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ABRAHAM J. HESCHEL ON MYSTICISM AND HASIDISM

MODERN JEWISH THEOLOGIES AND JEWISH MYSTICISM

In one of the most insightful observations on theology in Judaism, Heschel pointed out the role played by Spinoza's sharp distinction between philosophy and the Bible, as inspiring a vision that encouraged a view of Judaism as legalistic. In the same essay he even speaks about a "Halakhic heresy."¹ Spinoza's distinction has been appropriated by Moses Mendelssohn, on the one hand, and by German philosophers like Kant and Hegel on the other hand. In a way, much of Heschel's opus is a lengthy polemic with, and an effort to offer an alternative to, this separation between the legalistic and the theological.² He contributed not just an alternative theology but one that strives to dissolve an opposition between the two and offers instead a consonant synthesis between thinking about God and living in a religiously performative community. By doing so Heschel capitalizes especially on Hasidism, but in more general terms he accentuates Jewish mysticism as a clue for understanding the enlarged version of Jewish theology. Already in a relatively early period of his career in the United States, he complained that "there is no proper evaluation of the place of mystical experience in the life of Israel."³

Articulated almost a decade after the publication of Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, and years after Heschel became well-acquainted with it, this is an audacious statement, reflecting Heschel's independent approach. Immediately following the above statement, he confessed that the yearning for prophetic inspiration remains even in the present, an issue to which we shall return below. No less interesting is the emphasis on the topics of revelation, inspiration, and prophecy, in a period when the dominant figures in the small American academe of Jewish studies were Harry A. Wolfson at Harvard, interested mainly in history of philosophy; Louis Finkelstein and Saul Liebermann at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, concerned basically with Rabbinics; and Salo W. Baron, a noted historian at Columbia University. None of them, let me emphasize, looked favorably on Jewish mysticism, to say the least.

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This more sympathetic approach became, however, the royal path followed by many of the Jewish thinkers in the last generation. It is the mystical elements in Judaism, rather than the philosophical ones, that was conceived of as constituting a reliable source for building a new theological edifice, as we see in the writings of Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Hillel Zeitlin, Gershom Scholem, André Neher, Adin Steinsaltz, to a certain extent in R. Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, and now in Arthur I. Green. In the last decades, we start to understand that also thinkers that appear to stand on the other corner of the intellectual scene, like Walter Benjamin, Emanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Harold Bloom, and sometimes even George Steiner—whose acquaintance with the primary sources of Jewish mysticism was much less evident—in fact draw sometimes sporadically, and in a rather truncated manner, from the resources found in Jewish mysticism.

More than anyone could imagine two decades ago, major figures in Jewish culture and politics resort to advice, teachings, and even veneration of personalities who are either Kabbalists or Hasidic masters in Israel and in the United States, and it suffices to recall the names of R. Abraham Isaac ha-Kohen Kook and R. Isaac Kaduri in Israel, or of Menahem Mendel Schneerson, the last Rebbe of Lubavitch in the United States. Spinoza indeed was successful in imposing a certain vision of Judaism among Jews and non-Jews in Central Europe, but in the long term his approach became obsolete in the most important centers of Judaism. However, while most of the thinkers mentioned above looked to Kabbalah for the source of their theological constructs, Heschel was one of the few to militate for Hasidism as a primary source. With the major exception of Martin Buber, all his contemporaries were much more concerned with what was, in their reading, a more classical, remote, and rather abstract type of literature—Kabbalah—almost ignoring Hasidism as a serious theological alternative. It should be emphasized that even for Buber, who was acquainted in his childhood with the Ryzhin dynasty, the extended Hasidic literature was, to a great extent, a rediscovery of the early twentieth century, after his initial studies of Christian and comparative mysticism in Germany.

The shift toward a more balanced approach to mysticism in the history of religion started at the beginning of the twentieth century, and we can see its first symptoms in the appearance of seminal books dealing with mysticism and visionary experiences like Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*, William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, or Martin Buber's *Ecstatic Confessions*.⁴ For them mysticism was, to a great extent, a discovery of a glorious past, much less than the continuation of a living experience. They started to bypass, slowly and hesitantly, the enlightenment traditions that reduced the Middle

Ages to an age of darkness. By dissipating the mists created by the age of Enlightenment, the age of mysticism began. This apotheosis of mysticism in general—and the role the Jewish perspective played in this renaissance—is quite a complex story whose results are hard to predict: Is illumination going to outlast illuminism? Is the aegis of mysticism going to fare better than the age of reason? This is still quite an open question.

In any case, Heschel, in a manner reminiscent of Buber, strove to build a more enlightened form of Hasidism, much more open to the Other, a religion that transcends in its spiritual dimensions the narrow bounds of the particularistic Hasidic communities. The relevance of the mystical elements in shaping new communities in the past and today is an interesting point, which attracted the sustained attention of sociologists of religion, like Philip Wexler.⁵

ONE OF THE FEW

Few were the scholars in Jewish studies in the twentieth century whose achievements are as impressive as those of Heschel. He wrote in several genres: poetry, theology, scholarship, philosophy of religion; he contributed to inter-religious dialogue and participated in various Jewish and American political movements: Zionism, human rights, and anti-Vietnam protest. His scholarship, a small part of which will preoccupy me here, encompasses most of the fields within Jewish studies: Bible, Rabbinic thought, medieval philosophy, Polish Hasidism. In a way, the entire continuum of Jewish thought—philosophical and mystical—attracted him, and he contributed original scholarship to each of them. In a generation of major scholars in Judaism, Heschel was one of the few who wrote his scholarship in so many languages: Yiddish, Hebrew, German, and English.

Few of them underwent the vicissitudes he did: his precarious situation in Germany and Poland, his last-minute escape to London and then New York, years of ongoing adjustments and uncertainty, not to mention the terrible suffering related to the destruction of much of his family in the Holocaust. Even fewer among these scholars overcame those periods in life in such an incredible manner, and kept a serene and basically optimistic attitude toward life and humanity, while aware of the horrific past and of the abysses he believed still existed in the present. His attitude was quite positive, though he was preoccupied by the heritage of one of the most pessimistic thinkers in Judaism, R. Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, to whom he dedicated his last

book. Fascinatingly enough, he never wrote a book on the Besht, the iconically optimistic founder of Hasidism.

Few were the scholars who, while growing up in a Hasidic ambiance, studied in German universities, were active in that country for a while, but made most of their career in a totally different cultural environment, the United States, while caring so much for the state of Israel.⁶ Few underwent so much emotional turmoil, but kept alive the early heritage they cherished, and were capable of expanding it beyond the parochial frameworks in which it was embedded. In fact, it seems that Heschel is the single scholar of Jewish mysticism whose identification with, and commitment to, a living Jewish tradition is so evident.

There were religious questions that preoccupied Heschel more than others, and I would say the most important of them was the question of revelation. This is obvious in his book on the Prophets, in his articles collected in the volume edited by Morris Faierstein, in his studies about the early Hasidic masters edited by Samuel Dresner. In a way, his *Torah min ha-Shamayim* touches this central nerve in his system, but even more exemplary of this perspective are his theological writings, where he defined God as in search of Man. A God whose major attribute is pathos is a God who looks for contact, and revelation is just one major form of this contact.⁷ Heschel's theory of revelation differs from what we find in the other major Jewish thinkers of his generation: not dialogical *a la* Buber, not symbolic *a la* Scholem, not a philosophical-ethical turn to the Other *a la* Levinas, but a much more concrete approach focused on the performance of the commandments, especially prayer.

Though Heschel's religious resources for his view of revelation are multiple, as he was acquainted, at least in principle, with all the layers of Judaism, as well as with other religions, the major religious modality that influenced his own theological thought was Hasidism. This means that Hasidic values were not only ideals for Heschel, but a hermeneutical grid for his understanding of Judaism, and in principle, for his vision of the ideal religion. If the former assumption is self-evident from his family background, and from the studies he dedicated to the topic,⁸ the latter part of my assessment, about the hermeneutical grid, may be much less trivial from the academic point of view, and it may contribute something to a more general understanding of Heschel's scholarly praxis. Heschel read at least some of his sources with the eye of someone immersed in Hasidism as a vibrant religious phenomenon, not just as an important aspect of Jewish history or of his personal biography, and thus also selected and interpreted the earlier Jewish material accordingly, a point that I shall return to it below.

However, Heschel's dependence on Hasidism as a major spiritual resource is not a mere translation of the traditional sources into English. In fact, it is surprising how little Hasidism is present in some of his theological books. Heschel was much more interested in translating the Hasidic values than in using a Hasidic vocabulary. Writing for an English audience, which in a great part was Christian, he had to address his readers and listeners in terms they were acquainted with, and Hasidic religious terminology is far from clear in the original Hebrew, or easy to translate beyond its particular contexts. Heschel had to resort to a spectrum of English terms that approximate the meaning of Hasidic terms, but he only rarely offered a key for these correspondences. To understand these approximations is in my opinion not only a matter of a scholarly archeology of the origins of his nomenclature, but also a contribution to a more precise understanding of Heschel's thought.

On the other hand, the other main claim of my essay will be that Heschel adopted a Hasidic reading of medieval Kabbalah, which consists in a more psychological understanding of the theosophical-sefirotic structure of the divine realm than is found in the sources he quotes. This presentation of Kabbalah involves a propensity to de-hypostatization and de-sexualization, as well as a marginalization of the magical and, only to a certain extent, also of the theurgical elements of medieval Kabbalah. These readings are done not as part of an analytical exposition but rather *en passant*, as if representing the plain sense of the sources.

RELIGION: OBSERVANCE CUM EXALTATION

In an opening statement found in his 1949 essay, "The Mystical Element in Judaism," Heschel describes the mystics as those who "want to see the sun themselves."⁹ This is the reason why the Kabbalists are also depicted as those who "want to feel and to enjoy Him, not only to obey, but to approach Him."¹⁰ These descriptions presuppose a certain vision of mysticism that I would like to elaborate on: God is, in principle, approachable; the experience of the mystic of such an experience is more emotional than cognitive—see the resort to the verbs "feel," "enjoy"—and this is also the case with the phrase "see the sun." The resort to the term "not only to obey" assumes logically the importance of obeisance, posited as a given, which should culminate with a higher form of existence.

This experiential description of the Kabbalist is in my opinion more pertinent to Hasidism than to Kabbalah as a whole. In any case,

it evinces what Heschel imagined as an ideal mystic. For him, it is the direct contact with the deity that is characteristic of the mystical enterprise, and as such it differs from other forms of religiosity based on mediation, an issue to which we shall return immediately below.

However, beyond the personal and direct experience of the divinity, the Kabbalist is attributed in the same essay another religious purpose: "He aims at the elevation and expansion of existence. Such expansion goes hand in hand with the exaltation of all being."¹¹ While the first description has to do with the personal experiences, the second one deals with external reality: "existence." This double vision of the mystic, as playing on two different registers—the personal, experiential, and the objective, performative—is the core of Heschel's view, and it is expressed by resorting to a certain term that reflects both experiences, namely "exaltation."

What is the meaning of this "exaltation of all being" mentioned in the last quote? It seems that it is a conjunction of the seen with the unseen, the understanding of their oneness, so that "they form one interconnected whole."¹² It is an action done by the mystic that affects in one way or another external reality. Such an act may be, in principle, only a matter of perception, namely of fathoming the structure of being, or of doing something more active, which would alter external reality. Elsewhere he speaks about the closing of the distance between, as part of "the adjustment of the details to the whole."¹³ In other instances he speaks about an "exaltation of existence": "The cardinal sin is in our failure not to sense the grandeur of the moment, the marvel and mystery of being, the possibility of quiet exaltation."¹⁴ The question is what is the meaning of "exaltation" in terms of Jewish mysticism? Let me address this issue in more detail.

Though author of several studies on the greatest minds in Jewish thought in the second millennium of the Common Era (Sa'adya Gaon, Ibn Gabirol, Maimonides, and Isaac Abravanel), Heschel considered the founder of Hasidism, the Besht, as someone without parallel "in the last thousand years."¹⁵ I assume that such a compliment means perhaps more: he would not find anyone greater than the Besht in the first millennium of the Common Era, leaving the only serious competitor to one individual in the millennium that preceded the Common Era, the biblical Moses. He formulated this parallel between the two figures: "Then came Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov and brought heaven down . . . In the days of Moses, Israel had a revelation of God: in the days of the Baal Shem Tov God a revelation of Israel. Suddenly there was revealed a holiness in Jewish life that had accumulated in the course of many generations."¹⁶ In fact, only Moses would fit the description Heschel offered for the Besht's achievement: "The Besht left behind a new people."¹⁷ This is the greatest tribute Heschel

presumably could give to a spiritual leader, and it befits, in the way I understand Heschel, only those two individuals in the history of Judaism. Let us distinguish more precisely between the former and the latter. In one of his descriptions of the Besht he wrote: "The Besht taught that Jewish life is an occasion for exaltation. Observance of the Law is the basis, but exaltation through observance is the goal."¹⁸

Heschel identifies Moses as one that created a new people, the revealer of "the observance," if my assumption about the status of Moses is correct, while the Besht, and in other cases Hasidism in general, has presumably contributed the theory of "exaltation."¹⁹ Heschel's own recurring resorting to the term "exaltation" demonstrates that he consciously followed the path of the Besht. However, I assume that there is something more than admiration and spiritual affinity between Heschel and the founder of Hasidism. As Heschel himself tells, his grandfather, the first Abraham Joshua Heschel, has been described as someone in whom the soul of the Besht has returned,²⁰ namely some form of transmigration. Heschel himself was attracted to Medzibuz, a town in Podolia, the place where the Besht was active, as was his great grandfather later on.²¹ Does this mean that Heschel conceived himself, in a way, the spiritual inheritor of the Besht? He himself formulated his attitude to the founder of Hasidism as follows: "The Baal Shem dwelled in my life like a lamp... The Baal Shem Tov gave me wings."²² In fact, we may describe much of the phenomenology of the ideal religion as Heschel proposed it, as gravitating toward the centrality of prayer, described sometimes as an emanation of Man to God,²³ a view that represents the axiology of the Besht.²⁴ From Heschel's own testimony we know that he was considered to be the "R. Levi Isaac of Berditchev of our generation."²⁵

Heschel returns to the topic of exaltation in a lengthy discussion in his essay on the mystical elements in Judaism.²⁶ In fact, Heschel gives a variety of explanations about the unique status of Man as part of his description: one is that Man is a mystery, which means that he is a microcosm, since he is the symbol of all that exists.²⁷ In other cases it is the fathoming of the mystery, in some are cases it is what I propose to call theurgical, namely that man is capable of having an impact on God via religious performances.²⁸

None of these descriptions are, however, called in Jewish mysticism by the term "exaltation." The closest Hebrew term I am acquainted with is related to the elevation of the worlds by the prayer or other religious performances, which is indeed called *ha-'ala'ah*, or by the verb related to it, *le-ha'alot*. However, this is an operation man does to the worlds, not a direct exaltation of man himself. Indeed, this elevation of the worlds means that man, or the Kabbalists, have special

powers, which can be described by a reader as an exaltation of man's powers in a metaphorical sense.

One of the possible sources for Heschel's exaltation, is found in Hasidic literature the following passage, which combines the individual and the objective:

It is written: "The deeds of the righteous men are greater than the creation of heaven and earth."²⁹ The divine R. Dov Baer, blessed be his memory said: It is because the creation of heaven and earth was by means of the emanative concatenation³⁰ [by the way of creating] existence *ex nihilo*, descent of the supernal to the inferior, but the righteous men by their deeds divest themselves of their corporeality, and think always about the Holy One, blessed be He. They see and understand and imagine that indeed He, as if, was Nihil before creation, which means that they cause the return of existence into the Nihil, and this is much more wondrous, to elevate the inferior to the supernal.³¹

Based upon the Lurianic theory of elevation of the sparks, shattered by the primordial act of breaking of the vessels, to their original place in the supernal structure of Adam Qadmon, this theory underwent some important modifications in Hasidism, where it stands much more for the elevation of the lower realm and its sanctification, rather than the reconstruction of the divine structure on high. In some cases, it is the profane that has been elevated to the sacred, including words and deeds that have no religious significance that can be elevated. However, what is properly Hasidic is the conjugation of the personal experience of the divestment of corporeality, some form of detachment from the body, in a moment of ecstasy, with the elevation of the created reality to its source in God, understood as a mystical *Nihil*.

Let me turn now to two short quotations from a student of the Great Maggid, whose name is R. Abraham Yehoshu'a Heschel, the author of *'Ohev Israel*, and Heschel's great great grandfather: "And this is the *middah*³² that it is incumbent to elevate everything from the lower to the higher, from one rank to another, up to the rank of '*Attika*.'"³³ Or according to another statement found in the same book: "And the more is he purifying his soul the more she is elevated to a high rank, so that by his purification of his soul he arrives at the aspect of '*Attika*.'"³⁴ Therefore, purification and elevation entail two different attainments: the personal and the objective, just as in the case of exaltation.

However, writing in English, for an audience not conversant with the Kabbalistic and Hasidic terminology, I assume that Heschel had something quite different in mind. In Christian terms, exaltation has to do with the special status of Jesus Christ, as for example, in Paul's

Philippian Hymn 2:8-9: “[a]nd being found in the appearance of a man he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name, which is above all names that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and in earth.”³⁵

This is too famous a passage to be ignored by a scholar as knowledgeable as Heschel. However, I assume that his resorting to the Paulinian theory of exaltation of Jesus is not a simple one, but it has been conjugated with the most anti-Paulinian position imaginable, which proclaims the paramount importance of the observance of the commandments, a leitmotif of his thought. This is also the case of Heschel’s emphasis on describing man as mystery. I wonder whether there is any modern Jew who was as fond of the term mystery as Heschel was.

Appropriating a claim that recurs in Christianity about the fate of the redeemer as embodying a mystery, Heschel emphasized the nature of everyman as a mystery. Thus, the conjugation of mystery with observance, and conducive to exaltation, as a basic synthesis for religious life constitutes a main contribution to the philosophy of Judaism as a religion, done by a thinker who, in my opinion, did not fear to adopt and adapt visions found in Christianity.

IMMEDIACY AND HASIDISM

The combination of observance, or obeisance, and exaltation means that exaltation, at least in one of its forms, is attainable through the ordinary performance of commandments, and it may be a daily experience. Not the achievement of the Unique, ultimate son of God, but of Jews who combine the rites with an open spiritual attitude toward the mystery of God. It is, in principle, an immediate experience, and a concrete one. Indeed, as Heschel put it, “What we need is *immediacy*. The ultimate human need is the need for a meaning of existence. This will not be found through introducing a set of symbols.”³⁶ We shall address later the question of symbolism, but let me reflect now on the insistence on immediacy in this passage. It assumes that the highest religious experience is not a matter of the glorious past, but an achievement possible in the present. The pathos of God is not just an important historical event but part of a continuous present, and relatively easily attainable.

This is the impact of Hasidism, a religious modality predicated on the possibility to attain, in the immediate present, an experience of God.³⁷ Let me mention three examples of this Hasidic insistence on immediacy. The first one is very short: The Besht taught that man

pronounces only three words of the eighteen benedictions, while the other part of the prayer is actually recited by the *Shekhinah* which overcomes the human person and prays from his throat.³⁸ The second one is even more dramatic: When the famous and more popular figure, R. Meshullam Zushia of Hanipoly, was asked why he does not study Talmud, his answer was that when he starts to read the first word of it, *Me'Eimatai*, he sees in it the other "possible" vocalization, namely *Me'Eimaty*, which means "out of my awe," and this awe falls on him and he cannot study more. However, more substantial is the following story, which I find the most important formulation of the new ethos introduced by Hasidism, attributed in many sources to the name of the Besht:

There was a great wise king, and he made walls and towers and gates by means of illusion.³⁹ And he commanded that persons will come to him through these gates and towers, and he commanded to spread the treasures of the king at each of the gates. And there was one person who went until the first gate and took the mammon, and returned. And there was another etc., until his son, his beloved one made a great effort to go to his father the king. Then he saw that there is no screen that separates him and his father because everything was an illusion. And the meaning of the parable is understandable. And the words of the wise are attractive.⁴⁰ And I⁴¹ had written elsewhere what I heard from my teacher, may his memory be blessed, that it is known that God, Blessed be His name, who fills the entire world with His glory, and each and every movement and thought are from Him, blessed be He, and by this knowledge and by its means "all the wrongdoers will fall apart etc.,"⁴² and all the angels and palaces, all were created and done as if from His substance, blessed be He... and there is no screen separating between man and Him, Blessed be He.⁴³

The mystic, who is described here as the son of God discovers that the distance between him and his father is illusory, and that the deity is found everywhere, being approachable during the performance of the ritual, and the blowing of the Shofar is mentioned immediately before the quoted passage. Immediacy is a matter of some pantheistic visions that become a main theological assumption in Hasidism, much more than in any other form of Jewish mysticism. I assume that it is to this parable that Heschel hints at when he writes that "His remoteness is an illusion capable of being dispelled by our faith."⁴⁴

IMMEDIACY VERSUS SYMBOLISM

Heschel's Hasidic background informed to a very great extent his attitude toward symbolism. Unlike the main schools of Kabbalah—the

theosophical–theurgical, Zoharic, and Lurianic—in which symbolism played a major role, as we are going to see below, Hasidim mitigated the importance of this dimension in the Jewish mystical form of representation. This mitigation has to do with the reduction of the role of the *sefirot* and the configurations that constellated the Kabbalistic theologies since Luria. To be sure: this is not a rejection; neither may we detect a clear critique addressed by Hasidic masters to the address of Kabbalists on this point. This is a considerable diminution of the resort to canonized symbols, which is related to the immediacy of the divine presence on the one hand, and the role played by another direct presence, that of the Holy Man, the righteous, or the *Tzaddiq*.

No doubt, one of the main issues that attracted Heschel's attention was the role symbolism should play in religion, especially in Judaism. The Reform movement's declaration that ceremony and symbolism are necessary in worship attracted his critique in an essay printed in 1953.⁴⁵ This is much more evident in his essay printed in 1954, and then reprinted in *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism*,⁴⁶ and in *Moral Grandeur*, in a somewhat changed form entitled "Symbolism and Jewish Faith."⁴⁷ Throughout this study Heschel dwells basically on the Bible, and much less on any other layer of Judaism, but from his title it is possible to assume that he considered symbolism as negligible for an authentic understanding and experience of God. So, for example, he says: "If symbolism is the standard, Moses will have to be accused of having had a retarding influence on the development of man,"⁴⁸ while elsewhere he is even more poignant: "symbolism degenerated in vicarious religion."⁴⁹ However, let me point out that Heschel is either speaking about the Bible as a nonsymbolic document or, in many other instances, about God being less concerned with symbolism. I know much less about God than I know about the Bible, and I am inclined to agree with his understanding of the religious wavelength of the Bible.

What is the symbol that Heschel still considers valuable? "The one symbol of God is man, every man . . . Human life is holy, holier even than the Scroll of the Torah."⁵⁰ This seems to be also the meaning of the statement "What is necessary is not to have a symbol but to be a symbol."⁵¹ I understand this last statement to mean that the living experience of man acting religiously is the symbol for God above anything else, including the Torah. This form of symbol is achievable in the present.

Let me point out that if in the earlier essay on "The Mystical Element in Judaism" printed in 1949, symbolism was somehow present insofar as the Jewish mystical tradition is concerned (and not envisioned in a negative manner though also not emphasized⁵²), in the 1953 and 1954 essays mentioned above, especially in "Symbolism and

the Jewish Faith," I discern a change in the attitude toward this category that is presented now in a more negative light.⁵³ In 1950, in his *The Earth is the Lord's*, symbolism is still present, as we see in the statement: "All things below are symbols of that which is above."⁵⁴ Thus, sometime between 1950 and 1952, Heschel changed his mind as to the role symbolism should play in religious life.

Heschel was not a man of direct polemics and criticism. He was concerned much more with problems than with the persons who created them. This is the reason why a study of his thought is not always aided by oblique critiques, whose subjects are hardly mentioned, not even in notes. However, in the case of symbolism, Heschel addressed two specific groups: Catholics and Reform Jews. I am not aware of any answer to Heschel's critiques, but we shall suggest an answer below.

HESCHEL'S READING OF THE ZOHAR

The emphasis above on the Hasidic sources of Heschel's religious thought seems to be contradicted by a reading of his essay "The Mystical Element in Judaism." In the footnotes accompanying the essay there is not one Hasidic book. The most conspicuous source of his exposition is rather the book of the *Zohar*. There are good reasons to choose this book as the main representative of Jewish mysticism, as it is the single most influential book in the history of the mystical understanding of Judaism.⁵⁵ However, logical as this choice may be from an historical point of view, it scarcely serves my point. If the *Zohar*, either as written by Rashby, or by a medieval author, is the main source of a comprehensive picture of Jewish mysticism, my entire argument is contradicted by the selection done by Heschel himself in the most important piece salient to my argument, as presented above.

However, the situation is much more complex. The *Zohar* is not a simple book whose views are transparent and on whose topics and general conceptual structure scholars agree. What happened in Kabbalah scholarship in the last generation only demonstrates the conceptual complexity of this text.⁵⁶ For example, one of the older contemporaries of Heschel, Moses Gaster, formulated in an article on the book of the *Zohar* printed in 1923: "It is, therefore, an idle attempt on the part of scholars to formulate a mystical system of the Zohar. There are in that Book not one but many such systems standing side by side, sometimes supplementing one another and sometimes contradicting one another."⁵⁷ Or, two pages later: "Many more systems could easily be discovered in the various sections of the Zohar."⁵⁸

Unlike Gaster, Heschel was very much interested in theology. For him the diversity that is found in this book was not a matter of richness, or of the compilation of different sources, but much more a stumbling block. He was interested in what can be described as a strong phenomenology of Jewish mysticism in general, the book of the *Zohar* included; but in my opinion, this phenomenology was both historically and phenomenologically speaking, Hasidic in essence. There is no study devoted to the way in which the Hasidic masters understood the *Zohar*, and it is difficult to discern a single, exclusive way in which this book has been understood. It would nevertheless be fair to say in a general manner that the early Hasidic masters, unlike the later Zhidatchov-Komarno tradition, which was much closer to the Zoharic and Lurianic forms of Kabbalah, understood this classic of Jewish mysticism the same way they approached other books of Judaism, namely as pointing to the values of devotion, ecstasy, and exaltation. Thus, the following remarks about the way in which Heschel reads the *Zohar* represent not just one possible manner of reading it, but in fact the traditional way in which the early Hasidic masters actually read this book.

Formulated in quite a succinct manner, the description of Jewish mysticism in Heschel's most concentrated essay on the topic is very selective: it assumes coherence and a great amount of agreement between mystics, which is the price one has to pay for what I call "strong phenomenology." Out of a vast literature, it is not just that one book is selected, important as it may be, but it is presented selectively. To be sure: all the great presentations of Judaism are selective, be they philosophical or mystical. There can be no doubt about this necessity, especially in a theological construction.

What is essential to Zoharic thought but is nevertheless left out of Heschel's survey? First and foremost, the paramount role played by various forms of mediation in many versions of Jewish mysticism. The *sefirot* are not only divine manifestations but also divine powers to which prayer and other commandments are directed. It is also their more anthropomorphic configurations that are absent in the construct of Jewish mysticism, and more prominently the sexual imagery and metaphors, which are also related to the meaning of the performance of the commandments. Neither is the paramount role of the *Tzaddiq*, which functions in different ways in the Kabbalistic and Hasidic literatures as a major form of mediator, receiving its due place in Heschel's description of mysticism, unlike that of Martin Buber. The immediacy of the experience, so dear to the hearts of both Buber and Heschel, as part of their strong existentialistic propensities, was interpreted as possible only if the direct presence of God is involved.

However, Hasidic literature allows immediacy in a paramount manner by mediation of the Holy Man, a point that was much more difficult to conceptualize in the framework of an existentialist approach. Perhaps as an extension of the last point, neither Buber nor Heschel are interested in questions related to the magical aspects of Hasidism as embodied in some of functions of the *Tzaddiq*.

In my opinion, in both cases the tendency to create a Jewish theology that may be attractive to the democratic and individualistic approach, in western Europe or the United States, problematized the status of the righteous individual who towers over his community in a rather authoritative manner. Again, Heschel's implicit critique of the role played by median structures, hypostatical-sefirotic or linguistic-symbolic, should be seen as a development with roots in medieval Kabbalah, and reminiscent of the way in which Martin Buber described the "de-schematization" of Kabbalah in Hasidism. Attempts to offer more anthropological and psychological interpretations of the hypostatic structures in the *Book of the Zohar* and even more in Lurianic Kabbalah are not inventions of the Hasidic masters, but have some antecedents, modest to be sure, in earlier strata of Kabbalah.⁵⁹

HESCHEL AND THE PAN-SYMBOLIC READING OF KABBALAH

The forceful denial of the prominent role symbolism should play in religion was formulated in contrast to the emphasis on symbols on the part of Reform Jews and Catholics, as we learn explicitly in Heschel's articles.⁶⁰ However, such a dramatic claim might have also more referents. For example, he might have addressed Kant's philosophy, described, as Heschel pointed out referring to Salomon Maimon's formulation, as an approach that advocates the possibility of symbolic knowledge alone.⁶¹ To these three explicit references,⁶² let me add a fourth, and more implicit one.

The dominant interpretation of Jewish mysticism as it developed since the Middle Ages, as formulated by Gershom Scholem and elaborated by his students, was decisively symbolic. In his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, first printed in 1941, and well known by Heschel, Scholem writes in a rather laconic manner: "the mystic refrains from destroying the living texture of religious narrative... His essential mode of thinking is what I should like to call symbolical in the strictest sense."⁶³ Immediately following this statement, he writes: "A hidden and inexpressible reality finds its expression in the symbol. If the symbol is thus also a sign or representation it is nevertheless more than that."⁶⁴ In the same period the following statement was also

made: "In Kabbalah, one is speaking of a reality which cannot be revealed or expressed at all save through the symbolic allusion. A hidden authentic reality, which cannot be expressed in itself and according to its own laws, finds expression in its symbol."⁶⁵ Those are comprehensive characterizations of a huge body of literature, written over centuries in different parts of the world. These strong interpretations of Kabbalah as essentially symbolic are hard to ignore in order to properly understand Heschel's approach to symbolism. To deny, categorically, the role of the symbol in "Jewish faith," as Heschel did, could only consternate the scholar who formulated the above statements. Indeed, Scholem reacted categorically, and rather sharply, mentioning Heschel by name: "I cannot by any means support the view, here put forth . . . that Rabbinic Judaism is outside the categories of symbolism."⁶⁶ Indubitably, Heschel touched a central nerve in the phenomenology of Kabbalah as offered by Scholem, and he reacted.

However, symbolism became in his school a tenet that should hardly be challenged. A great connoisseur of Scholem's thought, the Israeli philosopher Nathan Rotenstreich, insightfully articulated Scholem's two main intellectual axes as follows:

"symbolism, on the one hand, and the denial of the unio mystica and pantheism on the other, seem to be the two correlated axes comprising, as it were, the epistemological and the ontological components, respectively, of Scholem's interpretative work."⁶⁷

This is no doubt an important observation: not only that these are two central axes but that they indeed are correlated. It cannot be overemphasized that the understanding of this correlation is a clue for the entire Scholemian scholarly project. For the sake of the present discussion, let me point out that without the assumption of pantheism, or of another form of direct contact with God, symbolism becomes much more important. It is the only avenue that remains available and provides some insight into the hierarchical structure of the supernal world, which is both important and inaccessible. Since the first axis, namely symbolism, is formulated in a positive manner, while the second one, pantheism, is described as absent, and because symbolism is conceived to be a comprehensive form of expression in Kabbalah as a whole, I propose to describe this approach as "pan-symbolic."⁶⁸ Heschel's belief in the possibility of a direct contact with the divinity contradicts the general mode of Scholem's understanding of Jewish mysticism, and undermines also the importance of symbolism, as it has been assumed in the latter's phenomenology.

Indeed, these are not simple conceptualizations of the few statements adduced above from *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Later on, in an essay that reflects, in my opinion, his views as they were already

formulated early in his youth Scholem reiterates the opinion that mystical language in general is quintessentially symbolic:

...what exactly is this 'secret' or 'hidden' dimension of language, about whose existence all mystics for all time feel unanimous agreement, from India and the mystics of Islam, right up to the Kabbalists and Jacob Boehme? The answer is, with virtually no trace of hesitation, the following: it is the symbolic nature of language, which defines this dimension. The linguistic theories of mystics frequently diverge when it comes to determining this symbolic nature. But all mystics in quest of the secret of language come to share a common basis, namely the fact that language is used to communicate something which goes way beyond the sphere which allows for expression and formation: the fact also that a certain inexpressible something, which only manifests itself in symbols, resonated in every manner of expression.⁶⁹

This is an apotheosis of symbolism, which is extended here to the status of a benchmark of every form of mysticism. More than in the other formulations above, the symbolic mode almost coincides with the mystical. We may therefore describe two different developments in the relation between mysticism and symbolism: though at the beginning the views of Scholem and Heschel on the topic are very close, and reflect the impact of *Major Trends* on Heschel (though early in their writings both refer only briefly to this topic), the two thinkers moved in different directions—Heschel attenuated the role of symbolism in Judaism, Scholem accentuated it in Jewish mysticism and universalized his theory to encompass mysticism in general. Or, to put it in other terms: while Scholem, following the lead of Johann Reuchlin and of German Romanticism, exalted the role of the symbol in Jewish mysticism, Heschel returned to a more Hasidic approach that mitigated its role in religion in general.

A. J. HESCHEL AND ABRAHAM ABULAFIA

The amplification of the role of symbolism in Scholem's oeuvre after 1941, should be seen as part of his subsequent diminution of the more mystical aspects of Kabbalah, as found, for example, in the school of Abraham Abulafia, and the denial of *unio mystica*. On the other hand, Heschel's denial of the importance of symbolism comes together with the emphasis on the possibility of direct experiences of God in the present, and I would say, with a new openness to the ecstatic element in Judaism, in comparison to his earlier, antithetical attitude toward ecstasy in *The Prophets*.⁷⁰

It is difficult to conclude my discussion of this topic without referring to the end of Heschel's Hebrew article printed in 1945, on

“Maimonides and the Prophetic Inspiration,” where he deals with Abraham Abulafia’s prophetic Kabbalah. After reading some of the primary Hebrew writings of this kabbalist, as well as Scholem’s chapter on him in *Major Trends*, Heschel decided to read a manuscript of Abulafia’s longest commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, entitled *Sitrei Torah*, from a codex found in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. When describing the affinity between this mystic and Maimonides, especially the former’s yearning for prophecy, and the attempt to teach others to become prophets, Heschel concludes his article with the following amazing statement: “Like a mystery encased in an enigma, there is this wondrous trait in this astonishing man, viz., his relationship to Maimonides . . . Perhaps a secret was revealed to him that is hidden from our view. The answer is God’s.”⁷¹

Since Heschel declared that “the answer is God’s” I shall refrain from attempting to address the possible meaning of Abulafia’s relationship to Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, as a source of his prophecy or of ecstatic mysticism. Let me address however, the rhetoric used in this small passage. Even for a style like Heschel’s, replete with hyperboles, this characterization of Abulafia is quite exceptional: the resort to terms like enigma, mystery, wondrous, and astonishing, all together in one sentence, is unparalleled, to the best of my knowledge, in Heschel’s oeuvre, even in the contexts describing the Besht and discussed above. The impression prophetic Kabbalah made on Heschel must have been far-reaching, as it encouraged Heschel to look in many manuscripts and printed materials in 1944 for the rather lengthy introduction of an anonymous Kabbalistic *Commentary on Prayer*, stemming, in my opinion, from Abulafia’s circle.⁷² This type of academic preoccupation seems to be an unparalleled event in Heschel’s scholarly career: to print a sustained Hebrew text for the first time on the basis of many manuscripts. He never did anything like this before or after. The content of this commentary exemplifies, at least to a certain extent, the confluence of observance and exaltation.⁷³

What is characteristic of Abulafia’s specific brand of Kabbalah, though less so of the anonymous commentary, is the indifference to the Kabbalistic symbolism as practiced in the main school of Kabbalah, on the one hand, and the emphasis on experience on the other hand.⁷⁴ To what extent the encounter with this type of Kabbalah (which must have taken place no later than 1943, namely between 1941 and 1943) had changed something in Heschel’s more general religious orientation, is an enigma encased in a mystery, and I shall not venture, on the basis of the little I know now, to give an answer. What I would nevertheless like to draw attention to is the fact that

Heschel's contemporary, R. David ha-Kohen (known as *ha-Nazir*, the Nazirite, the author of a book entitled *Qol ha-Nevu'ah*, "The Voice of Prophecy") who was also interested in questions of prophecy as a possible experience in the present, was exalted when he read Abulafian material in manuscripts Scholem gave him as early as mid-1930s.⁷⁵ It would be interesting to compare the surge of interest in prophecy in the writings of these two traditionalist thinkers, apparently totally independent of one another. In any case, Heschel argues explicitly "the thirst for prophetic inspiration, the yearning for the sublime experiences of the supernatural has never died among us."⁷⁶ This is a somewhat cautious formulation, which does not assess the actual existence of prophecy, but nevertheless alludes to a quest for it in the present.⁷⁷

Why Abulafia's views, which Heschel became acquainted with in 1943, disappear in such a comprehensive manner from all of his subsequent studies, is yet another enigma. Perhaps Heschel's spiritual project did not allow for the absorption of the collision of ecstasy and prophecy, transcending the antithesis as delineated in Heschel's phenomenology.

EXILE VERSUS EXALTATION

Early in his intellectual career, while already in Germany, Heschel formulated a theology of the divine pathos. In fact, the intersection between the Divine Pathos and human piety is the main message of his theology. In both cases, active rather than contemplative personalities are involved in this interaction. God is in active search for man and vice versa. The Lurianic mechanization of the theosophical system created a problem in maintaining a personal and vibrant relationship with the divine realm. In a way, part of this realm has been fragmented and dispersed, and it is the role of the Kabbalist to elevate the sparks of divine power, and reconstruct divinity. According to Scholem, this important Lurianic concept, that of the breaking of the vessels, refers in fact to *Galut*: "This 'breaking' introduces a dramatic aspect into the process of Creation, and it can explain the *Galut* . . . In other words, all being is in *Galut*."⁷⁸ Elsewhere Scholem describes Lurianism again in exilic terms: "The Kabbalists did not explicitly say that the act of *Simsum* was a divine type and prefiguration of the exile, though the analogy seems obvious."⁷⁹ According to these statements, God retreated, so to speak, while creating the world, and thus brought forth exile.

In a way, the stark divergences between Scholem and Heschel may have much to do with the difference between the Lurianic pessimism

and Hasidic optimism, represented by these two thinkers, respectively. Here we have an interesting situation: Luria and Scholem, two persons who spend much of their life in the land of Israel, are speaking about the *Galut*, and, in a way, quite pessimistically, much more than Heschel, who lived all his life in *Galut* and in one of the darkest moments in Jewish history. The centrality of Lurianism in Scholem's historiography is paramount, as this form of Kabbalah reflects the culmination of earlier developments, conceptual and historical, and it serves as the starting point of other major developments. According to the logic of Scholem's historiography, to which Martin Buber also agreed in his own way, Hasidism is, phenomenologically speaking, basically the result of a process of "neutralization" of the more authentic line of mysticism cum messianism, which was opened by Isaac Luria and then accentuated in the Sabbatean movement.⁸⁰ For Heschel, however, neutralization is the last term one should use regarding this "revolutionary" movement, which brought about, as mentioned above, "hope and exaltation." If, for Scholem, the thoughts of some of the paragons of Jewish mysticism (Isaac Luria, Sabbatai Tzevi) constitute the main clue for understanding the profound problems that haunted Jewish mysticism in the Middle Ages, for Heschel the Besht towers above all his predecessors in the domain of Jewish mysticism.

However, in addition to this divergence in matters of historiography, there is a deeper divide in the ways in which Jewish mysticism was presented in the writings of the two thinkers: as Heschel insisted time and again, Hasidism is a lived experience, which cannot be properly understood without direct contact with this living tradition.⁸¹ For Scholem mysticism was much more a matter of symbolic expression of some form of experience, and what is available to the scholar of mysticism are the literary manifestations of this experience.⁸² If, for Heschel, life in a community is the locus where the essence of Judaism, identified as a form of plenitude he called exaltation, it seems that, for Scholem, that was much less the case. For Scholem Jewish life in exile is what he designated as a life lived in deferment,⁸³ while for Heschel, on the contrary, celebration and exaltation are conceived of as experiences attainable in the present, anywhere. Scholem has been fascinated by the image of "lost keys," which means that the significance of the symbols that expressed the communal historical experiences or of the Jewish tradition became opaque and that his main scholarly enterprise was intended to find those allegedly lost keys.⁸⁴ Heschel, however, was much more confident that such keys were not lost but found in the form of the continuous Hasidic tradition.⁸⁵

From my point of view, both approaches are a matter of religious *imaginaire*: they express feelings of rupture, in the case of Scholem, or

connectiveness, in the case of Heschel. These different feelings inspire diverse intellectual and spiritual projects expressed on the literary and scholarly levels. Images of breaking, rebellion, alienation, the special status of the revolutionary scholar, are nurtured by the *imaginaire* of rupture. The feeling of connectiveness will yield another set of images: celebration, exaltation, the immediate presence of the divinity within a community. The existence of a vibrant Hasidic community in Warsaw, unlike the religious situation of the Jews Scholem describes in the Berlin of his youth, is no doubt one of the clues for the divergences between their respective phenomenologies of Jewish mysticism.

To be more specific: for a Hasidic master, the assumption is that the “key of the Torah,” *Mafteah ha-Torah*, is always available, at least to one of the righteous of the generation. For example, in the late collection of legends entitled *Gedolim Ma`asei Tzaddiqim*, R. Abraham Yehoshu`a Heschel of Apta was reported to have said that the famous Maggid of Zlotchov, R. Yehiel Michal, was that righteous individual. Heschel follows, in principle, this illustrious antecedent to the by positing that tradition has not been broken, obfuscated, and truncated by history, but, (despite the horrors of the Holocaust) a spiritual continuity is possible. He believed he possessed the keys of a spiritual revival, which did not entail deciphering obscure codes found in ancient codices, but engaging in lived experiences like those he witnessed during his childhood in Warsaw⁸⁶ and attempted to impart to his generation.

How long will such a vibrant spiritual experience be able to reverberate in the new social structures built by the Jews in the aftermath of the destruction of the communal forms of Judaism, is an interesting and open question. Heschel opted for a positive answer. The surge of Neo-Hasidism and Neo-Kabbalah in some circles confirms his feeling. Nevertheless, it may be that after all, the existential rupture Scholem felt in early years of twentieth-century Berlin, or Kafka felt in Prague, is more representative of the vast majority of urban Jews today, than the compact communal existence of Warsaw. To be sure: the experience of the Warsawian type of community did not disappear, as the renaissance of Hasidic ultra-orthodoxies demonstrate—as Lubavitch, Satmar, and Bratzlav sects demonstrate. However, neither Scholem nor Heschel intended to address this type of audience. Though writing mainly in Hebrew, Scholem was too historically oriented for such a public. Heschel wrote in English, circumventing the historical discourse, but this language, much more homiletic, was nevertheless not the language that the larger Jewish public consumed at the time. The vast majority of the Jews remained, however, beyond their spell, preferring either the more popular forms of Jewish mysticism, or the more orthodox ones. Both scholars (like Buber before them), understood the potential treasures of Jewish mysticism for a Jewish

revival, but, though they claimed they possessed its keys, these two genial thinkers did not find the wavelength for a broader audience, beyond intellectuals and theologians in either Israel or America, in order to trigger a spiritual renaissance like that of Hasidism.

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NOTES

1. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, Essays*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York, 1996), p. 155.

2. See especially Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York, 1955).

3. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Prophetic Inspiration after the Prophets, Maimonides and Other Medieval Authorities*, ed. Morris Faierstein (Hoboken, NJ, 1996), p. 24.

4. Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Fin-de-Siècle Orientalism, the *Ostjuden* and the Aesthetics of Jewish Affirmation," in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* (Bloomington, 1984), pp. 96–139, who reads Buber's interest in mysticism as part of a *fin-de-siècle* mood.

5. See his two books, *Holy Sparks: Social Theory, Education, and Religion* (New York, 1996), and *Mystical Societies: An Emerging Social Vision* (Boulder, 2000).

6. To a certain extent, this is true in the case of Prof. Alexander Altmann, who came also from a Hasidic family, but he did not create a theology of his own.

7. For the most concentrated discussion of the sources of the divine as pathos see Heschel, *The Prophets* (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 489–492.

8. This point has been made by several scholars. See, e.g., Samuel Dresner's Introduction to *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov. Studies in Hasidism*, ed. S. H. Dresner (London, 1985), p. XXXI or Donald J. Moore, *The Human and the Holy: The Spirituality of Abraham Joshua Heschel* (New York, 1989), pp. 182–92.

9. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur*, p. 164.

10. See also the similar description of the pious man, who is aware of the presence of God in Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p. 282.

11. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur*, p. 165. See also "In Search of Exaltation," *ibid.*, pp. 227–229.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 165. See also Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's* (New York, 1950), p. 70.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

14. *Who is Man?* (Stanford, 1965), p. 116. See also *ibid.*, p. 118.

15. See Dresner's Introduction to *Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p. XXXVII.

16. Heschel, *Earth is the Lord's*, p. 98. See also Heschel, *Moral Grandeur*, pp. 33–34.

17. Dresner, Introduction to *Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p. XXXVII.

18. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur*, p. 34.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

20. See Heschel's Introduction to *A Passion for Truth* (New York, 1973), p. XIII.

21. Dresner, Introduction to *Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, pp. XXVI–XXVII.

22. *Ibid.*, p. XXVI. See also Susannah Heschel's Introduction to *Moral Grandeur*, p. XXIX. Those are quite explicit words, which should be compared to Gershom Scholem's assumption that if he believed in metempsychosis he would have assumed he was the transmigration of Johannes Reuchlin.

23. See Abraham Joshua, *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism* (New York, 1954), p. 10.

24. That prayer plays a central role in Heschel's project and that he understood the contribution to Jewish mysticism as related to this form of worship, see *Moral Grandeur*, p. 37, as well as his extended discussion of prayer, *ibid.*, pp. 100–126, especially p. 116. See also *Man's Quest for God*, p. 8: "Prayer is the essence of spiritual living." In a similar context, *Moral Grandeur*, p. 116, Heschel rejects the vision of prayer as a "symbol of ideas and values."

25. Dresner, Introduction to *Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p. XXVII.

26. *Moral Grandeur*, pp. 166–169.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

28. See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, London, 1988), pp. 156–199; Charles Mopsik, *Les Grands textes de la Cabale, Les Rites qui font Dieu* (Paris, 1993); Yair Lorberbaum, *Image of God, Halakhah and Aggadah* (Tel Aviv, 2004) (Hebrew); and Jonathan Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism from Rabbinic Literature to Safedian Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 2004) (Hebrew).

29. *Ketubot*, fol. 5a.

30. *hishtalshelut*

31. Meshullam Feibush of Zbaraz, *Yoshe Divrei 'Emmet*, No. 12:

וזה שאמרו (כתובות ה' ע"א) גדולים מעשה צדיקים יותר ממעשה שמים וארץ, ואמר האלהי ר' דוב בער ז"ל מפני שבריות שמים וארץ היה השתלשלות יש מאין ירידה מעליו לתחתון, וצדיקים במעשיהם שמפשיטים את עצמן מגשמיות, וחושבים בהש"ת תמיד, ורואים ומבינים ומדמים באמת שהוא כאילו היה אין כקודם הבריאה, נמצא מחזירים מיש לאין, וזה יותר פלא להעלות מתחתון לעליון.

32. This is quite a polysemic term in Jewish mysticism. It may signify here a way of behaviour.

33. 'Ohev Israel (Zhitomir, 1863), fol 60d: למדריגה למעלה וממדריגה: והוא המדה שצריך

34. *Ibid.*, fol. 60cd: הוא עולה למדריגה יותר גדולה עד ש"י הזדככות נפשו הוא בא נפשו יותר

35. More on this passage, see e.g., Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden, 1998), p. 337.

36. *Moral Grandeur*, p. 99. Underlined in the original version of the essay.

37. On Heschel and Hasidism see also, in addition to Dresner's Introduction, Steven T. Katz, "Abraham Joshua Heschel and Hasidism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 31 (1980): 82-104.

38. On these short triggers in the Besht I intend to elaborate in my book on the Besht in preparation. See Heschel, *Moral Grandeur*, p. 37. On Heschel and prayer, see Edward K. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words, Abraham Joshua Heschel's Poetics of Piety* (Albany, NY, 1996), pp. 52-56.

39. *'Ahizat Einayyim*. In this context I cannot enter into a discussion of the possible Hindu impact on this aspect of the parable. See, meanwhile, Gershom Scholem's short remark in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1972), p. 224 and Joseph P. Schultz, "The Concept of Illusion in Vedanta and Kabbalah," in his *Judaism and the Gentile Faith* (East Brunswick, NJ, 1982), pp. 93-94. For the acquaintance of early Kabbalists with some form of theory dealing with the world as a dream, namely some sort of Maya, see Assi Farber, "A New Fragment from the Introduction by Joseph Gikatilla to *Ginnat Egoz*," *JSJS* I (1981): 162-163, n. 9 (Hebrew).

40. This is a formula for the end of a quotation recurring in the writings of R. Jacob Joseph.

41. Namely R. Jacob Joseph of Polonnoy, the student of the Besht.

42. Psalm 92:10. The last lines are quoted also in the Besht's name in *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef* (Koretz, 1780), fol. 13d (and see also *ibid.*, fols. 9b, 18a); *Tzafnat Pa'aneah* (Brooklyn, NY, 1976), fol. 86b.

43. *Ben Porat Yosef*, (Pietrkov, 1884), fol. 70c.

44. Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p. 154.

45. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur*, p. 143.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-144.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-99.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 89. Note the resort to the Christian term "vicarious." See also the discussions and the texts on p. 85.

50. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur*, p. 85. See again in his article on Jewish mysticism, *ibid.*, p. 167: "Man is a mystery. He is the symbol of all that exists."

51. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

53. Heschel, "Symbolism and Jewish Faith," in *Religious Symbolism*, ed. F.E. Johnson (New York, 1954), pp. 53-79, especially pp. 76-77, reprinted in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, pp. 80-99.

54. Heschel, "Symbolism and Jewish Faith," in Johnson, *ibid.*, p. 70.

55. See also the rather dominant place the Zoharic literature plays in Heschel's essay on "God, Torah and Israel."

56. Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany, NY, 1993), pp. 85-138, Boaz Huss, "Admiration and Disgust: The Ambivalent Re-canonization

of the 'Zohar' in the Modern Period," in *Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought*, ed. Howard Kreisel, (Be'er Sheva, 2006), pp. 203–237, and Ronit Meroz, "Zoharic Narratives and their Adaptations," *Hispania Judaica* III (2000): 3–63; Meroz "Der Aufbau des Buches Sohar," *PaRDaS: Zeitschrift der Vereinigung für Jüdischen Studien, e.V* II (2005): 16–36.

57. Moses Gaster, "A Gnostic Fragment from the Zohar: The Resurrection of the Dead," *The Quest* XIV (1923): 457.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 459. On Gaster and the *Zohar*, see M. Idel, "Moses Gaster on Jewish Mysticism and the Book of the Zohar," in *Te'uda, New Developments in Zohar Studies*, ed. Ronit Meroz Vols 21–22 (2007), pp. 118–124 (Hebrew).

59. See M. Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany, NY, 1995), pp. 227–238.

60. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur*, pp. 83–84. For more on Heschel and symbolism, see Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, pp. 75–89.

61. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur*, p. 87.

62. For the possibility that Heschel had Buber in mind when criticizing religious symbolism see Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, pp. 82–84.

63. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1967), p. 26.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

65. *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time & Other Essays*, ed. Avraham Shapira, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Philadelphia, 1997), p. 140. This view, formulated in 1941, has been repeated later, without mentioning its source, in Tishby's essay on Kabbalistic symbolism, where the symbol in Kabbalah is described as a "representative of an occult, or hidden, entity or process, that is neither revealed in itself at all nor can it be expressed in a direct manner." Isaiah Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy* (Ramat Gan, 1964), p. 13 (Hebrew). For ancient and medieval sources of this view see Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington, 1990), pp. 9–14.

66. Gershom Scholem, "Religious Authority and Mysticism," originally delivered as a lecture at Eranos, and printed in an English translation in *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York, 1967), p. 22, n. 1. I do not quite understand why Scholem asserts that Heschel's claim is predicated on Rabbinic Judaism alone, since Heschel is speaking about Jewish faith in general, and refers often to the Hebrew Bible, and only marginally to Rabbinism. In the Hebrew translation of this study Scholem expresses the same surprise in a sharper manner. See Gershom Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Joseph ben Shlomo (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 26, n. 15. See also Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, p. 181, n. 3.

67. Nathan Rotenstreich, "Symbolism and Transcendence: On Some Philosophical Aspects of Gershom Scholem's Opus," *Revue of Metaphysics* 31 (1977/8): 605.

68. See M. Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven, London, 2003), pp. 272–313.

69. "The Name of God and the Linguistic of the Kabbalah," *Diogenes* 79 (1972): 60. See also *ibid.*, pp. 62, 79, 165, 193; Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, trans. R. Manheim (New York, 1969), p. 36; Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 27; Isaiah Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy* (Ramat Gan, 1964), pp. 11-22 (Hebrew). For more on Scholem's view of Kabbalistic symbolism in general, see David Biale, *Kabbalah and Counter-History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA, 1982), pp. 124-125; Susan A. Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought & Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, & Levinas* (Bloomington, 1991), pp. 83-84, 93-114; and Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 200-234.

70. See Heschel, *The Prophets* (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 363-365. See, for example, *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (New York, 1951), p. 142.

71. Heschel, *Prophetic Inspiration*, p. 126.

72. See "Perush al ha-Tefillot," *Kovetz Mada 'i le-Zekher Moshe Shor* (New York, 1944), pp. 113-126.

73. This interesting text has been edited in its entirety twice in recent years. See the editions of Adam Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah: A Study and a Critical Edition of an Anonymous Commentary on the Prayers* (Los Angeles, 2005) (Hebrew), and Saverio Campanini, "Yehudah ben Nissim ibn Malka - Perush ha-Tefillot," in, *Catalogue of the Kabbalistic Manuscripts in the Library of the Jewish Community of Mantua*, ed. Giulio Busi (Florence, 2001), pp. 219-358.

74. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 200-210.

75. See M. Idel, "Abraham Abulafia, Gershom Scholem, and David Kohen [ha-Nazir] on Prophecy," *Derekh ha-Ruah, Sefer ha-Yovel le-Eliezer Schweid*, ed. Yehodaya Amir (Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 819-834 (Hebrew).

76. Heschel, *Prophetic Inspiration*, p. 24. Compare also to the view expressed in the context of medieval figures, *ibid.*, pp. 25-26, 39.

77. See also Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, pp. 138-139.

78. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, p. 45.

79. Heschel, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, trans. R. J. Z. Werblowsky (Princeton, NJ, 1973), p. 31. See my article, "On the Concept of *Zimzum* in Kabbalah and Its Research," in *Lurianic Kabbalah*, eds. Rachel Elior and Yehuda Liebes (Jerusalem, 1992), pp. 59-112 (Hebrew).

80. See Gershom Scholem, "The Neutralisation of Messianism in Early Hasidism," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* pp. 178-202, and compare also to Buber's view, which claims the neutralization in Hasidism of the Gnostic elements in Kabbalah, rather than of messianism, as Scholem claims, in *Hasidism* (New York, 1948), pp. 112-116. On the other hand, see the view of Isaiah Tishby, who opposed both Buber's and Scholem's view of the neutralization of messianism in Hasidism, in "The Messianic Ideas and Messianic Trends in the Growth of Hasidism," *Zion* XXXII (1967):1-45 (Hebrew). See also the Introduction of Dresner, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, pp. XVI-XIX. For another approach to this topic, see M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven, London, 1998), pp. 237-238.

81. On the problems related to the discrepancy between the written literature and Hasidic life, see the caveats of Abraham J. Heschel, *Kotzk: The Struggle for Integrity* (Tel Aviv, 1973), I, pp. 7–10, (Yiddish), translated in Dresner's introduction to Heschel, *Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, p. XXIII; Heschel, "Hasidism," *Jewish Heritage*, 14, no. 3 (1972): 14–16; and Ze'ev Gries, *The Book in Early Hasidism* (Tel Aviv, 1992), p. 92 (Hebrew).

82. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, trans. Allan Arkush (Princeton, Philadelphia, 1987), p. 408.

83. See Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, p. 35.

84. Scholem's discussion of the lost keys to the understanding of the Torah is found in *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 12–13. See also M. Idel, "Hieroglyphs, keys, enigmas; on G.G. Scholem's vision of Kabbalah: Between Franz Molitor and Franz Kafka," *Arché Noah*, eds. Christoph Schmidt and Bernard Greiner (Freiburg, 2002), pp. 227–248.

85. See Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p. 161.

86. There is a renewal of Kabbalistic academies in the last decades, some claiming continuity with the traditions of the Beit El academy in Jerusalem.