

# *De Natura Dei: On the Development of the Jewish Myth*

## I. General Characteristics

When encountering Kabbala for the first time, many face it in dismayed trepidation: Can this be Judaism? Where is the pure monotheism we have learned to expect from studies of the Bible, Talmud, Midrash, and Jewish philosophy? The research literature does not solve this riddle and, needless to say, these questions are not discussed in the writings of those scholars who view Kabbala as an alien growth and have a vested interest in stressing them. But even Gershom Scholem, the leading scholar of Kabbala who turned it into a decisive factor in the history of the Jewish spirit, saw it as a new eruption of the myth beginning in the twelfth century. Scholem stressed the vast difference between Kabbala and "the tendency of classical Jewish tradition to liquidate myth as a central spiritual power"<sup>1</sup> and therefore, when searching for the mystery of Jewish "vitality," could find it only in the Kabbala.<sup>2</sup> This approach also reflects disbelief in the kabbalists' pretension to be *baalei kabbala*, namely, guardians of the mythical tradition, and raises the question: How did such a striking innovation find acceptance by an ancient, wise people, at the close of the Middle Ages?

In this essay, I will try to trace the outlines of an alternative answer. Essentially, Kabbala is not a new creation but a reformulation, in different form, of the same myth that has been the very heart of the Torah since time immemorial. The mythical element did not erupt in the Kabbala; rather, that is where it was given systematic formulation and set within rigid frameworks, which may have in fact restrained and weakened its personal, spontaneous vitality. Adapting an ancient myth in accord with the spirit of the times is not particular to Kabbala. This flexibility is in the very nature of myth, which unfolds in line with changing sensibilities and develops complex interactions with the surrounding culture, while preserving its continuity. To the extent that it is flexible, a myth is also conservative,

traditionally transmitted, and evolves through textual interpretation. I have discussed the "external" links of the kabbalistic myth elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> and this essay will deal with its internal development. In other words, I will try to show that the characteristic features of the biblical and the rabbinical God have been attired in the guise of the kabbalistic *sefirot*.

But there is a preliminary question: Why are we unaware today of a continuum extending from the biblical to the kabbalistic conception of divinity? We have probably been influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, which held the biblical and talmudic God above all myth, construing myth and Judaism as essentially contradictory. This is not just a popular truism, but an assumption adopted by most of Judaism's spokesmen, from philosophers like Hermann Cohen to distinguished scholars and philologists such as Yehezkel Kaufmann and Julius Guttman. Even Moshe David Cassuto, most of whose research was devoted to emphasizing the parallels between the Bible and Ugaritic literature, consistently attempted to show that the Bible preserved idolatry only in form, while pouring new, nonmythical content into the old vessels. If *myth* be defined as a groundless prejudice, then the assumption of an a-mythical Judaism is a total myth. Indeed, a host of scholars, most of them Gentiles, followed the opposite course and highlighted the Hebrew myth as part of the general one. However, these scholars lacked influence especially in the field of kabbalistic research, which they did not pursue because their work reflected an unacceptable blurring of Judaism's uniqueness, as well as a rift between biblical and later Jewish literature. Nuances of an anti-Jewish ideology can occasionally be discerned in these writings, either reflecting the Christian attempt to deny rabbinical Judaism its pretence to be the legitimate heir of biblical religion or, in the case of Jewish scholars, expressing the influence of radical Zionist historiosophy or even of "Canaanite" denials of the Exile.

The uniqueness of Judaism may be preserved without severing it from myth the well-spring of the religious impulse. Myths are shared by all religions but are also the source of each religion's uniqueness, as they are concerned with the particular and concrete rather than with generalizations and abstractions. This emerges from the most general definition of myth, one essentially accepted by most scholars: A myth is a sacred story about the gods expressing that which the abstract word, or Logos, cannot express.<sup>4</sup> It is because of this sacredness that myths affect life. Those who see the Logos as the central essence have turned *myth* into a derogatory term, denoting trivial and vain inventions whereas those, like myself, who do not

believe that reality can be completely reduced to logical terms, recognize myth as its culmination. Each religion has its own myth into which it absorbs and incorporates influences from other religions, and this is also true for the Jewish religion. Even Judaism's monotheistic essence is not contradictory to myth, and monotheism itself has its own, far-reaching myth. The very declaration of the unity of God is mythical in origin and, Maimonides notwithstanding, does not turn God into an abstract inapprehensible concept. Judaism's mythical elements are not a result of polytheistic influences. On the contrary, philosophical abstraction emerged in fact within Greek polytheism, and thinkers such as Maimonides laboriously attempted to graft it on to the monotheistic texts; this attempt, as we shall see later, often led to the strengthening of myths rather than to their disappearance. There was good reason for the Platonic academy to remain as the last bastion of "pagan" religion during the expansion of Christianity.

Scholars of religion such as Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade have already pointed out the mythical element in monotheistic religion. Martin Buber went even further and grounded his conception of Judaism in the monotheistic myth.<sup>5</sup> However, although Buber stressed the human attitude toward the divine as a mythical entity with whom dialogue is possible, the kabbalists were concerned with the mythical features of God Himself. Therefore, while affirming myth, Buber denied the kabbalistic gnosis (the knowledge of God's mysteries). In this essay, I am concerned with the mythical features of the one God that, through their analogy to those of the human being created in His image, enable the dialogue to take place. In my view, this is no affront to the glory of God, the *Adam Ila'a* [Man Supreme] of the Zohar, who transcends even the most sublime idea; I will also show how these features are the source of the kabbalistic gnosis odious to Buber.

True, the Jewish myth in its kabbalistic guise may be disturbing. The personal descriptions of God in the Bible and in rabbinical literature may be approached lightly, merely as legends attempting to shape individual attitudes toward God. However, the Kabbala ascribes a more defined ontological meaning to God's attributes and confines them within a conceptual range that, though not rationally apprehensible, weakens the closeness of the "I-Thou" relationship. The biblical myth may be embraced without requiring us to believe in it, but Kabbala makes more stringent demands that reach into the rational realm too; it may be for this reason that wide circles, which enjoy this complacent distinction between myth and mind, feel threatened by it. Moreover, as I shall show later, the somewhat dry and arbitrary systematization pervasive in the Kabbala may evoke a sense of alienation.

These features of the kabbalistic myth are grounded in the exegetical approach to rabbinical *midrashim* that characterize most of the early Kabbala and actually created it. Unlike the philosophical exegesis of Midrash, kabbalistic exegesis did not expound one system according to an already available one; the kabbalistic system was actually created through exegesis of the Midrash. Kabbalists fostered one Jewish myth, that of the "ten *sefirot*," which after a long development, crystallized into the ten attributes or divine hypostases<sup>6</sup> and became the organizing framework for the Jewish myth in its entirety. Kabbalists ascribed to a specific *sefira* all mythical references to God's attributes found in the Bible and in rabbinical literature, in line with the conceptual rigor favored by the medieaval approach and under the influence of philosophy, despite the latter's attempt to eradicate all mythical traces from Judaism. Philosophy failed in this attempt, but it did have a share in changing the shape of the myth. Philosophy affected kabbalists directly, through ideas such as the *unio mystica* and the neo-Platonic emanation, which in Kabbala fused in the mythical descriptions of attachment (*deveikut*) and emanation (*atsilut*). It also affected them indirectly, by evoking their need for self-defense; to protect myth from attacks mounted from the philosophical flank, kabbalists adopted the ways of their adversaries and arrived at more conceptualized formulations of God's attributes. This conceptualization never reached the point of completely reducing mythical entities: myth always remained the heart of Kabbala and this process only strengthened it, made it more structured, and even raised its ontological status. However, a heavy price was occasionally paid, in the form of a considerable devaluation of the personal and vital nature of the Jewish myth, as we shall see further on.

This was not an inevitable consequence. Organizing the myth in the model of the ten *sefirot* can be potentially fruitful and enriching, providing the individual *mythologoumenon* with a wider range of interesting associations. This was indeed the case with the Zohar and the circles that crystallized around it.<sup>7</sup> The Zohar was written in a setting of wealth and security; as against the philosophical option, it built a marvelous structure from the ancestral mythical elements, which was only strengthened by the addition of kabbalistic and philosophical components. The Zohar blurs the boundaries between genres, and not in vain was it written in the mold of an ancient *midrash*. Its authors often continued creating living myths in the ancient manner and included the kabbalistic *sefirot* only when necessary and in an appropriate dosage. The *sefirot* are not included for the sake of systematization, but to deepen the old myth through new reflection, because the Zohar recognizes the freedom of mythical

creativity. This freedom is granted only to the kabbalist who is "faithful" to the spirit of religion, not to transgressors "weaving heavens of chaos," as some of the disciples and imitators of the Zohar indeed did.<sup>8</sup> The writers of the Zohar were wary of this, and it exists in a fruitful tension between the need to spread its message and to conceal it.<sup>9</sup> The multifaceted character of the Zohar explains the fascination it has exerted over its readers from the time it was written until our own days; a great deal of subsequent kabbalistic creativity is no more than attempts to systematize the zoharic myths. These attempts are not inevitably unimaginative and dull; at times, they reflect a great individual soul, as attested by the wondrous system Isaac Luria developed from the Zohar in Safad.

One need not be perplexed by the assumption that myths can be graded according to their ontological validity. A wide range of possibilities stretches between legends and parables, on the one hand, and an objective, inevitable reality, on the other. Myths do not always lay claim to absolute ontological validity, which may vary widely in line with the literary genres. In my view, it can be assumed that the mythical validity of religions based on canonized Scriptures will be particularly high. Hence, the mythical status of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is even higher than that of the Greek myth, which gave birth to the term. Undoubtedly, in Greece as well, myth was the foundation of ritual and considered a religious truth but, since Greek religion lacked "Scriptures" in the full sense of the term, its ontological validity was lower. The changing course of myth may be traced through several literary genres in Greek religion, both from the perspective of its authors and from that prevailing in later periods. There are great differences between the status of myths in Homer's writings, which was very close to that of "Scriptures," the description of the gods in Hesiod and Orpheus, and the status of myths in the classical tragedies, where they were transformed according to the needs and inclinations of the playwrights. Furthermore, these all differ from the myths that Plato integrated in his philosophical writings.<sup>10</sup>

The same phenomenon is found in Jewish literature: the mythical status of the biblical stories of Creation or the Exodus differs in descriptive style and in the authority of its source from that of its midrashic amplifications. The Bible tells a flowing, detailed story in the name of God or Moses, and this authority is accepted and confirmed by the later Halakha; on the other hand, rabbinical *midrashim* are the statements of different rabbis, who are often in mutual disagreement. (Indeed, rabbinical myths themselves appear in various forms. Some were formulated in clearly mythical terms, because of literary considerations and in order to deliver a non-

mythical message, as I have shown elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> whereas others have a prominently mythical character and will be discussed later.) However, the biblical myth is itself not the apex of the ontological scale, and this myth too can be removed from its literal context and expounded, whether in allegorical or other terms. Praxis, rather than belief in the details of the biblical myth, is the core of Jewish religion though, as we shall see later, praxis is not divorced from myth. In this regard, the credit for being the most mythical religion belongs to Christianity, which meticulously formulated the details of its myth through a series of disputes, schisms, and even wars and established them as articles of faith to be committed to memory. These features of the Christian myth reflect its contest with philosophy and its adoption of the latter's concepts,<sup>12</sup> in a process similar to the one described earlier regarding Kabbala. However, in Christianity this process culminated in a dangerous fusion philosophical elements merged with the Paulinian principle of faith, which superseded the commandments and became the key to salvation. Indeed, in his epistle to the Galileans, the emperor Julian the Apostate preferred paganism to Christianity on the grounds that the Christian myth, as opposed to the pagan one, does not allow for allegorical interpretation.

The kabbalists themselves were aware of the high status of their myth. This awareness increased in the course of history and reached its peak in the kabbalistic, messianic awakening of the Sabbatean period. For the Sabbateans, identifying the true God (the "God of truth" in their terms) was a crucial aspect of their activity. Sabbetai Zevi himself had difficulty formulating exactly the nature of his God, given its elusive personal character.<sup>13</sup> This task became the main concern of Nathan of Gaza, Sabbetai Zevi's prophet; in his profound, extensive, and largely unpublished work, Nathan created an innovative kabbalistic system where the images of God and the Messiah are connected and shaped through their mutual influence. However, the core of Nathan's work is not theoretical definition but rather the emotional bond of faith and love joining the believers, God, and the Messiah. It was the Sabbatean theologian Abraham Miguel Cardozo who raised theoretical definition to the rank of a messianic end, devoting his numerous writings to this purpose,<sup>14</sup> as did his followers. In Cardozo's writings, for the first time in kabbalistic literature, there is a formulation resembling a Christian credo: "I believe with my whole heart and soul that He is the Cause of all Causes, that He is One, the only One, the singular One ... that He shines through the ten *sefirot* of emanation ..."<sup>15</sup>

The credal style, which started with Sabbateanism, occasionally appears in later Kabbala in even stronger terms and accompanied

by a ritual instruction to recite it daily. It is interesting that precisely at a time when its influence was on the wane, Kabbala demanded such authority for its myth. The following excerpt appears in the *Sefer Od Yosef Hai*, by the nineteenth century Babylonian kabbalist Rav Yosef Hayyim ben Elyiahu Elhakham: <sup>16</sup>

Every man should carefully recite these words every day, including the Sabbath and the Holidays, before the portion on the *akeda* [the sacrifice of Isaac]. This declaration is greatly needed for the ways of mystery, and these are its words: "I believe with my whole heart and soul that God Our Lord is the Cause of all Causes, that He created the ten *sefirot* which are *keter*, *hokhma* and *bina*, *hesed*, *gevura* and *tiferet*, *netzah*, *hod*, *yesod* and *malkhut* and His Light is revealed and hidden in the Supreme *Keter*, and from there it shines upon the letter *Yod*, which is *hokhma*"...

After the kabbalistic description, it goes on to state: "It is my belief and my wish before the Holy One, blessed be He, with my whole heart and with a willing soul, to completely eliminate all strange, unfit, harmful and forbidden thoughts as well as all thoughts which are, God forbid, heretical, and all bad reflections and all bad, unfit, harmful and forbidden images."<sup>17</sup>

This text is followed by detailed halakhic instructions concerning the ways of "eliminating" heretic thoughts, borrowed from the laws about the disposal of leavened bread during Passover. As far as I have been able to ascertain, this text was not printed in the prayerbooks and was circulated in a special booklet, undated, printed in Jerusalem several times. We may perhaps infer from this as well that, despite the Kabbala's high ontological status in the kabbalists' eyes, belief in it did not become normative for the general public or for the leadership. The normative status of the kabbalistic myth is lower than that of Maimonides's thirteen articles of faith, which lack a prominently mythical character and were accepted into the liturgy.

Further evidence of the high status of the kabbalistic myth may be found in its liturgical uses; from the sixteenth century onward, kabbalistic excerpts were extensively included in prayerbooks. These excerpts range from short allusions, such as the formula *leshem yihud* [for unity], stated before performing the commandments, all the way to long passages meticulously describing kabbalistic beliefs. Many of these excerpts appear in the first anthology of kabbalistic liturgy, *Sha'arei Zion* [The Gates of Zion], which Nathan Neta Hanover compiled shortly before the advent of Sabbateanism. In this anthology

we find, for instance, the passage *Petah Eliyyahu* from the introduction to the *Tikkunei Zohar*, which precedes the prayers in Sephardi communities; this passage, though not worded as a credo, is a general summary of the kabbalistic myth. We should also include under this rubric the well-known book *Hemdat Yamim* [The Beloved of Days] unquestionably Sabbatean which suggests that kabbalistic *kavvanot* [devotional intentions] be turned into a text to be recited aloud. Indeed, this process began even earlier, as attested by the many kabbalistic *piyutim* [ritual songs] for various occasions; although of lesser liturgical validity, some of these *piyutim* were occasionally printed in prayerbooks.

The first kabbalists were already aware of the ontological importance of myth, even if they did not establish it as a dogma or integrate it into normative liturgy. By liturgy I refer to words and deeds, not to intentions which are obviously the core of Kabbala since its inception or to practices adopted by closed circles at its early stages of development.<sup>18</sup> This awareness of the importance of myth is expressed in the very claim that Kabbala constitutes a distinct phase in the understanding of religion that is different from textual or midrashic interpretation, as well as in the names ascribed to it, such as *Derekh Emeth* [The Path of Truth] in Nahmanides' Commentary on the Bible; *Orah Keshot* [The Path of Truth], *Raza de-Hokhmeta* [The Mystery of Wisdom], or *Raza de-Meheimanuta* [The Mystery of Faith] in the Zohar. It is also reflected in the precautions and secrecy in which the first kabbalists shrouded their knowledge,<sup>19</sup> as well as in their consistent abstention from introducing any innovations in the body of knowledge handed down to them. The latter approach was prevalent among Gerondian kabbalists and their leader Nachmanides,<sup>20</sup> as against the creativity displayed by circles associated with the Zohar, to which we referred earlier.

In this essay, my concern is with myth itself, as it is revealed in the texts. I am not concerned with the sociological or psychological role of myth, or with the circumstances of its creation. Therefore, I will not be relating to the whole field of research on these aspects of myth, from Jung extending to Levi-Strauss and their disciples as well as their opponents, which has recently elicited a tremendous volume of work. I am interested in precisely those facets of myth that cannot be reduced to general concepts. Furthermore, I do not use the term *myth* in the amplified meaning adopted by the social sciences, where it includes additional concepts, ideologies, and spiritual approaches, which would obscure my intention. I adhere to the original meaning of the word, which denotes a story about the gods and their nature, adapted to the one God of Jewish religion. God's unity



determines His nature; it also has a mythical aspect that, in my eyes, is the source of life of the Jewish religion.

## II. Talmud and Kabbala: God's Actions as Reflected in His Attributes

We shall first examine several passages of rabbinical literature exposing the character and attributes of the talmudic God, in order to illustrate the continuities and contrasts between the Talmud and the Kabbala noted in the previous section. Obviously, we can no more than touch on this diverse and monumental body of literature, created by widely different circles over many centuries. I use the conventional term *rabbinical* as a matter of convenience although, in every respect, delimiting this literature is an impossible task due to the difficulties of defining the time span, social strata, scope of relevant literature and literary genre, as well as the rabbis' concepts and beliefs.

Examples were chosen mainly from the Babylonian Talmud and its tannaitic *beraitot*, given the Talmud's central place in Jewish literature and its quality as a clear, early document, less influenced by outside currents of thought and marked by stronger mythical leanings. I will show how these examples blend into a myth with uniform features, albeit not one formulated as a fixed and articulated credo. These features assume various guises, in accordance with the needs of the exegete and the "mythological validity" of his claims. The recurrence of these features and their close integration into the halakhic and religious ethos, as well as the continuity between the Bible and the Kabbala that we shall discuss later, will point to a myth in the full sense of the term. It will then become clear that these are not vain assertions, as alleged by those intent on "purifying" and blurring the essence of religion.

Still, it is not my claim that this myth is "the rabbinical view," as there is no "rabbinical view." Broadly different and even mutually contradictory statements appear in this literature, including the Talmud, and I intend only to indicate and describe a living myth from which the Kabbala developed. Such a description is missing from the extensive work dealing with rabbinical beliefs, because even serious talmudic scholars have been unable to altogether avoid the influence of those preconceived notions that describe rabbinical Judaism as legalistic and opposed to mysticism and myth. The first to spread this libel, which many Jews construed as praise, were the Christians, starting with Paul. Therefore, most scholars dealing with mythical

descriptions such as the ones following, often see them as only explicit or implicit forms of a message belonging in the human realm, failing to combine them into a complete, credible myth (though support for various forms of the talmudic myth has indeed been voiced over the last few years). I have chosen the opposite path and granted priority to celestial beings for, as we shall see, the rabbis thought that human religious behavior must spring from the mythical essence of divinity. I believe that this claim is self-evident and the onus of proof is on those claiming that the rabbis were "flippant," so to speak, precisely when they came to describe their God.

The first example will serve to link various genres of talmudic-midrashic literature, as well as show the affinities between this literature and Kabbala. It is from the Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 7a:

R. Ishmael b. Elisha says: I once entered into the innermost part [of the Sanctuary] to offer incense and saw Akathriel Yah, the Lord of Hosts, seated upon a high and exalted throne. He said to me: Ishamael, My son, bless Me! I replied: May it be Thy will that Thy mercy may suppress Thy anger and Thy mercy may prevail over Thy other attributes, so that Thou mayest deal with Thy children according to the attribute of mercy and mayest, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice! And He nodded to me with His head.

Several scholars felt this passage was incompatible with their own approach. In a paper attempting to define and limit the scope of the mystical element in rabbinical literature, Ephraim Urbach, the most comprehensive scholar of rabbinic thought in our time, dismissed it as part of the *Hekhalot* literature and of the "mysteries of the Chariot watchers, who were far from the ways of the first *tannaim*."<sup>21</sup> This passage is indeed related to the tradition of *Hekhalot* literature, as can also be inferred from the names of its two protagonists: the divine one (Akatriel Yah ...) and the human one (Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, the High Priest), as Urbach pointed out. *Hekhalot* literature resembles kabbalistic literature on various counts, and precisely for this reason, we shall not be devoting special attention to it in this essay, where we are concerned with the mainstream midrashic tradition and the continuum linking it to Kabbala. I have chosen this passage to show that noting its closeness to *Hekhalot* literature is not, in and by itself, sufficient to remove it from the realm of rabbinical literature. In the following pages, we will compare it with others of professed "midrashic" quality and thus further our understanding of its special features as well as its links with the other examples.

True, the preceding passage has a quasi-kabbalistic character unusual for the Talmud: God's attributes<sup>22</sup> seem to be independent entities, "suppressing" and "prevailing" over each other and actually controlled by a man, Rabbi Ishmael, just as the Kabbala speaks about the ten *sefirot* that the kabbalist can affect. However, it is immediately apparent that the image of God is not wholly kabbalistic. A personal God requesting a blessing is revealed to Rabbi Ishmael beyond the attributes, whereas no God is found in the Kabbala outside the *sefirot*, as the emanating *Ein-Sof* is neither a personal image nor the object of a religious relationship.<sup>23</sup> Evidence of this difference can also be found in the kabbalists' exegeses of this passage: not satisfied with the slight overlap between the attributes and their own *sefirot*, they made "Akatriel" himself part of the scheme, and precisely as the lowest *sefira*, which is beneath the attributes.<sup>24</sup>

But are the attributes indeed independent entities, separate from God? Let us consider this question by looking at another talmudic passage, which appears immediately before the previous one:

R. Johanan says in the name of R. Jose ... hence [you learn] that the Holy One, blessed be He, says prayers. What does he pray? R. Zutra b. Tobi said in the name of Rab: "May it be My will that My mercy may subdue My anger, and that My mercy may prevail over My [other] attributes, so that I may deal with My children in the attribute of mercy and, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice." (Berakhot 7a)

This passage is much more in line with the general features of talmudic style. There is no "Akatriel" and no "Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest" from *Hekhalot* literature but rather an ordinary statement by a famous *amora*, without hinting at human influence on the divine attributes. Although Rabbi Ishmael's blessing is reproduced literally, in this passage it appears as a prayer that the Holy One, blessed be He, prays by Himself, to Himself and for Himself. Can we still adhere to a description of the attributes as independent entities mechanistically linked? Were this the case, God should have acted directly on the attributes rather than pray to Himself "May it be My will ..." and, most certainly, so should Rabbi Ishmael, whose blessing too begins with "May it be Thy will ..." Whereas at first we could have ignored this formula, which seemed a polite form of address to God that masks direct human interference with the divine attributes, we now find that God Himself requests "May it be My will" and the euphemistic argument cannot be applied to Him.

We may infer from this "self-prayer" that the attributes are only psychological characteristics typical of human beings, who are prey to their instincts and need to struggle in order to overcome feelings such as pity and anger. True, the attributes occasionally appear as independent entities, but the rabbis also depicted the *yetser ha-ra* [evil inclination] as a fly dwelling between the two entrances to the heart (Berakhot 61a), and the collective *yetser ha-ra* of the people of Israel as a young fiery lion coming forth from the Temple's Holy of Holies (Yoma 69b).

But ... may we speak of God's evil inclination? Indeed we may. We can understand Rabbi Ishmael for choosing not to: It is disrespectful to mention His evil inclination to Him even as we are blessing Him, and the term does not suit the exalted tone of the passage. However, we find this explicit phrase elsewhere:

R. Joshua b. Levi said: Why were they called men of the Great Assembly? Because they restored the crown of the divine attributes to its ancient completeness. [For] Moses had come and said (Deuteronomy 10:17): "The great God, the mighty and the awful." Then Jeremiah came and said: Aliens are destroying His Temple. Where are, then, His awful deeds? Hence he omitted [the attribute] the "awful."<sup>25</sup> Daniel came and said: Aliens are enslaving his sons. Where are His mighty deeds?<sup>26</sup> Hence he omitted the word *mighty*.<sup>27</sup> But they came and said: On the contrary! Therein lie His mighty deeds that He subdues His inclination, that He extends long suffering to the wicked. Therein lie His awful powers: For but for the fear of Him, how could one [single] nation persist among the [many] nations! But how could [the earlier] rabbis [meaning Jeremiah and Daniel] abolish something established by Moses? R. Eleazar said: Since they knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, insists on truth, they would not ascribe false [things] to Him. (Yoma 69b)

The usage "His inclination" was unacceptable to some of the copyists, who wrote "His wrath" instead, whereas the Gaon of Vilna opted for "His will," but this usage still appears in the main printed edition. Evidence of its accuracy is also furnished by the parallel verse in Avot 4:1: "Who is a hero? He who subdues his inclination."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the same verb appears as well in Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha's blessing ("That Thy mercy may subdue Thy anger") and from the parallel version of this passage it is clear that no external suppression was intended there either. Moreover, even the use of "prevail" adopted by Rabbi Ishmael ("Thy mercy may prevail over Thy other attributes")

lacks a mechanistic connotation regarding the attributes. In the Aramaic version of the Bible we find "his mercy prevailed" as a translation of "his affection was kindled" (Genesis 43:30) spoken of Joseph, a human being.

The Jewish myth changed between the biblical and the rabbinical periods and the passage from Yoma, attributed to the period of the Great Assembly, shows awareness of this change. In the biblical period God still had external enemies although, indeed, none as great and powerful as He: "Who is like Thee, O Lord, among the gods?" (Exodus 15:11). God could not be vanquished by His enemies but, nonetheless, it was still God's glory to defeat them and He was praised by the men of the Bible for His past and future victories: "I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider He has thrown into the sea" (Exodus 15:1) or "On that day the Lord with His sore and great and strong sword shall punish Leviathan the flying serpent, and Leviathan that crooked serpent; and He shall slay the crocodile that is in the sea" (Isaiah 27:1). This is not the approach of the Midrash, where both the human enemies and the monsters of the sea have been brought low and are not seen as worthy adversaries. The war with the Leviathan becomes Gabriel's task, and the battle ends following God's intervention (Baba Bathra 74b75a): "Gabriel is to arrange in the future a chase of Leviathan. ... And if the Holy One, blessed be He, will not help him, he will be unable to prevail over him." Indeed, there are still angels and a celestial retinue who argue sometimes with their Creator, mainly because they envy mortals, but their whole nature is to serve. God's arguments with them might lead Him to hesitate, but not to external war. Outwardly (as is already the case in several biblical instances), God is Almighty; His real wars are only waged within Himself.

Therefore, according to this passage, when Jeremiah and Daniel felt that God appeared to have been defeated by His enemies, they ceased His praises since they were false and "they would not ascribe false [things] to Him" or, in the version of the Jerusalem Talmud, "flatter Him."<sup>29</sup> After all, these praises continue those of Moses (Deuteronomy 10:17): "a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, who favors no person, and takes no bribe." The men of the Great Assembly thus changed the prophets' ways and reverted to the full wording: "a great God, a mighty and a terrible."<sup>30</sup> Why the reversal? We could explain it in the spirit of the biblical myth and ascribe it to the political and religious improvements in the wake of the Return to Zion but, for the rabbis, this would be out of character. Indeed, unlike the prophets, the men of the Great Assembly could never imagine God's defeat at the hands of His enemies, but neither would they consider

it an heroic deed for God to defeat them. In order to be called a *hero*, God must overcome. What, then, must He overcome? The men of the Great Assembly introduced their psychological myth and "restored the crown of the divine attributes to its ancient completeness": They restored the myth of God's heroism. To the extent that the biblical God was a hero, He is now a hero of heroes because "Who is a hero? He who subdues his inclination." What does this mean? It means extending "long suffering to the wicked" (an expression also found in the Sanhedrin passage later, p. 18), when God lets His enemies rule over His house and His people and seems defeated.

It is noteworthy that the Jerusalem Talmud expresses reservations about this myth as well and ascribes it, though in a more subtle form and without the words "His inclination," to the prophet Jeremiah. Unlike Daniel, Jeremiah did say "mighty" because, according to the Jerusalem Talmud version: "He should be called mighty, that He sees His house destroyed and is silent." However, the men of the Great Assembly did not follow Jeremiah because, for abstract theological reasons, they opposed all mythologyman is incapable of grasping God's ways or, in their words: "Does flesh and blood have the power to measure these things?!" The rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud also expressed views in this spirit when they dealt elsewhere with the formula of "great, mighty and terrible God." Angry at those attempting to add a chain of adjectives to these three, in the spirit of the *Hekhalot* literature, the rabbis stated that even these, "had not Moses our Master mentioned them in the Law and had not the men of the Great Assembly come and inserted them in the prayer, we should not have been able to mention them." <sup>31</sup>

Saadia Gaon's approach is worth noting in this context. He also compared the words of Jeremiah and Daniel to the biblical verse and commented on the absence of "mighty and terrible." Although this comparison was obviously inspired by the Talmud, he totally ignored the rabbinical pronouncements in this regard and settled the issue in totally nonmythical fashion!<sup>32</sup>

During the biblical period, when God still had external enemies, He could request help from man, at least in ancient rhetorical devices such as?

And He saw that there was no man,<sup>33</sup> and was astonished that there was no intercessor; therefore His arm brought salvation to Him; and His righteousness, it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon His head and He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak, according to their deeds, so

---

will He repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the islands He will repay recompense. (Isaiah 59:1618)

What help can God expect from flesh and blood creatures? Verbal encouragement, as in the words of the prophet: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art Thou not it that has cut Rahav in pieces, and wounded the crocodile? Art Thou not it which dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" (Isaiah 51:910)

But what is Rabbi Ishmael's role? Is the expectation that man should help God also found in the rabbinical period? How can man interfere with God's attributes? The talmudic God too asks man for help, real and crucial help, even if many talmudic scholars are uncomfortable with this request. Help again appears as verbal encouragement, despite the fact that God struggles against His own attributes. As human beings need help and support in their struggle against their passions, so does God, and this parallel is explicitly mentioned when summarizing the passage on Akatriel and Ishmael: "Here we learn that the blessing of an ordinary man must not be considered lightly in your eyes" (elsewhere the Talmud learns the same rule from stories about biblical figures).<sup>34</sup> That is, we may learn from God's request about human nature and about the proper conduct toward humankind in general since, despite claims to the contrary, the ethos of the rabbis is grounded on their myth but does not replace it.<sup>35</sup>

Rabbi Ishmael's blessing even entered the liturgy and is included in the morning prayer after the reading on the binding of Isaac; to encourage God further, Abraham is presented to Him in the prayers so that his memory may be preserved in reward for his actions, and also as a paragon for the subdual of passion:

Master of the world! Even as Abraham our father held back his compassion in order to do Thy will with loyal heart, so may Thy mercy hold back Thy anger from us; let Thy mercy prevail over Thy attributes. Lord our God, deal with us kindly and mercifully; in Thy great goodness, may Thy fierce wrath turn away from Thy people, Thy city, Thy land, and Thy heritage...

Doubts may still remain as to whether this is not an unusual motif in rabbinical literature that only appears here because of the mentioned links between the Akatriel story and *Hekhalot* literature.

The following parallel passage, of impeccable midrashic credentials, should help to allay them:

R. Joshua b. Levi also said: When Moses ascended on high, he found the Holy One, blessed be He, tying crowns on the letters [of the Torah]. Said He to him, "Moses, is there no [greeting of] Peace in thy town?" "Shall a servant extend [a greeting of] Peace to his Master!" replied he. "Yet thou shouldst have assisted Me," said He. Immediately he cried out to Him, (Numbers 14:17) "And now, I pray thee, let the power of the Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken." (Shabbath 89a)

Although this passage resembles the Akatriel-Ishmael story in content, in its literary approach it is diametrically opposed. In that case, as usual in *Hekhalot* literature, the dominant tone is mystical and formal, creating a distance between God and His creatures. Akatriel and Ishmael, a product of this literature, feature as protagonists. In this case, the protagonists are familiar and close to every Jew the Holy One, blessed be He, and Moses. There is a close link between the identity of the protagonists and the contents of the stories: The first tells of a High Priest who enters the innermost part of the sanctuary to offer incense, when God officially addresses him and requests a blessing. The second tells of an intimate conversation between God and Moses, conducted as a psychological contest full of cunning and misunderstandings.

In the Akatriel-Ishmael story, as in other accounts of ascents to Heaven from *Hekhalot* and apocalyptic literature, God's nature is revealed in the very statement about His attributes or about celestial entities. Ostensibly, this is the main "content" of the story. But here, in the personal myth, God's psychological dilemma is also sharply expressed in the "background story," the story of the meeting between Moses and God. God tries to protect His honor as Lord and Master while trying to obtain Moses' help, and His request for a blessing thus seems like an admonition, seemingly phrased in simple, popular language: "Moses, is there no [greeting of] Peace in thy town!?" Is it not the custom to extend peace greetings where you grew up!? Moses truly believes that God is protecting His honor and does not understand that, in fact, He is asking for his help. Therefore, Moses' reply is in the spirit of God's admonition: "Shall a servant extend [a greeting of] peace to his Master?" God then sees that hints will not suffice. He humiliates Himself and makes His request explicit: "Yet thou shouldst have assisted Me." Only now does Moses understand what is being asked of him and he blesses God in the words of the



verse, wishing that His power, which is identical with His attributes of mercy, may grow.

God's attributes of mercy appear in the next biblical verse, which the Talmud reader is supposed to have completed in his mind: "And now, I pray Thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as Thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long suffering, and great in love..." The mention of His attributes of mercy attests that, in this case as well, it is intended to have mercy "prevail over His attributes"; however, identifying His attributes of mercy with "His power" may point to their actual nature as characteristics of God rather than separate entities, as could have been understood from the Akatriel story.

The very mention of the attributes through a biblical quote helps to soften the formal style and the mythical overtones of Rabbi Ishmael's phrasing ("Thy mercy may prevail over Thy other attributes"); by contrast, the understatement characterizing the encounter between God and Moses accords the myth a more personal and primitive bent. The story of Akatriel seems to be nothing but a formal, exalted formulation and a conceptualized abstraction of this primitive myth, intended to hide God's "human weaknesses" under a cloak of distant glory in order to adjust it to the mystical style of *Hekhalot* literature. The alternativeturning the story of Akatriel into a personal myth is inconceivable. We do occasionally find in *Hekhalot* literature expressions of an intimate bond between God and His worshippers, often to the chagrin of the ministering angels; the contrast created after the breach in the cloak of distance makes this bond seem even more powerful. We will see in section III that, in rabbinical *midrashim* too, the angels fulfill a similar literary role).

In the more aloof version of the Akatriel-Ishmael story the mystic's influence on the divine attributes seems to be a quasi-magical or, more accurately, a quasi-theurgic act; however, in the personal story, it appears more likely that Moses influences his God through his words of encouragement. This idea is found explicitly in an earlier version of this story, where Moses' words to God ("And now I pray Thee, let the power...") are compared with the cries of support with which spectators encourage athletes in the arena:

"enhances strength" (Job 17:9)...applies to Moses who enhanced the strength of the Almighty, as when he said "And now, I pray Thee, let the strength of the Lord be enhanced..." so that the measure of mercy [may] prevail over the measure of justice...A strong man was exercising with a block of stone that came from a stonecutter. A passer-by saw him and said: "Your power is

marvelous. You are strong and brave," as is written: "And now, I pray Thee..." R. Azariah, citing R. Judah bar R. Simon, said: Whenever righteous men do the Holy One's will, they enhance the strength of the Almighty. Hence Moses' plea, "And now, I pray Thee..." On the other hand, when men do not do His will, then, if one dare say such a thing, (Deuteronomy 32:18):<sup>36</sup> "The Rock that begot thee, thou dost weaken."<sup>37</sup>

In a sentence preceding this passage, the Midrash suggests another option: "'enhances strength...' is the Holy One who enhances the strength of the righteous to enable them to do His will." Indeed, in the account of Moses' ascent to heaven cited in the Shabbath passage (p. 16), the parties were also ambivalent. God and man are meshed and need each other. It is not only God who needs to be encouraged by Moses to abandon justice and embrace mercy, but Moses too needs God's prodding to become aware of the need for mercy, first through a hint ("Is there no [greeting of] peace in thy town?") and then explicitly ("Yet thou shouldst have assisted Me"). This appears even more clearly in another talmudic version of the encounter between God and Moses, where Moses speaks of the attribute of mercy relying on the same biblical verse, but God makes it explicitly clear that it is He who holds the copyright on the idea of mercy:

When Moses ascended on high, he found the Holy One, blessed be He, sitting and writing "long suffering." Said he to Him, "Master of the World! Long suffering to the righteous?" He replied,<sup>38</sup> "Even to the wicked." He urged, "Let the wicked perish!" "See now what thou desirest," was His answer. "When Israel sinned," He said to him, "didst thou not urge Me, [Let Thy] long suffering be for the righteous [only]?" "Master of the World!" said he, "but didst Thou not assure me, Even to the wicked!" Hence it is written, "And now, I pray Thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as Thou hast spoken, saying." (Sanhedrin 111a111b)

In this passage, the relationship between God and Moses seems more complex and delicate than the biblical one. This dialogue would not fit the style of the biblical myth, which is more aloof and unequivocal. In the biblical context, Moses seems to be consistently on the side of mercy, as it is said (Psalms 106:23): "Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He should destroy them." We even find God imploring Moses (Deuteronomy 9:14):

"Let Me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven: and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they" but Moses does not leave Him alone and, as we shall see later, "ignores God's command." As usual, the Talmud added a daring mythical picture:

R. Abbahu said: Were it not explicitly written, it would be impossible to say such a thing...[This formula serves to license the pursuit of a very bold line in the development of the biblical myth. Although this direction is already latent in a literal reading of the text, it entails an exaggerated concretization of the phrase "let Me alone"] this teaches that Moses took hold of the Holy One, blessed be He, like a man who seizes his fellow by his garment and said before Him: Master of the World, I will not let Thee go until Thou forgivest and pardonest them. (Berakhot, 32a)

The Zohar developed this idea through the use of kabbalistic symbolism. As usual, it amplified the myth while leaving its personal intensity undiminished, and described Moses as embracing the King, wrestling with Him and pinning Him down by His arms.<sup>39</sup> According to Exodus 33:34, when God would not come up in the midst of His people Moses forced Him to reveal to him the secret of His attributes of mercy, through which He might be brought to change His decrees. This biblical description already seems to contain all the seeds of the blunt myth on which the *Selihot* ritual is grounded:

R. Johanan said: Were it not written in the text, it would be impossible for us to say such a thing; this verse teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, drew his robe round Him like the reader of a congregation and showed Moses the order of the prayer. He said to him: Whenever Israel sin, let them carry out this service before Me, and I will forgive them...A covenant has been made with the thirteen attributes that they will not be turned away empty handed. (Rosh Hashana 17b)

In talmudic sources however, Moses is ambivalent in his commitment to the attribute of mercy, as we saw earlier. The reasons will become clearer as we delve further into Moses' character in the Talmud, where we find another description of his meeting with God:

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: When Moses ascended on high he found the Holy One, blessed be He, engaged in tying

crowns to the letters. Said Moses, "Master of the World, Who stays Thy hand?" He answered, "There will arise a man, at the end of many generations, Akiba b. Joseph by name, who will expound upon each tittle heaps and heaps of laws." "Master of the World," said Moses; "permit me to see him." He replied, "Turn thee round." Moses went and sat down behind eight rows [and listened to the discourses upon the law]. Not being able to follow their arguments he was weakened, but when they came to a certain subject and the disciples said to the master "Whence do you know it?" and the latter replied "It is a law given unto Moses at Sinai," he was comforted. Thereupon he returned to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, "Master of the World, Thou hast such a man and Thou givest the Torah by me!" he replied, "Be silent, for such is My decree." Then said Moses, "Master of the World, Thou hast shown me his Torah, show me his reward." "Turn thee round," said He; and Moses turned round and saw them weighing out his flesh at the market stalls. "Master of the World," cried Moses, "such Torah, and such a reward!" He replied, "Be silent, for such is My decree." (Menahot 29b)

This famous passage, widely regarded as the archetype of the relation between the Written and the Oral Law, replicates the situation presented in the two previous ones (pp. 16 and 18). In itself, the very appearance of a story in three different versions is proof of its "mythical validity," close to that of a personal legend and far from the rank of an "article of faith." This passage opens like the one in Shabbath and Moses encounters God as He is engaged in tying crowns to the letters but, whereas in the passage in Menahot the crowns are the story's substance, in the Shabbath passage the crowns are never mentioned again. However, were we to join to the Shabbath passage the "long suffering" quote from Sanhedrin (p. 18), the meaning of the crowns in the former would become clearer. Crowns are added to letters, in the same way that the attribute of mercy is added to justice, but Moses cannot grasp this. In Menahot he is presented as a slightly inadequate man; he not only fails to grasp the meaning of the crowns, needing to be "telescoped" into the future, but he also fails to understand the discussions between Rabbi Akiba and his students, till "he is weakened." It is interesting to note that the Talmud chose to use the very expression used in reference to God.<sup>40</sup> Moses is "comforted" when hearing the argument quoted in his name, but his sense of justice compels him to return to God and request that the Torah be given through Rabbi Akiba, a wiser man. However, God

claims that justice is not at stake "Be silent, for such is My decree" and even repeats this answer when relating to Moses' stronger appeal "Such Torah, and such a reward!" which he had voiced when witnessing Rabbi Akiba's painful death.

Moses is also portrayed elsewhere in the Talmud as refusing to accept that God can depart from the principle of justice:

R. Johanan further said in the name of R. Jose: Three things did Moses ask of the Holy One, blessed be He, and they were granted to him. ... He asked that He should show him the ways of the Holy One, blessed be He, and it was granted to him. For it is said "Show me now Thy ways" (Exodus, 33:13). Moses said before Him: "Master of the World, why is it that some righteous men prosper and others are in adversity, some wicked men prosper and others are in adversity?" He replied to him: "Moses, the righteous man who prospers is a righteous man the son of a righteous man; the righteous man who is in adversity is a righteous man the son of a wicked man. The wicked man who prospers is a wicked man son of a righteous man; the wicked man who is in adversity is a wicked man son of a wicked man." (Berakhot 7a)

Although God somehow answers Moses' question, the Talmud finds this response unacceptable and corrects it a few lines later: "a righteous man who prospers is a perfectly righteous man." However, others felt that Moses' question had not been answered at all and, rather than being a problem of justice, this issue belongs in the realm of God's arbitrary right of clemency:

Now this [saying of R. Johanan] is in opposition to the saying of R. Meir. For R. Meir said: "Only two [requests] were granted to him, and one was not granted to him." For it is said (Exodus 33:19): "And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious," although he may not deserve it, "And I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy," although he may not deserve it.

Unlike Moses, Rabbi Akiba himself never complained about the injustice of his painful agony, as the Talmud tells us elsewhere:

When R. Akiba was taken out for execution, it was the hour for the recital of the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4), and while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the kingship of heaven. His disciples said to him: "Our teacher,

even to this point?" He said to them: "All my days I have been troubled by this verse (Deuteronomy 6:5): 'with all thy soul,' [which I interpret] "even if He takes thy soul." I said: "When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this? Now that I have the opportunity shall I not fulfill it?" He prolonged the word *Ehad* [One] until he expired while saying it. A *bat kol* [heavenly voice] went forth and proclaimed: "Happy art thou, Akiba, that thy soul has departed with the word *Ehad*!" The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Such Torah, and such a reward? [He should have been] 'from them that die by Thy hand, O Lord' (Psalms 17:14). He replied to them: 'their portion is in life' (ibid). A *bat kol* went forth and proclaimed, "Happy art thou, R. Akiba, that thou art destined for the life of the world to come." (Berakhot 61b)

Moses thus ranked among the angels; they had also asked about Rabbi Akiba's death "Such Torah, and such a reward?" and had received an answer from God reward is in the world to come. Rabbi Akiba himself, however, does not demand justice from God and sees his agony as an expression of His love (the full verse that troubled Rabbi Akiba reads: "And thou shall love the Lord thy God ... and with all thy soul ..."). Rabbi Akiba seems to view his death as an expression of God's love. "His ways," His mythical ways, are better known to Rabbi Akiba than to Moses, the man of justice; the only answer to which Moses is therefore entitled about Rabbi Akiba's death is "Be silent, for such is My decree." This death is not in the rational realm, and you, who cannot penetrate the mystery of God's passion and love, must accept it as capricious and arbitrary.

This description of Rabbi Akiba is also supported by other sources. In a book <sup>41</sup> I devoted to the talmudic passage "Four entered the *pardes*" (Hagiga, 14b15a), I show that Rabbi Akiba who is here considered the perfect mystic and whose ascent to heaven resembles that of Moses described as the antithesis of Elisha ben Avuyah, the "other," whose very demand for formal justice causes his downfall. In my analysis of the prophet Jonah, I show that he too is one of those who share in God's mysteries and oppose the idea of justice, as does Abraham, who is tested in order to prove this. <sup>42</sup>

I would not have dared to suggest this interpretation of God's love, had the Talmud not done so before me:

Raba (some said R. Hisda) says: If a man sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct. ... If he examines and finds nothing [objectionable] let him attribute it

to the neglect of the study of the Torah. ... If he did attribute it [thus] and still did not find [this to be the cause] let him be sure that these are the chastenings of love. For it is said (Proverbs 3:12): "For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth." Raba, in the name of R. Sahorah, in the name of R. Huna, says: "If the Holy One, blessed be He, is pleased with a man, He crashes him with painful sufferings, for it is said (Isaiah 53:10): "And the Lord was pleased with [him, hence] he crushed him by disease." Now, you might think that it is so even if he did not accept them with love. Therefore it is said (ibid): "To see if his soul would offer itself in restitution." Even as the trespass offering must be brought by consent, so also the sufferings must be endured with consent. (Berakhot 5a)

The rabbis deal extensively with the virtue of suffering, and scholars have summarized their views.<sup>43</sup> However, the lofty stage of "chastenings of love" that are reserved only for individuals such as Rabbi Akiba and "God's servant" in the verse from Isaiah, has not been sufficiently clarified. Despite R. Ami's view, which resembles that of Job's friends "There is no suffering without iniquity" (Shabbath 55a) the chastenings of love are not related to any sin, as is clear from the beginning of the passage as well as from a saying in the following page: "Leprosy ... they are an altar of atonement, but they are not chastenings of love" (Berakhot 5b). The "love" in the "chastenings of love" is not the love of the sufferer but the love of God, who is their source and reason (except for the indirect suffering caused by the envy of those who are jealous of this love; see, e.g., Zohar I:182b). The sufferer is indeed meant to give love in return, like Rabbi Akiba, but merely raising the possibility that he might not "even if he did not accept them with love" emphasizes again that the main lover is God.

A comparison with the kabbalistic explanation of "chastenings of love" is in place here. The Zohar (I:181a) claims that the "love" in "chastenings of love" refers to the *Shekhina*, called *Ahava Zuta* [minor love], who is pained by its separation from the male divinity, that includes the *Ahava Raba* [great love] - apparently implying the *sefira* of *hesed*. Humanity is also hurt by these sufferings those born on the moon's wane are fated to suffer with it and to be renewed with the new moon, for the moon is a symbol of the *Shekhina*.

Rather than a negligible view of God's love, this description is an integral and important part of the overall Jewish myth, though it is not easily found since God's honor requires its concealment. We shall see in the final section that this description fits the figure of

the biblical God as it emerges elsewhere in the Talmud. Thus, we shall see that God sometimes causes the righteous to suffer because He longs to hear their prayers (Yebamoth 64a), whereas the statement "the righteous are seized [by death] for the [sins of the] generation" (Shabbath 33b) seems to rely on a similar assumption, which in Christianity was transformed into the sacrifice of the "son of God." We find in the *Midrash Rabba* on Song of Songs 6:2: "My beloved is gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, '...My beloved' refers to the Holy One, blessed be He; 'to his garden' refers to the world; 'to the beds of spices' indicates Israel; 'to feed in the gardens' indicates synagogues and houses of study and 'to gather lilies' to take away the righteous in Israel." More bluntly and dramatically, this idea is conveyed by "a certain child" (an anonymous child can apparently say more) in the eulogy to Rabba son of R. Huna: "In His wrath against His world, God robbed it of its souls and rejoiced in them as in a new bride; He who rides upon the clouds gladdened in the coming of a pure and righteous soul" (Moed Katan, 25b).

Rabbi Akiba's example gave strong impetus to this mythical trend in Jewish tradition, because Jewish martyrs throughout history saw it, alongside the binding of Isaac, as a model. Following his example, they died with the *Shema* on their lips as a testimony of their faith.<sup>44</sup> The story of R. Akiba's death is woven into the myth of "the Ten Martyrs," which appears in many versions—some midrashic, some in the *Hekhalot* literature, and some as *piyutim* (ritual songs). This myth became part of the very core of Jewish religion and any attempt to describe it would be beyond the scope of this essay, so I shall only touch on a number of relevant points and briefly trace its development in kabbalistic literature.

In the book *Bahir*, which is considered the first text of this literature, Moses' question appears as follows:

Said Rabbi Rehumai: "This I have learned; when Moses asked to know the ways of God and said (Exodus 33:18) 'Show me Thy ways,' he asked to know why some righteous men prosper and others are in adversity, some wicked men prosper and others are in adversity, and they did not tell him." "You say they did not tell him? Rather, they did not tell him what he asked. Can you possibly believe that Moses did not know this secret? But thus did Moses say: 'I know the ways of the powers but I do not know how the Thought unfolds in them, I know that in the Thought is truth, but I do not know its parts, and I ask to know.' And they did not tell him."<sup>45</sup>



In Exodus 33, Moses makes two requests: the first, in verse 13, "show me Thy ways," and the second, in verse 18, "show me Thy glory." He was granted the first, and thus said: "I know the ways of the powers"; he was denied the second, and thus said: "I do not know how the Thought unfolds in them." The word *glory* [literally, honor] stands for God's essence; as a dignified person is addressed as "your honor" rather than "you," God's essence here is called "the thought" (as in the talmudic quote: "Be silent, this is My decree" or, literally, "Be silent, thus it has entered My Thought) and therefore Moses said: "I know that in the Thought is truth." Similarly, in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 1:10, Maimonides expounded the word glory in the Exodus verse as "He sought to have a clear apprehension of the truth of God's existence" and stated: "It is beyond the mental capacity of a human creature, composed of body and soul, to obtain in this regard clear knowledge of the truth" (unlike Saadia Gaon who translated "your glory" as "your light"; i.e., the created Glory).

The book *Bahir* looks on Moses' problem as one typical of kabbalists: he understands God's attributes, which have become quasi-mechanical entities "the ways of the powers" acting each in its own destined way and bringing either good or evil. But God's essence, or His personal Thought, cannot be predicted, and we cannot understand "why some righteous men prosper and others are in adversity, some wicked men prosper and others are in adversity." This distinction between attributes and essence is kabbalistic and not talmudic, but is an adequate conceptual formulation of the difference noted above between Moses' quasi-mechanistic perception of God's attributes and Rabbi Akiba's personal approach.

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the book *Bahir* is aware of a divine personal essence transcending the attributes and the *sefirot*, attesting to this book's special status between Midrash and Kabbala. Although later kabbalistic literature also reveals this awareness,<sup>46</sup> it tends to emphasize elements of mechanical regularity. Kabbalists went even further than the request denied to Moses and explained, although in great secrecy, the unfolding of Divine Thought that caused the death of the Ten Martyrs, as well as the details of God's cruel love for Rabbi Akiba. This was not merely a spiritual love, but the expression of a divine need that was sexual and physiological. The death of Rabbi Akiba and his friends, as well as that of others after them, raises the *mayin nukbin*, the liquid that enables the mating of the male and female elements in the Divine.<sup>47</sup> *Kiddush hashem* [the sanctification of the name] seems to have been derived from *kiddushin* marriage. Moreover, the phrase *thus it has entered My Thought*, through which God expressed His love, assumes technical

significance, and the death of the Ten Martyrs became a myth of catharsis, namely, repairing the worlds by purifying the Divine Thought from its drossan old Jewish idea that, according to Moshe Idel, developed under the influence of Persian religion. The Ten acquired cosmic significance as representing the *sefirot*, which they purify throughout history, and for this purpose, the myth of the Ten Martyrs was merged with the myth of the destruction of the worlds and the death of the Edomite kings.<sup>48</sup> In this instance, the Jewish religion adopted a course not unknown in the history of religion and included human beings in a divine myth.<sup>49</sup> However, it retained their essence as flesh and blood creatures and conceived them as reincarnated souls, from the days of Joseph's brothers, for whose sin the Ten were sentenced to death according to the midrashim,<sup>50</sup> through Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai's friends in the *Idra* of the Zohar, all the way to Rabbi Isaac Luria and his disciples.

Already in the book *Bahir*, in a passage immediately following the one just cited, we are told that "some righteous men prosper and others are in adversity, some wicked men prosper and others are in adversity" due to their actions in previous incarnations. The book *Bahir* may have ascribed this explanation to the "ways of the powers" that became known to Moses rather than to the "unfolding of the Thought," if there is any correspondence at all between these two passages in the book, but other kabbalists merged the two and turned the death and reincarnations of the Ten into a way of purifying the divine Thought.

This relationship between Rabbi Akiba and Moses is also woven into the details of the kabbalistic myth and into Lurianic Kabbala in particular, where it attained its full development. Rabbi Akiba indeed ranks higher than Moses in this myth (a statement generally true, although the opposite is occasionally the case due to the intricacies of reincarnations and soul sparks). Moses is placed in the *sefira* of *tiferet*, which is a "corporeal" rank, and his mating is corporeal and through *yesod*, whereas Rabbi Akiba is placed in the *sefira* of *bina* and mates through a kiss, a more exalted and spiritual love transmitted through the mouth. Thus, it is no mere coincidence that Rabbi Akiba is the main figure in the "Oral Law," which is perceived as ranking higher than the "Written Law," obviously represented by Moses.<sup>51</sup> It is from the Talmud that the kabbalists inferred that Moses had not reached the *sefira* of *bina* (Rosh Hashanah 21b): "Fifty gates of *bina* [understanding] were created in the world and all were given to Moses save one," though this might be another case of a midrashic idea that attained technical development in the Kabbala. When we compare this statement to the previous passage where Moses was

denied understanding of "why is it that some righteous men prosper...", as well as with the mystery of Rabbi Akiba's sufferings, we may conclude that the fiftieth gate of *bina* is the key to these questions, and it was granted to Rabbi Akiba. Some kabbalists refer to the gate denied to Moses as "the gate of silence,"<sup>52</sup> perhaps pursuant to "Be silent, for such is My decree." Compare, "the mystery of 'these are the kings who ruled in Edom,' namely, in the place of silence [from the Hebrew *dom* for be silent] for this is My decree."<sup>53</sup> This may clarify the use of *Masa Duma* ["the burden of Duma" (Isaiah 21:11)] in reference to the "sacred religion of Edom," which is how Jacob Frank referred to his conversion to Christianity, whose true meaning must remain secret.<sup>54</sup> For Luria, as usual, the ontological myth assumes the guise of reincarnation: he saw himself as Moses and his disciple Rabbi Hayyim Vital as a reincarnation of Rabbi Akiba.<sup>55</sup>

### III. Talmud and Kabbala: The Essence of the Divine Attributes

We shall continue the analysis of the divine attributes as they are reflected in other passages of rabbinical and kabbalistic literature. This analysis will reveal different nuances in the definition of these attributes as well as in their relationship to God and will clarify and illustrate the character of the talmudic myth, whose flexibility can only attest to its vitality. The divine attributes are sometimes depicted as external instruments, with God pondering which to select:

The Lord God This may be compared to a king who had some thin glasses. Said the king: "If I pour hot water into them, they will burst; if cold, they will contract [and snap]." What then did the king do? He mixed hot and cold water and poured it into them, and so they remained [unbroken]. Thus said the Holy One, blessed be He: "If I create the world only with the attribute of mercy, its sins will be great; only with the attribute of justice, the world cannot exist. Hence I will create it with the attribute of justice and with the attribute of mercy and may it stand." (Genesis Rabba 12:15)

This description was congenial to the kabbalists, who relied on it for some of their ideas, such as the destruction of earlier worlds because of unmitigated justice. In the Kabbala this concept is not used metaphorically but refers to real worlds that had actually been

destroyed, such as the kingdom of Edom. But this kabbalistic notion may simply be bringing to full fruition an idea already latent in this midrash, which expounds God's "full name," the Lord God, as found in the Genesis 2 version of the Creation. Then, as usual, it interprets *Lord* as the attribute of mercy and *God* as the attribute of justice, though it must obviously have been aware of the story of Creation as told in Genesis 1, where only the name *God* appears. (As is well known, biblical source criticism is founded on these distinctions and on reiterations of the divine name). The author may also have assumed that a world created earlier and founded on the attribute of justice, had not survived; indeed, a passage in Genesis Rabba 3:7 states "that the Holy One, blessed be He, went on creating worlds and destroying them until He created these ones." Further on, however, this midrash ascribes the destruction of the worlds to God's arbitrary will rather than to His external attributes: "this pleases Me, but those did not please Me." Although a similar notion appears in the Kabbala too, kabbalists leave room for God's judgment and the destruction of the worlds takes place inside the divine Thought.<sup>56</sup>

Elsewhere, the divine attributes appear not as God's qualities but as His different dwellings, and another description speaks of different chairs God sits on when passing judgment.<sup>57</sup> The spirit of this description is close to the Kabbala, which suggests the theory of the *sefirot* as vessels but without seeing them as the divine essence. In its original meaning, *mida* [attribute] denotes a measuring container; if this is meant to point to the nature of the attributes, we may assume that a fixed regularity characterizes their functioning:

It was taught in R. Meir's name: "'For behold, the Lord comes out of His place' (Micah 1:3) He moves from one attribute to the other. He leaves the attribute of justice and enters the attribute of mercy for Israel. ..." R. Samuel b. Nahman: "If the Holy One, blessed be He, meant to bring good'God is not a man that He should lie' (Numbers 23:19), and if He meant to bring evil'Has He said and He shall not perform? Or has He spoken and shall He not make it good?'" (ibid)<sup>58</sup>

This view was later contended by those claiming that God's actions are not dictated by the set functioning of the attributes but by His relations with man:

And the sages said: "Was it not a man that turned God's words as if they were not?!" Lord, why does Thy wrath burn against Thy people' (Exodus 32:11). 'Nor the son of man, that He should

repent' (Numbers 23:19)"Was it not the son of Amram who made God repent?!"And the Lord relented of the evil which He thought to do to His people' (Exodus 32:14).

This is also the direction followed by the Babylonian Talmud: "R. Eliezer said, Why are the prayers of the righteous likened to a pitchfork? <sup>59</sup> To teach thee that just as the pitchfork turns the corn from place to place in the barn, so the prayers of the righteous turn the mind of the Holy One, blessed be He, from the attribute of cruelty to that of compassion." (Sukkah 14a).

This passage too draws a parallel between "places" and "attributes," although here the attributes are clearly personal. They are part of "the mind of the Holy One" and, instead of alluding to them by their technical names, as "the attribute of justice and the attribute of mercy," the reference is psychological "the attribute of cruelty and that of compassion" and suggests the righteous can affect these through their prayers. But human influence extends here only to the attribute of justice, as is evident from this passage as well as from the rabbis' references to Moses in the previous one. The attribute of mercy functions in its set way, as we saw earlier in the promise given to Moses: "A covenant has been made with the thirteen attributes that they will not be turned away empty handed" (Rosh Hashanah 17b). It is possible that this covenant was not conceived in purely magical terms, and it may leave room for a personal approach to God (see the wording of the *Selihot* prayer, "Remember today the covenant of the thirteen attributes," which overlooks the contradiction between the request to remember and the preset regularity of the covenant). It is indeed suggested elsewhere that the attribute of mercy might also be abolished and by the very same R. Samuel bar Nahman who had prescribed exactly the opposite rule:

R. Samuel b. Nahman said: "Woe to the wicked who turn the attribute of mercy into the attribute of judgment. Wherever Lord is employed it connotes the attribute of mercy, as in the verse, 'The Lord, The Lord, merciful and gracious.' (Exodus 34:6) Yet it is written, 'And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great,' (Genesis 6:5) 'And the Lord repented that He had made man,' (ibid.: 6) 'And the Lord said: I will blot out man.' (ibid.: 7) Happy are the righteous who turn the attribute of judgment into the attribute of mercy. Wherever God is employed it connotes the attribute of judgment 'Thou shall not revile God,' (Exodus 22:27) 'The cause of both parties shall come before God.' (ibid.: 8)<sup>60</sup> Yet it is written, 'And God heard their groaning and God

remembered His covenant,' (ibid. 2:24) 'And God remembered Rachel,' (Genesis 30:22) 'And God remembered Noah' (ibid. 8:1)." (Genesis Rabba 33:3)

Rather than presenting God as moving from one attribute to another, here the attribute itself changes: the attribute of mercy shows justice and the attribute of justice shows mercy. We may interpret this in two ways: either each attribute has its own ontological personality, transcending the qualities of mercy and justice, or this is no more than a description of God's moods and He is called by the justice name *God* even if He changed His mind at the last moment, and by the mercy name *Lord*, even if He is suddenly filled with wrath against the wicked. Although the kabbalists grew up on this notion, they were incapable of such flexibility:

You may at times find in verses of mercy the name God which indicates justice. ... And also in verses of wrath the name Lord which indicates mercy. ... Since a righteous man deserves well, then why was his judgment crooked, and a wicked one, does he deserve mercy? He should be destroyed. But the depth of these questions is only given to the masters of worship [namely, the kabbalists].<sup>61</sup>

In the personal myth, the assumption that the attribute of mercy would always remain while the attribute of justice could be eliminated was formulated differently, but this myth too speaks of the contrary option as a possible exception:

For R. Aha b. R. Hanina said: "Never did a good word go forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, of which He retracted for an evil one, save the following, where it is written, (Ezekiel 9:4) 'And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof...' The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel: "Go and set a mark of ink upon the foreheads of the righteous, that the destroying angels may have no power over them, and a mark of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked, that the destroying angels may have power over them."<sup>62</sup> Said the attribute of justice before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Master of the World, wherein are these different from those?" "Those are completely righteous men, while these are completely wicked men," replied He. "Master

of the World," it continued, "they had the power to protest but did not." "It was revealed and known to them that, had they protested, they would not have been heeded." "Master of the World," said he, "if it was revealed to Thee, was it revealed to them?" (Shabbath 55a)

The opening passage refers only to God, who may "retract" at will, although it later becomes clear that He retracts because of the attribute of justice. However, the attribute of justice here is not a mechanistic structure but rather a personality in its own right, persuading its master with logical arguments. It is clear from the opening statement ("Never did...") that persuasion is not guaranteed success and that, at times, God will not change His views. Indeed, in a similar instance elsewhere in the Talmud, the attribute of justice makes the very same claim ("Wherein are these different from those?" [Israel and the nations of the world]) and God rejects its plea.<sup>63</sup>

The personal nature of the attribute of justice is enhanced by its identification with the angel Gabriel, who appears at the opening. As the plot unfolds, it becomes clear that the attribute of justice is reacting to the mission God assigned to Gabriel; in another version of the same story, "the angel of death" appears instead of Gabriel, strengthening this identification even further.<sup>64</sup> In its final response, the attribute of justice is quoted as "Said he" [the angel, of masculine gender on Hebrew), rather than "Said she" [the attribute, of feminine gender in Hebrew].<sup>65</sup> This is not the only instance of an interchange between the attribute of justice and the angels. In Sanhedrin 103a, "the Holy One, blessed be He, made Manasse a kind of opening in the Heavens against the attribute of justice, in order to accept him in his repentance," whereas parallel sources claim that the angels, and not the attribute of justice, blocked the windows so that Manasse's prayer would not be heard in Heaven.<sup>66</sup>

On the one hand then, the attribute of justice is identified with the angel (we shall return to this later), and on the other hand, it is only a divine psychological characteristic, or God's evil inclination. In *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, God's spiritual qualities are portrayed as angels who minister to the throne of glory: "Seven attributes minister before the throne of glory, to wit: wisdom, righteousness, justice, mercy and compassion, truth and peace."<sup>67</sup> These attributes closely resemble the homonymous kabbalistic *sefirot*. There is a further dimension: the attribute and the angel are also limbs of the divine body. Several talmudic references to this parallel are pointed out later, but this image is better known from the Kabbala, and is already found in the book *Bahir*:

The Holy One, blessed be He, has seven sacred shapes which also appear in man, as is said (Genesis 9:6) "for in the image of God made He man," (Genesis 1:27) "in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." And they are these: a right and left thigh, a right and left hand, a body with a circumcised member<sup>68</sup> and a head, to wit, six. And you had said seven? The seventh is His wife, as is said (Genesis 2:22) "and they become one flesh," and she had been taken from His side...<sup>69</sup>

These seven shapes and limbs are undoubtedly the divine attributes, as can be inferred from other passages in the book *Bahir*. In a parallel statement (82), they are spoken of as "the powers in Heaven" of the seven human limbs, and the attribute of justice is also described as one of the limbs God's hand:

And what is Satan? It teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, has an attribute named evil to the North of the Holy One, blessed be He. ... And what is this attribute?<sup>70</sup> It is the shape of the hand, with many extensions,<sup>71</sup> and all are named evil, evil. ... And all of man's evil inclination comes from there. And why was it given to the left? Because he may not rule anywhere except in the North...(162163)

Although the attribute of justice does not appear as God's hand in the Talmud, the attribute of mercy indeed does:

R. Simeon b. Lakish said in the name of R. Judah Nisiah: What is implied by the verse (Ezekiel 1:8) "And they had his hand of a man under their wings?" *Yado* [his hand] is written [instead of *yede*, the hands of]: this refers to the hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, which is spread out under the wings of the living creatures [the angels that bore the Divine Chariot] in order to accept penitents and shield them from the attribute of justice." (Pesahim 119a)

*From*, in the phrase *from the attribute of justice* at the end of this passage is a translation of the Hebrew *mi-yad* [from the hand of], hinting perhaps at a literal hand. But it seems more likely that the attribute of justice is represented by the shielding wings of the living creatures blocking access to heaven, through which God passes His hand in order to make way for penitents, as in the opening He had made for Manasse against the angels.<sup>72</sup> In kabbalistic literature,



the attribute of mercy and the attribute of justice appear as the right and the left hands.

As the attributes in the Talmud, the shapes in the book *Bahir* are not only God's limbs but also His angels. Thus, the attribute of justice is called *Satan* and further on assumes an extremely personal form. This is true as well for generic references: the concept "sacred shapes" in the book *Bahir* is also a name for the angels, as emerges from their role as keepers of the Garden of Eden and in charge of the nations of the world (95,98.) These references are clearly to the same shapes, since the author of the book *Bahir* uses the seven limbs to bring the full count of angelic shapes to seventy two.<sup>73</sup>

Though these ideas are explicitly stated in the book *Bahir*, in essence they appear much earlier. Beside the talmudic hints we have considered, there are exact parallels to the *Bahir's* statements on the shapes of God as His attributes and as His angels in ancient Jewish literature, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in the Apochrypha. Similar images also appear in Gnostic and Patristic works which were influenced by the Judaic literature of the times, and even in the *Shi'ur Koma* literature, which is concerned with the description of God's limbs and also perceives them as angels.<sup>74</sup> However, it seems that in the *Shiur Koma* literature the perception of the limbs is more basic and binding, resembling the sefirotic frameworks in the Kabbala, whereas in the Talmud it is merely another aspect of the dynamic personal myth, as further quotations will make clear.

Before proceeding with the textual discussion, let us pause to consider the significance of the talmudic finding. A serious question emerges: Given that the talmudic myth allows for changes and nuances, what is the meaning of turning spiritual attributes into places and chairs,<sup>75</sup> or even into angels and limbs? I believe this approach is rooted in the ambivalent rabbinical relationship to God. On the one hand, the rabbis felt a close intimacy with God, which enabled them to deal in meticulous detail with the mysteries of His attributes. On the other hand, they feared for the King's honor. It is to this end that angels were created, since it is easier to speak of them than of God; angels help to keep the suitable distance, and this is also their role in *Hekhalot* literature. However, as created, external beings, the angels fail to express the depth of the divine dilemma. The obvious question is this: since God is Almighty, why should He listen to the angels? How can these created beings prevent God from acting on His will? These questions are also relevant to the talmudic use of places and chairs, which can express only ways of enacting God's decrees rather than the spiritual struggles that preceded them.

It is to fulfill the contradictory demands posed by the need to guard God's honor without diminishing the importance of His internal struggles that the angels were identified with the limbs, which enjoy an intermediate status: they are not as close as the spiritual attributes but are not as separate and distinct as the angels. This dilemma, wherein manifestations of intimacy alternate with concealment and distance, characterizes not only those who formulate the talmudic myth, but also the God emerging from it. We already noted this in the Akatriel-Ishmael story discussed in the previous section, and we shall find further echoes of it in the following passages.

Evidence of the difference between God's limbs, which are His angels, and God's essence, can also be found elsewhere: "What is meant by 'the day of vengeance is in mine heart' (Isaiah 63:4)? R. Johanan said: I have revealed it to my heart, but not to my limbs. R. Simeon b. Lakish said: I have revealed it to my heart, but not to the ministering angels." (Sanhedrin 99a)

The two views appear as alternative formulations of the same idea. Although both R. Johanan and R. Simeon b. Lakish equate between the limbs and the angels, they avail themselves of different myths. R. Simeon b. Lakish's statement that God refrains from revealing the secret of the end of days to the angels is linked to the well-known motif of the angels' jealousy of mortals. As the angels had opposed the creation of Adam, the giving of the Torah to Moses, and the ascent of the four *tannaim* who entered the *pardes*,<sup>76</sup> so do they oppose redemption. They may rely for their opposition on the principle of justice, which assumes the children of Israel are unworthy of redemption (in their standard phrasing, quoted earlier "wherein are these different from those?"), as the angels are often merely another manifestation of the celestial attribute of justice or, in more general terms, of the rational aspect of God's essence. R. Johanan's saying, however, is concerned with God's internal spiritual struggle. God conceals "the day of vengeance" in His heart, that is, in His unconscious (we shall have more to say about God's heart later).<sup>77</sup> He is afraid to bring it to conscious awareness and reveal it to His limbs or let it pass His lips, because expressing it verbally would turn a diffuse feeling into a conscious, defined plan. As Rashi commented: "I did not utter anything my limbs may hear, but this secret was hiding in my heart." This interpretation is confirmed by a parallel version, wherein the limbs are replaced by the mouth: "R. Samuel taught in the name of R. Judah: Should a man tell you when redemption is to come, do not believe him, as it is written 'the day of vengeance is in my heart.' If the heart has not disclosed it to the mouth, how can the mouth disclose it to others?!"<sup>78</sup>

Why this fear of revealing "the day of vengeance" to the limbs? It is hardly possible that God fears the limbs may reveal His plans to the nations of the world. First, the limbs or the angels do not act against His will, and second, who could prevent God from acting as He wishes, even were His plan to be revealed? There is another reason. The feeling of vengeance should preferably remain in God's heart since an explicitly stated plan for revenge may rouse divine doubt and hesitation and call forth contradictory claims from the attribute of justice and the attribute of mercy that, as stated, are identified with the angels and the limbs. This is an authentic reason since, as we shall see later, God indeed has profound doubts about redemption and His vacillations at times foil all attempts to bring it about, as was understood by R. Johanan <sup>79</sup> when he spoke of the heart and the limbs. There is a further reason, related to the first: Exposing feelings, such as the desire for vengeance, is not in keeping with the King's honor, and He therefore hides it. This interpretation is clearly confirmed in the following passage:

"But if ye will not hear it, My soul shall weep in secret for the pride." (Jeremiah 13:7) R. Samuel b. Inia said in the name of Rab: The Holy One, blessed be He, has a place and its name is "Secret." What is the meaning of "for the pride"? R. Samuel b. Isaac said: For the pride of Israel that has been taken from them and given to the nations of the world. R. Samuel b. Nahmani said: For the pride of the Kingdom of Heaven. But is there weeping before the Holy One, blessed be He? And R. Papa said: There is no grief before the Holy one, as is said (Chronicles I 16:27): "Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and gladness in His place." There is no contradiction: the one case means inwards and the other outwards. And outwards there is no weeping? And yet it is written (Isaiah 22:12): "And on that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth" The destruction of the Temple is different, for even the angels of peace wept, as is said: (Isaiah 33:7) "Behold, the mighty ones cried outside, the angels of peace wept bitterly." (Hagiga 5b)

God does not hide His feelings in His heart, but in a secret place, one concealed even from the angels. Indeed, the feelings in this passage are not feelings of compassion for Israel but rather feelings of vengeance against the nations of the world, but this is irrelevant for our purposes. Two reasons were advanced for this concealment: "For the pride of Israel that has been taken from them and given

to the nations of the world" and "For the pride of the Kingdom of Heaven." The two reasons are juxtaposed and lexically parallel, and the reader may mistakenly assume that they are also parallel in their contents,<sup>80</sup> but I believe that this juxtaposition is a deliberate camouflage to protect the pride of the Kingdom of Heaven and avoid the statement: "for the pride of the Kingdom of Heaven that was taken." God indeed fears the scorn of the Gentiles in the next passage but these misgivings are not serious. The pride of the Kingdom of Heaven cannot be taken away by any rivals, after the men of the Great Assembly "restored the crown of the divine attributes to its ancient completeness."<sup>81</sup> The pride of the Kingdom of Heaven is cited here as a reason for hiding, not for weeping. Public weeping would hurt God's pride and, for this reason, He cries in "Secret"; namely, "inwardly" and not "outwardly"<sup>82</sup> as do the angels. The day of the destruction of the Temple is an exception; on that day, God agreed to forego His honor and weeping in public was allowed.

The dialectic tangle regarding the breach of honor entailed by weeping is developed in the parallel version below, which confirms our interpretation:

At that time [the destruction of the Temple] the Holy One, blessed be He, wept and said: Woe to me! What have I done? I caused my *Shekhina* to dwell below on earth for the sake of Israel; but now that they have sinned I have returned to my former habitation. Heaven forbend that I should become a laughingstock and mockery to the nations. At that time Metatron came, fell upon himself and said before Him: Master of the World, let me weep but do Thou not weep. He replied: If you do not let Me weep now I will repair to a place where you are not allowed to enter and I will weep, as it is said: "But if you will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret for your pride." (Jeremiah 13:17). (Lamentations Rabbati, proem 24)

In this passage, the situation is inverted: wishing to protect God's honor, the angel offers to weep in His place and God refuses, threatening to weep in secret. In the rest of this chapter, it is again God who wishes to forego His honor because of Israel's grief (although the chapter recounts the day of the Temple's destruction, a day on which the talmudic passage quoted earlier also agreed to waive the rules of honor). Thus, we see God undressing and girding only sackcloth on His loins to teach the angels the laws of mourning. In a picture not unlike the mad King Lear, God cries: "Woe to the King who succeeded in His youth but failed in His old age." "Were it not

written it could not have been said," says the Midrash when referring to the angels who mourned for God "like a man whose dead is lying before him," a precedent for those claiming that God died in Auschwitz.

"Secret" is an internal "place" for God (similar to the Zoharic usage of the word *place*). However, for the same reason, God also tends to hide in other places:

It has been taught: R. Jose says, I was once traveling on the road, and I entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Elijah of blessed memory appeared and waited for me at the door till I finished my prayer. He said to me: Peace be with you, my master! I replied: Peace be with you, my master and teacher! And he said to me: My son, why did you go into this ruin? I replied: To pray. He said to me: You ought to have prayed on the road. I replied: I feared lest passersby might interrupt me. He said to me: You ought to have said an abbreviated prayer. I then learned three things from him: One must not go into a ruin; one may say the prayer on the road and if one does say his prayer on the road, he recites an abbreviated prayer. He further said to me: My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin? I replied: I heard a divine voice, cooing like a dove, and saying: Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burnt My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world! And he said to me: By your life and by your head! Not in this moment alone does it so exclaim, but thrice each day does it exclaim thus! And more than that, whenever the children of Israel go into the synagogues and the houses of study and respond: "May His great name be blessed," the Holy One, blessed be He, shakes His head and says: Happy is the king who is thus praised in His house! Woe to the father who had to banish his children, and woe to the children who had to be banished from the table of their father! (Berakhot 3a)

Why does Elijah come and why does he admonish R. Jose for having entered the ruin rather than saying a short prayer? Are these commandments that important? Even if they are, is there no connection between them and the divine voice in the second part of the story? I believe the divine voice is the reason for the ban on entering the ruin and the other related prescriptions: it is forbidden to enter and intrude upon the solitude and weeping of God. Other reasons are advanced later for the ban on entering the ruin: "There are three reasons why one must not go into a ruin: because of suspicion, because of falling debris, and because of demons," but this is a new passage

attached because of a thematic association and there is no evidence that these were Elijah's reasons. Perhaps, this passage is intended as camouflage, since explicitly stating a prohibition against breaching the King's honor would in itself constitute a breach.

God is not always careful to hide when weeping over His children, and His grief and sorrow can engulf the earth and affect the whole universe. A natural phenomenon called *zewa'ot* is usually interpreted to mean earthquakes, but the talmudic description, as well as the comparable Arab term,<sup>83</sup> seem to point to an association with thunder and lightening or with meteors hitting the earth:

R. Kattina was once going along the road, and when he came to the door of the house of a certain necromancer, there was a rumbling of the earth. He said: Does the necromancer know what this rumbling is? He called after him, Kattina, Kattina, why should I not know? When the Holy One, blessed be He, calls to mind His children, who are plunged in suffering among the nations of the world, He lets fall two tears into the ocean, and the sound is heard from one end of the world to the other, and that is the rumbling. Said R. Kattina: The necromancer is a liar and his words are false. If it was as he says, there should be one rumbling after another! He did not really mean this however. There really was one rumbling after another, and the reason why he did not admit it was so that people should not go astray after him. R. Kattina, for his own part, said: [God] clasps His hands, as it says (Ezekiel 21:22) "I will also smite my hands together, and I will relieve my fury." R. Nathan said: [God] emits a sigh, as it says (Ezekiel 5:13) "I will relieve my fury and I will be comforted." And the Rabbis said: He treads upon the firmament, as it says (Jeremiah 25:30) "He shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth." R. Aha b. Jacob says: He presses His feet together beneath the throne of glory, as it says (Isaiah 66:1): "Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool." (Berakhot 59a)

Before us is a myth in the full sense of this term, and one of the most elemental kind: It is meant to explain natural phenomena and is intentionally put in the mouth of a Gentile necromancer and wizard. The rabbis agreed with him, and it was only for the sake of appearances that they contested his views, to prevent others from being led astray by him. As for the issue itself, they do not disagree with the wizard any more than they disagree among themselves

(God's tears for the suffering of exile are also mentioned in Hagiga 5b), and the main difference is in the mythical style, which also affects the contents. Contrary to the wizard's self-reliance, the rabbis are careful to back their statements with biblical verses. It is interesting to compare this myth with its later versions in the Kabbala and note the erosion of its elemental character: the tears rolling into the sea are no longer meteors or lightning and have become the foundations of the principle of justice, which undergo meticulous analysis, sweetened in the sea of the *sefira of malkhut* or the *sefira of hokhma*.<sup>84</sup>

The rabbinical explanation of the night watches resembles that of the *zewa'ot*: "R. Isaac b. Samuel says in the name of Rab: The night has three watches, and at each watch the Holy One, blessed be He, sits and roars like a lion and says: Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burnt My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world" (Berakhot 3a).

Here as well, there is a full, complete myth; Rab even adopts the necromancer's style and fails to rely on any verse.<sup>85</sup> In a superficial reading, this might appear as no more than a suitable story about the sorrows of exile rather than a true myth touching on God's essence. After all, God is omnipotent and Israel was exiled by His will; should He so desire, He could return them without weeping, sighs or roars. I tend to see this as a real myth, well anchored in the image of the talmudic God for whom, as He is portrayed in many places, Israel means everything and it is hence no wonder that He suffers in their grief. In the next section we shall see that God not only empathizes with the sufferings of His people, but is enslaved when they are enslaved and their redemption is His redemption. Redemption is truly difficult for God, due to psychological difficulties and profound doubts. The following passage shows that it is not necessarily the attribute of justice that prevents redemption and, at times, it might be the attribute of mercy:

It is written (Jeremiah 30:6) "Ask now, and see whether a man travails with child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned to paleness?" What is meant by "I see every man" [*gever*]? Raba b. Isaac said in Rab's name: It refers to Him to whom all strength [*gevura*] belongs. And what is meant by "all faces are turned to paleness?" R. Johanan said: God's heavenly family and God's earthly family,<sup>86</sup> [Rashi expounds these as the angels and Israel] when God says: These are the work of My hands and these are the work of My hands [Rashi expounds these as the Gentiles and Israel] how shall I destroy the former on account of the latter? (Sanhedrin 98b)

The thrust of this passage is to explain the meaning of the "pangs of the Messiah," which the Talmud mentioned and described a few lines before. There too, "pangs" were perceived in their original sense as related to pregnancy and birth and their duration was therefore established as nine months, but the mother was not named. In this passage, the mother is clearly God Himself, the only one about whom it may be said: "Him to whom all strength belongs" (Compare with Song of Songs Rabba 1:11: "On King Solomon" [*Shelomo*] on a King to whom peace [*shalom*] belongs.") We follow Rashi's exegesis of this passage with no fear of R. Meir Ha-Levi (Ramah), who warned those who adopt this interpretation that they "will be called upon to answer for it."<sup>87</sup> In the passage from Isaiah 66:79, which is probably the background for the preceding talmudic statement as well as the source of the expression *pangs of the Messiah*, God is the father though the mother is "Zion." In the Kabbala, this matter became part of a large and impressive myth wherein the doe, which is the *Shekhina*, delivers the Messiah with the help of a serpent that bites her womb.<sup>88</sup> In the Talmud the birthpains represent God's profound doubts, an internal psychological drama that revolves around the price of Israel's redemption, once more unlike the Ramah's exegesis *ad locum*, who claims that God is struggling with the created attribute of mercy, which differs from His essence. Evidence may be advanced from the famous parallel version stating that God rebuked the ministering angels when the Red Sea parted saying: "The work of my hands is being drowned in the sea, and you chant hymns... because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not rejoice in the downfall of the wicked" (Megilla 10b). That is, God Himself is merciful, and His opponents in this case are the angels, who represent the attribute of justice.

In both these stories the situation is the same, and both are quoted in Rabbi Johanan's name, who uses the expression *the work of My hands* in the same sense. Indeed, in a later, midrashic version of the story,<sup>89</sup> the rulers of Egypt and Israel quarrel over the drowning of the Egyptians, and only after the victory of the ruler of Israel did God act in accordance with the attribute of justice, which is not portrayed as a divine spiritual quality but as a chair on which He chooses to sit. The myth of God as alternating between the chair of justice and the chair of mercy appears frequently in rabbinical literature.<sup>90</sup> These descriptions should not be seen as mutually contradictory nor should one be read through the perspective of another; all are legitimate variations of the living talmudic myth and reflect the tendencies and personal tastes of each author. In the



following pages, we shall give further consideration to the limits of potential flexibility in a myth of this kind.

God's hesitations and doubts as described in the Talmud reflect those of the rabbis themselves: A suffering, doubting God is proper and fitting for a suffering and doubting people like the Jews. In the pages following the earlier Sanhedrin passage the Talmud cites all possible views on redemption, from those who await it all their lives and see it as a cosmic ideal beyond nature, to take place at a fixed time, all the way to those who say: "There is no Messiah for Israel, as they have already enjoyed him during the reign of Hezekiah" (Sanhedrin 98b). Between these extremes there are many intermediate stages, such as the view that "The only difference between this world and the days of the Messiah is in the enslavement to foreign powers" (Sanhedrin 99a) or that which sees redemption as concerning only respectable householders and not learned scholars: "All the prophets prophesied only in respect of him who marries his daughter to a scholar, or engages in business on behalf of a scholar or benefits a scholar with his possessions, but as for scholars themselves, 'the eye has not seen, O God, beside Thee' (Isaiah 64:3)" (Sanhedrin 99a).

There are also some highly paradoxical statements about redemption: One claims that the very yearning for the Messiah forbids us to think about him, as our thoughts keep him away: "Three come when the mind is diverted: Messiah, a finding, and a scorpion" (Sanhedrin 97a). The contrary view also appears awaiting the Messiah is its own reward; this expectation will never be fulfilled and its only value is in the performance of a commandment. (Compare this to the question, Did you hope for salvation? which the soul is asked after death Shabbath 31a). According to this view, even God awaits the Messiah, but in the context of an internal psychological struggle that makes its fulfillment impossible. This struggle resembles the one in the previous passage; though we are not explicitly told there whether the struggle has been or will be decided, it would seem it is still pending, given that God has been debating this question since Jeremiah's time. (Note the use of the past tense: "when the Holy One, blessed be He, said.") On the other hand, in the next passage the negative answer is almost explicit: God's problem in the previous passage was His mercy, whereas here the source of the delay is the attribute of justice:

What is meant by "it speaks [*va-yafeah*] concerning the end and does not lie?" (Habakkuk 2:3). R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: Blasted [*tipah*] be <sup>91</sup> the bones of those who calculate the end. For they would say, since the prede-

terminated time has arrived, and yet he has not come, he will never come. But wait for him, as it is written (ibid.) "if it seem slow, wait for him." Should you say, we wait for his coming, and He does not, therefore Scripture says (Isaiah 30:18): "And therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious to you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you." And since we wait for him and He waits for him, what delays [his coming]? The attribute of justice delays it. But since the attribute of justice delays it, why do we await it? To be rewarded [for hoping], as it is written (ibid.): "Happy are all that wait for him." (Sanhedrin 97b)

The question "But since the attribute of justice delays it, why do we await it?" assumes that the delay is eternal. The answer does not dispute this, nor does it set a time limit for the delay caused by the attribute of justice.<sup>92</sup> Those "who calculate the end" and say "he will never come" are cursed not because they lied but because they said what they said and ceased waiting. The prophet Habakkuk said in fact the opposite: He not only said "if it seem slow, wait for it," but also "because it will surely come, it will not delay." However, the rabbis quote only the first half of the verse, reading it as a declaration rather than a condition. This was also Maimonides's view, who was influenced by this talmudic passage when formulating his own article about the coming of the Messiah.<sup>93</sup>

#### IV. Talmud and Kabbala: *Keneset Israel*

The following passage illustrates the action of the attribute of justice, how it prevents God from bringing redemption and who its opponents are:

"For the increase of the realm and for peace without end" (Isaiah 9:6). R. Tanhum said: Bar Kappara expounded in Sephoris, Why is every *mem* in the middle of a word open, whereas this is closed? [In the word *marbeh* (increase), the Hebrew letter *mem* is closed, as it should be were it the final letter of the word.] The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to appoint Hezekiah as the Messiah, and Sanherib as Gog and Magog; whereupon the attribute of justice said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the World! If Thou didst not make David the Messiah, who uttered

so many hymns and praises before Thee, wilt Thou appoint Hezekiah as Messiah, who did not sing your praise despite all the miracles which Thou wroughtest for him? Therefore it [the *mem*] is closed. Immediately, the earth said to Him: Master of the World! Let me sing before Thee instead of this righteous man and make him the Messiah. So it broke into song before Him, as it is written (Isaiah 24:16): "From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs of glory to the righteous." The prince of the world said to Him: Master of the World! Fulfill the desire of this righteous man. A heavenly voice cried out (ibid.): "It is my secret, it is my secret." Said the prophet (ibid.): "Woe to me, Woe to me." How long [must we wait]? The heavenly voice cried out (ibid.): "Traitors have dealt treacherously; traitors have dealt very treacherously." Said Raba, and others say R. Isaac: Until there came spoilers, and spoilers of the spoilers. (Sanhedrin 94a)

The attribute of justice is especially harsh here. The sin that it condemns refraining from hymns and praises is not even mentioned in the Bible and is nowhere considered an offense, except in Lurianic Kabbala where singing praises serves to "raise the *mayin nukbin*" [the female waters] and to repair the world. The attribute of justice infers this is an offense only on the basis of a petty a fortiori argument: "If Thou didst not make David..." [a fortiori arguments are generally called *din*, as *midat hadin*, the attribute of justice]. Even so, an exceptionally harsh punishment is imposed on the basis of this argument preventing redemption, perhaps not only in Hezekiah's times but forever, as indicated by the expression "until there come spoilers, and spoilers of the spoilers." This expression pertains not only to two generations of traitors and thieves but perhaps "for all times," a hypothesis that the following statement may strengthen: "R. Hillel said: There is no Messiah for Israel, since they have already enjoyed him during the reign of Hezekiah" (Sanhedrin 98b). R. Hillel's mention of Hezekiah and the context of the discussion following indicate that the allusion in the preceding passage is to this statement.

The one attempt to oppose the attribute of justice, unfortunately to no avail, is not made by the attribute of mercy but by the earth. True, the earth appears in the expounded verse, but is it indeed an adequate adversary for the attribute of justice? Some of these doubts will be allayed if we see that, in this passage, the earth is identical with the "prince of the world." The paragraph "Master of the World! Fulfill the desire [*tsiviono*] of this righteous man" only paraphrases the words of the earth, with the root *tsevi* serving as a connecting

link: "Immediately, the earth said to Him: Master of the World! Let me sing before Thee instead of this righteous man and make him the Messiah. So it broke into song before Him, as it is written (Isaiah 24:16): 'From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, glory [*tsevi*] to the righteous.'" I believe that this identification between the earth and the prince of the world is also dictated by the plot, in which there is no room for two separate figures, one "the earth" and the other "the prince of the world." The title *prince of the world* also suits the "earth," because the Rabbis use the term *world* in a meaning approximating that of "the earth" in biblical language.

The prince of the world seems a more adequate adversary for the attribute of justice because he is an angel ["prince"], a shape that, as we saw, is at times assumed by the attribute itself. Furthermore, in his appointed role as caretaker of the world, we may assume that the prince wishes the Messiah to come, even more so if we refer to earlier traditions (not explicitly mentioned in the Talmud), which identify the "prince of the world" with Michael, "the prince of Israel," and then with Metatron,<sup>94</sup> the protector of "the rights of Israel" and responsible for punishing the Gentiles.<sup>95</sup>

Having established that the "earth" and the "prince of the world" are identical, it will be easier to find traces of this mythical personality in other rabbinical passages mentioning "the earth." Thus, for instance,

"Behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:13). R. Huna and R. Jeremiah said in R. Kahana's name: Even the three handbreaths of the earth's surface which the plough turns was washed away. It is as if a royal prince had a tutor, and whenever he did wrong, his tutor was punished; or as if a royal prince had a nurse, and whenever he did wrong his nurse was punished. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Behold, I will destroy them with the earth," I will destroy them and the earth with them. (Genesis Rabba 33:7)

True, the tutor and the nurse are only metaphors for the earth, but when the earth stands for a tutor and a nurse who are punished together with their charge, it transcends its concrete, material meaning. Most important, we found almost the same parable in the same *midrash* (Genesis Rabba 27:4) and in the same context the cooperation of others in the destruction of humanity during the Flood but this time "God's heart" appears instead of "the earth": "'And it grieved Him at His heart' (Genesis 6:6). R. Berekiah said: If a king has a palace built by an architect and when he sees it, it

displeases him, against whom is he to complain? Surely against the architect!"

God's heart appears here as a separate entity, mediating between Him and Creation. (Indeed, in a parallel version in Genesis Rabba 8:3 the divine heart stands for "an agent," and it is claimed that heaven and earth were God's two advisors in the Creation.) God creates the world through His heart and punishes it when Creation fails. A mediating entity evokes immediate associations with Gnosticism, the heretical Christian sect of the time, whose main tenet is the distinction between a Supreme God and a Creator known as the Demiurge. In Gnosis, *earth* is also a name of a celestial power. Moshe Idel cited Gnostic sources on the earth and showed the similarities between them and kabbalistic writings dealing with this symbol.<sup>96</sup> Although these similarities are unquestionable, they do not stem from a direct connection between Gnosis and Kabbala but rather, as Idel stated, from the Jewish sources of Gnosticism. Here I will deal with the mainstream trends in kabbalistic development; that is, with its origin in the talmudic myth.

The notion of the heart as a mediating entity between God and the world, identical with the prince and the earth, is not all we may infer from the talmudic sources previously quoted. God's "heart," like the human heart, is inseparable from Him, and Creation is said to have taken place through God's heart only because the rabbis believed that, for humankind too, the heart represents the creative aspect, as in "a discerning heart" (Berakhot, 61a) As God's heart is portrayed as an agent, so is the human heart.<sup>97</sup> God's heart is indeed identical with the earth, which is the prince of the world and, like the attribute of mercy, acts to bring the Messiah but, as we saw earlier,<sup>98</sup> messianic times are directly connected to God's heart without mentioning "the earth." The heart there is God's "unconscious," which is portrayed as part of His spiritual essence and unlike the angels who are the limbs, as God concealed from them the secret of the end of days and revealed it only to His heart. Although this statement confirms the validity of the link we posed between the heart and messianic times, it also upsets the identification between heart, "prince of the world" and "earth."

However, this contradiction is only apparent, reflecting a level of conceptual rigor inappropriate to the living talmudic myth a myth lacking in self-reflection and of undefined ontological validity. The angels can be perceived simultaneously as external entities serving God and as His limbs or His attributes. Similarly the heart, God's internal spirituality as against angels and limbs, can be perceived in another context as "prince of the world," despite the latter's angelic

character, or even as identical with the earth. In an ancient parallel version of this statement, God's Son replaces the heart. I am referring to Jesus' statement in the New Testament (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32): "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." Contrary indeed to the talmudic heart, here the secret is not even revealed to the Son; nevertheless, his role is that of an intermediate entity, more worthy of knowledge than the angels. Thus, this myth appears in many variations, even if we choose to disregard the last passage due to its different literary source.

This flexibility is lost in the kabbalistic myth. I have claimed before that the *mytholegoumena* was not invented by the kabbalists, who only confined it within the conceptual framework of the ten *sefirot*, and the following is a prominent example. The last *sefira* is called *malchut* or *Shekhina*, a concept that developed gradually from an immanent aspect of divinity that rested in the Tabernacle onto the distinct, divine personality of the kabbalists.<sup>99</sup> But even the kabbalists preserved some of the *Shekhina*'s elemental quality as an inseparable aspect of God and thus used it to define the duality we encountered in the Talmud. On the one hand, the *Shekhina* is part of the divine world, the ten *sefirot* the Zohar refers to as the world of union or *alma de-yihuda*, and on the other hand, it is the beginning of a world of separation.<sup>100</sup> The *Shekhina* is one of divinity's supernal stones, which the "builders" [the higher *sefirot*] had rejected as "worthless," and which then became "the cornerstone" of the nether world.<sup>101</sup> Kabbalists ascribed to this *sefira* all the preceding *midrashim* about "the earth," as well as other examples of rabbinical literature dealing with similar myths.<sup>102</sup> This *sefira* is therefore called "earth" (or "the land of Israel")<sup>103</sup> as well as "prince of the world" or the angel Metatron.<sup>104</sup> Included in this *sefira* are other *midrashim* too, such as the ones on the heart, the nurse, the agent, and the architect.<sup>105</sup> Although the kabbalists did not resolve the duality apparent in midrashic descriptions of God's heart, they allocated this duality (or better, multiplicity) a special and stable "place" the *sefira* of *malchut*. This allocation may also be seen as a way of formalizing the duality and raising its level of ontological validity.

The most important symbol of the *Shekhina* in Kabbala is that of God's consort. A wife, unlike a man's heart, is an independent person, but an almost organic fusion occurs when she mates with her spouse and the two together create one "being."<sup>106</sup> The difference between the two types of sources is mainly one of emphasis: Whereas the Midrash speaks of the *Shekhina* as an integral part of God's personality, which may also be perceived as the "prince of the world,"

for the Kabbala this is essentially a separate figure. However, the extent of this separation may vary, and the *Shekhina* may alternately appear as God's partner or as His "heart." In any event, there is an unquestionable continuity between Midrash and Kabbala, and the latter cannot be seen as a new creation. We shall also show later that neither was kabbalistic erotic imagery created ex nihilo, but is rather the culmination of a gradual process of development.

The *Shekhina* is also known in Kabbala as *Keneset Israel*. It dwells [*shokhenet*] within the people of Israel, is saved when they are rescued, and grieves when they suffer. This symbol can easily be linked to these midrashic and talmudic myths, such as those dealing with the image of "the earth" punished for human sinfulness during the flood and asking for the coming of the Messiah, and its national features become even sharper when it is called "the land of Israel." Moreover, the *Shekhina* in Kabbala is also the city of Jerusalem. It thus inherits the ancestral notion of a "heavenly city," which was widespread in early Christianity and in Gnosis and also appears in talmudic literature,<sup>107</sup> as well as other national motifs in rabbinical literature to be reviewed later. Already in the midrashic sources, the mutual relationship between God and Israel is in every case attended by a mythical entity; all the kabbalists had to do was to identify all these entities and unite them in the figure of the *Shekhina*.

Moreover, in Pesahim 118b the Talmud even contrasts *Keneset Israel* and the Jewish people, and makes *Keneset Israel* look very similar to its kabbalistic meaning.

One of the *Shekhina*'s most important names among the early kabbalists was *atara* (crown). As recent research shows,<sup>108</sup> this symbol was derived from mythical ideas found in the literature and times of the Rabbis, such as wreathing the divine crown from the prayers offered by His people (Hagigah 13b) and the phylacteries laid by God, in which it is written "And who is like Thy people Israel, a singular nation in the earth" (Berakhot 6a). Another and no less important symbol is the moon. The waning and waxing of the moon points to the role of Israel,<sup>109</sup> and I believe that this motif too is already found in rabbinical literature. Thus, for instance, in the famous myth about the waning of the moon:

R. Simeon b. Pazzi pointed out a contradiction [between verses]. It says (Genesis 1:16) "And God made the two great lights," and it says (ibid.) "The greater light ... and the lesser light." Said the moon unto the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the World! Is it possible for two kings to wear one crown?" He answered, "Go then and make thyself smaller." "Master of the

World!" cried the moon. "Because I have suggested that which is proper must I make myself smaller?" He replied, "Go and thou wilt rule by day and by night." "But what is the value of this?" cried the moon. "Of what use is a lamp in broad daylight?" He replied "Go. Israel shall reckon by thee the days and the years." "But it is impossible," said the moon, "to do without the sun for the reckoning of the seasons, as it is written (Genesis 1:14): 'And let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years.'" "Go. The righteous shall be named after thee as we find, Jacob the Small, Samuel the Small, David the Small." On seeing that it would not be consoled the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Bring an atonement for Me making the moon smaller." This is what is meant by R. Simeon b. Lakish when he declared, "Why is it that the he-goat offered on the new moon is different, in that it is written concerning it (Numbers 28:15): 'unto the Lord'? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'Let this he-goat be an atonement for Me making the moon smaller.'" (Hullin 60b)

Even at the literal level, the connection between the moon and Israel in this myth is already clear. To compensate the moon for its waning, God ruled that Israel shall reckon their days by it instead of by the sun, as do the Gentiles, and lunar eclipses are therefore considered a bad omen for Israel in the Talmud.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, God ruled that the righteous of Israel shall be named after the moon. One of them is King David (according to Samuel I, 17:14: "And David was the youngest [smallest]," his links with the moon are discussed later). The second is no other than the people of Israel, who are the ones intended by the only occurrence of the expression appearing in Amos 7:5: "How shall Jacob stand? For he is small."

A sacrifice is offered with the new month to atone for this divine sin, suggesting that the waning of the moon is the cause and symbol of Israel's misfortunes. This was the usual kabbalistic interpretation of this talmudic myth,<sup>111</sup> though with a characteristic difference. According to the Kabbala, the waning of the moon was devised with a certain purpose or reflects some immanent fault in the structure of the supernal worlds, whereas the Talmud adopts a personal myth. The moon's claim "Is it possible for two kings to wear one crown?" bothered God, who inadvertently answered "Go then and make thyself smaller." God understood immediately that He had been unfair but could not retract His words, despite the destructive consequences henceforth to the people of Israel. In exactly this fashion, King Xerxes in the book of Esther regrets his promise to Haman to harm Israel



but cannot withdraw it, and it is noteworthy that in talmudic literature, King Xerxes is compared to the King of the world.<sup>112</sup>

This connection between the moon and Israel recurs often in the Midrash. Thus, we are told in Exodus Rabba 15:26 that during the reign of king Solomon [Shelomo], the true [*shalem*] king who built the Temple, "the moon's disc was full." This notion is pervasive in Kabbala and was further enhanced by the identification between Solomon and the *sefira* of *yesod*.<sup>113</sup> A stronger expression of the connection between the moon and Israel appears in the following statement, in the benediction over the new moon formulated by the Babylonian *amora* Rab Judah (Sanhedrin 42a): "The moon He ordered that it should renew herself as a crown of beauty for those whom He sustains from the womb." Rashi comments: "The Holy One, blessed be He, told the moon that it should renew itself as a crown of beauty for those whom He sustains from the womb [namely, Israel<sup>114</sup>]; the moon is a sign to them that, as they reckon her days by it<sup>115</sup> they shall also renew themselves in their exile like the moon." The kabbalists readily extended this interpretation to the renewal of the *Shekhina*,<sup>116</sup> although it is worth noting that the comparison of the moon to God appears already in the Talmud:

Said R. Johanan: Whoever pronounces the benediction over the new moon in its due time welcomes, as it were, the presence of the *Shekhina*, for it is written here (Exodus 12:2): "This month" and it is written there (Exodus 15:2): "This is my God and I will praise Him." In the school of R. Ishmael it was taught: Had Israel earned no other privilege than to greet the presence of their Heavenly Father once a month, it were sufficient. Abaye said: Therefore we must recite it standing. (Sanhedrin 42a)

The traditional benediction over the new moon concludes with the phrase "David king of Israel lives and will endure," linking King David with the moon. The source of this concluding formula is in Rosh Hashanah 25a, where it had served as a secret code for the sanctification of the month: "Rabbi said to R. Hiyya, Go to En Tob [a place where the court would meet for this purpose] and sanctify the month and send me the password 'David king of Israel lives and will endure.'"

Rashi created a link between King David and the moon through the verse in Psalms 89:38: "It [his throne] shall be established forever like the moon" though, in the previous verse, David's throne had actually been compared to the sun. It seems that David's link to the moon is stronger than the one suggested by Rashi; we saw earlier

that David, who was "the smallest," had been named after the moon. This time perhaps the Zohar, in its addition of a messianic motif, is closest to the original spirit of the talmudic statement: "When the moon is renewed, David king of Israel lives and will endure" (Zohar I:192a). The mystery surrounding the intercalation of the month and the year in the Talmud ["the secret of the intercalation"], of which this password is part, may attest to it. Decisions about the calendar were considered an expression of sovereignty and the rabbis insisted on these issues being settled only in the land of Israel, in defiance of the the Roman authorities that had apparently tried to abolish this symbol of Jewish statehood.<sup>117</sup>

These rabbinical perceptions developed gradually, until they attained their full kabbalistic significance. The kabbalistic idea does appear almost fully grown in the following statement by the pietist movement in Ashkenaz, which scholars have acknowledged as the transitional link between rabbinical literature and Kabbala:<sup>118</sup>

When Israel is forced into apostasy, the moon wanes,<sup>119</sup> as it is written (Jeremiah 31:14): "Rachel weeping for her children." And why was the woman compared to the moon? To tell you that, as the moon waxes for half a month and wanes for half a month, so the woman is close to her husband for half a month and lonely in her impurity for half a month. And as the moon is accessible at night, so is the woman, as it is written:<sup>120</sup> "In the evening she would come" (Esther 2:14).<sup>121</sup>

In this passage, the moon is also granted female sexual characteristics, first and foremost in the comparison between the monthly cycle of the woman and that of the moon. Apparently, the original source for this comparison is the following passage:

The women heard but did not consent to give their earrings to their husbands [in order to make the golden calf]. ... And the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the women their reward in this world, that they should observe the new moons more stringently than men and rewarded them in the world to come, that they are destined to be renewed like the new moons. (Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer, 45)

Jews in medieval Ashkenaz were apparently impressed by this passage, and this is the source for the custom<sup>122</sup> whereby women refrain from work on the days of the new moon. R. Isaac b. Moshe from Vienna, the author of the *Or Zarua'* and one of the leading Ashkenazi

halakhists in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries who knew nothing about Kabbala, added another explanation:<sup>123</sup> "Every month the woman immerses, is renewed and returns to her husband as beloved as on her wedding day. As the moon is renewed each month and they yearn to see her, so the woman is renewed every month to her husband and he yearns for her as if she were new, and that is why the day of the new moon is a holiday for women."

But the passage in *Sefer Hasidim* [The Book of the Pious] went a step further. It combined this link between the moon and the woman with that between the moon and Israel, and the waning of the moon and the impurity of the woman were thus united with the destiny of Israel. The kabbalists did exactly the same and identified both these faults with the fault in the *ShekhinaKeneset Israel*.<sup>124</sup> Another important similarity between these two sources is in the figure of Rachel and in the use of the verse "Rachel weeping for her children"; as far back as *Sefer Hasidim*, Rachel symbolized *Keneset Israel*, and this is also the kabbalistic usage.<sup>125</sup>

However, there is one difference between the *Sefer Hasidim* and the Kabbala. The moon and the female may symbolize *Keneset Israel* but not the *Shekhina* as a divine entity though, as I showed earlier,<sup>126</sup> the main kabbalistic innovation pertaining to the concept of the *Shekhina* is not related to its mythical content but to the crystallization of a formula that changed its ontological status. This is also the case here. A well-known prophetic metaphor likens the people of Israel to God's bride though the ontological status of these comparisons varies, even in the Bible. The statement (Jeremiah 2:2) "I remember in thy favor the devotion of thy youth, thy love as a bride" is not the same as the detailed descriptions in Ezekiel 16 and 23 or as the first chapters in Hosea, where the prophet resorts to symbolic erotic acts. The rabbis went a step further when they expounded all the love poems in Song of Songs as expressions of the love between God and *Keneset Israel*, and a consecutive reading of Song of Songs Rabba creates great difficulties for those committed to an exclusively allegorical interpretation. Other rabbinical passages, such as the description of the Temple's cherubs as a pair of lovers drawing close and separating according to the relation between God and His people, only strengthen the difficulties entailed by this interpretation.<sup>127</sup>

The biblical God is single. Genesis 1:27 indeed states: "So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." From here, we might conclude with the kabbalists<sup>128</sup> that God's image is both male and female, as is further implied by the plural usage of the previous verse: "And God said, Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness."

However, even if this were the early literal approach, there is no trace of it in later biblical consciousness. Celibacy is a difficult condition, as may be inferred from the statement by God Himself in Genesis 2:18: "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone"; in order to repair this situation God created the woman and, in a celestial parallel, made Israel His consort.<sup>129</sup> I believe this interpretation is the source of the erotic allusions in the prophetic "parables" on Israel, as well as of the rabbinical attitudes reflected in the *midrashim* on *Keneset Israel* and other utterances, such as God rejoicing in the souls of the righteous as in a "new bride."<sup>130</sup> These statements closely resemble the kabbalistic approach linking the personified image of *Keneset Israel* in rabbinical literature (or the biblical "virgin daughter of Israel") with the *Shekhina*, God's consort.

Even without the erotic overtones, the people of Israel were the foremost concern of the talmudic God, as is clear from the talmudic myths dealing with God's anguish over the Exile discussed in the previous section. No one portrays an alienated divinity indifferent to our destiny. All the mythical descriptions deal with God's attitude to His creatures and, first and foremost, to the people of Israel. It is precisely the mutual relationship between human and God that constitutes the very contents of the Jewish myth, as is even manifest in God's name (see Rashi's commentary on Exodus 3:14, based on Berakhot 9b.) These descriptions lent further credence to the kabbalistic portrayal of the *Shekhina* as *Keneset Israel*. Although the use of this symbol limited and clearly defined the contents of these myths, it also strengthened their mythical validity and enabled their conceptual formalization. For the kabbalists, God suffers not "only" in empathy with Israel, but because of a rift in the divine essence that severs the *Shekhina* from the higher *sefirot*. Whereas the Talmud attributes the pain to God in general, the Kabbala focuses it on the *Shekhina*; the pain also affects the *sefira* of *tiferet* (as well as the related *sefira* of *yesod*) that affects the *Shekhina* from above and is portrayed as its partner, because water cannot go through a blocked channel and, if it is a tree (the Tree of Life), it withers.<sup>131</sup> Thus, divorce also afflicts the evicting husband, "his visage is marred" and he "is lost."<sup>132</sup>

In Kabbala, this rift is called "the exile of the *Shekhina*," a notion that also derives from a talmudic myth:

It has been taught: R. Simon b. Yohai said: Come and see how beloved are Israel in the sight of God, in that to every place to which they were exiled the *Shekhina* went with them. They were exiled to Egypt and the *Shekhina* was with them, as it says. ...

And when they will be redeemed in the future, the *Shekhina* will be with them, as it says (Deuteronomy 30:3): "Then the Lord thy God will return thy captivity." It does not say here *ve-heshiv* [He shall bring back] but *ve-shav* [He shall return]. This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, will return with them from the places of exile. (Megilla 29a)

Different variations of this idea appear in rabbinical literature.<sup>133</sup> From other passages it is clear that not only does God accompany Israel in its exile, but that its anguish is His anguish and that He is saved through its salvation as, for instance, in the description of the *hossanas* ritual as it appears in the Jerusalem Talmud (Sukkah 4:3). According to one of the views cited in the Mishnah, those circling the altar say: "May me and Him be saved," which is expounded in the Gemara as meaning that God Himself needs to be saved with His people, and many verses attesting to His enslavement in all places of exile are advanced as evidence. The *piyut* [ritual song] *ke-hosha'ta*, which is recited during the ceremony of the *hossanas*, is based on this interpretation. Also, in Exodus Rabba 30:31, God is not the savior but is "saved" (according to the original Hebrew version of Zechariah 9:9) and in *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 17:5, the redemption of Israel will come together with the redemption of God's right hand (probably an allusion to the *Shekhina*), which is bound as long as Israel is enslaved.

This myth too underwent a similar process. The expression "the *Shekhina* went with them" served in kabbalistic literature to identify between the exiled God and the *sefira* of *malkhut*, the exile being the separation of *malkhut* from "the Holy One, blessed be He" [the *sefirah* of *tiferet*], though the Talmud explicitly sees them as identical. The exile of the *Shekhina* is also portrayed in the Kabbala in more conceptualized terms: While in exile, the *Shekhina*'s link to God is mediated through the princes of the nations whereas, under normal circumstances, the *Shekhina* would have served to mediate the divine emanation to the princes, who would have been Her subordinates.<sup>134</sup>

We found another talmudic myth worthy of the name *the exile of the Shekhina*:

R. Judah b. Idi said in the name of R. Johanan: The *Shekhina* made ten journeys, as is stated: from the ark cover to the cherub, and from one cherub to another, and from the cherub to the threshold, and from the threshold to the court, and from the court to the altar, and from the altar to the roof, and from the roof to the wall, and from the wall to the town, and from the town to the mountain, and from the mountain to the wilderness,

and from the wilderness it ascended to its own abode, as it says (Hosea 5:15): "I will go and return to my place."...Correspondingly, the Sanhedrin wandered to ten places of banishment... (Rosh Hashana 31a)

A similar vision appears in the Midrash:

"And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." (Genesis 3:8) R. Abba b. Kahana said: Not *mehallekh* [walking] but *mithalekh* is written here, which means that it repeatedly leaped and ascended. The real home of the *Shekhina* was in the nether sphere; when Adam sinned it departed to the first firmament; when Cain sinned, it ascended to the second firmament; when the generation of Enosh sinned, it ascended to the third; when the generation of the Flood sinned, to the fourth; with the generation of the tower of Babel, to the fifth; with the Sodomites, to the sixth; with the Egyptians in the days of Abraham, to the seventh. But as against these there arose seven righteous men: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Moses, and they brought it down again to earth. Abraham [brought it down] from the seventh to the sixth... (Genesis Rabba 19:7)

The kabbalists integrated this picture too into their broader myth. When the channels are repaired, God's stature is complete and reaches the earth; and when they are blocked through fault of human action, the *Shekhina* rises and returns to its source in the world of emanations.<sup>135</sup> The early kabbalists' descriptions of the *Shekhina*'s exile are not always consistent: at times the *Shekhina* descends into exile and at times it ascends. However, as kabbalistic doctrine was perfected, descriptions of the *Shekhina*'s exile also sharpened into more rigid conceptual frameworks.<sup>136</sup> This process culminated in the complicated divine machine of Isaac Luria, wherein every picture found its place. Certain aspects of the *Shekhina* descended and are in exile, whereas others returned to their source and even the Holy One, blessed be He, called *Ze'er Anpin* in Lurianic Kabbala, at times returns to its mother's womb in the *sefira* of *bina* (which in Lurianic Kabbala signifies the slavery in Egypt).<sup>137</sup> The ascent of the *sefira* of *tiferet* is easily portrayed as the completion of the rift caused by the descent of *malkhut*. Thus did the Kabbala preserve both the concepts and the images of the talmudic myth, and its chief innovation was changing the character and the ontological status of this myth.

## V. The Biblical Background and Its Implications

This description of the talmudic and kabbalistic myth as essentially God's internal struggle over the fate of Israel, may seem inappropriate to those whose knowledge of Judaism is derived from other sources. I believe this description simply traces the development and the change in the biblical image of God that, eventually, affected Jewish religion at all levels. Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this essay to delve into the wide field of biblical research. I will only outline the biblical God's characteristic features as they appear, in different forms and with varying emphases, in several biblical sources. My focus will be on those narrative sections of the Bible that were the basis for the talmudic and kabbalistic passages discussed in the previous sections.

One of the the salient features of biblical stories is that they portray history as dependent on the character and moods of God, whose attitude to His creatures is ambivalent, compounding love, on the one hand, and hatred and jealousy, on the other. God created and sustains humankind; to mitigate His loneliness and find expression for His love and His kingdom, He chooses those who are worthy because, in the words of a medieval kabbalistic proverb, "there is no King without a people." But, since Creation, God has been jealous of His creatures, whose separate existence abolished His exclusivity; He is afraid that human beings may compete with Him and deny Him the awe and honour due to Him as a king, or that they may not requit His love suitably, through absolute devotion and even self-sacrifice. However, God understands that consummating His jealousy would entail the destruction of Creation and He gives those He has chosen precise instructions aimed at assuaging His anger and jealousy while perpetuating their continued separate existence.

This is the impression usually left by a literal reading of the Bible, and there is nothing new in it. Since ancestral times, most of those who have read the Scriptures literally have perceived God's image in this fashion, even when they found it antithetical to their views. As a result of this literal approach, some came to hate the biblical divinity (like the Gnostics of Marcion's school, snake worshippers, and Cain's worshippers) or to oppose biblical religion (like Julian the Apostate, who tried to revive Greek paganism, and felt biblical religion was too mythical for his taste!<sup>138</sup> Others grappled consciously with the literal level and, to save the Scripture's authority, interpreted it according to philosophical systems (such as Philo and

Maimonides). Not so the rabbis; they had no problem at all with the biblical myth and added much of their own to it when delving into the essence of God and describing it in myths such as the ones we reviewed in the previous chapters. The rabbinical myth is more daring and explicit than the biblical one; the Bible approaches its myth with extreme awe and reverence, endowing with higher ontological validity. As we showed earlier, when seeking to understand God's attributes the Rabbis resorted to personifications, which were later consolidated and systematized in kabbalistic literature. The biblical approach, on the other hand, consistently presents one divine image; when a noun like *Wrath* is used as a substitute for God Himself, it is only as a form of speech appropriate mainly to dignitaries like kings, whose honor requires us to speak of their actions rather than their essence. Indeed, deferring to God by referring to His actions (such as *Might* or *Shekhina*) rather than to His name, abetted the mythical concern with the attributes at a later stage, although the final result defeated the original intention of abstaining from dealing with God's "personality."

We may, therefore, resort to rabbinical exegeses to understand the biblical myth and, in itself, their "homiletical" quality does not negate their hermeneutical value. Through its use of a different genre and due to its greater freedom, the rabbinical myth often amplifies and actualizes the implicit potential of the biblical stories. A discerning and discriminate reader knows how to choose a *midrash* and use it, as Rashi clearly shows in his biblical commentary, which has been espoused by the people as a reflection of their own consciousness. Rashi too accepted myth at face value and without any ideological justifications; such mythical simplicity is not found even in kabbalistic literature, wherein myth is already self-conscious and reflective, as well as to a certain extent polemical.<sup>139</sup> Rashi tended to sharpen the mythical-psychological aspects and even the sexual ones in unexpected situations or where the Bible, out of deference, limits itself to a hint. Thus, Genesis 2:18: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help to match him," is usually interpreted to mean that it is not good for a man to be without a woman; Rashi, however, ascribes this complaint to God's situation when threatened by a competitor: "That it should not be said that there are two entities: God above, alone without a mate, and the one below without a mate." Even if we choose to ignore Rashi's commentary and expound this verse as relating only to the anguish of man's loneliness, there is ample evidence of the Creator's problem in this regard. When saying "it is not good that man should be alone," God may be attesting to His own experience when moved to create man,<sup>140</sup> although in this chapter there is no dearth of doubts and regrets about His Creation



(as usual in rabbinical and apocalyptic literature these doubts became arguments with the angels, who opposed the creation of man).

This apprehension is clearly revealed in the prohibition to eat from the tree of knowledge. Indeed, the reason for this prohibition is only explained by the snake (Genesis 3:5): "for God knows that on the day you eat of it, then your eyes shall be opened and you shall be as God, knowing good and evil," but it is also confirmed by God, who used it to justify the expulsion from the Garden of Eden (ibid., 3:22): "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become like one of us, knowing good and evil: and now, what if he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eating, live for ever." The rabbis developed this theme even further and attributed to the snake the claim that God feared man would develop the ability to create worlds after eating from the tree of knowledge, as every artisan hates his fellow craftsmen, and His suspicions were confirmed when man knew his wife and begot children.<sup>141</sup> The rabbis believed that these were also the grounds for banning individuals from pursuing mystical concerns on their own, particularly in the *Sefer Yetzira* [the Book of Creation] and in the creation of the *Golem*.<sup>142</sup>

This is the beginning of the long human saga in which human beings disobey God's will, He punishes them and selects those individuals beloved to Him. The reason for God's anger is not always explicit, though the quintessential sin would appear to be rebellion. The sin of the flood generation is vaguely stated as "wickedness," "evil" (Genesis 6:5), or "violence" (ibid. 6:11), but apparently, the main offence was that stated at the beginning of the chapter: the sons of God took the daughters of man for their wives and the daughters bore the mighty men of renown who threatened God's standing. This issue is stated more explicitly in the story about the tower of Babel, from which we we may also draw inferences about the generation of the flood. The builders of the tower made their intentions clear: "And they said, Come, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven; and let us make us a name [compare "man of renown" earlier] lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). God is concerned about this design: "And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language, and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be withheld from them, which they have schemed to do" (ibid., 11:6).

The sin of addressing another divine entity beside God, which is discussed later, may be adding betrayal to the sin of rebellion. This may explain God's anger over the sons of God taking the daughters of man, as against "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord... and Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:89). God wants His chosen,

His loved ones, those who walk with Him, for Himself alone. Thus "And Hanokh walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 5:22). Thus Abraham, who is called His lover (see Isaiah 41:8), who is not taken to Heaven but is told to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house and belong only to God (Genesis 12:1) and is then commanded: "Take now thy son, thy only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22:2). I believe that the reason for this command may be God's suspicion that Abraham is turning away his love from Him toward his only son.

Because of His love for the patriarchs, God chose their children Israel to be His people. Love is now demanded from the whole people: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God; the Lord is one. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:45). I think that Rabbi Akiba, in seeing this as a demand to give up his soul,<sup>143</sup> was not far from the spirit of this verse. However, this demand cannot be accommodated with the social and political existence of a whole people; the people maintained this demand as an ideal and tended to rely on the merits of the ancestors' love and devotion, and particularly on the binding of Isaac, rather than impose the duty of sacrifice on every individual. Even if only on some individuals, this ideal did have an effect and the call for sacrifice was never abolished, which is the reason for the ambivalent biblical attitude toward human sacrifices.<sup>144</sup> The verses intimate that, originally, the sanctification of the firstborn required that they be sacrificed, and only following a later development of biblical law were the people told to redeem them;<sup>145</sup> similarly, the tribe of Levi was singled out for the task of worship only after its members "consecrated" themselves against their families (Exodus 32:29).

The struggle over this question continued throughout the period of the First Temple; some would immolate their sons to the *Moloch*, which is not idol worship but a kind of sacrifice to God,<sup>146</sup> whereas others refrained from doing so. One of the prophets believed that burning children is a vile practice, but God commanded it to punish the people of Israel (Ezekiel 20:24-26), and another cries, in God's name: "I did not command them, nor did it come into my heart,"<sup>147</sup> as he said about all other sacrifices.<sup>148</sup> Still another prophet knew this practice to be an accepted custom, as valid as other sacrifices, all of which he opposed (Micah 6:68). Indeed, many animal sacrifices (specially sacrifices of atonement) are substitutes for human sacrifices. There are many signs, among them the famous description by Philo of Byblos,<sup>149</sup> indicating that the practice of circumcision is another

example of this type of substitution. Nevertheless, and despite these historical developments, vows of human sacrifice could not be rescinded,<sup>150</sup> and continued to influence God.<sup>151</sup> These ambivalent feelings about human sacrifice can later be traced in a similar ambivalence toward *Kiddush ha-Shem* [martyrdom].<sup>152</sup> *Kiddush ha-Shem* has remained a law pertinent only to individuals and is not to be commanded, as we saw in section II regarding Rabbi Akiba, on the grounds that the behavior of the commanded man must reflect the spirit of the commanding God.

The reverse side of love is jealousy, in heaven as on earth. For this reason idolatry is considered as the foremost biblical sin. Scripture often expounds it in this way, as in the second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:36), where God calls Himself "jealous," the idol worshippers "those that hate me," and their opposite "those that love me." It also explains the widespread use of "whoring" for describing the yearning after other gods, a common usage in the Bible, often accompanied by long and explicit descriptions of defilement with foreign gods as opposed to loyal marriage to the God of Israel. The intensity of this image (accompanied in Hosea by symbolic acts), takes it beyond its exclusive metaphoric quality. A priori, this is indeed not a metaphor; the verb *to whore* seems to be one of the original terms for idolatry rather than a colorful substitute for another.

It is appropriate to mention the Zohar in this context, which excels in bringing to the surface elemental and archaic mythical feelings and applying them to the kabbalistic framework. The Zohar strongly emphasizes the necessary link between love and jealousy, in heaven as on earth, and even dares to use celestial jealousy to strengthen love. The Zohar found a hint in the following verse (Genesis 6:18): "But with thee I will erect my covenant"; according to the Zohar, the covenant refers to the male sexual organ, and the verse expresses the idea that the love of the righteous for the *Shekhina* arouses God's jealousy, and He is thus moved to mate with her.<sup>153</sup>

Apparently, monotheism itself is only an elaboration of the idea of God's jealousy, which preceded and created monotheism: the efforts to appease the jealous God eventually generated the idea that other gods simply do not exist. This idea, unknown to figures such as Jephthah and David,<sup>154</sup> started to take shape among the prophets toward the end of the First Temple and became established in the writings of Deutero-Isaiah and Malachi, apparently under the influence of Persian universal religion.<sup>155</sup> The prevalence of ontological monotheism (namely, acknowledging the reality of only one God, as opposed to religious monotheism, which commands the worship of only one God and is obviously fundamental to biblical religion from its

inception) in later Judaism, eventually weakened the idea of jealousy that had engendered it: if there are no other gods, there is nobody to be jealous of.

Alongside jealousy is wrath; it is in fear of God's wrath that Jewish religion and many of its commandments, mainly those aimed at appeasing and soothing Him called *signs*, such as circumcision,<sup>156</sup> *tefillin*<sup>157</sup> and *mezuzah*<sup>158</sup> took shape. We have previously mentioned circumcision in another context, but there is no contradiction. The distinction between the soul's attributes entails an abstraction, and in reality, they are intertwined; this is also the case for religious reactions to God's attributes, as well as for "love substitutes," such as atonement sacrifices, that can also act as defense mechanisms against the anger God expresses when He fails to receive His due. This link between love and defense mechanisms appears most sharply in the Zohar, when the right meditation is assigned to the *nefilat appayim* (prostration) ritual at the end of the prayer. By prostrating, the worshipper delivers himself to his death and thereby saves himself from the *Shekhina*, who actually wishes to kill him. God must be "seduced," but wholeheartedly and without deceitful thoughts!<sup>159</sup>

Occasionally, protection is needed not from God's wrath but from Satan or other harmful agents. However, as we saw in Section III, Satan is at times merely an amplification of the divine attribute of justice. Even those cases that originate in nonmonotheistic mythologies or are part of universal demonology are gradually integrated by religious consciousness into a specifically Jewish mythical scheme. The status of evil in Kabbala is therefore hard to define, because the same system appears at times as dualistic and at times as monistic;<sup>160</sup> in fact, the very attempt at definition may be inappropriate, as the struggle between these impulses is immanent to the Jewish myth, like it is to the divinity itself. Thus, some of the sacrifices, such as the scapegoat<sup>161</sup> or the *millu'im* [consecration] offerings,<sup>162</sup> are described in both rabbinical and kabbalistic literature as bribes to Satan. However, kabbalistic literature at times perceives all sacrifices in this fashion: only the intentional meditation [*kavvana*] accompanying sacrifices rises to Heaven, whereas the sacrificial flesh symbolizes the rejection of evil.<sup>163</sup> This rejection is at times expounded as part of the process of building the complete "divine stature," when everything will be in its proper place,<sup>164</sup> and the Zohar therefore finds fault with those who "abstain from evil" and do not give the *sitra ahra* [the other side] its due. According to the Zohar, the "act of Creation," that is, the emanation of the divine, can be described according to the "mystery of the great crocodile," which is the *sitra ahra* or Satan.<sup>165</sup>

God's wrath resembles not only that of a jealous lover but also that of a king angry at his rebellious subjects, as He is also the king of His people. Since religion's inception, fear of punishment appears side by side with awe of His majesty. This awe is in a relentless struggle with the intimate love for God, particularly in the hearts of those mystic followers who felt themselves torn between two religious duties: the wish to be near, to know and to enter the mysteries of the divine, against the duty to defer to the king and respect His aloofness.<sup>166</sup> The latter inclination grew stronger in *Hekhalot* literature, which tended to raise God to inaccessible heights while placing the world of the *Hekhalot* as a mystical object within grasp, in contrast to the talmudic myth, as reviewed in Section II. Awe of His majesty opened the way for the absorption of philosophical, antimythical ideas into Judaism, though with an important reservation: philosophy could be a part of Judaism as long as it fought against all other myths while strengthening that of God's kingdom as an object of awe and love (as is clear from Maimonides' writings). But, when following its own inner logic, philosophy also revealed the mythical foundations of God's kingdom and made God into an abstract idea, it turned against its original Jewish purpose and ceased being an organic part of Jewish religion (e.g., Spinoza). This was an unacceptable development for, in Zoharic terms, this religion is wholly founded upon the covenant and the grace between the *Adam Tata'a* [the man below] and the *Adam Ila'a* [the Man Supreme.]

#### Appendix: Messianism in Maimonides

Compare this talmudic passage with the wording of the twelfth of Maimonides' thirteen articles of faith concerning the coming of the Messiah. These articles appear in Maimonides's *Commentary on the Mishnah*, at the beginning of the tenth chapter of Sanhedrin, while the passage from Sanhedrin 97b is from the Gemara to M. Sanhedrin 10:1 discussed by Maimonides. The gist of Maimonides's twelfth article is the same Habakuk verse found in the talmudic passage that, in my view, influenced Maimonides' view.

The twelfth article is messianic times, which means to believe in his coming and not to say that he is delayed and, if he is delayed, wait for him; no time is to be set for him, and Scripture is not to be expounded in order to disclose when he is due to

come. The rabbis said blasted be the bones of those who calculate the end. And to believe in greatness and love and to pray for his coming.<sup>167</sup>

Contrary to the talmudic passage, Maimonides does account for the phrase *it will not delay* at the end of the verse, but takes it out of its literal context and formulates it as "not to say that he is delayed," implying "not to argue or complain about his delay" in the Arabic original. *It will not delay* ceases to be a factual statement about the coming of the Messiah and becomes a religious demand imposed on the believer; Maimonides's formulation thus supports the talmudic exegesis of the verse "if he is delayed." This approach was adopted by the author of the famous medieval paraphrase printed in Ashkenazi prayer books, who worded "the thirteen articles" as a credo: "And although he is delayed"; however, it is doubtful whether this was the interpretation of those who turned this article of faith into a Zionist song.

Maimonides's language confirms this interpretation. Accurately translated, his twelfth article would read as follows: "That he should believe in him [with a belief that entails] greatness [or praise] and love"<sup>168</sup> or "To believe in him [entails] praise and love." Rather than the Messiah, the believer or his belief is praised, because the word *love* makes no sense otherwise. This version is unlike the one adopted by the accepted translation, where *honor* replaced *love* and a few words were added in an attempt to make sense of the passage: "And he should believe in him that he precedes in greatness and honor all the kings that have ever been."<sup>169</sup>

Hence, for Maimonides, awaiting the Messiah is a virtue with its own reward, unrelated to his actual coming. In the same spirit, in Laws of Kings 11:1, Maimonides accused of heresy<sup>170</sup> not only those "who do not believe in him" but also those who "do not look forward to the coming of the Messiah."<sup>171</sup> Moreover, in Laws of Kings 12:2, Maimonides stated that one should not busy oneself with legends describing detailed events to take place in messianic times, "since they lead neither to the fear of God nor to the love of Him," thus implying that the only purpose of messianic belief is fear and love.<sup>172</sup> This idea is also emphasized in the *Epistle to Yemen*, which stresses that reckoning the end and attaining worldly success are unimportant in relation to the eternity of the people and the Torah and to the expectation of redemption. Indeed, the prevalent spirit in this Epistle, aimed at comforting the masses, is more lenient toward those busy reckoning the end. It even engages on some of these calculations on its own but lends them less credibility, viewing them rather as

instrumental in fostering perseverance in the expectation of the Messiah. The Habakuk verse is therefore given a different interpretation.<sup>173</sup> Messianic times are important as an ideal: hoping for them and attempting to bring them about affect religious life in this world. Hence, Maimonides ascribed worldly and natural features to messianic times, which enable attempts to realize the messianic ideal but do not guarantee their success. Writing the *Mishneh Torah* as the constitution of the ideal state, should be seen as one such attempt.

Maimonides did not rule out the possibility of fulfilling messianic expectations and even described two contradictory scenarios. In Laws of Kings 11 the King Messiah is portrayed as a warrior in King David's image, who will bring about messianic times through coercion and war, whereas in the *Commentary on the Mishnah*<sup>174</sup> he is portrayed in the image of King Solomon, who will attain messianic aims through persuasion and after attaining world recognition. (See Laws of Repentance 11:2 and in *Guide of the Perplexed* III:11, though Solomon's name is not mentioned.) The second description cannot be dismissed as unrealistic, because it suits the purpose of human existence according to Maimonides (as explicitly stated in the *Guide*, *ibid.*). Moreover, because in Maimonides's view the world will never be destroyed (see *Guide of the Perplexed* II:2729), we may assume that the potential latent in man's purpose will eventually be actualized, as is claimed by Aristotelian philosophy.<sup>175</sup> However, there is apparently no urgency in this expectation and its realization entails a very lengthy process. We may infer this from Maimonides's statement that messianic times will be very long "since the wise [referring to Plato]<sup>176</sup> said that when a sublime combination is attained, it will be very hard to split it apart."<sup>177</sup>

But the core of redemption for Maimonides is not its actual realization. This is also clear from his description of messianic times that, in addition to realistic aspects, includes a utopian dimension.<sup>178</sup> Although he was influenced in this regard by the Sanhedrin passage, Maimonides changed it according to his own view: He softened the statement about the impossibility of attaining redemption and, obviously, dismissed the mythical explanation the indictment of the attribute of justice. These changes not only reflect Maimonides's theories of the divinity. In his view, messianic times would come only after human beings change their nature, cease their squabbles and hatreds over material scarcity and replace them with the knowledge of God (see mainly the short and moving chapter in *Guide of the Perplexed* III:11). What claims will the attributes of justice and mercy raise then? Even if this expectation fails to be realized, awaiting

the Messiah is enormously significant for human life and, on this point, there is no difference between Maimonides and his talmudic source.





## Notes

### *De Natura Dei: On the Development of the Jewish Myth*

This essay was written in loving memory of my teacher and mentor, Ephraim Gottlieb, who introduced me to the mysteries of Jewish myth. Over the many years since his death I have always been aware of his influence and encouragement, though I have developed my own style and my scholarly interests may differ from his. I fully believe that, with his breadth of vision, Prof. Gottlieb would have made no attempt to restrain his students from pursuing fields of study closest to their hearts. His only condition would have been that they be honest in their scholarly work and always hold truth as a beacon before them.

Indeed, this essay is oriented in directions that differ from those pursued by Gottlieb. He clearly distinguished between Kabbala, the sole object of his scientific research, and Talmud, rabbinical literature, and Maimonides, which he studied in the synagogue and saw as the core of his religious commitment. Although in this paper I have attempted to bridge between them, this approach also serves to sharpen the differences between these sources, and

some of my conclusions may therefore be fairly close to Gottlieb's. To cite only one instance: Gottlieb used to say that the kabbalists, unlike the rabbis, had no sense of humor. I would tend to agree with him in principle except with regard to the Zohar and, as I show, I believe this is related to the personal quality of myth in the Talmud, as against its rigid systematization in the Kabbala.

1. G. Scholem, "Kabbala and Myth," in his book *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, (New York, 1965), p. 88. Various formulations of similar statements appear in many of Scholem's writings although in some of them the historical relation between myth and its counterpart becomes more dialectical. The following anecdote illustrates this well. In Scholem's private book collection, presently housed in the National and University Library at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, there is a copy of I. Goldziher's interesting book, *Der Mythos bei der Hebraeern und seine geschichtliche Entwicklung* (Leipzig, 1876). On the front cover of the book, the following note appears in Scholem's handwriting: *Jugendsuenden eines Grossen Gelehrten* [Youthful sins of a great scholar].

2. G. Scholem, *Explications and Implications: Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance* [Hebrew: *Devarim be-Go*] (Tel-Aviv, 1976), p. 27.

3. See Y. Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar," in *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany, forthcoming); Y. Liebes, "The Kabbalistic Myth as Told by Orpheus," in this volume; Y. Liebes, "Jonah as the Messiah ben Joseph" [Hebrew], in J. Dan and J. Hecker, eds., *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby* (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 3, Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 269-311; Y. Liebes, "Christian Influences in the Zohar," *Immanuel* 17 (1983/1984): 436-7; Y. Liebes, "The Angels of the Shofar and Yeshua Sar ha-Panim" [Hebrew], in J. Dan, ed., *Early Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 6, Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 171-195.

I would like to comment on a quasi-kabbalistic description of emanation in early Isma'ilism, whose origin is shrouded in mystery. I am referring to the text researched and edited by S. M. Stern, *Studies in Early Isma'ilism* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1983), pp. 329. The ontology, hermeneutical approach and many other details, including linguistic ones, resemble the kabbalistic approach. Thus, the first emanation's name is *kuni* which, as the text explicitly indicates, derives from the imperative *kun*, namely, "be!" with the addition of two letters (*u* and *i*) found only in the Hebrew name of God. In the Kabbala as well, the imperative *yehi* (be) points to a sacred name denoting the beginning of *atsilut* (Zohar I:16b), and we also found a name derived from the letters *k* and *n* with the addition of *h* and *a* (Zohar *Hadash*, *Yitro*, 41c). Though the parallel between this name (*anokhi*) and *kuni* is purely coincidental, it may illustrate a similar approach. From *kuni* emanates *qadar*, and there may be a link between this name and the *Botsina de-Kadrinuta* of the Zohar. The entities that follow afterward may be paralleled to the *Six Ends*

(in Arabic *Sittatu Hududin*, which emanated from the *Kuni* when he mistakenly assumed himself to be the only god). Also, this passage mentions seven *kerubim* (in Arabic *kurubiyya*). The names of other emanating entities are similar to those of kabbalistic *sefirot*.

Symbolic references are also similar to those found in Kabbala: *kuni* is male and *qadar* female; *kuni* is the sun and *qadar* the moon. *Kuni* is also referred to by the Koranic name *Sidratu al-Muntaha*, whose description resembles the kabbalistic "Tree of Life," while those who "hold it" are praised. Furthermore, it also mentions *Ha-Avir ha-Dak* [the Subtle Ether] and the importance of the letters, from which the world was created. God's names, like in the Kabbala, serve here as his garments; there are also parallels to some well-known kabbalistic notions, like the one who "lights his candle from another candle, and does not deprive the first one" and the *Benei Aliyya* [Excellent] "who are but few," all in a text of less than ten pages. Several scholars have already noted the mutual links between Isma'iliya and Kabbala on several issues, such as the theory of the worlds, the ten sayings, the theory of the hidden righteous men and the cyclical nature of time. The more extensive research required by these questions is beyond the scope of this essay, and I will only point to the study by S. Pines, "Shi'ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 165251.

4. See, e.g., "Myth" in M. Eliade, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Religion*.

5. See, e.g., M. Buber, "Myth in Judaism," in N. Glatzer, ed., *On Judaism* (New York, 1967), pp. 95107. For an analysis of this question in the writings of Buber and other thinkers see M. Schwartz, *Language, Myth and Art* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, 1967). Franz Rosenzweig also valued myth highly. He searched for it in Judaism and failed to find it, as rationalist views were prevalent in his time; he therefore attempted to find myth in Christianity and came close to conversion. See M. Idel, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Kabbalah" in P. Mendes-Flohr, ed., *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (Hanover and London, 1988), p. 171.

6. This myth unites the ten *sefirot blima* of the *Sefer Yetsira* with the ten talmudic and midrashic sayings through which the world was created, as well as with other traditions found in Gnostic literature. See M. Idel, "The *Sefirot* Above the *Sefirot*" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 239280; M. Idel, *KabbalaNew Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), pp. 112122. For the essence of the *sefirot* in the *Sefer Yetsira*, see Y. Liebes, *The Sin of Elisha: The Four Who Entered Paradise and the Nature of Talmudic Mysticism* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1990 [first mimeo edition, 1986]), p. 117; Y. Liebes, "R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol's Use of the *Sefer Yetsira* and a Commentary on the Poem 'I Love Thee'" [Hebrew], in J. Dan, ed., *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe* (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 6, 34, Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 9297. On the ten sayings and their meaning see Liebes, "Christian Influences." pp. 5657 and n. 50, and "The Messiah of the Zohar." The ten

sayings were apparently equated with the ten fingers of God; see Genesis Rabba 4:4, which equates one of the sayings with "the finger of the Holy One, blessed be He." The *midrash* on the ten plagues that befell Egypt, in the Passover Haggada, assumes that God has ten fingers; in the *Sefer Yetsira* 1,3, the ten *sefirot blima* are compared to "the ten fingers." It is worth pointing out that in the early Kabbala, the system of the ten *sefirot* and the system of the thirteen attributes of mercy competed for precedence. See J. Dan, *The Early Kabbalistic Circles* [Hebrew], compiled from his lectures by Y. Agassi, (mimeo, Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 120. Two comments are in place here: (a) The *Idrot* in the Zohar also reflect this complex relation between the ten and the thirteen; (b) some count only ten in the verses in Exodus 34:67, usually considered as the basis for the thirteen attributes of mercy (The Lord, the Lord ...; see Rosh Hashana 17b). Thus, e.g., in the *Shoher Tov* [Midrash on Psalms] 97, 8, this claim appears in the name of "our rabbis." For the same claim in the Samaritan tradition see Zeev ben Hayyim, ed., *Tibat Marqe* (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 349, and also: "it is by ten that we know Israel, creation, redemption, mercy of the Great Name" (p. 307).

7. On the circles that authored the Zohar, see Y. Liebes, "How the Zohar Was Written" [Hebrew], in J. Dan, ed., *The Age of the Zohar* (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 8, Jerusalem, 1989).

8. On this point, see Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar."

9. Ibid.

10. See G. S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (Aylesbury, England, 1974); P. Veyne, *Did Greeks Believe in Their Myths?* (Chicago, 1988).

11. See Liebes, *The Sin of Elisha*, pp. 142146.

12. See H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).

13. See Y. Liebes, "Sabbetai Zevi's Attitude Towards His Own Conversion" [Hebrew], *Sefunot* (New Series) 2 (1983): 267307; Y. Liebes, "The Religious Faith of Sabbetai Zevi," and "Sabbatean Messianism," both in this volume.

14. See Y. Liebes, "Miguel Abraham Cardozo Author of the *Raza di-Meheimanuta* Attributed to Sabbetai Zevi and the Error in Attributing the *Iggeret Magen Avraham* to Cardozo" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 55 (1980): 603616 and the addendum in *Kiryat Sefer* 56 (1981): 373374. Also Y. Liebes, "The Ideological Basis of the Hayyun Controversy" [Hebrew], *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C, 1982, pp. 129134.

15. I. R. Molho and A. Amarillo, "Autobiographical Letters of Abraham Cardozo" [Hebrew], in *S. Z. Shazar Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 195960), [*Sefunot* 34], p. 238. It is worth noting that Cardozo formulated his beliefs here in monistic terms, blurring the dualistic element emphasized in many

of his other writings. Cardozo also used monistic formulations elsewhere; see Liebes, "Miguel Cardozo," pp. 609-610, though the one God there is called *Malka Kaddisha* and not *Ilat Kol ha-Illot*.

16. Yosef Hayyim, *Od Yosef Hai* (Jerusalem, 1950), 30c.

17. This last passage is a modified version of a declaration intended by Jews to cancel out any heretic statement they may have made at times of religious persecutions. See Y. Liebes, "Mysticism and Reality: Towards a Portrait of the Martyr and Kabbalist R. Samson Ostropoler," in I. Twersky and B. Septimus, eds., *Jewish Thought in the seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), pp. 246-248. See J. Katz's comment, *Tarbitz* 52 (1983): 661, and my response, on p. 663.

18. Most kabbalistic practices developed during the sixteenth century; however, it seems some of them originate in early Kabbala, like *Tikkun Leil Shavu'ot* (the practice of holding a study vigil on the eve of the Shavout festival). See Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar."

19. See G. Scholem, "A New Document Toward the History of Early Kabbala" [Hebrew], *Sefer Bialik* (Tel-Aviv, 1944), pp. 141-162.

20. See M. Idel, "We Have No Tradition on This," in I. Twersky, ed., *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1983), pp. 51-73.

21. E. E. Urbach, "The Traditions about Merkabah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period" [Hebrew], in E. E. Urbach, *The World of the Sages: Collected Studies* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 505-508. For a critique of this article and its approach see Liebes, *The Sin of Elisha*, pp. 910, 122-125. On the other hand, M. Idel's view on this rabbinical passage resembles mine see note 37.

22. On the attributes, see also E. E. Urbach, *The Sages Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 448-461.

23. There is indeed a kabbalistic dispute on this question, known in Kabbala as *atsmut ve-keleim* [essence and vessels]. Some kabbalists found a personal god in the *sefirot*, though this is not the typical kabbalistic approach. A prominent example of such a personal approach may be found in the passage *Petah Eliyyahu* in the introduction to the *Tikkunei Zohar*.

24. See Todros Aboulafia, *Otsar ha-Kavod* (Warsaw, 1889), ad. loc. 4:34, where the name Akatriel is indeed derived from the name of the first *sefira*, *keter*; this is probably the correct etymology. However, as we mentioned, Akatriel points to the lowest *sefira*, called *malkhut*, because of the link between *malkhut*, which is also referred to as *atara* [crown] and the highest *sefira*, called *keter*, [crown]. See note 107.

25. Jeremiah 32:18: "O, great and mighty God."

26. In the Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 7:4 (10c), Daniel's question appears as: "His sons endure the yoke, where is His might?"

27. Daniel 9:4: "O Lord the great and dreadful God."

28. In *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, Version A, Ch. 23: "Who is that is most mighty? One who subdues his evil impulse"; similarly, in the talmudic passage before us: "The mightiest heroism" (though in many manuscripts only "heroism"). The reference in *Avot* may already be to God. In the *Seder Eliyahu Rabba*, Ish Shalom ed. (Vilna, 1902), Ch. 1, there is a reference to God as "rich and happy with His lot." Compare: "Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot" in *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*.

29. Jerusalem Talmudas earlier, note 26: "Said R. Isaac b. Elazar [apparently the son of the rabbi who made the parallel statement in the Babylonian Talmud]: the prophets know that God is true and they do not flatter him."

30. Apparently according to Nehemiah 9:32.

31. Berakhot 33b.

32. See Y. Kappah, ed., *The Book of Daniel: Commentary by Saadia b. Yosef* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 166167 (on Daniel 9:4); see editor's note 8.

33. Compare Avot 2:5: "In a place where there are no men, strive thou to be a man."

34. Megilla 15a: "R. Eleazar b. Hanina also said: Let not the blessing of an ordinary man be lightly esteemed in thine eyes, for two men great in their generation received from ordinary men blessings which were fulfilled in them. They were, David and Daniel. ... Let not the curse of an ordinary man be lightly esteemed in thine eyes, because Avimelekh cursed Sarah...and this was fulfilled in her seed."

35. Zohar I:135a, *Idra Rabba*. Even from the "emendation of the supreme countenances," which is the central myth of the Idras, the Zohar learns political conduct. According to this myth, *arikh anpin*, the superior countenance, was set first, and *ze'ir anpin*, the small countenance, was set afterward: "And from here we learn: every head of state who [acts] improperly, his people are improper and if he is proper, all are proper."

36. On this verse see note 40.

37. *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, Mandelbaum ed., Section 25, pp. 379380. M. Idel (see note 6) discussed this passage and its parallel versions, including the Akatriel issue, pp. 156166. Idel explained the theological and thus obviously mythical character of this passage and also concluded that its approach is not far from the kabbalistic one, although he placed less emphasis on the personal and flexible character of this myth.

38. This is inferred from the Hebrew *appayim* (two faces), according to the Jerusalem Talmud, Ta'anit 2:1 (65b): "R. Samuel b. Nahman said in the name of R. Johathan: It is not written *erekh af* but *erekh appayim*: God is patient with the righteous and He is patient with the wicked."

39. Zohar II:193a. See Y. Liebes, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1977; offset, 1984), p. 199.

40. Leviticus Rabba 23:12: "'Of the Rock that begot thee thou art unmindful [*teshi*]' (Deuteronomy, 32:18), as meaning you have weakened [*hitashta*] the strength of the Creator."

41. See note 6.

42. See Liebes, "Jonah as the Messiah ben Joseph," pp. 304311.

43. See E. E. Urbach "Asceticism and Suffering in Talmudic and Midrashic Sources" [Hebrew], in Urbach, *The World of the Sages*, pp. 437458; Urbach, *The Sages*, pp. 420448; Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Theology of Ancient Judaism* [Hebrew] (London and New York, 1962), pp. 93113.

44. There is an interesting parallel in Islam, to which I would like to draw attention. The statement "There is no God but Allah and Muhamad is his prophet" is an article of faith recited daily by Muslims, equivalent to the recital of the *Shema* in Judaism. However, it is also the statement made by martyrs, just as the *Shema* has been since Rabbi Akiva's death. In Arabic, this is related to a linguistic double meaning: This statement is called the *shahada*, that is, a testimony, implying a testimony of faith, but a martyr's death is also called *shahada*, namely, the death of a *shahid*, who is not only a witness but one who dies sanctifying God's name. Thus did the Greek word *martyr*, meaning witness, assume its modern meaning in Christianity, implying one whose death attests to his or her faith. See *First Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. *Shahada*. Similarly, the *Shema* is perceived as a testimony in several sources in rabbinical literature see Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshuta*, Shabbat, p. 263. This may be related to the tradition stating that the letter *ayin*, at the end of the word *shema*, and the letter *dalet*, at the end of the word *ehad* [One], which appear in the *Shema Israel* verse, should be capitalized because, when combined, they form the word *ed* [witness]. I found this tradition first mentioned in the commentary of the *Baal ha-Turim* to Deuteronomy 6:4 (the verse of the *Shema*): "*Ayin* and *dalet* capitalized make *ed* as it says (Isaiah 43:10): 'You are my witness,' and the Holy One, blessed be He, is also a witness to Israel, as is written (Malachi 3:5): 'And I will be a swift witness'." A similar idea is mentioned several times in the Zohar, such as II:160b; however, in the Zohar it is always God who testifies for man. See also Moses de Leon, *Shekel ha-Kodesh* (London, 1911), pp. 100101. It must be pointed out, however, that the Muslim *shahid* is different from either the Christian or the Jewish martyr, since he is killed fighting a holy war [*jihad*] against the infidels rather than as a passive victim.



45. Reuven Margaliot, ed., *Sefer Bahir* (Jerusalem, 1951), 87a, n. 194. With corrections from Munich MSS 209, it is catalogued as number 1625 in the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in the National Library in Jerusalem.
46. See, e.g., E. Gottlieb, "The Concluding Portion of R. Joseph Gikatila's She'arei Zedek" [Hebrew], in E. Gottlieb, *Studies in Kabbala Literature* (Tel Aviv, 1976), pp. 135-138. There are many, though less detailed, versions of this portion in his other writings, in which Gikatila thoroughly discusses Moses' understanding; he also deals with the attributes as opposed to God's arbitrary essence. Indeed, God's essence here is part of the sefirotic system, as the highest *sefira*, called *keter*.
47. See Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar."
48. See M. Idel, "The Evil Thought in the Deity" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 49 (1980): 356-364. I deal with this issue in the appendix to my paper "How the Zohar Was Written."
49. This is Euhemerus' account of how myths are created, named *euhemerism* after him. It is also cited by Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II:24. It is partly true regarding the pagan myths, more so regarding Christianity (the deification of Jesus) and can even be said to have a place in Judaism, though to a lesser extent. Myths of this sort were built around Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, and perhaps also around "the mother of the seven sons"; see *The Fourth Book of Maccabees*, as I showed in "How the Zohar Was Written," n. 297.
50. Some tend to ascribe the Exile and all the sufferings afflicting Israel to the sin of Joseph's sale by his brothers; there is an interesting link between this matter, the Christian notion of original sin, and the sin of Jesus' crucifixion. I intend to deal with these issues in a study on the author of *Livnat ha-Sapir*, who is particularly concerned with this matter.
51. See *Sha'ar ha-Kavvanot* (Jerusalem, 1902) on *Nefilat Appaim*, 5:48c. Compare to the reading of the *Shema*, *ibid.*, pp. 2324 ff..
52. See J. Angelet, *Livnat ha-Sapir* (Jerusalem, 1913), 4b. In H. N. Bialik's poem "*Hetsits va-Met*," this gate is called *Shaar ha-Blima* [the gate of nothingness].
53. M. Cordovero, *Shi'ur Koma* (Warsaw, 1883; offset, Jerusalem, 1966), 65d. Indeed, I could not find an earlier source that explains Edom as derived from *demama* [silence], as I could not find a source for the saying on the gate of silence that appears in *Livnat ha-Sapir*—see the previous note—and we cannot be sure that these two motifs were created together.
54. *Daat Edom* is conversion to Christianity and *Masa Duma* [the burden of Duma] refers to the curtain of silence that is to surround this issue and all its implications; see G. Scholem, "Redemption Through Sin," in G.

Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (New York, 1971), p. 132. Scholem does not cite references for this term. The verse from Isaiah 21:11, clearly related to Edom, serves as background: "The burden of Duma, One calls to me out of Se'ir." The Zohar (III:22a) expounds it as derived from the root *dom*, silence: "but the exile of Edom is 'a burden of silence' for its term has not been disclosed." The Zohar refers to the fact that no term was set for the present exile, unlike previous ones whose duration was known, but Frank could easily have connected it to the mystery of conversion to Christianity. This is a natural source for Frank, who loved the Zohar and rejected most kabbalistic literature. However, it is possible that the passage by Cordovero mentioned earlier added kabbalistic nuances to this mystery; moreover, *Edom* is a symbol of God's highest countenance in the circles associated with the Sabbatean book *Vaavo ha-Yom el ha-Ayin* [I Came Today to the Spring], which was admired by Frank's disciples. See M. A. Perlmutter, *Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschuetz and His Attitude Towards Sabbateanism* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, 1947), pp. 9091.

55. More exactly, in the year 5331 (1571), when R. Hayyim Vital was twenty-nine, his soul became "pregnant" with R. Akiba's soul. See Hayyim Vital, *Sefer ha-Hezionot*, Aeskoly ed. (Jerusalem, 1954), p. 135. I believe that this is a crucial detail in the history of Lurianic Kabbala.

56. See note 48. At times, the Kabbala expounds *malkhei Edom* [the kings of Edom] as related to *nimlakh be-da'ato* [consider], given their common Hebrew root (*m-l-kh*). The notion of merging the attributes, found in this midrashic passage, influenced the structure of the kabbalistic *sefirot*. Kabbalists claimed that the *sefira* of *itiferet* [beauty], also called *rahamim* [compassion], is a combination of *hesed* [grace] and *din* [judgment]. However, this notion seems to have been preceded by another, closer to this midrashic passage, claiming that in fact *hesed* combines *din* and *rahamim*. See M. Idel, "Notes on Medieval Jewish-Christian Polemics" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 3 (1984): 690695, and the addendum, *ibid.*, 4 (1985): 219222.

57. See note 90.

58. Jerusalem Talmud, Taanit 2:1 (65b). See also Genesis Rabba 53:4.

59. A pitchfork [*atar*] is related to the prayers of the righteous through the verse in Genesis 25:21: "And Isaac prayed [*va-yeater*] to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord granted his prayer and Rebekah his wife conceived."

60. These verses were interpreted as if meant for human judges.

61. *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* (Mantua, 1558; offset, Jerusalem 1963), 7ab. According to the exegeses printed on the page, the phrase *the depth of these questions* hints to the mystery of reincarnation.

62. See Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Life and Manners of Jewish Palestine in the IIIV Centuries C.E.* (New York, 1942), pp. 185-191.

63. Megilla 15b.

64. "Otiyyot de-Rabbi Akiva," version B, in Abraham Wertheimer, ed., *Batei Midrashot*, Vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1955), p. 396.

65. *He* refers to the angel (masculine in Hebrew) whereas *she* refers to the attribute (feminine). The comment of the *Masoret ha-Shas*: "It should say 'she said'," provides further support for this version. The parallel version mentioned earlier, in Megilla 15b, also has "he said."

66. See Urbach, *The Sages*, p. 459. See also Ch. 3 in the second edition of my book, *The Sin of Elisha*.

67. *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, Version A, Ch. 37.

68. Thus in the Munich MSS, and in the printed version: circumcision. According to this formula, the account does not tally. The unity of the body and the circumcised member is explicitly stated in the parallel versions in *Sefer Bahir* 82, 168.

69. *Ibid.*, 172.

70. Thus in the Munich MSS, whereas in the printed version "one" was added.

71. Thus in the Munich MSS, and in the printed version: emissaries.

72. See note 66.

73. As shown by M. Idel, "The Problem of the Sources in the *Bahir*" [Hebrew], in *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe*, p. 58. See also his *Kabbala*, p. 124.

74. See the article by M. Idel, *ibid.*, pp. 55-72 and his book, *ibid.*, pp. 122-128. See M. Idel, "The World of Angels in Human Form" [Hebrew], in Dan and Hacker, *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy and Ethical Literature presented to Isaiah Tishby*, pp. 166. See G. G. Stroumsa, "Forms of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983): 269-288. On God's attributes as "shapes," see M. Fishbane, "Some Forms of Divine Appearance in Ancient Jewish Thought," in J. Neusner, E. Frerichs, and N. M. Sarna, eds., *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox* (Atlanta, 1989), pp. 261-270.

75. On chairs, see note 90.

76. See Liebes, *The Sin of Elisha*, pp. 344-1, 98-105; p. 38, n. 1, contains references to the extensive literature on this topic.

77. See p. 31.

78. *Shoher Tov* [Midrash on Psalms] 9, 2 and parallel versions.

79. See p. 39. Many views on God's attributes have been quoted in R. Johanan's name; some of these appear in Section II and some will be quoted later.

80. Kabbalists saw this parallel as identifying between "the Kingdom of Heaven" and *Keneset Israel*. See, e.g., *Sefer Otsar ha-Kavod*. However, as I explain, this is not the literal reading.

81. See p. 12.

82. I disagree with the claim of *Otsar ha-Kavod* that the term *batei brai* [outwardly] is a copyist's mistake.

83. *Zauba'a* is storm in Arabic.

84. See Zohar 19b, *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*: "In the ten crowns of the King there are two tears of the Holy One, blessed be He, that is, two attributes of justice, which come from both these tears. ... And when the Holy One remembers His children, He drops them into the great Sea, which is the Sea of Wisdom, in order to sweeten them." See also Zohar III:132a, *Idra Rabba*. The Zohar also includes beautiful and realistic descriptions that develop the early myth while preserving its integrity, such as Zohar II:9a, *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* or II:196a. On the other hand, in Luria's writings, as usual in his Kabbala, the myth becomes extremely complex and elaborate. See *Sha'ar Ma'amarei Rashbi* (Jerusalem, 1959), 8a.

85. The same story is quoted a few lines earlier in R. Eliezer's name, but in a different version: "As is written (Jeremiah 25:30) 'The Lord shall roar from on high, and utter His voice from His holy habitation; He shall mightily roar because of His habitation!.' The continuation of this verse "He shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth," was quoted earlier in the description of the *zeva'ot*.

86. He apparently expounded *panim* [face] as the similar sounding *pamalia* [family or retinue].

87. Meir ben Todros ha-Levi Aboulafia, *Yad Ramah on Sanhedrin* (Warsaw, 1895), 85b. Compare to a similar picture in Berakhot 29b: "Even at the time when Thou art filled with wrath [*ebrah*] against them, like a pregnant [*ubarah*] woman, may all their need not be overlooked by Thee."

88. On this myth in Sabbateanism see Y. Liebes, "New Writings in Sabbatean Kabbala from the Circle of Rabbi Johathan Eybeschutz" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 5 (1986): 309-312. I point out the kabbalistic and midrashic sources of this myth and also refer to the literature (see note 44.) Nevertheless, this topic requires further research, and

particularly the Lurianic stage. Sabbateans also related this issue to the breach in the closed shape of the final Hebrew letter *mem* see *ibid.*, pp. 291-292. The first source on this question is the talmudic passage quoted at the opening of Section IV, where it is claimed that the letter was closed when king Hezekiah was not appointed Messiah.

89. Aaron Yellinek, ed., *Midrash va-Yosha'* (Leipzig, 1853; offset, Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 3940.

90. See, e.g., *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, 23, 3. In Sanhedrin 38b, the chairs from the verse in Daniel 7:9: "Thrones were placed, and an ancient of days did sit" are identified as "one for justice and one for mercy," although this exegesis was heatedly contested.

91. Another version reads: "Blasted be the spirit." Maimonides, see the appendix to this essay, writes "the minds."

92. It is called "the yeast in the dough" in a parallel version in Berakhot 17a: "And what prevents us? The yeast in the dough and the subjection to the foreign powers."

93. See the appendix to this essay.

94. See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkaba Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1960), pp. 444-9.

95. See Hagigah 15a and Liebes, *The Sin of Elisha*, pp. 40-45.

96. See M. Idel, "The Land of Israel in Medieval Kabbalah," in L. A. Hoffman, ed., *The Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1986), pp. 170-187. See also Idel, "The Problem of the Sources in the *Bahir*," pp. 66-67.

97. Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 1:8 (3c), and parallel versions.

98. See p. 34.

99. See G. Scholem, "Shekhina: The Feminine Element in Divinity" in his *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: 1991). On this matter, Scholem seems to have drawn too sharp a distinction between kabbalistic literature and that preceding it. Moshe Idel also expressed this view in a personal communication. See also M. Idel's book, *Kabbala*, pp. 128-136. An attempt to describe the myth of the *Shekhina* as developing in a continuous sequence from the Bible to the Kabbala appears in R. Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York, 1978). On the other hand, Abelson's classic book is concerned precisely with the abstract idea and not with the myth, which he considers as a "personification." See J. Abelson, *Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature* (London, 1912). In various articles, Eliot Wolfson has expressed views similar to mine on the *Shekhina* and on the antiquity of Jewish myths. I could not make sufficient use of them in the present essay.

100. See Zohar I:155a, and many parallel versions.

101. See *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, 92a; Zohar I:20a.

102. Another example can be found in *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, end of ch. 34, and the gist of this notion appears already in the Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 5:2 (9b); for the earth to be able to deliver those buried in it when the time comes to resurrect the dead, God must first "heal" the earth. The Zohar deals extensively with this matter in I:181b182a, where the earth is also the *Shekhina*; during redemption, because of the abundance bestowed on it, the *Shekhina* will grant soul to the dead (at times it seems that the bodies come out from the lower earth and the *Shekhina* is the source of the souls, although at times it seems that the lower earth is an aspect of the *Shekhina*). The passage is a kabbalistic development of a source from the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, Zohar I:124a126b. The exegesis focuses on the story of Abraham's slave (equated in both sources with the angel Metatron) who was sent to find a wife that is, to revive the body for Abraham's son that is, for the soul. Unlike the version of the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* in the *Zohar* the slave is also the *Shekhina*, and all the rest of the kabbalistic symbolism is interpreted accordingly.

103. See Idel, "The Land of Israel in Medieval Kabbala."

104. Thus in the early Kabbala and in the Zohar, e.g., I:181b. Indeed, in the *Tikkunei Zohar*, Metatron is a lower entity and acts as the servant of the *Shekhina*.

105. *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, 110ab.

106. See Liebes, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon*, p. 33, n. 26, and other references there.

107. See M. Idel, "On the Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought" [Hebrew] in M. Hallamish and A. Ravitsky, eds., *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought*, (Jerusalem, 1991); also H. Pedayah, "'Flaw' and 'Correction' in the Concept of the Godhead in the Teachings of Rabbi Isaac the Blind" [Hebrew], in Dan, *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 229-233. Both scholars point to the continuity between the midrashic and the kabbalistic idea and expound in this spirit the passage in Ta'anit 5a: "Said R. Johanan: The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'I will not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until I can enter the earthly Jerusalem.'" Relying on the kabbalistic tradition and on early sources, Idel rejected Urbach's claim that heavenly Jerusalem was of limited importance in rabbinical literature. See E. E. Urbach, "Earthly Jerusalem and Heavenly Jerusalem," in Urbach, *The World of the Sages*, pp. 376-391. I would like to add my own to Idel's remarks as well as comment on Urbach's conclusions. Urbach wrote at the opening of his article (p. 376): "R. Johanan's comments...ascribe only minor importance to heavenly Jerusalem. As long as the Holy One, blessed be He, does not enter earthly Jerusalem, the destroyed city, he does not enter heavenly Jerusalem either;

therefore, the building of earthly Jerusalem takes precedence." The conclusion of the whole article, as it appears in the last sentence, is based on this presumption (p. 391): "For the Rabbis, heavenly Jerusalem is nothing but the outcome of the growth and the building of earthly Jerusalem..." I believe that R. Johanan's statement is an important and paradoxical innovation; because of His love for the people and his empathy with their grief, God was willing to refrain from entering His beloved city. (The expression *avo' bi-Yerushalaim* [I will enter Jerusalem] may hint to sexual connotations in this context, as in te parallel versions in Gnostic literature and in the exegeses of the early Kabbalists, who replace *avo* [enter] with *ezdavveg* [mate], as shown by Moshe Idel.) *Tanhuma*, a late midrash, does indicate the precedence of earthly Jerusalem: "Because of His great love for earthly Jerusalem, He made another heavenly one" (Exodus 38.) Moreover, from Origen's letters and from other sources, we learn that the idea of the *Shekhina* also called *Wisdom*, *Earth*, and *Jerusalem* was widespread amongst Jews. See "The Kabbalistic Myth as Told by Orpheus," in this volume, p. 176, n. 86.

108. Asi Farber-Ginat, "The Concept of the Merkaba in Thirteenth Century Jewish Esotericism: "Sod Ha-Egoz" and Its Development" [Hebrew], Ph. D. Dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1987, pp. 231244. See also Idel, *Kabbala*, pp. 191197. See another view in Dan, *The Early Kabbalistic Circles*, pp. 159165.

109. See, e.g., *Nahmanides' Commentary on the Torah*, Genesis 38:29; *Zohar* I:180b181a; see the references quoted in Mikhal Oron, ed., *Sha'ar ha-Razim* by R. Todros Aboulafia (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 49, n. 19.

110. Sukka 29a: "Our Rabbis taught: When the sun is in eclipse, it is a bad omen for idolaters; when the moon is in eclipse, it is a bad omen for Israel, since Israel reckons by the moon and idolaters by the sun."

111. See, e.g., *Zohar* III:79b. *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, 106a109a. See also M. Cordovero, *Pardes Rimonim*, Section 18, called "The Waning of the Moon" and also *Ets Hayyim* in Lurianic Kabbala, Section 36, also called by the same name. See also references quoted in note 109.

112. See, e.g., Megilla 15b.

113. See, e.g., *Zohar* III:181b.

114. According to Isaiah 46:3: "Hearken to me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who are borne by me from birth, who are carried from the womb."

115. In another version, the Gentiles crush them *monim lahem* and oppress them; however, the other meaning of *monim* is reckon, in which case it would be *monim lahreckon* by her, rather than *monim lahem*. I believe the version *monim lah* is the correct one.

116. See, e.g., *Ra'aya Meheimana*, Zohar II:187b188a. Rabbi Hayyim Vital, *Ma'amar Pesi'otav shel Avraham Avinu* (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 5 (bound with other writings in the anthology *Ketavim Hadashim me-Rabbenu Hayyim Vital* [Jerusalem, 1988]).

117. See Berakhot 63ab; Ketubot 111a; and others. See *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, Ch. 8; Exodus Rabba, Ch. 15.

118. Thus in several places in Moshe Idel's studies, and in Farber, "The Concept of the Merkaba." On the similarities and differences between these two layers see J. Dan, "A Re-Evaluation of the 'Ashkenazi Kabbala,'" in *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe*, pp. 129135.

119. See note 110.

120. Compare Exodus Rabba, 15:6: "Should you enquire why Esther is compared to the moon, the answer is that just as the moon renews itself every thirty days, so did Esther..."

121. *Sefer Hasidim* (Bologna, 1538), 119b, n. 1154. (In the Mossad ha-Rav Kook edition [Jerusalem, 1973], pp. 571572). Indeed, this passage is part of the section originally in the *Sefer Hokhmat ha-Nefesh* by R. Elazar from Worms (see, e.g., in the introduction by I. Marcus, *Sefer Hasidim*, facsimile edition of the MSS [Jerusalem, 1985], p. 10) but I did not find this passage in either the printed or the MSS editions of the *Sefer Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*. Even if the source of this passage is in the writings of R. Elazar, it still belongs to the literature of the German pietist movement.

122. See Rashi and Tosefot, Megilla 22b; Hagiga 18a; Rosh Hashana 23a. See also *Tur and Shulkhan Arukh, Orakh Hayyim*, 417.

123. Quoted in the *Darkhei Moshe*, on the *Tur* (ibid.).

124. See Zohar III:79ab.

125. See, e.g., Zohar III:187b: "And it seemed thus to Jacob but only as a symbol, since it is written (Genesis 29:9): 'And Rachel came,' and this is the shape of another Rachel, as is written: 'A voice was heard in Ramah...Rachel weeps for her children'." See also Liebes, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon*, pp. 182183.

126. Note 99 and ff.

127. Baba Batra 99a; Yoma 59ab. On this question, its significance, the parallel versions and its influence on Kabbala, see Idel, *Kabbala*, p. 165. See Liebes, "New Writings in Sabbatean Kabbalah."

128. See note 106.

129. See more in the next Section.

130. See p. 23.



131. See *Sefer Bahir*, 102, 113, 119. See Joseph Gikatila, *She'arei Ora* (Warsaw, 1883; offset, Jerusalem, 1960), 19a20a.
132. See Zohar I:182a.
133. See Urbach, *The Sages*, pp. 6769.
134. See Gikatila, *She'arei Ora*, 48a52a.
135. See *Otsar ha-Kavod* on Rosh Hashana 31a; *She'arei Ora* (ibid.), 8a9a. See also Idel, *Kabbala*, pp. 166170.
136. See B. Zak "The Exile of Israel and the Exile of the *shekhina* in *Or Yakar* of Rabbi Moses Cordovero," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 1 (1982): 157178.
137. See *Sha'ar Ha-Kavvanot* (Jerusalem, 1902), 79a80c (on Pesah, *drush a*). On these ideas and their development in Sabbateanism, see Liebes, "New Writings in Sabbatean Kabbala," pp. 191294.
138. In his book against the Galileans, Julian admits that biblical myths may possess deep significance when taken beyond their literal meaning, but neither Jews nor Christians tend to approach myths in this fashion.
139. See G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1961), pp. 78.
140. See p. 51.
141. See Genesis Rabba 19:4. See also Ariela Dim, *Zot ha-Pa'am: Eser Nashim mi-Tokh ha-Tanakh* (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 1820. After her death, Y. Liebes edited the book and added an introduction.
142. See Liebes, *The Sin of Elisha*, pp. 148158.
143. See p. 21.
144. See Y. Kaufmann, *The History of Israelite Religion* [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv, 1960), Vol. I, p. 666; Vol. III, pp. 509510: "Human sacrifice in Israel...reflects the self-bewilderment of the Israelite religion."
145. See Exodus 13:2; 1213.
146. See Tur Sinai, *Ha-Lashon veva-Sefer* (Jerusalem, 1952), pp. 122181.
147. Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; 32:35.
148. Jeremiah 7:2123. Similar views are shared by other prophets, as is well known.
149. Quoted in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, I:10, 33; see also I:10, 44; IV:16, 11.

150. Leviticus 27:39; Judges 11:3040.

151. See Kings II 3:2627.

152. Maimonides' views, as formulated in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Tora* 5, in *Sefer ha-Mitzvot, Mitzvot Ase* 9, in the *Epistle on Martyrdom* and in the *Epistle to Yemen*, provide a good illustration of this ambivalence. This question is much beyond the scope of this work and a hint will sufficient in this context. Even though he compared the sufferings of forced conversion to an offering on the altar, Maimonides commanded us not to spare loss of wealth or even exile to avoid martyrdom and does not mention dying for "the sanctification of the Name." See the end of the first chapter in the *Epistle to Yemen*.

153. See Zohar I:66b; I:245a. This matter remains mysterious here, but is clarified in the Hebrew essay by R. Moshe de Leon, *Sod Eser Sefirot Blima*, G. Scholem ed., in *Kovetz Al-Yad* 8 (1976): 381. The whole matter, including the pertinent sources, is discussed extensively in Y. Liebes, "'Tsaddik Yesod Olam': A Sabbatean Myth" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 1 (1978): 107108.

154. See, e.g., Exodus 15:11; Judges 11:24; Samuel I 26:19.

155. According to the prophet Malachi, in his time the whole world worshipped God Malachi 1:11. Compare Cyrus' statement in Ezra 1:2:. Deutero-Isaiah indeed suggests a slightly different approach Isaiah 45:4.

156. See Y. Liebes, "*Ha-tikkun ha-kelali* of R. Nahman of Bratslav and Its Sabbatean Links," in this volume, p. 135, and the addendum in *Zion* 46 (1981): p. 354.

157. Phylacteries, from the Greek *philacterion*, talisman for keeping. Compare Genesis 4:15.

158. See Exodus 12: 2223.

159. Zohar III:121a. See Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar," and n. 311.

160. See I. Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* [Hebrew], Vol. I (Jerusalem, 1957), pp. 285295. Tishby spoke of the "dualistic trend" and of the "limits of duality." On the other hand, Dorit Cohen Eloro, in a lecture at the Conference on the Study of the Zohar, at the Hebrew University in 1988, claimed that we must speak of the "monistic trend" and of the "limits of unity." See also I. Tishby, *The Doctrine of Evil and the Kelippah in Lurianic Kabbalism* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1963). Tishby also favored dualism in this work, but points out that it is limited by many restrictions and by monistic theories.

161. See *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 46, which refers to the scapegoat as a "bribe" to Satan, and thus often in the Zohar, such as I:114b.

162. See Leviticus 9, and Nahmanides commentary on Leviticus 9:7.

163. See Zohar I:64b65a.

164. Compare the notion of divine catharsis in connection with the death of "the Ten Martyrs," see notes 48 and 49.

165. See Zohar II:32b35b. See Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar."

166. My book *The Sin of Elisha* is grounded on this approach, which I show to be the source of talmudic mysticism and the cause of its limitations. This approach is also helpful in explaining the sins of Elisha ben Avuya and others who entered the *pardes*, as opposed to Rabbi Akiba, the only one capable of attaining the right mixture of love and fear. On this duality in the Zohar and in the *Sefer Bahir*, see Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar." I believe this was also the background to the Hayyun controversy, which is connected to the struggle against Sabbateanism, on which see Liebes, "The Ideological Basis of the Hayyun Controversy."

167. This is a translation of the Arabic original. The authograph, which most scholars confirm as authentic, appears in the facsimile edition of Moshe Sasson, *Commentary to the Mishnah by Moshe ben Maimon* (Copenhagen, 1961), part II, p. 304. This edition was printed with a new Hebrew translation by J. Kafeh, *The Mishna with a Commentary by R. Moshe ben Maimon* [original and translation], *Seder Nezikin* (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 216.

168. Amos Goldreich, with whom I consulted, suggested this translation.

169. The translator is apparently Shelomo Ibn Ya'akov. See M. Goshen Gottstein, "The Thirteen Principles of Maimonides as Translated by Alharizi" [Hebrew], in *Likutei Tarbiz V: Studies in Maimonides* (Jerusalem, 1985), p. 309. Alharizi's translation is more accurate: "And we must believe in the Messiah, exalt him and love him," *ibid.*, p. 319. The third translation, which appears at the opening of Itzhak Abrabanel's *Rosh Amana* seems bizarre: "And we must remember redemption [*ge'ula*, which was apparently mistaken for *ha-gedula* greatness] and the love of God." Kafeh translated literally and thus did not decide on this issue: "And to believe in greatness and love."

170. Namely, heresy against the Torah and the Prophets, but in the article in the Commentary on Sanhedrin, he is considered guilty of heresy against God.

171. Aviezer Ravitzky pointed this out to me.

172. Ze'ev Harvey brought this to my attention.

173. See Isaac Shailat, ed., *Letters and Essays of Moses Maimonides* [Hebrew], Vol. I (Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 99100.

174. Kappah edition, pp. 207208.

175. It has often been indicated that Maimonides's description of messianic times was influenced by Aristotle's epistle to Alexander the Great. This epistle is preserved in an Arabic translation and, before Maimonides,

R. Moses Ibn Ezra had already commented on its pertinence to messianic times; see S. M. Stern, *Aristotle on the World State* (Columbia, S.C., 1970). From Ibn Ezra's comments, it appears that naturalistic descriptions of messianic times based on this Aristotelian epistle had been known before him. This seems to be evident from the fact that Ibn Ezra included the epistle in the wrong place, immediately after his controversy with those who take miraculous description of messianic times out of context. It appears then, that Ibn Ezra copied the epistle from his opponent, without realizing that it was antithetical to his own intentions. See A. S. Halkin, ed., *Moshe ben Ya'akov ibn Ezra: Kitab al-Muhadara wal-Mudhakara* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 268271.

176. *Politeia* 8, 546a. This has already been noted by J. Kraemer and Warren Harvey.

177. Following my Hebrew translation (Y.L.) of Maimonides's Commentary on the Mishna.

178. See Aviezer Ravitzky, "'In Man's Measure': Messianic Times for Maimonides" [Hebrew], in Zvi Baras, ed., *Messianism and Eschatology* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 191220.

