

Time and Eternity in Jewish Mysticism

That Which is Before and That Which is After

Edited by

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BRILL

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PART 6

Conclusion Beyond Time



“Higher than Time”: Observations on Some Concepts of Time in Kabbalah and Hasidism

Moshe Idel

Abstract

The study surveys the variety of concepts of time in Judaism, and especially in Kabbalah, and addresses in more detail the concept of a super-temporal experience. While traditional forms of Judaism operated with a variety of concepts of time, the theosophical Kabbalists reified time by identifying terms of time with a various sefirotic powers. On the other hand, the ecstatic Kabbalah has been informed by Greek concepts that conceived time as related to movement and characteristic of the corporeal world, and pursued intellectually understood experiences that transcend time. This approach is similar to and in my opinion also informed the better known Hasidic concept of “higher than time.”

1 Introduction: On Types of Time in Judaism

No one was ever born a Kabbalist. Those who eventually turned to Kabbalah were, in the vast majority of cases, people who first experienced other forms of Judaism. More often than not, studies of the Hebrew Bible with Rashi's commentary, Rabbinic Judaism including Midrashic and Halakhic thought, and sometimes even Jewish philosophy, preceded the encounter with Kabbalists and Kabbalistic texts. This is not only assumed by historical reconstruction, but it also explicitly shows up in the confessions of some Kabbalists who wrote about their religious journeys. Precedent forms of Jewish literature were much more standard in the first stages of the study curricula of would-be kabbalists, but with the progress of students, their encounters with more sophisticated forms of literature became less predictable; this is due to the fact that the latter were not part of a canonized curriculum. Thus, someone could first study Abraham ibn Ezra's commentary on the Bible or his other writings, or he could begin by examining Maimonides' books, or he could start to study Kabbalah in more than one way, as we know from the testimonies of Kabbalists themselves.

The variety of possible contacts also shaped the manner in which some students understood the more speculative texts that they encountered. Given the non-theological proclivities in more traditional forms of Judaism, variations on theological themes were conceived of as a matter of someone's choice. The specifics were not important, as long as they did not affect the crucial aspect of Rabbinic Judaism, namely, the performance of the commandments.

For the purposes of our study here, this means that a variety of concepts about time were accumulated intellectually, and in many cases also experientially, throughout the lifetime of one who would become a Kabbalist.¹ As a child, he would experience what I would like to call "shared time," namely the cyclical time of the week, with the Sabbath as a central experience of that which is different. This was a time that an individual was to share with his family and community, but was also to share with the divinity, due to the latter's description in the Hebrew Bible as one who rested on the Sabbath. This means that when one experiences the sanctified time of the Sabbath, he is living synchronically with other traditional Jews and with God. I should emphasize that such an experience is not only a matter of childhood practice, but that it may remain part of one's mature life; this is regardless of the different meanings that may be attached to it with the development of one's intellectual horizons. I shall refer to this type of time as *microchronos*, and in our case, it is a cyclical microchronos. Such a child could learn about another type of cyclical time, namely, the biblical laws of *shemittah* and Jubilee, but it is hard to assume that in the exilic situation, these were experienced in a direct manner. Let me emphasize that this kind of time, i.e., the cyclical microchronos, is strongly related to rituals, as found in the Hebrew Bible and in more detailed rabbinic instructions.

By engaging in other types of Jewish literature, namely, rabbinical literature, one could come to see a broader perspective than that of the microchronos, which involves a more mythical history of the entire nation. This perspective of time is not just the awareness of a long past, but also an expectation of a better, messianic future. Such time can be described a linear, and couple very well with later views on progress in history. The periods of time in this view

1 For my emphasis on the diversity of conceptualizations of time in Kabbalistic literature see "Some Concepts of Time and History in Kabbalah," *Jewish History and Jewish Memory, Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, eds. E. Carlebach, J. M. Efron, D. N. Myers (Brandeis University Press, Hanover and London, 1998), 153–188; "Sabbath: On Concepts of Time in Jewish Mysticism," in ed. G. Blidstein, *Sabbath, Idea, History, Reality*, (Ben Gurion University Press, Beer Sheva, 2004), 57–93; and "Multiple Forms of Redemption in Kabbalah and Hasidism," *JQR*, vol. 101 (2011): 27–70. See also the end of the next footnote.

transcend the weekly repetition and the annual cycle of feasts by centuries and even millennia, and I would like to refer to this view as the mesochronos. The mesochronos has little to do with rituals, and thus it does not necessarily conflict with the microchronos.

More reflective approaches to time are encountered in more philosophical types of literature. For example, some 12th century Jewish thinkers like Abraham bar Hiyya and Abraham ibn Ezra adopted another type of cyclical time that I designate as macrochronic. This is cosmic time, which deals with cycles of many thousands, or even tens of thousands of years. These cycles are relevant for the fate of the universe, and not only of the nation or of the particular individual. This type of time cannot be experienced, but it too can be understood and accepted without any conflict with the two other types of time. In other forms of philosophy, however, especially in Neoplatonic and Neoplatonic philosophy, a totally different approach to time can be discerned: This is a split between time and eternity as based on the assumption that the immutable divinity inhabits a supra-temporal, or extra-temporal realm, which can also be described as eternity. Such views as found in medieval philosophy reverberates also, *mutatis mutandis*, in some schools of Kabbalah. Here, the divinity no longer participates in events *in time*, but inhabits a realm that is beyond time. This category of eternity beyond time does not necessarily exclude the possibility of accepting the existence of the three other times. However, it is possible to envision cases in which an attraction to the supra-temporal, or the eternal, would necessarily belittle or marginalize the importance of other forms of time.

Last but certainly not least, it is important to mention that the emergence of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah created other approaches to time, especially with its variety of perceptions of the mutability of divine powers. Some of the theosophical-theurgical systems were deeply impacted by an astrological manner of thinking, which allowed each of the seven lower *sefirot* to govern over of a cosmic cycle, or a cosmic *Shemittah*.² Other views spoke

2 See Haviva Pedaya, *Nahmanides, Cyclical Time and Holy Text* (Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 2003), 213–411 (Hebrew); Colette Sirat, “Juda b. Salomon Ha-Kohen—philosophe, astronome et peut-être Kabbaliste de la première moitié du XIII^e siècle,” *Italia* 1.2 (1979), 48, n. 21; M. Idel, “The Jubilee in Jewish Mysticism,” in *Fins de Siècle—End of Ages*, ed. J. Kaplan (Merkaz Shazar, Jerusalem, 2005), 67–98 (Hebrew). About the circularity of time see also Elliot R. Wolfson, *Aleph, Mem Tau, Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth and Death* (University of Los Angeles Press, Berkeley, 2006), 55–116; and Brian Ogren, “La questione dei cicli cosmici nella produzione pugliese di Yisshaq Abrabanel,” *Itinerari di ricerca storica* 20/21 (2006): 141–161. Given the negative connotations related to some Kabbalists’ assumptions that they lived in the most negative cycle, the attitude to time was also negative. This was especially the case with the

about the consequences that the dynamic relations between the divine powers have upon this world,³ while others combine the various theosophical-theurgical approaches to time. In later Kabbalistic schools, it is possible to discern efforts toward a mapping the sefirotic world by means of the hypostatization of temporal terms. This includes *zeman*, which sometimes refers to the all of the *sefirot*,⁴ and “days,” which represent the lower seven *sefirot*. It also includes an interpretation of the Rabbinic concept of *seder zemanim*, i.e., the “order of times,” as those seven lower *sefirot*,⁵ or in another case as *Tiferet*⁶ and *Malkhut*.⁷ In other examples, “day” represents the last *sefirah*,⁸ *Rosh ha-Shanah* is identified with *Gevurah* or *Binah*,⁹ and *Yom Kippur* is identified with *Hokhmah*¹⁰ or *Binah*.¹¹ Shabbat refers to either *Malkhut* or *Yesod*, and in some cases to *Binah*, while *Shabbat ha-gadol* and *Yovel*, namely, Jubilee, refer to *Binah*.¹² Following the theosophy of the *Zohar*, many Kabbalists used terms like ‘*Attiqa’ Qadisha*’, which is another temporal designation denoting “the Holy Ancient One,” in order to refer to the highest levels within the divine world.

Kabbalists related to *Sefer ha-Temunah* and those influenced by it. Their attitude, sometimes antinomian, differs from those of Abulafia or other theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists.

- 3 See M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988), 222–234.
- 4 See the view of R. Joseph Karo, adduced in Wolfson, *Aleph, Mem, Tau*, 8.
- 5 See e.g., R. Azriel of Gerona, *Commentary on the Talmudic Legends*, ed. I. Tishby, (Mekize Nirdamim, Jerusalem, 1945), 80, n. 6, 116, 142–144, *Sefer ha-Shem, Attributed to R. Moses de Leon*, 123. See also Wolfson, *Aleph, Mem, Tau*, pp. 84–86, 88, 90, who calls this view as “time without time”.
- 6 *Sefer ha-Shem, Attributed to R. Moses de Leon*, 118.
- 7 *Ibidem*, 181.
- 8 R. Azriel of Gerona, *Commentary on the Talmudic Legends*, 115.
- 9 See, e.g., R. Joseph Gikatilla, *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, (Krakau, 1881), fol. 26a, *Zohar* I, fol. 226b, II, fol. 32b.
- 10 *Sefer ha-Shem, Attributed to R. Moses de Leon*, ed. M. Oron, (Cherub Press, Los Angeles, 2010), 69.
- 11 See, e.g., Gikatilla, *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, fol. 30b, *Kabbalistic Commentary on Rabbi Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi on Genesis Rabbah*, ed. M. Hallamish, (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1984), 46, 192, *Zohar*, I, fol. 220b, II, fol. 39b, 40b, 135a, *Sefer ha-Shem, Attributed to R. Moses de Leon*, 72, 89.
- 12 See Elliot K. Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1989); idem, *Sod ha-Shabbat, The Mystery of Sabbath* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1989), and my “Multiple Forms of Redemption,” p. 45 n. 62, *Sefer ha-Shem, Attributed to R. Moses de Leon*, p. 148. Ya’aqov ben Sheshet, *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhohim*, (Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 93, 168–169, Gikatilla, *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, fols. 13b, 30b. See above n. 2.

More prominent than all of these examples, however, seems to be that of “day” and “night” as symbolizing *Tiferet* and *Malkhut*, respectively, which need to be unified through the performance of rituals.¹³ It would be easy to give many more examples, and we should see the correspondences between time and the *sefirot* as just one among many forms of symbolism that include anthropomorphic, literal, and paradisiacal types. These were all used in order to flesh out the significance of the sefirotic system while conferring a special meaning on that system at the same time. Let me emphasize that Kabbalistic symbolism is not fixed, and various Kabbalists offered their own different sefirotic interpretations of the same word.

These examples of the reification of time as referring to or corresponding with divine powers are part of a much broader phenomenon evident in the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, namely, the ritualization of the sefirotic realm¹⁴ In my opinion, the reification and hypostatization of concepts of time reflect the importance of sacred time to kabbalists. On the mundane, experiential level, this includes the holidays and Sabbath, which parallel the divine map according to the principle of upper and lower correspondence. Sometimes this correspondent parallelism is understood in an interactive manner. In other words, unlike the sacramental approach to time, which offers the possibility of transcending ordinary time by performing ceremonial rules, the philosophical and the ecstatic Kabbalistic approaches attempt to transcend time altogether. Whether such a hypostatic approach is related to the supernal, hypostatic understanding of time in Neoplatonism is a question that cannot be dealt with here.¹⁵ As I shall try to show below, the main school of 18th century Eastern European Hasidism represents a combination of earlier concepts of time. Specifically, I shall be concerned with one single theory that

13 Ya'aqov ben Sheshet, *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhohim*, ed. G. Vajda, 160, 171, 194; *Zohar* III, fol. 177b, 260b; *Sefer ha-Shem, Attributed to R. Moses de Leon*, 123; and later on, R. Hayyim Vital, *Sha'ar Ma'amarei Rashbi*, (Jerusalem, 1988), 9: “You should know that *Ze'ir Anpin* [the Small Face, namely the divine Male] is called Day and his female is called Night, and see that the positive commandments correspond to 248 limbs, and this is the reason why all the commandments seize the place named Time [*zeman*] . . . since there is a cooperation [*shittuf*] between Male and Female, which are called Day and Night.”

14 See my *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism* (Cherub Press, Los Angeles, 2005), passim, especially 215–220.

15 See Shmuel Sambursky, “The Concept of Time in Late Neoplatonism,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 11, (Jerusalem, 1966), 153–167, S. Sambursky—S. Pines, *The Concept of Time in Late Neoplatonism*, (The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, 1971).

combines various ideas of supra-temporally transcending regular time on an experiential level.¹⁶

The possible accumulation of different ideas of time over time means that the phylogenesis of Jewish culture can be encountered in the ontogenesis of a later Jewish figure. Consequently, as both an inheritor of various traditions and as mature person, one can embrace a variety of concepts of time. This does not mean that all of the erudite Jews at any given time shared the same conglomerate concepts of time, even though some with similar intellectual itineraries may have. My assumption is that a turn to higher forms of literature, which may be different from tradition, does not necessarily signify a rupture with the earlier literature. This is especially the case, since the more mature consumers of higher literature remained part of the traditional societies in which they continued to live and be active as Jewish philosophers and Kabbalists. Regardless of the lack of rupture, ideas still differed from one Kabbalist to another or from one Hasidic master to another. The differences might stem from varying proportions that earlier theories of time were accorded in the various systems, or they may be because of the idiosyncratic nature of the various mystics. In other words, concepts of time heavily depend upon corresponding images of the deity that are imagined to either participate in or to transcend time, and since these images are diverse, so too are the time-images diverse. This does not necessarily point to a theologically oriented understanding of Judaism, since the God-images themselves are reflections, or projections, of the ideals of life here below.

These observations about the variety of time concepts in Judaism are relevant not only for a proper understanding of Judaism, but also for a more adequate phenomenology of religion in general. Indeed, there is a stark distinction, found especially in the books of Mircea Eliade, between the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition as dependent on a linear time, and the so-called archaic religions as inhabiting circular visions of time. This distinction constitutes an extreme case of over-simplification that fails to take into account the variety of life-forms in Judaism. Eliade's paradigm is especially challenged by the importance of cyclical time in traditional Judaism, since the time of the Hebrew Bible. His reduction of Judaism as dominated by a single, linear concept of time is the result of a simplistic approach, which unfortunately turned into the late 20th century's most widespread theory of religion. The more cyclical approaches found in traditional Judaism and in Kabbalah have already been analyzed in relation to Eliade's claim in other studies. Here, I would like to elaborate on another point that needs a more detailed analysis, namely, the

16 For conglomerate ideas of time see my "Multiple Forms of Redemption," 34.

notion of the possibility of overcoming historical time in Jewish thought, an approach that Eliade attributed solely to archaic religion.¹⁷

2 Higher than Time in Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalistic School

Unlike many other Kabbalists, we know much about the life of Abraham Abulafia, the founder of ecstatic Kabbalah.¹⁸ He began his studies as a boy with his father, concentrating on traditional subjects such as the Bible and Rabbinic literature. He then turned to the *Guide of the Perplexed*, which he perused carefully and then taught for many years in several towns in Southern Europe. In 1270, he began his studies of Kabbalah, concentrating upon commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah*. His intellectual itinerary is reminiscent of that of his student R. Nathan ben Sa'adya Har'ar, and it represents a broader phenomenon in the

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- 17 See my *Mircea Eliade: From Magic to Myth* (Peter Lang, New York, 2014), 135–155. Compare also to an analysis of Eliade's time and history in general Carl Olson, *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade* (Macmillan, Houndsmills, London, 1992), 139–156. Compare to the reverberations of his view in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being, Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (Fordham University Press, New York, 2005), xviii.
- 18 *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken Books, New York, 1960), 119–155, and his last series of lectures at the Hebrew University printed as *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah and of Abraham Abulafia*, ed., Y. ben Shlomo (Akademon, Jerusalem, 1969), (Hebrew). See my monographs *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* tr. J. Chipman (SUNY Press, Albany, 1987), idem, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, tr. M. Kallus, (SUNY Press, Albany, 1989), idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1988), and *Natan ben Sa'adya Har'ar, Le Porte della Giustizia*, a Cura di Moshe Idel, tr. Maurizio Mottolese, (Adelphi, Milano, 2001). Sustained discussions on some topics in Abulafia's Kabbalah are available also in chapters of many of my other books, in particular *Messianic Mystics*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998), 58–100, 295–302, *Kabbalah in Italy, 1280–1510, a Survey*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2010), 30–88, 297–298, or *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism*, (Continuum, London, New York, 2008), and “Abraham Abulafia: A Kabbalist ‘Son of God’ On Jesus and Christianity,” in ed. N. Stahl, *Jesus among the Jews* (Routledge, London, New York, 2012), 60–93, as well as Elliot R. Wolfson, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence: Angelic Embodiment and the Alterity of Time in Abraham Abulafia,” *Kabbalah*, vol. 18 (2008): 133–190, idem, *Abraham Abulafia: Hermeneutics, Theosophy, and Theurgy* (Cherub Press, Los Angeles, 2000), Harvey J. Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder, Abraham Abulafia, the Franciscans, and Joachimism*, (SUNY Press, Albany 2007), Robert J. Sagerman, *The Serpent Kills or the Serpents Give Life: The Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia's Response to Christianity*, (Brill, Leiden 2011).

younger Jewish elite in the last third of the 13th century in Spain and Italy.¹⁹ Though a devout Maimonidean with strong Arabic Andalusian Neoaristotelian tendencies, Abulafia was also acquainted with and influenced by Neoplatonic books. These include R. Bahya ibn Paquda's *Sefer Hovot ha-Levavot*,²⁰ and *Liber de Causis*, which is a version of Proclus's *Elements of Theology* found in Arabic, Hebrew and Latin.²¹ He was also interested in the writings of Abraham ibn Ezra.²² These bodies of speculative literature are quite disparate, and thus exemplify the diversity of the conceptual conglomerate that informed his thought.

Like many other medieval Neoaristotelian thinkers, Abulafia adopted a theory of ten separate cosmic intellects that are mostly unrelated to changes taking place in the sublunar world, and whose intellectual activity does not change. According to Maimonides, anything unconnected to motion or change, including God, "does not fall under time;" this phrase has been translated into Hebrew as "lo nofel taḥat ha-zeman."²³ Like in the case of traditional Jewish theology, in which God acts and rests and the Jew imitates Him, so too in philosophical texts the philosopher attempts to imitate God. But here God is conceived of in a totally different manner, i.e., as an intellect that exists beyond time. In some cases, the philosophical imitation of God is a matter of assimilation into the divine entity that is conceived of as intelligizing. In such a manner, according to some of the philosophical sources and to ecstatic Kabbalah, one may become a part of the divine realm.²⁴

19 See my Moshe Idel, "The Kabbalah's Window of Opportunities, 1270–1290," in eds. E. Fleisher, G. Blidstein, C. Horowitz, B. Septimus, *Me'ah She'arim, Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, (The Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2001), 171–208.

20 "We-Zot li-Yehuda," in *Genzei Hokhmat ha-Qabbalah*, ed. Adolph Jellinek, (Leipzig, 1853), 18–19. Abulafia adopted an important aspect for his sort of mysticism from this book: the centrality of inner war as part of spiritual life. See my "The Battle of the Urges: Psychomachia in the Prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia," in ed. A. BAR-LEVAV, *Peace and War in Jewish Culture*, (Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem, 2006), 99–143 (Hebrew).

21 See his *Imrei Shefer*, ed. A. Gross, (Jerusalem, 1999), 193–194, and M. Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of Kabbalah in the Renaissance," in ed. B. D. Cooperman, *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1983), 216–217, 220–223; idem, "Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," in ed., L. E. Goodman, *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1993), 332–333. A discussion of hypostatic time from this book is found together with Abulafian material in manuscripts, an issue that deserves a separate analysis.

22 We-Zot li-Yehuda, 18–19.

23 *Guide of the Perplexed*, 1:57, and introduction to part II, premise 15.

24 For Abulafia's views of time see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, 124–125, idem, "The Time of the End': Apocalypticism and Its Spiritualization in Abraham Abulafia's Eschatology,"

Following Maimonides, Abulafia sees the assimilation into the divine as the most important religious activity. In one of his prophetic books he writes that the separate “intellects themselves alone do not fall under the [category of] time”²⁵ This is an important statement that should be remembered when dealing with the Agent Intellect, the last of the ten separate intellects, as it is in a category that transcends time. In good Aristotelian manner, Abulafia connects time to movement, and claims that there is no time without movement.²⁶ In the framework of this paper, however, I am not interested in his concepts of time as such, but in the experiential implications of his views.

I shall begin my analysis of Abulafia’s experiential approach to time by translating a short, neglected passage from his *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*. In describing humans, Abulafia he writes:

We are the last of all the beings, and from this side we are the most distant from Him. And because we are the last beings [who are remote] from him, He desired that we should be closest to Him from another side. He

Apocalyptic Time, ed. A. Baumgarten, (Brill, Leiden, 2000), 155–185, in some sections in the first two of the studies mentioned above in n. 1, for example in “Sabbath: On Concepts of Time in Jewish Mysticism,” 69–74. Compare to Wolfson, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” 138–139, where he claims that only the eschatological aspects of time in Abulafia’s thought have been investigated, and ignores not only what I wrote in those studies but also relevant texts that have been addressed there, which he did not engage, and some of which will be analyzed below. As to the manner in which he interpreted some of the texts he did engage, see below. He apparently forgot what he himself wrote earlier in *Aleph, Mem, Tau*, 211 n. 48. The following approach differs from the main assumption found in Wolfson’s studies about time in Abulafia, but in this framework, I cannot address all the details of my reservations.

25 See Ms. Firenze-Laurenziana Plut. 11, 48, fol. 80ab. For Abulafia as the author of this untitled treatise see my “A Unique Manuscript of an Untitled Treatise of Abraham Abulafia in Biblioteca Laurentiana Medicea,” *Kabbalah*, vol. 17 (2008): 7–28. See also *Sefer ha-Melammed*, ed. A. Gross, (Jerusalem, 2002), 10, and also on 21 there, for what I interpret to be a natural event. Unaware of the translated statement that denies relations to time insofar as the separate intellects are concerned, Wolfson, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” p. 190 n. 211, interprets a passage from *Imrei Shefer*, ed. A. Gross, 34, as if it deals with Metatron, regularly identified with the cosmic, separate Agent Intellect, as being “a personification of time”. However, the passage he quotes has nothing to do with Metatron, as it is evident from its wider context. Also his interpretations offered to Abulafian texts *ibidem*, 180–187 miss, in my opinion, the point. For an analysis of just one such example see below beside n. 52, and compare to the contents of the texts quoted beside nn. 51, 58 to the effect that God does not fall under the category of time.

26 *Sefer ha-Melammed*, 9.

saw that there was no manner that is more excellent than that in which He created us, and He set us as bodies that possess faculties [*koḥot*] that receive from others *hawayyot* that exist for short times, and *hawayyot* that are present without time at all, and they are the eternal [*hawayyot*], and everything that is universal is eternal and everything eternal is universal.²⁷

According to this passage, God demands that humans become eternal by becoming universal,²⁸ a metanoic experience that predicates the reception of eternal powers. Though such a reception is a change in the individual, it is not a change insofar as the eternal *hawayyot* are concerned. We may distinguish between a particular type of experience related to the body, which is extremely remote from the divinity, and a spiritual experience related to the faculties, which bring one close to God. According to another passage to be discussed below, these faculties actually bring one within God. Abulafia, who follows some brief discussions found in Abraham ibn Ezra,²⁹ Was certainly not the first to posit this transformation from a particular individual to a general or universal being. Let me point out that the statement covers humans in general, and not just the Jews. This amounts to a more universalistic approach, which is indeed Abulafia's main view.³⁰ In general, I would say that the more Neoplatonic dichotomy between the universal and the particular informs this passage. This is also the case in Abulafia's *Sitrei Torah*, a commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. There we read:

And [it] will unite with it after many hard, strong and mighty exercises, until the particular and personal prophetic [faculty] will turn universal,

27 *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*, ed. I. Weinstock, (Mosad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1984), 19. Compare also to the similar views on general principles in Al-Batali's *Sefer ha-Aggulot ha-Ra'yoniot*, ed. D. Kaufmann, (Budapest, 1880), 50. On general principles see also in *Or ha-Sekhel*, ed. Gross, 40, 108–109. Abulafia's quote translated here is reminiscent of Meister Eckhart's statement in his commentary on Psalm 86: "We have been put into time for the purpose of coming nearer to and becoming like God through rational activity in time." Cf. Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*, (Herder & Herder, New York, 2005), 192.

28 Moshe Idel, "Universalization and Integration: Two Conceptions of Mystical Union in Jewish Mysticism," in eds. M. Idel and B. McGinn, *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, (MacMillan, New York, 1989), 27–58.

29 As pointed out judiciously by Weinstock in his footnotes.

30 See my *Secrets and Pearls: On Abulafia's Esotericism*, ch. 21 (in preparation).

permanent and everlasting, similar to the essence of its cause, and he and He will become one entity.³¹

This is not a union in which the particular identities of the factors interacting are preserved. Rather, in my opinion, there is here a total transformation of the particular intellect into a universal, everlasting entity. Abulafia imagines that this happens in the moment, and no individual existence is imagined to maintain itself or to survive the post-mortem state of existence.³²

A similar position is found in another ecstatic Kabbalistic treatise written by someone from Abulafia’s school, *Sefer Ner ’Elohim*:³³

The root of all the negative commandments is to allude [*li-remoz*] not to follow temporary matters, since whoever is drawn toward the vanities of temporality,³⁴ his soul shall survive in the vanities of temporality; and whoever is drawn toward God, which is above temporality [*le-ma’lah me-ha-zeman*], his soul shall survive in eternity, beyond time [*be-lo’ zeman*], within God, may He be blessed [*ba-shem it[barakh]*].³⁵

Following Abulafia’s thought,³⁶ the anonymous Kabbalist describes the effect caused by the union of a person to a specific object: if one adheres to temporary entities, then his survival will depend on time; if he adheres to an eternal entity, his survival will be eternal. Interestingly, the eternal is described

31 Ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 155a, ed. Gross, 138. On Abulafia and simplification or depersonalization, see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 18–19.

32 This process of universalization by cleaving to the supernal spiritual realm also means an experience of supra-temporality. See also *’Otzar ’Eden Ganuz*, III:8, ed. A. Gross, (Jerusalem, 2000), 337: *dibbuq nitzhi*.

33 On the problems related to the authorship of this treatise see M. Idel, *Abraham Abulafia’s Works and Doctrines*, (Ph. D. Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1976), 72–75 (Hebrew).

34 *Hevlei ha-zeman*. This warning about the negativity and the futilities of time is a topos in the Middle Ages. It recurs in Spanish Jewish poetry, and was shared by several Jewish thinkers, especially Maimonides. Cf. Israel Levin, “*Zeman and Tevel* in the Hebrew Secular Poetry in Spain in the Middle Ages,” *’Otzar Yehudei Sefarad*, vol. 5 (1962): 68–79 (Hebrew). For Abulafia’s use of this phrase see, e.g., *’Otzar ’Eden Ganuz*, 331, *Mafteah ha-Tokhahot*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem, 2001), 62, *’Imrei Shefer*, 136, or *’Or ha-Sekhel*, 20, 21, 105.

35 *Sefer Ner ’Elohim*, Ms. Munchen 10, fol. 154b, ed. A. Gross, (Jerusalem, 2002), 68. This text is especially close to *’Or ha-Sekhel*, 21. This vision of the negative commandments as an allusion, namely as preventing someone from being immersed in mundane issues, deserves a separate discussion.

36 See the passage from *’Otzar ’Eden Ganuz*, translated in my *The Mystical Experience*, 124–125.

as God, who is beyond time, and adherence here means an entrance into the divine realm. God is described by the Hebrew phrase *le-ma'lah me-ha-zeman*, an expression that is rare in the Middle Ages, but will become a leitmotif some centuries later in East European Hasidic literature, as we shall see below. Even though this passage from *Ner 'Elohim* was probably not the first source to inspire later thinkers, for the time being, it seems to be the first dated occurrence of this phrase in Jewish literature. The experience of the soul, however, is described by a slightly different phrase: *beli zeman*, without time. This divergence may refer to a status achieved by the soul after leaving time. I wonder whether the expression “within” related to God reflects some form of transcendent the space, just as it reflects transcendent time. Or alternatively, perhaps it is perceived of as comprising all of space, just as God’s transcendent time was conceived of as comprising all of time.

The process of universalization was expressed in two of the quotes above by terms stemming from ibn Ezra, but Abulafia also uses Neoaristotelian noetics in order to point to a rather similar transformation. In one of his commentaries on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, he writes:

You should meditate on his [Maimonides’ words] in an intellectual manner, You should separate yourself because of them from the entire species, the universal man, and you will become for God distinguished and comprehensive, and you will be called by the name “Living God,” and you will become similar to God.³⁷

The assimilation into God is quite explicit here, as it is a process of universalization. Nevertheless, the Kabbalist does not refer here to an experience that transcends time. Calling a mystic by divine names is not something new in Abulafia, nor is it new to Abulafia. In fact, it shows up in other forms of mysticism.³⁸ For Abulafia, it can be seen in another passage that was written in the very same period, concerning one who becomes assimilated into God:

If, however, he has felt the divine touch and perceived its nature, it seems right and proper to me and to every perfected man that he should be

37 *Sitrei Torah*, ed. A. Gross, (Jerusalem, 2002), 188. Compare to the description of a transformation into a divine species in the *Commentary on Sefer ha-Melitz*, Ms. Rome-Angelica 38, fol. 9a, printed in *Matzref ha-Sekhel*, ed. A. Gross, (Jerusalem, 2001), 19–20. This has been discussed in my *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 16. It is also discussed in the Untitled Treatise preserved in Ms. Firenze-Laurenziana, Plut. II, 48, fol. 83a.

38 On theophorism in Abulafia and its background see my *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism*, passim, especially 286, 306–307.

called ‘master,’ because his name is like the Name of his Master, be it only in one, or in many, or in all of His Names. For now he is no longer separated from his Master, and behold he is his Master and his Master is he; for he is so intimately adhering to Him [here the term *devequt* is used] that he cannot by any means be separated from Him, for he is He. And just as his Master, who is detached from all matter, is called . . . the knowledge, the knower and the known, all at the same time, since all three are one in Him, so shall he, the distinguished man, the master of the distinguished Name, be called intellect, while he is actually knowing; then he is also the known, like his Master; and then there is no difference between them, except that his Master has His supreme rank by His own right and not derived from other creatures, while he is elevated to his rank by the intermediary of creatures.³⁹

It is clear that the transformation written about here not only concerns the eternal survival of the soul, but also concerns the essence of that soul, which is transformed into an intellective element. This obliterates the differences between the cause of the transformation, i.e., the Agent Intellect, and that affected by it, i.e., the human intellect. Perfection here is conceived of as being a matter of the intellect, and the perfect man comes to be seen as a comprehensive being:

In the perfect man [*ha-ish ha-shalem*] whose intellect has been actualized, his liver, heart, and head, that is, brain, are one thing until the vegetative soul and the master of knowledge [*ba’alat ha-da’at*] discerns, knows, understands, and comprehends to govern her matter according to God and not according to nature alone. The efflux overflows from the world of angels to the world of heavenly spheres and from the world of heavenly spheres to the world of mankind until the point that the distinguished universal person⁴⁰ becomes intellectualized in actuality.⁴¹

39 *Commentary on Sefer ha-Yashar*, printed in *Matzref ha-Sekhel*, 103–104. For the sources and an interpretation of this passage see my *Messianic Mystics*, 299–301.

40 *Ha-meyuhad ha-kelali*. My translation here differs from that of Wolfson’s rather oxymoronic phrase “particular universal,” which is erroneous, as are the conclusions he draws there as to Abulafia’s alleged particularism. For more on this issue see *Secrets and Pearls: On Abraham Abulafia’s Esotericism*.

41 *’Otzar ‘Eden Ganuz*, 11:1, 200. In general I used Wolfson’s translation in *Venturing Beyond, Law & Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006), 72, with one major exception, mentioned in the previous footnote.

It is evident that the “perfect man”—*ha-ish ha-shalem*⁴²—at the beginning of the passage is parallel to the phrase that occurs later in the passage, which I translated as “distinguished universal person.” In the two last quotes, an individual person signifies someone who has actualized his intellect. Thus, the supra-temporal achievement is a matter of intellectual activity that, as a part of one’s universalization, broadens his perspective.

Let me turn to the occurrence of the divine name in some of the discussions above. For Abulafia, the function of the divine names is by no means an exegetical issue alone; the pronunciation of the divine names is a technique for reaching a prophetic experience, and the confidence in the possibility of its attainment stands at the core of Abulafia’s book, and of his system as a whole. Concepts of time, such as the Sabbath, for example, should be understood in the context of the main religious purpose of his Kabbalistic system, which is the attainment of an ecstatic experience that does not depend upon place and time.⁴³ The Sabbath is therefore not only an important concept, whose connotation adds luster to the discussion; it also serves as an allegorical syntagm for the highest religious experience, which should and can be achieved in the present.

42 Cf. *Ha-ish ha-meyuhad*. The source of this specific use of the term *meyuhad* is ibn Tibbon’s translation of the *Guide* 1:14, and Shlomo Pines’s translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1963), 1, 40 as “[outstanding] individual” that is described in opposition to *hamon*, multitude. About this phrase as referring to a distinguished individual, see also “Sheva’ Netivot ha-Torah,” ed. A. Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbalah*, Erster Haefte, (Leipzig, 1854) 4, 9; ‘*Otzar ‘Eden Ganuz*, Preface, 2, III:9, 354; and *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, ed. A. Gross, (Jerusalem, 2001), 9, 15. See also ‘*Otzar ‘Eden Ganuz* 1:8, 173, where Abulafia’s gematria of *meyuhad* = 68 = *Hakham* [wise] = *ha-navi* [the prophet]. This fits the view found in *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, 9. See also the very important discussion of the “distinguished man” in *ibidem*, 128. These gematriot indeed define the meaning that Abulafia attributes to the distinguished individual. For another important passage where the “perfect man” is described as comprising everything, see *Imrei Shefer*, 121, translated into English by Wolfson, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” 172–173. The more common expression, found already in Islam, *al-insan al-kamil*, is something connected to a prophet and approximates the later Hebrew *ha-‘adam ha-shalem*, a phrase that also occurs in Abulafia’s writings, sometimes in the context of universalization. See, e.g., his *Commentary to Sefer ha-Yashar*, printed in *Matzref ha-Sekhel*, 99. For the closest parallel to Abulafia’s concept of “distinguished man,” see the view of ibn Arabi as described in Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger, The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1985), 314 and Paolo Urizzi, “L’uomo teomorfico secondo ibn ‘Arabi,” in eds. P. Spallino ad P. Urizzi, *Il Fine ultimo dell’uomo* (Officina di studi medievali, Palermo, 2012), 151–187, especially 167–168 n. 82.

43 See my “Sabbath: On Concepts of Time in Jewish Mysticism,” 69–74.

Likewise, Abulafia’s usage of the biblical noun *ha-yom*, today, has to do with a feeling of spiritual urgency that is characteristic of his mystical system. Indeed, an analysis of the occurrences of the term “today” shows that it does not stand for the transient in Abulafia’s writings, but that it stands for the ever-present, and for enduring sorts of experiences.⁴⁴ According to Abulafia, regular time is in fact homogenous, despite the fact that the language used by him implies a certain temporal hierarchy.

If Abulafia’s highest experience is described by a profound transformation that basically affects the intellect, I assume as plausible the cessation of ritual life as long as the supra-temporal experience is imagined to be occurring. The intellectual nature of the transformation and union is quite explicit in an anonymous text that I attribute to Abraham Abulafia: “from the side of his knowledge, the one that comprehends it will become a separate intellect, and this is the reason for his survival, which is the best that one can possibly achieve.”⁴⁵ The acquired supra-temporal experience of the perfect human is not the only reason why ritual is conceived of as secondary or irrelevant in the ideal state. The permanent supra-temporal nature of God, which is described in a manner reminiscent of the perfect man, is another reason for the secondary nature of ritual. In order to illustrate this, I shall address an interesting passage from Abulafia’s commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, entitled *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*:

[a] But their issue⁴⁶ is YHWH—in the world of the angels, which are the first Hawayah according to the secret of necessity⁴⁷ YHWH—in the world of the spheres, which are the second Hawayah according to the secret of necessity, YHWH—in the lower world, which is the third Hawayah, the last according to the secret of necessity, in those according to their degree and in those according to their degree. This is the reason why the wisdom

44 See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, 115–117.

45 Ms. Sasoon 290, 235. On the authorship of this short anonymous treatise see Idel, *Abraham Abulafia’s Works and Doctrines*, 6.

46 Namely of the three tetragrammata, which he mentions beforehand, where he refers to both the Talmud and to Maimonides’ *Guide* I, ch. 61. See *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem, 2001), 72–73.

47 *Hivuv*. I am not sure that I fully understand this term. From the broader context, it may be connected to the description of God as the “Necessary Existent” in the context of the Tetragrammaton. See *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, 73. See also Idel, *Secrets and Pearls: On Abraham Abulafia’s Esotericism*, n. 683.

comprises all the three together,⁴⁸ those and those, and all the existent[s] of the three are [emerging] in a necessary manner from the unity of God, blessed be He. However, despite this, He, blessed be He, is Unique, One alone, since in One comes the unique Hawayah, which is not the case in that which is other than Him. [b] And since He does not fall under time, it is allowed to [attribute to] Him the three times equally, by saying about Him that He was, and is and will be.⁴⁹ He was before man, and is together with man, and will be after man. And so the tradition is that He was before the world, and is together with the world, and will be after the world. [c] And the secret is that He was in the past, as He is now, and as He will be in the future, without change, for nothing of his actions changes in relation to Him and in accordance with His knowledge. All the more as He himself does not change, and inasmuch as his attributes are nothing but His essence, His attributes do not change. And the change that is thought by us, that is found in our world, is not a change in His operation, blessed be He, but [only] the revolution of the sphere. And the revolution of the sphere is not a change in the substance of the sphere, not in general and not in particular.⁵⁰

Let me first analyze what is new in paragraph [c], especially since the term “secret” is found there. I will view this in comparison to the earlier discussion, in the passage about God and time. In my opinion, the secret has to do with Abulafia’s view of the immutability of the divine. This holds for all of the three worlds and times, and is an issue that is absent in the more traditional descriptions offered in paragraph [b].⁵¹ The ecstatic Kabbalist refuses to allow any change in the divine essence or in His attributes, since change is related to

48 *Hokhmah* = 73 = *HYH, HWH, WYHYH* = 72. For the very probable source of this gematria in the writings of Abulafia’s teacher Barukh Togarmi, see Wolfson, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” 189 n. 208. See also below nn. 57, 59, 69. In this passage, the term Hawayah refers to the Tetragrammaton, namely the threefold form of the Tetragrammaton that was sometimes conceived of as the Talmudic name of twelve letters, as Abulafia mentions earlier on the same page in *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*. See also Wolfson, *ibidem*, 187 n. 205.

49 *HYH, HYH W-YHYH*.

50 *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, 72. Paragraph [b] and part of [c], have been translated by Wolfson, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” 187. The denial of change even in the substance of the sphere, despite its motion, should be compared to the passage from *’Or ha-Sekhel*, 29, and see Wolfson’s different interpretation, *ibidem*, 187.

51 Compare, however, to Wolfson’s claim, *ibidem*, that the passage deals with “the mystery of time” [sic]. See also above n. 25.

motion in time, and God and the separate intellects are explicitly understood in paragraph [b] as entities beyond the category of time. Such a view as to the immutability of the divine realm is also found elsewhere in Abulafia's thought,⁵² and it counteracts the assumption that has been aired by Elliot Wolfson as to the impact of human acts on the divine realm, namely theurgy, as a relevant category for understanding Abulafia's Kabbalah.⁵³

However, what is important to emphasize is that immutability is conceived by Abulafia, in good Maimonidean fashion, to be a secret, since it contradicts the widespread Biblical, Talmudic and most of the theosophical-theurgical images of God, which are quite dynamic. Also a secret is the presence of a Tetragrammaton in each of the three worlds, as mentioned in paragraph [a]. This may be understood as connected to the presence of an immutable entity within increasingly mutable worlds. This is also a Maimonidean position, since it fits the Great Eagle's assumption regarding the naturalness of the divine presence in the world, hinted at in paragraph [b] by the “togetherness” of the divine with the three worlds;⁵⁴ this is a view that I have described as “limited pantheism.”⁵⁵

In another commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, there is a similar passage:

There are three times that are intelligized by the human intellect, which are divided into three parts, and *Howeh, ve-Hayah ve-Yihieh*, are also always in the divine intellect;⁵⁶ all the three are in one principle... because the divine separate intellect does not fall under the

52 See e.g., *Mafteah ha-Ra'yon*, ed. A. Gross, (Jerusalem, 2002), 5, and *Sitrei Torah*, 111. I hope to elaborate on this issue in a separate study.

53 See his *Abraham Abulafia*, 83–84, 172–173, and n. 213, 224. See also his *Language, Eros, Being*, 204, and Sagerman, *The Serpent Kills*, VIII, 7 n. 13, 88, 235–236, etc. Interestingly enough, in his “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” 187, when dealing with the passage from *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Wolfson had nothing to say about this flat out contradiction between immutability and the concept of theurgy.

54 See my “*Deus sive Natura*, The Metamorphosis of a Dictum from Maimonides to Spinoza,” in eds. R. S. Cohen and H. Levine, *Maimonides and the Sciences*, (Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 2000), 87–110, and Wolfson, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” 185–186.

55 See my *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 12–14, and *Kabbalah in Italy*, 147–148.

56 See above n. 49 on the three times as represented by the three tenses found within wisdom. See also below n. 59. On intelligized times see Abulafia's *Mafteah ha-Sefirot*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem, 2001), 16–17.

[category of] past time, or under the [category of] future time, because the two [tenses] point to motion, and time is discerned by them.⁵⁷

The mystic is thus capable of sharing an experience of the three comprised tenses with the world of the separate intellects, including God. This would amount to a supra-temporal experience. While the human intellect intelligizes these times separately, within the divine intellect they are unified. Since the divine intellect is not denied the present tense, it seems that Abulafia has in mind some form of perpetual now. Indeed, in his *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, he writes that “the influx that he [the recipient] receives and comprehends from the form of universal wisdom is without time.”⁵⁸ This means that the noetic processes are conceived of as transcending time. Let me point out that nowhere in the above passages is the imaginative faculty mentioned, let alone integrated into the processes that have been discussed.

An early 15th century anonymous text that was probably written in Italy under the impact of Abulafia’s views, as well as those of Neoaristotelian philosophers, writes:

And I am telling you a principle that after the soul of the prophet becomes divine, united to “all,” it will become similar to God, blessed be He, in its operations. And [just] as God does not operate in time, so too the soul of the prophet does not have to operate in time. But given the fact that the prophet adheres to matter, he nevertheless has to operate in matter,⁵⁹ though briefly and very swiftly, his prophetic soul will pass from form to form until it will arrive at the desired, ultimate form, where his soul will halt. And that form will be perceived by its seers, and they will think that it is a miracle and a wonder . . . he comprises them together, since

57 Ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 148b. For more on this passage see M. Idel, “Sefirot above the Sefirot,” *Tarbiz*, vol. 51 (1982), 260–261 (Hebrew), and Wolfson, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” 186. See also above n. 26.

58 See his *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, ed. Gross, 80. On the process of comprehension as taking place “without time”—*mi-bilti zeman*, see also R. Nathan ben Sa’adya Har’ar, *Le Porte della Giustizia*, 476. On wisdom and the three times, see above n. 49. See also below n. 69. For the source of Abulafia’s concept of “universal wisdom,” see Wolfson, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” 189 n. 208.

59 Miracles performed by prophets are an issue discussed by several philosophers and by Abulafia himself. See Aviezer Ravitzky, *History and Faith, Studies in Jewish Philosophy* (Gieben, Amsterdam, 1996), 154–204, and my *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 63–66. For additional discussions of these issues in *Toledot ’Adam* see Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 836, fols. 156a, 165b.

he already became universal, and this is the reason why he can innovate forms in material entities, and perform wonders and miracles, since he is an absolutely righteous man.⁶⁰

Theosis by universalization is an interesting formula, since it echoes the specific view found in Abulafia’s school of ecstatic Kabbalah, and here is found a century and a half later. It is also found in some examples in Hasidism. Moreover, the connection of this formula to prophecy is one more example of ecstatic Kabbalah’s attraction. In short, the transcendence of time in ecstatic Kabbalah has to do with the adherence of the human intellect to atemporal entities and processes, rather than with hypostases of time. This is the case even when such hypostatic views were known to these Kabbalists.

3 On “Higher than Time” in Eastern European Hasidism

Kabbalistic forms of thought changed over the centuries, and one of the greatest of these changes is found in Eastern European Hasidism.⁶¹ Since the last quarter of the 18th century, a more complex view of time can be discerned in the writings of several masters of Hasidism. The early Hasidic masters adopted the view that the last seven *sefirot* deal with the time of creation, but they added to it the assumption that the three higher *sefirot* are found higher than time. This view is different from the discussions in sources written in the centuries after Abulafia and before the emergence of Hasidism. In those sources, the phrase *le-ma’lah me-ha-zeman*, i.e., “higher than time” appears, but it means something different. In the case of those such as R. Meir ibn Gabbai,⁶² it deals with the descent of the divine voice from the supra-temporal realm, and in the case of those such as R. Isaiah Horowitz in his *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit*,⁶³ It deals

60 See *Sefer Toledot 'Adam*, ibidem, fol. 165a. Some lines beforehand, on fol. 164b, the anonymous author writes that “the natural things are perceived by intermediaries, since they endure a long time, while the miracle is without time [*beli zeman*].” On the affinities between this book and Abulafia, see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, 200–201.

61 For a different assumption, that Kabbalistic tradition changed only slightly over centuries, see Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 128.

62 See his *Avodat ha-Qodesh*, III:8, (Jerusalem, 1973), fol. 66c. See also the end of his introduction to *Tola'at Ya'aqov*, (Constantinople, 1560), fol. 5a, where God is described as “without time,” while in an earlier Kabbalistic text, emanation was described by the same phrase.

63 See *Ha-Shelah*, (Jerusalem, 1969), III, fol. 184a. There is no connection between this concept and the intellect, nor is there a requirement to ascend to a plane that is higher than time.

with the view that the Torah and the soul stem from a hypostatic entity that is “higher than time.” In these two sources, there is no connection between this concept and the intellect, nor is there a requirement to ascend to the realm that is “higher than time.” These are just examples of other hypostatic understandings, but they have little to do with an individual that transcends his human condition, as we have seen was the case in Abulafian kabbalah, and as we shall see to be the case in Hasidism as well.

Closer to Abulafia, however, is a statement by the little known 14th century Spanish thinker R. Yehudah ben Moshe Hallelwah, who describes the strengthening of one’s intellect through the study of the Torah as bringing one to be “higher than time;”⁶⁴ but this reference is more of an indication of the philosophical source of the phrase, rather than an indication that Hallelwah was a plausible source that influenced later authors.

For some of the Hasidic masters, the highest spiritual experience for a mystic constitutes an ascent from the times of the seven *sefirot* to the supra-temporal plane of one of the higher divine powers. The phrase *le-ma’lah me-ha-zeman* is used to refer to this supra-temporal experience. Thus, while in ecstatic Kabbalah, “higher than time” refers to a transcendence beyond mundane time and movement, in Hasidism it means not only extricating oneself from the mundane experiences, but also transcending the theosophical hypostatization of time in the seven lower *sefirot*. From this point of view, it is plausible to assume that regarding this point, Hasidism reflects a synthesis between the kinds of attitudes found in the theosophical and the ecstatic types of Kabbalah.⁶⁵

Let me adduce just one of many examples from a major 18th century Hasidic leader, R. Dov Be’er Friedmann (1700–1772), known as the Great Maggid of Mezritch.⁶⁶

64 *’Imrei Shefer*, ed. Ch. Ben Zion Hershler, (Jerusalem, 1993), 422.

65 See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 58.

66 On this seminal Hasidic figure, see Rivka Schatz Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism, Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought*, tr. J. Chipman, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, The Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1993), especially 15–79, 168–188; Joseph Weiss, *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism*, ed., D. Goldstein, (Littman Library, Oxford, 1997), 69–83 and more recently, Netanel Lederberg, *The Gate to Infinity, Rabbi Dov Baer, The Magid Meisharim of Mezhirich*, (Rubin Mass, Jerusalem, 2011) (Hebrew); and Menachem Lorberbaum: “Attain the Attribute of *’Ayyin*: The Mystical Religiosity of *Maggid Devarav Le-Ya’aqov*,” *Kabbalah* vol. 31 (2014), 169–235 (Hebrew). On this central Hasidic circle, see *Speaking Torah, Spiritual Teachings from around the Maggid’s Table*, eds. A. Green, E. Leader, A. E. Mayse, O. N. Rose (Jewish Lights, Woodstock, Vermont, 2013), two volumes especially I, 1–74.

Someone should think that he is as nothing, and he will totally abnegate himself⁶⁷ and will think in his prayer only about the *Shekhinah*. And then he will come higher than time, namely into the World of Thought,⁶⁸ where everything is equal, life and death, sea and land... in order to come to the world where everything is equal, unlike what happens when someone adheres to the corporeality of this world, and he adheres [then] to the division [*hithalqut*] between good and evil, namely to the seven

67 *Yishkah'et 'atzmo*, literally, “he will forget himself.” Compare to “obliterate” in the passage to be translated below from ‘*Or ha-Emmet*, and in a passage in the name of the Great Maggid quoted in R. Ze’ev Wolf of Zhitomir, in ‘*Or ha-Me’ir*, (Perizec, 1815), fol. 95cd. The Great Maggid is very fond of the term ‘*ayin*, nihil. See Schatz Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, 67–79, 87, 193, 205 and Lederberg, *The Gateway to Infinity*, 251–281; and for his student, see Rachel Elijor, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God, The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism*, tr. Jeffrey Green, (SUNY Press, Albany, 1993), 173–178. It may be that self-annihilation in Hasidism is a parallel concept to the Sufi experience of *fana'*: the passing away of the self as part of an ecstatic experience. Compare, e.g., to G. C. Anawati et L. Gardet, *Mystique Musulmane, Aspects et Tendences, Experiences at Techniques*, (Vrin, Paris, 1976), 104–106, William C. Chittick, *Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination, The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, (SUNY Press, Albany, 1989), 93, and Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997), 202–203, 211–212, 227–228 as well as Robert C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, (Schocken Books, New York, 1972), 12, 46, 93, 121–123, 125, 141, 166–167. Especially interesting is the possible relationship between Hasidic annihilation and the union with the divinity, as a parallel to the relation between *fana'* and *baqa'*. Whether there is also a Christian kenotic connotation in the Great Maggid's terminology, as is implied in the comparisons to Christian quietism offered by Schatz Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, *passim*, is a matter still to be proven.

68 This is a supernal layer of reality identical with the *sefirah Hokhmah*, and with the supernal *hyle*, a view found already in early Kabbalah. See also above nn. 49, 59 and especially below nn. 79, 90. The return to prime-matter has something to do with the possibility of a spiritual renewal, as we find in a passage to be quoted below from R. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl. In some cases in Kabbalistic literature, the act of repentance and the soul's return to the source are interrelated. See M. Idel, “Types of Redemptive Activities in Middle Ages,” in ed. Z. Baras, *Messianism and Eschatology* (Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem, 1984), 264–265 n. 46 (Hebrew). See also R. Levi Isaac of Berditchev, *Sefer Qedushat Levi* (Jerusalem, 1993), Bereshit, fol. 5a: “Despite the fact that man dwells here below, on earth, by virtue of his deeds, he merits to walk all his days in the supernal worlds, especially during the Holy Sabbath, because the holiness of the Sabbath is so great that man cleaves to the supernal holiness. Thus we find that man returns to his roots during the Sabbath... During the Sabbath man returns to the supernal worlds in his thought, out of the great luminosity and holiness of the Sabbath.” *Sabbath* is interpreted, in a pseudo-etymological manner, as pointing to return.

days of the building. And how shall he come higher than temporality, wherein lies absolute unity?⁶⁹

Two types of experiential attitude to time are predicated on the existence of two layers of existence. Like in ecstatic Kabbalah, here the plane that is higher than time is not just a metaphysical realm, but is a state that is attained by a mystic who abnegates himself as part of his liturgical process. This sacramental activity allows for transcendence, not only of this corporeal world, but also of what is called the seven days of the building, namely, the seven lower *sefirot* that correspond to the seven days of creation; this is a common view among the theosophical Kabbalists. The two realms, the lower world and the seven lower *sefirot*, are described in rather negative colors, as including some form of distinction between good and evil, while above them there is a supreme state of absolute unity and harmony, to which the soul ascends.

However, *'Aḥdut*, the term for unity that appears at the end of the quoted passage, has various meanings in the writings of the Great Maggid. Not only does it signify the divinity, but it also signifies “union,” as we learn from a famous passage dealing with mystical union.⁷⁰ This means that the experience of ascent to the supra-temporal plane assumes not only a form of psychanodia, but also assumes a unitive experience.⁷¹ Indubitably, the concept of *'Aḥdut* here also stands in opposition to the term division. It should be mentioned that according to another tradition of the Great Maggid, the act of thought seems to be supra-temporal, while speech that attempts to express that supra-temporal moment of insight may take a long time.⁷² Let me point out that in this seminal passage, there is no sense that the divine power descends as the result of the sublime experience.

Though probably independent of ecstatic Kabbalah, there is a common denominator between this passage and the late 13th century Kabbalist: transcending time also means transcending the human condition. It is not just a moment of self-annihilation, but a state of heightened perception of the

69 *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov*, ed. R. Shatz-Uffenheimer, second edition, (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1990), 186. See also *ibidem*, 267. For a parallel view again in another collection of traditions, see *'Or Torah* (Jerusalem, 1968), 160.

70 *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov*, 38–39, and the discussions in Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, (Schocken Books, New York, 1972), 226–227; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 65–67; Lederberg, *The Gate to Infinity*, 279–280.

71 For the ascent to the divine unity as culminating in an experience of union with it, see the view of a disciple of the Great Maggid, R. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, discussed in Idel, *ibidem*, 66.

72 *'Or Torah*, 114.

equality between opposites, a state of consciousness that is part of the drastic transformation. The ascent beyond time and temporality is related to a form of ontological *coincidentia oppositorum* on the one hand, and to a form of perception of the totality referred as “absolute unity,” on the other. In this case, explicit phrases are used, and this is not merely the projection of a scholar’s interpretation upon the text.

A study of the components of this text may help us to understand its emergence. In my opinion, we may assume that the six or seven days of creation correspond to the concept of the six extremities that point to the lower *sefirot* and the existence of separate opposites. This is coupled with the assumption that unity is found higher, in the *sefirah* of *Binah*, which is an idea that was also found earlier.⁷³ Such a view was reported by a contemporary of the Great Maggid and another student of the founder of Hasidism R. Israel Ba’al Shem Tov, R. Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye. This is brought forth in the name of an anonymous “great person,”⁷⁴ which may plausibly be identified, on the grounds of a partial parallel found elsewhere, as the Besht himself.⁷⁵ Elsewhere, the same R. Jacob Joseph cites, in the name of the Besht, a view concerning the mixture of good and evil within the seven days, which holds that in the higher sphere everything is good.⁷⁶ Interestingly enough, among the disciples of the Great Maggid, the seven days are sometimes described as the “world of separation.” This is a term used by Kabbalists to distinguish between the unified realm of the ten *sefirot* and the extra-divine world of multiplicity.

Nevertheless, it seems that the issue of temporality and the ascent to the plane that is “higher than time” was only introduced into the discourse of Hasidic thought by the Great Maggid. We may discern this from the recurrence of this theme in the writings of many of his disciples. But it is absent in the writings of the other branches of Hasidism, namely, that of R. Jacob Joseph and of the Besht’s grandson, R. Moshe Hayyim Efrayyim of Sudylkov. It is found, however, in several instances in the writings of the great-grandson of the Besht, R. Nahman of Bratzlav.⁷⁷

73 For examples of the distinction between the seven lower *sefirot* and the higher three, conceived as one unit, see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 74, and *The Angelic World: Apotheosis and Theophany*, (Yediyot Sefarim, Tel Aviv, 2008), 42, 174–175 n. 112 (Hebrew).

74 *Toledot Ya’aqov Yosef*, (Koretz, 1780), fol. 60c.

75 See his *Ben Porat Yosef*, (New York, 1976), fol. 69c.

76 *Tzafnat ha-Pa’aneah*, (New York, 1976), fol. 94b.

77 R. Nahman was well-acquainted with theories from the court of the Great Maggid, as he was in good relations with R. Levi Isaac of Berditchev, a main disciple of the Great Maggid.

The differences between the early Hasidic schools point to the fact that it was not the Besht who adopted the theory of a plane “higher than time,” but his disciple, the Great Maggid.⁷⁸ In my opinion, this is also the case with the corollary term *hithalqut*, division, which is also absent in R. Jacob Joseph’s books and in those of R. Moshe Hayyim Efrayyim of Sudylkov. This distinction between the two Hasidic schools may have something to do with the pronounced divergence between the Besht and his brother-in-law, R. Gershon of Kutov, regarding the approach to extreme ecstatic experiences. The Besht expressed some reservations regarding extreme types of experience, while his brother-in-law was more accepting of the possibilities.⁷⁹ The debate between the two brothers-in-law has only been preserved in the treatises from the Besht’s student R. Jacob Joseph, and does not exist in the writings of the Great Maggid and his followers. This is a fact that I interpret as a rejection of the Besht’s reservations by the Great Maggid.⁸⁰ On the other hand, the mystical theory based on the transcendence of time is not part of what I have designated as the three main models that informed the thought of the Besht: the agonistic, the harmonistic and the noetic.⁸¹ It may be that the Great Maggid adopted a view that is closer to that of R. Gershon of Kutov concerning this point of ecstasy. This is an issue that deserves further investigation. In any case, if R. Gershon is in the background of the Great Maggid’s discussions above, or of the two thinkers share a common background, then we may assume that some form of Sufi views on ecstasy had an influence on this central Hasidic master.⁸²

78 Whether or not this has something to do with the emergence of the concept of *qadmut ha-sekhel* in the school of the Great Maggid is an issue that deserves a separate study. See Gershom Scholem, *The Last Phase, Essays on Hasidism by Gershom Scholem*, eds., D. Assaf and E. Liebes, (‘Am ‘Oved and the Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2009), 268–276, (Hebrew) especially the last passage quoted by Scholem on 271, from *Maggid Devarav le-Ya’aqov*. Unfortunately, I could not identify this in the editions of this book with which I am acquainted, but only in *‘Or Torah*, 26—where the concepts of “without time” and “qadmut ha-sekhel” occur together. In this seminal passage, divine wisdom is mentioned as related to timelessness and to *hyle*. See also above nn. 49, 59, and especially n. 69.

79 See M. Idel, “Prayer, Ecstasy and Alien Thoughts in the Besht’s Religious World,” in eds., D. Assaf and A. Rapoport-Albert, *Let the Old Make Way for the New: Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Eastern European Jewry, Presented to Immanuel Etkes*, vol. 1: *Hasidism and the Musar Movement* (Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem, 2009), 57–71 (Hebrew).

80 For other, more general suggestions as to the differences between the two masters, see Haviva Pedaya, “The Besht, R. Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, and the Maggid of Mezritch: Basic Lines for a Religious-Typological Approach,” *Daat* vol. 45 (2000), 25–73 (Hebrew).

81 Idel, “Prayer, Ecstasy and Alien Thoughts,” 71–105.

82 *Ibidem*, 58–59 n. 7, 61–71.

An important parallel to the above passage is adduced by a disciple of the Great Maggid, R. Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir, who quotes a tradition concerning the higher realm in his master's name:

There is certainly no aspect of division [*hithalqut*] of the degrees there, and it is appropriate that one should take to himself luminosity . . . so as to always be higher than time, since one should pay attention to where the inappropriate attitudes come from . . . everything is following under time . . . but if one considers himself to be naught, and he is equanimous toward the world, and he elevates himself to be higher than time, since by means of time he is prone to reach jealousy and hatred . . . since all those opposite attitudes emerge out of the “building” and the lower, since there is a division of time that generates the inappropriate attitudes . . . and he elevates himself higher than the world of division and the orders of time . . . and he sets existence and naught as equal indeed, and there, there is no division, and in any case they are higher than time.”⁸³

In this passage, time has a double meaning: on the one hand, with the passage of time, negative feelings emerge, and this is the reason why it is better to transcend time. On the other hand, time refers to the seven divine attributes that correspond to the seven days, in which opposite qualities are found. In this situation, too, time should be overcome by ascending to the realm that is described as “higher than time.” This is a realm related to one of the three higher *sefirot*.

In any case, the Great Maggid has also been reported to have said the following:

[a] Elijah is alive forever, despite the fact that he is a compound of the four elements, and they are [immersed] within temporality, even though their root is in unity. And when he draws down the unity⁸⁴ within them, they are aggrandized and become higher than temporality, and arrive to the simple unity. And [so] he can live forever . . . [b] And when someone wants to walk a distance of five hundred years,⁸⁵ he must walk very

83 *’Or ha-Me’ir*, fol. 15bc. Similar views recur many times in this book without mentioning his master. See, e.g., 46c, 49d, 201c.

84 Basically a term for divinity.

85 This is a standard Rabbinic unit of measure in order to describe gigantic beings.

much. But in a dream⁸⁶ he can walk them in one moment, because they are higher than temporality. And the delight that he enjoys there in the one moment that is above temporality he cannot enjoy in this world, because he is [immersed] in time, and time had been obliterated [*batel mi-metzi'ut*], as time is [part of] creation, and he cannot receive what is higher than time.⁸⁷

Here we have a stark opposition between “time” and that which is “higher than time,” which are presented as two alternatives to each other: The former should be obliterated for the latter to be received. The obliteration of time parallels the abnegation of the self in the earlier passage of the same master. In paragraph [a] Elijah is considered to be someone who reached the plane that is “higher than time,” which in this passage means immortality. Here, as in the earlier cited passage, this plane that is “higher than time” is identified with unity. However, this term also means a certain type of existence that can be manipulated, namely drawn down into this world, ensuring corporeal immortality. In paragraph [b], the Hasidic master speaks about the possibility of reaching the plane that is “higher than time” through the experience of a dream. Again, the assumption that this is an experience and not just a technical reference to a metaphysical level is evident. Here we have the descent of the divine quality of unity, but this is only in order to elevate the four elements and thus to cause immortality.

Interestingly enough, the Great Maggid also connects the state of being higher than time to the intellects. In one of his teachings, he interprets a Lurianic discussion in a very philosophical manner. He interprets the term *shannah*, year, as referring to *shinnuy*, change, while *hodesh*, month, is understood as *hiddush*, innovation. Thus, changes are conceived to be related to time. However, in the realm that is “higher than time,” all time is comprised in one moment. Thus, the emanation of all the supernal worlds, which are higher than time, takes place in the realm of the intellect, *be-shikhliyyut*, and “they came from one intellect to another until it arrived in the world of time, where all the changes are revealed.”⁸⁸ Thus, we have a theory reminiscent of Abulafia’s view, which also connected the immutability of the realm that is “higher than time” with the intellectual world, as we have seen above.

86 The dream is an example for being higher than time. See R. Pinhas Shapira of Koretz, *Midrash Pinhas*, (Bilgoraj, 1930), fols. 26b–27a. Paragraph [b] is found in a different paragraph in *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov*, 236.

87 *Sefer 'Or ha-'Emmet*, (rpr., Benei Beraq, 1967), fol. 7d. The Hebrew formulation is not clear.

88 *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov*, 123.

Phenomenologically speaking, there is a sharp difference between the ecstatic Kabbalah and the Hasidic discussions, beyond that which we have already described above. For the ecstatic Kabbalists, the transformation involved in passing beyond time means a transcendence beyond normal corporeal existence, and implicitly also beyond ritual performance, by way of an intense intellectual operation. In Hasidism, by contrast, ritual is described as performed by strong devotion, which involves an operation performed by all the limbs, especially during prayer. Though “time” and its division are relegated to a negative status that should be transcended, the human body and its ritual operations are not. For example, we read in R. Ze’ev Wolf of Zhitomir: “He linked the particulars of his limbs by a strong link to thought,⁸⁹ and there he was higher than the aspect of the division [*hithalqut*] of time, because there is there nothing but the simple unity.”⁹⁰ This means that though ritual performance requires the unification of the various aspects of personality—indeed a requirement that is already recurrent in many of the Besht’s instructions—this intense moment takes that person out of the normal realm of time. This means a non-intellectual type of experience, which differs dramatically from the main gist of the texts of ecstatic Kabbalah.

Elsewhere we read in a passage of the Great Maggid of Medziretch:

What⁹¹ is written in the phylacteries of the Master of the world? [It is written]⁹² ‘And who is like the people of Israel, a singular nation on the earth.’ . . . as they reach a state of unity which transcends number . . . for time is under their control to do whatever they want, as they are higher than time [*le-ma’lah mi-zeman*]. And He, blessed be He, is united to us, the only obstacle being our capacity, as it is written:⁹³ “Turn to me, [says the Lord of hosts], and I will return to you,” as He, Blessed be he, dwells in thought. And when a person thinks futile things, he pushes Him away [as it is written],⁹⁴ “And Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting.” As

89 I assume that here there is an ambiguity: one must act with limbs in a manner that he is aware of what he is doing, in a way repeatedly recommended by the Besht, but also as adhering to the supernal world, designated as the “World of Thought,” often times identified as the *sefirah* of Wisdom. See also above n. 69.

90 ‘*Or ha-Me’ir*, fol. 165a.

91 BT *Berakhot*, fol. 6a.

92 I Chronicles 17:21.

93 Zechariah 1:3.

94 Exodus 40:35.

the cloud was dwelling on him, the intellect cannot dwell on man, since darkness dwells in him.⁹⁵

The Hebrew *sekhel*, intellect, is a veiled reference to God, who is alluded to earlier in this collection of traditions in the following way: “As if when we perform worthy acts, the ‘world of the intellect’, blessed be He, is broadening. Therefore, the divine intellect dwells in our thought, this state being regarded as one of union.”⁹⁶ The simultaneity between the human and the divine acts of thought is conspicuous, and it presupposes a Neoaristotelian psychology and theology. This type of Neoaristotelianism is found in some of the followers of Maimonides, Abulafia among them; though the Neoaristotelian stand has been interpreted here in a theurgical manner that points to the broadening of divine consciousness. The Great Maggid, however, displays a much more Neoplatonic propensity.

The concepts used by the Great Maggid forcefully point to the description of an experience, which may be designated as *unio mystica*. The type of cleaving described in this passage transcend the mere connection between two unities since, in the end, they achieve a state of union passing beyond unity. This is an attribute that is reserved in medieval source for God alone. Even the supratemporal nature of Israel at the moment of the cleaving is appropriate to the Neoplatonic concept of “the world of the Intellect,” which is identified here with the Deity as an entity that transcends time.⁹⁷

The divine phylacteries include the statement of the unique—literally one—nation, while the human phylacteries, in which Israel is designated as if it is called by the Divine name, hint at the state of union; it is the union of two thoughts. Elsewhere, the same Hasidic master describes the spiritual activity “as if the *Tzaddiqim* cause God to be as their intellect, since He thinks whatever they think.”⁹⁸ This is especially so when the thought is performed out of enthusiasm, which causes god to delight. We face here an interesting example of what was designated by Gershom Scholem as the transformation of thought into emotion during the process of *devequt*.⁹⁹

95 'Or ha-'Emmet, fol. 8a. See also Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 48–49.

96 Ibidem, fol. 5c.

97 See, e.g., *Ennead*, III:7. See also above n. 16.

98 *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov*, II. See also the passage from the Great Maggid, 'Or Torah, 35, and Gershom Scholem, *Explications and Implications*, ('Am 'Oved, Tel Aviv, 1976), 356 (Hebrew).

99 See *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 218.

Most of the disciples of the Great Maggid resorted to the concept of the supra-temporal, as we can see in the writings of R. Levi Isaac of Berditchev, R. Shne'ur Zalman of Liady, and R. 'Elimelekh of Lysansk. We cannot survey all of those discussions here, but let me turn to another main follower of the Great Maggid, R. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl.¹⁰⁰ He too refers to the concept of a plane that is “higher than time”¹⁰¹ several times in his writings. I shall cite one that deals with the fact that the time of repentance is not fixed, but can happen anytime. This is according to a Rabbinic statement that repentance is one of the seven entities that preexisted the creation of the world.¹⁰²

The world is in time, but before the world, there was no aspect of time at all. And this is the reason why there is no time [fixed] for the performance of repentance, but it happens *ex tempore*, since one [who repents] arrives higher than time and immediately amends everything . . . and when he comes to the root and cleaves to the plane that is “higher than time,” he becomes a new being.¹⁰³

The assumption is that by cleaving to the source of time and of change, one is capable of amending sins committed in time. This approach is reminiscent of the extraordinary powers acquired by the prophets who, according to some philosophers, cleave to the universal soul.¹⁰⁴ According to this Hasidic master, the nature of lower time is cyclical. He describes the annual holidays as returning to the initial point of ancient events, as if a new beginning, in a manner reminiscent of Eliade's concept of *illo tempore*.¹⁰⁵ However, regeneration is related to a transcendence of cyclical time by reaching the higher plane.

Indeed, the Hebrew phrase for the supra-temporal, “higher than time” *le-ma'lah me-ha-zeman*, or *le-ma'lah min ha-zeman*, as pointing to a lived or imagined human experience, and not only to a metaphysical layer, occurs hundreds of times in Hasidic literature. However, only a few pre-Hasidic sources for it may be detected. This ascent to a realm that is higher than regular time

100 On this figure see Arthur Green, *Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, Upright Practices, The Light of the Eyes*, (Paulist Press, New York, 1982), 1–27 and now Gadi Sagiv, *Dynasty, The Chernobyl Hasidic Dynasty and Its Place in the History of Hasidism*, (The Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem, 2014) (Hebrew).

101 *Me'or 'Einayyim*, (rpr., Jerusalem, 1975), 90, 269, 302.

102 *BT, Nedarim*, fol. 39b, *Tanna' de Bei 'Eliahu Rabba'*, ch. 31.

103 *Me'or 'Einayyim*, 255. For an interesting parallel see the early 19th century Hasidic encyclopedia *Qehilat Ya'aqov*, by R. Jacob Tzvi Yalish, (Lemberg, 1870), I, fol. 18a.

104 See above n. 60.

105 *Me'or 'Einayyim*, 106.

is sometimes tantamount to the soul's going, or returning to its source, and thus transcending creation, which is determined by time. The Hasidic masters combined the two moments of transcendence and return to the source—the root—in an explicit manner. Let me point out that the above passages are not exceptional in Hasidism, and it is possible to adduce many other examples to this effect.¹⁰⁶

4 Some Concluding Remarks

Regardless of the differences between the different forms of literature that we surveyed above, we may discern a certain general common denominator: new dimensions of time, in comparison to biblical and Rabbinic conceptions, have been added. These more “sublime” types of time create a certain tension with the older, regular types of time. In the theories of a realm that is “higher than time,” regular times are described as inferior and even negative, both in ecstatic Kabbalah and in Hasidism. In the Kabbalistic theories which mapped the sefirotic realm with terms related to time, the lower units of time, the *michrocronoi*, are not considered to be negative, but are regarded as counterparts to the supernal powers. Performances during those times are considered to be necessary for the perfect life of the individual on the one hand, and for the perfection of the supernal system, on the other. Thus, despite this duality, we may discern a stark divergence between the attitudes found in the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah and those found in philosophical thought and ecstatic Kabbalah, on the one hand, and the even more complex attitude we discerned in Hasidism, on the other hand. In the Hassidic approach, regular forms of time have been meshed together with the seven lower powers as necessary, multiple and ambivalent, while the realm that is “higher than time” is unified.

There are other seminal differences between ecstatic Kabbalah and Hasidism, such as the difference between an anomian versus a nomian attitude respectively. Nevertheless, the common concern with ecstatic experiences and

106 See, e.g., in addition to the sources mentioned above also the Great Maggid's collection of sermons *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'akov*, 116, 149, 234, 267–269. The Great Maggid's ascent to the realm that is “higher than time” during prayer differs from the Besht's ascent, as explicitly described in some sources as ascents during sleep. On this issue I hope to elaborate elsewhere. See, meanwhile, my “Ascensions, Gender and Pillars in Safedian Kabbalah,” *Kabbalah*, 25 (2011), 57–86.

with unitive and intellectual terms brought them to develop similar attitudes that depreciate time in favor of an other-worldly, supra-temporal attitude.

The proposal to see a possible Sufi impact on the Great Maggid does not preclude the possibility of the impact of ecstatic Kabbalah. After all, his resort to the same Hebrew form *le-ma'lah me-ha-zeman*, reflects a Hebrew source. In addition, one main disciple of this Hasidic master, R. Shne'ur Zalman of Liady, has correctly been shown to have had some acquaintance with Abulafia's views.¹⁰⁷ In fact, the second phase in ecstatic Kabbalah, as exemplified by R. Nathan Har'ar and R. Isaac of Acre, already integrated some Sufi elements, some of which could have been known to the early Hasidic masters.¹⁰⁸ In any case, the role played by the intellect in Hasidism, despite its very substantial emotional proclivities, goes far beyond the role that it played in the Cordoverian and Lurianic kinds of Kabbalah.

In any case, as has been shown, both ecstatic Kabbalah and Hasidism, two schools in Jewish mysticism, considered the attainment of the supra-temporal realm as a possible experience. This is in a manner reminiscent of other religions. Let me emphasize, though, that I do not consider this idea of supra-temporality to be a universal characteristic of mysticism.¹⁰⁹ In fact, it is absent from the vast majority of Kabbalistic writings, which militated for a hypostatic understanding of time. This shows that Kabbalistic literature evinces more than one theory, and sometimes holds stark divergences. There is indeed quite a discrepancy between obliterating the various forms of time and hypostatizing them in order to enhance ritual performance related to specific moments in time. Let me draw attention to the obvious implications of the experience of transcending time: such an experience may also transcend ritual. Since, in most cases, the performance of ritual is based on motion, it is thus predicated on time; the transcendence of time may thus have what I call “anomian” implications. This does not mean that a person who has imagined enjoying the supra-temporal experience cannot return and perform rituals in a normal manner. There are, however, descriptions that maintain that the experience of

107 See Bezalel Naor, “The Song of Songs, Abulafia and the Alter Rebbe,” *Jewish Review*, April–May, (1990), 10–11; and idem, “*Hotam Bolet Hotam Shoqe'a*, in the Teaching of Abraham Abulafia and the Doctrine of Habad,” *Sinai*, vol. 107 (1991), 54–57 (Hebrew).

108 See my *Hasidism: from Ecstasy to Magic*, (SUNY Press, Albany, 1995), 457, index, under item Sufism, and *Kabbalah & Eros*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2005), 153–178.

109 See, e.g., Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, 26, 27, 123, 124, 141–142, idem, *At Sundry Times, An Essay in the Comparison of Religions*, (Faber and Faber, London, 1958), 38, 41, 45–46, 92.

union may impede such a performance.¹¹⁰ The new value of the peak experience of the individual, which differs from the communal, is the result of the introduction of categories stemming from Greek philosophy. This contributed to the emergence of an individualistic type of experience that encourages the human to share the supra-temporal state with the divine, even at the price of renouncing the social synchronization of time within the religious community. The emphasis, as shown by Abulafia's exercise, came to be upon solitude and mental concentration.¹¹¹

The main Hasidic approach attempted to mitigate the extremely individualistic and anomian approach found in ecstatic Kabbalah. Indeed, as we have seen above, it was emphatic in regard to the importance of prayer and of bodily involvement in both prayer and the ritual of phylacteries. The Great Maggid is reported to have said that "it is impossible to cleave to God but by means of Torah and commandments,"¹¹² and that "the speech and the deed are done in their [fixed] time but thought is not in time . . . the supernal world is not in time."¹¹³ Thus, the performance of a commandment is imagined to participate in both temporality and supra-temporality. This emphasis on the nomian is indubitably one of the reasons why Hasidism became a mass movement, unlike Abulafia's Kabbalah, which remained elitist.

The transcendence beyond time in the thought of the above-mentioned Jewish mystics is best understood as the adoption of sophisticated approaches, stemming from Greek philosophies and also perhaps Sufi themes. It is not, as Eliade would claim, a reflection of archaic mentalities. Insofar as Judaism is conceived, at least, it is the concentration on rituals that constitutes a continuation of archaic or pre-axial mentalities that have mitigated the axial theories stemming from Greek sources, which themselves dealt with an escape from time.¹¹⁴

110 See Idel, "Prayer, Ecstasy and Alien Thoughts," 64–65.

111 See my *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 108–113. For *hitbodedut* in Jewish philosophy, see my "Hitbodedut as Concentration in Jewish Philosophy," in eds. M. Idel, Z. W. Harvey, E. Schweid, *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Eighteenth Birthday* (Jerusalem, 1988) vol. 1, 39–60. (Hebrew). For possible source of concepts related to *hitbodedut* in Sufism see my *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 106–107.

112 'Or Torah, 114.

113 Ibidem.

114 For the view of 18th century Hasidism as a combination of pre-axial and axial approaches, see my *Hasidism: from Ecstasy to Magic*, 225.