

# Sabbath: On Concepts of Time in Jewish Mysticism

"During Sabbath there is no Exile"

-R. Moses Cordovero, *Tefillah le-Moshe*

Moshe Idel

## 1. Some Preliminary Distinctions

The purpose of this paper is to present some views concerning the Sabbath as informed by various more general visions or models of time, in Jewish mysticism. The existence and the importance of those general models that inform important segments of Jewish mystical literature will be dealt with below. Several scholars have already addressed important issues dealing with Sabbath in Kabbalah<sup>1</sup> and the following presentation does not summarize neither reiterate their findings; rather an attempt will be made to introduce some different heuristic categories, or a theory of models, in order to better distinguish between the different modes of mystical understandings of the nature of this day.<sup>2</sup> However, before turning to the main

- 1 See Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, tr. R. Mannheim, (Schocken Books, New York, 1969), pp. 139-146; Abraham Y. Heschel, *The Sabbath, Its Meaning for Modern Man* (Farrar, Strauss and Young, New York, 1951); Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar, An Anthology of Texts*, tr. D. Goldstein, (The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, London, Washington, 1994), vol. III pp. 1215-1238; 1281-1298; Arthur Green, "Sabbath as Temple: Some Thoughts on Space and Time in Judaism," *Go and Study - Essays and Studies in Honor of Alfred Jospe*, eds. R. Jospe and S. Fishman, (Washington, D.C. 1980), pp. 287-305; 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); Elliot Wolfson, "Eunuchs Who Keep the Sabbath: Becoming Male and the Ascetic Ideal in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism," in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, eds. J.J. Cohen - B. Wheeler (New York, 1997), pp. 172-174, idem, "Coronation of the Sabbath-Bride: Kabbalistic Myth and the Ritual of Androgynisation", *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, vol. 6 (1997), pp. 315-340 and the studies referred to in notes 4 and 7 below.
- 2 For more on these models see Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1995), pp. 45-145, and note 103 below.

topic of my discussion - views of Sabbath in the Jewish mystical literature - let me survey some attitudes to Sabbath in some earlier non-mystical types of literature. We may distinguish between three main approaches to time in Jewish literature since antiquity: one to be designated as cosmogonic, another cosmological, and the third ritualistic. I shall exemplify these types using the concepts of Sabbath as the main test-case.

According to what I propose to call cosmogonic time, the seven days of creation served as the archetypal time, the *illo tempore*, a vision of time so strongly related to the formative divine activities that they can hardly, if at all, be imitated by humans. Already Rabbinic thought knows about an order of days before Creation.<sup>3</sup> We may envision the primordial Sabbath as the completion of the primordial time, and the beginning of the heroic time, when the ancestors enter the scene. Sabbath separates between two orders of time: one dominated by the divine creation, the other starting with *historia sacra*. However, a part of that cosmogonic time is nevertheless paradigmatic for the later processes taking place in nature and for human behavior insofar as the cessation of activity during Sabbath is involved. However, the structure of time, maybe even the rhythm of six plus one, informed some other religious matters in the Bible, like the theory of the Shemittah, namely the cessation of work of earth after six years, and Jubilee, which consists of seven units of Shemittah. *Imitatio dei* is therefore quintessentially not an action but a break of the normal course of life. This cosmogonic approach envisions time, and I would say reality in general, in quite positive terms as they are presented as a direct creation of God.

Though each of the days of creation tells us a separate story, this cosmogonic time should be divided into two main categories: the active six and the passive seventh, the Sabbath. Cosmogonic time is totally dependent upon divine actions, and being different from each other, the basic units of time are heterogenous. Given the intentionality that is implied in the divine creative actions, we may speak of a 'warm' type of approach. In the case of Sabbath we find, already in late antiquity,

<sup>3</sup> Genesis Rabba 3:5.

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some few instances of identification between God and Sabbath,<sup>4</sup> when God is described in the second century Pseudo-Clementine Homilies, XVII,6 as anapausis, the Repose, and as being the source of the six extensions, which are described as expanding to the infinite. God is likewise described as the mystery of Seven. I take this identification between Sabbath and God, which recurs also in medieval Kabbalah, as emblematic for the larger positive attitude to time.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, cosmological time as it will be understood in the following, is much less concerned with the processes in the beginning, but with the nature of the celestial or divine powers which govern reality in the present. It is basically an astrological approach, which sees the celestial bodies as ruling over the processes taking place in the sublunar world. As such days and nights were understood as totally heterogenous, each of them reflecting the qualities characteristic of the astral bodies which correspond to them. According to this approach, time is heterogenous and it is hard to differentiate between the six days on the one hand, and the seventh on the other. Moreover in this pattern of describing the nature of each day as reflecting the qualities of the governing astral bodies the seventh day, Sabbath, is indeed the worst time in the week. From the point of view of the Sabbath, the cosmogonic time is positively heterogenous, while from the cosmological point of view it is negatively heterogeneous. Cosmogonic time, reflecting the pattern of the week moves in time according to an ascending vector, while the cosmological one represents a declining one. Sabbath, according to the astrological stand, and I shall describe in more details this issue below, is the time of negativity, because the pernicious planet of Saturn is appointed upon it.

- 4 See M. Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1990); Shlomo Pines, "Points of Similarity between the Doctrine of the Sefirot in the Sefer Yetzirah and a text from the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies, The Implications of this Resemblance," *The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, vol. VII, no. 3 (1989), pp. 68, 79-80, 96-97. The Pseudo-Clementine Homilies and Recognitions preserved important Jewish traditions, some of which have parallels in medieval Jewish esotericism.
- 5 On the extreme devotion of the ancient Therapeutes to the sanctity of Sabbath, see Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah*, pp. 61-62, 139 note 8, 140 note 12. For Sabbath in the Zohar see Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, III, pp. 1223-1224.

A third kind of time is the ritualistic one. Many of the biblical commandments depend upon specific moments in time: some of the festivals follow the seasonal rhythm, others the day-and-night cycle.

Both types of affinities are based on solar rhythms, though also the lunar calendar was important in the Bible. In the Biblical and Rabbinic understandings of the ritual, rhythms of time pertinent to the performance of the ritual are not described as dependent upon articulated structures of higher orders. We may even say that in some rabbinic sources, the higher, divine power is, to a certain extent, dependent upon the lower one, a phenomenon to be described in the following as theurgy. Time is basically colored by the nature and sequel of ritual acts. This is the reason why if someone has lost the sense of time and is unable to know when the day of Sabbath falls he is supposed, in that state of emergency, to start counting seven days and celebrate Sabbath in the seventh of these days.<sup>6</sup> According to such a view, it is more the pattern based on the centrality of the figure 'seven' than the correspondence between a certain well defined moment in time, the day of Sabbath, and the rule of a certain heavenly body and its qualities, that counts from the religious point of view. Though we may assume a certain initial dependence of some commandments, Sabbath for example, upon astrological structures,<sup>7</sup> this dependence has been obliterated, or at least strongly mitigated, in the ancient Jewish classical sources, with some very few exceptions, one of which will be dealt with immediately below. In other words, an astrological superstructure of the ritual has been substituted for by a direct relationship between the divine life and the human performance that imitates the divine one. However this biblical substitution has been mitigated already in a Rabbinic source. The ritualistic time, which I propose to designate as microchronos, is quintessentially a circular mode of time, reminiscent, from some respects, of the cosmological time, but its cycle is more dependent upon the specific regulations concerning human acts rather than

<sup>6</sup> BT, *Sabbath* 69b.

<sup>7</sup> See Havivah Pedayah, "Sabbath, Sabbatai, and the Diminution of the Moon - The Holy Conjunction, Sign and Image", in *Myths in Judaism* ed. H. Pedayah = *Eshel Beer-Sheva*, Vol. 4 (1996), pp. 150-153 (Hebrew).





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A constellated universe, which is ordered by the planetarian bodies and the rhythm of their motion and cosmic sympathetic interaction, offers a new task to these celestial bodies; their rule colors the various segments of time in accordance to rather stable, sometimes even immutable sequences of events. This seminal passage should be understood as part of a more general process of finding relations between ritual and what was conceived of as scientific schemes, in whose framework Sabbath is no more dependent exclusively on the divine works, Creation or redemption from Egypt, but on natural order. In the same time, order in nature and society depends less on what someone is doing here below, even if it is ritualistically important, but more on the movements of natural, but celestial bodies. It is not only a matter of the ordinary sequence of day and night, or of seasons, which was perceived all the time by any human being; time is defined in the new universe by astrological qualities and they inform now the aim of the rituals performed in a certain moment. The warm world of the ritual had to adjust itself to the cold order of the universe, and to order that is basically indifferent to human needs. It means that a consonance between the rule of a certain celestial power and a certain ritual may ensure its maximum efficacy, or their dissonance may render the ritual void of an external influence. The astrally colored time is to be met by human deeds that are sympathetically related to the specific nature of time.

Such a nexus between celestial structures and the performance of the Hebrew rituals here below has penetrated Kabbalah already in the 13th century as we learn from a short passage from an anonymous Kabbalistic book, where the anonymous author enumerates the following topics in the context of Sabbath: "Qaftziel, right ear, and the day of Sabbath, and its angel is Sabbatai".<sup>16</sup>

In an anonymous middle 15th century philosophico-kabbalistic treatise composed in Italy we find the following statement: "On Jericho the influx of Saturn is found, which is the seventh of the planets and this is the reason they circumambulated around it seven times and the wall fell on the day of Sabbath, which is Saturn's

<sup>16</sup> *Commentary on Prayers*, Ms. Paris BN 848, fol. 15a.

day and there was a destruction, because the nature of Saturn is to emanate destruction".<sup>17</sup>

The blatant description of the seventh day as the time of destruction is rather rare though it includes a whole trend of authors, mostly followers of Abraham ibn Ezra, pointing to the negative aspects of Sabbath within astrologically oriented ways of thought. Even when allowing more positive qualities to Saturn, some negativity is still conspicuous.

In a fascinating passage, found in an untitled treatise of Alemanno, the astro-magical conceptualization of the Torah is even more evident. When dealing with the third sefirah, Binah, which is appointed upon the third celestial sphere, that is dominated by Saturn, he described it as "supreme and noble, higher than all the other planets which is the reason why the ancient sages said about it that it generated all the other planets...And they say that Saturn is the true judge and the planet of Moses, peace be with him."<sup>18</sup> The angel of Saturn is Michael,<sup>19</sup> the great minister, so called because of his great power in divine matters and He is the ministering angel of Israel.

And the astrologers who described Saturn say that it endows man with profound thought, law and the spiritual sciences, prophecy, sorcery (kishshuf.) and prognostication and the Shemittot - the Sabbath Year cycle - and Yovelot. The Jewish people and the Hebrew language and the Temple are under its jurisdiction.<sup>20</sup> Saturn's major conjunction with Jupiter in the dominion of Pisces occurred to assist

17 *Sefer Toledot 'Adam*, Ms. Oxford Bodleiana 836, fol. 180b.

18 The view that the Jews worshipped Saturn is already found in ancient texts. Cf. A. Bouche-Leclercq, *L'Astologie Greque* (Paris, 1899), pp. 318, 371, 478; Yohanan H. Levi, *Studies in Jewish Hellenism* (Mossad Bialik, Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 122, 143 (Hebrew); Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, tr. John Bowden (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1974) vol., II p. 176 note 47; Eric Zafran, "Saturn and the Jews," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 42 (1979), pp. 16-27 and the commentaries of the Ibn Ezra and R. David Qimhi on Amos 5:26 as well as the material collected by Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, see above, note 10, vol. V p. 135 note 6.

19 This angel was conceived of as presiding over the people of Israel. On the nexus between this angel and Saturn see Joshua Tractenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (Atheneum, New York, 1970), p. 251.

20 On Saturn ruling over Jerusalem see Abraham Abulafia, '*Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford Bodleiana 1580, fol. 95b.

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the nation and the Torah and its prophets. This planet endows the people with perfection in sciences and divine matters such as Torah and its commandments, out of its sublimity, because it is spiritual...It is concerned only with thought, understanding and design, esoteric knowledge and divine worship and His Torah, and the Sabbath day is in its sway....and if they will keep its spiritual rules and laws it will impart a spiritual influx abundantly. But if they will not keep the way of God, it will spit everything which is bad: prophecy will occur to the fools and to babies in an insufficient manner, and to women and to melancholiacs and those possessed by an evil spirit, and maleficent demons that obliterate the limbs and bad counsels and sorceries (Kishufim) and anxieties and erroneous beliefs".<sup>21</sup>

The Torah is therefore the ideal form of behavior which ensures the attraction of the spiritual forces upon the lower world. Though in the last occurrence of the term sorcery it has a conspicuously negative connotation, in its first occurrence the context seems to point in a different direction, a more positive one. In any case, the Torah which points to a certain regimen vitae is categorized in the same category as the astro-magic which is hinted at by the spiritual sciences, designated in Hebrew by the phrase Hokhemot Ruhaniyyot.<sup>22</sup> In this passage Alemanno brings together a plethora of motifs, which amount to a saturnization of sabbath and of Judaism in general, a phenomenon which still waits for a more detailed analysis.<sup>23</sup>

21 Ms. Paris BN 849, fols. 94b-95a; on this treatise in general see Gershom Scholem, "An Unknown Treatise of R. Yohanan Alemanno," *Qiriat Sefer*, vol. 5 (1927/1928), pp.273-277 (Hebrew), and on this passage see also Moshe Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of Kabbalah in the Renaissance," *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard D. Cooperman (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1983), p. 209.

22 On this phrase as pointing to astral magic see Shlomo Pines, "On the Term Ruhaniyyut and its Sources and On Judah Halevi's Doctrine," *Tarbiz* vol. 57 (1988), pp. 511-540 (Hebrew); idem, "Shi'ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi's Kuzari," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. II (1980), pp.165-251, especially pp. 243-247; idem, "Le Sefer ha-Tamar et les Maggadim des Kabbalists," *Homage a Georges Vajda*, eds. G. Nahon et Ch. Touati (Peeters, Louvain, 1980), pp. 333-363.

23 See, for the time being, M. Idel, "Saturn, Schabbat, Zauberei und die Juden," *Der Magus* eds. A. Grafton and M. Idel, (Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 2001), pp. 209-249.

Let me adduce a text that exemplifies the integration of the astrological repeatable pattern with the theosophical structure, and the change introduced by such an adoption. In a late 13<sup>th</sup> century Kabbalist R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, there are several discussions of the cosmic cycle of seven thousand years. According to one of his discussions of the Jubilee "When six thousand years pass, which is (the cycle of) the world, twilight will immediately set in. Then 'the righteous will sit with their crowns on their heads, basking in the splendor of Shekhinah; <sup>24</sup> they will adorn themselves to enter the Great Sabbath, Mother of the Children. When the Sabbath begins, all the worlds, levels, and chariots will be drawn up to Binah, as it is written:<sup>25</sup> 'For dust you are, and to dust you shall return'".<sup>26</sup>

I would like to point out the resort to the verse from Genesis: the dust is a symbol for the third sefirah. Why 'dust' point does to this divine attribute and to the source from which everything stems and returns? I would like to suggest the possible contribution of the nexus between Sabbatai on the one hand, and Yovel-Binah on the other, to this conception of the dust. According to several astrological and at least one Kabbalistic source, Saturn is appointed on dust, and it may be that the occurrence of this term does point to a certain affinity between the above passage and astrological thought.<sup>27</sup> However, while the astrological interpretation of dust is related to vanity and ephemerality, according to the theosophical Kabbalah, dust is often times a symbol for Binah, the third sefirah, and the Great Mother.<sup>28</sup>

The Grand Sabbath is, according to the above text, also the Great Mother, which gave birth to everything and everything will return

24 CF. *BT, Berakhot*, fol. 17a.

25 Genesis 3:19. This verse recurs several times in the same context. See *The Book of Mirrors, Sefer Mar'ot ha-Tzove'ot*, ed. Daniel Matt (Brown Judaic Studies, Scholars Press, 1982) pp. 104, 224.

26 *Ibid.* p. 102; Matt, preface, p. 32.

27 See Abulafia's *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* ed. Israel Weinstock (Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1984), p. 34 (Hebrew). See also the quote from Abulafia's *Sefer ha-'Ot* in the next paragraph.

28 See e.g., R. Joseph be Shalom Ashkenazi (*Kabbalistic Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, ed. M. Hallamish, (The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1984), p. 196), who belongs to the same kabbalistic school as R. David, and perhaps even influenced him.

to it. However, unlike the cosmic conflagration that will consume everything, according to astrological speculations, R. David allows the continuation of the mystical enjoyment of the righteous. Thus the positive ascending vector of cosmogony, as understood in the first paragraph above, was projected within a description impacted by the descending negative vector of cosmology. Like the figure of the Great Mother, also Binah is giving birth and destroying, and the time of twilight is the best representation of the liminality of this power. Let us return one more time to the astrological context. Binah as the third sefirah has been connected in this Kabbalistic school to Saturn-Sabbatai, a nexus we already discussed above. As such the negative-positive nature of the mother is paralleled by the dual nature of Saturn in the Middle Ages.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. Sabbath, Divine Names and Ecstasy

Unlike the negativity connected to the Sabbath in astrological sources, the vast Kabbalistic literature evinces a prominently positive attitude toward this day. Despite the variety of approaches that will be described below, the Kabbalistic discussion of Sabbath refrained from attributing to this day a negative quality and even criticized the astrological perceptions.<sup>30</sup> Let me start with the concept of Sabbath in the ecstatic Kabbalah.

One of the first, perhaps the first most important treatise belonging to ecstatic Kabbalah, is R. Barukh Togarmi's Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah where he writes, in a rather enigmatic passage: "The incantation of the language is the secret of the Garden of Eden, known from the three meals, 26, 65, and 86, incumbent upon the individual to eat on Sabbath, (during) day and night".<sup>31</sup>

The passage is based upon a gematria, namely on the affinities between the numerical values of the different phrases constituting this quote. The basic figure is 177, which is the gematria of Gan `Eden on

29 See Klibansky, Panovsky, Saxl, *Saturne et Melancholie*, index. p. 716 *sub voce*, "nature duelle".

30 See Idel, "Saturn, Sachabbat, Zauberei und die Juden," note 23 above.

31 Printed by Gershom Scholem as an appendix to his *The Qabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah and of R. Abraham Abulafia*. ed. Y. ben Shlomo (Akademon, Jerusalem, 1969), p. 235 (Hebrew).

one hand, and the three divine names, the Tetragrammaton, Adonai and Elohim, on the other; This is also the case of the phrase 'day and night' - yomam va-laylah. Moreover, according to a certain way of calculation the phrase 'three meals' - shalosh se udot - amounts to 1176, which was understood as  $176+1=177$ , while the phrase hashba'at ha-lashon is 1178, when understood as follows:  $1178=178-1=117$ . What are the conceptual relations between the different elements which are connected with each other by the numerical calculations? The incantation of language is related to the three divine names, this figure pointing to the three meals the Rabbis claimed that should be ritualistically eaten during the day of Sabbath.<sup>32</sup> These three names are available, just as is the possibility to eat the three meals. Thus, the mentioning the Garden of Eden has to do with an experience which is on the one hand magical, on the other ritualistic. In other words, the term Paradise is connected to linguistic activities, the incantation and the three divine names, and to the performative ritual of keeping the Sabbath. The fact that Togarmi adduces the Talmudic view implies, as I indicated, a ritualistic consummation of the three meals during that day. However, the question is whether those meals are necessary to induce the Paradisical experience, or is their mentioning interpreted allegorically, by resorting to the above numerical techniques, in order to shift the centre of gravitation from a corporeal meal to a spiritual one, all this based upon linguistic units, the divine names. In my opinion, the answer is quite evident: in the school that emerged out of views formulated by Togarmi the divine names can be used any time, and the day of Sabbath does not constitute an especially preferred moment.

Therefore Sabbath becomes an allegory for the apex of a mystical experience which can be attained not in this day.

Another version of the first passage is found in Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla's classic *Ginnat 'Egoz* where he argues that "the three names, whose secrets are 26, 86 and 65, are the secret of the stages of the intellectual degrees, and are called by the general name of Garden of Eden, for by means of their grasp one enters the Garden of Eden while alive".<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *BT Sabbath*, fol. 117b.

<sup>33</sup> *Ginnat 'Egoz*, fol. 15c.

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It is hard to know whether the additional elements of this passage are Gikatilla's invention or whether he explicated Togarmi's dense passage, by resorting to Abraham Abulafia's views to be adduced below. In any case, here it is an intellectual experience that is meant, one which allows someone to enter Paradise alive.

This is an intellectual Paradise, obtained while alive by means of a linguistic activity - the three divine names<sup>34</sup>. The three divine names stand here, implicitly, for the three Sabbath meals, which constitute the intellectual ladder, which is tantamount to Paradise. Thus, Paradise does not necessarily mean a place, neither an experience which comes after the three names or meals, but is a concept, or an experience, that is tantamount to using them as a mystical technique. In fact, the title of this book means "The Garden of the Walnut" a phrase that is interpreted in the opening poem as standing for a garden where there is a tree of life and one of knowledge, thus a Paradise. Therefore, in addition to the magical and ritualistic, there is also an intellectual activity, that is tantamount to Paradise. Nothing in this book hints that this intellectual experience is utopian, difficult, or is merely a matter of nostalgia. Therefore, in ecstatic Kabbalah there are three ways of attaining Paradise while alive: the ritualistic one, as result of the resort to classical Rabbinic sources, the magical-linguistic and the intellectual, the latter two reflecting the innovation of this school.

In a series of Kabbalistic writings composed by Abraham Abulafia, the founder of ecstatic Kabbalah, many of the elements found in the two texts mentioned above recur, in a much more elaborated version. Again, it is difficult to assess what is new in these elaborations, and what is a latter explication. Abulafia was quite an original thinker, capable to inventing the most bizarre ideas in the garb of numerical calculations. He repeated most of the themes already hinted at earlier by Togarmi: language, meals, names, degrees, day and night. However, what seems to be crucial in Abulafia's system is not only an exhibition of mathematical agility or interpretive ingenuity; interested as he was in interpretation, he was much more concerned with forms of ecstatic experiences which may be achieved in the present. Indeed,

<sup>34</sup> These three names recur several times in this book as a very important issue. See e.g., *ibid*, fol. 16ab.

one of his most important handbooks, which describes a technique to reach such an experience, is entitled *Hayyei ha-`Olam ha-Ba'*, the 'Life of the World-to-Come' namely the description of the technique leading to a beatific experience to be achieved while alive. This book has little to do with post mortem visions but insists that such a beatific experience should be enjoyed in this world. In the introduction to this book he writes: "The intention of all these sacred names is to apprehend<sup>35</sup> the three degrees, designated in our tradition as three meals, known from the secret of ha-Yom, ha-Yom, ha-Yom, as it is said<sup>36</sup> 'Gather it today for today is a Sabbath of the Lord. Today you will not find it in the field.' And the secret of the Manna is the secret of the descending water<sup>37</sup> and the descending dew".<sup>38</sup>

For Abulafia, the function of the divine names is, by no means, an exegetical issue alone, provoked by the accidental numerical equation to Gan `Eden; the pronunciation of the divine names is a technique to reach a prophetic experience, and this search and the confidence in the possibility of its attainment is the core of Abulafia's book, and of his system as a whole. Therefore, the concepts of time and place, namely Sabbath and Paradise, should be understood in the context of the main religious purpose of his Kabbalistic system: the attainment of an ecstatic experience which does not depend upon place and time. Sabbath, like Paradise, is therefore not only an important term, whose connotation adds a lustre to the discussion; they serve as allegorical syntagms for the highest religious experiences, which should and could be achieved in the present. Abulafia's insistence on the biblical noun ha-Yom, today, has to do with the feeling of spiritual emergency, that is characteristic of his mystical system. Indeed, as an analysis of the occurrences of the term 'to-day' shows, it stands in the ecstatic Kabbalist's writings not for the transient but for the ever-present and the enduring sorts of experiences.<sup>39</sup> According to Abulafia time

<sup>35</sup> *le-hasig*. In this context it may also mean "to achieve".

<sup>36</sup> Exodus 16:20.

<sup>37</sup> *Mayim* in gematria is 90 like man, the Hebrew term for "Manna".

<sup>38</sup> *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, Ms. Paris BN 777, fol. 105b.

<sup>39</sup> See Moshe Idel *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, tr. Menachem Kallus (SUNY Press, Albany, 1989), pp. 115-117.

is in fact homogenous, despite the fact that the language used by the Kabbalists implies a certain temporal hierarchy. So, for example, in an interesting passage found in his apocalypse *Sefer ha'Ot*, he writes that "The war was hard within the heart, between blood and ink - and the blood is from the spirit - and the ink from dust, and the ink was victorious over blood - and the Sabbath overcame all the days of the week".<sup>40</sup> The war mentioned here is a sort of psychomachia between the spiritual element in man, allegorized by blood, and the intellectual one, allegorized by ink, described as stemming from dust. Sabbath therefore corresponds to the intellectual faculty in man, which prevails over the spiritual one, conceived of as lower.<sup>41</sup> However, the juxtaposition between the ink-dust-Sabbath on the one hand, and blood-spirit-days of week, on the other, are metaphorical expressions for the real struggle: that between intellect and imagination. These two powers are the real factors, which are referred metaphorically by the other terms. Interestingly enough, dust, related to Sabbatai/Saturn elsewhere in Abulafia, also stands for the intellect.<sup>42</sup>

Let me introduce another passage where the issue of the heptad is presented as a repeatable pattern: "The secret of seventy and of seventy-two is an important introduction to the knowledge of the essence of (all) the languages. Behold, seven, seventy and seven hundreds and those similar to them belonging to the principle of seven, the simple and the complex (heptads), are topics which indicate the plurality of the incantations<sup>43</sup> of the Jewish powers as it is testified by Sabbath, because there is a supplementary (soul) for those who rest and recreate in this (day). And the powers of the planet of Saturn testify together with the Shemittin and Yovelin, and the sefirot testify with the decads, that the tens also point to multiplicity. And the ten

<sup>40</sup> *Sefer Ha'Ot*, ed. A. Jellinek, " 'Sefer Ha'Ot'. Apokalypse des Pseudo-Propheten und Pseudo-Messias Abraham Abulafia," *Jubelschrift zum siebzigsten Geburtstage des Prof. Dr. H. Graetz* (Breslau, 1887), p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> On this allegorical struggle see Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: On Kabbalah and Interpretation* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002), pp. 438-448.

<sup>42</sup> See also the previous section on dust and Binah.

<sup>43</sup> On the magical aspects of Saturn see Idel, "Saturn, Schabbat, Zauberei und Juden," note 23 above.

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which reminds someone of his total alienation to the material world. Unlike the astrological explanation of the cessation as intended to avoid the pernicious influences of supernal powers, according to the Safedian Kabbalist the day Sabbath as holiness means separation, and thus a reminder of his true essence and his belonging to another realm. The rite mentioned here, the blessing over the day, points to the main characteristic of holiness: separation of a day in time from other days, which teaches, according to the Kabbalist, the difference between the man and this lower world.

The implication of such a concept would be a Gnostic attitude that rejects the weekly time as fallen and invites an escapist attitude. Indeed, Sabbath does not belong to the ordinary time just as the Gnostic supreme God does not belong to this world. However, such a reading would be an overemphasis. Some pages afterward, de Vidas adduces an oral tradition he heard from his master, R. Moses Cordovero, which qualifies this dualistic attitude. Building on R. Joseph Gikatilla's view that Sabbath is like the center of a circle whose six points found on the circumference are the six weekly days, Cordovero continues "the middle point which is the Sabbath goes with each of them in order to give them an influx, and in each and every day there is something of Sabbath. This is the reason why one should not work more than (strictly) needed for his living, because in each day there is some form of Sabbath".<sup>47</sup>

Thus, Sabbath is not a transcendental time which should be starkly distinguished from the other, but in fact a center that radiates from its power and holiness to the periphery. In fact, each day possesses a quality of Sabbath and should therefore be respected by a certain cessation from work. In classical neoplatonic terms, the six days are described as ascending to the Sabbath in order to receive from there their power. Thus, Sabbath is ontically different but not in a manner

*Gate of Holiness*, ch. 2, pp. 30-31. See already the view of R. Asher ben David, a Provençal kabbalist writing at the beginning of the 13th century, in *R. Asher ben David, His Complete Works and Studies in his Kabbalistic Thought*, ed. D. Abrams (Cherub Press, Los Angeles, 1996), p. 111,

that creates the feeling of a life thrown in a total misery of work, a complete alienation from which someone escapes for a short part of his life. Sabbath is conceived of as a reservoir from which luminosity is brought in ordinary time in general. Indeed, the view that the vitality of the six days stems from Sabbath is widespread in Jewish mystical literature.<sup>48</sup> Sacred time penetrates therefore the profane one and transfigures it, at least in part. This understanding of Sabbath is reminiscent of Mircea Eliade's theory of the ritual as an attempt to bring back the ancient perfect days by a set of stable performances.<sup>49</sup> However, in Judaism and most of its mystical interpretations, this renewal is not only a matter of rare rituals, like the annual installation of the primordial acts, but is a weekly experience, which radiates beyond the restricted number of hours in a specific day. As we shall see below, it is plausible that repeatable patterns induce meaning in life, which is not always expressed semantically. Let me emphasize that according to this Kabbalist Sabbath organizes the other weekly days not only by the dint of its transcendence but also by its immanence, and thus it creates a coherent pattern.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4. Sabbath, Theosophy, Theurgy

The Kabbalistic texts analyzed in the previous paragraph assume that Sabbath is an experience taking place basically on the human level. In ecstatic Kabbalah divinity was not conceived of as being affected by the temporal rhythm that informs both cosmos or man. In other words, while in the astrological type of understanding time can be described as scientific, cold, heterogenous, the ecstatic understanding is more psychologistic, warm, and homogenous. According to ecstatic Kabbalists God does not interfere in the emergence of the human encounter with Sabbath. As such those are non-mythical approaches to Sabbath and to theology. This attitude is, however, a

48 See below section 5, for R. Moses Cordovero's view; for Hasidism see, e.g., R. Aharon of Zhitomir, a late-18th-century Hasidic writer, a student of R. Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, in his *Toledot 'Aharon* (Lemberg, 1865), I., fol. 35b.

49 See Mircea Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour, Archetypes et répétition* (Gallimard, Paris, 1969). Compare to Jose Faur, *Homo Mysticus, A Guide to Maimonides's Guide of the Perplexed* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1999) pp. 142-147.

50 See also below, section 7.

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minority stand in the general economy of Kabbalah. Since the 13th century the main trend in Kabbalah, the theosophical-theurgical one, emphasized mythical approaches to both the structure of the divine and of the interface between the dynamic divine and the human religious practice and experience. God ceased, for those Kabbalists, to be an intellectual and unchangeable entity, as Jewish philosophers averred, but more a dynamic interaction between different divine powers or attributes, the so-called sefirot. The emergence of those powers as emanations from a higher divine level, the interactions between themselves and between them and the created reality can be defined as one of the main Kabbalistic myths. Indeed, dynamism, as has been pointed out in a convincing formulation of Ernst Cassirer, is one of the conditions of the emergence of the mythical mode of thought: "Only where man ceases to content himself with a static contemplation of the divine, where the divine explicates its existence and nature in time, where the human consciousness takes the step forward from the figure of the gods to the history, the narrative, of the gods - only then have we to do with 'myth' in the restricted, specific meaning of the word...Only by his history is the god constituted; only by his history is he singled out from all the innumerable impersonal powers of nature and set over against them as an independent being. Only when the world of the mythical begins as it were to flow, only when it becomes a world not of mere being but of action, can we distinguish individual, independent figures of it. Here it is the specific character of change, of acting and being acted upon, which creates a basis for delimitation and definition".<sup>51</sup>

The history of the different gods and their impact on the mundane world or in our case of the different divine attributes or sefirot, is somehow related to time. Let me inspect the possible contribution of this emphasis on time for the understanding of some concepts of Sabbath in the main Kabbalistic school, the theosophical-theurgical one. According to R. Joseph Gikatilla - when writing as a theosophical-theurgical Kabbalist in his later stage of his literary

<sup>51</sup> Ernest Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1971), vol. 2 pp. 104-105.

activity - in his Secret of the Sabbath, the act of keeping Sabbath affects two types of unifications within the sefirotic realm. By unification the Kabbalist understood the establishment of the relationship - often expressed in erotic and sexual images - between the different divine powers. This elaboration is one of the most original contributions of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah to the phenomenology of Judaism: the divine union is a state to be reached by human actions not a tenet that describes an ontological state of affairs. Since there are many divine powers, there are also many forms of unifications that the Kabbalist is able to induce by his performance of the ritual. According to Gikatilla, keeping Sabbath induces the lower unification, which concerns the sefirah of Malkhut, the last, or tenth feminine potency, which rules over this world, and that of Yesod, the ninth and masculine sefirah. On the other hand, a higher unification would affect the relationship between the sefirah of Binah, namely the third sefirah, and Malkhut.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the very performance of the commandment of keeping Sabbath is conceived of as creating an ontic continuum between the last sefirah and one of the highest ones. The quality of the performance that affects the divine realm will be designated as theurgical. However, this theurgical operation, in fact a strongly theocentric attitude which gravitates around the inducing of union with the deity, opens the way for a union between man and the world-to-come, which is described also as Sabbath. Thus, a theurgical operation precedes a more mystical experience of union with the higher realm. According to Gikatilla's formulation, "Sabbath is the secret of the gate by which someone enters to the life of the world-to-come, because Sabbath is called the Grand Sabbath,<sup>53</sup> and if he did not keep Sabbath in this world, he has no gate to enter to the World-to-Come, because Sabbath and the World-to-Come are designated by the same name".<sup>54</sup>

The Grand Sabbath stands for the third sefirah, Binah, understood as the last of the fifty gates of wisdom. The ascent to this sefirah may be

<sup>52</sup> On keeping the Sabbath and acts of unifications according to other contemporary texts see Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, III, p. 1223.

<sup>53</sup> *Ha-Shabbat ha-Gaddol*.

<sup>54</sup> *Sod ha-Shabbat*, Ms. Paris BN 823, fol. 52ab. On pre-rabbinic, rabbinic and other sources concerning the nexus between the Sabbath and the World-to-Come see Heschel of Apta, *Ohev Yisra'el* (Zhitomir 1863), p. 108.

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understood as the return of the soul to its source, and thus the entrance to the World-to-come. Gikatilla offers a rather technical explanation for a view found already in ancient Judaism. What is new here is the hypostatic formulation: a certain divine attribute is envisioned as the world-to-come, which occupies a rather specific place in the divine pleroma, and this hypostasis is continuously available to the Kabbalist. This entrance can be understood in two ways: one is assuming that by keeping the injunctions related to this day, someone will enjoy the World-to-come in the individual eschatological future, namely post mortem. Or, alternatively, during the experience of Sabbath in this mundane world, someone is enjoying concomitantly a spiritual experience related to the return of the soul to the source.

Philologically speaking, both explanations can be defended, and indeed it may be that they were not conceived to be exclusive. Let me attempt to make more the second reading explicit, without claiming that it is the exclusive one. By unifying the sefirotic powers by the two kinds of unifications, an ontic continuum is created, which allows the human soul to climb to its origin. Indeed, in other cases when the sefirot Binah, Yesod and Malkhut are discussed together, a conspicuous eschatological vision is explicated in those contexts, including the return of the soul to this sefirah.<sup>55</sup> Thus, we may understand the keeping of the Sabbath as creating the condition of a process of reversion, the neoplatonic return of the soul to its primordial source. Thus, this commandment as understood by Gikatilla in his later writings, combines theurgy and mysticism, the later experience being expressed under the plausible influence of neoplatonism. In other words, the creation of a plenitude on the ontological level, the union between the sefirot, will open the possibility of an experience of plenitude on the psychological level.<sup>56</sup> This reversion of the human

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g. the texts from *Sha'arei 'Orah* and *Sha'arei Tzedeq* which were analyzed in M. Idel, "Types of Redemptive Activities in the Middle Ages," *Messianism and Eschatology* ed. Z. Baras (Merkaz Shazar, Jerusalem, 1964), pp. 263-269 (Hebrew); idem, *Messianic Mystics* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1998) pp. 104-110.

<sup>56</sup> See the important remarks related to the psychological and mystical aspects of the great chain of being in Bernard McGinn, *The Golden Chain* (Cisterian Publications, Washington, D.C., 1972), pp. 61-102. See also Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains* (forthcoming).

spirit to the supernal source should be understood also as expressed by a pseudo-etymology; the noun Shabbat is reminiscent of the Hebrew verb, *Shav* pointing to return. Though I did not find this pun in Kabbalistic sources, I assume that they were aware of it. So, for example the awareness of the transcendental status of Sabbath as the world of the souls, as adduced above from R. Elijah de Vidas' *Reshit Hokhmah*, is reminiscent of the Neoplatonic theory of *reversio*. The first time that such an explicit connection was made in a source I am acquainted with is rather late.<sup>57</sup>

Let me compare the view of Gikatilla's teacher in his youth, the above-mentioned Abraham Abulafia as discussed in the previous paragraph, and that of his student. Abulafia, like Gikatilla in the above passage, resorted to the phrase *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, the life of the world to come, as the compensation of a certain type of behavior. However, while the later Gikatilla assumes that the experience of the Sabbath depends upon the keeping of the halakhic regulations pertinent for this day, for Abulafia, and the younger Gikatilla in his *Ginnat 'Egoz*, Sabbath is basically a linguistic term found in the classical sources, which is to be understood as pointing, more eminently, to a certain type of value in their society, and for an inner experience in their esoteric systems. I would say that if the Abulafian Sabbath and that of the young Gikatilla owes much to an Aristotelian-oriented type of inner noetic experience, in the later Gikatilla's Kabbalistic writings it is much more neoplatonically oriented. Let me adduce an example for an ontic-emanative concept of Sabbath. R. Yitzhaq of Acre wrote: "This is why neither light nor darkness, neither evening nor morning, neither day nor night, had been mentioned in the day of Sabbath, because it is not one of them<sup>58</sup> but a divine influx".<sup>59</sup>

Unlike the encounter with the Sabbath as the third sefirah when

57 See R. Menahem Nahum of Chernobil, *Sefer Me'or 'Einayyim* (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 126, and in the text of R. Levi Yitzhaq of Berditchev to be adduced below, in section 7.

58 Of the six days.

59 R. Yitzhak of Acre, *Untitled Treatise*, Ms. New York, JTS 1853, fol. 7b; R. Abraham Yehoshua Heschel, *'Ohev Yisra'el*, p. 108.

someone performs an ascent in the manner the later Gikatilla described, in R. Yitzhaq of Acre's text Sabbath is a power descending from the divine to the human realm.

Let me point to two other characteristics of Sabbath in the theosophical Kabbalah. One is the view that Sabbath is the time when the demonic powers are no more active, given the fullness of the divine presence then, or the intrinsic holiness of this day.<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, Sabbath was conceived of as the most propitious time for procreation.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly enough, cessation of activity does not imply general passivity, relaxation, an extended weekly siesta, but time dedicated to enhanced spiritual activity and to corporeal procreation. Sabbath means, according to this model, not an encouragement to desist from activity but a framework in which man is insistently asked to shift his ordinary behavior by an orientation toward the divine. This may be also the meaning of procreation, which was understood not simply as reproduction of the parents, but the multiplication of the divine image.<sup>62</sup>

##### **5. The Astrologization of Time: R. Moses Cordovero**

A certain synthesis between the voluntaristic vision of time in the book of Genesis and the mechanistic understanding characteristic to astrology is to be found in some forms of Kabbalah. The seven days of creation are identified with divine attributes, namely the seven lower sefirot which govern over the created cosmos. As such concepts of time like day, Sabbath, Shemittah or Yovel, Jubilee, have been 'elevated' to the status of symbols for the divine powers conceived of as hypostases. However, these seven powers are arranged according to a rather stable pattern from the point of view of its components which, though dynamic insofar as the relations between those components, is still predictable and even the changes take place in a manner that is dictated by the known pattern. In other words, the

60 See Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah*, see above note 1, pp. 137-138.

61 Ginsburg, *ibid.* pp. 101-120; Wolfson, "Eunuchs," note 1 above.

62 See Yair Lorberbaum, *Imago Dei: Rabbinic Literature, Maimonides and Nahmanides* (Ph.D. Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1997) (Hebrew).

six days of creation were now related to the very divine attributes and their dynamic, but the nature of this dynamic is different from that of the biblical voluntarism, which consists, at its bottom, in an inexplicable divine will. We may speak about an astronomization of the realm of divine attributes, taking place gradually since the middle of the 14th century and becoming more evident in the writings of R. Moses Cordovero. We had already seen such an example in the case of Alemanno's passage quoted and analyzed above.<sup>63</sup> Let me introduce now a much more influential author to exemplify this process: "the matter of the changes of the times<sup>64</sup> depends upon the supernal sefirot and the directive<sup>65</sup> that reaches us from them. We are the people of God, (therefore) all our behavior and the revolutions of our times<sup>66</sup> are counted by us exactly in accordance to the spheres of the sefirot, since the secret of our souls, spirits and higher souls is that we are sparks hewn from the light of the sefirot and all our intention is to imitate the supernal (entities) as far as possible, to link ourselves to the supernal roots, to cleave to our Creator, as far as possible... and he arranged the periods of the year and the motions of the stars in such a way as to enable us to know, out of their signs,<sup>67</sup> the supernal directives just as they are in the Land of Israel".<sup>68</sup>

The phrase translated as the 'spheres of the sefirot', in Hebrew *Galgalei ha-Sefirot*, betrays the influence of the Kabbalistic thought of a late 13th century Kabbalist, Rabbi Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi.<sup>69</sup> There can be no doubt about the astronomical origin of the term. Thus it points to a version of the cosmological time, which is regulated by

<sup>63</sup> See above, n. 21.

<sup>64</sup> *Shinnuei ha-zemanim*.

<sup>65</sup> *Hanhagah*.

<sup>66</sup> *Gilgulei zamanenu*. This is a pun on the term *galgalei*, spheres, which will occur immediately below.

<sup>67</sup> Note the explicit astral reference: the celestial world serves as a visible map, which enables someone to read, symbolically, its invisible and higher counterpart.

<sup>68</sup> *Sefer Tefillah le-Moshe* (Premislany, 1892), fol. 190a. On this kabbalist in general see Bracha Sack, *The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero* (Ben Gurion University Press, Beer Sheva, 1995), especially pp. 227-228. On this book see idem, "On the Prayerbook Tefillah le-Moshe - Some Remarks," *Da'at* vol.44 (1999), pp. 59-84 (Hebrew).

<sup>69</sup> See his *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, above n. 28, pp. 24-26.

the stable pattern that is based on seven ruling powers. However, unlike the pure astrological vision, a cosmogonic aspect is visible as the divine intentionality is quite transparent. The centrality of the concept of guidance or directive, *hanhagah*, is strongly related to the quasi-astronomical sefirot.

According to Cordovero, who draws upon much earlier sources, Sabbath does symbolize each of the three sefirot: Binah, Tiferet and Malkhut.<sup>70</sup> Another important discussion in his book deals with the possibility to affect the nature of Sabbath by the human sanctification of the day.<sup>71</sup> According to one opinion, the Sabbath is a datum which does not depend upon human actions, though - as this Kabbalist claims later - by the very remembrance of the Sabbath "we add holiness though we do not innovate this holiness".<sup>72</sup> Thus, though attempting to preserve a certain independence of the theosophical processes that provide the influx that consolidates below as Sabbath, as we shall see in the next paragraph, Cordovero nevertheless allows a certain amount of theurgical influence on the intradivine processes related to the division of the influx between the three sefirot symbolized by Sabbath.

#### 6. Sabbath, Talismanics and Time

In the same context of the astrological vision of the divine powers, the sefirot, as appointed over the days of the week, Cordovero deals also with the nature of the Sabbath. Let me adduce his concise comment and explain its intellectual background: "Sabbath is a spiritual matter that dwells upon man and truly inhabits the reality of the world. This is the reason why it is necessary to prepare a really 'nice dwelling'<sup>73</sup> in order to (contain) the existence of the Glory of God that inhabits the world, that fills all earth, so that all the corporeal and created vessels, like sun, moon, and stars and firmaments, the earth and its settlement, everything is changed during the day of Sabbath and is filled by the light of the holiness of Sabbath, which is seen and comprehended by

<sup>70</sup> *Tefillah le-Moshe*, fols. 193a, 210b-211b.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* fols. 210b-211a.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 211a.

<sup>73</sup> *Dirah na'ah*.

those who are preparing themselves".<sup>74</sup>

Sabbath is not only a time experienced by some persons belonging to a certain religion, but the moment of the transfiguration of the entire reality, which is then permeated by the divine presence. From this point of view, Sabbath is a hierophanic time, to use Mircea Eliade's term.<sup>75</sup> However, Cordovero conceives Sabbath not just as a moment in time propitious for the revelation of the holy, but an entity, consisting of holiness and light,<sup>76</sup> which descends in a certain moment upon the material world and is experienced by those who prepare themselves and their belongings so as to contain the presence of Sabbath. According to this view, Sabbath is not only the time of hierophany, but to a great extent a hierophany itself. How did the Safedian Kabbalist understand the preparations which ensure the dwelling of the Sabbath?

We may assume, in order to better understand Cordovero, the existence of two main processes that collaborate in the emergence of the human experience of Sabbath: the continuous process of emanation of divine light and spirituality, and the process of preparation that ensures that the spirituality should dwell within the material world. The process of emanation is related to the passage we had adduced earlier. Let me turn to the more precise meaning of the preparation. In the passage that immediately precedes the discussion of Sabbath, Cordovero wrote: "Behold as to the matter of this holiness that is emanated upon us, we have to make a preparation and an emendation<sup>77</sup> because the body is a chariot for the spiritual and the spiritual dwells upon the body according to the preparation of the body, because this is the way of spirituality to emanate all the time, and the corporeal things receives in accordance to their preparation...and this will happen even in the case of the bad and lower spiritualities,

<sup>74</sup>\* *Sefer Tefillah le-Moshe*, fol. 190b. Compare also to R. Menahem Mendel of Kosov, "Ahavat Shalom (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 1, and p. 39, where the apotropaic nature of the Sabbath is emphasized.

<sup>75</sup> See e.g., his *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Meridian, New York, 1972) pp. 391 ff.

<sup>76</sup> According to other discussions, there is also a certain "air of the Sabbath" that descends during this day. See *Sefer Tefillah le-Moshe*, fol. 190b.

<sup>77</sup> *hakhanah ve-tiqqun*. See also R. Abraham Yehoshua Heschel, 'Ohev Yisra'el, p. 109.

that dwell on the recipient when he is prepared".<sup>78</sup>

The human body and the material objects serve as the possible places, in fact containers, for the dwelling of the divine presence and they must be prepared accordingly for the descent of the divine. The Sabbath is conceived in this context as an ontic influx which descends in our world, which should be prepared for its reception. The source of such a view is to be found in the astro-magical traditions that had a deep influence in several high medieval Jewish writings, and had a significant impact also on a variety of topics in Cordovero's thought.<sup>79</sup> However, it is only in very few instances that the Safedian master points to the structural affinity, which is in my opinion an historical one, between his Kabbalistic views and those of the medieval magicians influenced by astrology.<sup>80</sup> The case of Sabbath is one of them. The Kabbalists were aware of the affinity between the structure of their conceptualization of rituals and that of the astro-magicians.

Immediately after the last passage Cordovero wrote: "This was the worship of the worshippers of the stars: they were performing preparations and invitations<sup>81</sup> and prepared themselves and received the 'spirituality of the star'<sup>82</sup> or zodiac sign that they wanted, and the external powers<sup>83</sup> do everything according to the intention and the preparation. And this is really the path of the holy and the spiritual, which comes to Israel. Man has to prepare himself, resorting to holy preparations which are in accordance to the Torah".<sup>84</sup>

Therefore, the material aspects of the biblical and rabbinic regulations concerning the Sabbath, which had not been explained in the legalistic sources by means of a theological superstructure, have been understood in accordance with the way of thought of medieval astro-magic. I assume that the three sefirotic powers that were called Sabbath, have been conceived as emanating the Sabbath-

<sup>78</sup> *Sefer Tefillah le-Moshe*, fo. 190b.

<sup>79</sup> See Idel, *Hassidism*, above n. 2, pp. 65-76.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* p. 68.

<sup>81</sup> *Hakhanot ve-hazmanot*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ruhaniyyut ha-kokhav*. This is a widespread term in medieval astro-magic. See above n. 22.

<sup>83</sup> Namely, the demonic one.

<sup>84</sup> *Sefer Tefillah le-Moshe*, fol. 190b. See also note below.

spiritualities downward, and these could be collected in a certain day by those who know the details of the pertinent preparations. The details are, however, not only the numerous regulations found in the halakhic treatises dealing with Sabbath; according to Cordovero, the 'nice dwelling' is not only a matter of lodging the spirituality of the day of Sabbath in a certain place but also, according to an allegorical understanding of this phrase, the entire realm of human behavior, especially the performance of the commandments in general, that serve as receptacles of the spirituality of Sabbath, even if they had been performed during the week days. The purity of man is conceived of as the 'nice dwelling' for the Sabbath.<sup>85</sup> Seen from this point of view, the entire religious experience is Sabbath-oriented, as it transfigures all human activity as a preparation for the Sabbath-experience.

To a certain extent, Sabbath is understood not only as an important point in time but also as the very telos of the entire spiritual life. It should be emphasized that despite the fact that Cordovero accepted a trend of thought stemming from medieval astro-magic, his vision of Sabbath does not adopt its negative aspects.

The concept of Sabbath as the span of time of an ontic invasion of the sacred within profane time has been, so I believe, demonstrated sufficiently from the above quotes, especially those from Moses Cordovero's *Tefillah le-Moshe*. Elsewhere in the same book he claims that due to the operation of *tiqqun*, namely the emendation or the reparation that is accomplished during the Sabbath, which affects the sefirot of Tiferet and Malkhut, redemption occurs, and then there is no Galut.<sup>86</sup> By doing so he capitalizes on the Rabbinic vision of Sabbath as an anticipation of the next world and on Kabbalistic texts, like that of Gikatilla analyzed above.

### **7. Sabbath as an Experience of Plenitude in Hasidism**

Sabbath has been described in an infinite number of Hasidic texts as a special time for a spiritual experience. It is during Sabbath that

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 191a.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* fol. 217b. The Safedian kabbalist uses also the term *Tiqqun ha-Shekhinah* in similar contexts; cf. *ibid.* fol. 241a.

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the formative activities of the Hasidic rabbis took place: the sermons delivered to their followers in the afternoon, an institution that generated many of the Hasidic writings, which are basically sermons delivered in Yiddish. I shall adduce in this chapter some few examples which, I hope, are representative.

R. Levi Yitzhaq of Berditchev, a leading figure in Hasidism at the end of the 18th century, explains in his *Qedushat Levi* that "Despite the fact that man is dwelling here below, on earth, by the virtue of his deeds he merits to walk all his days in the supernal worlds, especially during the Holy Sabbath, because the holiness of Sabbath is so great that man cleaves to the supernal holiness. Thus we find that man returns to his root during Sabbath....During Sabbath man returns to the supernal worlds in his thought, out of the great luminosity and holiness of Sabbath".<sup>87</sup>

This is the quintessential time for returning to the spiritual source, by an imaginative walk into the supernal worlds, which is at the same time a return to the source of his soul. There can be no doubt that the understanding of Sabbath as the time of return is inspired by the Neoplatonic vision of spirituality as return, since according to this type of thought, the primordial is the highest and the more spiritual. Sabbath is described, by a false etymology, as representing by its very root, the return to the source, which represents an experience of *devequt*, mystical cleaving of the soul to her source. However, the basic assumption that underlies the passage is not exhausted by Neoplatonic view.

The ascent is not an ontic one, despite the mentioning of the supernal worlds, but an imaginary one. Cleaving is possible because holiness permeates the entire cosmos during Sabbath, and is available to someone who divests himself from his material preoccupations. This immanence of Sabbath is reminiscent of the motifs of immanence we discussed above.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> *Qedushat Levi* (Jerusalem, 1993), Bereshit, fol. 5a. This is a good example of what Ginsburg called "the plurality of lives". See the kabbalistic texts and literature adduced by him in *The Sabbath in Classical Kabbalah*, n. 1 above, pp. 165-166 note 171.

<sup>88</sup> See end of section 3.

Let me bring some more examples for this approach in 18th and 19th centuries Polish Hasidism. According to R. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, every Sabbath, during the recitation of the collective response to the Kedushah Benediction of the Mussaf, the prayer that starts with the word Keter, "all the souls of Israel, even those found on a lower rank, ascend (on high) if they are linking themselves to the righteous, and integrating themselves with them; then they ascend with the righteous upwards, because then the righteous, together with the holy parts in the souls of the Israelites, are approaching the high, just as in the (moment of the) act of creation, before the sin, when the souls were integrated on the highest rank, into Adam, as it is written<sup>89</sup> 'Adam extended from the beginning of the world to its end'".<sup>90</sup>

Sabbath is the temporal framework which allows the transcendence of the time of the fallen creation in order to reach the prelapsic perfection. The righteous comprise the souls of those members of their congregation who pray and then elevate them to the state of the pure souls contained in Adam before his sin.

Let me explore in this context the view of a mid-19th century influential commentary on the Pentateuch, *Sefer Ma'or va-Shemesh* authored by R. Qalonimus Qalman ha-Levi Epstein of Cracow. Unlike the prior quote, which envisions the transcendence of time as a return to the origin, the following passage points to the possibility of transcendence by a certain form of anticipation of the temporal eschaton: "The coming of the Messiah will be when<sup>91</sup> the (sefirah of) Malkhut will ascend to (the configuration of) 'Attiqa' Qaddisha' and the Tzaddiqim will drawn then the influx from the Supernal Constellation<sup>92</sup> from the 'thirteen emendations of the Supernal

<sup>89</sup> *BT Hagigah*, 12a.

<sup>90</sup> *Me'or 'Einayyim*, n. 57 above, p. 149.

<sup>91</sup> The Hebrew formulation is not so clear: *Yehieh zeh she-ta'aleh*.

<sup>92</sup> *Mazzal 'Elyon*. This is a classical symbol for the sefirah of Keter.

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Beard'<sup>93</sup> to Malkhut, and therefrom to Knesset Israel.<sup>94</sup> Behold that on every Sabbath there is a resemblance of this (process) that the Tzaddiqim are drawing down the influx from 'Attiqa' Qaddisha', from the Supernal Constellation... to Knesset Israel... in each and every Sabbath it is done in this way that the Tzaddiqim cause the ascent of Malkhut to 'Attiqa' Qaddisha' and draw down the influx from there to Knesset Israel".<sup>95</sup>

We witness here a combination of theurgical activities, the elevation of Malkhut to the highest level of the sefirotic world, and the drawing down of the influx upon the last sefirah. Then the influx is drawn onto a lower divine entity described here as Knesset Israel. If this last term is understood in technical sefirotic terms, which is less plausible in a context where Malkhut is explicitly mentioned, then we have a third theurgical operation.

However, if this term is understood to point to the community of Israel here below, I would describe this phase as magical, as it addresses also the material welfare of men in the mundane world. By interpreting of this text as a combined theurgical operation, or a theurgical-magical one, it is described as representing the descent of the Messiah. However, what concerns me for the point under discussion in this chapter, is the fact that the descent of the Messiah is not conceived of as a mystery of the remote future, but an operation that recurs each and every Sabbath. This point is of paramount

93 This is another symbol for the first *sefirah*, both in the book of the *Zohar* and in R. Joseph Gikatilla. This Hasidic master resorts numerous times in his book to these two terms for designating the source of the influx to be drawn down.

94 In theosophical Kabbalah this term represents the last *sefirah*, but here it seems that such a reading is implausible. Compare to a similar passage *ibid.* pp. 120, 132-133, 360, and especially pp. 121, 134, 136, 143, where the drawing down of the influxes and blessing upon the four worlds, i.e., also on the mundane world, is mentioned. See, however, *ibid.* p. 483, where a more theosophical reading is plausible. On the basis of the discussion on p. 122, there is a possible reference to both the supernal and lower Knesset Israel. I suspect, on the basis of a discussion found in this book, p. 139, that there was a certain affinity between two different words, *Mashiyah* and *Meshikhah*, the drawing down, which was due to their similarity when pronounced.

95 *Ma'or va-Shemesh* (Jerusalem, 1992), I p. 103. On the Shabbath and the drawing down of spirituality and vitality, see R. Abraham Yehoshua Heschel, '*Ohev Yisra'el*', note 54, above, pp. 107-108.

importance because it expresses the possibility that Hasidic masters, and also some of the Kabbalists, could experience what they conceived of as the Sabbath as anticipating the messianic time, both from the point of view of the ascent to the highest divine level, namely the mystical vector, and as able to bring down the influx that ensures material success, which I described as magical model.<sup>96</sup> The drawing down may also ensure, however, a more general feeling of a direct divine presence, though the way of achieving it may include magical practices. According to R. Menahem Mendel of Kosov Sabbath is, following the Zohar,<sup>97</sup> the name of God.

According to another principle, recurrent in Hasidism, the vitality and the soul of man are connected to his name.<sup>98</sup> Thus, when someone calls a sleeping man, he reacts immediately. On the base of those two assumptions, by calling Sabbath, someone is causing the descend of the divine vitality from above. The Hasidic master recommends therefore reciting the name Sabbath several time during that day.<sup>99</sup> What seems to me important in this discussion is the assumption that an experience of the divine is easily available on this day by resorting to the recitation of its name.

## 8. Concluding Remarks

I would like to reiterate my proposal to understand the way in which this experience of *plenitude* of the Sabbath was understood by the Jewish mystics mentioned above. It is their belief in an ontology that relates special moments of time to divine hypostases that underlies the possibility of experience. The assumption that God extends his presence here below, or the possibility of the mystic to reach the divine hypostases, are less connected to the nature of the units of time and their sanctifications, as with the possibility of the individuals to transcend the ordinary experience. According to the theories of A.Y. Heschel and A. Green concerning the Sabbath it is

<sup>96</sup> Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 65-81.

<sup>97</sup> II, fol. 88b. See note 4 above.

<sup>98</sup> See the passage adduced in the name of the Besht by his disciple R. Jacob of Polonoye, *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef* (Koretz, 1780), fol. 37d.

<sup>99</sup> *Ahavat Shalom*, see note 74 above, p. 28. See also a partial parallel *ibid.* p. 87.

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a construction in time which substitutes for the material Temple and so a sacred time moves to the centre in lieu of a destroyed sacred place.<sup>100</sup> This view may be correct in general in post-biblical Judaism, but I wonder if this explains the mechanism of sources similar to those mentioned above.

I would say that the sefirotic realm is the structure that informed the new meanings of both time and space, because in the symbolic interpretations of both time -and place-units depend, to a great extent, on the nature of the divine hypostases.

It is the power of the imaginaire characteristic of the sort of Kabbalah that constructed the ten sefirot structure, that may teach us something about the way some mystics envisioned their experiences of Sabbath. Reification of time, part of a much more widespread process of reifying many concepts in Judaism by the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, impacted also the Sabbath: it become a woman, a representative of the last sefirah, an entity that can be met. In one of the above discussions we had seen how time had been connected back to place, as Cordovero's discussion of the 'nice dwelling' to be prepared for the arrival of the emanation called Sabbath shows. In other terms while the pre-Kabbalistic concepts of Sabbath had a conspicuous propensity for an experience here, on the mundane plane, in Kabbalah the propensity is for various ways in which other kinds of order intrude in the mundane one. The creation of a strong metaphysics, of a supernatural realm that governs the lower world continuously and in accordance to some recognizable laws, affected dramatically the forms of experience that populate Kabbalistic literatures. By elevating the concepts of time and space to another hypostatic level, the difference between them is somehow obfuscated. This is also the case when a strong emphasis on the inner experience is conspicuous; the strong allegorical interpretations, like the strong ontological one, weaken the difference between categories of time and space. In the later case, these categories were understood as projections of inner experiences.

<sup>100</sup> See note 74 above, p. 28. See also a partial parallel *ibid.* p. 87.

As seen above, especially in Hasidism but not less in Abraham Abulafia and in the early Joseph Gikatilla, Sabbath represents the time of or the allegory for attaining an experience of bliss, expressed sometimes in terms of the World-to-Come or the messianic world. As I already mentioned, these terms stand for some forms of plenitude of experience, which were conceived of by those Jewish mystics as attainable in the world, before the advent of the Messiah. Sabbath as understood in these authors expresses a confidence in the possibility and the immediately availability of a type of the perfect experiences of beatitude. Therefore, the strong emphasis laid by scholars upon the apocalyptic type of messianism, namely upon the emergence of a totally different world as a precondition for the dramatic improvement of a fallen world now in exile, does not hold in these cases. Those Kabbalists assumed that their experience of Sabbath is far from being a 'life in deferment' - to use Scholem's term<sup>101</sup> - but a time in which someone may achieve an experience of perfection. As S. Talmon has appropriately formulated it, in a slightly different context, one concerned with the biblical concept of redemption: "The concrete fabric of the expectation of redemption places upon the People of the Bible a responsibility for forming the future which grows out of their responsibility for forming their present...each person is called upon to help bring about the realization of the 'time of redemption' in history. Human obedience to divine command is expected to lead to a transformation of the world, not to bring about a world revolution".<sup>102</sup>

This perfection depends upon the resort to the ritual, to mystical and magical techniques, as described above, whose efficacy was conceived of as crucial for triggering those experiences. It is paramount to draw attention to the diversity of sources which affected the concepts of Sabbath discussed above. Astrology, philosophy, magic should be studied in order to be able to understand the different models which underlie the various Kabbalistic and Hasidic sources. On the basis

<sup>101</sup> *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (Schocken Books, New York, 1972), pp. 7, 35.

<sup>102</sup> *King, Cult and Calendar in Ancient Israel* (The Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1986), p. 162.

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of the above analyses, as well as many others,<sup>103</sup> Jewish mysticism should be seen as much more open to a diversity of modes of thought, experiences and practices. Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, astrology, astro-magic or theurgy, all contributed to the diversification of Kabbalistic thought including the concepts of Sabbath.

The question that may be asked after the above emphasis on the importance of the different models that informed the perceptions of Sabbath, is what is more dominant: the event, namely the keeping of the Sabbath, or its interpretation. To be sure: it is hard to ask such a question in a simple manner and I am not sure that even the formulation of the question is salient. In the absence of the authors we studied, may be that this is altogether a theoretical question. However, we may at least attempt at addressing it in another manner: the variety of approaches described above should not be harmonized too easily but allowed their independence. It is not a coherence of the explanations emerging from the applications of the models to the Sabbath that I seek but the possible implications of their existence altogether. Though diversity is to be allowed as a datum, the topics which attracted this diversified approach should be understood as the most important one for a certain culture. Different interpretations emerge when something is important, and thinkers are striving debating its meaning. This was for sure the case of Sabbath. If someone is in search for one comprehensive and coherent picture of Sabbath in Kabbalah, the theory of models as expounded above is not going to help. However, if finding the center gravity vibration is not the aim of the intellectual or spiritual interpretation, there is a certain cohesion based on the insistence of both Halakhic and speculative Jewish authors as to the importance of the experience of Sabbath. Like many other important topics in Jewish religion in search for elaborated interpretations, also

103 See eg., M. Idel, "The Infant Experiment: The Search for the First Language," *The Language of Adam, Die Sprache Adams*, ed. A. P. Coudert, (Harrasowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1999), pp. 57-81; idem, "Conceptualizations of Music in Jewish Mysticism," *Enchanting Powers, Music in the World's Religions*, ed. L. Sullivan, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1997), pp. 159-188; idem, "The Contribution of Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah to the Understanding of Jewish Mysticism," *Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 50 Years After* eds. P. Schaefer and J. Dan (J.C. Mohr, Tuebingen, 1993), pp. 117-143.

the effort to produce Sabbath attracted the variety of models, some of them stemming from non-Jewish sources, which could allow the evaluation of the already existing behavior during the day, by means of new spiritual angles. The particularistic nature of Sabbath did not deter or prevent the introduction of ecstatic, magical and theurgical models, indifferent of their origins. Is this fascination with Sabbath able to teach a more general lesson beyond the confined Jewish universe? Is there a more basic psychological intuition that surfaces beyond the cultic dedication to the creation of islands of special time? I used several times above the term 'colored' in connection to time. Let me elaborate now more on this term. The homogenous time, or the monotonous continuity without variation, may open the possibility that a 'terror of monotonous time' may emerge and exercise a certain problem by diminishing the possibility of some forms of meaning. The construction of the two superstructures dealt with above: the astral and the sefirotic are not only a matter of a medieval natural science or of a specific theology. The two systems have, for the authors who formulated them, immediate implications on the structure of the mundane time. It is fragmented and made variegated, fraught with up and down, with fears and expectations, in other words time acquires qualities which destroy homogeneity.

However, this discontinuity does not entail an open-ended motion to infinities of possibilities, namely a completely heterogenous time. The relative small number of ruling powers, seven planets and the twelve-zodiac signs in astrology, and the ten sefirot in Kabbalah, ensures flexibility on the one hand, and repetition on the other.

This repetition creates the sequence between the ruling of the different power, or in other words, a repeatable pattern. The inner structure of the repeatable patterns certainly differ from each other. Therefore, the astrological pattern which ends with a conflagration, what I called in a similar context the downward vector, differs from a Kabbalistic pattern, which ascends toward redemption or a variety of messianic events. Therefore, without attempting to obfuscate the inner structures of the repeatable patterns, I would like to emphasize their importance.

Different from the monotonous on the one hand, and from the

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open ended non-repeatable instances on the other, the repeatable pattern brings both stability and divergence, organizing the smaller elements into a more general picture. In other words, if we look at conceptualizations of time as imaginary constructs, they seem to be patterns of conquering the monotonous, of transfiguring the chaotic meaninglessness into a pattern that becomes meaningful by its very structuring. Let me explicate this meaning of the pattern: it is internalized by becoming a model of behavior which oftentimes is unconscious, and any disruption of the patterns created quandaries.

I assume that this is the psychological implication of the repeatable patterns on the basic level. The rhythm that is so important for the function of the body invites forms of more spiritual rhythms. The explanations supplied by the superstructures are adding dimensions that go beyond the organic aspects of behavior, attempting to reach more conscious or abstract sequences.

Between the linear homogenous monotony and the atomistic indefinite variations, the repeatable patterns that structure time represent modes of copying with reality, on both the psychological and intellectual levels. The structured religious *nomos* is, if I am correct, an attempt to solve a basic problem of experiencing time, by infusing order within a chaotic flux. Unlike the Freudian vision of ritual or religion, as phenomena related to neurosis, it is possible to claim precisely the opposite: neurosis may emerge by the lack of recognizable patterns of behavior. The relaxation of Sabbath,<sup>104</sup> and what has been mentioned by R. Elijah de Vidas as the aspects of Sabbath found in the weekly days, may serve as instructions for reducing stress, rather than a representation of stress.

<sup>104</sup> Also the concept of *menuha*, as intimately connected to the Sabbath, has sometimes been reified in Kabbalah. As I hope to show elsewhere, according to an interesting discussion of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto in his *'Adir be-Marom*, there is an apotheotic of the last sefirah qua feminine divine power, Sabbath and repose, which sublates the six male sefirotic powers, identified as the active agents, exilic factors and weekdays, in the eschaton. For a different interpretation of these passages see in several discussions by Elliot R. Wolfson, more recently in his "Gender and Heresy in the Study of Kabbalah," as well as notes 5 and 84 above.

