Jews enjoyed, or suffered, from a long history. Collective memory could, and had to preserve — as part of religious imperatives found in the Pentateuch — events that were conceived of as formative for the identity of the nation. Indeed, according to some formulations offered in modern history, Judaism has been shaped by the memory of the Jewish past. I belong to those who accept this view, but only if it is strongly qualified. This means that memory is quite important and formative, but the role played by memory of historical even is peripheral to other forms of memory, whose impact was incomparably more influential for the different ways in which traditional forms of Judaism understood themselves. Formulated in a period in which history reigned supreme in humanities in Germany, generations of Jewish scholars looked for the understanding of this religion within the parameters dictated by European, basically Greek, forms of history. No wonders that the first books on Jewish history that have been written by Jews in modern times have been compiled in Germany of the 19th century. However, this approach radiated far beyond the German-Jewish culture and made significant inroads in some other Jewish communities and continued to keep its primate since then, much due to secular, often times Zionist understandings of the history of Judaism. There is much to praise in such an attempt that contextualize many major developments of the Jewish communities: their historical emergence, customs, affinities with surrounding culture, reactions to them, and the reasons of their disappearance. Often times, this historical vision helps understanding also less social, political or economical developments. Intellectual and religious interactions are part and parcel of some form of elite cultures, just as magic and customs represent interactions with popular forms of non-Jewish surroundings. As such, there is no doubt that the ordinary historical tools, as shaped by the European approaches are quite helpful for analyzing some major

aspects of this religion. However, for other dimensions of this religion those tools are less capable to contribute something substantial. This seems to be the case insofar as questions regarding remembrance and identity are concerned.

Unlike the more simplistic approaches that emphasize the more external facts: institutions, economics, or politics, some more recent approaches put an emphasis on the *imaginaire*, the perceptions of what is conceived of as reality. Readings of the external events according to conceptual categories shaped long before those events take place, in circumstances that are totally different, are rather common instances. The explanations of recent events based on categories found in the sacred scriptures are just one major example of how history has been remembered, understood or forgotten. My contention is that with the dispersion of the Jews after the destruction of the second Temple, the historical events of the separate Jewish communities lost their general impact on the whole nation, and stopped to be encoded in its collective memory. To a great extent continuing the biblical vision of the Israelites as a corporate personality, the collective memory of Rabbinic Judaism and its later developments has been shaped by a common experience in the mythical past. This experience, the redemption from Egypt, has been reverberated by a special form of memorizing, that I shall describe as the 'envelope of reminders' that remained the single most important form of shaping identity for all the forms of traditional Judaism. In comparison to the contributions of the various chronicles or histories of the various communities, important as they may be, the envelope of reminders loom prominent by far for preserving the identity of the Jews. Repeated hundreds of thousands of times in the lifetime of most of the traditional Jews, and implemented for thousands of times on their bodies, the components of the envelope of reminders dealing with a mythical event in hoary antiquity, incomparably surpass the modest, sometime marginal contributions to Jewish identity by the chronicle-writings. I would venture to say that despite the terrible experiences that haunted Jewish history and their imprints on the fate and self-understanding of each Jewish community, their overall contribution is secondary in comparison to the sense of identity created by the ancient envelope of reminders, and its various interpretations. The comparison between the two forms of memorizing, the historical and the traditional, is a crucial issue for understanding both the strength and the weakness of ordinary historical studies. The former is based on documents preserving the construction of and the atrocities inflicted upon the various Jewish communities, which served and continue to serve as the center of many of historical studies. The latter deals with the traditional envelope of reminders, is a quintessential matter for understanding how traditional societies cope with dramatic changes affecting so much of their life without loosing a sense of identity, whose sources stems from images propagated over millennia in so different circumstances. The former deals basically with facts collected by diligent historians in order to reconstruct what may be conceived of as being the external envelope of Jewish life, which often
times did not dramatically differ from that of their neighbors, religious divergences aside. Neither were their respective histories diverging so dramatically. Both enjoyed in moments of prosperity, both suffered from natural disasters and human wickedness. No doubt that sometimes Jews suffered more, given the precarious situation of a minority, which served as scapegoats.

The attempt to search the emergence and the tools of self-understanding that shaped an identity that could withstand those historical disasters is more important however, in the case of minorities than in that of majority cultures. Here memories of arriving from another place, belonging to another religious order, of having another mission in history, play a role that is hardly met in majority cultures. Thus, the importance of identity, imaginary as it may be, is paramount. It is much more concerned with the permanent, the stasis that connects the difficult present with a much better past, the alleged superiority of the minority when compared to the majority, an imaginaire which could afford a much greater amount of change without having the feeling that its continuation is immediately endangered. Attempts to anchor their identity in matters, basically rituals, that are concrete and perceptible from within and without the community, namely strong self-identities and separation from the external surrounding, dominated the Jewish minorities more than divergences in matters of theology with their gentile neighbors. To be sure: in the elites, especially when they confronted each other, even small divergence may receive huge dimensions. However, the differences between Jews on the one hand, and Christians and Muslims on the other hand, are less that of theology than of lifestyle, as embodied in the emphasis put on different forms of rituals. For traditional Jews, rituals related to the shared memory of a mythical event of redemption constituted the main strategy of maintaining a certain unified identity for individuals living in so many different countries and circumstances over centuries. I speak here not so much about the numerous ritualized memorizations of historical events that happened to a certain community, but about the single, or few instances of redemption and of belonging that was/were shared by the entire nation. While the formative memories act as unifying tools, the later and much more numerous instances that may produce significant memories that were characteristic to a certain community, may relativize the shared memory of the nation as a whole. While the formative memory was concerned with a positive event, the redemption from Egypt, the subsequent memories of the individual communities, dealt mainly with negative events.

However, my claim will be below, that it is not the historical part of that shared memory that is cardinal for maintaining the shared identity. I assume that it is its mythical aspects, which means basically the extraordinary intervention of God in the normal course of history and nature, which is defined since then as the national redeemer, and of the nation as belonging exclusively to that redeeming God.

In the normal manner in which things are understood the content of one’s memory is a major part of his/her personality and a shaping factor indeed. Its weakening will deteriorate the sense of identity; its enhancement may contributed
to a similar effect, given the pre-dominance of external and more objective type of
information over the inner personal processes. In fact personality works, when
functioning best, with the two processes, the weakening and the enhancement
alternatively, and tries to resists their excess. The effort of keeping the necessary
without been overwhelmed by the abundance of information — what is called
suppression, or the retaining the minimum information necessary to maintain a
sense of identity, are always found in a shaky balance. The underlying assumption
is that the core of human personality is important in itself and it should regulate
those processes in the best way for sustaining that core. Basically, this is a modern,
secular and perhaps quite a romantic approach, which sees in the eupsychia of the
individual to ultimate aim of human life. Without questioning the importance and
pertinence of this claim for modern times, let me attempt to portray a vision that
underlie some religious outlooks, older and newer.

According to many religious systems, the truth is given by a heterogeneous
revelation, which should guide the lives of the believers and in order to be capable
to do so it is indispensable that their psyche will be inculcated with the contents of
that revelation. Memory is therefore part and parcel of religious life because
without this faculty an essential aspect of religion, the shaping of one’s personality
according to a certain spiritual pattern, will not be effective. The question is to
what extent the heterogeneous material is supposed not only to enter the mind of
someone but also to curb, even to overcome, the core of his personality. This
question can be asked in many different ways, one of which would be to what
extent the process of internalization of religious values produces a new persona­

ity. It is obvious that many aspects of religion are based upon deprivation and
asceticism, which represent strong forms of inculcating heterogeneous values. It is
obvious that more numerous these prohibitions are more we may assume a
restructuring of the core of personality. Identification with a highly detailed and
articulated religious system, especially when many forms of actions are required by
it, will invite deeper restructuring of personality. Let me put it in economical
terms. The memory of the individual becomes loaded with the details of the
religious system, the physiological apparatus will become accustomed with
gestures shaped by that system and even the modes of thinking will retain much
of the dominant spiritual propensities of the persons who shaped that system.

Those processes of sharp shaping of personality are even more powerful in
religious mentalities that emphasize the importance of and the life within a social
group that shares the same values. The social interaction becomes a powerful vehicle
for a further inculcation of the values and modes of behavior of the specific group.

In the manner in which memory is understood, it points to the retrieval of
information, which is not based upon the presence of the remembered things, but on
their representation in the human mind. Unlike perception that relates the mental
operations to things that are present, memory is much strongly related to processes
concerning absences of the “originals”. This distinction is rather sharp in non-
idealistic systems of thought, which surmise the possibility to have some form of meaningful access to the reality of things by their reflection within the mental apparatus. Memory in non-idealistic systems is a less ontic mode of cognition. However, in idealistic systems, the shaping of reality by and within the processes of cognition will close sometime the gap between the ontic level and its representation within the human psyche. Perception and memory may have the same ontic status as shaping the numenal reality in two different phenomenal forms of representations.

In an idealistic system, the world is created by an adaptation of the external reality to the human and also individual modes of cognition, memory being one of them. In the following we shall deal, inter alia, with a variety of views regarding memory and remembrance, which may be described as ergetic memory or remembrance (2). I propose to define this mode of memory as the faculty that brings to the inner spiritual faculty an issue, which is also created or recreated by the act of memorizing, in the external reality. In the following, I shall survey a variety of instances concerning the remembering of God in different forms of Jewish literature. This remembering is of a special type: God is conceived not as an entity experienced by the person as part of his past experience, an experience that cannot be reiterated in the present. Neither is God conceived as a transcendent entity ‘geographically’ distant and thus beyond the scope of the immediate human perception. Thus, the treatment of remembrance is not that of an absent entity, either temporarily or locally, but much more a concern with the need to keep in someone’s consciousness a spiritual being not confined by boundaries of place and time. Thus, many discussions of remembrance are connected to the concept of mental concentration, which is not expressed by any term in classical Hebrew. The ideal of permanent remembrance as it will be exemplified in sources to be adduced below is, therefore, not so much a matter of a flash-insight into the nature of God. I assume, on the contrary, the possibility to keep in one’s consciousness a certain vision of God that has, so I see it, not too much of an ineffable. I surmise that the act of keeping steadily in mind a concept, perhaps even the presence, of God as a national redeemer in the past, and the hope for his future redemption, might have been accompanied by feeling some form of more intimate relationship between individual man and God. Whether the individual conceived himself to be part of the corporate personality of the nation or not, he had the feeling that he is connected to the divine realm also in the present. Likewise, the divine remem-

(2) For my use of the term ergetic in other contexts see my Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid, SUNY Press, Albany 1990, pp. XXVI-XXVII. My resort to it in the present context is reminiscent of the concept of actualization of tradition by memory, as Brevard C. Childs, Memory and Tradition in Israel, SCM Press LTD, London 1962, has suggested. See especially the linkage proposed by several Jewish authors in the Middle Ages between the root ZKR and PQD, which is related to God’s visiting someone, like Sarah or Hanah. See also R. Abraham ibn Ezra’s commentary on Exodus 20:5; Nahmanides, on Genesis 21:1; Exodus 20:5.
brance of man may be understood as constituting some form of providence, or enforcement, of that person.

On the other hand, I would like to emphasize in the following pages the importance of the different reminders or the signposts, for inducing the remembrance. I assume that in the Hebrew Bible there was an approach to create what I propose to call an ‘envelope of reminders’, which was intended to keep the identity of the redeemer of the Israelite corporate personality constantly in mind. This envelope operated on the basis of separation from the other nations on the one hand, and establishing a sense of belonging to the redeeming God, on the other. In fact the two issues, the changes in the nature of memory and the different understandings of the signposts or reminders, are strongly related to each other.

The following discussions should be understood against a more general background of the almost absolute absence of detailed psychological discussions in the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic literature. This means not only a neglect of treating the psychological states of mind of the protagonists, but also an absence of psychological terminology for different spiritual faculties. Philo of Alexandria apart, it is only with the adoption of Greek forms of philosophical thought during the Middle Ages, that more detailed psychological discussions emerged in Jewish literature. Despite this central nature of biblical and Rabbinic emphasis on the external history and performance of the commandments, the importance of memory and forgetting is quite evident. Nevertheless, to my best knowledge, there is no term in biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew that designates the faculty of memory. The term zikkaron stands for either a reminder or for the content of memory, zekher stands for a sign that reminds someone, while the Rabbinic zekhirah stands for the act of remembering. It is only in the Middle Ages that a term for the capacity of remembering has been invented under the impact of the Greek philosophical traditions that reached some Jews in Arabic translations (3). Before entering in media res, let me differentiate between the gist of the following treatments and the outstanding discussions about memory in Judaism in our generation. The first is the historically oriented view of Yosef H. Yerushalmi, who distinguishes between the concepts of memory and history in a substantial manner (4). The other is the concept of mnemohistory formulated by Jan Assmann, who combines the two concepts, the external history and its reverberation in cultural memory over millennia (5). A third possible approach would be to examine Jewish texts from the vantagepoint of the history of

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(4) YERUSHALMI, Zakhor.

memorization, or the arts of memory or mnemotechniques\(^6\). Without questioning at all the validity of any of those approaches or the importance of specific findings emerging when applied, my approach will deal with some psychological and theological approaches, which were imagined to have created some important moments of connectiveness between man and God. Or, to put it in other words, I would like to argue that memory and remembrance played, in some parts of the Hebrew Bible, an important part in the worship of God. The nexus between remembrance and worship took, as we shall see, different forms in the various layers of Jewish thought since the Bible.

2. AN APOTHEOSIS OF MEMORY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE: FEW REMARKS

In the following, I shall be dealing basically with some forms and meanings of the Semitic root ZKR. This root has a very rich semantic field indeed, which cannot be dealt with in detail within this framework. I do not intend to claim that there is one or a major meaning shared by the various biblical books, and I do not attempt to harmonize the diverging usages of this root, but draw attention to what seems to be an approach that deserves an analysis in itself. Let me first remark that this root may be used already in biblical Hebrew in connection to mental, oral and written levels\(^7\).

I would like to emphasize here a major ambiguity related to two different understandings of the acts related to this root and concerning memory: one is to keep, sometimes constantly in mind; the other is to recall something which has been forgotten. They have a common denominator: something is kept in mind in a certain moment, either because it was there before, or because it has been recollected in the moment this act is concerned. Thus, for example, the first meaning is more plausible when it occurs in the Bible together with the denial of forgetting, like in Deuteronomy 9:7. In a certain way, this type of demand from God to be kept continuously in his servant’s memory is paralleled by the verse in Psalm 16:8: “I set God in front of me all the time”\(^8\). This verse had a huge impact on Jewish spirituality, especially on Polish Hasidism, but this issue cannot be dealt with here but in a tangent manner.


\(^\text{7}\) See R. Abraham ibn Ezra’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes 6:9 who mentions the first two levels.

\(^\text{8}\) Tamid. This term occurs also in the context of the High Priest worship. See Menahem Haran, *Temples and the Temple Service in Ancient Israel*, Eisenbrauns, Winona 1985, pp. 213-214, 217. More on visualizing the divine name see in some discussions below. I cannot enter here the long history of the interpretation of this seminal verse in Jewish mysticism especially in Polish Hasidism.
Thus, God keeping his worshiper in his memory and the worshipper keeping God in his memory, point to forms of strengthening reality: it is as if the existence of a content in memory, strengthens the ontic status of that content, or of the person who memorizes that content. When God is kept in the human memory it strengthens man, just as God’s memorizing a certain individual strengthens that individual.

Characteristic of the biblical type of memorizing is the continuous presence of signs and reminders, that are intended to keep a certain issue in mind as long as possible. So, for example we read in Exodus 13:1-16:

The LORD said to Moses, “Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal”. Then Moses said to the people, “Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast. Today, in the month of Aviv, you are leaving. When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites — the land he swore to your forefathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey — you are to observe this ceremony in this month. For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the LORD. Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders. On that day tell your son, ‘I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt’. This observance will be for you like a sign ['ot] on your hand and a reminder [zikkaron] on your forehead that the law of the LORD is to be on your lips. For the LORD brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand. You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year. “After the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your forefathers, you are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD. Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons”. In days to come, when your son asks you, “What does this mean?” say to him, “With a mighty hand the LORD(9) brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons’. And it will be like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand”(10)

It seems that there are two main, though different conceptual lines that merged in this passage. On the one hand the Israelites are commanded to keep the memory of the ancient events alive by a constant learning by oral repetition and by bearing the appropriate signs on their hand and forehead. This is part of creating the identity between the later and the earlier components of the nation as both constituting some form of corporate personality. It is obvious that the manner in

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(9) On this expression in the Hebrew Bible see Moshe WEINFELD, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, Eisenbrauns, Winona 1992, p. 329.

(10) See also Deuteronomy 6:20 and CHILDS, Memory and Tradition cit., p. 78.
which the passage is formulated: though written later, the imperative to remember is addressed to persons living long after the historical event. At a certain extent, Jews throughout centuries were requested to see themselves as being liberated from the Egyptian slavery, in a manner reminiscent of what is better known from the Passover Haggadah.

What is equally important is the fact that those external signs expressly remind the Israelites about divine actions, and I see the correspondence between the mighty hand of God and the signs on the human hand, quite a meaningful relationship. The Israelite is supposed to be surrounded by memorials pointing to the emerging of the nation by its rescue from Egypt. Though we may assume that those signs and reminders are part of what may be called an ancient Jewish art of memory, I would say that this would be too strong a formulation. Arts of memory are created in order to improve the process of memory in certain important or decisive moments when a huge amount of information should become available in a short span of time. As an art they may be used to charge the memory with different forms of topics. The above biblical passage, as some other parallels, intends however to keep one single chain of events alone in mind, all the time. It is not an abstract device, which pertains to someone’s profession, as an orator for example, but is supposed to shape someone’s entire religious life. In other words, memory is kept, according to this passage, by resorting to a ritual, not to an art or a mnemonic technique.

A third theme, which may be also present in the above passage, is the apotropaic one, which would see the signs as functioning as amulets(11). These different interpretations do not mean that the concreteness of the above passage does not have parallel figurative expressions in the Hebrew Bible(12).

On the other hand, however, I see those signs as pointing to a relationship of the Israelites to God, articulating thereby a theory of belonging to their divine redeemer. Since He redeemed them from slavery they become His property and should not only remember Him constantly, but also redeem the first-born male and animal by a certain sacrifice. This is not a relationship restricted solely to the inner awareness of the Israelites who is reminded of the cardinal event that should impress his memory alone, but also an issue to be perceived by someone watching him from outside. The Israelites and all their possessions are regarded as being of their God, and their belonging to Him should be made obvious to an external observer. This seems to be also the meaning of the request to put the name of God upon the people of Israel(13).

(13) Meir bar ILAN, So shall they put My name upon the people of Israel (Num 6:27), «Hebrew Union College Annual» 60 (1990), pp. 19-31 (Hebrew).
Last but not least in this context: the root ZKR may sometimes have a meaning that transcends just the recollection of a certain concept but imply a certain actualization, performance or dramatization. So, for example, the keeping of the Sabbath is not just the remembrance of the day, but keeping *de facto* the pertinent acts related to it as the parallelism to the phrase *Shamor 'et Yom ha-Shabbat* points to\(^{(14)}\). Likewise, the vision of Sabbath as a moment in time to keep in mind, *zakhor*, explicit in Exodus 20:8-11 aligns also this central biblical practice to the inventory of the reminders intended to remind the Jews of the divine acts in the primordial times.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates\(^{(15)}\).

This envelope of reminders is necessary since the arrival of the Israelites to the Promised Land is prone to induce oblivion of the redemption from Egypt. The welfare of the future, according to the sequel of this passage, needs a system of continual reminders that will keep the formative event, and what is even more important, its cause, God, in mind all the time. What is pertinent for the point made in the introduction is that the historical redemption is to be understood much less as history, and much more as the divine manifestation in both nature and history. According to verse 12, the Israelite is warned “not to forget the Lord, you God, that redeemed you from the Land of Egypt”. Thus, the entire passage under scrutiny here should be understood not in a reminder of one God, or a transcendental God, but of the active divinity that redeemed the Israelite corporate personality.

This redeeming divinity, and not the abstract one God, is the subject of verse 4 in the same chapter, the famous *Shema' Israel*, “Hear Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One”. I understand it in the framework of the above discussion as pointing to the single redeeming divinity, which was active as the redeemer of the Israelites. Indeed, the singleness of God as the unique active power is reverberated in the Passover Haggadah, which accentuates this point\(^{(16)}\).

This passage from the Deuteronomy is an important exposition of what I described as the envelope of reminders. However, more that any other passage quoted above, and I would say more than any other passage in Judaism, it become a sort of credo. It would be no exaggeration to describe this passage as the most recited

\(^{(14)}\) *Weinfeld, Deuteronomy* cit., p. 222.


text in the whole history of Judaism by far more popular than even the Ten
Commandments. It was recited daily several times, and it was conceived to be the
formula to be recited in moments of danger or before death. Even today, the national
Israeli radio is opening its broadcasting program every morning with this passage.

To this past-oriented understanding of memory, we should add a more future­
oriented one, as expressed in the verses of Deuteronomy 11:18-21:

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as signs [le-’ot] on your hands
and they will be le-tota/ote between your eyes. Teach them to your children, talking about
them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when
you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates [of the city], so
that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to
give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

The first verse is based upon a parallelism between heard and mind, on the one
hand, and hands and “between the eyes” namely forehead, on the other hand. This
parallelism points to the application of signs and reminders on the places related and
close to thinking and remembering: the left hand, which is close to the heart, and
the forehead, which is close to the brain. Though this is never formulated in an
explicit manner, it seems that the proximity between the limb and the reminders was
understood as triggering the remembrance. This is one of the most explicit biblical
texts describing what I call the envelope of reminders. It should be pointed out that
the signs mentioned in this passage include written reports of the historical
redemption, inserted in those reminders, despite the possibility that the details of
those practices have interesting parallels to Egyptian practices. The occurrence of
the theme of mezuzah is important for our claim about the envelope of reminders. It
is not only the human body that should be surrounded by reminders; those
reminders should also be posited on the doorframes of the houses and at the
entrance to the city. Thus, the garment of man — as we shall see immediately below —
the house, and the city, the most important comprehensive entities that
encompass men, are marked with reminders. However, in addition to the local
distribution of the reminders, the biblical imperatives mention also the ongoing
temporal recitation of those reminders. Those should be repeated all the time, in all
the circumstances, and passed from one generation to another.

Therefore, it is not only the historical liberation of Egypt that explains the

(17) Nafshekhem. This term can be translated in a variety of forms like soul or spirit.
(18) This difficult term, which has been understood as phylacteries, has been recently discussed
(19) The heart has been conceived of as the place of memory also elsewhere in the Bible. See I
Samuel 21:13, Job 22:22, etc.
(20) WEINFELD, Deuteronomy, A New Translation cit., pp. 342-343.
importance of the ritual of remembering, but also its efficacy insofar as the future is concerned. It reminds God to keep His oath. This is one of the possible reasons why forgetting God is tantamount to a sin; it disconnects a major form of relationship between man and God.

According to another seminal passage, there is one commandment that serves as a reminder for all the other commandments, the tassel or the tzitzit. By looking to it one is reminded of all of them. It seems that the occurrence of the tassels at the fringe of the garments is a particularly strong illustration for my theory of the envelope of reminders. It is clear that the performance of those commandments is creating the corporate personality, by separating the Israelites from the other nations on the one hand, and by establishing the connectiveness between this nation and God, on the other hand. According to Numbers 15:37-40:

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD(21), that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD your God’".

Here, there is no mention of the other components of the envelope of reminders, but the tassels constitute such an envelope as they are at the fringes of a garment. At the same time they point to all commandments, all this in the context of separation on the one hand, and belonging or consecration to the other. A combination of the hand- and heart-reminders, with the garments having tassels constitute the components of the concrete envelope of reminders. Though mentioned in different passages of the Pentateuch, they were understood since quite early times as part of an integral manner of dressing and remained so since then. The reminders are signs, in a semiotic sense of the word, which remind both the people who wears them, and communicate their allegiance to the God who redeemed and then choose them, to any outside observers. To a certain extent, the above view transforms the body of the observant Jew into a sign that functions in two directions: establishing an elective affinity between him and God, and drawing a dividing line between him and other people. Thus remembrance becomes a concrete event that involves both the body and the spirit of the person, and may serve an important manner to define the Jew.

Interestingly enough, the two main sorts of reminder, the phylacterys and the mezuzah, play a double role: they are signposts ‘ot, whose plural is ‘otot, which include within them letters, ‘otiyot, which constitute the message to be remembered. We have emphasized the issue of remembering related to the envelope of remainders. However, as Yohanan Muffs has remarked in a very insightful study, the garments and the phylacterys worn by the Israelites may signify God, just as Israel may be described as and inscribed on the garment of God (22). This intimate relationship transforms the resort to the remainders into ergetic events that cause a direct relationship with God. Indeed, as Muffs sensitively pointed out, those forms of imagery point not to allegories or symbols but to a “simply mystical vision taken quite literally. This is true of most Jewish visionary mysticism” (23).

Most of the Rabbinic and post-Rabbinic Jewish forms of religion are based upon two main forms of activity: the performance of the Rabbinic commandments, and the study of the Torah, in its more general sense of the concept. Both kinds of activity require elaborated knowledge, about the manner in which the 613 commandments should be performed, and even more in the case of the study of complex texts.

A religion based on the enactment of the minutia of so many types of acts and the importance of the minutia of the sacred text assumes the tantamount importance of mastering the knowledge of a lot of details. Some were acquainted with the performance of the commandments not by learning from books but by mimesis. Nevertheless, memory is required for the sake of even the most daily religious activities. Thus, already in the Hebrew Bible the importance of remembering is strongly emphasized, where one may find also the importance of remembering historical events. However, the Bible is concerned with a collective or a corporate community, which was understood as destined to play a role in history, and much less with individual forms of remembering or forgetting. Even when the biblical texts use the singular form “you” they point to the transhistorical person who is meaningful only because he belongs to the chosen community. It is the communal cumulative body, synchronically and diachronically, that is the main protagonist of the Bible, more than the exceptional individuals, be them the patriarchs, the prophets or kings, and even Moses. Thus, we may speak about the biblical literature as emphasizing the “cadres sociaux de la memoire” in an exclusive manner (24).

However, another connection between remembrance and national identity is the linkage between the divine remembrance and redemption. To be remembered by God is sometimes in the Bible strongly connected to being rescued, as we learn in the verse from Numbers 10:9: “When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be

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(22) See his Love and Joy, (note 28 below) pp. 49-60.
(23) Ibid., p. 55.
(24) See Maurice HAlBWACHS, Les cadres sociaux de la memoire, F. Alcan, Paris 1925.
remembered [nizkkartem] by the Lord, your God and rescued from your enemies”.

This nexus is crucial for many later developments in Judaism that will concern us below. In my opinion the act of remembering is not a mere noetic act, a process that concerns solely the entity which remembers, not only the residue of an entity in the consciousness of another entity, but a more substantial relationship between two entities. By remembering one entity strengthens the ontic status of the other. This understanding of the above verse does not assume that God is just reminded by the sound of the trumped and then He acts in order to rescue the fighters. This reading assumes not only an epistemic relationship between God and the nation. In my opinion the act of remembering is also ontically related to the rescue since by reminding someone bestows some form of existence without the divine mind. By putting himself within the divine memory, or reminding God of one’s existence, one is attaining some form of ontic status. Being remembered by God is therefore always positive in the Bible, and implies both an inner divine event and an action that ensure from it, as we can see in a series of biblical texts like Genesis 9:15-16, 30:22. According to a scholarly interpretation, the ritual of the high priest in the Holy of Holiest, had something to do with inducing an act of divine remembrance.

Another influential passage is found in Exodus 3:15: “God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - has sent me to you’. This is my name forever, and this is the remembrance [by which I am to be remembered] from generation to generation”. According to biblical poetics, the name and the remembrance should be understood as synonyms just as the terms “forever” and “from generation to generation.” Indeed at least one case in the Bible the term name, Shem, means remembrance or memorial of something, like in the expressions Yad va-Shem in Isaiah 56:5. The affinity between name and remembrance is quintessential for some forms of Jewish mysticism that will be dealt with in section 7 below. However, in the biblical worldview I assume that by remembering someone is to remember his name and since the name represents some core of the thing, the thing possesses by the act of remembering some form of ontic status. This seems to be the case in verse Exodus 33:12, where Moses quotes God as telling him “I knew you by name.” Here the calling of name comes as a later stage of a process, which commenced with creation and again it is connected to the human creation. I assume therefore that memory is at least sometimes connected in the Hebrew Bible to a linguistic representation of the remembered entity, and has some ontic reverberation provided the affinity between the name and the object represented by that name.


Remembrance as conditioned by visible and tangent objects that induce the continuous awareness of the nature of the divine and the affinity between the Israelites and God, is occurring in the Bible also insofar as God is concerned. We had already seen above the issue of sonorous reminding God by means of trumpets. However, according to some few verses found in the Bible, it becomes clear that God too needs some entities that will remind him, especially the rainbow\(^{27}\), the covenant with mankind, and we shall have more to say about the envelope of reminders attributed to God in Rabbinic literature below.

Last but not least: from the above passages it is clear that remembrance of an historical event was intended to be inculcated in both the individual and collective memory of the Jews over centuries. However, we may ask the question to what extent is this memory intended to recall the historical event, and constitute some form of mnemohistory, to resort to Assmann’s term, or to memory of the past, as Yerushalmi will formulate it? Is the event, underwent by the ancient Israelites, dramatic and constitutive, as it may be, the main purpose of the imperative to remember? On the ground of the above analyses I would rather say that history is, insofar as the above topics are concerned, a signpost that points to a certain time of relationship between the Israelites and Jews on the one hand, and the redeeming God on the other hand. I would like not to be misunderstood: memory is not a way of acquiring a certain type of theology or awareness to it. In my opinion, the gist of the above passages is a correlative situation: both God and man are defined by the historical event in a manner that transcends the unique moment of the historical event. It is not God in general, neither His essence, and I would say even not His Unity, what is called monotheism, that is at stake, but rather what turns to be the most important divine attribute that concerns man, the redemptive attribute. This specific activation of the divine will is to be described as correlative since it shapes not only the divine activity in a certain historical moment, but also the object of the effect of that act. In this context let me mention also the strong correlative nature of important aspects of the biblical thought, expressed by the imagery of the divine face, as illuminated or hiding from man, in order to express a certain divine attitude to man\(^{28}\).

3. REMEMBERING GOD IN PHILO

The earliest post-biblical most extensive corpus write by a Jew in ancient times is that of Philo of Alexandria’s writings. His views, and perhaps also those, which

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\(^{(27)}\) See Genesis 9:16; Exodus 2:24; Ezekiel 16:60.

were described by him, reflect a deep acculturation of Greek philosophical ideas that impacted, *inter alia*, also the importance of the envelope of reminders.

It seems that the praxis of keeping the divine in memory was quite an ancient technique, as we learn from a description of the first documented group of Jewish contemplators, the Therapeutes. Philo of Alexandria describes this group of solitary persons as follows:

In each house there is a sacred chamber, which is called a sanctuary or closet, in which in isolation they are initiated into the mysteries of the holy life. They take nothing into it, neither drink nor food, nor anything else necessary for bodily needs, but laws and oracles delivered through the prophets, and psalms and other books through which knowledge and piety are increased and perfected. They always (29); remember God and never forget him, so that not even in their dreams no images are formed other than the lovingness of divine excellences and powers. Thus many of them, dreaming in their sleep, divulge the glorious teachings of their holy philosophy (30).

It seems that remembering God always is the acme of a path, which includes some special preparations. Those preparations may be considered as inductive of a continuous type of contemplation of the divine. The meaning of remembering in this context is a continuous keeping in mind, not retrieving a certain concept from memory after it has been forgotten. We may assume that the existence of the chamber for retreat should be understood as part of the effort to be with God alone, by escaping the noises and the preoccupations of the mundane world. This memory is conceived of as a mystical faculty, which harbors the divine presence in an ongoing manner. Here solitude is described as prophylactic rather than an *imitatio dei*. It creates the condition for the beginning of contemplation rather than being already part of the very path of turning the attention toward the One. From another passage of Philo’s we learn about a similar praxis this time in the manner in which he reported, or imagined the worship of the High Priest in the Jerusalem Temple:

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(29) See above, note 8.

The God-loving soul, having stripped itself of the body and the objects dear to the body, and having fled far away from these, acquires fixity, firmness and stability in the perfect precepts of virtue. It is therefore attested to by God that it loves what is noble; “for”, says he “it was called the tent of witness”. He passes over in silence who it is that calls it so, in order that the soul may be roused and consider who it is that bears testimony to virtue-loving minds. For this reason the high priest shall not enter the Holy of Holiest in his robe(31) but having doffed the vesture of opinions and impressions of the soul, and having left it behind for those who love externals and esteem semblance above reality, shall enter naked without color and sounds, to pour as a libation the soul-blood and offer as incense the whole mind to God, our savior and benefactor(32).

The High Priest’s solitude in the Holy of the Holiest is understood to teach the fleet from the multitude and corporeality, rather than a requirement for the performance of the ritual. It is a mental worship rather than a corporeal one that is mentioned here. The High Priest’s sacrifices are allegorized as pointing to acts of spiritual devotion. To a certain extent, the Therapeutes’ chamber of solitude, described as a sanctuary, is to be understood as reflecting the same role as that played by the biblical Holy of Holiest. In any case, it is important to draw attention to the phenomenological, and perhaps also historical, affinities between the above passage and the last section of Plotin’s Enneads, where an interesting vision of the sanctuary as the place for mystical contemplation is offered(33). Perhaps pertinent for the above discussion of the High priest as a mystic is the possibility that Philo himself was of priestly origin(34). By and large, Philo applies in this context, as in many other cases, his spiritualistic approach that stresses the inner processes as the gist of his religiosity. We may assume that the image of divestment, which results in nakedness(35), is tantamount with forgetting of the material worlds that disturbs the senses, allowing the permanent remembrance of God. The more material and vocal aspects of the biblical envelope of reminders seems to play no role in his

(31) Lev. 16:1.
(35) On the nakedness of the soul see also Philo, De Cherubim, par. 17.
writingS(36). Interestingly enough, Philo refers explicitly to the mother of the Muses, Mnemosyne, in a discussion, which is an adaptation of a Hesiodic myth to an explanation of the Genesis account of creation(37). Indeed, in a manner reminiscent of the Greek sources, where human history - unlike the past lives of persons - did not play any role in the process of remembrance, in the above passage by Philo, God, apparently his transhistorical essence, is the object of remembrance, not His attribute as redeemer, as pointed out by the biblical verses.

4. RABBINIC REMEMBERING OF TEXTS

As we have seen in the previous section, remembering God constantly was part and parcel of a Jewish form of spirituality as represented by some of the passages adduced above. The envelope of reminders mentioned above remained important also in Rabbinic literature, despite the fact that we may assume some changes. In fact in some instances in this literature, a sequel that includes seeing, remembering and doing is formulated on the basis of a verse from Numbers 15:39 adduced and discussed above: the three actions are designated by the nouns Reiy'ah, Zekhirah, 'Assiyah. Thus, a new form for remembering has being coined: Zekhirah. Thus, the contemplation of the tassels reminds someone of the commandments, and he then performs them. In this context, one of the paragons of early rabbinc literature, R. Shimeon bar Yohai, is quoted to the effect that “whoever is diligent in [performing] this commandment [the tassels] he merits to encounter the face of the Shekhinah(38)”(39). According to some other Rabbinic discussions, there is a certain continuum that starts from the blue color of the tassels up to the blue of the divine chariot, mediated by the blue of the sea(40). Thus, the act of remembering is not just a certain recalling of religious information, but in fact the trigger for its performance. The concreteness of the reminder, in this case the tassels, is quite conspicuous, as it is the effect of the remembrance. The manner in which the


(39) BT, Menabot, fol. 43b. See also Yalqut Shimeoni Numbers, par. 706; idem, Deuteronomy no. 933. A number of ethical treatises have reiterated this approach.

(40) See, e.g., BT, Hullin, fol. 89a.
customs related to phylacteries were practiced in Rabbinic literature they are wore manly during prayer. Thus, a nexus has been created between the biblical mnemotechnique and prayer. In fact, most of the biblical texts quoted above become part and parcel not only of the envelope of reminders, as they were part of the biblical text, but also integral and paramount part of Rabbinic liturgy, and were recited during the daily prayers several times. I know no other biblical text or any Jewish texts that are integral part of both the canonical text, of the envelope of reminders, and of the daily liturgy itself. From this quantitative point of view, the texts included in the envelope of reminders represent the most influential passages in the entire Jewish tradition. Moreover, it should be mentioned that in the case of liturgy, the Rabbinic assumption was that the person who prays must pronounce it, and nothing like a mental prayer has been acceptable. This means that the vocal prayer, to be ideally performed in a quorum, created what I called a sonorous ambiance, which contributed something to the feeling of a community praying together. In a metaphorical manner, we may speak about a sonorous envelope that was created by the performers during reciting also the texts related to the envelope of reminders.

Moreover, in Rabbinic sources the envelope of reminders was projected also onto the divine realm. Rabbis have explicitly portrayed God as donning phylacteries, and as possessing a *tallit*(41). To be sure, in His phylacteries another biblical text has been inserted: God was imagined to remember not what He has done in *illud tempus*, but the uniqueness of the people of Israel and its relationship to God(42). This discussion represents an important instance of reciprocal remembrance, when the two different personalities, the human and the divine, don reminders in which the other is enscribed in order to keep him perpetually in his memory. In fact, according to an influential passage found in the Heikhalot literature, in the moment when the Jews are reciting the triple sanctus, God looks in their eyes, and He stretches over the representation of the Jewish people on high, two acts that have erotic and sexual implications, respectively(43). Last but not least in this context: according to a Rabbinic source, Moses is described as seeing the back of God, in the form of the knot of

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(42) Berakhot, ibid.

the head-phylactery\(^{44}\). This is an interesting example how the reminder is not divorced from the entity it is pointing at. By imagining the existence of a supernal envelope of reminders, two distinct poles represented by separated envelopes of reminders have been surmised: the human semiotic one and the divine one, both keeping the other in his mind. Each of them is not only serving as a reminder for himself, but also strengthens the other's awareness of the reciprocity of that remembrance. In other words, in Rabbinic Judaism the two envelopes of reminders operate as both inner and outer semiotic systems: while creating a configuration of signs that separates the person enveloped by this reminders from other persons, it also shapes the consciousness of that person. The emergence of the supernal envelope seems to be part of the growing importance of parallel structures in Rabbinic thought, and in this literature there was not only a supernal Jerusalem, but also a supernal temple and a supernal ritual were imagined to coexist with the mundane ones\(^{45}\). These correspondences are cardinal for the emergence of the subsequent developments in Kabbalistic hermeneutics, which is based upon the assumption that it is possible to understand the lower by means of the higher, and vice-versa\(^{46}\).

However, in Rabbinic literature, remembrance took a form of its own, according to which remembering was related more to absorbing some form of religious knowledge found in texts, than in wearing the signs that reminds the Jew of the ancient event and his belonging to the redeeming God. In other words, an additional channel for remembering God emerged with the canonization of the Hebrew Bible, and subsequently, with the canonization of other forms of religious literature which constitutes the Rabbinic literature. This new form of dealing with a divine revelation by studying a much larger text than what has been commanded in the biblical discussion, changes dramatically the nature of remembrance. In lieu of keeping in mind a relative small text, and repeating it continuously, in the Rabbinic theory of remembrance an incomparatively longer series of texts have been introduced. To a certain extent, by broadening the range of the religious study to the entire Bible and Rabbinic tradition as a whole, contradicts the biblical imperative of keeping in mind the verses from Deuteronomy. The expansion of the shorter biblical passage to the Bible as a whole created a tension between the biblical type of remembrance and the Rabbinic one.

To be sure: this new form of remembering did not obliterate the older forms, by means of tefillin, mezuzah, tzitzit or Sabbath, which remained operative also in

\(^{44}\) BT. Berakhot, fol. 7a.


Rabbinic literature. However, unlike the more permanent form of the phylacteries in the Bible, where the assumption seems to be that someone should wear them all the time, the Rabbinic regulations assume a ritual of donning that is quite short, limiting them to the morning prayer. However, it was the move in a new direction that is characteristic of Rabbinic Judaism. The collective or corporate approach remains a main attitude in Judaism since the Bible. I used the term “a main” but not the only main attitude. Since the emergence of Rabbinic literature, the status of the individual, especially of the scholar become more prominent, though it did not obliterate the centrality of the corporate community. God in the Sinaitic revelation was imagined in some sources are directed to each and every one of the individual Israelites, and took different forms in accordance with his/her capacities (47). Thus, for example, we read:

Rabbi Levi said: The Holy One, blessed be He, has shown Himself to them as this icon (48) that is showing its faces in all the directions. Thousand people are looking at it and it looks to each of them. So does the Holy One, blessed be He, when He was speaking, each and every one of Israel was saying ‘the speech was with me’. I am God is not written, but “I am God, your Lord”. (49) Rabbi Yossei bar Hanina said: ‘According to the strength (50) of each and every one, the [divine] speech was speaking (51).

A fragmentation of the assumption of a homogenous revelation is conspicuous. To be sure, the content is the same though each person heard something that has been accommodated to his own physical and psychical apparatus.

Also the importance of individual eschatology becomes more evident with the ascent of novel pictures of the afterlife. The act of remembering turns to be not only a reproductive activity attached to the performance of the communal rituals, or to the study of the content of a fixed book. It become related to the concept of innovation related to the study of the Torah, namely of the Rabbinic exegetical activity, which moves slowly toward a more individual process of mentally

(47) God has been portrayed as having many faces; see MUFFS, Love & Joy cit., pp. 146-147 and Marc Hirshman, A Rivalry of Genius, SUNY Press, Albany 1996, pp. 90-93. On the idea that each of the embryos received the Sinaitic revelation and has seen the divine glory according to its own capacity see Zohar, vol. II, fol. 94a; Barbara Holdrege, Veda and Torah, SUNY Press, Albany 1996, p. 324 and also the important collection of texts in A.Y. Heschel, Theology of Ancient Judaism, Soncino Press, London 1962), vol. II pp. 267-271 (Hebrew).


(49) The first form is in plural, while the second one is in the singular, like in the Bible.

(50) Left kobo. This accomodationalist view had many repercussions in Jewish thought, which cannot be discussed here.

(51) Yalqut Shimeoni, on Exodus, par. 286, p. 172.
acquiring the entire realm of Jewish literature, much of it consisting in postbiblical literary corpora. Thus, it is not only a matter of memorizing the divine word, the revelation *par excellence*. The fate of the dead scholar depends, according to some interesting and rather influential Rabbinic sources, not only on the books he studied, but also on what he remembers, or is capable of bringing with him in the afterworld. One is supposed to arrive to the celestial court loaded with a biblical and Rabbinic library in his memory. According to Rabbinic views, all the innovations emerging during the studies of veteran scholars have already been revealed during the Sinaitic revelation. Thus the requirement from the dead scholars to arrive to the next world loaded in order to see God seems to be a return of the revelation to its original generator. To make it a little bit clearer: the Sinaitic revelation that contained the entire canonical corpus, should be assimilated by the scholars in a manner that it becomes part of their personality and thus travels with him *post-mortem*. Then, another revelation takes place: that of the divine stature, presumably as a retribution for the study of the canonical corpus.

Let me attempt to substantiate the above claims. According to some of the formulations, it is not exactly in the dead scholar's memories that those studied books are found, but 'in his hand': *be-Yado*. Let me start with a Talmudic passage which, though in the form it is printed does not contain the main point I would like to make, there are good reasons to believe this point was part of the original version:

The name having forty-two letters is holy and sanctified and is only transmitted to one who is discreet, [*tzanu'a*] has reached the middle of his life, is not prone to anger or to drunkenness, does not arouse criticism by his ways of life, and speaks agreeably with people. And he, who knows it is heedful thereof and observes it in purity, is beloved on high and popular below. He is feared by the people, *his learning is preserved by him*, and he inherits the two worlds, this world and the next.

I brought here the English version of Maimonides' quotation from the Talmud as translated by Shlomo Pines. This Talmudic passage does not contain, in the form it is found in the printed versions of the Talmud, any paramount magical element. However, in the Middle Ages, a version of this passage, as quoted by Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, though presumably not from this book, has been quoted also by the late 13th century Kabbalist R. Todros ben Joseph ha-Levi Abulafia's *Otzar ha-Kavod*. The phrase translated by Pines, as "his learning is preserved by him" does not appear in the printed Talmud. Its Hebrew formulation is *Talmudo mitqayyiem be-yado*, which means that he does not forget

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(52) Leviticus Rabba 22:1.
(53) Compare to the gist of this quote in *BT. Qiddushin*, fol. 71a.
(55) Warsau 1879, fol. 30b.
what he learned but literally it should be translated that the Talmud or the learning is maintained in his hand. This remembering seems to be a magical attainment, related to the reception of the divine name, quite similar to claims found in Heikhalot literature\(^{(56)}\). Since it is implausible to assume that Maimonides, the main fighter against magic in Judaism, would add to a Rabbinic source anything reminiscent of magic, we must assume the original presence of this phrase in the Talmudic discussion.

At least from this important point of view, the similarity between Talmudic and Heikhalot texts is paramount, an issue that should be well remembered well comparing the attitude to magic in the two corpora. Moreover, the tzenu‘im mentioned in the Talmud are ostensibly part of the elite, which means that this practice was part of an elite culture. A close parallel to this passage is found in a Midrash, though it is apparently a fragment that belongs, according to some scholars, to the Heikhalot literature. In *Midrash Mishlei* it is said that God examines the scholars what did they study during their lifetime. After the whole range of Biblical and Rabbinic studies have been mentioned, a student who studied Talmud, or his study in general, and still remembers it, *mi she-be-yado Talmud* “whoever has [his] learning in his hand”, comes in the presence of God, who says:

> Because you have studied Talmud, did you gaze [*Tzafita*] the chariot, did you gaze [*Tzafita*] [my] greatness?\(^{(57)}\) There is no delight in my world but in that hour when the scholars sit and study the Torah, and peer and look at and see, and ponder upon this immense Talmud: how my seat of glory is standing; how the *Hasbmal* does stand...and more important than all the other [issues] how I am standing, from my nail until the top of my head, what is the size of the palm of my hand, and what is the size of the fingers of my feet...This is my greatness, this is the splendor of my beauty that my sons acknowledge my glory, by [the means of] this *Middab*\(^{(58)}\).

What is crucial from our point of view is the fact that the study of the greatness of God is not included in a special form of literature, which culminates the Rabbinic curriculum, but is rather a special modus of study of the whole range of classical texts. In a way similar to the Midrashic sources, where the study of the Torah for its own sake is opening the student to a paranormal experience as we shall see immediately below, also here the result of the special for of study opens the way to a contemplative, or even ecstatic vision of the gigantic size of the supernal world, which includes also the gigantic divinity. Here, peculiar topics of

\(^{(56)}\) See below the passages adduced from this literature.

\(^{(57)}\) *Gedulab*. The vision of the immense size of God is cardinal for this type of literature.

Shi‘ur Qomah were conceived as being achieved not by a resort to the special hymns and mystical techniques of the Heikhalot literature, but by an immersion in the classical texts. This nexus between the study of canonical texts and gazing to the divinity, may be understood if we assume that the divine shape is encoded, or inlibrated, within those books. The manner of this inlibration may differ: secrets hidden within specific parts of texts by gematria (59) or in any other way. It should be mentioned that this combination of textual studies with paranormal experiences, which is characteristic of the Heikhalot literature, is reminiscent of a famous passage found in the 'Avot treatise which describes the unusual attainments of someone who studies the Torah for its own sake. The best way to understand these quotes, as well as others which were not adduced here, as pointing to a kind of spirituality that cultivates the study of texts as an aim in itself, while the mystical experience stands apart the textual study.

Moreover, in Ma‘aseh Merkavah, in a rather awkward statement, it written that “when Rabbi Nehuniya ben ha-Qanah told me the secret of the chambers of the palace of the Merkavah, and [of] the Torah as well, I shall not forget [even] one of their chambers, and I saw the King of the world, sitting on the high and sublime seat” (60).

The secret of the Torah, just as the secret of the supernal world, namely the chambers of the palace of the Merkavah, become imprinted upon the mystic’s consciousness and this state is related to the vision of God. We may guess the nature of this gazing from a parallel text from the Heikhalot literature, where we learn that when R. Nehuniya ben ha-Qanah, (one of the main protagonists of the Heikhalot literature) has revealed to someone “the secret of the Torah, immediately my heart has been illuminated like the gates of the Orient, and the orbs of my eyes gazed the depths and the paths of the Torah, and nothing has been forgotten” (61).

The attainment of the “secret of the Torah” produces a special approach to the Torah, which involves both mystical contemplation, the gazing of the inner structure of the Torah, and magical attainment, the extraordinary memory (62). Here, there is a clear example for a process of illumination that culminates in an absorbing of the Torah and its secrets in the scholar’s memory, in a manner that it cannot be forgotten more. According to another passage found in a Midrash (whose precise date is disputed by scholars) the study of the Torah has another

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(59) See IDEL, The Concept of the Torah cit., pp. 46-49.
form of extraordinary effect (63). “Because someone has read the Torah, the prophets and the hagiographia, and studied the Mishnah, Midrash of halakhhot and ‘Aggadot, and studied the Gemara, and studied the [talmudistic] casuistry, for their own sake, [then] immediately the Holy Spirit dwells upon him” (64).

Thus, memory is not only part of an effort to attain a certain amount of expertise as part of the elite structure of the Rabbinic society, or an utilitarian vision of the study of the Torah which is intended to function within society. A strongly individualized role is now attributed to his study and remembering: it saves someone by safeguarding his portion in the life-to-come. To a certain extent, it seems that the function of the name as the object of remembering in the Bible has been taken over by the Torah: God knows someone by means of the Torah he studied and still possesses.

Let me turn to the possible meaning of the above texts. I can envision two main theories that will make sense of some of the quotes: one, which I would like to call inlibration, the other transmission.

A] According to both the Rabbinic and the Heikhalot literatures, the topics studied in order to reach some form of extraordinary experience, are also the matter-subject of everyone else: no specific text is related to a specific individual. No one has a text destined to be his own alone. From this point of view the individual assimilates himself to the corporate texts and is assimilated into a form of scholarly community. Indeed, the person is acquiring an individual achievement by his studies but this is done by the common literary patrimony of the entire nation. To a certain extent, we may assume that someone attains his own private immortality by losing his idiosyncratic personality when he assimilates the shared literary tradition. Remembering this patrimony, he apparently obliterates his emotions, problems, or history. The scholar absorbs the books and he becomes thus “inlibrated”, which means that his personality is formed by the content of the books, which it took over. Study and remembering are therefore not only part of looking for guidance in this world but also the path for attaining immortality in the next world. It is possible to be remembered by God only insofar as someone becomes identical to the content of the books he studies. His assimilation to the book-content may cause the disintegration of his personality while studying, but his survival is ensured to the extent that he becomes a scholar. Unlike the Islamic understanding of God as revealing to man within or by means of the book, which H.A. Wolfson has described as inlibration (65). I use the term inlibration here in

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(64) Seder Eliyahu Zuta, ch. I. See also the passage from *Heikhalot*, Schaefer, Synopse cit., par. 297.

order to describe a phenomenon in which man's personality is overcome by the content of books, as that he will be able to please God in the world-to-come.

B] A question that arises from some of the above passages has to do with the special manner in which the remembering is expressed: "whoever has in his hand." Is the scholar assumed to become some form of emissary who brings the revelation back to its source? Is this form of expression involves also the possibility that the dead scholar is giving back in the next world, what he received in this world by his learning? Such a view would nicely explain why the verb "remember" itself does not occur. According to this view, it is not the inlibration that ensures immortality but more the role of being allowed in the presence of God and then seeing His stature, by the dint of the treasure he brings back.

Inlibration as described above constitutes a process of transformation of the Rabbinic scholar. It recreates his personality and generates the precondition for the immortality. This transformation is strong enough in order to account for the spiritual meaning of Rabbinic rituals of learning, that are so important in Rabbinic Judaism.

Against the background of these remarks, let me adduce the characterization of some Rabbinic rituals as offered by Gershom Scholem:

[a] hypertrophy of ritual, which became all-pervading...accompanied by no magical action. The rites of remembrance produce no effect they create no immediate bond between the Jew and his natural environment and what they conjure up without the slightest gesture of conjuration is the memory, the community of generations, and the identification of the pious with the experience of the founding generation which received the Revelation. The ritual of Rabbinical Judaism makes nothing happened and transforms nothing. Though not devoid of feeling, remembrance lacks the passion of conjuration, and indeed there is something strangely sober and dry about the rites of remembrance with which the Jew calls to mind his unique historical identity... A penetrating phenomenology of Rabbinic Judaism would be needed to determine the nature of the powers of remembrance that made this possible and to decide whether other secret factors may not after all have contributed to this vitality(66).

(66) On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism, tr. R. Manheim, Schocken Books, New York 1969, pp.120-121. The emphases are Scholem's. On the paradoxical character of this passage in its context see Harold Bloom, Scholem: Unhistorical or Jewish Gnosticism, in Harold Bloom (ed.), Gershom Scholem, New York-New Haven, Philadelphia 1987, pp. 212-213, and Yerushalmi, Zakhor cit., pp. 117-118 note 26. Indeed, I accept the paradoxical nature of Scholem's discussion but it seems that this paradox is the result of the biased presentation of Rabbinism, which created, as Yerushalmi has perceptively described it, a "stark contrast". For more on the manner in which I understand Rabbinism, analyzing differently the material adduced by Scholem in order to make the above point see Moshe Idel, Rabbinism versus Kabbalism, on G. Scholem's Phenomenology of Judaism, "Modern Judaism" XI (1991), pp. 281-296.
Scholem's emphasis on the relationship between identity and remembrance is well taken, as we have already seen above in the biblical sources. However, questions about vitality of certain rituals are not easily answered by scholarship. One of the answers is sheer inertia. However, on the basis of some of the above discussions, at least the rituals related to studying the Torah should, in my opinion, be understood not just as remembering formative historical events, but also as intensifying the awareness to the special nature of God. He is understood as the main factor in those events that were crucial for the national identity and the relationship between Him and the Jew is based on the importance of mutual remembrance and on the fact that it is an ongoing process. The imaginaire of mutual remembrance is in my opinion, adding an important dimension to the historical aspect of remembrance. Thus, the alleged dryness and soberness of the remembrance-rituals is the result of an exaggerated emphasis on the historicity of the remembrance, on the expense of the connectiveness to the divine that is implied in the acts of remembrance. Or, to formulate it in other terms: Scholem, and to a certain extent also Yosef H. Yerushalmi, have, in my opinion, emphasized too much the historical dimension of remembrance, and much less the spiritual aspects implicit in this type of relationship. Indeed, someone may ask why should a ritual directed to the divine, create a linkage between the Jew and the environment, as Scholem demands? Is the efficacy of the religious ritual measured only in matters of relationship to nature, as Mircea Eliade would demand, or must the ritual have a magical or orgiastic effect, as Scholem put it in the same context, again I assume under the impact of Eliade? Indeed, in the vein of the Eliadean vision of archaic religion as a form of reintegration of man within an objective natural primordial order, Scholem describes attunement with nature as a form of transformation that someone would expect from a ritual. However, in some Rabbinic sources, and apparently in a looser manner also in the Bible, the main transformation is not related to the relation man-nature, but that of man-God, and the faculty of memory is one of the main vehicles for attaining it. Unlike Eliade, who conceived himself more as a scholar who gave preponderance to archaic forms of spirituality more oriented toward nature, Scholem was a scholar of mysticism. Why should the importance of memory be belittled in a sort of research dealing preeminently with inner spiritual processes, by measuring the rituals only according to their relationship to nature, is an interesting question.

5. One's Book as One's Remembered Essence

The process of inlibration mentioned above might explain a recurrent practice in Judaism where many important masters are mentioned, or remembered not by their names but by the titles of their works. Immortality is imagined to be ensured by the book someone writes. It stands now for the very author's essence.
Another important development, which brings to a certain completion the line of developments that we investigate here, occurs in some schools in Kabbalah. Some important authors assume that every Jew has a specific type of interpretation, which is related congenitally with his own person and he is required to reveal it\(^{(67)}\). In this case, the issue of remembering does not play a significant role since his personality is envisioned as congenially connected to this specific interpretation. The Kabbalists assume nothing like a romantic concept of individual creativity neither a process of self-fulfillment. Nevertheless their assumption is that the very nature of someone’s personality is strongly connected to an aspect of the books shared by the community, namely the Bible, and to the view that his commentary should also be shared with this community. At is as if the revelation of one’s commentary constitutes a part of a process of the ongoing revelation of the Bible itself.

To summarize this development: in a way revelation is supposed not only to guide the lives of the recipients but also to shape their personality to the extent that the content of revelation overcome the peculiarities of that person. Revelation should continuously be remembered because this ensures the best form of life here and the best fate in the world-to-come. In some cases, especially in mystical texts, the process of studying allows the person to gaze the divine structure.

As seen above, the main way for remembering adopted by Jews has been produced by a system of reminders attached to the human body in order to keep constantly in memory the pertinent material. As pointed out this was the manner in which God has been remembered during prayer, since the elaboration formulated in rabbinic Judaism. I would like to discuss shortly a description, which strives to structure the reliable Kabbalistic library, recommended by a Spanish Kabbalist who arrived to Italy immediately after the expulsion from Spain. Distinguishing between the ‘good’ Kabbalistic books from the ‘bad’ ones, R. Yehudah Hayyat attempted to fight the ‘pernicious’ type of Kabbalah prevalent in Northern Italy. In lieu he offers a list of mostly Kabbalistic books written in Spain:

These are the books that you shall approach \([\text{tigrau 'elezhem}]: \text{Sefer Yetzirah, attributed [\text{ba-mekbkhuneb}] to Rabbi Aqiva, blessed be his memory; Sefer ha-Bahir, attributed to Rabbi Nehunia ben ha-Qanah, should be “a diadem to your head”\(^{(68)}\); the book of the Zohar “should not depart from your mouth”\(^{(69)}\); and the books of Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla and those of Rabbi [Moshe ben] Shem ‘Tov de Leon, you “shall tie them about thy neck”\(^{(70)}\) and the secrets of Nahmanides, should be written upon the table of your heart, and the books of

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\(^{(68)}\) Proverbs 1:9.

\(^{(69)}\) Proverbs, 6:21.
Rabbi Menahem Recanati, “thou shall bind them for a sign upon thy arm”\(^{(71)}\); and Sefer Ma'arekhet ba-'Elohat with my present commentary, “shall be as frontlets between thy eyes”\(^{(72)}\) and then you will be successful in your ways and then you will be illuminated\(^{(73)}\).

It is significant that the list of the recommended Kabbalistic books reflects faithfully the Kabbalistic sources, which informed most of the discussions in both the questions of R. Yehudah Hayyat and in R. Joseph Alqastiel's the responsa to them\(^{(74)}\). Likewise, the mentioning of three commentaries on Nahmanides’ Kabbalistic secrets and some folios from the book of the Zohar are mentioned together in an epistle addressed by R. Isaac Mor Hayyim, a Sephardi Kabbalist, to R. Isaac of Pisa. From the context we can learn that the Italian Kabbalist, unlike the Spanish one, did not possess these writings. Hayyat, writing to an audience of noble men in Mantua of the late decade of the 16\(^{th}\) century interested in Kabbalah, uses many components of the envelope of reminders in order to recommend the need to adopt the Spanish Kabbalistic tradition. Using the fragments of the biblical verses, he creates an ideal image of a Kabbalist who attaches the Kabbalistic books to his body. This discussion is quite a remarkable example for the transformation of the biblical language in order to express the ascent of an entire literature, believed to represent the hidden essence of the Bible, and organize it in accordance of the envelope of reminders.

6. FROM SIGN, TO MEMORY, AND TO ADHERENCE TO GOD

Let me move now to discussions that illustrate the transition from the envelope of reminders of God to the adhesion or union to it. Or, in other words, I would like to exemplify how some of the discussions above served as starting points for more explicit mystical treatments.

The famous late 13\(^{th}\) century Catalan Kabbalist, R. Bahya ben Asher, wrote about the creation of the world following a Platonic approach, that sees in the supernal world of forms the prototype for all that was created below. However, in addition to the structural correspondences between the Temple as a microcosm which reflects the supernal world, envisioned as a supernal temple, the Kabbalist assumes also the possibility of the presence of the higher within the lower, a

\(^{(71)}\) Deuteronomy 6:7.

\(^{(72)}\) Totafot. See above, note 18.

\(^{(73)}\) Minhat Yehudah, (Mantua 1558), fols. 3b-4a.

presence that creates a union between the two worlds\(^{(75)}\). In this context a
description of the uniqueness of the people of Israel is offered:

This is the great degree of Israel, they have a great adherence \([\text{devequt gadol}]\) to the Holy One,
Blessed be He. This is the reason why it is written \(\text{"And you will be a special treasure unto Me"}\(^{(76)}\) The word \('\text{special treasure}'\)\(^{(77)}\) points to the very thing within which there is a hidden
power, as the \('\text{special treasure}'\) is said about the power of the grasses and the pearls, within
there is a hidden power. And out of the strength of adherence \([\text{rov devequt}]\) [of Israel] God
unifies and praises them as one nation. This is the reason why it is written\(^{(78)}\): “What is
written in the phylacteries of God?” “Who is like the people of Israel, a singular\(^{(79)}\) nation on
the earth”\(^{(80)}\) just as they unify Him and praise Him saying: “Hear, Israel: The Lord, our
God, the Lord is one\(^{(81)}\),\(^{(82)}\).

The importance of the unity for achieving a state of union with God is obvious
in this passage, as well as in the lines that follow them. Only by being or becoming a
monos, it is possible to adhere to the divine Monad. The fact that in the human
phylacteries the unity of God is mentioned, as the unity of the people of Israel is
mentioned in the divine phylacteries, allows a reading that by remembering the
one, the one becomes one with another one. I wonder whether the segullah is not
only Israel, saying what they say about God, but also the phylacteries, which from
outside no one sees the treasure hidden within: the formula of the divine unity. In
any case, it is clear that the affinity between the two types of reminders, the human
and the divine phylacteries, represents a union between Israel and God, reminded
each other by the texts found in the respective phylacteries. According to another
discussion of this author, which has several parallels\(^{(83)}\), one of which may serve as
the source of R. Bahya, the divinity is portrayed as dwelling upon someone who
dons the phylacteries, a view that is consonant to the resort to the term \(\text{devequt}\) in
the above passage\(^{(84)}\).

Let me turn now to a much later interpretation of the \(\text{tefillin}\) as a symbol for

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\(^{(75)}\) Cf. R. Bahya ben Asher, \(\text{Kad ha-Qemah}\), par. Lulav, in Ch.D. \(\text{Chavel}\) (ed.), \(\text{Kitvei Rabbenu

\(^{(76)}\) \(\text{Exodus 19:5}\).

\(^{(77)}\) \(\text{Segullah}\). In fact R. Bahya refers to a concept that is not biblical but quite medieval, dealing
with special qualities inherent in some few objects, that could not be described by means of the
regular physics.

\(^{(78)}\) \(\text{BT. Berakhot}\) fol. 6a.

\(^{(79)}\) In Hebrew \('\text{ehad}', namely, “one”.

\(^{(80)}\) \(\text{I Chronicles 17:21}\).

\(^{(81)}\) \(\text{Deuteronomy 16:4}\).

\(^{(82)}\) \(\text{Kad ha-Qemah}\), p. 234.

\(^{(83)}\) See, especially, \(\text{Zohar}\), III, fols. 262b-263a.

\(^{(84)}\) See his \(\text{Commentary on the Pentateuch}\), on \(\text{Exodus 13:16}\), ed. Chavel, pp. 104-105. Compare
also \(\text{ibid.}\), pp. 268.
union between God and man. The mid-18th century cardinal Hasidic master, the Great Maggid of Medziretch, interprets the Talmudic passage concerning God’s phylacteries in a rather remarkable manner:

‘What(85) is written in the phylacteries of the Master of the world? [It is written](86) ‘And who is like the people of Israel, a singular nation on the earth’. It is written in the works of Isaac Luria(87) that the phylacteries are called brains(88) — that is, brains, called pleasure and enthusiasm — by which we are united to Him, be He blessed and praised(89). “And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord”, as if you are called by the name of the Lord, blessed be He, since you become one unity with him, and this pleasure is called our phylacteries. And His pleasure(90), blessed be He, in which he delights because we are united to Him, be He blessed, is called His phylacteries. “And who is like the people of Israel, a singular nation” — as they reach a state of unity which transcends number, but the number is under their control... for time is under their control to do whatever they want, as they transcend time. And He, blessed be He, is united to us, the only obstacle being our capacity, as it is written(91). “Turn to me, [says the Lord of hosts], and I will return to you”, as He, Blessed be he, dwells in the thought. And when a person thinks futile things, he pushes Him away [as it is written](92), “And Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting”. As the cloud was dwelling on him, the Mind cannot dwell on man, since darkness dwells in him(93).

The term mind is a veiled reference to God, Who is alluded to earlier in this passage in the following way: “As if when we perform worthy acts the world of the mind, blessed be He, is broadening. Therefore, the divine mind dwells in our thought, this state being regarded as one of union”(94).

The simultaneity between the human and the divine acts of thought is conspicuous. It presupposes a Neoaristotelian psychology and theology, as found in some of the followers of Maimonides, Abulafia among them, though the Neoaristotelian stand has been interpreted in a theurgical manner: the broadening of divine consciousness. The concepts used by the Great Maggid forcefully point to a description of an experience, which may be designated as unio mystica. The type of cleaving described in this passage transcends the mere connection between two

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(85) BT. Berakhot, fol. 6a.
(86) I Chronicles 17:21.
(87) See Peri ‘Etz Hayyim, Gate of Tefillin, passim.
(88) He Hebrew term is Mahin.
(89) Deut. 28:10. This verse is written in the common phylacteries, which are referred to below as “our phylacteries”.
(90) Ta’anug. The ideal of causing the delight of God by performing the Jewish rituals is tantamount in Hasidism.
(91) Zechariah 1:3.
(92) Exodus 40:35.
(93) ‘Or ha-Emmet (Bnei Barak, 1969), fol. 8a.
(94) ‘Or ha-Emmet, fol. 5c.
unities since, in the end, they achieve a union passing beyond unity, an attribute reserved in medieval source for God alone. Even the atemporal nature of Israel at the moment of the cleaving is appropriate to the Neoplatonic view of the world of the Intellect, here identified with Deity, as surpassing time (95). The divine phylacteries include the statement expressing the unique — literally, ‘one’ — nation, while the human phylacteries, in which Israel are designated as if they are called by the Divine name, hint at the state of union; it is the union of two thoughts (96) which is performed out of enthusiasm and causes delight to God. We face here an interesting example of what was designated by Scholem as the transformation of thought into emotion during the devequt process (97). Nevertheless, we perceive the continuation of philosophical terminology, which flourished in 13th century Kabbalah in order to express unitive experience, into early Hasidic thought. More than any other set of concepts (98), the philosophical framework provided a relevant terminology to the Hasidic masters in matters of unio mystica. Here, the mental operation of union has been allegorized by means of the concrete reminders.

7. **On Remembering the Divine Name in Jewish Mysticism**

Let me turn to another Kabbalistic school, the ecstatic Kabbalah, which stressed the importance of reciting/remembering as integral part of its mystical technique. Less concerned with the parallelism between the lower and the higher levels, and the theurgical affinities between them, it was concerned with creating a sonorous envelope by reciting/remembering the divine names.

Among the most important reverberations of the root ZKR in Jewish mysticism is its strongest form hazkarakah, derived from the form hif'il: hizkkir. It means reminding, pronouncing or reciting, and we shall survey here the instances in which this verb and noun have been used in connection to the divine name. The sources of this type of connection are biblical, as we learn from several verses from the Psalms (99). It assumes the nexus between pronouncing or

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(95) See, e.g., Enned, III:7.
(98) Scholem’s assertion that Lurianic views of what he calls adhesion, which were transmitted orally, deeply influenced the Hasidic view of “adhesion” seems to me to be doubtful; see his Kabbalah, Keter Publications, Jerusalem 1974, p. 372.
reciting on the one hand, and causing the substantial presence of the divine in the context or as the result of that pronunciation. In fact, we may speak about a worship of the divine name, especially in the book of Psalms, which may be based upon this affinity (100).

Apparently following some Rabbinic views, the Qur'an verses emphasize the supreme status of the continuous memory of God. This memory is, in a manner reminiscent of some of the earlier analysis, a matter of a pure mental exercise, but an activity that goes along with some recitative activity. So, for example, we read that

Recite what is sent
of the Book by inspiration
To thee, and establish
Regular Prayer...
And remembrance of God
Is the greatest (thing in life)
Without doubt (101).

Elsewhere, the affinity between man and God is described in terms of reciprocal remembrance: “Remember Me; I shall remember you. Thank Me, and do not act ungrateful with Me!” (102).

On the basis of these and other formulations as to the importance of the nexus between recitation and memory, Muslim mysticism developed an important type of technique based on recitations known as dikhr a noun derived from the same root as ZKR, the verb discussed above in the biblical and Rabbinic sources as well as in Jewish mysticism, as we shall see immediately below. However, the apotheosis of remembrance by recitation is not related in Islam with an envelope of reminders encompassing man, though the existence of reminders is explicit in a more general manner in the Qur'an (103). Moreover, the recitation has been understood in a Hadith as the returning of something that has been given by God (104).

In some parts of Jewish mysticism, just like in some other forms of mysticism the concept of pronunciation as part of a technique to reach and eventually to become united to God is found (105). The precise history of those techniques and

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(100) See, e.g., Psalm 86:9; 92:2: 115:1; 140:14.
(101) Surah XXIX:45.
(102) Surah Al-Baqarah.
(104) See ibid., p. 96.
their possible intersection still waits to be written\(^{(106)}\) and I shall avoid here dealing with the historical aspects of those traditions or with phenomenological comparisons. However, insofar as the Kabbalistic traditions related to the divine name as part of a special type of esotericism (whose details are not always clear) are concerned, there can be no doubt that the earliest Kabbalists elaborated upon the techniques drew from earlier sources. Some of them were articulated in early 13th-century Ashkenazi esotericism, which have earlier sources in the Heikhalot literature\(^{(107)}\), though an important 11th-century Spanish author, R. Shlomo ibn Gabirol, the famous Avicenna of the Latin scholasticism, also put a certain accent on the importance of the pronunciation of the divine name\(^{(108)}\).

However, the emphasis on the recitation, and remembering of the divine name reached in Judaism their apex in ecstatic Kabbalah, a school founded by the 13th-century mystic R. Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia. I shall not engage here the entire realm of the Kabbalistic discussions of *hazkkarah* in his writings, but adduce some examples in which pronunciation is related to the act of remembering. This practice should be understood, in my opinion, also causing some form of an ontic presence of God with or around the reciter. Such a proposal is adumbrated by the existence of a practice of the “putting on the [divine] name” that is found in some few Hebrew texts that precede the emergence of ecstatic Kabbalah, though this phenomenon is known also in non-Jewish sources\(^{(109)}\). It is a magical ritual of putting on a garment and a hat upon which letters of the divine names have been inscribed. Indeed, the most important instance dealing with this issue is a magical book called *Sefer ba-Malbush*\(^{(110)}\). This practice may well be connected to the fact that in some sources God is also attributed a garment upon which letters of the divine name are written\(^{(111)}\). Thus, a nexus between the divine name and some concepts connected to envelope is plausibly known to Jewish authors at the mid-13th century. In any case, at the end of the eighties of the 13th century R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Har'ar wrote in his *Sha'arei Tzedeq*,

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\(^{(106)}\) See my forthcoming monograph *Enchanted Chains.*


\(^{(110)}\) See also WOLFSON, *Through a Speculum that Shines* cit., p. 242.

If he is able to compel and to further draw [from his thought] it will emerge from within to without, and it will be imagined for him by the power of his purified imagination in the form of a pure mirror, and this is ‘the shining rotating sword’\(^{(112)}\) whose back side is transformed and becomes the front, and he recognizes the nature of its inner side from the outside, like the image of the ‘Urim and Tummim, which in the beginning cast light from within. And their message is not arranged in a straight and ordered [manner], but only when combined\(^{(113)}\). This is because its form is incomplete, separate from its essence, until it is distinguished [from it] and clothed in the form of his imagination, and therein it joins the letters by a perfect joining, ordered and ready. And this seems to me to be that form which is referred to by the Kabbalists as ‘garment’ [Malbush]\(^{(114)}\).

This resort to the image of garment is indubitably related to the imagery of clothing and divestment found in R. Nathan’s teacher, Abulafia. In the latter’s *Ozar Eden Ganuz* we read that

Nature prepared the limbs and their spirit and powers so that it is possible to reach this purpose, by means of an intense exercise and the study of the things that are *in potentia* in man, and those which come from the influx upon the human powers from the divine powers, it is possible that someone will actualize his potential. And by means of it his power will strip from all the natural powers and put on the divine powers, and thus he will escape the natural death in the day of his death and will live forever\(^{(115)}\).

Therefore, the imagery of the stripping and clothing occur in order to describe the escape from the natural world and the encounter with the spiritual one: the divine powers clothe the mystic. In the same book the ecstatic Kabbalist says that “All the letters are engraved in your heart from the holy spirit, which is within your spirit...and this is the holy spirit that is engraved within you from the holy spirit itself, and it is speaking within you and outside you”\(^{(116)}\).

Like in the quote from the anonymous book *Ner Elohim* to be adduced below, the speech, which is the act of the holy spirit, is emerging from within and constitutes an externalization of the human thought.

\(^{(112)}\) Gen. 3:24.

\(^{(113)}\) Metzurefet. This means that only when changing the order of the letters, the message will emerge.

\(^{(114)}\) See Natan ben Sa’adyah Har’ar, *Le Porte della Giustizia, Sha’arei Sedeq*, ed. Moshe Idel, tr. Maurizio Motrolesi, Adelphi, Milano 2001), pp. 245-250, 424, 482. This passage has been translated by Schölem in *Major Trends* cit., p. 155 in a different manner.


\(^{(116)}\) Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1580, fol. 17a. Compare also the discussion in Abulafia’s *Or ha-Sekhel*, where the holy spirit and the spirit stand for, respectively, the inner speech, namely the human intellect, and for the outer, namely vocal, speech. Ms. Vatican 233, fol. 16b. See also in Abulafia’s *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, where the Holy Spirit is the intellectual influx descending from above while the spirit is the human intellect. Ms. New York JTS 1801, fol. 29a, ed. Gross, p. 59.
However, what seems to be specific to the manner in which the revelation was described as Malbush by those anonymous Kabbalists referred by the author of Sha'arei Tzedeq is the conspicuous role played by the letters in this revelation, on the one hand, and the fact that they stem from the human thought. This second trait assumes that the Malbush stands, to a very great extent, for an experience of self-revelation. To my best knowledge, the concept of self-revelation has been connected explicitly with the concept of Malbush solely in Ner 'Elohim, a book written by another disciple of Abulafia's. The anonymous Kabbalist writes as follows:

The Holy Spirit is combined with the spirit that exists from it. And the [human] spirit is compounded from elementary spirit, which is a vapor, and is the matter, and the Holy Spirit that is combined with them and is clothed by it as it is the secret of 'the Holy Spirit clothed him.' This is because man is a garment for the Holy Spirit, namely that it covers itself within him, and it reveals itself in the form of the Malbush and in the likeness of the soul that clothes itself by the body. This does not mean that it was not with him but it is hidden from him and now it reveals itself to him, because 'All the earth is full of His Glory'... This is the reason why the pronunciation of His name by the threefold letters, will generate the power of His name which is the form for the letter and the letter is its matter.

Recitation of letters of the divine name is, therefore, related explicitly to the revelation of a spiritual entity of divine origin that is hidden within the human constitution. This revelation is designated by the term Malbush. The performance of the mystical technique is conceived of as generating, by recitation of letters which produces the vapor, the material substratum for the form that is the likeness of the soul, the holy spirit, and the divine Glory at the same time. It is important to point out the immanence of the Holy Spirit within man and its activation by the recitation. This seems to be a parallel to the drawing forth the speeches hidden within human thought, according to the passage from Sha'arei Tzedeq. An immanentist approach is expressed also in one of Abulafia's major books, in a manner reminiscent of the experience of R. Nathan in Sha'arei Tzedeq.

Prepare yourself to hear that which will be answered in the pronouncing of the letter, and [when] you hear the letter pronounced from his mouth, do not pronounce it, for he has pronounced it for you, but receive the tidings that He shall speak with you, for 'in one [word]
God speaks’ (123); and rejoice in your heart, and pronounce again the head of the end, which is [the letter] 23); and even if you wait a little while to hear, let it all be within one breath, and let the completion of the breaths (1) be in the pronouncing of the letter, and not in any other thing, apart from the time that he answers you, and he shall pronounce the letter at the place which you have stated, and therefore the verse reads ‘in every place where I shall remember [My Name]’ (124) — not ‘where you shall remember.’ And the secret of the matter is: if I will remember, you will remember, and if you shall remember, I shall remember. And consider his reply, answering as though you yourself had answered(125).

This passage depicts the act of pronouncing the letters by means of letter-combination, and the answer received when they are articulated. We may infer two contradictory things from this concerning the nature of the one answering: 1) the respondent is God: “He shall already speak to you, for ‘in one God speaks’” while the subject of the second verse, “I will remember”, is God. It follows from this that a dialogue occurs between God and the one combining at the time of the pronouncing; 2) the respondent is the person himself, “and think when you respond, as though you yourself had answered yourself”. This double meaning reappears elsewhere in that book:

When you complete the entire name and receive from it what the Name [i.e., God] wishes to give you, thank God; and if, Heaven forbid, you did not succeed in what you sought, know that you must return in full repentance, and weep for that which is lacking in your level, and that you mentioned the Divine Name in vain, which is a grave sin. And you are not worthy of blessing, for God has promised us in the Torah to bless us, saying(126), “in every place where I will have my Name mentioned, I will come to you and bless you”. Behold, [what is written] “where I will mention My Name” — when you pronounce My Name; and the secret of this is that at first you pronounce My Name, when you mention My Name as I have informed you, and the secret [refers to] the matter of the movement of the head at the time of reciting the Qedusah [Doxology](127).

The result of the practice of recitation is, inter alia, “to receive the efflux of wisdom and [the power] of creation”(128). In his mystical handbook, 'Or ha-

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(123) Job 33:14.
(124) Ex. 20:24. This is one of the most important passages dealing with some form theology of the divine name. The problem is that the version of the verse is problematic and scholars are inclined to see the form 'azkkir, I shall recite, as a mistake for tazkkir, ‘you shall recite’, which means that wherever someone will recite the divine name, there He will come and bless him. See CHILD, Memory and Tradition cit., pp. 12-13.
(126) Ex. 20:20.
(127) Ms. Vatican 233, fol. 56b; IDEL, The Mystical Experience cit., p. 87.
(128) See Ms. Vatican 528, fol. 71b and IDEL, The Mystical Experience cit., p. 26. The creation
Sekhel, this Kabbalist describes the process of pronunciation of the letters of the Divine Name: "then play the hiriq which extends downwards and [it] draws downwards the supernal force in order to cause it to cleave to you(129). Hence, Abulafia explicitly indicates that his technique is intended to collect or attract the spiritual forces upon the person who permutes the letters. The exact nature of this supernal force is not clear; however, it may be connected to astral bodies, though this is not a necessary interpretation. From our perspective, the question may be asked to what extent this drawing down is intended to create an envelop in which the human sounds and the attracted spiritual influx mix. It is not simple to answer this question in a conclusive manner. However, there are some indications that may encourage such a suggestion. First and foremost the main result of the recitation is the appearance of some form of a double of the reciter, an imaginary one to be sure, with which the mystic conduces some form of dialogue(130).

In other words, while in the biblical and Rabbinic cases the material envelope of reminders orientates the consciousness toward the divine, in ecstatic Kabbalah, the recitation of the names of God creates some form of spiritual envelope, as we may learn from the resort to the term malbush. Even more than in earlier sources, we may discern in this brand of Kabbalah an emphasis on the reciprocity related to remembrance:

And know that the Kabbalist receives, that God says to a man, “Receive Me and I will receive you”, as it is said(131) ‘Thou hast avouched [lit., spoken for] the Lord... And the Lord hath avouched [lit.: spoken for] you’, and therefore it says(132) ‘In every place where I shall cause my name to be mentioned I will go to you and bless you’... and it says to you that if you remember My Name for My honor, I have already remembered your name for your honor(133).

Here the reciprocity is quite obvious in a manner reminiscent of the Arabic sources. Elsewhere in his 'Or ha-Sekhel, Abulafia wrote:

When the false apprehension is negated... and is remembered in the mind from the heart of those who feel and the enlightened ones, then ‘death shall be swallowed up(134) forever and God will erase tears from every face and the shame of his people will be removed for the

referred to here is that of the Golem. On this issue see Scholem, On the Kabbalah cit., pp. 169-204 and Idel, Golem cit., pp. 96-118.

(131) Deut. 26:17,18.
(132) Ex. 20:24.
(133) Ms. Jerusalem NUL 8* 1303, fol. 5a.
(134) Isa. 25:8.
mouth of the Lord has spoken’. That is, the secret of the intellect will be revealed after its disappearance(135).

When man abandons the dwelling of the blood — namely imagination — he actualizes his intellect and cleaves to the Agent intellect and ensures his immortality. In other words, the recitation of the divine name, its remembrance, is inductive to a redemptive experience, which is limited to the intellect. Thus this may be a theoretical issue, it is plausible that for Abulafia this was not the case. “When I arrived at [the knowledge of] the Names, by my loosening of the bonds of the seals, ‘the Lord of All’ appeared to me and revealed to me His secret and informed me of the end of the exile and of the time of the beginning of redemption. He compelled me to prophesy”(136).

It is evident that the initial stage of preoccupation, expressed by the phrase “When I arrived at the knowledge of the Names of God”, is indebted to his Kabbalistic practices. It enabled Abulafia to free himself of the bonds of the material world, in his words, “by my loosening of the bonds of the seals”, and only afterwards was he graced with a revelation, “the Lord of All appeared to me”. Within this revelation lies the mystical experience he termed ‘prophecy.’ Let me compare this manner of expression “the end of X is the beginning of Y” to what Abulafia has to say about remembering the divine name

Because in the matter of remembering there are important issues, and if someone is not very careful he endangers himself, the ancient ones have hidden it. However, now-a-day the hidden has been revealed because the forgetting reached its outmost limit and the end of the forgetting is the beginning of the remembering(137).

Again the structure of the discourse dealing with the end of X as the beginning of Y. “Now-a-days” stand in Abulafia’s writings for the period in which the historical exile is about to be terminated(138). He believed that he is a prophet and a messiah. Thus, the secret of Judaism, which is his own Kabbalah based on the recitation or the remembering the divine name, is now revealed, a revelation that is

(135) Ms. Vatican 233, fol. 125a.
tantamount with the beginning of redemption. Therefore the act of forgetting parallels the concept of exile, while remembering is conceived of as the beginning of redemption.

However, this historical reading has an additional meaning, which concentrated on the individual redemption: the process of recitation of the divine names are tantamount to travelling the path of prophecy, or ecstatic Kabbalah, which culminates in someone’s self-redemption by union with the divine sphere. In Sefer ha-Malmad written by Abulafia, we learn that

It is known that these two attributes are changed always in accordance to the nature of creation, to each other. And the secret is that the attribute of mercy is always prevailing, because the numerical value of YHVH is 26 while that of the name 'Elohim is 86, namely when someone will add 86 to 26, and when someone will write 26 in its plene form, kaf vav, the concealed [name of] 86 under the name of 26 will be found. This means that the attribute of judgement is concealed while that of mercy is revealed. Both are, however, 26 which means that these two attributes are [constitute] but one attribute.

Therefore, though Abulafia spoke first about two different attributes, they are in fact one, which manifests itself in different forms. The implication of this statement is similar to that of assuming that the beginning of remembering is the end of forgetting, or that the end of the exile is the beginning of redemption. Opposite, or even diametrically opposite as the two attributes are, they are not separate or unrelated. They may point to different moments in time in history, or in personal experiences, but the nexus between them is indissoluble, just as remembering and forgetting are.

The above discussion may be understood as consisting in objective treatments and indeed in his book Abulafia intended to propose techniques, which may serve everyone to reach a mystical experience. However, he conceived himself in terms strongly connected to those techniques. He assumed for himself the role of the destroyer and the builder, as part of his self-perfection as a prophet and Messiah, and applied it to spiritual projects. In his prophetic work written between 1285-1288, one of the few apocalypses composed by a Kabbalist, he describes himself in as Zekhariyah, which means the reciter of the divine name:

And the end of delivery and the day of redemption has arrived
But no one is paying attention to this issue to-day to know it.
There is no redemption but by means of the name of YHWH
And His redemption is not for those who do not request it

(139) The letters K[F] and V[v] can be combined in another form, in order to constitute KaV whose numerical value is 26, namely the gematria of the Tetragrammaton, and pav which is numerically equivalent to 86, the gematria of 'Elohim.

In accordance to His Name.
This is why I, Zekhariyahu
The destroyer of the building
And the builder of the destruction
Has written this small book,
By the name of 'Adonay the small [name]
In order to disclose in it the secret of YHWH the great [name].

Redemption is related again to the knowledge of the divine name, and this knowledge must involve the issue of recitation of remembering, implied in the cognomen Zekhariyahu. Thus, redemption and remembering are linked together again. Like in the two cases adduced above, the dialectical vision is clear; he is the destroyer and the builder at the same time. The building is a matter of reciting the divine name. Indeed, Zekhariyahu is one of some theophoric names Abulafia assumed for himself in his prophetic books. It means “the person who recites [or mentions] the Tetragrammaton” and the numerical value of its consonants amount to 248 like the consonants of Abulafia’s proper name ‘Abraham’. Elsewhere Abulafia calls himself as Raziel, namely the revealer of El, God, again a name whose consonants amount to 248. However, even more important are the sentences according to which the mystic found in a state of union with the divine intellectual world, is called by the name Shadday and in fact by all the other divine names.

The dialectics between the rules of two divine names, 'Adonay and the Tetragrammaton, is not totally clear but we may infer what is the intention both from the context and from a parallel found in a book written in Abulafia’s immediate entourage. The situation of the exile - a term which does not mean in Abulafia’s thought only or primarily the political-social plight of the Jews - is represented by the divine name 'Adonay, which is a main substitute for the Tetragrammaton, the latter being the ruling name in the time of redemption. In any case, an interesting parallel to this view is found in a book written by one of the Kabbalists to whom Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel has been dedicated, R. Nathan ben Sa’adyah Harar. In his Sbearei Tzedeq, this disciple of Abulafia describes the exilic situation as constellated by the name Adonai while the messianic age will be
governed by the Tetragrammaton. The two situations are exclusive insofar as the same person is concerned: someone is, at least in a certain moment, either in exile under the substitute of the divine name, or redeemed, when he worships the Tetragrammaton. Thus, the ascent, or the building of the one, means the destruction of the other\(^{146}\). In this context we should understand the nexus between the remembering and some form of earlier erasure, found twice in this book. First R. Nathan describes the Sufi remembering of the name of Allah, which is understood as erasing everything found in the mind of the mystic. This process is called \textit{mehiqah}, which parallels the Arabic \textit{Mahw}\(^{147}\). Later on in his autobiographical account, he reports that his teacher, plausibly Abraham Abulafia, ordered him to forget a certain type of combining letters after he studied it, in order to advance to another mystical technique\(^{148}\). Thus, the very process of remembering is conspicuously connected to an erasure of a previous content, or its forgetting. In another way, the beginning of remembering is connected to the end of forgetting. In one of the descriptions of the process of remembering found in \textit{Sefer ha-Hesheq}, we learn that:

When you wish to recite the name of seventy-two letters\(^{149}\)...you must arrange [so that] to be alone in a special place. [Then] pronounce the secret of the Ineffable Name, and separate and isolate yourself from every speaking creature, and from all vanities of [the world, so as not to view them as] attributes [of God]. And also so that there should not remain in your heart any thoughts of human or natural things, of either voluntary or necessary [matters], as if you are one who has given a writ of divorce to all forms of the mundane world, as one who has given a testament in the presence of witnesses in which he orders [another] to take care of his wife and his children and his property, and has relieved himself of all involvement and supervision and transferred it from himself and gone away\(^{150}\).

The theme of the divorce points to a moment of substantial spiritual change. It is another form of forgetting, or undressing that is necessary in order to start the process of pronunciation/remembering. This separation from the common form of experience facilitates the recitation and the absorption of the sonorous activity of

\(^{146}\) Ibid., pp. 87-91.

\(^{147}\) The issue of erasure is crucial for the understanding of R. Nathan's stand, and it does not occur in such a strong manner in Abulafia's own writings. The latter is more concerned with the engraving of the proper forms of cognition than with catharsis. See, e.g., \textit{Hayyet ha-Nefesh}, Ms. Munchen 408, fol. 65a; \textit{Scholem, Major Trends} cit., p. 384 note 105. For a fascinating distinction between the Sufi's effort to erase and the theologians' attempt to inscribe see Fritz MEIER, \textit{The Problem of Nature in the Esoteric Monism of Islam}, in \textit{Spirit and Nature, Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks}, Bollingen Series XXX.1, Pantheon Books, New York 1954, pp. 153-154.

\(^{148}\) \textit{IDEL, Le Porte della Giustizia} cit., p. 414.

\(^{149}\) This is one of the most cardinal divine names in Abulafia's Kabbalah.

\(^{150}\) Ms. New York JTS 1801, fol. 9a; Ms. British Library 749, fol. 12b.
recitation, and the digesting the divine concept within the consciousness. The concept of forgetting is even more explicit in the book of Abulafia’s disciple, R. Nathan ben Sa’adyah Harar. In a fragment that stems from a lost writing of his, we read: “The wise and illuminated R. Nathan, blessed be his memory, told me¹⁵¹: ‘Know that the perfection of the secret of prophecy for the prophet is that he should suddenly¹⁵² see the form of his self standing in front of him. He will then forget his own self and it will disappear from him. And he will see the form of his self in front of him, speaking with him and telling him the future”¹⁵³. Thus we have an explicit testimony, which deals with the negation of the regular self in order to meet the higher self, who reveals secrets in a dialogical type of encounter¹⁵⁴. This initial self-forgetting, which may culminate in the encounter of the higher self, may have something to do with the Sufi concept of erasure, or the recommendation of R. Nathan’s master to forget or erase the techniques he memorized earlier. The author proposed a detailed path for “remembering”, namely for reciting the divine name in his Sha’arei Tzedeq. We may relate the two moments as follows: the first stage, the remembering, causes the self-forgetting as part of a more complex spiritual development, which is supposed to culminate in a moment of self-revelation.

We may summarize the above couples of concepts as follows: remembering, redemption, and the Tetragrammaton constitute the positive pole, while forgetting, exile, and ‘Adonay, constitute the negative pole. Abulafia believed that, historically speaking, he lives at the end of the rule of the latter and the beginning of the former.

In the vein of some of the discussions above, we may assume that the remembering of the divine name is intended to reach a lasting result. Abulafia describes remembering as follows: “You should arise your thought to the remembering, which is impossible to forget forever and it [will be achieved] when you will think always on the four letters of the [divine] name, and their names, their numerical valence and their form and their meaning and their multiplication”¹⁵⁵. Thus Abulafia applied what has been written in the Talmudic passage about the mysterious name of forty-two letters, to the Tetragrammaton. This inscription may point to the absorption of the divine name in the consciousness of the mystic in a manner that becomes an indelible part of it¹⁵⁶. It should be

¹⁵¹ Presumably to R. Isaac of Acre.
¹⁵² The assumption that the prophetic experience starts suddenly recurs in R. Isaac of Acre, and if this text represents indeed R. Nathan’s stand, R. Isaac was influenced again by R. Nathan.
¹⁵⁵ Sefer ha-Hesheq, p. 32.
mentioned that what is described here is a mental type of remembering, the last, or highest among the three types described in Abulafia's writings.

In a passage in which he describes his recommendations, after Christians have rejected his views, he preaches: “Now you, of wise heart seek the Lord in your hearts, day and night. Investigate His Truth and cleave to Him and remember His Name. For His Name is engraved within the memory and the Spirit of the Lord speaks, and within Her is recognized eternal salvation.” The mystical and salvific aspects of the act of concentration on the divine name are obvious also in an important Kabbalist who was close, from some points of view, to both Abulafia and R. Nathan, R. Isaac ben Shmuel of Acre:

He who wishes to know the secret of the connection of his soul above and the communion in his thought with the Supreme God, and to acquire by that continuous, uninterrupted thought the ‘life of the world to come’, and that God be always near him, in this life and in the next, let him place before the eyes of his mind and his spirit the letters of the Unique Name, as if they are written before him in a book in scribal writing... so that when he places the letters of the Unique Name before his eyes, your mind’s eye and your heart’s thought shall be in them, in the Infinite.

Like in Abulafia’s contemplation of the letters of the divine names according to Sefer ha-Hesheq, we see a similar practice also in R. Isaac’s passage. The divine name, serving as a signpost is so powerful, pointing directly to the divine signifier, that it is conceived of as sublating all the other signposts. To be sure: here there is no mentioning of remembering, or of a recitation of the divine name. However, at least in one case in an early 19th century Hasidic text, the relationship between the name and the denominated entity, God, described as remembering, is explicit. R. Jacob Isaac ha-Levi Horovitz, the so-called Seer of Lublin, articulated in one of his directives: “Do not release your thought for one moment from the awe of the Holy One, blessed be He. At least you should imagine the letters of the Tetragrammaton, blessed be He, and remember that it is the name of the Holy one, blessed be He”.

I am not sure that I can explain what is the meaning of “at least”. Does it imply the possibility that someone should pronounce the name? However, what seems to be obvious is the fact that the imagining of the name should be accompanied by the awareness that it is pointing to the signifié, God. In any case,

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157) Ibid., pp. 30-37.
158) IDEL, Sefer Ha-Ot cit., p. 76.
159) The phrase ‘the life of the world to come’ though existent before Abulafia, become a religious aim that can be achieved by means of a technique, as it is in this passage of R. Isaac.
160) Literally the so-called Assyrian script.
162) Zot Zikkaron, Brooklyn 1981, fol. 2b.
remembering operates here with the letters of the divine names used in a technical manner, or as part of a more complex technique. The assumption is that there is a substantial linkage between the name and the divine realm, and the ascent from the former to the latter is quite obvious.

The constancy of the relationship between man and God in the last two quotes is quite evident. It is reminiscent of a passage R. Isaac cites in the name of an otherwise unknown Ashkenazi master, R. Yehudah ha-Darshan, dealing with Enoch, the biblical patriarch:

Enoch was a cobbler. And when he was preparing the shoes, by each and every hole he was sticking with his awl he was blessing God, blessed be He, by with whole heart and perfect intention... and he never forgot to bless even in the case of one single stick but was always doing so. Out of his love he disappeared, because God took him and he merited to be called Metatron and his degree was [then] very high\(^{(163)}\).

The Arabic versions that may constitute the source of this passage had been discussed recently in an important study\(^{(164)}\). I would like to read this text as reflecting also an aspect of *dhikr*. I assume that the act of blessing involves a certain remembrance of the divine name. Just as the Sufi *dhikr* is related to each and every act of breathing, as is the tradition about Enoch mentioning each and every stick as the occasion of blessing God.

8. DIFFERENT SIGNPOSTS FOR REMEMBRANCE

Let me emphasize that memory as discussed above is not only a mental operation but is tightly related to loud recitation of texts and divine names, or more material operations as attaching written documents to someone’s body. Nevertheless, we may speak about a certain shift from the more material signs for memory as found in biblical and Rabbinic forms of Judaism, to somewhat less material ones, in ecstatic Kabbalah. The main signposts of the Bible are the more permanent *Totafoi*, understood later in Rabbinic literature as the removable phylacteries and the tassels. However, in Rabbinic literature, the path to reach God is mainly the study of the Torah as we learn, for example, from a seminal statement: “Rabbi Jeremiah said in the name of R. Hiyya bar Abba: it is written ‘They had deserted Me, and did not keep

\(^{(163)}\) Me’irat ‘Einayim, p. 47.


My Torah’(165). May they desert me but keep my Torah, because out of their studying Torah, the light within it will cause them to repent”(166). I think it will not be far-fetched to say that the light within the Torah orientates the student toward the divine realm. If an external reading of the Torah seems to differentiate between its study and the divine realm, and to induce even an oblivion of God, a more intense study will reach the innermost aspect of the Torah, its light, which is a signpost for the divine. The Torah is, therefore, described as a channel for returning to God, despite the heterogeneous nature of this text, namely its including numerous discussions which do not refer to God at all.

To be sure: Both the biblical and the Rabbinic signposts remained important also in the subsequent stages of Jewish thought and praxis. However, their meaning was reinterpreted time and again, and in some cases, as we shall see immediately below, sublated to what was conceived to be their inner rationale. Let us take Abulafia as an example. There can be no doubt that the different aspects of the divine names were the core of his understanding of ideal Judaism. In the light of this supreme value the meaning of the Torah has been reinterpreted so that it is conceived to consist in a series of divine names or even one long divine name(167). Indeed, according to an interesting passage divine names and combinations of letters are conducive to knowledge in a manner reminiscent of the easy understanding of the canonical books by youngsters:

We, and all those who follow our intellectual Kabbalah [attaining] prophecy by means of the combinations of letters, He will teach us the essence of reality as it is, in an easier way in comparison to all the way in existence in the world, despite the fact that the knowledge of the essence of reality, which is apprehended by much thought. What brings about it [the knowledge] is the combination [of letters], and this combination induces it [the knowledge] as immediately as a youth studies the Bible, then the Mishnah and Gemara’ he will indubitably achieve it quickly, with perseverance, being better than any thought(168).

Letters are, therefore, the new main signs that play the most important religious role in Abulafia religious axiology. His thought represents a move from the phylactery, namely the concrete-contact memory of the Bible, and from the mental-Torah type of memory, to the less semantic letter-oriented type of remembering God. “You must — he writes — first verify in your heart, anyway that you can verify that the letters are in essence signs and hints in the image of

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(165) Jeremy 16:11.
(166) ‘Eikha’ Rabbati; Petiheta II; Pesiqta de-Rabbi Kahana’, 16:5.
(167) See IDEL, Absorbing Perfections cit., pp. 319-332.
(168) ‘Ozar ‘Eden Ganuz, Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1580, fol. 90a. See also ibid., fol. 136a: “We have Kabbalistic ways, which are bringing us to the intelligibilia in an easy manner [be-qalut], without their [the philosophers’] ways”.
characters and parables, and were created because they are instruments by which man is taught the way of understanding”(169).

In Hebrew the letters, as both sound and sign, in their singular forms, are represented by the same noun: ‘ot(170). Let me turn to the other sign, the biblical signposts. Less evident in his system is the religious significance of the tefillin and the tassels. Not that they do not appear in his discussion of mysticism, but their status is rather precarious. So, for example Abulafia recommends to the initiate: “[I]f you can wrap yourself in a tallit and don your tefillin on your head and your arm, so that you may be fearful and in awe of the Shekhinah, which is with you at that time. And cleanse yourself and your garments, and if you can let them all be white(171), for all this greatly assists the intention of fear and love”(172). The biblical sort of envelope appears here in an explicit manner. However, the suggestion to don the tallit and tefillin is formulated in an optional manner: ‘im tukhal, a fact that is quite remarkable. What in fact would prevent a Jew from donning those two ritualistic artifacts? If he does possess them, there is no reason not to don them, but if the assumption is that there is some formal hindrance to do so. Indeed, this may be the case, given another recommendation mentioned in this context: “if it is night, light many candles, until it shall enlighten your eyes well”(173). The possibility, in fact the recommendation, to recite the names at night, as it happened almost in all the cases, conflicts with, or at least complicates, the donning of the tallit and tefillin, as formulated by Rabbinic regulations. Though there is nothing especially antinomian in the way the nocturnal Kabbalists operate, it is certainly not following anything nomian. Why at all complicate the entire technique by introducing such a tension between the mystical technique and the ordinary Rabbinic ritual is, in my opinion, quite a pertinent question. The answer is found in the passage quoted above: donning the two objects are creating a certain ambiance that is pertinent to the encounter with the divine presence. Just as white garments are helpful in creating the appropriate atmosphere, but their absence does not invalidate the technique, so should we understand the possible absence of the tallit and tefillin, as not affecting the recitation of the divine names. Also elsewhere, in his 'Or ba-Sekhel, Abulafia recommended to the practitioner, in a rather optional manner, “And

(169) Sefer ba-Hesheq, Ms. New York, JTS 1801, fol. 31b, see now the edition of A. Gross, Jerusalem 2000, p. 63.


(171) See Ecclesiastes 9:8. The sources for white clothes are numerous and they include also many magical texts. See WOLFSON, Through a Speculum that Shines cit., p. 237 note 195.

(172) Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba’, Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1582, fol. 51b; This passage is the source of Albotini’s Sullam ha-'Alfiyab, ed. Y.E. Porush, Jerusalem 1989), p. 73.

sit enwrapped in clean white pure garments or new garments over all your garments, or have your tallit and your head crowned with tefillin”\(^{(174)}\) The ‘or’ here is paralleling the ‘if you can’ in the earlier book; the two formulations demonstrate that for Abulafia just white clothes were more essential for his mystical path than the ritualistic objects, or what I proposed to call reminders. The verb ‘crowned’ is the only reference to the manner in which Abulafia understood the function of the tefillin: they are not reminders, but adornments. Interestingly enough, the single instance I know where the recommendation of donning of those two artifacts in ecstatic Kabbalah is not formulated in an optional manner is in the version copied by the 16\(^{th}\) century R. Yehudah Albotini from \textit{Or ha-Sekhel}\(^{(175)}\). Indeed, Albotini, was an Halakhic figure, unlike Abulafia and R. Nathan, and this fact may account for the change he introduced in Abulafia’s optional discourse: someone cannot deal with sacred objects which are part of the ritual in an optional manner. Reading the anomian stand of Abulafia’s via the lens of a nomian figure like Albotini should, however, not transform the anomian practice into an hypernomian practice\(^{(176)}\).

Moreover, in a third case, in a book written later in Abulafia’s life, when describing again the preparations for recitation the ecstatic Kabbalist completely ignores the issue of wearing phylacteries\(^{(177)}\). In other words, the paramount role of the tefillin as signposts or reminders had been substantially eroded in Abraham Abulafia’s mystical technique, which preferred a much less semantic approach, as we have seen above. The reminders become auxiliary, secondary components of an evolving path, which brings the divine presence by means much stronger than the earlier Jewish reminders. This mitigation of the role of the traditional reminders is paralleled by an original approach toward the historical events to be remembered. According to Abulafia, it is not the unique, external event in ancient history that the esoteric understanding of the


\(^{(175)}\) See Sefer Sullam ba-Aliyah, p. 69.

\(^{(176)}\) Compare, however, to WOLES, \textit{Abraham Abulafia} cit., pp. 209-210, who claims that the donning of the tallit and tefillin is ‘essential’ for the recitation because the latter is no more than “an extension of traditional prayer”. See also \textit{ibid.}, pp. 150-151 note 153. Speculations about the possible secrets - not mysteries in my opinion – of the phylacteries found in some forms of Kabbalah, fascinating as they may be, do not transform someone into a hypernomian figure. Sometimes those speculations may in fact weaken the performance of the commandment \textit{de facto}. To decide what is the contribution of a certain interpretation to the actual performance or to the assumption that performance is important at all, is a matter of the type of semiosis which informs a specific interpretation. In my opinion, Abulafia’s semiosis emphasizes much more the inner structure of the words of a commandment, rather the inner structure of its performance. This issue deserves a separate and more detailed discussion than what can be offered in this framework.

\(^{(177)}\) See Sefer ha-Hesheq, in the passage cited in IDEL, \textit{The Mystical Experience} cit., p. 38.
Bible orientates, but an atemporal process that is taking place in the spiritual realm of the mystic\(^{(178)}\). The internalization of the most important religious processes diminished the importance of the Rabbinic signposts. Unlike some theosophical views that regard the phylacteries as the reason for the dwelling of the divine presence upon man, as seen above in the context of R. Bahya ben Asher, for Abulafia and R. Nathan the letters of the divine name and their activation create the linkage with the divine.

Let turn to the Hasidic vision of the signpost: the Torah. As pointed out in the previous section, it is to the individual letters/sounds that the Hasidic masters are cleaving. We may assume that the divine status of those letters represents a new situation: the letters are not only purifying the human thought, or drawing down the divine power. To cleave to the letters is to cleave to God, which means in our terms to transform the former signpost for memory to cleaving to the divinity itself. The precise relationship between the signpost and the object it represents is rather complex: there are Hasidic views according to which the Torah-letters are the containers within which the divine power, influx, light or vitality is automatically present. According to other views, the light within the letters is conceived of as mediating between the letters/sounds on the one hand, and the divinity on the other hand. And last, but not least: a widespread assumption is that human activity is the factor that induces the divine components within the letters/sounds as containers.

Structurally speaking, all those three theories assume that the signposts represent not just indications to something transcendent, just a sort of reminders, but something closer to substantial links between the human and the divine. This is the reason why the Besht emphasized the immediateness of the experience of learning, which can allow an absolute memory, which does not need rehearsing. A similar transformation is visible also in the manner in which the tefillin were understood by the Besht’s most important disciple, the Maggid of Medzirec. As seen above, he interprets a Talmudic discussion about the content of the human phylacteries where God is mentioned, and the phylacteries donned by God, where the nation of Israel is mentioned, in order to describe an experience of mystical union between the two.

We may therefore summarize a certain development in Judaism: from the permanent phylacteries in the Bible, to the temporary though ritualistic ones in Rabbinic Judaism, to the optional use of them as ornament in ecstatic Kabbalah, or even ignoring them altogether according to Abulafia’s Sefer ba-Hesheq. In all those cases, the issue of remembrance is crucial, but the signposts inducing it changed in accordance to the main values of the different forms of conceptual structure emerging in Judaism. However, what should be emphasized, is the

\(^{(178)}\) See IDEL, Language, Torah and Hermeneutics cit., pp. 121-124.
fact that God is not remembered directly, by an act of unmediated concentration on His nature; His remembrance is mediated by the different sorts of reminders. This is not a matter of a negative theology at all, but of a cardinal role played by the ritual components of Judaism, which include also the Torah and its letters.

The above shifts in the status of the signposts for memory, or the reminders, reflect also different anthropologies (179). The more body-oriented biblical anthropology, becomes more performative and more scholarly in Rabbinism, and then more mentalistic in ecstatic Kabbalah. The submission of the Israelite to the personality of the redeeming God is more related to external deeds, while in some of the subsequent developments in Judaism, a more internalized understanding of affinities between man and God emerged. This process of internalization is paralleled in some cases by a diminution in the semantic valences of the reminders: the letters of the divine names are combined, according to Abulafia with other letters, so that the content is obliterated, and this is even more conspicuous in R. Nathan’s Sha’arei Tzedeq. The role played by the phylacteries is also corroborating this understanding of the non-semantic nature of the signposts. This is also the case in Hasidism, where the words of the Torah or of prayer have been atomized, and reduced to a series of separate letters. Thus, in the different forms of Jewish mysticism, historical memory receded to the background while more direct experiences of the divine moved much more to the center.

(179) Other approaches to the reminders found in Kabbalah, like the theosophical, symbolic and the theurgical aspects will be dealt with in a separate study.
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