

Shi'ur Komah:

THE MYSTICAL

SHAPE OF

THE GODHEAD

I

The revolution wrought by biblical monotheism in the history of religion is tied to the imageless worship of God. The prohibition "Thou shalt make unto thee no graven image nor any kind of shape" stands at the beginning of a new revelation. It is associated with worship that abhors images and seeks to evoke the Holy in other ways. However, a question arises here whose answer is not at all self-evident: is this God, who may not be worshiped in the image "of anything that is in heaven or on the earth," Himself without image or form? This question forces itself upon the reader of the Hebrew Bible, as it does upon any human discourse concerning God. Any discussion of God must necessarily use the imagery of the created world, because we have no other. Anthropomorphism—the application of human language to God—is as intrinsic to the living spirit of religion as is the feeling that there exists a Divine that far transcends such discourse. The human mind cannot escape this tension. In-

deed, there is nothing more foolish than attacking and denigrating anthropomorphism—and yet, nothing forces itself more readily upon the sober and reflective consciousness of most theologians. The dialectics are unavoidable: it pertains, not only to the statements that corporealize God Himself, but also (as is often overlooked) to any discussion of the so-called "word of God" Benno Jacob, an important commentator on the Jewish Bible, formulated the problem aptly: " 'God spoke' is no less an anthropomorphism than 'God's hand.'"¹

Of course, the anthropomorphic form of expression, freely used in the imagery of the Torah and the prophets, in hymns and in prayers, may not go beyond the realm of speech; it must not make the leap from the liturgical to the cultic. The question nevertheless remains: Does God, the source of all shape, Himself have a shape? Or more precisely: Under what conditions does He have a shape? What features of God actually appear in the theophanies?

The realm of these questions is defined by the terminology of the Bible, which uses two different terms to speak of the shape of God. One term is *temunah*; the other is *tselem*. *Temunah* is derived from the Hebrew root *min* ("kind" or "species"). It refers to that which has a shape or is in the process of taking shape. The second commandment uses the term *temunah* when it forbids the making of the shape of any thing in heaven or on earth for cultic purposes: "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness of any thing that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down unto them, nor serve them" (Exod. 20:4). And Deuteronomy (4:12), when recalling the revelation on Mount Sinai, says: "And the Lord spoke unto you out of the midst of the fire; ye heard the voice of words, but ye saw no form, only a voice. . . ." It goes on to stress (v. 15): "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves—for ye saw no manner of form on the day that the Lord spoke unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire "

This is the basis for the prohibition against using images in worship. Only the voice of God, and no other shape, reaches across the abyss of transcendence bridged by revelation. Theophany is an act of hearing: the most spiritualized of all sensory perceptions, but a sensory perception

nevertheless! From here, as we shall see, the road leads to regarding divine speech and the Divine Name as the mystical shape of the Deity. The Bible, however, distinguishes between those images seen by the eye and those perceived through hearing the voice. When the voice of God warns Moses (Exod. 33:20), "for man shall not see Me and live," this does not mean to imply that God is intrinsically devoid of shape—quite the contrary! Indeed, in Numbers (12:8), God says of Moses—whom in the above-quoted passage has been prohibited from seeing Him—"with him do I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of God² doth he behold." These contradictory statements indicate that discussion of the divine form was not meaningless, even if later exegesis attempted to interpret it away.

No less strange, in this respect, is the second term, which the Torah (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6) uses only in connection with the creation of man and which, in a certain sense, is the key term for all anthropomorphic discussion of God: *tselem* 'Elohim. The Hebrew word *tselem* refers to a three-dimensional image or form. When God says, "Let us make man in our image (*tselem*), after our likeness," and the following verse says "in the *tselem* of God He created him," man, as a physical-plastic phenomenon, is placed in relationship to the primal shape reproduced in him, whatever that shape might be. God must therefore have something like an "image" and "likeness" (*demuth*) of His own. This "image" or "likeness" is not an object of cultic veneration, but is something that defines the essence of man, even in his physicality. This notion of *tselem*, as the likeness of a heavenly although not necessarily corporeal structure, undergoes all the stages of interpretation and reinterpretation required by the desire for an ever-stronger emphasis on divine transcendence and the conception of God as pure spirit.

It is perhaps relevant to cite here two diametrically opposed views concerning the notion of *tselem* 'Elohim in Genesis, by two well-known modern exegetes. Hermann Gunkel writes:

This similitude refers primarily to man's body, although of course the spiritual is not thereby excluded. The idea of man as the εἰκὼν θεοῦ [*imago dei*] can also be found in the Greek and the Roman

tradition, where man is formed *in effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum*—"in the image of the gods, the master of nature" (to quote Ovid)—as well as in the Babylonian tradition. . . . Modern man will probably object to this explanation by claiming that God has no shape at all, as He is a purely spiritual being. But such an incorporeal God-idea demands a power of abstraction that was beyond the reach of ancient Israel, and attained only by Greek philosophy. The Old Testament instead constantly speaks, with great naivete, about God's form. . . . God is thus conceived as a human being, albeit many times more powerful and more dreadful. . . . Yet we already note another current in Israel during the ancient period: The prophets find it blasphemous to depict God in an image. God is far too enormous and glorious for any possible image to resemble Him (Isa. 40:25), nor dare we depict Him in words (Isa. 6). Already in the most ancient times, no one could behold His countenance. The more sublime the concept of God became under the influence of the prophets of Judaism, the more this awe increased. . . . Hence, that era would probably not have brought forth the idea that man carries the divine form.³

In Benno Jacob's commentary, we find the exact opposite idea:

There is no doubt that, throughout the Bible, so far as its leading minds are speaking, God is a purely spiritual being without body or form. . . . The *strongest* anthropomorphisms are to be found precisely in the words of those orators and prophets who *simultaneously*, and with the most elan, proclaim God's incomparable sublimity and absolute spirituality, such as Isaiah and Job. Thus, one can say that, the more spiritual the concept, the more anthropomorphic the expression, as these figures were concerned, not with philosophical precision, but with speaking about a living God.

It is not surprising that, for Benno Jacob, Gunkel's above-quoted lines are a "monstrosity," refuted by ethnological facts that Gunkel fails to take into account: namely, that "even primitive nations have achieved such an

abstraction (if it *is* one)... . Furthermore, this anthropomorphism (i.e., of the "image of God," *tselem 'Elohim*) is found in P [the Priestly Codex, allegedly the latest written source of the Torah], for whom it would have been most repugnant, according to Gunkel's characterization."⁴

One might say that the vehement opposition between these two passages defines the climate in which our discussion still moves. Both authors are to a large extent correct, yet both distort their basic thesis through misleading generalizations. Benno Jacob quite properly felt that anthropomorphism does not exclude the conviction of God's incorporeity, but his simultaneous goal of banning discussion on the form of God is in no wise confirmed by the biblical text. In any event, our own discussion below has nothing to do with what the authors of the biblical books meant by their utterances about God; the question is rather that of how these utterances were subsequently understood and what effect they had. In this respect it is obvious that the trend toward the pure spiritualization of God, as expressed in intertestamental and especially Hellenistic Jewish literature, is not the only one. It contrasts with another trend that adheres with absolute faithfulness to anthropomorphic discourse about God. The Jewish aggadah is the living and most impressive example of this mode of discourse, in which the sense of intimacy with the Divine is still sufficiently powerful for its authors not to flinch from extravagances that they knew were not to be taken literally. The metaphorical character of such utterances, which generally refer to God's activity rather than to His appearance, is in nearly all cases quite transparent, and is often underscored by the very biblical passages quoted by way of support. But we are not concerned here with the aggadic worldview per se. What really concerns us is the following issue: in light of the hostility of rabbinic theology to myths and to imagistic discourse on God, as well as the tendency in Jewish liturgy to limit anthropomorphic depictions of God, why was the problem of Gods' form not eliminated altogether? As against the rejection of mythical images in the exoteric realm, which tolerated these images only as metaphors, there was a renaissance of such images in the esoteric, where they were connected with mystical theological axioms. In other words, the mythical images became mystical symbols.

II

The development of mysticism in Judaism is linked to speculation concerning the first chapter of Ezekiel. Here the prophet describes a vision he had by the waters of the river Chebar during the Babylonian Exile: he saw a vision of the divine chariot, the *Merkavah*, the divine throne built upon it, and the creatures of the upper world, in animal and human form (who later become categories of angels), who carry it. The elaborate and rather obscure description of the details of the *Merkavah* was subsequently taken up by visionaries in the pre-Christian era, and particularly in the first two centuries of the Christian era, who sought to repeat the experience of the vision of the *Merkavah*. Retaining Ezekiel's terminology, while reinterpreting its meaning, his description was transformed by them into a depiction of the royal court of the divine majesty. This vision was revealed to the visionary upon ascent to the highest heaven: originally, perhaps, the third heaven; later, when the number of heavens was increased, to the seventh heaven. In apocalyptic literature, descriptions of the celestial world include descriptions of the world of the divine throne and the *Merkavah*. But these same authors become extremely reticent when they reach the point of speaking about He who appears on the throne itself, the figure of the Godhead or its theophany: "And upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above" (Ezek. 1:26). Isaiah had already seen "the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and His train filled the Temple" (Isa. 6:1), while Ezekiel describes the light surrounding the figure seated on the throne "as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about" (Ezek. 1:28). But for both prophets what is important is not so much the theophany itself as the voice that emerges and strikes the prophet's ear. Needless to say, this vision of the shape of God on the throne, as of the other elements of the *Merkavah* vision, became an object of contemplation and speculation. The ascent of *Merkavah* mystics to heaven or, in a different version, to the heavenly paradise, was considered successful if it not only led the mystic to the divine throne but also brought them a revelation of the image of the Godhead, the "Creator of the Universe" seated on the throne. This

form was that of the divine *Kavod*; rendering this word as "glory" "splendor" and the like fails to transmit the true substance of the numinous conception. *Kavod* refers to that aspect of God that is revealed and manifest; the more invisible God becomes for the Jewish consciousness, the more problematical the meaning of this vision of the divine *Kavod*.

We have thus reached the first major topic in our discussion: namely, the manner in which the Jewish Gnostics and *Merkavah* mystics conceived of the mystical form of the Godhead: the *Shi'ur Komah*. This Hebrew term is often translated as "measure of height," the noun *komah* being construed in its biblical sense as "height" or "stature." Such a rendering is valid, particularly given the appearance of this word in the Song of Songs (which, as we shall see, is closely connected with these speculations). Nevertheless, *komah* most likely has the precise significance here that it has in Aramaic, where it quite simply means "body." Indeed, the body of the Creator or Demiurge is also called the "body of the Godhead" (*guf ha-Shekhinah*), and is described in some highly peculiar fragments that have survived.⁵ Some of the oldest texts containing these fragments understood the anthropomorphisms of the *Shi'ur Komah* in terms of descriptions of the "hidden *Kavod*." One of these fragments, *Hekhaloth Zutarti*, is ascribed, no doubt pseudepigraphically, to Rabbi Akiva, the central figure in second-century talmudic Judaism. Akiva is presented as receiving such visions, saying that God is "virtually like us, but is greater than anything; and this is His glory which is concealed from us"⁶ Indeed, the notion of God's concealed glory is virtually identical with the theosophic usage found in the oldest known traditions of *Merkavah* mysticism, which speak of the vision or contemplation of God's glory as the deepest level of religious life. Thus, it is rhapsodically promised that, "Whoever knows this measure of our Creator and the glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, is promised that he is a son of the World to Come." Considering the provocative extravagance of this anthropomorphous description, this promise, uttered here by Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva, is extremely paradoxical. Nor should we forget that these men were not only the two most important rabbinic authorities of the first half of the second century, but were also viewed by the tradition of *Merkavah* mysticism as the true heroes of Jewish gnosis. The question emerges: Are we

dealing here with attempts of later heretical, sectarian groups to give themselves an Orthodox Jewish appearance? Or are these esoteric traditions authentic ones, taken from the center of rabbinic Judaism in the process of its own crystallization?

These questions occupied medieval Jewish writers passionately, no less than they do modern authors. The bizarre fragments that attempted to describe and measure the limbs of God's body are, as we have said, provocative in their solemnly arrogant boldness: they were bound either to arouse indignation or to be venerated as repositories of a mystical symbolism that was no longer intelligible.

The surviving fragments of the *Merkavah* literature, which are largely incomprehensible and textually corrupt, are quite clearly related to the Song of Songs. Phrases from this biblical book, particularly the portrayal of the beloved (5:10-16), appear repeatedly in various passages:

My beloved is white and ruddy,
Pre-eminent above ten thousand.
His head is as the most fine gold,
His locks are curled,
And black as a raven.
His eyes are like doves
Beside the water-brooks;
Washed with milk.
And fitly set.
His cheeks are a bed of spices.
As banks of sweet herbs;
His lips are as lilies,
Dropping with flowing myrrh.
His hands are as rods of gold
Set with beryl;
His body is as polished ivory
Overlaid with sapphires.
His legs are as pillars of marble.
Set upon sockets of fine gold;

This is my beloved, and this is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

During the first and second centuries, when the Song of Songs began to be interpreted as portraying the relationship between God and Israel, tremendous weight was given to the descriptions of the beloved, who was seen as none other than God Himself, as revealed in the Exodus, in the splitting of the Red Sea, and in the wanderings in the desert. The *Shi'ur Komah* fragments followed these bodily descriptions and even surpassed them. Enormous measurements are given for the size of the Creator and for the length of each limb. As if this were not enough, unintelligible combinations of letters are given to indicate the secret name of each part. This technique is most probably linked to the schematic drawings of human beings found on Greek amulets and magical papyri of the same period, covered with secret names. These names, composed of Greek letters, obviously belong to the same cultural sphere as the secret names in the *Shi'ur Komah*. As even its oldest extant manuscripts do not date back beyond the eleventh century, and as the copyists of such enigmatic fragments no doubt corrupted any number of passages, there seems no hope of finding the key to this secret. Semitic- and Greek-sounding elements are tangled together, so that the Greek seems more like an imitation of the sound of Greek words than authentic Greek—just as one might expect from, say, glossolalia. Indeed, perhaps these names emerged from such ecstatic speaking in tongues. Thus, any translation of these passages is virtually doomed. The tremendous dimensions make any contemplation illusory; the original goal was presumably a certain numerical harmony among the various measurements, rather than a visual image of the individual numbers.

The key Biblical verse for this tradition was Psalm 147:5: *Gadol 'adonenu ve-rav koah*—"Great is our Lord and mighty in strength." On the basis of the numerological computation (*gematria*) of the phrase *ve-rav koah*, this line was interpreted as, "the size of our Lord is 236." The key figure in the measurements of the body of the Creator, which appears repeatedly, is 236,000,000 parasangs. But this does not tell us much, for "the measure of a parasang of God is three leagues, and a league has ten

thousand cubits, and a cubit three spans, and a span fills the entire world, as it is written, 'who measures the sky with His span' (Isa. 40:12)"⁷ Another fragment reads:

Rabbi Ishmael said: Metatron, the great prince of the testimony, said to me: I bear witness about YHWH, the God of Israel, the living and permanent God, our Lord and Master. From the place of the seat of His glory [that is, the throne] upward there are 118 myriads, and from the place of the seat of His glory downward there are 118 myriads. His height is 236 myriad thousand leagues. From His right arm to His left arm there are 77 myriads. From the right eyeball to the left eyeball there are 30 myriads. His cranium is three and one third myriads. The crowns on His head are sixty myriads, corresponding to the sixty myriads of the heads of Israel.⁸

This last sentence refers to an aggadic conception (as we find repeatedly in these fragments): the image of Sandalphon, the angel appointed over the prayers of Israel, who is a 500-years-walk tall. Thus, every individual in Israel who calls upon God in prayer places a crown on His head, for prayer is an act of crowning God and recognizing Him as king.⁹

These texts exude a sense of the world beyond; a numinous feeling emanates even from these enormous, seemingly blasphemous numbers and from the monstrous series of names. God's majesty and holiness, the form of the celestial king and Creator, assume physical shape in these numerical proportions. What moved these mystics was not the spirituality of His being, but the majesty of His theophany. Rabbi Ishmael reexperienced Isaiah's vision: "I saw the king of the kings of all kings sitting on a high and towering throne, and all the hosts of heaven stood before Him, at His left and at His right."¹⁰ But it is not words of prophecy that reach the initiate here; instead, the highest of all archons shows him the dimensions of the shape appearing in this vision, and of all its individual physical parts, from the soles of His feet to His beard and brow. In reality, though, all measurements fail, and the strident anthropomorphism is suddenly and paradoxically transformed into its opposite: the spiritual.

Suddenly, in the middle of a description in one of these fragments, we read:

The appearance of the face is like that of the cheekbones, and the appearance of both is like the shape of the spirit and the form of the soul, and no creature is able to recognize it. His body is like chrysolite, his brilliance breaks tremendously out of the darkness, clouds and mist surround him, all the archeons and seraphim vanish before him like a drained pitcher. That is why we have no measurement, and only names are revealed to us.¹¹

Indeed, this ancient author is very chary with numbers, but all the more generous in listing the secret names of these parts in the "language of purity"¹²—that is, an esoteric language of the pure names.

However, the "language of the pure name," in which the mystical form of the Deity in its concealed glory is revealed to the initiate, allows us to recognize a connection between this aspect of Jewish *Merkavah* speculation found in the *Shi'ur Komah* and one of the most puzzling forms of second-century gnosis. The Gnostic teachings of Marcus, a disciple of Valentinus, had always been distasteful to scholars of Gnosticism because of the affinity between his teachings and the linguistic mysticism and letter symbolism of the Kabbalah.¹³ Indeed, the point of departure for his teaching is a mingling of linguistic mysticism and *Shi'ur Komah* notions. Despite the Christian interpretation of these ideas, the mixture points unmistakably to their origin in Jewish esoterism—a point first noted by Moses Gaster nearly a century ago.¹⁴ The Greek form in which these speculations are transmitted is merely Marcus's adaptation of Semitic speculations, a point confirmed by the fact that the ritual formulae he employed in his mystical liturgy are indisputably Aramaic. The native soil of his gnosis was not Egypt, but Palestine or Syria, where he must have become acquainted with the oldest forms of *Shi'ur Komah* imagery.

The *Merkavah* mystics receive their revelation while rising to the throne, while Marcus received his when the supreme Tetras "descended to him from invisible and unrecognizable places in the guise of a woman,

into its elements, Marcus receives the revelation of Truth itself from his female guide. "For I brought [Truth] down from her supernal dwelling, that you might see her nude and come to know her beauty, but also to hear her speak and to admire her understanding." There follows a list of the parts of this mystical form, from head to foot, and of their secret names, each of which are nothing but combinations of the first and last letter of the alphabet, the second and penultimate, and so on in this order [the system known in Hebrew as *'atbash*], Thus, for Marcus, the alphabet as a whole constitutes the mystical shape of Truth, which he—quite in keeping with the Jewish terminology of the "body of the *Shekhinah*"—calls the "body of truth" (σῶμα τῆς ἀληθείας), and the form of the primeval, which, for him, is the primal human being, the *Anthropos*. "Here is the source of every word, the origin of every voice, the utterance of all that is unutterable, and the mouth of dumb silence."

We find in Marcus that the description of the origins of the mystical form of the primal human being is connected with language mysticism and a doctrine of secret names and letter combinations—much as we have found in the strictly Jewish, or more correctly Jewish-Gnostic, *Shi'ur Komah* fragment. Marcus's theory of language can also aid us in understanding and interpreting the Jewish text. The notion of the letters of God's name as aeons is also a later Kabbalistic teaching. The secret names of the organs are combinations, into which the basic elements of the Primal Man, which is the great Name of God, subdivide. What Marcus refers to as the primal human being corresponds, in *Shi'ur Komah*, to the human form seen by Ezekiel on the throne. The doctrine of the *Shi'ur Komah* contains both a teaching of the name of the Creator—which is a configuration representing God's ungraspable, shapeless existence—and of the sensory shape in which the Creator appeared to Israel as a handsome youth by the Red Sea, and in which He reveals himself to devotees of *Merkavah* mysticism at the end of the journey of the ascending soul. Marcus could therefore have received this teaching concerning the infinite power and depth of the letters from contemporary Jewish tradition, not just from the neo-Pythagorean tradition with which scholars used to link these speculations. In so doing they overlooked precisely those elements lacking in the neo-Pythagorean, but present in the Jewish *Shi'ur*

Komah tradition. In my opinion Marcus was acquainted with both traditions and synthesized them. The *Sh'ur Komah* literature and that variant of this teaching that Marcus adapted to his purposes mutually illuminate one another. Perhaps it should also be noted that the mystical-magical character of the alphabet sequence, in the specific form mentioned above [i.e., 'atbash], is familiar to the Jewish tradition. In fact, a Greek-Hebrew amulet discovered in Karneol in 1940 contains on the Greek obverse an apostrophe to God, "Thou Heaven-Shaped, Sea-Shaped, Darkness-Shaped, and All-Shaped (*pamomorphos*), the Ineffable before whom myriads of angels prostrate themselves," while on the verso of the amulet the Hebrew alphabet appears, in 'atbash sequence, as the secret name of God.¹⁶ This sequence is transcribed into Greek on the Greek side of the amulet!

We may therefore assume that the Deity has a mystical form that manifests itself in two different aspects: to the visionary, it manifests itself in the tangible shape of a human being seated on the throne of glory, constituting the supreme primal image in which man was created; aurally, at least in principle, it is manifested as God's name, broken into its component elements, whose structure anticipates that of all being. According to this doctrine, God's shape is conceived of, not as a concept or idea, but as names. This interlocking of tactile and linguistic anthropomorphism, which I consider characteristic of *Sh'ur Komah* doctrine, pervades the extant fragments. Hence, it is not surprising to see a sentence such as: "God sits on a throne of fire, and all around Him, like columns of fire, are the ineffable names."¹⁷ The two realms are not separated, and the names of God, which are the hidden life of the entire Creation, are not only audible, but also visible as letters of fire. Furthermore, according to an aggadah attributed to the Palestinian *Merkavah* mystics of the early third century, "The Torah given by the Holy One, blessed be He, to Moses was given to him in [the form of] white fire inscribed upon black fire—fire mixed with fire, hewn out of fire and given from fire. Of this it is written, 'at His right hand was a fiery law unto them' [Deut. 33:2]"¹⁸ The Torah occupies here the same place as is occupied in Valentinus's and Marcus's gnosis by the already Christianized logos, the primal name of God that constitutes the form of everything.

There thus exists a "body" of the divine *Kavod* which, as we have seen, was a symbol that was revealed to the mystics. Even the most tangible anthropomorphisms bespeak a language of mysteries.¹⁹ Just as there is a mystical body of God in which His image appears, so is there a garment (*haluk*) in which this body is wrapped. This garment is described, not only in the aggadah, but even more in the hymns of the *Merkavah* mystics, some of which are extant from the third century. According to one of these hymns, the heavens were radiated from this mystical "shape"; according to another, "constellations and stars and signs emanate from His garment, in which he wraps Himself and sits upon the throne of glory." In yet another midrash (which makes use of the technical language found in these hymns), it is related that God opened the seven heavens on Sinai and revealed himself to Israel, "in His beauty, His glory, His shape, His crown, and upon the throne of His glory" (the throne here replaces the garment mentioned in the hymns). It is obvious that this midrash finds nothing wrong with these notions from the sphere of the *Shi'ur Komah* doctrine.²⁰

In the above discussion I have assumed the doctrine of God's form to be extremely ancient, hence one that could have been adopted in Gnostic circles that were joined by early Jewish converts to Christianity. This assumption is strengthened by an extremely interesting passage in the Slavonic Book of Enoch which, unlike the view of André Vaillant (the most recent scholarly editor, whose arguments on this score are quite weak), I cannot ascribe to a Christian author. Rather, I see it as a Jewish apocalypse written in Palestine or Egypt during the first century C.E. The Greek original has been lost, but it evidently used the term $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\eta$ in the sense of "stature" or "form." In chapter 13 of this book, Enoch says: "You see the extent of my body (*shi'ur komati*) similar to yours, and I saw the extent of the Lord without measure and without image and without end." Abraham Kahana's Hebrew translation (in his edition of the Apocrypha) made use of this term, without his being aware of the possibility that the term *shi'ur komah* in fact goes back to this period. The parallel between the contents of the Hebrew *Shi'ur Komah* and the Book of Enoch is striking and thought-provoking.

Similar images of God, as possessing a "form" or bodily shape,

μορφῆ, were certainly known to Jewish-Christian groups and are assumed in the sources of the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, some of which may have come from the Jewish-Christian Ebionite sect. Here too, especially in the seventeenth homily, the "beauty" of the father is emphasized and the parts of his body are described, as in the above-mentioned *Shi'ur Komah* hymns. The seventeenth homily emphasizes (again, like one of the fragments I quoted earlier) that this body is "incomparably more luminous than the spirit with which we perceive it, and is more radiant than anything else, so that in comparison with this body, the light of the sun must be regarded as darkness."²¹ All this suggests a connection with the Jewish Gnostic fragments extant in the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the *Shi'ur Komah*.

This early dating, however, was by no means undisputed. The few nineteenth-century scholars who dealt with these concepts, above all Heinrich Graetz, committed the grave error of dating the *Merkavah* literature far too late; its intimate and multiple connections with Gnostic literature and the syncretistic papyri therefore eluded them. Scholars dated those writings between the seventh and ninth centuries, tracing the anthropomorphisms of the *Shi'ur Komah* to the influence of an Islamic anthropomorphic school, the *Mushabbiha*, when in fact the exact opposite was the case.²² According to this approach, these Jewish doctrines originated among ignorant groups who were given to grossly sensual ideas, and were quite unknown to the *Merkavah* mystics of the tannaitic period attested to by the Talmud. The progress made in understanding and careful study of these texts has made such views untenable.

Over and above everything said above, there is extremely important, albeit indirect, evidence regarding the age of the *Shi'ur Komah* tradition connected to the Song of Songs. This evidence appears in a passage by Origen that has never been satisfactorily explicated. In the introduction to his well-known commentary on the Song of Songs—in which the Jewish reading, i.e., in terms of the relationship between God and Israel, is replaced by that between Christ and the Church—Origen writes:

It is said to be the custom of the Jews to forbid anyone who has not attained a mature age to hold this book [i.e., the Song of Songs]

in his hands. Moreover, even though their rabbis and teachers instruct their children in all the books of the Scripture and in their oral traditions,²⁵ they postpone the following four texts until the very end: the beginning of Genesis, describing the Creation of the World; the beginning of the prophecy of Ezekiel, which relates to the cherubim [that is, the doctrine of the angels and the divine retinue]; the end [of the same book], which describes the future Temple; and this book, the Song of Songs.²⁴

There can be no doubt that this passage refers to the existence of esoteric doctrines connected with the four texts mentioned. We know from the Mishnah that the beginning of Genesis and the first chapter of Ezekiel were considered to be esoteric texts par excellence, and it was therefore prohibited to lecture about them in public. They could be studied privately, but even then only by those who were worthy, mature, and held in esteem by their fellow citizens.²⁵ The reference to the concluding chapters of Ezekiel is presumably related to the association of these chapters with apocalyptic ideas concerning the rebuilding of the Temple. The fact that many details in these chapters openly contradict the Torah's description of the same subject also naturally led to limitations upon their study. Indeed, there was a tendency during the first century to exclude the Book of Ezekiel from the canon of biblical Scriptures because of these very contradictions.²⁶ It may be that the contradictions between these two sources were resolved among certain groups by means of some kind of esoteric teachings, although we have no definite information on this matter.

On the other hand, we know nothing about restrictions on the study of the Song of Songs. In fact, during the second and third centuries, the allegorical reading of this book in terms of the love between God and the Congregation of Israel was a favorite theme in the aggadic lectures of the rabbis. True, according to later testimonies, the Song of Songs was deemed unsuitable for public study because the servant—that is, the Christian Church—had usurped the place of the mistress—that is, the Synagogue. It has been justifiably argued that this would indicate that during the third century the Church allegorically reinterpreted the Song

of Songs in its own interests." However, the state of affairs with which Origen was already familiar in the early third century (and we must not forget that he worked in the town of Caesarea in Palestine and was well acquainted with the Jewish tradition)—namely, that of an older Jewish tradition—cannot be explained in terms of this polemic. Jewish scholars prior to Origen's time could not possibly have known about a Christological reading of the Song of Songs that would arouse their qualms about public study of this book for a simple reason: this reading first entered into the Church through Origen's own commentary on it.²⁸ Thus, the Jewish sages of the second or early third century would hardly have limited the study of a book due to a reinterpretation which they could only have known later.

The true basis for Origen's tradition lies in the fact that during the second century the Song of Songs was connected with the esoteric doctrine of *Shi'ur Komah*. Whether it originated from its interpretation or had earlier sources, the Song of Songs functioned as the biblical text upon which this doctrine was based. The *Merkavah* mystics most likely regarded the Song of Songs not only as an historical allegory within the framework of its aggadic interpretation but also as an esoteric text in the strict sense—i.e., as a text containing sublime mysteries, not universally accessible, concerning the manifestation and form of God in terms of the secrets of the Merkabah. The most profound of all the chapters of Merkabah mysticism is that concerning the shape of the Deity (extant in the *Sh'ur Komah* fragments), which speaks not only about the Merkabah per se, but, as we read in *Hekhaloth Zutrati*, "the Great and Mighty, Awesome, Enormous and Strong God, who is removed from the sight of all creatures and hidden from the ministering angels, but was revealed to Rabbi Akiva in the vision of the *Merkavah*, to do his will"²⁹ As Saul Lieberman has cogently shown, it can be demonstrated that the second-century tannaim saw the Song of Songs in terms of a *Merkavah* revelation that occurred at the Red Sea and on Mount Sinai—a point made in a number of midrashim.³⁰ This conclusively proves the age of the *Sh'ur Komah* idea, as I have already suggested on the basis of more general considerations. Origen's passage confirms that in his day, and probably some time before

him, the Jewish teachers in Palestine viewed the Song of Songs as an esoteric text concerning the manifestations and form of the Deity. One might even go further, and join Gaster in conjecturing that the prohibition against public study of the *Merkavah*, a prohibition already operating in the first century, was primarily directed against the *Shi'ur Komah* doctrine.³¹ This dating of the *Shi'ur Komah* is supported by a statement of St. Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Tryphon*, chap. 114) that, according to certain Jewish teachings, God has human shape and organs. This statement can be adequately explained by a proper dating of the *Shi'ur Komah* speculation. He presents these teachings not as heretical ideas but as the normative rabbinic teaching of his time. It is hence quite understandable that such notions penetrated, with some variation, even into Ebionite circles.

We may perhaps go even one step further. Mandaean writings frequently contain the designation of God as *Mara de-Rabutha* (the Lord of Greatness), referring to Uthras, the father of all celestial potencies. Scholars have thus far been unable to identify the origin of this term. It now appears that this designation, like so much else in Mandaean Gnosticism, derives from Judaism. The identical wording appears (strangely enough, unnoticed by scholars) in a fragment of an Aramaic paraphrase of Genesis discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, published in 1957; the text comes roughly from the first century B.C.E. There (col. II, line 4), Noah's father, Lamech, speaks to his wife about the "*Mara rabutha*, the king of all worlds." This name is used quite naturally, as one obviously taken for granted in these circles. If the Mandaeans were originally connected with Jewish baptismal sects near the Jordan (as many scholars tend to assume on the basis of their literature), then we are dealing here with the origins of a religious term that was first used in those circles and then moved eastward together with the early Mandaean groups. It is difficult to ascertain the exact image underlying this term. The "Lord of Greatness" may refer to He who possesses the attribute of greatness in an abstract sense, in which case it would harken back to David's prayer in I Chronicles 29:11. "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, etc." Indeed, in the Hebrew texts of *Merkavah* Gnosticism

we find a parallel name for God as "Lord of Strength."³² However, this may also be a further development along the lines of the *Shi'ur Komah*, which, as we have seen, concretely depicts the greatness of the "Lord of Greatness." In this context the key verse that we have already discussed, Psalm 147:5, is particularly suggestive: the "greatness of our Lord" (as the verse was construed here) is alluded to in the words *ve-rav koah*. We thus find both the Hebrew word for "great" (*gadol*) and the Aramaic *rab*, contained in the term *Mara Rabutha*. Perhaps the choice of this verse and its mystical, numerological interpretation as referring to the specific measurement of God's dimension are based precisely on this title of God.

An important conclusion of our discussion is not merely the fact of the existence of such images as that of a shape of God in ancient Jewish esoterism, but also the fact that we are not dealing here with the ideas of "heretical" groups on the periphery of rabbinic Judaism. On the contrary: The close link between these ideas and *Merkavah* mysticism can leave no doubt that the bearers of these speculations were at the very center of rabbinic Judaism in tannaitic and talmudic times. We must revise forward many of the assumptions of earlier scholars who, finding this notion unacceptable a priori, attempted to relegate the *Shi'ur Komah* to the fringes of Judaism. The gnosis we are dealing with here is a strictly orthodox Jewish one. The subject of these speculations and visions—*Yotser Bereshith*, the God of Creation—is not some lowly figure such as those found in some heretical sects, similar to the Demiurge of many Gnostic doctrines, which drew a contrast between the true God and the God of Creation. In the view of the *Shi'ur Komah*, the Creator God is identical with the authentic God of monotheism, in His mystical form; there is no possibility here of dualism. Given the antiquity of these ideas, which we have tentatively traced back to the first century, we may ask whether this orthodox *Shi'ur Komah* gnosis did not precede the dualistic conception of later Gnosticism, which emerged during the early second century. If so, the entire line of Gnostic development from monotheism to dualism must be understood in an entirely different way from that which scholars have thus far suggested. We likewise cannot ignore the possibility that the pronounced usage of the term *Yotser Bereshith* (De-

miurge) in those fragments (the oldest of which probably go back to the second or third century) might have been introduced in order to indicate the monotheistic alternative to the position of these sectarians—in other words, with a polemical aim against certain Gnostic groups in Judaism who had been exposed to the influence of dualistic ideas, which they tried to apply in heretical, Gnostic interpretations of the Bible.

In any event, these or similar traditions were preserved in Palestinian Judaism and its aggadah. As late as the sixth century, the most important liturgical poet of Palestinian Jewry, Eleazar ha-Kallir, used the terms *Shi'ur Komah* and *Yotser Bereshit!*) as perfectly acceptable, rather than heretical, concepts.³³ In the ninth century, when the Karaites began their vehement attacks upon the talmudic aggadah and its anthropomorphisms, the burden of their polemic was aimed against the *Shi'ur Komah* fragments, which both enjoyed ancient authority and were already reputed to be completely unintelligible.³⁴ However, the spokesmen of rabbinic Judaism in the Babylonian academics initially adhered to their tradition, and were unwilling to abandon even such extravagant lucubrations of the aggadic spirit as the *Shi'ur Komah*. However, there were great figures who were not prepared to defend this tradition.

Around the year 1000, Jewish scholars in Fez sent an inquiry concerning the *Shi'ur Komah* to Rav Sherira Gaon, head of the Babylonian academy. Among other things, they wrote:

And R. Ishmael said further: "I and R. Akiva are guarantors, that whoever knows the stature of our Creator and the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, is assured a share in the World to Come, provided only that he repeat it in the Mishnah every day." And he began to say, "His stature is thus and such..." And we wish to know whether Rabbi Ishmael said what he said from his teacher, who heard it from his teacher, and so on going back to Moses at Sinai, or whether he said it of his own accord. And if he said it of his own accord, should one not apply the Mishnah (*Hagigah* 2:1): "If a man does not consider the honor of his Creator, it were better had he never been born." May our master explain this to us clearly and fully.

R. Sherira replied:

It is impossible to explain this matter clearly and in full; it can only be done quite generally. Heaven forbid that Rabbi Ishmael should have invented such things out of his own head: how could a man arrive at such utterances of his own accord? Moreover, our Creator is too high and sublime to have organs and measurements in the literal sense, for, "To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?" (Isa. 49:18). Rather, these are words of wisdom that cannot be conveyed to everyone.

Other versions of this responsum contain even sharper language:

There are hidden therein profound reasons, which are higher than the highest mountains and exceedingly wondrous, and their allusions and secrets and mysteries and hidden things cannot be conveyed to every one.³⁵

In other words, the secrets of the *Shi'ur Komah* themselves allude to profound mysteries. R. Sherira thus has an opinion concerning this issue, but is not prepared to commit it to writing. Indeed, three generations earlier, Saadiah Gaon, under the impact of the Karaite polemic, held a far more reserved position:

There is no agreement among scholars about *Shi'ur Komah*, for it appears neither in the Mishnah nor in the Talmud, and we have no way of determining whether or not it comes from Rabbi Ishmael, or whether someone else composed it under his name. For there are many books which use the name of people who did not write them, but were composed by others who made use of the name of one of the great sages in order to attain prominence for their books.³⁶

Maimonides expressed himself in more extreme fashion. During his youth, he still considered *Shi'ur Komah* as a source deserving of interpretation, but he subsequently changed his mind, and could only view these

texts with horror. When asked whether it was a Karaite work or whether it contained "mysteries of our Sages, of blessed memory, concealing profound matters of physics or metaphysics, as Rabbenu Hai stated," Maimonides replied:

I never thought that this came from the Sages. Heaven forbid our assuming that this kind of thing derives from their hands! Rather, it is undoubtably no more than the work of a Byzantine preacher. All in all, it would be a highly meritorious deed to snuff out this book and to destroy all memory of it.³⁷

These words indicate the embarrassment felt by Jewish rationalists upon being confronted with a text of this type. Some, of course, attempted to salvage it by means of philosophical, allegorical interpretation—as, for instance, Moses of Narbonne (d. 1362),³⁸ or R. Simeon ben Tsemah Duran (14th c). The latter explicitly challenges a certain opinion that seems to have been widespread during the Middle Ages, even by several Kabbalists: namely, that the measurements of the *Shi'ur Komah* refer to the highest archons among the angels or to angelic beings. Rather, according to Duran, "the aim of this book is to maintain that everything in existence is God's Glory, and that their measurements [i.e., that of the organs] is so and so much; or else they referred to the dimensions of the *Kavod* as it appeared to the prophets."³⁹ According to Duran, *Shi'ur Komah* may be interpreted in a visionary manner (which is not far from the literal truth) or in a pantheistic interpretation which asserts that reality itself as a whole is the mystical shape of the deity. A far-reaching thesis is thus concealed here in mythical images.⁴⁰ In any event, the *Shi'ur Komah* was not an object of reverent study for these medieval Jewish groups; rather, as I have said, it was an embarrassment.

III

In the world of Kabbalah that developed in Western Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, nourished by ancient traditions of Jewish gnosis and the impulses of new mystical inspiration, the atmosphere

was altogether different. Medieval theology had already forgotten the original significance of the *Shi'ur Komah* vision, and was hard set on abolishing any view that attributed to God any human attributes whatever. These philosophers sought to push the biblical concept of monotheism to its utmost extreme, and even outdid the Bible itself in removing any vestiges therein of mythical or anthropomorphic parlance. It is no coincidence that Maimonides began his philosophical magnum opus, *Guide for the Perplexed*, by turning the key word *tselem* on its head—although, in his opinion, of course, right side up.

In the newly evolving Kabbalah, by contrast, we find the opposite tendency. Here, too, the spiritualization of the idea of God is an accepted fact, but in the reflections that took the place of the *Merkavah* visions, the ancient images reemerged, albeit now with a symbolic character. Unlike the philosophers, the Kabbalists were not ashamed of these images; on the contrary, they saw in them the repositories of divine mysteries. *Shi'ur Komah* became the watchword of a new attitude, which was no longer interested in the details of the ancient fragments—neither those of the measurements and numbers, nor of the enigmatic names, all of which were consigned to obscurity. In their place the Kabbalists returned, in their own way and with their own emphases, to the fundamental idea of a mystical form of the Godhead. The underlying principle might be formulated as follows: *'Ein-Sof*, the Infinite—that is, the concealed Godhead—dwells unknowable in the depth of its own being, without form or shape. It is beyond all cognitive statements, and can only be described through negation—indeed, as the negation of all negations. No images can depict it, nor can it be named by any name. By contrast, the Active Divinity has a mystical shape which can be conveyed by images and names. To be sure, it is no longer a potential object of vision, as in *Merkavah* mysticism; the stature and value of such visions become greatly diminished. Prophetic visions are mediated by infinite levels of theophany originating in deeper regions, which are below the sphere with which the Kabbalists are dealing. However, the Godhead also manifests itself in symbols: in the symbol of the organically growing shape of the tree, in the symbol of the human form, and in symbols of the names of God.

Both tendencies, which we have already encountered in the ancient *Shi'ur Komah* texts and in Marcean Gnosticism, emerge with renewed strength from the Kabbalistic sense of the world, albeit in altered form. The Kabbalists found it an honor, rather than an embarrassment, to speak about the *Shi'ur Komah*. Often enough, they paraded their own *theologia mystica* as the doctrine of the *Shi'ur Komah*, in proud defiance and mocking scorn of the stutterings of the apologists. It is no coincidence that one of the boldest and deepest writings of the later Kabbalah, *Shi'ur Komah* of R. Moses Cordovero of Safed (the most profound speculative mystic of the Kabbalah), bore the same title as that ancient work.

In His active manifestations, the Godhead appears as the dynamic unity of the *Sefiroth*, portrayed as the "tree of the *Sefiroth*," or the mystical human form (*Adam Kadmon*), who is none other than the concealed shape of the Godhead itself. Let me briefly recapitulate what the Kabbalists mean by *Sefiroth*. These were originally the ten primal numbers in which all reality is rooted—an idea expounded in a Hebrew text roughly contemporary with the ancient *Shi'ur Komah* and heavily influenced by Pythagoreanism: *Sefer Yetsirah* (The Book of Creation). However, the medieval Kabbalists changed its meaning when they adopted the term *Sefiroth*. For them the *Sefiroth* are the potencies constituting the active Godhead, and through which (to use Kabbalistic language) it acquires its "face." *'Anpin Penima'in*, the hidden face of God, is the aspect of the divine life turned toward us which, despite its concealment, seeks to take on shape. The divine life is expressed in ten steps or levels, which both conceal and reveal Him. It flows out and animates Creation; but at the same time it remains deep inside. The secret rhythm of its movement and pulse beat is the law of motion of all Creation. As the divine life reveals itself—that is, becomes manifest through its actions on the various levels of divine emanation—it assumes a different shape on each level or, speaking theologically, appears in different attributes. In its totality the individual elements of the life process of God are unfolded yet constitute a unity (the unity of God revealing Himself); together they are the shape of the Godhead.

The plasticity of its being—which radiates in all directions and mani-

feasts the infinite goodness of God—is revealed in its manifold functions. Abraham Herrera, in his book *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* (ca. 1620), describes the various aspects of the *Sefiroth* as follows:

The *Sefiroth* are emanations from the primal simple unity; making known His good which is without end; mirrors of His truth, which share in his nature and essence, which is above all, and that He is Himself the necessary being; structures of his wisdom and representations of His will and desire; receptacles of His strength and instruments of His activity; treasuries of His bliss and distributors of His grace and goodness; judges of His kingdom, bringing His judgment to light; and simultaneously the designations, attributes, and names of He who is the highest of all and who encompasses all. These ten names are inextinguishable: ten attributes of His sublime glory and greatness; ten fingers of His mighty hands, five of His right and five of His left; ten lights by which He radiates Himself; ten garments of glory, in which He is garbed; ten visions, in which He is seen; ten forms, in which He has formed everything; ten sanctuaries, in which He is exalted; ten degrees of prophecy, in which He manifests Himself; ten lecterns, from which He teaches; ten thrones, from which He judges the nations; ten divisions of paradise or canopies for those who are deserving of it; ten steps on which He descends, and ten on which one ascends to Him; ten beautiful fields, producing all influx and blessing; ten boundaries, which all yearn for but only the righteous attain; ten lights, which illuminate all intelligences; ten kinds of fire, which consume all desires; ten kinds of glory, which rejoice all rational souls and intellects; ten words, by which the world was created; ten spirits, by which the world is moved and kept alive; ten commandments; ten numbers, dimensions, and weights, by which all is counted, weighed, and measured; ten touchstones, by which the perfection of all things is tested, by that which are drawn near and are repelled by them. And these are the ten utterances containing All; the *genera* in whose bosom everything is contained and from whose bosom everything emerges; the providence which extends from one extreme to the other, and by the awesomeness of whose providence

all is prepared for their good and their benefit.... The supreme unities, to whom all the initial multiplicities return, by its intermediacy, to the simple unity; and above all the simple unities is the Infinite, blessed be He.⁴¹

Of course, even this turning toward created beings contains the ineffable that accompanies every expression, enters into it and withdraws from it. The awareness of this dual quality, this dialectic of manifestation within shape, is characteristic of the Kabbalist's knowledge of divine matters—a knowledge that was experienced in many ways. For example, the *Tikkunei Zohar* points out that God dwells both in the *Sefiroth* and between them:

You are within all and outside of all, and to every side, and above all and beneath all. . . . And You are in every *Sefirah*, in its length and breadth and above it and below it, and between each and every *Sefirah* and in the thickness of the every *Sefirah*.⁴²

The most precise formulation of this concept is in the writings of R.

Moses Cordovero:

The Infinite, the King, King of Kings, who rules all: for His essence penetrates and descends via the *Sefiroth* and between the *Sefiroth*, and between the *Merkavah* and within the Merkabah, and within the angels and between the angels, and within the celestial spheres and between the celestial spheres, and within the elements and between the lowly elements, and within the land and between the land and its offspring, down to the final point of the abyss—the whole world is full of His glory.⁴³

In other words, the formless substance of the *'Ein-Sof* is immediately present, in its full reality, in all stages of the process of emanation and creation, and in every imaginable shape. In this sense one may say that there is no thoroughly shaped image that can completely detach itself from the depths of the formless: this insight is crucial for the metaphysics

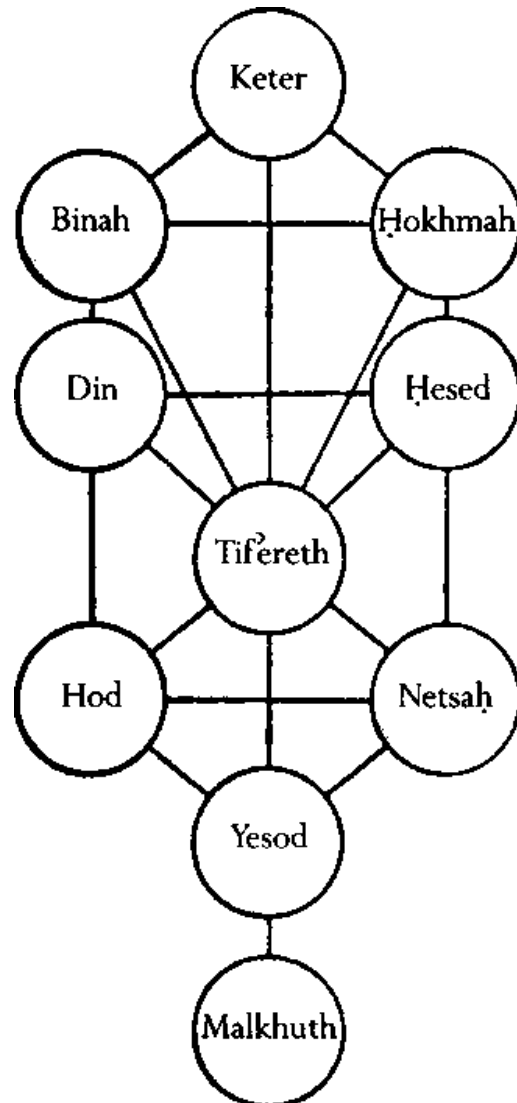
of the Kabbalah. The truer the form, the more powerful the life of the formless within it. To delve into the abyss of formlessness is no less absurd an undertaking for the Kabbalists than to ascend to the form itself; the mystical nihilism that destroys any shape dwells hand in hand with the prudent moderation struggling to comprehend the shape. One might say that both tendencies are peering out of the same shell. It is precisely in the doctrine of the *Sefiroth*, with its emphasis on the mystical shape which lies at the basis of every other shape, that the Kabbalist becomes aware of this danger, and tries to overcome it. The Divine is not only the shapeless abyss into which everything sinks, although it *is* that abyss too. In its turning toward the outside, it contains the guarantee of the existence of form—precarious and elusive by nature, but no less powerful for that. This comment is perhaps not superfluous in terms of the thought processes we are dealing with here.

But let us return to our point of departure: God's potencies grow into Creation like a tree, nourished by the waters of divine wisdom.⁴⁴ The Sefirotic tree, of which the Kabbalists spoke in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, preserves the image of the organic shape in which each thing is in its proper place, and where it partakes of the flow directed toward it from the union of the totality. The Sefirotic tree, in which God has implanted His strength ("the cedars of Lebanon which He hath planted," to quote one widely used exegesis), is also the Tree of the World and, in a certain sense, the true Tree of Life. Its root is located in the highest *Sefiroth*; its trunk embraces the central and thereby conciliating forces; while the branches or limbs which grow out of it at various points encompass the contradictory forces of divine activity in *Hesed* and *Din*. All of these taken together constitute the primary form in which the divine image appears in the Kabbalah. The tree grows upside down—an image familiar to us from many myths. The three uppermost *Sefiroth*—*Keter* (crown) or, in the *Zohar*, *Ratson* (will); *Hokhmah* (wisdom); and *Binah* (insight or discernment)—are the basic ground and roots of this tree. It is no coincidence that these determining forces are from the world of the intellect. In the next three *Sefiroth*, we find *Hesed* (grace or love), *Din* or *Gevurah* (severity or judgment), and *Rahamim* or *Tifereth* (mercy, also known as splendor or beauty), in which the extremes are united and conciliated. Again, it is no

coincidence that this sphere is defined by moral forces. The last triad consists of *Netsah* (endurance), *Hod* (splendor or majesty), and *Yesod* (the foundation) or *Tsaddik* (the Righteous One). This completes the picture of the creative forces, enabling them to operate together through the living force of God, by which everything finds its place and is maintained. As the living force par excellence, it is likewise the force of procreation, represented through symbols of male sexuality. All these active factors are in turn united in the tenth *Sefirah*, *Malkhuth* or *Shekhinah*, God's royal rule, into which they flow as into the ocean. The living forces of the Godhead pass into Creation through the medium of the last *Sefirah*, represented in symbols of receptivity and femaleness.⁴⁵ We thus arrive at a fixed canonic image of the Sefirotic tree, represented as shown on page 44.

While the image of the Sefirotic tree is represented in other structures, this one is the most widespread. The *Sefiroth* are thus not a series of ten emanations of aeons emerging from one another; on the contrary, they constitute a well-structured form, in which every part or limb operates upon every other, and not just the higher ones on the lower. The *Sefiroth* are connected with one another by means of secret "channels," *tsinoroth*, whereby each radiates into the other and in which the other is in turn reflected. The specific nature of each potency is deeply rooted in itself, but every potency likewise contains some aspects of all the others. Moreover, each one repeats in itself the structure of the whole, and so on ad infinitum—a point elaborated by the later Kabbalah. It is through this process of infinite reflection that the whole is reflected in every member and thus, as Moses Cordovero explained, becomes a whole.⁴⁶

However, the Sefiroth do not appear only in the shape of the tree. They also appear in the form of Primal Man (*'Adam Kadmon*), which corresponds to that of earthly man. The *Sefiroth* are the "holy forms," first mentioned in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, in which these two symbolic representations appear one after another. In S §112 (M §166) the date palm is cited as a symbol of the procreative power of the Godhead, exactly as in the Mandaeen writings. The "seventy palms" found by the Israelites at Elim (Exod. 15:27) during their wandering in the desert, indicate that "God has seventy shapes," and every palm tree corresponds to one of these



primal shapes. The Hebrew term *komah*, used here for "shape" is the same as that used in *Sh'ur Komah*. However, in S §§114 and 116 (M §§165, 172), the organs of man correspond to the "seven sacred forms of God":

The Holy One, blessed be He, has seven sacred forms, all of which have their counterpart in man, as said, "In the image of God He made him." . . . These are: the right and left thighs, the right and left hands, the torso, the phallus and the head.

In a different version, in which the torso and the phallus are not separated, the female is the seventh form that completes them. Above these seven bodily forms, corresponding to the seven lower *Sefiroth*, are the three upper *Sefiroth* symbolizing the spiritual forces: thinking, wisdom, and discernment. These are not conceived as bodily forms, but, at least according to the *Zohar*, are localized in the three chambers of the brain. There are, however, different developments of this symbolism, in which their correspondence to human organs is formulated in far greater detail.⁴⁷ In *Sefer ha-Bahir*, the oldest extant Kabbalistic text, these forms of God are explicitly identified with the *tselem 'Elohim* of Genesis 1:27: "In the image of God He created him." *Sefer ha-Bahir* adds: "in all his limbs and in all his parts" (S §55; M §82).

These notions received their most decisive expression in the *Zohar*, which views man as the most perfect shape—"the form that contains all forms" or "the image that contains all images"—through which alone all things exist. The first worlds that were created were destroyed because this true shape had not yet achieved its perfection, so that the balance and harmony in which everything exists through the secret of this shape had not yet been established. The lower, earthly human being and the upper, mystical human being, in which the Godhead is manifested as shape, belong together and are unthinkable without one another in a well-ordered world.

The perfection of the universe resides [or: appears] in this shape of man; it was this shape seen by Ezekiel on the throne, and of this that Daniel spoke when he said, "And, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the Ancient of days, and he was brought near before Him" (Dan. 7:13).⁴⁸

Thus, the *Zohar* returns to the same Biblical motifs found in the *Shi'ur Komah*. In the boldest parts of the *Zohar*, the *'Idra Rabba*, the *'Idra Zutta*, the Greater and the Lesser Assembly, (which are a sort of Kabbalistic *turba philosophorum*) and the *Sifra de-Tseni'utha*, "The Book of Conceal-

ment"—in which these ideas are summarized in solemn cadences—we find a version of the *Shi'ur Komah* reconceived in the spirit of the Kabbalah. This new version is in no way inferior to the ancient fragments, either in boldness or, if one may phrase it thus, Gnostic presumptuousness. However, in contrast with the *Shi'ur Komah*, it does not conceal its metaphysical background. Every organ of 'Adam Kadmon, nay, every last hair on his head, is a world unto itself; every detail alludes to configurations of the *Sefiroth* that unfold and reveal the infinite wealth contained in them. The details of the description reveal some acquaintance with medieval anatomy, and the author revels in the anthropomorphic paradoxes that supply the key words and mottos for the symbolic presentation of his metaphysics. Daniel's vision of "the Ancient of days" (Dan. 7:9), 'Atik Yomin, whose head is as white as snow and whose hair is like pure wool, provides the author with a term uniting the graphic image of a man of hoary old age with the notion of God's sheer remoteness and transcendence ('atik means both "old" and "removed"). But it is not by chance that the notion of 'Atika Kadisha, the "Holy Ancient One," reverberates with both these meanings, pointing also to the God who moves back from transcendence to shape. The 'Idroth hardly speak about the 'Ein-Sof, the infinite and formless God; in any event, they do not use this term. 'Atika Kadisha, the Holy Ancient One, which serves here as the supreme symbol, does not refer to 'Ein-Sof as such, but to 'Ein-Sof as it appears or, rather, is concealed in the highest *Sefiroth*. The concrete, visual symbol of the Holy Ancient One thus contains the dialectics of this transition from formlessness to form.

It seems obvious that the writer of these pieces was aware of the presumptuousness of his efforts. The hero of the mystical romance of the *Zohar* is the *mishnah* teacher Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai. He begins his discourse in the *'Idra Rabba* with a warning against the very anthropomorphism in which he is about to indulge. His warning is framed in the words of Deuteronomy: "Cursed be the man that maketh a graven or molten image" (Deut. 27:15). The words that follow concerning the "secrets of the Ancient of Days" are termed mysteries, and the speaker harbors no doubts about their merit: "I do not tell the heavens to listen,

nor the earth to hear, for we ourselves support the existence of the worlds." He begins his interpretation of the *Shi'ur Komah* as follows:

Before the Ancient of Ancients, the Hidden of the Hidden, prepared the shapes of the king and the crown of crowns, there was neither beginning nor end. He sketched and measured and spread out a curtain, in which he drew and called forth the primal kings. But these shapes did not endure, as it is written, "These are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel" (Gen. 36:31): a primal king over a primal Israel. And all those who were inscribed [in the curtain] were given names, but they did not endure, for He left them and concealed them. After a time, however, he entered that curtain and gave Himself shape. And we learn that, when He made up His mind to create the Torah, which had been hidden for two thousand years [prior to the creation of the world] and He took it out, the Torah instantly spoke before Him: "He who wishes to shape and to have effect, must first shape his own shapes [that is: shape himself]" And we have learned in the *Sifra de-Tseni'utha*: "The Ancient of Ancients, the Concealed of the Concealed, Mystery of Mysteries, took on a shape and it was given. He exists and yet does not exist; there is no one who can recognize him, for he is the Ancient of Ancients, the Elder of Elders, but in his shapes he becomes recognizable without being recognizable."⁴⁹

Sifra de-Tseni'utha uses the symbol of a scale to explain why the original shapes did not endure:

For so long as the scale did not exist, there was no seeing from countenance to countenance, and the primal kings perished,⁵⁰ and their species had no existence, and the earth vanished.... This scale hangs in a place that is not; on it are weighed those who do not exist; the scale stands on itself; it is not attached [to anything] and it is not visible. Those who were not, who are and who will be, have ascended and do ascend upon it.⁵¹

According to some, this scale is identified with the *Sefirah* of *Hokhmah*, divine wisdom, the principle of divine harmony permeating all worlds and all being. According to others, it represents the balance between the male and the female principle. In any event, the scale represents the principle of structure and shape. It is worth noting that the same symbol is used at the beginning of Dionysius Areopagita's book on the holy names (I, §3), which is a fundamental work of fifth-century Christian mysticism. This author also speaks of "that primeval divine scale which regulates all of the holy orders, and reaches even unto the celestial choruses of the angels."

The problem of the divine form is also posed in a precise formulation at the beginning of the *'Idra Zutta* (*Zohar*, III, 228a):

The Holy Ancient One, the Most Concealed of all the Concealed, who is separated from everything and yet not separated, for everything is connected to Him and He is connected to everything. He is everything; the Ancient of Ancients, the Concealed of the Concealed, who has shape and yet has no shape. He has shape in order to maintain the universe, and yet has no shape because He does not exist. When He assumed shape, He produced nine blazing lights from His shape, and these lights shine out of Him and spread continuously on all sides, like a lamp [or candle] from which light spreads on all sides; but when one approaches these lights in order to know them, there is nothing there but the lamp alone. Thus, the Holy Ancient One: He is a mystical lamp, Concealed of all the Concealed, knowable only through those lights which spread out from Him, reveal, and instantly conceal again. And these lights are called the Holy Name of God, and that is why everything is one.

The image in which the Ancient of Ancients is embodied, meticulously described in the *'Idroth* as the shape of the Primal Man, is identical with the name of God. The close interrelationship between the two realms, which we already found in the ancient *Shi'ur Komah*, is emphasized in this work too: that of the seemingly sensory contemplation of the parts of the body, and that of God's name, which breaks down into holy names in the

unfolding of the divine word. The Gnostic thinker Marcus describes in detail how the first word of His name—which, not coincidentally, is the first word of the Greek Bible, ἀρχή (beginning)—is to be analyzed, applying the procedures of linguistic mysticism to the Greek words and letters. In this procedure the names of the Greek letters are written, and their component letters are in turn written out as full names of letters, etc. The Kabbalists employed the same method in their own mysticism of language, in which the Tetragrammaton is split and divided into other divine names. In discussing this the *'Idra Zutta* weaves together the themes of anthropomorphic and linguistic mysticism.

What takes on form in God is that in which He reveals and announces Himself. Yet what would such a revelation be if not the name of God? Thus, the true elements of the divine form are the component elements of His name, the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This idea is one that accompanies Kabbalah from its first emergence and throughout its history. One of the earliest classical works of Spanish Kabbalah is entitled *Sefer ha-Temunah* (The Book of the Shape), the shape referred to being that of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which is the symbolic shape of the Godhead. One who is absorbed in contemplation of the Hebrew alphabet fulfills the verse mentioned at the beginning of this book: "And the shape of God does he behold" (Num. 12:8). These words refer to Moses, the receiver of the Torah; he was the great mystical adept, to whom this mystical form was revealed during his immersion in the Torah and its mysteries. *Sefer ha-Temunah* entirely avoids the forms of expression found in the *Shi'ur Komah* literature; it only refers to the configuration of the letters, which may be described as symbols of the various *Sefiroth*. But generally speaking, both views exist side by side; for the Kabbalist, they are merely different *façons de parler*.

The first configuration of ten, presented at the beginning of the *'Idra Zutta*, is that of the lamp and its nine lights: while these form the shape of the divine name, they are still included in the unity of the Holy Ancient One, whose being is both transcendent and nontranscendent, and they are negated therein. It is not clear whether the nine lights correspond to the nine *Sefiroth* that emanate from the first and highest *Sefirah* and with it form a decade, or whether the author of the *Zohar* is speaking

of nine lights that shine within the first *Sefirah* itself and illuminate its various internal aspects, even before the transition to the next *Sefirah*. In this *Sefirah* of divine wisdom a positive factor is added, diminishing the mystical obscurity and ineffability prevailing in the *Zohar's* remarks about the Holy Ancient One. For our purposes there is no need to decide between these two interpretations.

This highest mystical form of the Godhead is also described in the *'Idroth* as the *'Arikh 'Anpin* (literally, "the forbearing one"; the term was later construed as meaning "the large face"); it is likewise designated the "white head," *resha hivvera*. The skull, cerebral chambers, forehead, eyes, nose, and beard of this face are meticulously described, together with statements of mystical theology. Keeping with the biblical description of the Ancient of Days, he is depicted as an old man, white-haired, harmonious, thoughtful, and sleepless: "His eyes are balanced as one, constantly look about and do not sleep, as is said, 'Behold, the keeper of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers'"... "Therefore, he has no eyebrows, and there are no lids to his eyes" (*Zohar*, III, 289a). The body belonging to the white head is not described, but its existence is assumed. On the other hand, the parts of the head are described in great detail:

This Holy Ancient One is entirely concealed, and the highest Wisdom exists in his skull. Indeed, nothing of this Ancient is revealed except for the head, which is the supreme head of all heads. The highest wisdom, which is a [lower] head concealed therein, and is called the highest brain; the concealed brain, that is calm and prudent and of which no one knows apart from Himself. Three heads are carved out, one inside the other and one above the other. The first head [from below] is the concealed wisdom, which is concealed and not opened, and is the uppermost head for all other wisdoms [i.e., the *Sefiroth* emanating from it]. [The second head] is the supreme head, Holy Ancient One, the Concealed of all Concealed, the supreme head of all heads. [The third head] is a head that is not a head, and no one knows and it cannot be known what is in this head, for it is beyond wisdom or insight [i.e., this third head is the formless *'Ein-Sof* concealed within *'Atika Kadisha*, the Holy An-

cient One]. . . And that is why the Holy Ancient One is called the nothingness, for the nothingness depends on him. And all those hairs and threads emerge from the concealed brain, and they are all smooth and even, and the neck [covered by the hair] is not visible (III, 288a-b).

It is clear from this that the figure of the *'Atika Kadisha* also alludes to the *'Ein-Sof*, which transcends all "heads" and is beyond all shapes.⁵² One can see how problematical this most profound image of the Godhead is specifically as a shape—and to what extent the dialectics I spoke of earlier is operative here—from the fact that the same shape could also be called the nothingness. This image that can be called nothingness is ineffably filled with the rooted in shapelessness.

The problematical figure of *'Arikkh 'Anpin*, the first and highest *Sefirah*, becomes clearer when it is manifested in the continuous sequence of the divine manifestations, as the *Ze'ir 'Anpin*. Taken literally, *Ze'ir 'Anpin* refers to God as the "Impatient One"—that is, exhibiting the forces of rigor and justice alongside those of mercy and infinite generosity. This configuration of the *Sefiroth* is the true shape of the Godhead, embracing as it does all the manifestations of His activity. According to the *'Idra Rabbah*, it includes everything from *Hokhmah*, the divine wisdom, down to *Yesod*, the foundation of the world. In another version, that of the *'Idra Zutta*, this configuration embraces the six *Sefiroth* in two trios from *Gedulah (Hesed)* to *Yesod*. *Hokhmah* and *Binah* are here conceived as distinct shapes through which the worlds of these two *Sefiroth* are shaped and constructed; in this capacity they are designated as "father" and "mother" of the lower *Sefiroth*. Each *Sefirah* has its own structure, by which it was built as a "shape within the shape." Each one also has concealed worlds that are permeated with the structural laws of that *Sefirah*. For the *Zohar*, however, *Ze'ir 'Anpin* is essentially God as He is revealed in the unity of his activity. The true name of God, the Tetragrammaton, befits this level of manifestation and expresses its special structure. The factor joining and complementing the *Ze'ir 'Anpin* is its feminine counterpart, the *Shekhinah*, the last shape of the Divine in this system. In reality, however, the concealed shape of which we spoke above, which is on the

frontier of shapelessness, and that of the *Ze'ir 'Anpin*, which can be apprehended through mystical meditation, are not two separate forms. Thus, we read in the *'Idra Rabbah*:

The epitome of all these things is that the Ancient of Ancients and the *Ze'ir 'Anpin* are all one; everything was, everything is, everything will be in Him. No change takes place in Him, has ever taken place in Him, or will ever take place in Him. He has taken shape in these forms, and thus the shape that comprises all shapes in itself is complete; the shape that comprises all names in itself, the shape in which all other shapes appear; not that it is a shape, but that it has something of the shape. When the crowns and diadems [i.e., the *Sefiroth*] come together, the universal perfection comes about, for the higher ones and lower ones are combined in the shape of man. And because this shape embraces the higher and the lower ones, the Holy Ancient One has formed his forms and those of the *Ze'ir 'Anpin* in this shape. But if you ask: What is the difference between them? [The answer is:] Everything was in one equilibrium, but from here [i.e., the Holy Ancient One] there emanates the forces of Mercy, while from here [the *Ze'ir 'Anpin*] there issues severity [or justice]. And they are distinct [only] from our point of view. (*Zohar*, III, 141a-b)

Israel, it claims, lost the battle against Amalek because the children of Israel made a distinction between the *'Atika Kadisha*, who is called Nothingness, and the *Ze'ir 'Anpin*, called YHVH:

They wished to know [i.e., to distinguish] between the Ancient One, the Concealment of all Concealment, who is called *'Ayin* (Nothing), and *Ze'ir 'Anpin*, who is called YHVH. Therefore . . . they asked "Is the Lord [YHVH] among us, or not [Heb.: *Win*; literally, "nothing"!]" (Exod. 17:7). If so, why were they punished? Because they differentiated [between those primal shapes] and made a test, as it is written "because they tried the Lord" (ibid.). Israel said: "If it is this one [i.e., *'Atika Kadisha*], then we shall ask

in one fashion; but if it is the other [*Ze'ir 'Anpin*], then we shall ask in another fashion." (*Zohar*, II, 64b)

In a brief passage, parallel to the *'Idroth* (*Zohar*, II, 122b—123a), we find a succinct description of the "countenance of the king"—that is, the *Ze'ir 'Anpin*—in which the anthropomorphic *Shi'ur Komah* symbols are connected to theological motifs:

It is taught in the *Mystery of Mysteries*: The king's head is arranged according to *Hesed* and *Gevurah*. Hairs are suspended from his head, waves upon waves, which are all an extension, and which serve to support the upper and lower worlds: princes of princes, masters of truth, masters of balance, masters of howling, masters of screaming, masters of judgment, masters of mercy, meanings of Torah, and secrets of Torah, cleannesses and uncleannesses—all of them are called "hairs of the king," that is to say, the extension that proceeds from the holy king, and it all descends from *'Atika Kadisha*.

The forehead of the king is the visitation of the wicked. When they are called to account because of their deeds, and when their sins are revealed, then it is called "the forehead of the king," that is to say, *Gevurah*. It strengthens itself with its judgments, and extends itself to its extremities. And this differs from the forehead of *'Atika Kadisha*, which is called *Razon* ("will," or "pleasure").

The eyes of the king are the supervision of all, the supervision of the upper and the lower worlds, and all the masters of supervision are called thus. There are [different] colors joined together in the eyes, and all the masters of the supervision of the king are given the names of these colors, each one according to its way; all are called by the names of the colors of the eye. When the supervision of the king appears, the colors are stimulated.

The eyebrows are called "the place," which assigns supervision to all the colors, the masters of supervision. These eyebrows, in relation to the lower regions, are eyebrows of supervision [that derive] from the river that extends and emerges, and [they are] the place which brings [influence] from that river in order to bathe in the whiteness of *'Atika*, in the milk that flows from the mother; for when

Gevurah extends itself, and the eyes shine with a red color, *Atika Kadisha* illumines its own whiteness, and it shines in the mother, and she is filled with milk and suckles everything, and all the eyes bathe in the mother's milk, which flows forth perpetually. This is [the meaning of] Scripture: "Bathing in milk" (Song of Songs 5:12)—in the milk of the mother, which flows forth perpetually, without cease.

The nose of the holy king is the focal point of the countenance.⁵³ When the forces of power extend themselves and are gathered together, they are the nose of the holy king, and these powers depend upon the single *Gevurah* and emerge from there. When the judgments are aroused and come from their borders, they are tempered only by the smoke of the altar, and then it is written: "And the Lord smelled the sweet savor" (Genesis 8:21). The nose of *Atika* is different, since it does not need [the sweet savor], because the nose of *Atika* is called "long-suffering" in every respect;⁵⁴ the light of the concealed wisdom is called his "nose." And this is "praise" as it is written "My praise will I show you" (Isaiah 48:9), and King David was inspired by this: "Praise of David" (Psalm 145:1).

The ears of the king: when the desire is there and the mother gives suck, and the light of *Atika Kadisha* is kindled, then the light of the two brains and the light of the father and mother are aroused—all of these are called "the brains of the king," and they shine together, and when they shine together they are called "the ears of the king," for Israel's prayers are received, and then the movement begins toward good and evil, and by this movement the winged creatures are aroused who receive the sounds in the world, and all of them are called "the ears of the king."⁵⁵

The lips of the king and his palate are then portrayed in a similar fashion.

It is clear that *Shi'ur Komah* imagery is closely interwoven here with the author's mystical theology concerning various foci of divine activity. Each of the "bodily parts" corresponds to a specific realm, which provides the basis for a Kabbalistic thesis concerning the activity of the *'Atika Kadisha* and the *Ze'ir 'Anpin*. This is obviously a later approach, which reinterprets the biblical anthropomorphism and is already influenced by

medieval theology.⁵⁶ The author of the *Zohar*, and the later Kabbalists who followed in his footsteps, adopted this symbolism in an astonishingly daring manner; their goal was to defend the doctrine of a mystical form of the Godhead in order to explain the secret of divine activity. It took courage to employ these daring and, often enough, grotesque images. But they were also inspired by the certainty with which, in the course of comparing the theory of emanation with the mystical linguistic theory of the name of God, they grasped the imagelessness which, as a great modern thinker put it, is the refuge of all images.⁵⁷

lished as an article in *Diogenes*, 14 (1956), pp. 65-94. This was an international journal, published by UNESCO in several languages, widely read by the international scholarly community. Concerning the history of the Eranos Society, see William McGuire, *Bollingen: An Adventure in Collecting the Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, rev. ed. 1989). Scholem's participation is described on pp. 152-154.

12. Scholem gave a course on the history of the Sabbatian movement at the Hebrew University in 1955. I clearly remember his saying, when describing the Sabbatians' reinterpretation of the *Zohar* to conform to the biography of Sabbatai Zevi, that "if one did not know better, one could easily be convinced by their hermeneutics."

13. "Was Rabbi Moses de Leon the Author of the *Zohar*?" *Mada'ei ha-Yahadut*, vol. I (Jerusalem, 1926), pp. 16-26.

14. *Major Trends*, pp. 156-204.

15. *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, ed. Fishel Lachower, Isaiah Tishby (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1957), pp. xvii-cxvi. An English translation of this classical work, by David Goldstein, was recently published: *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, ed. Fishel Lachower and Isaiah Tishby, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1989), an introduction, pp. 1-126. The translation is distributed in the United States by B'nai B'rith International.

16. Published in *Sura*, III (1958), pp. 25-92. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky published a refutation of Belkin's thesis in the *Journal of Jewish Studies*, X (1959), pp. 25-44, 112-135; cf. Scholem's remark in *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), p. 57.

17. Weinstock published his thesis in *Tarbits*, 32 (1963), pp. 153-159, and Scholem responded to it in the same volume, pp. 252-265. See also Weinstock's collection of articles, *Be-Maagley ha-Nigleh vaha-Nistar* (Jerusalem, 1969).

18. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 112-155. See the reviews by Isaiah Tishby, in *Zion*, 54 (1989), pp. 209-222, 469-492 (and Idel's responses there, pp. 223-240; 493-508), and by Robert Alter, *Commentary*, 88 (1989), pp. 53-59.

1: *SHI'UR KOMAH*: THE MYSTICAL SHAPE OF THE GODHEAD

1. Benno Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin, 1934), p. 58.

2. Samson Raphael Hirsch translated this, characteristically enough, as *Gestaltung Gottes* (Formation of God).

3. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis, übersetzt und erklärt*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen, 1917), p. 122.

4. Benno Jacob, op. cit.

5. The two most important *Shi'ur Komah* texts were printed in the book *Merkavah Shelemah* (Jerusalem, 1922). The former text speaks in the name of Rabbi Akiba, ff. 32a-33b; the latter, consisting of several pieces, ff. 34a-43a, speaks in the name of Rabbi Ishmael. Another fragment, f. 44a-b is attributed to Akiba. These texts were previously known only in the extremely corrupt form in which they were printed in *Sefer Razi'el* (Amsterdam, 1701). Two manuscripts of *Shi'ur Komah* versions have par-

tially survived on parchment pages in the Cairo Genizah: one is at Oxford, Hebr. C 65, the other in the Sasson Collection, MS. 522; both were first identified by me. Further fragments are extant in *Hekhaloth Rabbati* and *Hekhaloth Zutrati*, the former in the name of Rabbi Ishmael and the latter in that of Rabbi Akiba. Another fragment is preserved in the so-called *Alphabet of Rabbi Akiba*, which, to be sure, was edited later than the above-mentioned pieces but nevertheless preserved a great deal of the old *Merkavah* material. The work of the Karaite Solomon ben Jeroham, *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*, ed. I. Davidson (New York, 1934), pp. 113-124, contains many passages taken from *Shi'ur Komah*.

6. In *Hekhaloth Zutrati*, MS. Oxford, Neubauer 1551, f. 40b.
7. *Merkavah Shelemah*, f. 30a.
8. Ibid., f. 34a-b. This passage, together with another from the then as-yet-unpublished *Sefer Razi'el*, are translated in Johann Andreas Eisenmenger, *Entdecktes Judentum* (Frankfurt, 1700), vol. I, pp. 2-4. The translator is highly indignant about the alleged blasphemies in those passages, no less so than the Karaite polemicists were when dealing with this subject in their attacks on rabbinic Judaism a thousand years earlier.
9. Cf. *Hagigah* 13b; *Exodus Rabbah* 1:21.
10. This introductory passage conflates Isaiah 6:1 and I Kings 22:19.
11. *Merkavah Shelemah*, f. 37a.
12. Ibid., f. 40a.
13. Cf. especially the texts of St. Hippolytus and St. Irenaeus in Irenaeus, *Adversus haereseos*, ed. Harvey, vol. I, pp. 114-188, esp. pp. 128-134 (I, 14, 1-2). Cf. the discussions and partial translations of A. Neander, *Genetische Entwicklung der vornehmsten gnostischen Systeme* (Berlin, 1818), p. 168-187; A. Hilgenfeld, *Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums* (Leipzig, 1884), pp. 369-384; W. Schultz, *Dokumente der Gnosis* (Jena, 1910), pp. 189-201; H. Leisegang, *Die Gnosis* (Leipzig, 1924), pp. 326-349. Regarding Gnostic linguistic theory and, above all, the theory of the name, one should note especially *The Gospel of Truth*, which appears among the Gnostic papyri found in Nag Hammadi. For the relevant passages, cf. Hans Martin Schenke, *Die Herkunft des sogenannten Evangelium Veritatis* (Göttingen, 1959), pp. 38-40, 51-54. This translation constitutes a further advance over the one in the first edition by Malinine, Puech, and Quispel.
14. M. Gaster, "Das Schiur Komah," in his *Studies and Texts* (London, 1925-1928), vol. II, pp. 1330-1353. This paper first appeared in *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, vol. 37 (1893).
15. Irenaeus, op. cit., p. 129. Almost the same idea appears in *The Treatise of the Three Rings*, one of the writings of Nag Hammadi (MS. Jung), in his formulations concerning the nature of the logos, the divine word that is Christ, as being the image of that which has no image, the body of that which is without body, etc.
16. Cf. Josef Keil, "Ein rätselhaftes Amulett," *Wiener Jahreshfte*, 32 (1940), pp. 79-84. The Hebrew portion of the inscription, which Keil and Ludwig Blau could not

decipher, is purely Jewish. The second line contains the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 28:58.

17. *Alpha-Betha de-Rabbi 'Akiva*, in Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrash*, III, p. 25.

18. In the name of Simeon ben Lakish in the Jerusalem Talmud, *Shekalim* 6:1, end; *Sotah* 8:3, end; Canticles Rabbah 5:11. In *Midrash Konen*, it states: "It [i.e., the Torah] was written in black fire upon white fire, and was connected upon the arm of the Holy One, blessed be He" (Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, II, p. 23). We likewise find in one of the *Shi'ur Komah* fragments that God's left hand is spoken of in the following terms: "The whole world hangs from it like an amulet from the arm of a hero." Cf. my *Buch Bahir* (Berlin, 1923), p. 110.

19. We wonder if the expression used by St. Paul in Philippians 3:21 concerning the transfigured body of Jesus $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \delta\acute{o}\xi\eta\varsigma$, is not the same as that which later appears in the *Shi'ur Komah* teaching as "body of splendor" (*guf ha-kavod*) or "body of the Shekhinah" (*guf ha-Shekhinah*).

20. *Pesikta Rabbati*, ed. Ish-Shalom, p. 98b. Concerning the garment of God, see my book *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1960), pp. 57-64, 131-132.

21. *Die Pseudoklementinen* I, "Homilien" ed. B. Rehm (Berlin, 1953), pp. 232-233; cf. *ibid.*, p. 59, Homily 3, §7.

22. See Heinrich Graetz, "Die mystische Literatur in der gaonäischen Epoche," *MGWJ*, 8 (1859), pp. 67-78, 103-118, 140-152, which has misled many readers. Scharastani himself (in T. Haarbrücker's translation, vol. I, p. 116), from whom Graetz drew; quite correctly claimed that the anthropomorphisme schools in Islam arose under Jewish influence.

23. I.e., *mishnayot*. Origen uses the Greek word *deuteroses*.

24. Origen, *Prologus in Canticum*, Patrologia Latina XIII, p. 63.

25. See *Hagigah* 13a, and *Kiddushin* 71a (regarding the transmission of the Name of 42 Letters "to one who is modest and humble and stands halfway through his life.")

26. *Menahot* 45a.

27. See S. Lieberman, *Midrashei Teman* (Jerusalem, 1940), pp. 13-17.

28. Cf. Friedrich Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien* (Wiesbaden, 1958), p. 15.

29. *Hekhaloth Zutrat*, MS. Oxford 1531, f. 45b. Cf. my *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 40.

30. Cf. Lieberman, pp. 118-126.

31. Gaster writes: "We must seek the origin [of the *Shi'ur Komah*] in a time when conscious opposition to God's humanization through means of anthropomorphic understanding and imagery was not yet developed. The inherent danger of this was only realized after the spread of Christianity; that also gave rise to the tannaitic protest against the existing translations of the Bible. Only in this context is it possible to understand the reluctance concerning the giving of instruction in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, and even the prohibition against dealing with it. It did not, as has previously been assumed, lead to an abstract philosophy but, on the contrary, to a grossly sensual conception of the Deity, which was bound to have consequences destructive to ethical

Judaism and to the maintenance of the spiritualistic conception of the Deity" (op. cit., p. 1340).

32. Cf. my *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 67.

33. "As the image of his Creator shall be is his image, as the form of His stature shall be his stature." Cf. my *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 124, n. 30.

34. Cf. e.g., Solomon ben Jeroham, *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*, pp. 114-124, who writes against Saadiah Gaon: ". . . who says that he has found wisdom and knowledge and understanding, and all secrets of the wisdom of your teachers. But I do not see you find anything but shame and contempt—the image of the form which you have chiseled out, and the measure in which you take pride"

35. Cf. B. M. Lewin, ed., *Otsar ha-Ge'onim: Hagiggah, Helek ha-Teshuvot* (Jerusalem, 1931), p. 10.

36. Ibid., *Berakhoth*, p. 17. The wording of the Arabic original is brought from a Yemenite manuscript by Joseph Kapah, *Yahaduth Teman* (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 408. R. Saadiah dealt with the problem of the *Shi'ur Komah* several times.

37. *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. J. Blau (Jerusalem, 1957), §117, vol. I, pp. 200-201, and see the notes there. On Maimonides' change of mind, see S. Lieberman, in his appendix to my *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 124, and Alexander Altmann, in the article mentioned in the next note, pp. 231-232.

38. Narboni's letter on *Shi'ur Komah* is published in a critical version and with an English translation by Alexander Altmann, in his *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 225-288.

39. See Simeon ben Tsemah Duran, *Magen Avot* (Livorno, 1784), f. 21b.

40. On the history of the interpretations of and polemics about the *Shi'ur Komah* among medieval authors, especially the philosophers, cf. A. Schmiedl, *Studien über jüdische, insbesondere jüdisch-arabische Religionsphilosophie* (Vienna, 1869), pp. 249—251; J. Hamburger, *Realencyclopädie des Judentums*, vol. II, p. 578; D. Kaufman, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre in der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie des Mittelalters* (Gotha, 1877), pp. 86, 217, 497.

41. *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, 7, iv. This work was written in Spanish by a Kabbalist from Marrano circles during the first third of the seventeenth century, and was published in Hebrew translation in Amsterdam, 1655. Cf. C. Knorr von Rosenroth: *Kabbala denudata*. Apparatus in librum Sohar, pars tertia et quarta, liber . . . Porta Coelorum, (Sulzbach, 1678), pp. 147-148.

42. Cf. *Zohar*, III, 109b (*Ra'ya Mehemna*); *Tikkunei Zohar*, §70, p. 127a. [All translations from the *Zohar* and *Tikkunei Zohar*, except where otherwise stated, are by the editor, and are based upon Scholem's translation from the Aramaic that appears in the Hebrew edition of this book.—Ed.]

43. *Pardes Rimmonim* (Cracow, 1592), VI, 8, p. 38b.

44. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, S §85; M §119. There are two main editions of the text of *Sefer ha-Bahir*, each of which divides the text into numbered sections in completely different ways. These are: (1) *Das Buch Bahir (Sepher ha-Bahir; Em Text auf der Frühzeit der Kabbala,*

auf Grund eines kritischen Textes ins Deutsche übersetzt und kommentiert von Gerhard Scholem. Dissertation, Ludwig-Maximilians Universität, München (Berlin, 1923). [Reprinted: Darmstadt, 1970.] (2) *Sefer ha-Bahir, ha-nikra Midrasho shel R. Nehunyah ben ha-Kanah*, ed. Reuben Margalioth (Jerusalem, 1951). Subsequent references to the *Bahir* will cite both editions: Scholem (S) and Margalioth (M), followed by the respective section numbers in each.

45. Regarding the ninth and tenth *Sefiroth*, cf. the detailed expositions in chapters 3 and 4 of this book.

46. See on this Yosef Ben-Shlomo, *Torat ha-'Elohut shel R. Moshe Cordovero* (Jerusalem, 1965).

47. At times *Hokhmah* is the head, and *Binah* is the throat or the two eyes, while *Keter* is interpreted as the crown characterizing the primal human being in his kingly dignity (cf., e.g., Gaster, *Studies and Texts*, 11, pp. 1348). In another development of this symbolism, which prepared the way for the doctrine of the *'Idra*, the first *Sefirah* itself is conceived as *'Adam Kadmon*, while later on this term is used for the entire Sefirotic system. The term is employed in this manner, for example, by Jacob and Isaac ha-Kohen of Soria, while in the *Zohar* itself, it occurs only in the latest strata. The *Tikkunei Zohar*, probably in contrast to other, more general symbolisms, speaks of *'adam kadmon le-kol ha-kedumim*—Adam as preceding all other primordial beings. In *Tikkunei Zohar Hadash*, the destruction of the primal worlds is ascribed not to the Holy Ancient One but to *'Adam Kadmon* (Warsaw, 1885), f. 114d.

48. *Zohar*, III, 144a, at the end of the *'Idroth*.

49. *Zohar*, III, 128a-b.

50. Genesis 36 reports of the Edomite kings only that each one built a city and died; according to the *Zohar's* reading, each one corresponded to a world having a specific structure, which was subsequently destroyed.

51. *Zohar*, II, 176a.

52. English: *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, arranged by Fishel Lachower and Isaiah Tishby, translated from the Hebrew by David Goldstein (Oxford, 1989), I, p. 335. "And if you say: Who is *'Atika Kadisha?* come and see. Beyond the heights above there is that which is not known, is not recognized, and is not described, and it comprises everything, and two heads are comprised in it. And everything is prepared thus. And [*'Atika Kadisha*] is not in number, or in thought, or in calculation, but in the devotion of the heart. Of this it is said, 'I said: I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue' (Ps. 39:2)."

53. According to talmudic halakhah, the nose is the feature that makes the face identifiable; cf. *Yevamoth* 120b.

54. A play on words: the Hebrew word for "forbearing" is *ma'arikh apo*, literally, "holding one's nose-breath for a long time."

55. English: *Wisdom of the Zohar*, I, pp. 337-339.

56. Later Kabbalists such as Cordovero go even further in this direction. A person, by taking the character of each *Sefirah* as a moral standard for his own conduct in

accordance with the Torah, reflects and imitates the mystical shape of God through his own deeds, virtually sculpting a replica of that shape out of his own actions; cf. Cordovero's widely circulated Kabbalistic ethical work, *Tomer Devorah* (translated into English as *The Palm Tree of Deborah*, introduction and notes by Louis Jacobs, London, 1960).

57. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main, 1955), vol. IV, p. 370.

2: SITRA AHRA: GOOD AND EVIL IN THE KABBALAH

1. I have published the pertinent writings of this author in *Mada'ei ha-Yahaduth*, II (Jerusalem, 1927).

2. *Genesis Rabbah* 9:1, ed. Theodor, p. 68.

3. This tractate was published by A. Jellinek, *Ginzei Hokhmah ha-Kabbalah* (Leipzig, 1853), pp. 1-8. Regarding the date of its composition, see my article on this subject in the German-language *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1929), vol. III, cols. 801-803.

4. Cf. my book *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Berlin, 1962), pp. 131-133 [now available in English: *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. A. Arkush, ed. R. J. Z. Werblowsky (Philadelphia and Princeton, 1987), pp. 148-151—Ed.], and *Sefer ha-Bahir*, S §14; M §22.

5. Cf. below, chapter 4, toward the end of sec. VI.

6. I have made use of the following Hebrew manuscripts: Oxford, Christ Church College 198, ff. 7b-8b; Leiden, Warner 93, f. 54b; Rome, Casanatense 179, f. 96a.

7. The word used here, *devarim*, is also understood by these circles in the sense of logoi, i.e., celestial powers, and it is in this sense that it is used further on as well.

8. *Kiddushin* 82a.

9. *Genesis Rabbah* 47:8 and passim, ed. Theodor, pp. 475, 793, 983.

10. Spelled here without the 'alef, as *ve-nitmeitem* instead of *ve-nitmei'tem* the author therefore sees here the Hebrew word *met* (dead).

11. *Berakhoth* 33a.

12. *Genesis Rabbah*, 19: 4, ed. Theodor, p. 172.

13. *Bava Batra* 16a.

14. *Pesahim* 21b.

15. *Genesis Rabbah* 21:5, ed. Theodor, p. 200.

16. That the two trees in this passage actually represent the *Sefiroth* of *Yesod* and *Malkhuth* is confirmed by a parallel passage in R. Ezra of Gerona's *Perush ha-Aggadot* (MS. Vatican 294, f. 27a-b), whose symbolism unequivocally indicates these two *Sefiroth*. The present passage simultaneously confirms Ezra's authorship of this piece, as documented at the end of the Oxford manuscript.

17. In this interpretation Adam's original sin is identical to that of the fallen angels; in both cases there is the demiurgical presumption of a creature to imitate