225 and 1264–65, n. 111; E. K. Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Albany, N.Y., 1989), pp. 73–74. I have discussed the gender implications of this motif in my "Coronation of the Sabbath Bride: Kabbalistic Myth and the Ritual of Androgynisation," to appear in the *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997). The Sabbath, therefore, symbolically represents the ascent of the Shekhinah and the consequent rule of the masculine potency over the feminine. Compare Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot* (n. 8 above), p. 135; *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 91, p. 56; sec. 296, p. 259; sec. 343, p. 288; Moses David Valle, *Berit 'Olam: Be'ur Sefer She-mot* (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 498–99. In the same context, Valle also describes the elevation of the Shekhinah to Hokhmah on the Sabbath, a theme he relates exegetically to the verse, "You shall keep the Sabbath, for it is holy for you" (Exod. 31:14).



house of David, until all the souls of Israel are bound to her, and in that moment it is said, "But I have installed My king [on Zion, My holy mountain]" (Ps. 2:6). This unification occurs as is appropriate in the Temple of which it is said, "Till I brought him to my mother's house, to the chamber of her who conceived me" (Song of Songs 3:4). The house from the supernal mother, which stands to unify this unification, as it is written, "God restores the lonely to their homes" (Ps. 68:7).<sup>132</sup>

The conjunction of the male Jews and the Shekhinah, ritually executed by the entry into the Temple, occasions the higher union in the divine.

The union of son and daughter in the womb of Binah results in a radical change in the nature of the Shekhinah. In her elevation to Binah, the Shekhinah assumes the nature of the latter. According to Luzzatto's *ketubah*, this transformation is symbolized by the fifty pounds, the sum of the dowry, which correspond to the fifty gates of understanding that emanate from the mother to the daughter. "The *he'* of Malkhut is perfected in all of her *sefirot* by the power that she receives from the mother and the house of her father, and she becomes a *nun* from the side of the mother, the straight *nun*."<sup>133</sup> The latter *he'*, which equals five, is attributed to Malkhut, but when she receives the influx from Binah, all of her *sefirot*, which are ten in number, are perfected, resulting in the sum of fifty, which is the numerical value of the *nun*, the letter attributed to Binah. The semiotic change from a *he'* to the straight *nun* marks the ontic transformation in gender from feminine to masculine,<sup>134</sup> which implies that the daughter becomes a creative force like the mother and judgment is transmuted into mercy. In the symbolic orientation of theological kabbalah, motherhood is portrayed as the phallic potency of the feminine.<sup>135</sup> The attribution of the role of Binah to Shekhinah signifies her transition from a state of containment to one of extension. This is the import of Luzzatto's citation of Zech. 2:8; that is, Jerusalem, a standard symbol for the Shekhinah in kabbalistic literature, is depicted as the city so densely populated that it has no walls. The overcoming of the quality of restrictiveness, associated with the attribute of judgment, is conveyed as well by the application of the rabbinic term for eschato-

<sup>132</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 470, p. 380.

<sup>133</sup> Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, p. 742. In Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 495, p. 398, the Shekhinah is described as being transformed into a straight *nun* when she is lifted up from the demonic realm by Binah.

<sup>134</sup> On the messianic implications of the straight *nun* in kabbalistic symbolism, see Wolfson, *Along the Path* (n. 102 above), pp. 83–86. In *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 202, p. 189, Luzzatto emphasizes the androgynous quality of the straight *nun*, for it symbolizes the human form in the chariot, which comprises male and female.

<sup>135</sup> Regarding the masculine and phallic aspect of motherhood in kabbalistic symbolism, see Wolfson, *Circle in the Square*, pp. 98–106.

logical reward, "property without boundaries," to the Shekhinah. By ascending to and becoming one with Binah, the Shekhinah transcends all boundary and limitations.<sup>136</sup>

On numerous occasions in his writings, Luzzatto characterizes redemption as the reunion of the mother and daughter, a motif that figured prominently in zoharic and Lurianic materials. Thus, in one passage he describes the redemption as the "time when the two lips, which are the upper and lower Shekhinah, are united, and it immediately says, 'Who is she who comes up from the desert' (Song of Songs 3:6), through Your unity that unites them, as it is written, 'Only one is my dove, [my perfect one,] the only one of her mother' (ibid. 6:9)."<sup>137</sup> Commenting on a passage in the Zohar wherein the mother is described as lending her garments to the daughter,<sup>138</sup> Luzzatto writes: "When the Nuqba' is alone in her aspect, she is the dark judgment to which Siṭra' 'Aḥra' is attached, but when her existence is perfected from the side of the mother, in the secret of her garments, her judgments are ameliorated and she is rectified by the great rectification."<sup>139</sup> The rectification of the Shekhinah therefore consists of the gender metamorphosis from passive female to active male, which is portrayed in the image of the daughter donning the clothes of the mother. The phallic nature of this transformation is made

<sup>136</sup> Compare Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 74, p. 45.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., sec. 160, pp. 134–35.

<sup>138</sup> The relevant passage occurs in *Zohar* 1:2a. For discussion of this text and its interpretation in Lurianic material, see Wolfson, *Circle in the Square*, pp. 104–6. Compare Valle, *Shiv'im Panim* (n. 18 above), 17b. The influence of the zoharic passage is also discernible in the following comment found in B. Sack, "The First Version of the *Tomer Devorah* of R. Moses Cordovero" (in Hebrew), *Asufot* 9 (1995): 173: "Malkhut is in the aspect of [the letter] *he'*, that is, the secret of her dissemination to overflow upon everything, and her limbs spread out to every side. When she is called *he'*, she is in the world of the feminine below, for the letter *he'* signifies femininity. When Israel go up [to Jerusalem] during the three festivals in the secret of 'all your males shall appear before the Sovereign, the Lord' (Exod. 23:17), they transformed the face of the *he'* to a *yod*, which is verily masculine. She removes the form of this *he'* and gathers her branches, and she is concealed in the letter *yod*, to ascend from the feminine to the masculine. That is, she is a *he'* from the side of the edifice of Binah . . . and she is a *yod* from the side of Ḥokhmah by means of Binah. Now she is adorned by the males who are shaped by the commandment of circumcision, the sign of the *yod* in the letter *yod* by means of Binah from the side of Ḥokhmah." Compare Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim* (Jerusalem, 1962), 14:3, pp. 73d–74b, and *Zohar 'im Perush 'Or Yaqar* (Jerusalem, 1962), 1:16.

<sup>139</sup> Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom* (n. 8 above), p. 16. In that context, Luzzatto relates the metamorphosis of the Shekhinah to the biblical narrative concerning the ark of Noah. Symbolically, the ark signifies the status of the Shekhinah after she has received illumination from the splendor of the supernal mother. Interestingly enough, Luzzatto also connects this symbolic complex to the *Zohar* itself; that is, the kabbalistic text, like Noah's ark, provides shelter to save the righteous from the raging waters of the demonic other side. See Rubin, "Zoharic Works of R. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto" (n. 9 above), pp. 397–98. Compare the words of Michael Terni, one of the members of Luzzatto's circle, cited in Benayahu, "Poetry, Prayer, and Confession" (n. 10 above), p. 45: "The perfection of the rectification (*shelemut ha-tiqqun*) is when 'Imma' and Nuqba' are joined together."

even more explicitly in the following passage in which Luzzatto reflects on the enlarged 'ayin and dalet of Deut. 6:4, the former corresponding to Binah and the latter to Malkhut:

'Imma' and Nuqba' are joined as one, "Who is she" (Song of Songs 3:6), and the heart comprehends. The 'ayin is enlarged and the dalet is enlarged, for when 'Imma' is united with Nuqba', she grows big like her . . . as the mother who nurses her son, *gimmel* and *lamed*, everything is a tower (*migddal*), and this is [alluded to in the verse] "The name of the Lord is a tower of strength" (Prov. 18:10), for the *lamed* is the tower extended in the air. . . . The supernal Yesod rules and unites everything as one like the name YHWH, which is everything, united together in the 'alef, [whose orthographic shape can be decomposed into] *yod waw yod*, the *yod* on the right, the *yod* on the left, and the *waw* in the middle that unites them, "He imposes peace in his heights" (Job 25:2).<sup>140</sup>

Binah, or the persona of the divine referred to as 'Imma', is characterized as the supernal Yesod, which no doubt corresponds to the lower Yesod, or the divine phallus.<sup>141</sup> The phallic element is highlighted by the fact that the union of the mother and the daughter creates one unified entity, which is imaged in the shape of a tower, a rather obvious phallic symbol.<sup>142</sup> In the state of messianic *tiqqun*, the Shekhinah assumes the nature of the procreative phallus as a result of her union with Binah, for she is enlarged and adopts the role of a nurturing mother.

#### CROWN OF HER HUSBAND: REDEMPTION AND THE MASCULINIZATION OF THE FEMININE

According to the widely accepted symbolism of the theosophic kabbalah, the male is correlated with the attribute of *hesed*, divine grace, and the female with the attribute of *din* or *gevurah*, judgment or strength. The union of these two, as I have already remarked, results in the containment of the female in the male, the left in the right. The amelioration of feminine judgment by masculine mercy is actualized in the messianic redemption. Thus, reflecting in his *ketubah* on the esoteric significance of the sum of the dowry for his marriage, Luzzatto writes: "One hundred

<sup>140</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 481, p. 388.

<sup>141</sup> In Trevis, *Razin Genizin* (n. 18 above), pp. 188–89, Messiah ben David is associated symbolically with Binah and Messiah ben Joseph with Yesod. Messianic redemption is thus described (on the basis of Dan. 12:3) as the illumination that ensues from the union of the two messianic figures: Messiah son of Joseph is the channel that carries the divine overflow from the Messiah son of David to the Shekhinah. In Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 473, p. 382, Messiah son of David is identified with Binah, referred to as Leah or the concealed world ('*alma' deitkkasya*'). Compare Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 187, p. 170, where the phallic nature of Binah is related to the image of a river that illuminates the *maskilim* in the mysteries of Torah. Compare *ibid.*, sec. 237, p. 224.

<sup>142</sup> Compare Luzzatto, *Shiv'im Tiqqunim* (n. 18 above), sec. 26, p. 64.

silver pounds for the union is complete, the male and female in the image of a perfect stature, 'male and female He created them and called them Adam' (Gen. 5:2). Then the left is sweetened by the right, the female is bound to the male, and the silver [symbolizes that] everything is mercy."<sup>143</sup> That the redemptive process involves the reintegration of the female to the male can be seen in the following comment of Luzzatto in *'Adir ba-Marom*: "A person must be clean and pure in his actions and his study must be precisely for the sake of the rectification of the Shekhinah, to restore her to the king."<sup>144</sup> Luzzatto explicitly glosses the meaning of *tiqqun ha-shekhinah* as restoring the feminine back to the masculine. The key ontological principle is articulated by Luzzatto in another passage from this work: "In truth the feminine is made only to receive from the masculine and to overflow to the lower beings. Consequently, the perfection of her existence is the reception from the masculine and the emanation."<sup>145</sup> Similarly, in *Kelalim Ri'shonim*,<sup>146</sup> Luzzatto affirms the secondary ontological status of the feminine when he writes that "Ze'eir 'Anpin is the essence for Malkhut is the terminus of Ze'eir 'Anpin, the principle of illumination that brings forth this world."<sup>147</sup> The nature of the feminine Shekhinah is determined exclusively in relation to the masculine potency; indeed, the function attributed to the Shekhinah is of a decidedly masculine quality. In *Pitḥe Ḥokhmah wa-Da'at*, the hierarchical relationship between the male and the female is articulated by Luzzatto in slightly different terms: "The matter is that which is revealed<sup>148</sup> below in Ze'eir and Nuqba', which is the place of governance, emanates above them and below them. Therefore, every inner light (*or penimi*) is the secret of Tif'eret, and every external vessel (*keli ḥiṣon*) is

<sup>143</sup> Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches* (n. 9 above), p. 742. Compare Moses David Valle, *'Or 'Olam: Be'ur Sefer Bere'shit* (Jerusalem, 1993), p. 155. Commenting on the verse, "I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come" (Gen. 9:9), Valle writes: "The secret is that the erection (*haqamah*) specifically needs Yesod in order to complete the union (*ziwwug*). . . . He intimated to him through this that from that point forward there would be a union above as there is below in a manner that was not the case during the flood . . . for there was no union in the supernal, holy gradations . . . for there is no union in the governance of judgment but only in the governance of mercy. When judgement returns to its sheath and mercy spreads forth in the world, the union above and below is renewed. This is the secret of 'I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come,' the dissemination of mercy in the world, which causes the union, will not cease." The depiction of the redemption in terms of the image of the containment of the left in the right and of the right in the left is repeated on a number of occasions in Valle's *Shiv'im Panim*, 2b, 8b.

<sup>144</sup> Luzzatto, *'Adir ba-Marom*, p. 41.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>146</sup> Concerning the composition of this work, see Benayahu, *Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto* (n. 9 above), p. 125.

<sup>147</sup> Luzzatto, *Kelalim Ri'shonim* (n. 77 above), sec. 23, p. 270.

<sup>148</sup> *Nigleh*. In the first edition of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, *Pitḥe Ḥokhmah wa-Da'at* (Warsaw, 1884), 7a, the reading is *nimshakh*, which should be translated as "emanates."

the secret of Malkhut, and every encompassing light (*'or maqqif*) is the secret of Binah, for Hokhmah is the absolute interiority (*ha-penimiyyut ha-gamur*) and Keter is the source (*ha-shoresh*), but<sup>149</sup> in the future to come the encompassing will be from the aspect of Malkhut."<sup>150</sup>

In the hierarchical structure of the *sefirot*, the feminine is associated with the external container and the masculine with the internal content. This hierarchy is operative on two different planes in the sefirotic realm: Malkhut is the vessel that contains the internal light of Tif'eret, just as Binah is the light that encompasses the interior light of Hokhmah. What is most significant for this study is the concluding remark, "in the future to come the encompassing will be from the aspect of Malkhut." This statement alludes to the recurring eschatological motif in Luzzatto's thought to which I have already referred, that is, the moment of redemption is marked by the transformation of Malkhut into Binah. The image of the encompassing light attributed to Malkhut signifies, therefore, that the lower feminine has been elevated to the higher feminine, which is masculine in relation to the former. The ascent of the daughter to the mother thus entails an inversion of gender attribution. This is not to say that the female becomes higher in status than the male, but only that the female itself is integrated into the male on a higher level. The encompassing light is a receptacle that surrounds and contains the inner light. But it is a receptacle from on top rather than from below, which is the posture ascribed to Malkhut in her normal state. Redemption, therefore, entails the reversal of positions such that the power that receives is placed atop the power that bestows.

The transposition of gender valence is conveyed more frequently in Luzzatto's writings by the use of the symbol of the crown. An allusion to this symbolism is found, for example, in *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah*: "From the time of the *peqidah* the crown (*'atarah*) began to be built for the Messiah, and it is known that this crown is the [aspect of the soul called] *yehidah*. . . . In those days, therefore, he will ascend in great degrees without limit, for the King of kings will coronate him with the crown of his glory (*'ateret kevodo*)."<sup>151</sup> The coronation of the Messiah is concomitantly a process unfolding in the divine realm. Indeed, the crown of the Messiah is identified as the most sublime aspect of the soul, called *yehidah*, which is rooted in the sefirotic potencies, and as the crown of God's glory, *'ateret kevodo*, which refers to the Shekhinah.

<sup>149</sup> Interestingly enough, this statement occurs in the Warsaw edition, 7a, but not in the more recent one (see *Pithe Hokhmah wa-Da'at*, p. 158).

<sup>150</sup> Luzzatto, *Pithe Hokhmah wa-Da'at* (n. 41 above), p. 158.

<sup>151</sup> Luzzatto, *Ma'amar ha-Ge'ullah* (n. 18 above), pp. 23–24. Compare Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 374, p. 310.

Hence, the statement that from the time of the first phase of redemption, the *peqidah*, the crown began to be built for the Messiah alludes to the fact that the Shekhinah itself is constructed during the messianic period.<sup>152</sup>

To appreciate the full implications of Luzzatto's remark, it is necessary to probe more deeply into the symbolism of the crown and its particular application to the Shekhinah. According to Luzzatto, who again follows a well established exegetical tradition in kabbalistic sources, the term '*aṭarah*' denotes the phallic aspect of the Shekhinah, which is at the same time the feminine aspect of the phallus. Indeed, the corona of the male organ, '*aṭeret berit*', is at once the locus of the feminine in the masculine and the masculine in the feminine. Consider the following remark of Luzzatto in '*Adir ba-Marom*':

I will convey to you the matter [of the verse, "The Lord through wisdom] establishes the earth," for the Nuqba' has two aspects: The aspect of the vessel (*keli*) that is in her, as they have said,<sup>153</sup> "a woman establishes a covenant only with the one who makes her into a vessel," as well as the reality of the Nuqba' from the aspect of Yesod, for the corona of the phallus ('*aṭeret yesod*') is the beginning of the existence of the Nuqba'. . . . The first intercourse is in the secret of the [acts of] strength, and she is built through them to receive afterward the male waters, and she is called "sea" in this aspect. Afterward, in the secret of the male waters she is the "earth," that which is sown and produces fruit.<sup>154</sup>

In the first aspect, the Shekhinah is compared to a vessel or the sea that passively receives the overflow of the male; in the second aspect, however, the Shekhinah is depicted as part of the phallus in the form of the corona, which designates the masculine dimension of the feminine, also alluded to in the image of the fruit-bearing earth. In producing her yield, the feminine earth adopts the posture and function of the male. Most significantly, the procreative dimension of the Shekhinah is linked to the symbol of '*aṭeret yesod*', the corona of the phallus.

The messianic rectification of the Shekhinah is most fully achieved when she is restored to the male as the phallic crown. Many passages from Luzzatto's writings that illustrate this point could have been cited, but for the purposes of the present study I will mention one selection from '*Adir ba-Marom*', in which Luzzatto displays his remarkable homiletical prowess. He begins by saying that "the aspect of Malkhut is the

<sup>152</sup> Compare Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 292, pp. 256–57. The role attributed to the Messiah in that context is to take the crown ('*aṭarah*'), i.e., the Shekhinah, out from exile and to restore it to its pristine glory. Compare *ibid.*, sec. 477, p. 385; sec. 505, p. 408.

<sup>153</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 22b.

<sup>154</sup> Luzzatto, '*Adir ba-Marom*' (n. 8 above), p. 134.

secret of the commandment (*mišwah*), the 613 commandments . . . for this is the corona of the phallus (*‘aṭeret ha-berit*), for she alone receives all 613. . . . Thus, in truth, this corona has an important function for she is parallel to all 613. Therefore [the rabbis,] blessed be their memory, said:<sup>155</sup> Great is circumcision for it is equal to all the commandments.”<sup>156</sup> The Shekhinah is thus localized in the corona of the phallus, which is symbolized by the letter *yod* in the name Shaddai. When the *yod* is removed from the name, what remains is the word *shed*, the demonic power associated with the gentile nations. The disclosure of the *yod* through the exposure of the corona occurs only in relationship to Israel in the secret of Malkhut: “Yesod emanates and is revealed in the secret of Shaddai, in the secret of this form and seal, for, in truth, Yesod comprises this corona (*‘aṭarah*). . . . Thus, in truth, this corona is the secret of Malkhut, which is contained there.”<sup>157</sup> Luzzatto draws the obvious conclusion from the fact that the Shekhinah is identified as the corona of the phallus: “The supernal *sefirot* are all in the secret of the masculine that takes shape according to Malkhut . . . but the corona is Malkhut according to the aspect of Yesod, which is the secret of the commandment. . . . It follows according to this that all of the *sefirot* are in the secret of *yod he’ waw* and the corona is in the secret of the final *he’*.”<sup>158</sup> The anthropomorphic configuration of the *sefirot* is in a masculine form, and the feminine element, Malkhut, is itself part of this male anatomy.<sup>159</sup> It is precisely the disclosure of this aspect of the divine that signals the transition from exile to redemption:

The secret of the corona (*‘aṭarah*) is the rainbow (*qeshet*) . . . and this is the secret of the unity itself, that is, the secret of the commandment (*mišwah*) in the secret of the conjunction of the male . . . and this is verily the secret of the rainbow, which comprises all the gradations in a single unity, in the secret of the *yod*, as we mentioned. . . . Thus, we have already said that since the aspect of the rainbow at one time was disclosed, it will never again be removed from the world, but it may be hidden by covers that darken. . . . When it is covered, then is the exile, but when it is removed from these coverings, then shall be the redemption, in the secret, “I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant” (Gen. 9:16).<sup>160</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Palestinian Talmud, Nedarim 4:14, 38a; Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 32b.

<sup>156</sup> Luzzatto, *‘Adir ba-Marom*, p. 6.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Compare Luzzatto, *TQT”W Tefillot*, sec. 334, pp. 282–83, where the Shekhinah is described as the “image of the anthropos” (*demut ‘adam*) that contains the unity of the holy name (YHWH). To be sure, the perfect human comprises male and female, which reflects the unity of the letters of the name, but the locus of the androgyny is in the phallus, and the feminine element is identified as the corona.

<sup>160</sup> Luzzatto, *‘Adir ba-Marom*, pp. 9–10.

The corona of the phallus, which is here identified as the rainbow, is the locus of the unity of masculine and feminine within the Godhead.<sup>161</sup> The rainbow, therefore, is the feminine element that has been integrated into the male as the sign of the covenant. From this vantage point, exile is described as the concealment of the (phallic) rainbow and redemption as its disclosure.<sup>162</sup> "As long as there is deceit in the world this rainbow does not stand in its strength . . . for the foreskin covers it. When truth rules this corona (*aṭarah*) is revealed, and this is salvation for the righteous one (*ṣaddiq*)."<sup>163</sup> This very point underlies the following prayer of Luzzatto to God: "Raise the horn of Your people, Israel,"<sup>164</sup> this is the 'righteous one who is the foundation of the world' (*ṣaddiq yesod 'olam*)

<sup>161</sup> In 'Or 'Olam (n. 143 above), p. 156, Valle comments on the verse, "This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you" (Gen. 9:12), in the following manner: "The word 'this' (*zo't*) indicates that he pointed with a finger, for God, blessed be he, showed them the rainbow that is in the clouds on a rainy day, for it alludes to the supernal union of Yesod and Malkhut. The word 'this' (*zo't*) precisely is the secret of Malkhut and it is commonly known that the 'sign of the covenant' (*'ot berit*) is Yesod. If the attribute of judgment rushes to seek the complete destruction of the universal judgment, the rainbow, which alludes to the union, is disclosed to stop her indictment, for in any event when there is union there is no place for the universal judgment. . . . In every generation when the attribute of judgment rushes to her prosecution, the rainbow immediately is revealed in order to bring to mind the covenant, and this is the secret of the union that nullifies the judgment. Therefore they said that the disclosure of the rainbow is a bad sign for the world, for they were worthy of the universal judgment had it not been for the disclosure of the holy union that abrogates it. From that which they said [*Zohar* 1:72b], 'when you see the rainbow shining in its colors expect the feet of the Messiah,' it seems that it is a good sign and not a bad sign. . . . It is a clear sign of the coming of the Messiah and of the rectification of the world. Since the rainbow alludes to the supernal union, it is not disclosed except as it is garbed within the cloud, for the holy matters are not revealed to the lower beings without a garment."

<sup>162</sup> Compare Luzzatto, *QTW Tefillot*, sec. 34, p. 20; sec. 310, p. 268; sec. 451, p. 366; sec. 342, p. 288.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 62, p. 40. On the description of the messianic future in terms of the disclosure of the phallus and the removal of the demonic foreskin, cf. Valle, *Shiv'im Panim* (n. 18 above), 3b: "According to this secret it is written, 'and for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel' (Deut. 34:12), for through him was the rectification of the phallus (*tiqqun ha-berit*) and the removal of the foreskin (*ha'avarat ha-'orlah*), and through him also was the disclosure of the supernal lights before all Israel, 'The glory of the Lord shall appear, and all flesh, as one, shall behold' (Isa. 40:5), the 'flesh' precisely, for the heart of stone shall be removed and in its place shall be given the heart of flesh (cf. Ezek. 11:19, 36:26), which will be able to see and to draw pleasure from the splendor of the lights that derive from the rectified Yesod. Concerning this secret it is written, 'Then your Master will no longer be concealed, but your eyes will see your Master' (Isa. 30:20), 'From the end of the earth we hear singing: Glory to the righteous!' (*ibid.* 24:16), for by means of the songs of the 'singing of the tyrants' (*ibid.* 25:5), the esoteric significance of which refers to the cutting of the foreskin, the glory and the beauty of the 'righteous, foundation of the world' (Prov. 10:25) is immediately revealed, and it will never be hidden or concealed, for 'The Lord has sworn by His right hand etc.' (Isa. 62:8)." See *ibid.*, 13a.

<sup>164</sup> From the prayer 'Avinu Malkenu, which is recited as part of the liturgy during the ten days of repentance from Rosh ha-Shanah to Yom Kippur.



(Prov. 10:25), who is the horn of the jubilee (*qeren ha-yovel*).<sup>165</sup> When the foundation of the mother (*yesod 'imma'*), the supernal river, illuminates him, immediately, 'He has exalted the horn of His people' (Ps. 148:14), by means of several lights, the secrets of Torah that issue forth from that very river to him. Through them it says with respect to the Shekhinah, 'I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant' (Gen. 9:16)."<sup>166</sup> The Shekhinah thus adorns herself in the form of the rainbow when the divine gradation that corresponds to the phallus receives the influx of light from the mother. The uplifting of the phallic component is accomplished through the dissemination of the secrets of Torah, which emanate from the divine mother to the phallus and from there to the Shekhinah. In the process of overflowing, the Shekhinah itself is assimilated into the everlasting covenant of Yesod in the form of the corona. This eschatological hope is repeated by Luzzatto in another prayer: "'In that day, I will set up again the fallen booth of David' (Amos 9:11) . . . through the secrets of Torah, which are from the side of the supernal mother, for when the Shekhinah is adorned in them, it says with respect to her, 'I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant' (Gen. 9:16). Not all of the secrets are equal, but when the Shekhinah is adorned in the secrets of Your unity, it is said that the rainbow is seen in her colors, immediately, 'I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant.'"<sup>167</sup>

The phallic transformation of the Shekhinah in the messianic rectification is affirmed by Luzzatto in an astonishing interpretation of the narrative concerning Noah's ark and the rainbow in *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot*. Luzzatto asserts that there are two aspects of the rainbow: "One is her aspect in exile in which she is garbed in the shells, which is exclusively to guard [Israel]. The other is in the time that she removes the garments of the weekday in the time of redemption, for then it says regarding her, 'I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant' (Gen. 9:16), to arouse the union."<sup>168</sup> Noah's entry into the ark symbolically represents the unification of Yesod and the Shekhinah, but in the process of phallic penetration the space of the female is itself transformed. Hence, Luzzatto speaks of the ark being made in the form of the *shin*, which represents the three attributes, *Ḥesed*, *Din*, and *Raḥamim*, the central pillars of the sefirotic pleroma. The construction of the feminine in this manner reflects the *tiqqun ha-shekhinah* that was necessary to protect the righteous against the floodwaters of the demonic. Indeed,

<sup>165</sup> Josh. 6:5. According to the *Zohar* (1:96a, 2:123a, 3:19b), the *qeren ha-yovel* symbolizes the Shekhinah, whereas, according to Luzzatto, this expression refers to Yesod.

<sup>166</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 265, p. 240.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., sec. 383, p. 317. Compare sec. 164, p. 139; sec. 237, p. 224; sec. 408, p. 336.

<sup>168</sup> Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot* (n. 8 above), p. 93.

the ark is identified as the rainbow, which, as we have seen, refers to the feminine element concretized in the masculine. The reconstitution of the androgynous phallus in the case of Noah's ark anticipates the final rectification of the Shekhinah in the messianic redemption.

#### CONCLUSION

There can be no question that the central doctrine in Luzzatto's messianic teaching is *tiqqun ha-shekhinah*. In contrast to other scholars who have focused exclusively on the heterosexual eros implied in this conception of redemption, I have argued that Luzzatto, in compliance with older sources, maintains that the union of the two genders results in the enfolding of the feminine back into the masculine. In the first phase of redemption, the appropriate language is the unification of male and female, but in the second and culminating phase, heterosexual symbolism gives way to the monosexual ideal wherein the female itself is transmuted to the male in the form of the crown that sits on the head of the righteous, which is a symbolic depiction of the corona of the phallus. The disclosure of the latter is the ultimate mark of redemption, for it symbolizes the ontic restoration of the female to the male and the concomitant overcoming of gender dimorphism. In the last of his 515 messianic prayers, Luzzatto describes the ontological condition of the divine potencies in the eschaton in precisely these terms:

Everything goes to one place in the four letters of Your holy name that rules, and this is what is revealed in Your world in the time of which it is said, "The glory of the Lord shall appear [and all flesh as one shall behold]" (Isa. 40:5). In that time, "the Lord shall be king [over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord with one name]" (Zech. 14:9), for by means of this secret He created Adam in His image, and through it "God made Adam upright" (Eccles. 7:29). [The word] 'adam' is [numerically equivalent to the tetragrammaton spelled out as] YO'D H"A WA"W H"A, which comprises all of Your gradations as is appropriate for all of them are contained under Your unity, to make through it one [entity], "I found only one human being in a thousand" (ibid. 7:28), and the Shekhinah rests on his head for she is the crown on the head of every righteous person.<sup>169</sup>

The divine gradations in the time of redemption are configured in the shape of a single anthropos, symbolized by the unity of the letters of the tetragrammaton. The gender of that anthropomorphic form, moreover, is clearly masculine. The feminine potency, the Shekhinah, is not portrayed as an independent being standing opposite the male. On the contrary, the unity within the Godhead is so complete that the feminine is

<sup>169</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 515, p. 419.

described as the crown that sits on the head of the masculine form. The identification of the Shekhinah as the crown on the head of the righteous signifies that the female has been optically restored to the male.

The eschatological status of the Shekhinah as the masculinized female, or the female reintegrated to the male, is also conveyed by the biblical description of the “capable wife” as the “crown for her husband” (Prov. 12:4). When the rectifications of the Shekhinah are completed and the evil is restored to the good, then the unity of the divine is disclosed through the Shekhinah, and she becomes the “crown of her husband,” which signifies her infinite ascent to the uppermost regions of the Godhead.<sup>170</sup> In this capacity, the female attains a higher status than the male because the glory of the latter is revealed only through the former. One might be tempted to argue, therefore, that the *tiqqun* of the Shekhinah results in a reversal of gender roles, for the female rises to the top and assumes the position of a crown on the head of the male. However, the portrayal of the Shekhinah as the crown only reinforces the androcentric orientation of the kabbalistic symbolism, for the worth of the female is still evaluated strictly from the perspective of the male. Indeed, as I have argued, the female who sits atop the male as a crown on the head has been transposed into an aspect of the phallus.<sup>171</sup> Support for my claim may be gathered from a comment made by Luz-

<sup>170</sup> Compare Luzzatto, *Kelalim Ri'shonim* (n. 77 above), sec. 26, p. 275, Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom* (n. 8 above), p. 53; letter of Luzzatto to Isaiah Bassan in Ginzburg, *Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and His Generation* (n. 12 above), p. 66, no. 30; and Luzzatto, *Shiv'im Tiqqunim* (n. 18 above), sec. 69, p. 133. On the unification of the first and the last of the *sefirot*, Keter and Malkhut, cf. Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom*, p. 119. On the ascent of the Shekhinah to the Infinite, cf. Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 440, p. 358; sec. 497, p. 400; sec. 503, pp. 404–6. The elevation of the Shekhinah is also emphasized by Valle, *Shiv'im Panim*, 2a, as the first rectification, which is the “rectification of the redemption,” *tiqqun ha-ge'ullah*. More specifically, Valle remarks that Moses, who is identified as the husband of the Matrona, empowers the two messianic figures “to lift up the Shekhinah to the highest of all the gradations.” Compare *ibid.*, 6a and 18a, where the messianic rectification is described, *inter alia*, in terms of the image of the Shekhinah dwelling upon the righteous one (*šaddiq*), which corresponds to Yesod.

<sup>171</sup> In *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 482, p. 389, Luzzatto describes the “perfect rectification” (*tiqqun shalem*) of the Shekhinah or her union with her husband in terms of the image of the cup being lifted up by the fingers of the hands (based on Ps. 116:13). As a result of being uplifted in this manner, the Shekhinah itself is identified as the *yod*, whose numerical value is ten corresponding to the fingers. But the *yod* is also an obvious phallic symbol, and Luzzatto clearly alludes to this in the following remark: “When she ascends above, she is not seen except as a *yod* that is concealed. Concerning this it says, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone’ (*ibid.* 118:22), for through Your unity she disappears so that through her Jerusalem will be built in an everlasting construction, as it is written, ‘The Mount of the Lord’s House shall stand firm etc.’ (Isa. 2:2).” Compare *ibid.*, sec. 200, p. 187; sec. 386, p. 319; sec. 497, p. 400. In *Shiv'im Tiqqunim*, sec. 69, p. 133, the messianic transformation of the Shekhinah into a *yod* is connected with the symbol of the crown of the husband (Prov. 12:4) as well as the image of the moon shining with the light of the sun (Isa. 30:26).

zatto in *Qin'at ha-Shem Seva'ot*, reflecting on the androgynous nature of Sabbath:

The secret of the matter is that Malkhut in her aspect below is in the secret of the seventh. When she unites with Yesod in the secret of the copulation he himself becomes the seventh since she is a crown on his head. Therefore [he is] the seventh because he is the sixth that is crowned by the seventh. From his own side he is a *waw*, but on account of Malkhut who is joined to him he is called the seventh. He is the secret of a *waw* and the *yod* is upon him, which is the *zayin*. Then, on account of his name, the Shekhinah is called *šedeq* because he is the *šaddiq*.<sup>172</sup>

According to this passage, the phallic Yesod is transformed by its union with the Shekhinah from the sixth day to the seventh. This is represented orthographically by the image of the crown, which is the *yod*, rising to the top of the *waw*, which no doubt is meant to convey the formation of the *zayin*, symbolic of the seventh. As a result of this union, moreover, the seventh assumes the name *šedeq*, "righteousness," on account of the sixth, which is called *šaddiq*, "righteous." The unification of Yesod and Malkhut, the sixth and the seventh, the *waw* and the *yod*, represents the reconstitution of the androgyne in the divine phallus.

The androcentric nature of the image of coronation is driven home when we realize that the depiction of the Shekhinah as the "crown of her husband" is an alternative way of conveying the idea that the Shekhinah is the corona of the phallus. The convergence of these symbols is made explicit in the following supplication of Luzzatto before God: "Crown us in the light of Your presence, for she is the crown on the head of the righteous one, and Israel are righteous for they come from the supernal Yesod. . . . Immediately, the Shekhinah certainly becomes a crown on his head, and this is 'a capable wife is a crown for her husband' (Prov. 12:4)."<sup>173</sup> In this context, the crowning motif is descriptive of man's relationship to the Shekhinah in the messianic redemption, but it is clearly based on the theosophic dynamic: Just as above the Shekhinah is the crown on the head of Yesod, so below she can become a

<sup>172</sup> Luzzatto, *Qin'at ha-Shem Seva'ot*, p. 115. The privileged status of the feminine vis-à-vis the masculine on the Sabbath is expressed in the following way in Trevis, *Razin Genizin* (n. 18 above), p. 210 (partially corrected according to Manuscript Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library Heb 805217, fol. 79a): "Come and see: On the days of the week the blessing of the world is from the aspect of the male, and this is the secret of the six days. The Shekhinah takes the power on each of those days from the male and through it she governs the world. On the day of Sabbath, however, blessing is from the aspect of the Shekhinah, certainly [a day of] rest and repose. On the days of the week the Shekhinah must take power from the male to govern the world, but on the Sabbath it is not so, for the gradations of the male must be rectified in the Shekhinah in the secret of the Sabbath."

<sup>173</sup> Luzzatto, *TQT" W Tefillot*, sec. 455, p. 369. Compare *ibid.*, sec. 145, p. 110.

crown on the heads of the righteous Jewish males. The eschatological coronation has important implications for understanding the respective value assigned to human sexuality and asceticism. In the final analysis, the ascent of the Shekhinah as the phallic crown signifies the unification of gender that is decidedly asexual. In an attempt to emulate the redeemed state of the Godhead, the messianic task of *tiqqun ha-shekhinah* on the part of the mystic necessitates engagement in carnal sexuality with the proper intention followed by the abrogation of eros.<sup>174</sup> To restore the feminine to the phallic potency of the divine, which is the ultimate rectification of the Shekhinah, it is necessary for the righteous to be crowned by the divine feminine, an erotic bond that is predicated on the subjugation of physical desire.

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<sup>174</sup> I am not suggesting that the messianic redemption demands an absolute and unqualified asceticism. On the contrary, it is clear from Luzzatto's writings that he maintained that the body in general is purified in the time of the Messiah and not abrogated. See n. 77 above. My point is, rather, that the restoration of the feminine to the masculine in the form of the corona of the phallus can be achieved only by one who has abstained from engaging in conjugal sex. The positive role assigned to human sexuality is connected to the theurgic task that one has in unifying the male and female aspects of the Godhead, which is the initial phase of the redemption, but to sustain the integration of the feminine in the masculine, it is necessary to abstain from physical sex. Hence, the erotic conjunction with God in the culminating stage of redemption does necessitate some form of sexual asceticism. See my study referred to above in n. 47. Compare Luzzatto, *TQT"V Tefillot*, sec. 404, p. 333. The conjunction with the Shekhinah in the messianic era is predicated on the fact that the masculine and feminine elements are united and hence the original sense of sexual innocence (Gen. 2:25) is restored to man and woman. Ascetic renunciation on the part of the righteous in their effort to achieve the messianic goal of the rectification of the Shekhinah seems to be implied in Valle, *Shiv'im Panim* (n. 18 above), 3b: "This is the import of the verse, 'I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem, by gazelles or by hinds of the field: Do not wake or rouse love until it please!' (Song of Songs 2:7). . . . Initially, it was necessary to rectify the secret of the back and then to come in the light of the face. . . . The one who rectifies in the posture of the secret of the back benefits for he restores all the evil to the good. . . . This is the secret of the verse, 'I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem, by gazelles or by hinds of the field,' the maidens of Jerusalem refers to the secret of the righteous engaged in the rectification of the Shekhinah. . . . The righteous themselves need to be strengthened until they achieve the termination of their labor and the completion of the rectification, which is to arouse the love. Surely they do not consume the fruit of their ways until the love is aroused."