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**VISION AND IMAGINATION IN JEWISH  
MYSTICAL TEXTS**

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## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

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The object of this essay is to critically analyse the historically accepted view of scholars and historians that Judaism is an auditory tradition and to affirm and verify a more modern view that a visual tradition has always existed within Judaism. The focus will be on two main types of the visual phenomenon. Firstly, representational images will be discussed, basing the argument on the rich artistic heritage of the Jewish people. Secondly, various otherworldly visions will be examined, with special reference to visions of the soul whilst in and out of the body. The soul while still in the body is able to have extraordinary visions. These spiritual visions are visible through the faculty of the imagination. They take many forms, including visions of the *kavod* (glory of G-d) and various other prophetic visions. When the soul actually leaves the body these other-worldly visions of the journeys to heaven and hell give us a glimpse into strange and wonderful realms.

The debate will commence with a discussion of the views of the historical writers and of their justification for refusing to recognise the existence of a visual tradition within Judaism on the austere basis that to do so would offend against the prohibition of the Second Commandment not to create images of G-d. The Israelites were set in their historical context with many close neighbours who embraced what they considered to be heathen and idolatrous practices. Because of this they had to become discerning with regard to the upholding of their laws and customs and this led to the

development within Judaism of manifold laws and regulations against idol worship. This attitude seemed to spread as a continual thread running throughout Jewish history and the subject of Jewish representational images continues to be a controversial issue. It is as a result of the ban that was sometimes placed on Jewish representational art that the refusal to accept a vibrant Jewish visual tradition has persisted.

The views of more modern writers will then be discussed through whom the argument will be introduced that, having regard for the many changes in the circumstances and contexts of the Jews as well as to the vital and constantly changing nature of the religion over time, it can be demonstrated that a vibrant visual tradition did in fact develop within the religion over the years.

Contrasting the established historical views with more modern views leads one to focus on the fundamental role which the biblical injunction against the creation of graven images has played in founding and enforcing the view that Judaism is solely an auditory tradition. On the one hand, this leads to a realisation that any argument in support of the existence of a Jewish visual tradition must recognise and deal with the biblical injunction and the limits of the founding precepts of the religion. On the other hand, in defining the debate, due recognition must also be given to the fact that it is unlikely that definitive answers will ever be found to questions about the exact limits and boundaries of permissible figurative representation in Judaism. For, like music, religion and fine art are essential forms of expression about which matters of definition and interpretation will always remain contentious.

Notwithstanding the attempt to deny a lively visual tradition, Judaism developed a notable artistic heritage which gave way to beautiful ceremonial objects, prayer-books and synagogues, some of which have great artistic and architectural significance in both the Eastern and the Western worlds.

This art and architecture not only reflects the Jewish world, but also shows the influences of the countries in which they were created and the fashions of the day. Unfortunately this thesis will not be able to analyse these artworks in any kind of depth as this would be a subject for another thesis.

It will also become evident that to be an artist in the Jewish world is actually a *mitzvah* (a good deed). The reason for this is that it is the duty of the artist to reveal the magnificence of G-d in all His infinity in a tangible way in a finite world. The way in which the artist accomplishes this is to reveal what is hidden, abstract and sacred in the artist's soul. In other words, the artist is making visible the divinity that exists in his soul.

The concept of imagination will be introduced and the crucial role which imagination has played in the formation of Jewish visionary and spiritual literature will then be analysed. The imaginative concept and theme will then be elaborated upon in order to demonstrate how, over the ages and by employing the imaginative faculty, Jews have always been able to envision and contemplate the divine and to advance the argument that this ought properly to be regarded as an aspect of a vital Jewish visual tradition. In asserting this argument and in illustrating the important role which imagination, as a primary constituent of the human make-up has played in permitting mystics to envision G-d within their imagination, care shall be taken to emphasise how this is possible without violating the decreed restriction.

The concept of imagination will also be examined and elaborated on as a manifestation of various aspects of a visual tradition within the wider concept of imagination. In so doing, and as further justification for the recognition of a visual tradition, illustrations will be furnished of how the visual imaginative faculty has enabled mystics to achieve a deeper understanding of the

spiritual realm. A close analysis will be undertaken of the manner in which mystics are said to be able to obtain access into the realms of incorporeality by regarding the spiritual component of the soul as the symbolic imagination and in thereby modifying sensory data into symbols. Elaborating on this, and in an attempt to furnish insight into how Jewish mystics have overcome the boundary between the spiritual and the material worlds through the imaginative faculty, an examination shall be undertaken concerning how mystics imaginatively encounter the spiritual in terms of the characteristics of the material and are thereby able to divulge information concerning the realms of incorporeality to the soul in material terms, yet still remaining spiritual.

The focus of the Jewish visual experience is on the ability to visualize that which is invisible. A discussion on the role of imagination will challenge the accepted view that the faculty of the imagination is lower than that of reason. The prophet sees and hears through the imaginative faculty. These issues will be discussed according to the opinions of Jewish medieval philosophers and Kabbalists, who all offer differing views on the role of the imaginative faculty, yet all agree that it definitely does exist and has an important role to play in the make-up of the human being. In fact it is often labelled as one of the crucial items which separates human beings from the animal species.

In concluding the discussion on the concept of the imagination and the visual aspects thereof it will be emphasised that it was the imagination that qualified the visionaries to symbolise G-d as an image in certain ways without producing idols and that it was by placing the image of G-d within the imagination that the visionaries have been able to approach the pertinent sections of the Bible without transgressing the biblical prohibition.

The soul plays a most important part in the prophetic experience as well as in the mystical ascent to the divine world. It is also because of the existence of the soul that the mystic is able to visualize the realms of spirituality. The soul will be analysed according to the writings of the Medieval philosophers, the Kabbalists and the Hasidim. The Medieval philosophers focused their analysis of the soul on its relationship to the body. These brilliant thinkers were obsessed with comparing their philosophical insights of the soul with those of the Greeks. Their studies also focused on the soul's journey after death, which allows us to have knowledge of the visual encounters of the next world which were often graphically portrayed. Visions of the next world have fascinated scholars through the ages, and Jewish philosophers, poets and artists were not to be left out. The otherworldly visions of the soul differ considerably, depending on whether the soul is still connected to the body or if it has left the body. When the soul is in the body, the mystical visions the soul experiences is mostly related to the vision of the invisible G-d and all His manifestations with the phenomenon of light playing an essential part. However, this subject will be critically discussed in chapter four, on Mystical Visions.

It will be discovered that the soul is a most intricate faculty within the human being. The three sections of the soul and their various functions will be discussed and it will be ascertained how these sections affect our characters and personalities. Moreover it will be seen that souls reincarnate in order to perfect themselves, and parts of a single soul are sometimes reincarnated in different people.

After examining the existence, importance and manifestations of a visual tradition within Judaism the discussion will continue to assert that a craving to encounter and imagine the divine in images can be discerned in a wide

variety of Jewish literature from ancient times through to the Middle Ages as evidenced by numerous mystical, prophetic and apocalyptic images.

A distinctive factor within Jewish mystical visions is that the Jewish mystic is very much influenced by the Jewish tradition and his visions will display a definite Jewish character. The vision described by the mystic is mostly evidenced by the mystic's knowledge of the Bible and all the subsequent and related Jewish literature. Even when in a complete meditative state the mystic hardly ever loses his Jewish identity. Different authors have focused on this factor and we will analyse the contributions in particular of Stephen T. Katz, Elliot Wolfson and Gershom Scholem.

It will be shown that the Jewish mystic's aim is not to have a physical vision of a spiritual being but to have a vision which is visible to the soul and thereby spiritual in nature. As mentioned earlier in this introduction, it is the imagination which allows for the visualization of spiritual realities to appear as concrete symbols. The discussion will then shift to the most controversial question of all, and that is whether G-d may appear to the human being. The outcome of the discussion is that the only way for this concept to be accepted in the Jewish faith is if the image of G-d is placed within the imagination. Wolfson and Scholem tackle this problem in depth and help us to make sense of this apparent contradiction which appears throughout Jewish literature. On the one hand there is certainly no determined iconic representation of G-d sitting on the Throne, but it was exactly because of this factor that the Jewish mystics have such a strong desire to have a vision of G-d on His Throne.

Because of the above factors, the creation of idols is forbidden, and the visualization of G-d took another direction; which is the prophetic visions of G-d who mostly takes the form of an anthropos. Firstly, several biblical

illustrations shall be considered. These include certain texts which indicate that the human similarity to the Divine is akin to an external likeness, Ezekiel's "account of the chariot" and Daniel's monumental vision of the "Ancient of Days". Further examples will also be cited from the Dead Sea Scrolls in the form of apocalyptic visions of heavenly ascents.

The literature of the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha will be highlighted as containing quality illustrations of a trend towards the creation of corporeal descriptive images of G-d and his qualities. Examples shall be furnished of several graphic descriptions of the angels and their relationship to G-d contained therein together with literature which shows that, even though this literature was regarded as devout in character, it was a cause of dilemma for the rabbis who were concerned about the portrayal of apocalyptic turmoil, of G-d and of the abundance of angels. It shall be argued that the fact that the Book of Enoch and works akin to it have again become widespread (due to their immeasurable value as virtually the only chronological testimonial of the religious development of Judaism from 200 B.C. to 100 A.D.) serves to reinforce the argument not only that a Jewish visual tradition exists, but also that it has immense value. The Book of Enoch contains vivid descriptions of other-worldly visions. The visions extend from the beautiful upper worlds of the seven palaces and the angelic hosts, through to scenes of horror and torture in hell. Visions of hell will be examined according to the Revelation of Moses.

Attention shall also be focused on the Kabbalists whose involvement with imaginative portrayals of G-d can be seen in their interest in the Shi'ur Komah literature and in their belief that G-d has a mystical shape which can be conveyed through images and names and which manifests itself in symbols such as the tree of the *sefirot*, the mystical human form (Adam

Kadmon), the female presence of G-d (the *Shekhinah*) and in the various names of G-d.

Light forms the most crucial phenomenon of the mystical vision and is most prominent in the twelfth and thirteenth century Kabbalistic visions. This will be discussed and examples will be given to explain that when the mystic sees a vision of intense light, he then becomes enlightened. The light takes on many forms, such as the letters of G-d's name in fiery form, the *sefirot* which appear as lightening and the *Shekhinah* who is radiant and brilliant as the *kavod* (the Glory of G-d). These all comprise the imaginary forms of the spiritual G-dhead. The Lurianic Kabbalah also focuses on light, as G-d during Creation withdrew some of His light so that the world could exist. It will be explained how G-d sent out a beam of light and revelation began.

Arising from the above, it should become clear that the historical failure to recognise the existence and importance of a visual tradition within Judaism has been fostered by an understanding of the prohibition against graven images which fails to take proper account of the visionary qualities within the written word and the human imaginative faculty which, in conjunction, enable the devout Jew to experience visions of the divine without contravening the strictures of the prohibition. Throughout all the Jewish literature there appears a tension between that which is hidden and invisible and that which can be seen and is visible due to the soul's ability to imagine.

## CHAPTER 2

# VISION, IMAGES AND IMAGINATION

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There has always existed the impression that Jewish thought was mostly auditory as compared to Greek thought which was labelled as visual. The visual method is to see one's G-d as dwelling within the world, while the verbal method experiences one's G-d from above. The two different types of truth manifested along different lines as explained by P. Joseph Cahill in his recent book, entitled *Mended Speech* that the awareness established by auditory thought is contrary to that of ocular thought. Cahill justifies this argument by stating that: "Both models of course are necessary in human living and are complementary. The issue here is simply that the stress of one or the other develops quite different intellectual systems."<sup>1</sup>

There were scholars who based their arguments on the presupposition that the Greeks were visual and the Jews auditory and it therefore became an accepted notion that the Jews heard their G-d in opposition to the Greeks who saw their G-d. Because the Jews heard their G-d, their G-d was imagined as being way above and He related to His people through the word. The Greeks, on the other hand, worshipped idols of their gods which they believed were visual representations of the truth. Heinrich Graetz, the nineteenth century historian illustrates the difference between the two cultures when he says:

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<sup>1</sup> David Chidester, "Word against Light: Perception and the Conflict of Symbols," *Journal of Religion* 65 (1985): 46.

To the pagan, the divine appears within nature as something observable to the eye. He becomes conscious of it as something seen. In contrast to the Jew who knows that the divine exists beyond, outside of, and prior to nature. G-d reveals himself through a demonstration of His Will, through the medium of the ear. The human subject becomes conscious of the divine through hearing and obeying. Paganism sees its god, Judaism hears Him; that is, it hears the commandments of His will.<sup>2</sup>

The Greeks, according to the scholars, were able to see their gods and therefore believed their Divine was as much a part of the universe as they were. The Jews however experienced their G-d as a transcendent and invisible being which could only relate to them from above. Thorlief Borman reiterated the difference between the Jewish people and the Greeks whose reality was oriented toward either hearing or seeing when he states: "Because the Greeks were organized in a predominantly visual way, and the Hebrews were organized in a predominantly auditory way, each people's conception of truth was formed in increasingly different ways."<sup>3</sup>

Philo of Alexandria also wrote about the distinct function of seeing and hearing and how it resulted in an altered way of relating to G-d. According to Philo when Moses was presented with the Law these two modes of awareness combined in a synesthetic way enabling the community of Israel to actually see the voice of G-d. This statement implies that when G-d gave His divine commandments, His voice was visible. Philo went on to explain that during the revelation of the Law, "from the midst of the fire that streamed from heaven there sounded forth to their utter amazement a voice, for the flame became articulate speech in the language familiar to the audience, and so clearly and distinctly were the words formed by it that they

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 47.

seemed to see rather than to hear them" (Decal. 46).<sup>4</sup> Philo was clearly trying to protect the Hebrew Bible from the critical eye of the Greek intellectual. No longer was there only the word. The word became an image of light which emerged from out of the darkness.

According to Philo, when Jacob's name became Israel, G-d enabled him to grasp the truth much more clearly by planting eyes in his understanding. No longer was he only able to hear that which did not give him entry into G-d's true wisdom. G-d, says Philo, is a divine architect who looked at His design and then fashioned the world according to His design. Therefore, the Creation was a visual event with G-d looking at His pattern and making sure that the tangible objects related to what G-d saw in spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Philo was not the only Jewish intellectual who discovered imperfections with the non-philosophical make-up of Judaism. They began to compare their customs unfavorably to the heritage of Plato and Aristotle. The two main concepts of the five books of Moses were based on revelation and divine supremacy. These concepts now seemed out of place in a Greco-Roman environment. Philo made it his duty to mythologize the Bible and thereby to adjust it to Platonic thought. Philo's attitude toward the visual arts also proved how he tried to harmonize Greek theories, especially those of Plato, with those of the Hebrew Bible. In *On the Giants*, XIII,59 he proposed that:

[Moses] banished from his own commonwealth painting and sculpture, with all their high repute and charm of artistry, because their crafts belie the nature of truth and work deception and illusions through the eyes to souls that are ready to be seduced.

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<sup>4</sup> David Chidester, *Word and Light : Seeing, Hearing, and Religious Discourse*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 30.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 34-36.

In *The Decalogue*, XIV, 66-67, Philo denounced those who:

filled the habitable world with images and wooden figures and the other works of human hands fashioned by the craftsmanship of painting and sculpture, arts which have wrought great mischief in the life of mankind. For these idolators cut away the most excellent support of the soul, the rightful conception of the Ever-living G-d.<sup>6</sup>

At first impression these views seem to match the anti-iconic outlook of many of the passages of the Bible. Nevertheless, Joseph Gutmann points out that Philo's views are in fact completely divergent from those of the Bible. Philo is simply repeating the Platonic concept that particular arts, the "amusement" and "imitative" arts should be banned from the ideal state, as they are deceitful and stir up desires which the rational faculty cannot control. Philo's reproach did not relate to that of the biblical opposition to art which was based on a motive to stop idolatry and the threat to monotheism. Moreover, the Temple was already well known for its aesthetic accompaniments.<sup>7</sup>

Another distinguished Jewish intellectual living in the Greco-Roman environment was Josephus. He wrote during the first century C.E. He strove to utilize Greek history as a mould for his own outline of Jewish history. Contrary to the Bible, Josephus' history of the Jewish people is empty of supplications to divine supremacy or the divine supervision of history. His work appeals rather to reason which is based on fact. He attempted to reconstruct the narrative of events in Jewish history. Gutmann feels that Philo and Josephus cannot be used as a support for the argument of a biblical anti-iconic attitude. Gutmann explains:

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Gutmann, "The Second Commandment and the Image in Judaism," *Hebrew Union College Annual* vol. 32(1961): 172.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 173.

It is evident, therefore, that sources like Josephus and Philo cannot be cited in support of any thesis which would affirm the ubiquitous observance of the Second Commandment. The conclusion to which one is inevitably drawn from an examination of the surviving material, both literary and archeological, from the Biblical and Hellenistic-Roman periods, is that a rigidly and uniformly anti-iconic attitude on the part of the Jews remains as much a myth as the Procrustean bed on which Jewish art history has so often been made to lie.<sup>8</sup>

## IMAGES

There are modern scholars of Judaism who also seem to have intentionally overlooked the actuality of Jewish art. Among them there appears to be a general consensus that because of the all-absorbing biblical anti-iconism, Judaism has always rejected the image. One such writer is Marcel Brion, who in his introduction to *The Bible in Art*, takes it upon himself to state that Israel, Islam and the Reformed Churches believe that the narrative should not be illustrated with a sculptured or painted rendition of the same incident. A further comment which he made is that some of the figurative paintings of post-classical Judaism, such as the murals in the synagogue of Dura Europas, radiate a bad conscience. The lack of knowledge displayed even by authorities on art show how the existence of Jewish art was hidden over the centuries. Bernard Berenson, for example, an authority on the art of the Italian Renaissance, wrote that the Jews who lived in Palestine and their forefathers, did not possess any kind of proficiency in the plastic or even the mechanical arts. He then reached a conclusion that the rich Jews of Alexandria possibly had their Greek version of the Old Testament illustrated by either Greek artists or Hellenized Jewish artists.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Nomenyi, *The Essence of Jewish Art*, trans. E. Roditi (London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), x-xi.

There are many other scholars who deliberately ignored the existence of Jewish art. Matthew Arnold wrote that even though the Jews outshone all the others in the field of ethics, they certainly did not shine in aesthetics. Another leading scholar, Sigmund Freud, hypothesized that the biblical prohibition (the Second Commandment) indicated subjecting sense perception to an abstract idea. Freud went on to write that it was a victory of spirituality over the senses. Other leading Jewish scholars seem to have intentionally set out to hide Jewish art. In the nineteenth century Jewish scholars recorded various facts about Medieval Hebrew manuscripts and they deliberately ignored the existence of beautiful decorations of the text and also the valuable miniature paintings. Another anecdote which further illustrates the misrepresentation of Jewish art is recorded by Namenyi. He wrote about an eighteenth century Christian Hebraist and Orientalist, Olaus Tychsen who when he discovered these beautifully illustrated manuscripts, approached some Jewish scholars for further data and was rebuked for believing that there existed decorations in Hebrew manuscripts.<sup>10</sup>

There is a further consideration when recording factors which support the continual output of Jewish art. Judaism may have gone through phases of its evolution whereby it was necessary to deny the image because of the fear of being influenced by its neighbors. Judaism is none-the-less a vibrant faith. It is forever changing with the times and has never throughout its history remained static. The Second Commandment is not a static notion in a fixed Jewish civilization which never evolved with the rest of the world. Instead, according to Joseph Gutmann, Judaism is a vigorous faith and throughout its three thousand year history, has displayed many different kinds of testimonies on the biblical prohibition.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Gutmann, *Hebrew Manuscript Painting* (New York: Braziller, 1978), 8-9.

The life-style of a community affects its concept of G-d and the relationship entailed. An example is that human beings distinctively empower the Divine with gifts and provisions which is appropriate to their specific surroundings and life-style. The Jews lived in the desert when the Commandments were given to them. Their G-d was considered as a tribal leader who escorted the tribes, safeguarding them and always remaining with them.<sup>12</sup> The Law placed a ban on all image-making so as to protect the Jews from producing idols and worshipping them. One must recall that in each ancient culture art was primarily produced for religious reasons and invented for the dominion of the gods. The most important aim of the Jewish leaders at that time was to protect the concept of monotheism. They felt that any effort to represent G-d artistically would lead to a betrayal of the Divine because He cannot be perceived visually. Depictions of G-d were therefore severely forbidden. Both the First and Second Commandments were firm statements against the polytheism prevalent at the time.<sup>13</sup>

Polytheism is the creation of symbols to declare man's adoration and praise for the component powers of nature. Drawings or objects were used as symbols of devotion and were given mysterious powers and used as a mechanism to restrain nature. The sun, moon, stars and the wind, rain, trees, rocks and earth were considered holy and therefore motivated the production of representational objects and symbols. For Judaism this was sacrilegious as it was trying to create G-d in man's own image. As far as the Jews are concerned, natural phenomena is only an exterior display of G-d's grandeur and eminence. King David summarized this by saying: "The heavens declare the glory of G-d, and the firmament shows His handiwork."<sup>14</sup> However, even though the threat of polytheism influenced the

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<sup>12</sup> Gutmann, "Second Commandment," 163.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Kaniel, *A Guide to Jewish Art* (New York: Allied Books Limited, 1989), 11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

quantity of creative output in Judaism, it still did not silence it. There are no nations which do not boast even a small amount of artistic treasures and the memorials dating back forty thousand years offer us extensive evidence of this. Namenyi explains that "the creative powers of man cannot remain content with expressions of his religious fervor in the form of poetry, music or ritual, and must therefore seek a concrete expression in all the other arts too."<sup>15</sup>

The Jews were neighbors of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt and the art of these two great civilizations expressed the peoples' religious feelings. The Jewish leaders witnessed how these monuments of art were imbued with holiness and worshipped as gods. The prophets reacted by condemning all images. However, the Jewish artist's aim was to produce an art which did not expose a static representation of a Divinity but rather would express the Will of G-d. The Jewish artist was also interested in illustrating the beauty of the word of G-d. They felt that to create something beautiful was to aid in the reverence of their G-d. To adorn the various books of ritual thus became a way of glorifying G-d. Namenyi outlines the large output of the Jewish artist:

Bibles, books of ritual (machzorim and siddurim), Haggadot, Megillot, theological works, copies of the Mishne Torah of Maimonides, talmudic treatises, copies of the Arba Turim of Jacob ben Asher, medical treatises, manuals of customs (Minhagim). Even after the invention of printing, manuscript books, especially books of prayers, Haggadot, the Tikkune Shabbat of Isaac Luria, books of benedictions of fables or of local chronicles (Pinkas), all these continued to illustrate the great tradition of Jewish illuminated manuscripts from which the mysticism of the heart and of the senses had never completely banished figures. The spiritual and artistic life of the Jews was in no era strictly

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<sup>15</sup> Namenyi, *Essence of Jewish Art*, 5.

partitioned or segregated and Judaism thus maintained its contact with the cultures of the nations in whose midst it survived.<sup>16</sup>

The Temple built by Solomon was proof of how the Jews were understandably influenced by their neighbors. Artistic practices took on a new sense of importance. Art was no longer condemned but instead became seen as a way of worshipping G-d. The nomadic G-d now had a stable home and it was similar to those of other oriental monarchs. The Temple included such graven images, such as the cherubim (which may have served as an invisible throne for the invisible G-d), and there were the twelve oxen amongst other works of art. Gutmann reminds us about the two artists mentioned in the Bible and the way in which they were honored. Hiram, (I Kings 7:14) is described as a prosperous court artist who is "filled with wisdom, intelligence and knowledge, to work any work in bronze, whereas Bezalel, who is simply a desert artist, was filled by G-d "with the spirit of G-d, in wisdom, intelligence and knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft." (Exodus 31:3ff)<sup>17</sup> This is written proof that despite the Second Commandment there existed artists in the Jewish tradition dating back from as early as biblical times. Artistic expression has always been a basic need of society and the Jewish people are no exception.

Throughout Jewish history, various Jewish leaders have used and abused the Second Commandment to suit their own purposes. Laws are always interpreted dissimilarly by different people and often done for ulterior motives. Commencing from the sovereignty of the seventh century Judean king, Josiah, the anti-iconic rebukes have been alluded to as explanatory of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Gutmann, "Second Commandment," 163-166.

the Jewish epic and the Jewish perspective on art, not solely under the jurisdiction of king Josiah, but through all of the Jewish history which was prior to his rule. However there were devious reasons for Josiah's insistence on the anti-iconic rigidity. Josiah and the priests were concerned about the lavish gifts and money being spent on G-d's place of worship as this resulted in the loss of their high and important status. Gutmann outlines the above when he declares:

Viewed against the historic background, then, the severity of Josiah's iconoclastic strictures bear little relation to the Second Commandment, particularly since there is no evidence in 11 Kings 23 that he removed any of the elaborate graven images from the period of Solomon, such as the cherubim, from the Temple at Jerusalem. Josiah's denunciations of idolatry were primarily measures designed to strengthen the monarchy and its priestly allies.<sup>18</sup>

An added fact to consider which is necessary towards the understanding of Jewish history as well as the history of Jewish art, is that even though certain Jewish scholars and rabbis would declare statements which were to be accepted as law, their followers would not always consent to their orders. Because the Jews have always been considered a people of the Book, the great authors of the past have tended to dictate their history. However, the way in which the community conducted itself often differed from the opinions of the great rabbis and philosophers. Gutmann points out that the discovery of Jewish art through archaeological discoveries of Near Eastern remains in the twentieth century have shown us how despite the claims of certain leaders, the artistic spirit continued to blossom. Among the finds were the outstanding paintings of the third century Dura-Europos synagogue in Syria and the figural mosaic floors of later Palestinian synagogues.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

<sup>19</sup> Gutmann, *Hebrew Manuscript Painting*, 9-12.

Fortunately, there were scholars who did reveal the existence of Jewish art. Since the knowledge of these scholars has surfaced, the direction is changing as to how the world judges the aesthetic accomplishments of the Jewish people. One such scholar is Maimonides, the notable eleventh century philosopher who determined in his monumental *Code of Jewish Law* that the transgression of idolatry is carried out, not when the splendor of images is appreciated, but rather when the images are furnished with divine characteristics. The taboos are immediately lessened once it has been determined that the work of art in question is not revered. The best example of this is the cherubim, the brazen oxen, and the molten sea which bedecked the Temple in Jerusalem. The important point which Michael Kaniel makes is that there was no complete rejection of all art, only to the art which was used for idol-worshipping. The talmudic declarations of idolatry differed from rabbi to rabbi depending on the threat of idolatry to monotheism at any given time. When there was no threat of idolatry works of art appeared in the synagogues. Some of the art even went so far as to show pagan images and symbols which had lost their essential meaning. Pagan goddesses were discovered on the mosaic floors of Byzantine synagogues.<sup>20</sup>

Bezalel Narkiss gives us a further example of the tolerance displayed towards art. A certain Rabban Gamaliel II was found bathing in a bath in Acre which was devoted to Aphrodite. The story continues that a certain gentile inquired of the rabbi for what reason he would bathe in a place accommodating an idol. He apparently answered: "The bath was not built in honor of Aphrodite, but rather, Aphrodite's statue was put there to beautify the bath" (Av. Zar. 44b).<sup>21</sup> Another anecdote is told that the same Rabban Gamaliel had pictures of the moon in his office to assist uneducated people

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<sup>20</sup> Kaniel, *Guide to Jewish Art*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Bezalel Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1969), 14.

distinguish the shape of the New Moon, even though the moon was observed as the symbol of a Greek goddess.<sup>22</sup>

Other scholars have also battled to give Jewish art its rightful heritage. David Kaufmann and Julius von Schlosser were the initial scholars to expose the jewels of medieval art that are maintained in European libraries and museums. Thereafter in 1907, David Gunzburg and W.V. Stasoff published certain reproductions of tenth century illuminated manuscripts which had been found in the Cairo Geniza. Then, in 1921, the French biblical and archaeological school in Jerusalem discovered the mosaics, unluckily seriously impaired, of the Naaran Synagogue. In 1930 E.L. Sukenik publicized those of the sixth century synagogue of Beth Alpha, which were unbroken and had been discovered by scientists of the Hebrew University. As previously mentioned the walls of the synagogue of Dura Europos in Mesopotamia were found in 1932 by Professor Clark Hoskins and Count Mesnil du Boisson.<sup>23</sup> One would have thought that these discoveries would have silenced all the one-sided opinions which disputed the very existence of Jewish art.

G-d is known in Judaism as the Supreme Artist who first laid out the world and then from its components fashioned man and woman. The rabbis go as far as to refer to G-d as a sculptor. According to Kaniel far from placing a ban on art, "to create beauty was considered in Judaism one of the greatest challenges given to man, for it meant participation in the creative character of the divinity."<sup>24</sup> Kaniel explains that aesthetics and art go together but should never be in discord with ethics and morality. Art and aesthetics in the Jewish religion are clearly not ends in themselves but are rather

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Namenyi, *Essence of Jewish Art*, x.

<sup>24</sup> Kaniel, *Guide to Jewish Art*, 14.

regarded as meaningful ways in assisting a person to accomplish spiritual exaltation. A story is related by Kaniel about Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the eighteenth century founder of Hasidism, who saw G-d in all the animate and inanimate creations. He was known to have said: "If the vision of a beautiful woman, or of any lovely thing, comes suddenly to a man's eyes, let him ask whence the beauty, if not from the Divine Force which permeates the world. And why be attracted by the part? Better be drawn after the all. Such perception of beauty is an experience of the eternal."<sup>25</sup> From the above it becomes clear that far from a prohibition on art, the Jew is actually obligated to create beautiful ceremonial objects so as to carry out the commandments.

### IMAGINATION

The saga of figurative representation within the Jewish tradition is still not finalized. Along with all the other major religions, there are many subjects which remain contentious as these issues are not simply right or wrong. Over the centuries these debates have oscillated from one direction to the other. Namenyi concisely summarizes the debate when he says:

Can such a debate ever be concluded, and what authority would ever dare impose a conclusion, now that artistic creation has become increasingly popular in order to satisfy, like music, one of the most characteristic tastes of man in our age?<sup>26</sup>

The Jewish mystic's obsession with the visualizing of G-d was another factor which shows that Judaism possesses a visual focus. The mystics would use their imaginative faculty to picture G-d so that they would not disobey the Second Commandment. The imagination is the faculty which allows the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Namenyi, *Essence of Jewish Art*, 23.

absent to become present. Usually that which is absent is invisible, but by using the imaginative faculty the incorporeal becomes visible in the human consciousness.

Elliot Wolfson explains that to overcome the boundary between spiritual and physical does not mean that in the instant of visualization there is a denial of the corporeal image. What actually takes place is that the mystic encounters the physical in terms of the spiritual. The imagination therefore states one thing in terms of another and correlates that which is unintelligible into a meaningful scope. The symbols assembled by the imagination express the ineffable in certain ways such that there is a complete understanding between the symbol and what is being symbolized. The imagination is no longer considered as inferior to reason, as the Aristotelians tried to establish. Wolfson raises it to a status of extreme prevalence. He calls it the divine component of the soul which enables one to enter into the spiritual worlds through an action of understanding that surpasses rational notions.<sup>27</sup>

In developing a theory of imagination, Wright Bundy proposed that the concept of imagination began with Plato, since before him there was no extensive account of the association of matter to spirit or of the outer to the inner. At first Plato felt that imagination which was also termed 'phantasy' was an unideal activity. Phantasy and imagination were at the time associated with a deceptive standard of subjectivity. However with the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*, Plato changed his opinion on imagination. He no longer denounced phantasies and images as wrong. Nevertheless, Plato wrote that however close phantasy and imagination are to the most elevated

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<sup>27</sup> Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 61-63.

mental function, they are never akin to it. They are only instrumental in reaching the highest mental function. According to Plato, human imagination was bound to the laws of matter, and as far as he was concerned there is no logical basis whereby human image-making could lead to a belief in immaterial concepts. There existed for Plato a chasm between spirit and matter and, similar to Dante's vision of Paradise, there was a point above which human phantasy was unable to go. Phantasy or imagination could therefore not be intuitive in its own personal capacity. Plato wrote that a person can only receive inspiration if the circumstances are correct and if he/she is in a receptive condition.<sup>28</sup>

The vision of a higher Being is not necessarily apprehended through our highest intellectual powers and neither is it fundamentally by way of the loftiest imagination that the vision is seen. Wisdom is the framework which the Idea assumes as the objective of the philosopher's pursuit of the highest abstract reality. However there is a juncture at which the philosopher must stop, for Truth in its direct brilliance is perceived only by G-d.<sup>29</sup> If a person of discernment uses his lower nature in the correct method then G-d gives that person a further means to vision, which is phantasy. Bundy explains this human phantasy when he says:

Impelled by love the poet may see in the beautiful objects of this world images leading one to think of Heavenly Wisdom; which, in this aspect, as the object of phantasy, must take the shape of Beauty. For neither Wisdom nor Justice nor Temperance, but that Beauty which is in all three is an object of vision. Thus Plato crowns his theory of knowledge with a theory in which the phantasy is recognized as the power by which the mind grasps truth made visible by the phantasy of G-d. Wisdom, Beauty, Love and Phantasy: these are the terms involved in the Platonic doctrine of poetic inspiration. Wisdom is the goal of all though;

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<sup>28</sup> Wright Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1927), 33-49.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 49-57.

Beauty its highest embodiment; Love the necessary restraint of impulse; and Phantasy the proper use of a power both of presentation and representation that the human may rise to the divine.<sup>30</sup>

Aristotle, on the other hand, gave the imaginative faculty a much higher status. He referred to the imagination as a memory image, but he still felt that the imagination cannot act on its own to produce an image, even though it can see the image as a copy of a former picture. According to Aristotle, Plato's insistence that phantasy was an expression of opinion testified a serious oversight to realize that phantasy is not simply "an unideal kind of judgement concerned with sensible experience."<sup>31</sup> Aristotle attempted to free its rights by revealing its fundamental functions between matter and spirit, and cautiously observing the laws of its behaviour. By accomplishing the above, Aristotle ascertained a tradition which was to endure for more than two thousand years. His first point was that phantasy is not the same sort of thought as conviction, of which opinion is a type, for we are able to contain our phantasies, and not control our opinions. Aristotle explains that in a painting, the object being impersonated may be considered as an actual object and as an image of that object. Likewise, our phantasy, which is the picture for the inner eye, may be conceived of as being both a matter of direct consciousness as well as an image.

Therefore, a phantasm is both an actual object of thought and because it personifies something else, it is also an image and a matter of memory. Phantasms are not bizarre mental states, but are actually objective and may be referred to as a memory-image. According to Aristotle, ecstasies consider their phantasms as being factual and not merely representational. One needs to exercise the memory so that it is capable of recollection and can

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 67.

view the image as a copy and not in its own nature.<sup>32</sup> Even though Aristotle was more accommodating in saying that phantasia acts as an assistance to practical reason he is still, according to Richard Kearney, averse to giving phantasia any freedom in its own right.<sup>33</sup>

Latin and Christian writers also condemned the use of imagination. They disapproved of it as they believed that the world was based on realism, and any diversion from that reality would cause a total disruption which would result in a dangerous situation for all. One of the Latin writers, Pliny declared that "nothing could be more foolish than a man ruled by imagination."<sup>34</sup> Other Christian scholars such as Augustine, Aquinas and Bonaventure all cautioned their readers that phantasia leads to illogical passion, even demonic possession. They did accept though that in particular educational situations it could be used as long as it could still be checked by realism. One of the major reasons why imagination was condemned by the tradition of western philosophy was it feared that imagination would have a bad influence on the natural pattern of existence. The majority of classical and medieval philosophers labelled imagination as an undependable, erratic and blasphemous faculty. Imagination was capable of turning things upside down and making things appear that were absent. Thomas Aquinas summed it up by saying imagination makes "everything other than it is."<sup>35</sup>

Fortunately the modern philosophers recognized the significance of imagination; its major function being to allow that which is invisible to become visible. These writers managed to transform its image from one of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 67-76.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining* (New York: Harper Collins Academic, 1991; reprint, London: Routledge, 1993), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 3.

unimportance to that of the core of all our wisdom. Kant, Schelling, Samuel Coleridge, as well as Baudelaire crowned imagination as the most important of the human faculties, without which we could not understand the world around us. Fichte made an allegation that "all reality is brought forth solely by imagination ... this act which forms the basis for the possibility of our consciousness, our life."<sup>36</sup>

Kant, likewise outlined imagination as the 'common root' of all our understanding and wisdom. Schelling classified imagination as the "unconscious poetry of being". However, it was undoubtedly the French poet Baudelaire who expressed the culminating honor of Romanticism when he proposed imagination "the queen of all the faculties ... which decomposes all creation and creates a new world, the sensation of novelty."<sup>37</sup>

The Jewish philosophers were influenced by the Neoplatonic tradition, whereby the focus is placed on the intellectual faculty. According to them, imagination has an intermediary role and in fact actually serves the rational faculty thereby making it a lower and subservient faculty. Ibn Ezra writes about a vision of G-d or the angels or other intelligible beings which appears through the rational faculty which he has named, "the inner eye, the eye of the heart, and the eye of the intellect."<sup>38</sup> Other Medieval Jewish Neoplatonists such as Isaac Israeli and Solomon ibn Gabirol also gave imagination an intermediate role which acted between sense perception and reason and amid corporeality and incorporeality. The imagination thus divulges information of the spiritual entities to the soul in material terms, even though these images are not actually material.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 160-161.

Isaac Israeli describes his view on imagination in his *Book on the Elements*. He appears to follow Aristotle's opinion whereby he explains that incorporeal forms are transmitted by the *sensus communis* on the orders of the intellect to the imaginative faculty. In his book he explained the workings of prophetic vision. When a person sleeps the incorporeal forms which are intermediary between the material and the spiritual, are impressed on the *sensus communis* which is also intermediate between the physical sense of sight and the imagination, which according to Israeli inhabits the anterior ventricle of the brain. The intellect then informs the *sensus communis* to send these incorporeal forms to the imaginative faculty. Compared to those forms found in our waking condition, these are much more illuminated. Israeli reckons that when the person is awake he will attempt to grasp the spiritual significance of these imaginative beings (*dimyonot*) through the reasoning faculty and will consequently rid the forms of all remnants of tangibility.<sup>39</sup>

Israeli places common sense as intermediary between the corporeal and the spiritual senses. Common sense transports the corporeal senses such as sight and smell and the physical characteristics of things to the spiritual sense which is the imagination. Israeli explains that imagination is still reliant on sense-perception as it is sent by the common sense and then imagination acts on it. In total this idea conforms to Aristotle's opinion of imagination as that of a faculty quite distinct from sense-perception but still dependent on it. Although imagination is unlike reason or thought, it is nevertheless indispensable to it. This likewise reverberates Aristotle's view when Israeli says: "The sensitive faculty, when it perceives things by sensation, implants their forms in the phantasia, which is in the front part of

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 162.

the head, and phantasia conveys them to the rational soul."<sup>40</sup> The intellect thus plays a very important part in the processing of these imaginative forms.

Judah Halevi explains the notion of prophetic vision and the specific role of imagination. He considers the constituents of prophecy not as an outcome of the prophet's intellectual association with the Active Intellect as moderated through his imaginative faculty. Rather he regards it as an "objectively verifiable datum",<sup>41</sup> even though the method of verification may surpass the limits of the customary processes of sense or intellect. Halevi stressed that which the religious Jew cannot explain but must nevertheless embrace. This is the essential contradiction of prophetic revelation whereby in the instant of prophecy the spiritual, incorporeal purpose of G-d becomes material in both a visible and audible form recognized scripturally as "the G-d of Israel".<sup>42</sup>

The methods of establishing this form are positively mental or spiritual, and the prophet both hears and sees in a way entirely dissimilar from the physical senses. Therefore, in *Kuzari* V:14, Halevi says that the understanding of factors connected with prophecy evades the philosophers, because their faculty of reasoning is too finite. Only exclusive persons in appropriate circumstances occupy the soul qualified of "forming an image for themselves from the world in its totality, and they know G-d and His angels."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Harry Austryn Wolfson, "Isaac Israeli on the Internal Senses," *Jewish Studies in Memory of George A. Kahut (1874-1933)*, ed. by S.W. Baron and A. Marx, (New York: Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1935), 586.

<sup>41</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 165.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



This form of G-d is established in a mental or spiritual way in which the prophet hears and sees in a way which is very different from his normal everyday mode. In *Kuzari* V:14, Halevi explains that the philosophers cannot understand the factors connected with prophecy as their faculty of reasoning is too finite. There are very few people who occupy the soul which is qualified to form images of G-d and His angels. In *Kuzari* IV:3 Halevi maintains that the prophets possess an "inner eye" or "spiritual eye" via which they observe the spiritual beings. He continues by distinguishing this "inner eye" as the "internal sense", which may be identified with the imaginative faculty through which the prophet comprehends the spiritual or incorporeal being.<sup>44</sup> Halevi therefore places the imaginative faculty on a very high level, but he states that the imaginative faculty can only see these spiritual forms under the direction of the rational faculty.

It seems to be a general consensus among the Medieval Jewish philosophers that although the imagination does play a significant role in the knowledge of G-d, the main factor is the intellectual faculty. The Medieval poets also accepted the customary philosophical briefing of the Hispano-Arabic culture of their epoch. They spoke about the heart's eyes which was used to obtain an intellectual perceiving of G-d or other disembodied entities. This intimates that in the Islamic-Jewish Neoplatonic tradition, the heart experiences a vision of the spiritual worlds and it is actually an intellectual intuition. This view is also mirrored by Maimonides in the *Mishneh Torah* where he states that: "The forms that are incorporeal are not seen by the eye, rather they are known through the eye of the heart, just as we know the Lord of everything without vision of the eye."<sup>45</sup> Maimonides does not appear to have a clear cut view on the function of the imaginative

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 165.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 171.

faculty. On the one hand Maimonides equates imagination with the evil inclination or the evil angel. He then continues by saying that the good inclination or good angel is that of the Active Intellect. He further states that in order to receive prophecy one has to have an outstanding imagination. There appears here to be a contradiction.

Maimonides states that the highest excellence that may exist in a person is the perfection of the imaginative faculty. This perfection cannot be obtained through learning nor by improving one's moral inclinations. Prophecy is consequently confined to a particular kind of person who by genetic capability has an expert imaginative faculty. For those people with an insufficient imaginative faculty, whereby the intellectual overflow only pours out in the direction of the rational faculty, they are mostly employed in scientific speculation.<sup>46</sup> Maimonides says that if the excess from the rational faculty extends to both the rational and the imaginative faculties, it is the imaginative faculty which has the higher position, and this is typical of the category of prophets. If the overflow only arrives at the imaginative faculty, there will be an imperfection of the rational faculty and this is characteristic of the type who rule cities, such as the authorities, the fortune-tellers, the diviners and the idealists. The outcome is that for those people whose rational faculties are superior, they become philosophers and for those whose rational faculties are prepared and who naturally have refined imaginative faculties become prophets, and then there are the governors who only possess imaginative faculties which are developed.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Leonard S. Kravitz, "The Revealed and the Concealed: Providence, Prophecy, Miracles and Creation in the Guide," *Central Conference American Rabbis* vol. 16, no. 4 (Oct. 1969): 8-13.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Maimonides explains the different functions of imagination and the Active Intellect in a way that seems to place the imagination on a higher level than the intellect. The argument once again makes a turn when Maimonides states that to be a philosopher is actually superior to that of a prophet. We read earlier that Maimonides acknowledged the imaginative faculty as the Evil Inclination, Satan, and the Angel of Death. He then says that the imaginative faculty may be called an angel, but the intellect is called a cherub. Moses was solely addressed to through the 'cherub' of the intellectual faculty. Moreover, Moses is actually a philosopher and not a prophet as he was addressed solely through the imaginative faculty. Therefore, in Maimonides' opinion, the uppermost level of prophecy is to actually be a philosopher. Kravitz surmises that it is hence apparent that the classification of prophecy as "...the highest degree of man and the ultimate term of perfection that can exist for his species..." is but a cloak of words to hide a concealed opinion.<sup>48</sup>

According to Maimonides and the other philosophers mentioned above who were influenced by Aristotle; even though the prophet acquires an overflow from the active intellect, there is still no personal contact with G-d. It was because of this that numerous Kabbalists criticized the philosophical comprehension of prophecy as interceded through the Active Intellect. R. Pinehas Eliyahu Horowitz, who was influenced by Hayim Vital, says that the pivotal role bestowed on imagination in the prophetic experience is a preoccupation with an ascent to the divine realm as well as a drawing down of the divine to the lower worlds. Horowitz explains that the vision of prophecy, in opposition to that of a dream, occurs when the soul is still adjoined to the body. Even so, one should still detach one's thoughts as though the soul had left this world. Horowitz explains how the vision of

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 14.

prophecy occurs: "Thus he should think and form in his imagination the gradations of the roots of his soul in all the worlds and he should imagine that he ascended to those worlds, one level after another, in those roots that he has there, from one to the other, and he should imagine in his imagination that he saw the lights that are there."<sup>49</sup>

Horowitz explains that the faculty that eases the 'ascensio mentis' is the imagination. Here we see the distinct difference between the view of the Kabbalist and that of the philosopher, in that the Kabbalistic view is that the prophet gathers down the light and energy straight from the Divine without it going through the intermediary of the Active Intellect. Hayim Vital totally disagreed with the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian followers, because he felt that even Mosaic prophecy demanded imagination. Vital disagreed with Maimonides that the difference between Moses and all the other prophets is that the other prophets needed imagination and Moses did not. The only difference according to Vital, was that Moses was qualified to attain the imagined form through his physical senses and to encounter the materialized form with all five external senses. It is obvious that for Vital the imagination is all important in the prophetic occurrence in a manner that has no place in Maimonide's philosophy on prophecy. Vital reiterates that a person who wants to achieve the prophetic inspiration of ruah ha-quodesh needs to detach one's soul "as if the soul went out from the body and ascended to the heavens."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Pinehas Eliyahu Horowitz, *Book of the Covenant* (Jerusalem, 1990); cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 322.

<sup>50</sup> Hayyim Vital, *Ketavim Hadashim le-Rabbenu* (Jerusalem: Ahavat Shalom, 1988), 6; cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 323.

The imaginative faculty is that which is responsible for the disconnection of body and soul so that the heavenly ascent can be accomplished. During the ascent the imagination is most active, as Vital explains:

You should ascend in your thought from heaven to heaven, until the seventh heaven, called Aravot, and imagine that there is a great, white curtain upon Aravot, and upon it are drawn the letters of the Tetragrammaton, in square letters, in a colour that is known, in very thick script, each letter like a mountain and white as snow.<sup>51</sup>

It is clear that the medieval Jewish philosophers were influenced by the Aristotelian approach which stipulated that the imagination had a minor role to play in the search for knowledge of G-d. This view resulted in the imagination being given an inferior and subservient position to the intellectual faculty. Imagination received a much higher status in the Kabbalah. It was no longer regarded as being less important than the rational faculty. In fact, not only was imagination regarded as the means by which the Divine could be visualized, but it was the imagination which enabled one's soul to enter into the realms of spirituality. An agreement seemed to be reached by the mystics that the visualization of the anthropomorphic form of G-d in the imagination evaded idolatry. The anthropomorphic image regarded in this way was seen as only a representative form and therefore performs as an intermediary between physicality and incorporeality. The physical shape of the Divine is only representative and so it enables the formless to be evident in form, but only within the imagination.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE SOUL

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In order to understand mystical visions, one needs to know about the make-up of the soul, because it is the soul which enables the mystic to rise above the ordinary and the mundane and have a mystical experience and vision. The soul is what enables man to realize G-d and is what makes him crave to know G-d. The soul is from G-d and is immortal. The immortal soul is the very essence which enables man to imagine, to think and to dream. The soul is a part of the Divine and therefore forms the manifestation of G-d in the world. The soul is, in other words, an image of the Divine, as it says in Genesis 1:27-28: "And G-d created man in His own image, in the image of G-d created He him; male and female created He them."<sup>1</sup>

The soul is what gives man free will and it is also what separates man from beast. The soul is not only the life force but allows man to go beyond even spirit because the intelligence of man can reach beyond spirit, however high one's intellect allows. This does not occur in the animal kingdom. In Genesis 2:7 it says: "Then the Lord G-d formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."<sup>2</sup> Man is able to create and form things according to his knowledge and ability.

The soul contains all the beautiful spiritual concepts and everything which is sacred is acknowledged by the soul. When an artist creates certain images,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

he is making manifest that which is kept hidden in the soul. Rav Kook, the first chief rabbi of Israel and a great mystic, pointed out that art in Hebrew is *omonut* and the root of this word comes from *emet*, which means truth. Therefore, the root AMN (*alef, mem, nun*) forms the following words: *aman* (artist), *omonut* (art), *neeman* (faithful) and *emunah* (faith or faithfulness). The common meaning of all the above words is the revealing of that which is hidden in the soul. Art is therefore considered as coming from the soul and is therefore holy. Rav Kook, when explaining an artist's capabilities, said: "He actualizes the lines of his soul."<sup>3</sup>

The artist by using his imagination, his thoughts and feelings, which lie hidden in the depths of his soul, creates in material form that which lies concealed deep inside. The words faith and artist are closely related, as the artist has to have faith in order to bring out that which exists in his soul. Faith is the essence of the soul and from this faith comes art, poetry, literature and music. This chapter will concentrate on the analysis of the soul in Medieval Jewish philosophy, the Kabbalah and in Hasidism.

## **JEWISH PHILOSOPHY**

Medieval Jewish philosophers were greatly influenced by the Greek and Arab thinkers and the terms soul, reason and intellect became popular and formed a large part of their philosophical research. In 711, in Babylonia, what became known as the Golden Age of the Jews, had begun. Every encouragement was given them to advance their own religious communal life. It was a time marked by liberality of intellect and the elevation of the arts and sciences. The Jews were responsible for translating Arabic books into Hebrew. The Hebrew translation would then be translated into Latin

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<sup>3</sup> Rabbi A. Yehoshua Zuckerman, "Art," in *The World of Rav Kook's Thought*, ed. by S. Rosenberg (New York: Avi Chai, 1991), 187.

thereby making it accessible to all of Europe. At this point one needs to speak about the philosophers who left their influence upon the majority of academics and writers of this time. Aristotle, Plato, Philo and Plotinus were among the first to form metaphorical systems. The philosophers were very concerned with relating the meaning of religion to reason and they focused on the concept of the soul.

Saadia, one of the most prominent Jewish philosophers, appeared among the Jews of Babylonia about the year 900. Saadia was soon elected the gaon, or rector, of the great academy that flourished in Sura. He wanted to put Judaism at the highest possible intellectual and cultural level. Saadia wrote poetry and above that arranged a rhyming diction of Hebrew to help other Jewish poets. His important accomplishment was a philosophical work called *Beliefs and Opinions*. He set about arguing that religion and reason were not in conflict and also that the profundity of spiritual truth in Judaism out-weighed that of Islam. Of the ten parts in Saadia's classic, the sixth part considers that of the soul. Saadia did not embrace the Platonic conception of the dualism of matter and spirit and neither did he welcome the tri-partite division of the soul. According to Bookstader:

To him [Saadia] the soul is a spiritual substance which is created simultaneously with the body; it is a unit and finds its seat in the heart - heart and soul, therefore, being synonymous terms in the Bible. This soul is indivisible and possesses a luminous nature like the spheres, but, it is simpler, finer and purer than they, and has a unique characteristic in that it is endowed with thought. It was created by G-d out of the primal ether from which the angels were made, at the same time the body was made and within the body. This union of body and soul was brought about in order to display that moral and ethical activity prescribed for it in the divine teaching. Should the soul neglect this it would defile and contaminate its purpose and purity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Phillip D. Bookstader, *The Idea of the Soul in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Philadelphia: M. Jacob, 1950), 25-26.

An interesting notion that Saadia considers is his reasoning for the confirmation that there is another world after this one, as no-one is really gratified and at peace in this world, even if one has succeeded in all the various material pursuits. He states that "there must be a reason for this, which is that the soul has an intuitional longing for the other world for which it is destined."<sup>5</sup> Concerning the predicament of the soul after death and the nature of reward and punishment in the next world, Saadia considers that because the body and the soul form a natural component during life and man's performance is the coupled striving of these two constituent regions of his being, it follows that future reward and punishment ought to be imposed upon the body and soul simultaneously.

The setting moves away from the East to the West to Spain from where extraordinary Jewish writers were to emerge. One such brilliant thinker to come forth from that period was the Hebrew poet and philosopher, Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021-1070). He was a living example of how philosophy and poetry could co-exist. He is best remembered to Jews for his deeply fervent liturgical poems which continue to be chanted by the devout in the various synagogues of the world. Ibn Gabirol proposed the concept of a material basis (matter and form) to spiritual essences as well as to the universe. This notion influenced the development of scientific conviction and of rationalism in Europe. His belief is that when two things have something in common it is the matter which is mutual and the form is what is different. The only true unity that exists is in G-d and whatever issues forth from G-d is affected with duality made up of matter and form. Together, matter and form are envisioned as a unit and the closer they are to their source the more consummate they are. This is explained by Bookstader: "To Gabirol corporeality and materiality are two different things. Prime matter, as it

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<sup>5</sup> J. Ross, *The Jewish Concept of Immortality and the Life Hereafter* (Ireland: Belfast Newsletter, 1948), 91.

emanates from the creator, invests all and assumes various gradations, the further this gets away from its original source, the creator, the less spiritual it becomes, and it assumes corporeality."<sup>6</sup>

This graded process reminds one distinctly of the Kabbalistic writers. All that issues from G-d is affected with the duality of matter and form and G-d is at one end of the cosmos and the corporeal world is at the other. Betwixt the two are the spiritual elements, Intelligence, Soul and Nature. The World Soul emanates, according to this theory, from the Universal Intellect and consequently has intellectual powers, which it issues forth, together with the subsequently emanated physical qualities of Nature, to the individual soul. Man's soul, a substance which is independent of the body, thus contains vegetative, animal and rational aspects and therefore mirrors the World Soul. Consequently, the soul's real existence is: "spiritual and eternal, and independent of the body. Its entrance into the body obscures its spiritual vision, though it does not lose all touch with the higher world from which it came."<sup>7</sup>

The leading Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages was Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides) (1135-1204), whom the Jews have known under the abbreviation RaMBaM (Rabbenu Moshe ben Maimon). He was an Aristotelian and blessed with a balanced mentality and stable character and he became a physician to Saladin in Cairo. He was also one of the greatest thinkers and developed a rational procedure for reconciling religious faith with reason. This procedure was even adopted by the scholars of the church. Naturally, this Aristotelian approach of trying to reinforce religion with philosophy was attacked by the traditionalists. Maimonides wrote on many subjects, including medicine and other secular subjects. His greatest

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<sup>6</sup> Bookstader, *The Idea of the Soul in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Ross, *The Jewish Concepts of Immortality and the Life Hereafter*, 102.

feat was his philosophical work *The Guide of the Perplexed*. This book was a challenge as it had to cope with the declarations of other religions and their continual faultfinding of Judaism. Maimonides also had to cope with Aristotle versus the Bible and how this affected the Jewish intelligentsia. The result was a brilliant book which was not only read by the leading Jews of the day, but also by the Christian theologians.

Maimonides considers the soul to be single in its basic nature but that its faculties are multitudinous. The faculties of the soul are as follows: 1. Nutrition, which is likewise called "growth"; 2. Sensation; 3. Imagination; 4. Desire; 5. Reason. At first Maimonides said that the soul of man is similar to the soul of all flesh, "simply a form associated with matter having no existence apart from the body. When the body is resolved into its component elements, the soul also perishes with all its parts including the rational."<sup>8</sup>

Maimonides therefore was motivated by reason. He maintained that by attaining the high and noble position of notable intellect one could live on forever. In other words a person has to earn the right of immortality by perfecting one's soul to the highest possibility. Of course this knowledge implies a true belief in the Unity of G-d and the soul referred to in this connection is not the soul which is needed for the body, but is rather the form of the soul, which is the knowledge it derives from G-d according to its ability. Maimonides' opinions on the world to come and on resurrection appear to be confusing. He made a statement regarding the resurrection that it is one of the foundations of the religion of Moses. However, he then says that in the world to come there is no physical body, but only souls of the virtuous without flesh, like the ministering angels. Subsequently, because there is no flesh, there can in like manner be no eating and no drinking nor

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<sup>8</sup> Bookstader, *The Idea of the Soul in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 95.

any other fleshly things which take place on earth. Maimonides seems to be implying that only souls will be resurrected, and not bodies. Cohen explains:

For all that, Maimonides is very firm in his teachings that bodies do not exist in the hereafter, nor are physical joys experienced. ... But the delights of the spirit are everlasting and uninterrupted, and there is no resemblance in any possible way between spiritual and bodily enjoyments. We are not sanctioned either by the Torah or by the divine philosophers to assert that the Angels, the stars; and the spheres enjoy no delights. In truth they have exceeding great delights in respect of what they comprehend of the Creator.<sup>9</sup>

To conclude, the great Jewish philosophers were unquestionably engrossed with the subject of the soul. During the Middle ages, religion was considered the finest wisdom: the problems of existence and questions of the state of the soul and body after one's earthly existence - these were some of the most significant themes which were dealt with in great detail.

Some philosophers adopted the views of the talmudic thinkers, which also differed from each other. Other philosophers discovered new views, sometimes controversial. Besides, the confusion of the subject, the medieval Jewish philosophers brought theoretical thought to an otherwise vague topic. The philosophers were clearly influenced by the Greek ideas of Plato and Aristotle. The main task of these philosophers seems to have been to harmonise the sentiments of immortality and resurrection.

In general, the Platonic view encouraged a perspective which considered the soul's pilgrimage towards the G-dhead as being filled with pure spiritual ecstasy. The body did not continue to survive and therefore this theory did not include that of resurrection. The Aristotelian philosophers generally thought of the acquired intellect as the immortal part of man which was either

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<sup>9</sup> A. Cohen, *The Teachings of Maimonides*, (U.S.A.: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1974), 242.

individual or general. While others, such as Saadia Gaon, reckoned that the righteous will definitely be bodily resurrected as the body and soul are one unit.

The Jews needed much endurance in order to survive the dangers involved in remaining Jews in Christian Spain and in the rest of Europe. One may presume that it was chiefly the writers, philosophers, rabbis and saints who encouraged the Jewish people to have positive thoughts and hopes. Plenty of books were being written and they had a profound influence on the Jewish community. Education seems to have been their main buttress. People studied the books and thereafter discussed them. The outcome was that Judaism became more than a religion of deep faith; but also a religion of intellectual intensity.

The beginning of the thirteenth century ushered into Christian Spain an end to the former tranquillity. The crusading spirit, the anti-Jewish measures of the various church councils and the actual attacks on innocent Jews showed that Christianity had now become the predominant religion. With this feeling of supremacy, came a brutal religious intolerance. The Jewish writers of the time were now turning away from the dominant Aristotelian philosophy, especially its intellectualisation of religion. The new thinking had to deal with the awareness of coming to terms with a forceful enemy. Guttman explains: "More pressing than the philosophic justification of Judaism was the need of Jewish apologetics against Christianity, and this gave philosophic work an entirely different focus and direction."<sup>10</sup>

One such person called upon to be the spokesperson of the embattled Spanish Jewry was Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (1194 - 1270), the Ramban, or Nahmanides in European literature. In 1263, Nahmanides was forced to

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<sup>10</sup> J. Guttman, *The Philosophy of Judaism*, (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1988), 242.

enter into a public debate before the king of Aragon about the belief in the messiahship of Jesus, in the Talmud. Even though Nahmanides effortlessly proved his point, he was banished from Spain and had to take on the risky journey to Palestine.

Nahmanides, along with many of his contemporaries was in disagreement with the daring rationalism of Maimonides. Nevertheless, Nahmanides was not an overt anti-rationalist, as his literary oeuvre was large, containing *halakah*, aggadah, Scriptural exegesis, homilies, Kabbalah, philosophy, poetry and polemics. He was also active as a communal leader and orator for Spanish Jewry during the most oppressive crises.<sup>11</sup>

Nahmanides's notion of Judaism emphasised the solely supernatural character of the Torah. This concept of Judaism upheld the historical nature of the Jewish religious world view, a point which had subsided in Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophies. His application of the Kabbalah encouraged an eclectic method whereby Nahmanides was able to shift his theological basis frequently. Guttman confirms that, "To these mystical doctrines were added Neoplatonic ideas, which were drawn partially from earlier Jewish philosophy and partly from non-Jewish sources. Together these elements produced a rich and independent type of mystical and theosophical speculation which, like mysticism generally, was completely opposed to rational philosophic thinking."<sup>12</sup>

Nahmanides, considered the soul of man to be pre-existent to the creation of the world. He envisions the souls as being treasured in a fountain of souls in the eternal light of G-d. This is the soul's perfect existence prior to descending into its material life whereby it will abide in a body.

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<sup>11</sup> David Novak, *The Theology of Nahmanides Systematically presented* (Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1992), xi.

<sup>12</sup> Guttman, *The Philosophy of Judaism*, 225.

Nahmanides believes in the *gilgul*, and therefore realises that every newborn child does not come in with "a fresh message from Heaven."<sup>13</sup> For Nahmanides the world to come is not a world of disembodied souls, but can be visualized as a world that is assembled and remains intact. He envisions that those who are resurrected will exist with both body and soul. The soul will then have higher knowledge than it had during its previous existence. The dependence of the body on the soul will invalidate the body's powers..."so that the body will subsist like the soul, no longer eating or drinking, just as Moses subsisted for 40 days on Mount Sinai."<sup>14</sup>

Ross says that Nahmanides's theory is one which attributes even to the flesh an almost spiritual importance. "Indeed, he [Nahmanides] thinks that the soul may have such an influence on the body as to transform the latter into so pure an essence that it will become safe for eternity."<sup>15</sup> Nahmanides says that if the body were absent, the soul would simply blend in with all other righteous souls. The souls could not then be rewarded in the world to come for its own virtue. This account of the resurrection is clearly a case of taking the middle path between the views of physicality of many of the Rabbis and the more spiritual views of others.

The doctrine of Nahmanides's book, *The Gate of Reward*, is expressively summarised by the late Prof. S. Schechter in *Studies in Judaism* whereby he quotes Chayim Vital:

R. Chayim Vital, in his "Book of Transmigrations of Souls", gives the following bold characteristic of the two great teachers of Judaism, Maimonides and Nahmanides. Their souls, says the author, both sprang forth from the head of Adam - it is a favorite idea of the Cabbalists to evolve the whole of ideal humanity from the archetype Adam - but the former, Maimonides, had his genius placed on the left curl of Adam, which is all judgement and severity,

<sup>13</sup> Ross, *The Jewish Concepts of Immortality and the Life Hereafter*, 242.

<sup>14</sup> Novak, *The Theology of Nahmanides systematically presented*, 126.

<sup>15</sup> Ross, *The Jewish Concepts of Immortality and the Life Hereafter*, 240.

whilst that of the latter, Nahmanides, had its place on the right curl, which represents rather mercy and tenderness.<sup>16</sup>

In the historical development of the Kabbalah consideration of the soul forms a major part of the Zohar. The view of the soul as an image of G-d, although with particular differences meant that G-d and man contain within their being the complete structure of the universe. Although man does not contain all that G-d contains, as G-d is the Creator and Initiator "in whom everything is rooted and all potency is hidden",<sup>17</sup> our part is in the creation process, to conclude the procedure by being the representative through whom all the capabilities are made manifest. In other words, "what exists seminally in G-d unfolds and develops in man."<sup>18</sup>

In Chabad Hasidism there seems to be a similar consensus. According to Rabbi Shneur Zalman, although man is a finite creature, he has been presented with an infinite, or otherworldly quality. This quality in man is the Divine soul and it is this significant part of man which participates in a vital way in the nature of G-d. Man is therefore able, by certain means "...to rise above his natural limitations, and establish communication with G-d."<sup>19</sup>

## **KABBALAH**

The origins of the Kabbalah are obscure as it had been received by its disciples from their masters and so perpetuated in secrecy. Only during the fall of the Second Temple did it occur that the masters began to write down their knowledge in manuscript form. The popularity of the Kabbalistic tradition slowly grew and by the fourteenth century the term Kabbalist had become the customary designation for the teachers of this hidden

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 238.

<sup>17</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), 152.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>19</sup> N. Mindels, *The Philosophy of Chabad* (New York: Kehot Publication Society, 1973), 10.

knowledge, and the term Kabbalah was used to refer to those existing manuscripts of that knowledge. After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the Kabbalah became popularly established in the sixteenth century and the mystical philosophies of the Zohar became centrally important within the Kabbalistic tradition. The Zohar has enabled the Jew to imagine the presence of G-d and filled him with a constant longing for communion with Him. In the Zohar the reader finds himself wandering through an enchanted forest, a mysticism of the imagination where nothing is dry or doctrinaire. A central principle contained in the Kabbalah is that whatever exists here below on earth resembles what is above. The Kabbalists believe that a person's soul is an echo of G-d. Dr Abelson describes this phenomenon as follows: "In the Kingdom of man's soul there are processes going on which are the exact counterpart of those going on in the upper world."<sup>20</sup>

In all branches of the Kabbalah, the soul as a spiritual entity which plays the highest of high parts in man's relation with the unseen, is brought to the fore. The authors of the Kabbalah were aware:

... that the final reality of G-d was beyond man's understanding ... that the power that radiates from the G-dhead is beyond man's enduring unless it is received at a great psychic distance or "veiled" by psychic obstacles ... They believed it was the goal of every human soul to be re-united eventually with the G-dhead ... that the union could occur only when the soul had perfected itself in life or in many lives here on earth.<sup>21</sup>

As mentioned above, in the Kabbalistic imagination the soul originates from the G-dhead itself and therefore, man is deemed as both the peak and the final culmination of the creative process. The rudimentary devising of this viewpoint can first be discovered in the Kabbalah of Gerona and in the Zohar. "...[Man] is composed of all ten *sefirot* and "of all spiritual things,"

<sup>20</sup> Simeon ben Yohai, *The Zohar*, Rev. ed. transl. by H. Sperling and M. Simon and intro. by J. Abelson, (London: The Soncino Press Ltd., 1984), xxi.

<sup>21</sup> J. Abelson, *Jewish Mysticism*, (New York: Herman Press, 1969), 14-15.

that is, of the supernal principles that constitute the attributes of the G-dhead."<sup>22</sup> This statement obviously has far-reaching consequences in that, if the soul is made up of the various *sefirot*, it was already a distinct spiritual entity before its affiliation with the world of action, or the physical world. There were different opinions on this issue. According to the Midrash ha-Ne'elam the highest part of the soul, that of the *neshamah*, even flows out from the Throne of Glory, a sphere which is below the *sefirot* though beyond the intellect. According to this view, even though the *neshamah* is created, it is a most superior creation. However, in the principal component of the Zohar, this account is relinquished and each section of the soul is allocated a root in the realm of the *sefirot*: "the *nefesh* originates in the *sefirah Malkhut*, the *ru'ah* in the *sefirah tiferet*, and the *neshamah* in the *sefirah Binah*. The descent of the supernal *neshamah* is brought about by the "holy union" of the "king" (*melekh*) and the "queen" (*matronita*), who are synonymous with the *Sefirot Tiferet* (or *Yesod*) and *Malkhut*."<sup>23</sup> The essence of every soul is a fusion of the two sexes, and only in the passage of their descent do the souls split into male souls and female souls. There is also an affinity here to the act of childbirth. The Zohar makes reference to a tree from which the souls emanate; and thereafter they fly onto earth which is alluded to as the womb. The "tree is *Tiferet* or *Yesod*, from which the souls fly to the *Shekhinah* where they are received like semen into her womb."<sup>24</sup>

The greatest difference between the Zohar and the Hebrew Bible is the weight the Zohar gives to the subject of the soul. A declaration like: "For dust thou are and unto dust thou shalt return" (Genesis 111:19) is not part of the Zohar's style. One must take into account though that the Hebrew Bible has two viewpoints on the soul. On the one hand the faith of ancient Israel

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<sup>22</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 152.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

<sup>24</sup> Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, transl. by David Goldstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 679-680.

did not conceive of a person as "an immortal, eternal, or deathless soul trapped in a body, but as a living mixture of breath and earth."<sup>25</sup> An animated person (or *nephesh*) depended on a blend of breath and earth in order to stay alive. However at death, the individual ceased to exist, the breath was returned to G-d and the clay reverted to earth. There was no remaining part of the person except for a vestige that moved downward to the shadowy underworld of She'ol. However, Ross argues that the biblical writers did not envision death as dark and gloomy, but rather imagined death as a release for the soul into the realms to where it truly belongs. He quotes various excerpts which illustrate this interpretation such as in Genesis 35:29 which says: "Isaac expired and was gathered to his people", which Ross explains it to mean that Isaac's soul was united with the souls of his forefathers.<sup>26</sup> There are many such references which insinuate the belief in the immortal soul.

Nevertheless, man's source is conceived of in the Zohar, in a far more genteel and poetic way, as is his destiny in the world to come. The author of the Zohar is convinced about the pre-existence of souls since the beginning of creation. There are beautiful descriptions of the souls, of how they were hidden in the womb of eternity. Scholem quotes a section from the Zohar which enables one to visualize the pre-existing souls:

Since the day when it occurred to G-d to create the world, and even before it was really created, all the souls of the righteous were hidden in the divine idea, everyone in its peculiar form. When He shaped the world, they were actualised and they stood before Him in their various forms in the supreme heights [still in the Sefirotic world] and only then did He place them in a treasure-house in the upper Paradise. There the souls live in pure celestial garments and enjoy the bliss of the beatific vision. Their progress from the sefirotic sphere to the paradisaical realm, which

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<sup>25</sup> David Chidester, *Patterns of Transcendence: Religion, Death and Dying*, (California: Wadsworth Publishing Co. 1990), 184.

<sup>26</sup> Ross, *The Jewish Concepts of Immortality and the Life Hereafter*, 1-2.

latter is already outside G-d, is interpreted as a consequence of the mystical "union of the King and the Shekhinah."<sup>27</sup>

The fact that there is no common belief among the rabbis and philosophers about the after-life also seems to hold true of the Kabbalistic writers. Because the Kabbalists were more imaginative and visual in their outlook, it is obvious that within the topic of life after death, this is where the Kabbalists could excel. This becomes even more apparent, when one considers the high place which the Kabbalah grants to the soul. The first step towards the soul's ascent back to the world of the *sefirot* is that of judgement. Judgement takes place even before the death of the person. When the image of the person (who is about to depart from the world) is removed then a place is prepared for that person's *neshamah*. When the decision is made as to the soul's fate whether it is going to leave the body or not, then once the final instant of death arrives, another judgement takes place and the soul signs the deed of confession and then the body and soul separate from one another. The Zohar mentions two conflicting visions which appears before a person's eyes while he or she is in the process of dying. The reason why this occurs now and not previously is because the dying person is given an extra supernatural spirit that enables the person to see other-worldly beings. The one vision mentioned is that of the heavenly *Shekhinah* with her three ministering angels. The soul is overcome with longing for communion with the *Shekhinah*. The other vision is that of the frightening appearance of the angel of death. One such description of this terrifying angel is explained as follows:

The King's guard descends and stands before him at his feet with a sharpened sword in his hand. The man raises his eyes and sees the walls of the room burning with the fire that emanates from him. And then he sees him himself in front of him, covered with eyes, clothed in fire, burning in the man's presence.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), 242.

<sup>28</sup> Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 833.

As the person is about to die, he has the most extraordinary visions. The dying person sees his relative and friends who had passed on previously and now reside in the next world. This time of a dying person's vision is at his best and he can recognize all his dead relatives just as he saw them while they were still alive. If the dying man is virtuous then all his dead friends and relatives will celebrate with him and address him in a rejoicing fashion. However, if he is evil, then only the wicked will appear before him and they wail and moan with the dying person. When the soul actually leaves the body, the spirits of his relatives and friends will escort him to the next world and let it see the abode where it will live, either to delight in paradise or to endure chastisement.<sup>29</sup>

The dying man is then shown another vision which he was not allowed to see while still alive. This is the vision of Adam. The dying man and Adam chat together. "Come and see. No man leaves the world without first seeing Adam. He asks the man the reason for his departure from the world, and he replies, 'Alas, it is all your fault that I have to leave the world.' And [Adam] says, 'My son, I transgressed just one commandment and was punished because of it. Consider how many sins you have committed, and how many of your Master's commandments you have transgressed.'"<sup>30</sup> The incentive for this conflict is to free man of the fallacy that his death is a direct result of the sin of Adam. It is authentic that death arrived in the world because of the serpent's conspiracy, but each person flounders because of his own wickedness, and is contaminated by the serpent as a result of his own wickedness.<sup>31</sup>

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29 Ibid, 833.

30 Ibid, 833.

31 Ibid, 833.

The dying man's glorification reaches its peak when he is able to eventually see the *Shekhinah*, who shows herself to him accompanied by three ministering angels. Tishby explains this vision:

For it has been taught that Rabbi Judah said: The time of man's departure is the great day of judgement, for the soul is separated from the body. And no man leaves the world before he sees the *Shekhinah*. This is the meaning of 'No man can see Me and live' (Exodus 33:20). And with the *Shekhinah* there come three ministering angels to receive the soul of the righteous." The angels require proof of the man's good deeds, and the soul gives evidence before them. "Then the soul of the righteous rejoices in her good deeds, and rejoices because she has been remembered." The soul is stirred by the sight of the *Shekhinah*, and longs for communion with her. "No man dies before he sees the *Shekhinah*, and because of its deep yearning for the *Shekhinah* the soul departs in order to greet her."<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, the soul is not allowed to take pleasure from the radiance of the *Shekhinah* for too long, as the angel of death is moving around and its dark image is waiting to take the place of the 'Queen of Light'. The reason given by the Zohar for such a drastic change in the vision from one of light to one of darkness, is in order to explain the practice of closing the eyes of the dead person. There are times when a dead person's eyes stay open as a result of his unwavering desire to be in the *Shekhinah's* company, and therefore his relatives have to close his eyes to prevent the holy vision that his eyes have taken in from being impaired. "For an alien, unholy vision is ready to confront him, and the eye that has just seen a celestial, holy vision must not look upon an alien vision".<sup>33</sup>

The *nefesh*, the lowest part of the soul, is only taken by the angel of death. The *neshamah* departs with a kiss and is taken away by Gabriel. Scholem explains that the *neshamah* is not exposed to sin and chastisement. The *neshamah* is taken to the "treasury" beneath the throne of glory where it

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 834.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 834.

stays until the resurrection.<sup>34</sup> The soul as it departs from the body, is greeted by relatives and friends who are already in the next world. If the soul has been sent to *Gehinnom*, then only the wicked of them appear before him and bemoan his fate. When the soul has been noble and good, then the welcoming spirits celebrate his destiny in the Garden of Eden.<sup>35</sup>

The distinction between the *olam ha-neshamot* ("the world of souls") and the *olam ha-ba* ("the world to come") which would be after the resurrection, was a more or less accepted notion in the Kabbalah. The journey the soul takes to get to the "world of souls" seems similar, but in reverse, to its descent into the world of matter. In the "world of souls", the *neshamot* retain their individuality. Nahmanides had a unique imagination and therefore explained the resurrection in a unique way. He said that following the ordinary physical life of the person, the body would be refined and then clothed in *malakhut* ("the garments of the angels"), and thereafter, proceed into the unfolding spiritual world, which would arrive once the resurrection has taken place. In this ethereal world the spiritual bodies would be assembled together in the various *sefirot*. There were inconsistent opinions as to whether the souls would maintain their separate identities. However, according to Abelson, the Zohar does speak throughout of a cosmic union, "a coming together, a fusion, of all the manifold universes 'above' and 'below'. And man, who, mainly by reason of his soul, is a denizen of these multiple worlds, becomes, whilst striving after communion with the Divine, a sharer in these cosmic acts of intercourse ..." <sup>36</sup>

The Zohar goes on to elaborate how the soul makes a vow before G-d to perform piously while on earth. If the soul succeeds in carrying out *mitzvot*, the soul will, during its earthly stay, weave a mystical garment which it will

<sup>34</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 333.

<sup>35</sup> Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 833.

<sup>36</sup> Abelson, *Jewish Mysticism*, xx.

wear after death in the lower Paradise. Before the souls descend to earth they have to wait in a storehouse in the Garden of Eden which is also named "the body of the souls". Over here the souls become more autonomous whereby they are clothed with celestial garments of light, and it becomes noticeable as to how their tangible garments in this world will be.<sup>37</sup>

The Zohar explains the journey of the soul descending to earth. From the Storehouse in the Garden of Eden, the soul moves into the halls of the Upper Garden of Eden which is called the "Holy of Holies." This hall is likened to a female which is always ready to receive, in this case it is equipped to accept all the holy spirits and souls that are descending to earth. This hall is a beautiful place of delight for the souls as the Holy One takes pleasure in them. The souls move to the fifth hall, the hall of Love. Since the world was created, all the souls have waited here to descend to earth.

From the fifth hall the souls move into the sapphire pavement and then soar down to the lower Garden of Eden where they spend thirty days to prepare them for life on earth. The soul is shown both the sufferings of *Gehinnom* and the bliss of the Garden of Eden. The soul swears to follow the principles of the Torah and to meditate on the mysteries thereof. Gabriel therewith introduces the spirit into the body. There are two other accompanying angels who remain with the soul throughout its life. It appears that these angels become the conscience of the person. The author of the Zohar likens the soul's stay in the Garden of Eden to learning in an academy, as follows: "Everything that [the souls] learn in this world they already knew before they came into this world."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 702.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 751.

According to the Zohar, the souls are not enthusiastic about descending to earth. However, there is a definite reason why the soul needs to, and that is in order to perfect itself so that it can achieve everlasting bliss in the upper world. The only way in which the soul can reach perfection is by inhabiting a physical body in order to render virtuous deeds. Before concluding on this topic of the pre-existence of souls, a quote from the Zohar is given to explain how significant the soul's destiny is to the fate of our world:

When the soul is perfected in this world, when it ascends to the place to which it is linked, then it is perfect on all sides, both above and below. And when the soul ascends, the desire of the female is aroused for the male, and then water flows upward from below, and the cistern becomes a well of living water. Then there is union and unification, desire and pleasure for that place is perfected through the soul of the righteous, and love and desire are aroused on high and [all] is united together.<sup>39</sup>

There are three parts of the soul, these being the *nefesh*, *ru'ah* and the *neshamah*. The seemingly predominant outlook in the Zohar is that the soul is visualized as three separate sections and are named by the Hebrew phrases: *nefesh*, *ru'ah* and *neshamah*. The *nefesh* is the lowest part and it appears in every person from the moment of birth as it is the origin of one's animal vitality. The *nefesh* satisfies the body's needs and is the inherent capacity of feeling and action which is needed to sustain the body. When a person manages to rise above his animal vitality then the *ru'ah* is stimulated and it enlightens the *nefesh*. The *ru'ah* is necessary for the maintenance of the *nefesh*, "for the *nefesh* survives only because of the power of the *ru'ah*, which acts like the breeze that blows."<sup>40</sup>

The *neshamah*, which is the highest of the three parts of the soul, is also the most superior. When a man engages himself in the study of Torah and its commandments, he is able to imagine the magnificent mysteries of the G-

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 754.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 686.

dhead. The *neshamah* originates from the origin of life, and from the source of intelligence and wisdom. The exceptional rank of the *neshamah* is particularly emphasised. It is the most superior of all and also the most holy. There are quite a few passages in the Zohar which visualize the source of the *neshamah* as being the outcome of divine intercourse between *tiferet* and *malkhut*. The *Shekhinah* is made pregnant by her "husband", *tiferet*, and the *neshamah* is formed as an embryo in its mother's womb.

Tishby refers to the following passage by Rabbi Moses Cordovero: "It is known that the process of transmission of the soul (*neshamah*) from *Binah* to *Tiferet* and *Malkhut* is hidden and subtle, like the way in which semen moves from the brain of the male to the male organ, and from the brain of the female to the female organ."<sup>41</sup> It is because of such descriptions that the Zohar is known for its explicit sexual illustrations. According to Scholem, certain Kabbalists of Gerona upheld the opinion that the origin of the *neshamah* was in the *sefirah* of *hokhmah* (Divine Wisdom), which means that some Kabbalists felt that man's mystical comprehension could obtain higher elevation.<sup>42</sup>

A further prevailing idea in the Zohar is the notion that the soul emanates on a level higher than that of the angels, as man is able to plummet to unmentionable depths of baseness, but he also has the ability, when he accomplishes his true mission, of ascending to heights even higher than the angelic sphere.<sup>43</sup> The soul is therefore "unlike other beings, including even the halls and the most exalted angels, who are no more than a nondivine extension, an emanatory projection from the last *Sefirah*."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 698.

<sup>42</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), 156.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>44</sup> Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 680.

As well as the sentiment of the tripartite soul, the Kabbalists subsequent to the Zohar, considered two extra higher parts of the soul, called *hayyah* and *yehidah*. They were regarded as the lofty levels of premonition and awareness and only a couple of people are blessed with these levels. The writings of the Chabad rabbis discuss these two parts of the soul in great detail, hence I will discuss this topic in that section. Also mentioned in the Zohar and in the works of the followers of Isaac Luria, is the word '*tselem*' which is not similar to any sections of the soul already mentioned. *Tselem* is referred to in the Bible, in Gen. 1:6, where it says: "Let us make man in our image [*Tselem*], after our likeness". The *tselem* is what each person has that is particularly unique to him. The *tselem* therefore, gives the person a certain individuality. It also acts as man's ethereal garment, acting as an intermediary between one's physical body and one's soul. The *tselem* acts as a garment for the soul in the celestial paradise before descending to the lower world, as well as during the soul's ascent after physical death. Contrary to the soul, the *tselem* advances in consonance with the biological activity of the body. The interesting aspect of the *tselem* is that it is only visible to the intuitive eye of the Kabbalist. The Kabbalists played on the word shadow (*zel*) and conceived of the shadow as being a projection of the inner *tselem*. This resulted in numerous widespread magical superstitions that were prevalent during the Middle Ages in Europe.<sup>45</sup>

The Zohar gives a very dim view of the physical body. According to this view, the divine soul is regarded as the gist of man, the body is simply an exterior garment and has no bearing on man's essential human character. The Zohar takes the biblical passage of Job 10:11 as its reference: "You have clothed me with skin and flesh." The Zohar states:

If skin and flesh are a garment, examine what man really is, for he is inside the garment. ... Man, indeed, in this world is man only

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<sup>45</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 158.

when there are three things joined together in a single bond so that he might be the pattern of man, to wit, *nefesh*, *ru'ah*, and *neshamah*. ... And when man dies he does so only after stripping off the garment.<sup>46</sup>

The soul is therefore, regarded as being alienated in the body and is viewed as yearning to escape to its source. The body is likened to a prison, whereby the soul yearns to escape and return to the place to which it properly belongs. However, there are times whereby the soul has a temporary release, and this is seen during flashes of religious rapture, when the soul can relish in the brilliance of the *Shekhinah*. The other way of experiencing a temporary release from the shackles of the body is to meditate on one's own soul. The Zohar explains:

So we see that there is [in the parts of the soul] a throne for a throne, and a throne for the most supreme above them, and when you examine the levels you will find the mystery of wisdom in this matter, and everything is wisdom, so that you might perceive in this way matters that are sealed. ... Since the man who intends to penetrate the royal palace needs first to know his own soul ... [which] is modelled on its Creator who created it .... Therefore, when man knows the eminence and nature of the soul, his thoughts and understanding will spread from there to the secrets of royal matters.<sup>47</sup>

In the Hekhalot literature, which will be discussed in length in chapter four, mention was made of how the ancient Jewish mystics exercised ascent of the soul. The reason why it was known that only the souls were ascending, is because the bodies of the rabbis who were meditating on the higher realms and conveying supernatural secrets, were witnessed as remaining on the ground. Moshe Idel explains that the descriptions of the Merkavah can be deciphered to mean that the vision of the divine palaces and the angels, are not actually an external happening, but are really the chambers within one's own consciousness. Many great rabbis reported to have great visions.

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<sup>46</sup> Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 680.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 683.

and insights, including spirit communication, while they were experiencing the ascent of the soul. Rabbi Isaac Luria, the great Kabbalist of Safed often related his journeys to the heavens accompanied by angels. The angels, according to Isaac Luria would take him to the academies of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Eliezer or any other prophets to whom he wanted to go. Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov was also well known for soul ascents. In the celebrated letter to his brother-in-law, he relates how his soul communicated with those souls of the dead:

On *Rosh ha-shanah* of the year 5507 [1746], I performed an incantation for the ascent of the soul, known to you. And in that vision I saw wondrous things, which I had never seen until then from the day that I became spiritually aware. And it is impossible to relate and to tell what I saw and learned in that ascent hither, even in private. But when I returned to the lower Paradise, I saw the souls of living and of dead persons, both of those with whom I was acquainted and of those with whom I was not acquainted ... numberless, in a to-and-fro movement, ascending from one world to the other through the column known to adepts in esoteric matters.<sup>48</sup>

Another function of the soul which took place within the lively imagination of the Kabbalist, is the responsibility it has towards the *Shekhinah*. The *Shekhinah* is akin to the soul's mother, like a son who provides for his parents. The soul is capable and is also required to support the *Shekhinah*, to reinforce her situation, and to amalgamate her with the other *sefirot*, and especially with her companion, the *sefirah tiferet*, so that intercourse may ensue. The *Shekhinah*, is consequently reliant on man's soul for her position. Man is moreover extraordinary in that he is able to blemish the *Shekhinah* and demolish her rank. This complementary association between man and the *Shekhinah* is utterly important, because the actual reality of good and evil relies upon it.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 94.

<sup>49</sup> Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 683-684.

Although Jewish philosophy had divergent views about transmigration, it was taken for granted in the literature of the Kabbalah. It was first written about in the *Sefer ha-Bahir* (late twelfth century). Following the *Bahir* the principle of *gilgul* (transmigration) stirred the imagination of the Kabbalists and became one of the primary tenets of the Kabbalah, although there were diverse opinions apropos to details. *Gilgul* explained the inadequacy of justice in the world and also the grim misery of the righteous and the flourishing of the evil. In the early Kabbalah, *gilgul* was considered to apply only to offences against procreation and sexual transgressions. Even so, *gilgul* nevertheless showed the grace of G-d, as one's soul is never extinguished, but instead is allowed reparation. The *Bahir* established that *gilgul* may proceed for one thousand generations, but in the Spanish Kabbalah the soul transmigrates three times while making amends. The virtuous are supposed to transmigrate ceaselessly so as to assist the cosmos.<sup>50</sup>

Adin Steinsaltz explains the doctrine of *gilgul* in a lucid, yet analytical way. He states that the soul has a duty to accomplish its tasks. Once the soul has completed its *tikkun* (repairing its own part of the world), then it can await death and perfection. However, the souls who have not fulfilled their duties have to reincarnate in another body and try once again to complete its *tikkun*. The result of this concept is that most souls in the world are not new and most people carry various baggage from former life-times. The doctrine then becomes complicated as Steinsaltz explains that when a person reincarnates, one does not acquire the former self again, as the soul appears in changed situations. To complicate matters even more, some souls are made up of more than a single previous person and partake of a couple of persons. A celebrated soul is often reincarnated in a couple of

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<sup>50</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 345-346.

people so as to assist them to fulfil different sections of their lives. Consequently, a person is also made up of things from past incarnations and this explains why often some incidents may occur which do not seem to pertain to the present, yet the person has to correct whatever is given to him to amend "and this struggle of the soul is also the struggle and way of the world toward its redemption."<sup>51</sup>

## HASIDISM

Chabad Hasidism is a strand of Judaism which concentrates more than any other on the subject of the soul and appears to be the Jewish mouth-piece on the concept of the soul. Hasidic literature is full of ideas and theories of the soul and its various functions. Therefore it is necessary to focus on the Hasidic literature when discussing the soul. Before commencing on the topic of Chabad Hasidism, it is appropriate to include here the opinions on the soul of the Maharal, Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague. Besides being honoured by both Jews and Gentiles alike in Prague, Abraham Isaac Kook regards Loew as the "father of Hasidism" and Gershon Scholem also acknowledged Loew's influence and wrote of him as "the first Hasidic writer."<sup>52</sup>

Jewish mysticism has been divided into Kabbalah *ma'asit* and Kabbalah *iyunit*, practical mysticism and speculative mysticism. Magic and mystical experiences fall under practical mysticism, whereas a systematised version of esoteric wisdom based on custom, knowledge, and antiquity, is known as speculative mysticism. Rabbi Loew, in the manifold legends about him, all credit him as being the master of practical mysticism. However, it turns out

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<sup>51</sup> Adin Steinsaltz, *The Thirteen Petalled Rose* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 63-65.

<sup>52</sup> B. Sherwin, *Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The life and works of Judah Loew of Prague* (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982), 52.

that his speculative mysticism is as impressive (if not more so) than his purported magical abilities.

Judah Loew was the head of the Jewish community in Prague in 1599. Prague is a most mysterious city and although the once bountiful Jewish ghetto, is now no more, the spirits of the people live on. Sherwin explains the mystery of this city in which the chair of Loew still stands in the synagogue:

Its Jews are gone, but their presence remains. Though brutally murdered, their legends survive. By telling their tale, we resurrect their Atlantis. By reviving their legends, we awaken their spirits. Their souls haunt the old ghetto of Prague. Their presence pervades the old synagogue in Prague. For there they go to be with their master, the "exalted" Judah Loew, called the "Maharal", rabbi of Prague. Though dead for generations, he is still rabbi of Prague. Though there have been rabbis in Prague, only he was and is rabbi of Prague.<sup>53</sup>

According to Loew, man is the focal point of all existence. If man were absent, the world would have no objective and no actual meaning. Man is the intermediary between the upper and lower worlds. Reality for Loew embodies "three worlds, or three dimensions of existence: the supernatural, the intermediate, and the natural; the "world to come" (*olam ha-ba*), the "intermediary world" (*olam ha-emza'i*), and "this world" (*olam ha-zeh*).<sup>54</sup> Man impersonates and manifests all three worlds.

Loew's attitude to the body was not very favourable. The body is potentially evil and one must consequently endeavour to decontaminate it. Purification of the body is not an end in itself, but a formula to perfect the soul. However just as the body is dependent on the soul for its framework and direction, the soul too needs the body to perform as the tool by means of which it may

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 110.

achieve perfection. Loew also stressed that human sex has metaphysical connotations as marriage and sex allows for physical completion.

Loew gives credence to the soul being located in the heart as all physical functions adhere to the heart and hence upon the soul in order to operate. By cleansing the physical aspects of the soul (those that man shares with the animals) the spiritual facet of the soul which is perceived as the intellectual, supernatural aspect of man, will take over. Animals and angels have no evil inclination and therefore only need to follow their natures. The human soul contains the evil inclination and by conquering his blemishes, by recognising his will, by embracing the Torah and by hallowed deeds, man can surpass the angels. As a result, perfection of the soul, according to Loew, is obtained by observing the commandments of the Torah. Loew says the Torah is equivalent to the supernatural realm and the human intellect. Sherwin explains: "For Loew, only by means of the spiritual Torah can material man open a door to the divine. He may try to pierce the shield of matter separating himself from G-d ... [However] since 'this world' represents privation, while only the world to come represents true existence and immortality, man's final perfection lies not in this world but in the world to come."<sup>55</sup>

Following the importance Loew places on the observance of the commandments, the final perfection of man is *devekut* with G-d. G-d is actually the origin of all love and differs from all other mortal loves. Human lovers maintain each their own disposition. Love of G-d is exclusive in that it is possible to reach a state of total cleaving in which the self is dissolved and totally immersed in the object of love. A prior oneness, split by creation, disjoined by sin, is retrieved. The soul and the human intellect, perfected of their material substances through observance of the commandments are

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 121-122.

now equipped, by means of love of G-d, to transfer man back to his former home, paradise. However one cannot accomplish genuine and comprehensive *devekut* in this world. In effect, the purpose of the observance of the commandments and love of the Torah and G-d, is to attempt to achieve complete *devekut* with G-d in the world to come.<sup>56</sup>

The Hasidic movement began in the eighteenth century and rapidly began to assume the social and ideologic characteristics that have come to be its main contribution to Jewish life. By the nineteenth century Hasidism could boast a sizable library whose volumes reflected its diverse ideological trends, and it came into its own as a movement exercising significant theological influence, rather than existing merely as a social and historical force. In the era preceding the emergence of Hasidism, Jewish culture, which had previously been primarily rabbinical or philosophical, had undergone a great metamorphosis along Kabbalistic lines and became almost totally Kabbalistic during the sixteenth century with the Kabbalistic philosophy of Rabbi Isaac Luria gaining a position of pre-eminence. In this intellectual and spiritual climate Hasidism came under the influence of the Kabbalah in many respects, receiving its fundamental ideas and theological terminology therefrom. The Kabbalistic ideas utilized by Hasidism derived from two main sources: The *sefirot* doctrine of the Zohar and Rabbi Isaac Luria's doctrine of *zimzum*, *shevirah* and *tikkun* which makes up Luria's cosmic history and many of his other revolutionary ideas, although not without considerable modification.<sup>57</sup>

The sentiment that the human soul is a component of G-d, was often alluded to in early Hasidic literature. However, this notion reaches a popular level of expression in the written output of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady, the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 135-141.

<sup>57</sup> J. Dan, *The Teaching of Hasidism*, (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1983), 1-9.

founder of Chabad Hasidism. This school of Hasidic thought was very influenced by the instruction of Judah Loew and Shneur Zalman was a direct descendant of his. Adin Steinsaltz states that the Tanya written by Shneur Zalman, was assembled from the works of virtuous authors, amongst others there was the "Maharal, a scholar of great learning and power, especially in the esoteric wisdom."<sup>58</sup>

Shneur Zalman of Lyady (1745-1813), the founder of Chabad Hasidism, was born in Liozna, Belorussia. Zalman proved himself to be a diligent pupil and in 1770 he was appointed the assignment of establishing a new *Shulkhan Arukh*. In 1788, Zalman was nominated as the Hasidic leader of Reisen. It was already evident that Zalman had invented a particular kind of Hasidim, to become known as Chabad. In 1797 the *Likkutei Amarim* ("collected sayings"), which became known as the Tanya, was published anonymously. The Tanya was received as the standard source of Chabad Hasidism and was known as "the written law of Habad".<sup>59</sup> According to Nissan Mindel, Zalman's philosophical system is fundamentally an integration between the Kabbalah and the halachah which leads to a union between the mystical and rational notions of Jewish thought.<sup>60</sup>

Shneur Zalman, at the outset of his writing, states that in man it is the Divine soul which is visualized as participating in a genuine way with the essence of G-d. Man is able within his imagination to ascend above his intrinsic restrictions, and corroborate interaction with G-d. "But, in accordance with the well-known adage that a man cannot raise himself by pulling at his hair, he has to find the means, outside and beyond himself, whereby to actualise

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<sup>58</sup> Adin Steinsaltz, *The Long Shorter Way: Discourses of Chasidic Thought*, ed. and transl. by Yehuda Hanegbi, (Jason Aronson, 1989), xiii.

<sup>59</sup> F. Seckbach ed. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd, 1972), 1432-1433.

<sup>60</sup> Mindel, *The Philosophy of Chabad*, 3.

his infinite potentials."<sup>61</sup> Steinsaltz says, in *The Sustaining Utterance* (which is a commentary on the Tanya), that one cannot depend on inspirations. If one receives an inspiration then it must be treated as a gift from Heaven. One must appreciate the gift, but not take it for granted that the gift will continue to arrive at will. One has to labour on oneself in order to know love of G-d. There are two kinds of love of G-d that need to be understood. The first kind of love is a natural love, in that the soul craves for its creator by its very temperament, as it is actually a part of the Divine. This craving is precisely a need for love of itself. The second kind of love is one that arrives from deliberate striving and meditation in order to allow one's imagination to soar upward. While the soul is still in the body it is constrained with matter and cannot adhere to G-d with complete surrender.<sup>62</sup>

Zalman states that knowledge of oneself is a method to knowledge of G-d and thereafter to a knowledge of the created universe. The groundwork of Zalman's psychological system is based on the principle of the "two souls". These souls are envisioned as the root of all human performance, and of the conscious and unconscious impetus behind them. Firstly, the "animal soul" (*nefesh ha-bahamit*) is the critical principle that keeps the physical body alive. Another name for the "animal-soul" is "vital soul" (*nefesh ha-chiyyunit*) and Zalman uses both terms interrelatedly. This "vital soul" is the origin of the bodily instincts and desire and from it the senses acquire their awareness. The "vital soul" in man is similar to the "vital" nature that enlivens all created beings, such as the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms. However, the vital soul in man accommodates specific rudimentary characteristics, such as intellectual and emotional traits, which are not present in the lower animal class, and which brand the "animal soul" in man specifically "human". These qualities incorporate self-respect, pride,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>62</sup> Adin Steinsaltz, *The Sustaining Utterance: Discourses of Chasidic Thought*, ed. and transl. by Yehuda Hanegbi (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1989), 3.

humility, aspiration, and various other attributes; some upright and some corrupt, which are mostly normal and are generally called "human nature".

The second soul is imagined as "a part of G-d above indeed", and termed the "Divine Soul" (*nefesh ha-elohit*). It is entirely autonomous of the body as it exists before coming into the body and continues to exist after the body is deceased. The divine source of the soul enables the soul, while still inhabiting the body, to ascend and to challenge the natural constitution of the human being. The result is that Zalman presumes that there are two dissimilar sources of human activity, "one natural and this-worldly; the other supernatural and other-worldly, and in his terminology - the "Animal soul" and "Divine soul," respectively. These two sources are combined in the living individual."<sup>63</sup>

We are reminded by Zalman that the discord which one experiences daily concerning that which one is supposed to do and that which one actually sets out to do, is not the result of a disagreement between the body and mind. We must imagine that we have a body and two minds, as each soul, spoken of above, has a mind of its own, with a determination and objective of its own. Steinsaltz says that this idea stems from Genesis 25:23 when Rebecca asks G-d what kind of conflict was going on in her womb. She was told that there were two very different personalities in her womb and they would create two separate nations. Steinsaltz explains how this story relates to our two souls:

The essence of the matter is that every human being contains not two sides to one being but two separate souls. No ordinary person can be so sure of himself that he will know exactly where he is going; he is always open to some other force within himself that may reorient him. There is a constant struggle between the two souls of a man, and one of the most enduring aspects of a human personality is its changeability, its tendency to flip and to

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<sup>63</sup> N. Mindel, *The Philosophy of Chabad* (New York: Kehot Publication Society, 1973), 27.

be something else. Thus, most men strive and hope to reach some level of decency, goodness, or even holiness; but frequently there is a sudden turn for the worse, and unexpected upheaval in which the person looks at himself with shame and horror. A trifle may often upset a virtuous enterprise, a trifle that, as we now know, expresses deep layers of ignominy in a man.<sup>64</sup>

The animal soul is seen as the origin of intellectual insight which is confined to the "individual's natural mental capacities"; the author calls it the "human intelligence" (*sechel enoshi*). This "human intelligence" emerges in the arts, sciences, handicrafts and all related performances. The Divine soul, or "Divine intelligence" (*sechel elohi*), emerges from a more elevated source and shows itself as a search for wisdom of G-d and all related elevated matters. This Divine soul which surpasses the body, is responsible for allowing man freedom of choice. This does not mean that the body is sinister, any more than nature is. The body is impartial and may be utilised as a tool for either moral or corrupt deeds.<sup>65</sup>

Zalman says that the two souls are adjacent to each other and that the Divine soul notifies the animal soul and acts through it and together they notify the body. Even though the two souls are so intimate, they are dissimilar in their basic nature and this factor is what serves as the antithesis in human encountering. The essence of the human is mostly made up of the Divine soul as it is possibly the more powerful of the two. The dependence of the Divine soul on its Heavenly Father is more authentic, according to Zalman, than the dependence of a son on a father in the physical world. In the material world, the son and the father are two disconnected beings, whereas the Divine soul and its Heavenly Father are never separated, because there are no restrictions in the supernatural world. This concept of kinship has many connotations and this is where the Chabad concept of true

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<sup>64</sup> Adin Steinsaltz, *The Long Shorter Way: Discourses on Chasidic Thought*, ed. and transl. by Yehuda Hanegbi (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc.), 55.

<sup>65</sup> Mindel, *The Philosophy of Chabad*, 28.

brotherhood comes into being. This notion of how each soul, no matter what is a part of the Divine, is summarised by Adin Steinsaltz in the following quote:

It is important, especially for those simple persons whose own souls are relatively hidden from sight, to establish an inner relation to the true heads of the people, the highest and most spiritual souls, and in this way receive life force from the source. As for those who are even less able to establish such a connection - and no one is totally unable to do so - life force is received from "behind," unconsciously. The meaning of this odd expression, "from behind," lies in the idea of G-d's omnipresence. He is everywhere. And the only reason for a person's inability to establish a connection with the Divine, even in terms of relating to saintly persons around him, is that he has turned his back on G-d. Therefore, the life force that G-d in His mercy wishes to bestow on him has to be given from "behind," without that person's conscious knowledge. Repentance (Teshuvah) is thus not really a "Return" in that one goes a long way back; it is rather a simple change of direction, a turning about to receive the Divine plenty face to face.<sup>66</sup>

Zalman continues to analyse the make-up of the soul, by investigating into what enables the soul to function. The soul has particular powers, which Zalman separates into two extensive categories: General Powers and Particular Powers. General powers are Delight, Desire and Will. They are not affiliated with any particular organ of the body. Whether it be cerebral activities, or expressive of emotions, or even physical exercise, one may experience delight, desire and will in all. Particular powers are further subdivided into two categories: Intellect-powers (*sechel*) and emotional qualities (*middot*). The intellect-powers are visualized as dwelling in the brain and from there, they stretch out to the heart and through the nervous system, they reach the bodily organs. Miscellaneous skills and the arts fall into this category. The intellect is made up of three faculties: *chochmah*, *binah* and *da'at*. The common translation is "wisdom", "understanding", and "knowledge". *Chochmah* is where the concept is first visualised and is

<sup>66</sup> Steinsaltz, *The Longer Shorter Way*, 9.

therefore the power of conception. *Binah* is where the concept is investigated and is known as the cognitive faculty. *Da'at* is the mental faculty whereby the concepts are converted into logical assumptions.

*Chochmah* is where the creative mental action begins with a "flash". This flash comprises the whole concept in potential, like a seed containing a potential tree. However, if this so-called "flash" is not nurtured, then it may disintegrate. This is where *binah* comes in to develop the idea and to mould it into a proper structure. *Chochmah* is likened to a father as he impregnates *binah*, who is the mother. From the alliance of the two, the higher emotions are born. This is where *da'at* is so important, as it has the role of taking the idea and formulating a mature account. This results in a close understanding and correspondence between the intellect and the emotions. *Da'at* controls and focuses on the ideas originating in the mind.<sup>67</sup>

The intellectual powers of the Divine soul enable the individual to dwell on the love and awe of G-d and the intense desire to be attached to God. There are also seven emotional qualities (*middot*) which belong to the Divine soul. They do not function in their pure states, but must integrate with one or more of the others, depending on predominating circumstances, or the necessity of the situation. The emotional qualities are termed as follows:

The first three emotional qualities are the principal ones. They are *chesed* ("kindness"), *gevurah* ("severity", in the sense of restraint), and *tiferet* ("beauty", in the sense of harmony). The next three - *netzach* ("victory"), *hod* ("splendour"), *yesod* ("foundation") - are secondary and auxiliary. The seventh, called *malchut* ("majesty") is the outlet through which all emotions are communicated.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Mindel, *The Philosophy of Chabad*, 36.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

*Chesed* is a tenderness which is seen in the gushing out of compassion. It expresses itself in charity, imparting of knowledge and in all acts of commitment and rightness. It has no boundaries. *Gevurah* (severity) expresses itself in lessening, restraint and keeping back. Fear or awe is associated with *gevurah*. *Tiferet* (beauty) is a combination of *chesed* and *gevurah* with *chesed* prevailing, a more or less temperate kindness. If kindness was left with no boundaries, it would be detrimental, an example being, too much love would certainly spoil a child. Kindness, therefore, must be moderated with severity. Likewise severity must be moderated with *chesed*. As can be detected from above, the three intellect-powers together with the seven emotional qualities conform to the ten supernal *sefirot* which is how G-d manifests of Himself in Creation. "In fact, just as the human soul descended from its Divine origins, so are its ten powers descended from the ten Divine Attributes. For it is a basic principle in Chabad, as in Kabbalah in general, that all phenomena in the temporal world have their "source" and origin in the eternal order."<sup>69</sup>

In the view of Zalman, the "animal" soul is the supplement of the Divine soul, which also is viewed as comprising ten powers. The great difference is that the ten powers of the Divine soul descend from and mirror the ten *sefirot* of Holiness, and the powers of the animal soul descend from, and mirror, the ten *sefirot* of unholiness, emerging from the *sitra achra*. The important thing to remember here, is that the perception of the *sitra achra* in the Tanya is not nearly as dark and ominous as in the Kabbalah. Zalman imagines that the *sitra achra* is a most material world which is very far removed from the source. The whole of creation is visualized as a "descent" from the source, which therefore results in a succession of worlds, from the most elevated to the gradually more "material" as they move further and further away from their source. The outcome is that created beings are in a state of

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

"separateness" from G-d. The further away a created being is, the more separated it is. The most separated realm is called the *sitra achra* and is occupied by *kelipot* ("shells") as the light is totally surrounded by their outer "shell". There are two types of *kelipot*. There are those that are totally sinister with no good in them at all, and there is the *kelipot nogah* which is ambiguous as it could be used for evil purposes or for good.<sup>70</sup>

The animal soul, in the view of Zalman, is not evil in itself. It is only evil when it abuses its natural character. The animal soul's absolute purpose is to serve as a tool for the Divine soul. Also the Divine soul, being primarily intellectual, needs the animal soul to carry out its passion, therefore creating a far stronger passionate love for G-d. This twofold soul is the inevitability of every single human being and is explained by Steinsaltz:

He who is neither saintly nor wicked, the common individual, will never know peace. In any case, not in this world. It is not given to a man to be completely at rest and tranquil; at best there can be a temporary armistice, but never an inner wholeness. The conflict between the two souls in him is unending, and his task is to emerge from it as best he can. But even if the happiness of the tranquil life is not granted to one, this does not signify that the life struggle is in vain. All that one does within the struggle is significant and contributes to the forward movement, to the progress of the soul.<sup>71</sup>

Dobh Baer (1773-1827) was the son of Shneur Zalman and was so-called after his father's teacher, the Maggid of Meseritch. When Zalman died, Dobh Baer became the leader of Chabad. Dobh Baer's *Tract of Ecstasy* (which is in the form of a letter written by Dobh Baer to his followers), gives us a blueprint on how to allow our soul to reach its utmost height while still in the body. Baer realises that G-d had to conceal Himself but nevertheless, the Hasid is always attempting to pierce through the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>71</sup> Steinsaltz, *The Long Shorter Way*, 56.

concealment. Genuine rapture occurs when the divine in man's soul comes into contact with the divine light which is normally hidden. The skill of contemplation entails meditation on the divine Nothingness which sustains all things until such time as the mind comprehends the concept that there is nothing else but G-d. The first step in contemplation is *chokhmah*, the realisation in one's mind that all is G-d. *Binah* is the deep meditation on the full connotation of the idea. Ultimately, *da'at* allows for total attachment of mind and heart to their origin in G-d.

All the five stages of the soul (*nephesh*, *ru'ach*, *neshamah*, *hayyah* and *yehidah*) are involved in the contemplation of the Divine. *Yehidah* is the most noble and conforms to "will". Before one can know a certain thing, there must first be a will to know it. *Yehidah* also corresponds to *kether*. Wisdom is portrayed as *hayyah*. *Neshamah* relates to *binah* and is known as the sympathetic understanding of the heart. *Ru'ach* characterises the emotions and are the six sefirot which are below wisdom and understanding. *Nephesh* corresponds to sovereignty and it is where the soul is hardly involved at all. To develop this idea further, *nephesh* is the lowest stage and it implies an urge to be close to G-d, and of this realisation, one determines to oneself to lead an improved life. Consequently, *nephesh* has its connotations for activity, but the spirit is not warmed as yet. The next stage of *ru'ach* is where the emotions are involved. The spirit is now sufficiently stirred to actually lead a preferred life-style. Then comes *neshamah*, whereby the heart is positively employed. No longer does one merely desire G-d and want to do His will but now one enjoys G-d. Then comes *hayyah* whereby one's mind and heart are aroused to ecstasy. Finally comes the most elevated level of all, which is *yehidah* and one experiences the will to know G-d and it is higher than all emotion and intellect. Man has now

practically accomplished self-transcendence and he meets the Divine way above the typical boundaries expected by his material nature.<sup>72</sup>

In conclusion, we can see that as the Jewish tradition evolved, speculation on the soul took on different proportions. The Bible considered the *nefesh* or soul as referring to the person whether they were alive or dead. The *neshamah* was the personal part of the soul which *Hashem* breathed into the person and when the person died, the *neshamah* returned to G-d. However, when they went to *Sheol*, it was envisioned as a place of no return and full of darkness. There are also insinuations of the soul continuing its existence after death, which shows that there are contradictions in the biblical text. There also exist contradictions in the rabbinic literature but the rabbis most certainly believed in the immortality of the soul and the concepts of reward and punishment in the next world.

Medieval Jewish philosophy saw Jewish life entering a new cultural phase with intellectual pursuits becoming the main focus. The soul was considered the important partner in the body and soul relationship, however it was mostly thought of as an alien which was yearning to return to G-d. The soul was what enabled one to have intellectual capabilities as it emanated from a kind of Universal Intellect. The Kabbalists concentrated all their writings on the make-up and the immortality of the soul. The soul has a unique spiritual essence which was clearly visualised in much of the Kabbalistic literature. The soul comes from G-d and eventually returns to G-d via the world of the *sefirot*. Hasidism was concerned with the salvation of the soul which must precede the redemption of the world. The eighteenth century was the Age of Enlightenment in Western Civilization whereby the European mind became

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<sup>72</sup> D. Baer, *Tract of Ecstasy*, transl. and intro. by Louis Jacobs, (London: Vallentine, Mitchell and Co. Ltd., 1973), 9-18.

obsessed with a belief in man and within this humanistic framework, one envisioned oneself as the authority of the world.

## CHAPTER 4

# MYSTICAL VISIONS

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Mystical experience, according to Steven Katz, is based on the mystic's particular religion. He disagrees with the popular opinion that the mystical experience does not fit in with the doctrines of the mystic's religious authorities. He reckons that the mystic's experience is a result of the mystical and religious texts which the mystic has studied through his life. The text is what must be analysed and understood and this becomes the aim of the mystic, to try and discover the secret behind the outer words of the text. The Jewish mystics also conform to the *halachah* and are very vigilant about every detail of the structures of their religion.

There are times when the mystic's teaching seems quite radical but they then place them within the context of orthodox scripture. An example of this is how the radical Kabbalists claimed that their wisdom was the 'revelation of the Prophet Elijah', the traditional keeper of the messianic secret and hence a pillar of Jewish orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup> The Prophet Elijah was known as the greatest keeper of the tradition and would never go against the religion. By using Elijah as a revealer of a mystical experience, the mystic was strengthening the traditional authority. The Zohar, too, was said to have been written by the talmudic sage of the second century, Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai. Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed of the sixteenth century said he received his knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Steven T. Katz, "The Conservative Character of Mystical Experience," *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (New York, Oxford University Press, 1983), 21.

from Elijah, the prophet. Katz sums up the method of the mystic in the following way:

... mystics saw their own teaching, and others saw it likewise, as either (a) the older teachings in a new guise; (b) a personal confirmation of existing doctrine; (c) a legitimate extension of traditional teaching; or (d) a new, but authoritative stage of tradition.<sup>2</sup>

The mystic, therefore, instead of leaving the text behind, actually focuses on the absolute and complete authority of the mystical text. The mystics may use allegory and symbolism, but it is still based on the text and therefore the mystics shows how everything that is sacred exists in the text and it is the text which is the supreme source of wisdom. Even though the text may be reinterpreted, the mystical experience never goes against the Torah. The Torah in fact becomes the most crucial factor in the entire religion and the more one studies it the more divine wisdom one can find. The Torah, in a mystical experience, is raised to the highest pinnacle.

From the moment a Jewish child is born there begin rituals and concepts which accompany him throughout life. With these behavioural expectations and ideological values are symbols and images which form his belief system. When the individual has a mystical experience these symbols and images are what constitute the experience. The mystic will also have read the various Jewish texts and so his experience will relate to the aforementioned texts.

It has been usual to label the mystic a rebel who does not go according to the norms of his religion and is more interested in his own individual pursuits. However, according to Katz, even though mysticism can

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 22.

sometimes threaten the established norm, it nevertheless contained all the conservative features of the religion from which it emanates. Of course the mystical experience will have some individual characteristics, but the experience on the whole is shaped by the elements of the religious tradition in which the mystic is steeped. The other issue at hand when analysing a mystical experience is to remember that the only account we have of it is either from the mystic who had the experience, or the mystic's interpretation of it after the event or else other peoples' interpretations of the experience and this could mean people from the particular religion, or else from another religion.

The performance of *mitzvot* are unique to the Jewish mystical experience and to add to this, they are the most crucial point which enables the mystic to have a visual experience. In order to reach a mystic state, the person needs to have a very special relationship with G-d and the world in general. The mystic, through his performance of *mitzvot* will develop a personal relationship with G-d and will become as a result, enlightened. Katz explains this relationship between G-d and the mystic by saying that "the Jewish mystic's experience is a preconditioned experience of a (moral-personal) G-d."<sup>3</sup>

The performance of *mitzvot* which is related to the mystical experience can be explained from a Kabbalistic point of view in relation to the *sefirot* and the related human action. Each *sefirah* is related, as will be discussed later, to parts of the human body, as well as to human ethical behaviour. The mystic's ethical behaviour correlates to a specific *sefirah*, as well as the mystic's prayer. In other words, if one performs *mitzvot* with the right

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<sup>3</sup> S. T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. by Steven T. Katz., (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), 34.

intention; and if one prays with total commitment and concentration, (*kavannah* in Hebrew) then one can slowly move upwards on the *sefirotic* Tree. As one moves up, one becomes more knowledgeable of G-d's names and this results in more knowledge of the Divine.

Katz is insistent that the Jewish mystic, even when he has ascended very high on the *sefirotic* Tree, will never lose his identity and form a complete union with the G-dhead. This is not the Jewish way. Rather he will visualize "the Divine Throne, or the angel Metatron, or aspects of the *sefiroth*, or the Heavenly court and palaces, or the Hidden Torah, or G-d's secret Names, but not loss of self in unity with G-d."<sup>4</sup> This factor comes from the Jewish theological tradition, whereby it is made repeatedly obvious that the Jew does not lose his sense of self during a mystic experience and not in any other way either.

Instead of unity with the Divine, the Jewish mystic's ultimate state is called *devekuth* which means the clinging to G-d. One can try and understand the Jewish G-d by realizing that G-d is totally and utterly unique and He is completely perfect and therefore will also be somewhat apart from His creations, even though our soul, as explained in Chapter three, does have a spark of divinity in it, it is only a spark and not the whole. Even in parts of the Zohar and the Lurianic Kabbalah, when the theory of emanation speaks about G-d emanating parts of Himself to allow for creation, even then G-d is totally transcendental and can never be completely understood as the title of Him as *Ein Sof* (the Never-Ending) implies. Katz sums up the Jewish mystical experience as follows: "Jewish mystics envisioned the ultimate goal of mystical relation, *devekuth*, not as absorption into G-d, or as unity with the divine but rather as a loving intimacy, a 'clinging to' G-d, a relation which all

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

the time is aware of the duality of G-d and mystic, i.e. which experiences G-d as Other rather than Self."<sup>5</sup> *Devekuth* is referred to in all Jewish mystical literature and in all Jewish mystical testimonies. Another factor which runs through all Jewish mystical literature is a shared ideological background which conforms to a strict *halachah*, and also a shared theological knowledge. The reason for this is there was a fear if this sacred knowledge got into the wrong hands, it would lead to anarchy and heresy and pseudo-messianism, as actually happened in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Elliot Wolfson concedes to a more modified form of Katz's contextualist approach along structural lines. He believes that the mystics' personal experience is based on their predecessor's experience but it is consequently enriched by it. Both Wolfson and Scholem agree that the interpretative framework of a mystic's particular religion is what forms the mystical experience, but they also see a common characteristic of mysticism as a historical phenomenon. Wolfson quotes Scholem:

There is no such thing as mysticism in the abstract, that is to say, a phenomenon or experience which has no particular relation to other religious phenomena. There is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system, Christian, Islamic, Jewish mysticism and so on. That there remains a common characteristic it would be absurd to deny, and it is this element which is brought out in the comparative analysis of particular mystical experiences.<sup>6</sup>

Scholem then goes on to say that the mystical experience is formless and that the mystic may even leave his religion behind. However, Wolfson does

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 35-36.

<sup>6</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 5-6; cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 55.

not agree with this concept of universalism. He rather takes a middle path between Katz and Scholem and says:

I would not consent to Scholem's characterization of the core mystical experience as being formless (inasmuch as I contend that all human consciousness is shaped by some interpretative framework, and is thus symbolic in its eidetic structure), but I, too, accept a modified form of the contextualist approach along structuralist lines.<sup>7</sup>

Wolfson states that the mystic's aim is not to have a physical vision of a spiritual being, but rather one which is spiritual in nature. He then gives us two types of contemplative vision which exists in Western mysticism. The first type is that of the Neoplatonic idea which is introvertive. The transcendent G-d is above all image and form and cannot be approached by the senses, nor the rational mind. Rather one must use one's intellectual vision, and not visual imagery. Therefore, the Neoplatonic mystics did not use the senses, only intellectual intuition and this, they felt, led to the mystical experience of G-d as negation.

The second type of mystical vision, according to Wolfson, is

'cognitive' mysticism, which affirms that supernatural or spiritual knowledge comes by way of revelation, intuition, or illumination. The culminating stage on the via mystica is not an eradication of all precepts and concepts, a stripping away of all sensational and representational form, but rather the beholding of the ultimate form - a vision of G-d in 'gleams of ecstatic vision.'<sup>8</sup>

This kind of mystical experience is when the vision of the mystic is completely stimulated and one can see things which are normally hidden from the human experience. The imaginative faculty is what enables this

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 57-58.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 60.

visual experience of spiritual realities which appear as concrete symbols. What happens is that the spiritual entities become visible through the imagination.

The problem of visionary experience in Jewish mysticism cannot be dealt with without tackling the question of G-d's form or image. Imagination enabled man to personify G-d as an image, even though Judaism clearly did not allow the creation of symbols which could be used to worship. The visionaries placed the image of G-d within the imagination and were therefore not transgressing the Law. As can be seen from the above, there was a continual conflict between the opinion that G-d cannot be represented by images and those that had the aspiration to speculate on G-d as an anthropomorphic image. The art historian David Freedberg commented on the above: "In order to grasp the divinity, man must figure it, and the only appropriate figure he knows is that of man himself, or a glorified image of him: enthroned, anointed, and crowned. All this, at any rate, for Greek and Judaeo-Christian culture, where man is the highest being and is himself the image of G-d."<sup>9</sup>

This desire to try and grasp the vision of the divinity is what compels the Jewish mystic. Wolfson states that this yearning to envision G-d in images became the driving force of the prophetic, apocalyptic and mystical imagination as is obvious from the surplus of material from ancient times and all through the Middle Ages. The biblical, apocalyptic and rabbinic texts are full of tensions between the auditory and the ocular accounts of G-d and these are what predetermined the mode for succeeding visionary mystics. Wolfson goes even further when he places vision as one of the dominant

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<sup>9</sup> David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 60. cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 4.

themes as he says: "The problem of the visionary experience of G-d represents one of the major axes about which the wheel of Jewish mystical speculations in its various permutations turns. Indeed, literary evidence attests that the religious experience described in the different currents of Jewish mysticism from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages is overwhelmingly visual."<sup>10</sup>

The Jewish mystics also referred to other senses which were used during the mystical experience. However the sense of sight held the highest position as is made evident when reading the visual make-up of the prophetic revelations in the scriptural passages. The tension between the ban on images and the visualizing of G-d actually seem to make up the fundamental constituent of the different types of Jewish mystical experiences. In other words, because there did not exist any iconic representation of the Jewish G-d, this very factor encouraged the Jewish mystic to attempt to visualize the Divine. The idea of G-d appearing to specific people as most notably an anthropos, began with the prophetic tradition. Furthermore, the imagination, acting as a symbolic centre which enables the representation of a formless G-d also began in the Bible.

According to Wolfson, the Jewish mystics' visions like mystics everywhere were very much influenced by their religious framework. Even though the imagination is the principle faculty that accommodates the mystical vision, Wolfson reckons that it will still differ among particular persons and specific groups of mystics. Therefore, Wolfson's investigation of visionary encountering in Jewish mysticism complies with a contextualist approach but notwithstanding this, presupposes that mystical experience is definitely situated in the symbolic imagination, "that is, the divine element of the soul

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 4.

that enables one to gain access to the realm of incorporeality by transferring or transmuting sensory data and or rational concepts into symbols."<sup>11</sup>

In the first chapter the conviction that Hebraic thought as opposed to Greek thought is basically auditory and non-visual, was analysed in depth. The conclusion was that because of the above belief, it added to the problem of the study of visionary experiences in Judaism and especially a visionary experience of G-d. However, according to Gershom Scholem because there existed a contradiction in the biblical texts on the divine form, the discussion thereof is most significant even though later authors tried to deny it. Scholem elaborates: "When the voice of G-d warns Moses (Exod. 33:20), "for man shall not see Me and live," this does not mean to imply that G-d is intrinsically devoid of shape - quite the contrary! Indeed in Numbers (12:8), G-d says of Moses-who in the above-quoted passage has been prohibited from seeing Him - "with him do I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of G-d doth he behold."<sup>12</sup>

Wolfson points out two further examples from Exodus which intimate that the Divine manifests Himself as a visual tangible form. These examples appear in Exodus 19:11 when G-d moved downward on Mount Sinai in front of the people and then in Exodus 24:10-11 Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Elihu and the seventy elders witnessed G-d's form on the mountain. However, in Deuteronomy 4:11, the author totally disagrees that anyone saw a tangible form of G-d at Sinai. Then in Exodus 19 the author assumes that G-d has a visual form but he nevertheless feels that a vision of such a form would be detrimental to the person. Consequently, in Exodus 9:12, G-d ordered

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the G-dhead*, ed. by Jonathan Chipman, transl. by Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 17.

Moses to put up obstacles around the mountain to prevent anyone from dying as a result of seeing the Divine. Following this, the Deuteronomist kept asserting that at Sinai the divine voice spoke out of the fire (4:12, 15, 36; 5:4) but yet no form was visible. According to the Deuteronomist, not only was no form visible but it was also impossible for G-d to have a form. However, Moses was allowed to have a vision of the divine back (Exodus 33:23); but he, like all other humans did not have a full view of G-d.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that Moses had a vision of only the back of G-d and that Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne (Isaiah 6:1) disturbed the second century rabbis. They responded in the Talmud by saying that all the prophets, excluding Moses, saw some image of the divine, "for they saw through the speculum that does not shine; Moses, by contrast, saw no form, for he saw through a speculum that shines."<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the above, in Numbers 12:8 it intimates that Moses saw the likeness of the Lord. It is confusing to the reader to see such contradictions in the same book. Wolfson feels that "it is precisely because both points of view, so strikingly different, inhabit the same corpus that the history of Jewish attitudes toward the visual imaging of G-d unfolded in the dialectical way it did."<sup>15</sup>

Gershom Scholem uses the word *tselem* when writing about the mystical shape of the G-dhead. Scholem explains: "When G-d says, "Let us make man in our image (*tselem*), after our likeness," and the following verse says "in the *tselem* of G-d He created him," man, as a physical-plastic phenomenon, is placed in relationship to the primal shape reproduced in him, whatever that shape might be."<sup>16</sup> This concept of the image or form of

<sup>13</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 25-26.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the G-dhead*, 17.

G-d has resulted in many discussions by philosophers and scholars throughout the centuries. This question of G-d appearing as an anthropos appears right from the time of the creation of man in Genesis. There it is written that Adam was created in the image of G-d. The discussion ranged from whether G-d has a material and physical likeness to Adam or whether this likeness was a spiritual similarity. The Bible seems to insinuate that the Divine and the human were similar in their exterior appearance. Humans have therefore always imagined G-d as an anthropos, as is made clear in many biblical texts such as in Exodus 24:10; 1 Kings 22:19; Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:26 and Daniel 7:9.

Wolfson points out another influential theme in the Hebrew Bible which deals with G-d as an anthropos. The Israelites were most concerned about G-d being close to them and they therefore built Him a Temple in Jerusalem. The scholars named the cherubim throne an "empty seat", because the invisible G-d sat on it. The impression one receives is that G-d is both invisible and yet in attendance. There were many like-minded biblical texts about G-d sitting on His throne in the Temple and they frequently took the appearance of visual images. What is clear from these texts is that the representation of G-d sitting on the throne was not confined to the audible sphere. Over here we come across the contradiction which runs throughout Jewish literature; even though there is no set iconic representation of G-d sitting on the throne, it was this exact idea which caused the desire and the aim of visualizing G-d on His throne. This concept became known as the "throne vision" which Wolfson explains as "the visionary experience of G-d in human form seated on the heavenly throne in the celestial palace".<sup>17</sup> In fact, an entire custom was started which was centred around the vision of the throne and was especially evident in Jewish apocalyptic and biblical

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<sup>17</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 18.

writings. Even in later rabbinic writings such as that of R. Ishmael ben Elisha who had a vision of Akatriel seated on the throne in the Temple, this throne vision was apparent. As Wolfson says: "The Holy of Holies, in which the Ark of the Covenant was enshrined, was the seat of the divine Presence, and hence the locus for the visualization of G-d."<sup>18</sup>

As is evident from the above discussion, the basic problem for the Jewish visual tradition was also whether G-d has a body which was likened to the human being. There seems to be an innate need to imagine G-d in a human form, and although the Jewish tradition forbids the making of icons, this visualization came out in other ways such as the prophetic visions of G-d which mostly took the form of an anthropos.

The starting point of the Jewish mystical tradition seems to derive from the prophet Ezekiel's vision of G-d. This vision takes place in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel in the Bible. There had been other experiences of G-d, a single example being that of Moses who experienced G-d at Mount Sinai and various other places too. However, Ezekiel's description of G-d was very different to that of Moses. Ezekiel had a detailed vision of G-d which came to be known as Maaseh Merkabah, the account of the chariot. Subsequent mystics were convinced that if they could really understand Ezekiel's vision then they too could experience G-d.

It is very difficult to articulate a mystical experience. When one experiences a mystical vision it is an intensely unique experience, even though it is grounded in one's religious tradition, as was analysed at the beginning of this chapter. According to Louis Jacobs, the Jewish mystics were reserved about their mystical experience. Even the mystics of the Kabbalah spoke

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 19.

and wrote about their experiences in an objective way with no personal feelings or opinions. This seems to be very much a distinguishing factor of Jewish mysticism. Louis Jacobs quotes Gershom Scholem on this particular issue:

If you compare the writings of Jewish mystics with the mystical literature of other religions you will notice a considerable difference, a difference which has, to some extent, made difficult and even prevented the understanding of the deeper meaning of Kabbalism. Nothing could be further from the truth than the assumption that the religious experience of the Kabbalists is barren of that which, as we have seen, forms the essence of mystical experience, everywhere and at all times. The ecstatic experience, the encounter with the absolute Being in the depths of one's own soul, or whatever description one may prefer to give to the goal of the mystical nostalgia, has been shared by the heirs of rabbinical Judaism. ... It is well known that the autobiographies of great mystics, who have tried to give an account of their inner experiences in a direct and personal manner, are the glory of mystical literature. ... The Kabbalists, however are no friends of mystical autobiography. They aim at describing the realm of Divinity and the other objects of the contemplation in an impersonal way, by burning, as it were, their ships behind them.<sup>19</sup>

Even though most Jewish mystics describe what they see in their throne visions in an impersonal way, it does not make their visions in the slightest bit inferior. Scholem says that the main reason for a lack of autobiographical mystical testimonies is because the Jews felt that there was a contradiction between a mystical experience of G-d and the notion of G-d as a Law-giver. Another factor, according to Jacobs, for a lack of personal testimonies, is that to perform a *mitzvah* in rabbinical Judaism was all-important. To study the Torah is one off the highest *mitzvot*, whereas to have a mystical experience was not considered as a *mitzvah*. Nevertheless the importance of mystical experience began to develop when the Gaon of Vilna, the greatest traditional rabbi, said that it was regarded as a reward to have a

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<sup>19</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*; cited in Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 2-3.

mystical experience for doing one's *mitzvot*. The eighteenth century Hasidim placed mystical experiences on the top of the list of *mitzvot*. Menahem Mendel of Peremyshlany, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov who was the founder of the Hasidic movement, said:

Nistar refers to something it is impossible to communicate to another, the taste of food, for example ... So it is with regard to the love and fear of the Creator, blessed be He. It is impossible to convey to another how this love is in the heart. This is called nistar. But how can it be correct to call the kabbalistic science nistar? Whoever wishes to study 'the Kabbalah' has the book open for him. If he cannot understand the book he is simply an ignoramus for whom the Talmud and the Tosafists would also be nistar. But the meaning of nistarot ('the secret things') in the whole of the Zohar and the writings of the Ari of blessed memory, is that these are all constructed on the idea of attachment (devekut) to the Creator, for whosoever is privileged to become attached to the Chariot on High and to gaze at it, like the Ari of blessed memory for whom the Heavenly Paths were clearly illumined so that he was able to walk constantly in them guided by the eyes of his intellect ... <sup>20</sup>

## **BIBLICAL AND APOCALYPTIC**

According to the first chapter of the biblical book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel saw the throne of G-d and in rabbinic literature this occurrence is known as the account of the chariot and is based on the following words of Ezekiel: "And I looked, and behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with a fire flashing up, so that a brightness was round about it; and out of the midst thereof as the colour of electrum, out of the midst of the fire. And out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one of them had four wings. ... "21

<sup>20</sup> Meshullam Phoebus of Zbarazh, *Yosher Divrei Emet*, *Kunteros* 1, No. 22, Munkacz, 1905; cited in Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, 4-5.

<sup>21</sup> *The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text*, 1279.

Ellie Wiesel discusses the above extract from Ezekiel and he says that even if the reader acknowledges the above extract, it is still not understood. It may not be properly understood but the ancient tradition of Merkavah or Hekhalot literature all stem from the above extraordinary vision. Wiesel goes on to challenge the reader: "Has he [Ezekiel] seen the real one? Only in his imagination but his description - far away from Jerusalem - is so real, so vivid, that it is a jewel in itself. Ezekiel, the prophet of imagination: more than his peer Jeremiah, he imagined both exile and redemptions in ways that made them both tangible. ... And what he saw is so unreal that those of us who dwell in reality are forbidden to follow his gaze and look and ... speak about it."<sup>22</sup>

The rabbis were seemingly unable to deal with the Merkavah experiences and therefore put a ban on them. When Maimonides was asked why the enigma of the chariot is so much more dangerous than that of Creation, he said that Creation is an issue which is naturally and physically present whereas the Creator is not. Ellie Wiesel quotes Gershom Scholem whereby he cites ancient documents of the Hekhalot material that warn us about delving into mystical terrains:

If a person was unworthy to see the King in his beauty, the angels at the gates disturbed his senses and confused him. And when they said to him, 'Come in,' he entered, and instantly they pressed him and threw him into the fiery lava stream ... And at the gate of the sixth of the seven palaces, it seemed as though hundreds of thousands and millions of waves of water stormed against him, and yet there was not a drop of water...But he, the visitor, asked the angels. What is the meaning of these waters? And they began to stone him: 'Wretched, do you not see with your eyes? Are you perhaps a descendant of those who kissed the golden Calf and thus are unworthy to see the King in his beauty?' And they struck him with iron bars and wounded him ...<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ellie Wiesel, *Sages and Dreamers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 82.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

The important point to realize is that Ezekiel saw a "likeness" of G-d. Therefore, we still do not know exactly what G-d looks like. This seems to be a usual way for the mystics to describe their vision of G-d. This is what retains the mystery of the vision and the mystery of what G-d actually looks like. Ezekiel was so overcome by his vision that he fell on his face, a common reaction to follow by other mystics as will be seen later.

The *kavod* (the glory of G-d) was also a concept which began with Ezekiel. Ezekiel felt that the *kavod* is the human form of G-d's manifestation. Ezekiel saw the *kavod* as a luminous body in the shape of an anthropos. The body was enveloped with splendour from the waist up and fire from the waist down. This luminosity forms a major part of Jewish mysticism as will become clear when looking at the Kabbalah.

Ezekiel felt that the glory of G-d is actually the human form of G-d's manifestation and not an object which is separate from G-d. The word *kavod*, which is the Hebrew for G-d's presence, does not mean the human form of G-d. Rather it means G-d's glowing glistening splendour and luminosity and because the human being is unable to endure the vision of it, it is generally wrapped in a cloud. Even Ezekiel imagined the divine form as a resplendent figure with brilliance from the waist upwards and with fire from the waist downwards. This shining *kavod* is found in many other biblical texts.

In the same way as there exists a *kavod* in which G-d's image comes into view, there also emerges a garment (*haluk*) which enfolds the body. The aggadah and various hymns of the Merkavah mystics, dating as far back as the third century describe this garment. The hymns explain how the heavens illuminate from this mystical "shape", and there is a passage which says that

"constellations and stars and signs emanate from His garment, in which he wraps Himself and sits upon the throne of glory."<sup>24</sup> Another hymn recounts that G-d uncovered the seven heavens of Sinai and showed Himself to Israel, "in His beauty, His glory, His shape, His crown, and upon the throne of His glory".<sup>25</sup>

This tradition which occupied itself with the mystical form of the G-dhead, became known as the Shi'ur Komah. There even exists documentation that the Shi'ur Komah is associated with the Song of Songs. This indication arises in an excerpt by Origen that has not yet been sufficiently unraveled. In the preface to his popular commentary on the Song of Songs, Origen writes:

It is said to be the custom of the Jews to forbid anyone who has not attained a mature age to hold this book [i.e. the Song of Songs] in his hands. Moreover, even though their rabbis and teachers instruct their children in all the books of the Scripture and in their oral traditions, they postpone the following four texts until the very end: the beginning of Genesis, describing the Creation of the World; the beginning of the prophecy of Ezekiel, which relates to the cherubim [that is, the doctrine of the angels and the divine retinue], the end [of the same book], which describes the future Temple; and this book, the Song of Songs.<sup>26</sup>

Origen quotes the above texts as having esoteric principles which run through all four. The Mishnah informs us that both the beginning of Genesis and Ezekiel were absolutely esoteric and so to instruct about them in public was forbidden. If a person was mature and honorable enough then they were allowed to read and study them in private. There was also a controversy related to the concluding chapters of Ezekiel and its apocalyptic

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<sup>24</sup> Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the G-dhead*, 29.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Origen, *Prologus in Canticum*, *Patrologia Latina* xiii. 63; cited in Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the G-dhead*, 30-31.

ideals about the reconstruction of the Temple. There were other portrayals of the same theme in the Torah which were very different to Ezekiel's ideas. Scholem states that because of this there was even an attempt to eliminate the Book of Ezekiel from the biblical canon.<sup>27</sup>

During the second century, the Song of Songs was coupled with the esoteric doctrine of Shi'ur Komah because the latter was based on the contents of the Song of Songs. Steven Katz explains:

That is to say, what the rabbinic mystic 'saw' was not independent of what he had studied in order to 'see'. The author of the Shi'ur Komah did not make the heavenly ascent unaided, did not seek out transcendence unguided, did not perceive the divine without a prior, biblical education which prepared him for his moment of supreme encounter, did not order and assimilate his experience without the help of the canonical description. He sought what Solomon had described, he found what Solomon had said there was to find.<sup>28</sup>

Apocalyptic writings were clearly the result of otherworldly journeys. Various methods of attaining these visions were used which included fasting, reciting prayers and mentioning mystical names. The longed-for vision was that of the enthroned form of G-d's glory and the common way of expressing this vision was based on the conventional terms used in the Hebrew Bible. These writings were compiled between 250 B.C.E to 250 C.E. The visual encounter with the Divine was what concerned the apocalyptists. The apocalyptist would receive revelations of divine mysteries through visions, dreams and other out of body experiences.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>28</sup> Katz, *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, 9.

There is one apocalypse which is incorporated in the Hebrew Bible and that is in the Book of Daniel. Central to this and other apocalyptic writings is the vision of the divine glory. The fact that Daniel's vision of the Divine was incorporated into the Hebrew Bible made it easier for the apocalyptic writers to put forward their visions. Whenever new concepts are revealed, they somehow are tested to see if they conform to the ideas set forward in the Bible. Even if these concepts are most adventurous, (which they often are), if they are accepted into the broader scope of Jewish literature, they are even passed as being commentaries on the esoteric parts of the Hebrew Bible. This allowed for some very daring writing.

Ithamar Gruenwald regards the Medieval Jewish Kabbalah as being a prime example of how entirely new methods of expression came about on the basis of being a commentary on the Hebrew Bible. Even before the Kabbalah there was an even more radical type of literature. Apocalyptic literature revealed things which was not written in the Bible and was therefore felt by many to be beyond ordinary human understanding and completely unorthodox. The reason why this literature is unorthodox is because the general mood found in the Hebrew Bible and clearly illustrated in the Book of Job, is that there is no point in questioning G-d as man will never understand everything however hard he tries. The wisdom of G-d and the way in which the world and the heavens function should not be queried, rather one should just accept it as not part of the human beings' comprehension. However, the Jewish mind cannot be stilled and there have been numerous quests for knowledge of Creation and the wisdom of G-d.

Apocalyptic revelation, on the other hand, maintains that it is important for the human being to understand the laws of nature and of where man comes from and where he is going. An outstanding example of apocalyptic

revelation in relation to nature, the divine and the spiritual worlds is found in the Books of Enoch which will be discussed at a later stage. In the apocalyptic literature, the constraints upheld in such books as Job are now removed and man is allowed to question the existence of evil in the world. The apocalyptic writers were convinced that an eschatological happening was about to occur and that is why all the previously hidden knowledge was now being given to man and the secrets were being revealed. Gruenwald reminds us that according to many apocalyptic writers: "The secrets had been disclosed to the legendary sages of antiquity who in turn put them into books which were sealed away, and in that condition they were preserved till the eschatological time came to open them."<sup>29</sup>

Whereas the biblical writers were adamant that the laws of nature and human misery were not to be questioned, the apocalyptic writers felt the exact opposite. These writers concentrated on the secrets of nature and the dilemmas caused by suffering and evil. Another interesting factor about apocalyptic writers is that they believed that the knowledge of all these secrets was not revealed because of man's attempts to understand G-d's wisdom. Rather this knowledge was viewed as a spiritual and miraculous revelation. There is a similarity in these revelations to those promised to the righteous people when they enter the world to come. Gruenwald explains the importance of these similarities: "If the wisdom granted to the apocalyptists corresponds to that promised to the righteous in the days to come, the apocalyptic revelation is one of the first, and necessary, stages in the process of salvation."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1980), 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

The first apocalyptic vision to be discussed is from the Book of Daniel which was composed in 164 B.C.E. and is the final of the 24 books that constitute the Hebrew Bible. This book proves to us the importance of visions in the apocalyptic writings as well as in the biblical texts. To help put Daniel into context a summary of the period of the Babylonian exile is necessary. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon in 587 B.C. who with his army overran the Kingdom of Judah and destroyed Jerusalem and its Holy Temple. This brought to an end the dynasty of King David as King Zedekiah was blinded and banished with many others to Babylon.

According to Margolies, it was the lofty visions of prophets such as Second Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah that kept the faith alive of those who were left behind in the Holy Land under Babylonian rule, and also of those in Babylon. The general message of these visions was that G-d was still with His people and He would eventually escort them back to the Holy Land which will then become a light for all other nations. In 539 B.C.E. Cyrus the Great of Persia took over the Babylonian empire and Persian rule lasted for about two hundred years. Life for the Jews went quite well and they managed to reconstruct the Second Temple.<sup>31</sup>

Then in 333 B.C.E. Alexander the Great of Macedonia took over Palestine and although the Jews were treated fairly under Hellenistic rule, that came to an end in 175 B.C.E. under Antiochus IV when the Book of Daniel was written. Antiochus was determined to put an end to Judaism and he showed this by placing a statue of Zeus (the "Abomination of Desolation" of the Book of Daniel) in the centre of the Holy Temple. The outcome of this was the

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<sup>31</sup> Morris B. Margolies, *A Gathering of Angels: Angels in Jewish Life and Literature* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 54.

Maccabean Revolt with the expulsion of the Greek army in 164 B.C.E. Once again Jewish life returned to normal and the Holy Temple was purified.<sup>32</sup>

Daniel's visions refer to great messianic outcomes and should make us feel optimistic about our future. In the first part of the book we read about Daniel's interpretations of the king's dreams. The second part consists of Daniel's visions and these are what are of interest to this dissertation. In a somewhat radiant and fiery language Daniel forecasts the eschatological future in a way which stimulates one's imagination. Daniel's first vision goes as follows:

I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven broke forth upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings .... And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear .... After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, ... After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces, ...<sup>33</sup>

The descriptions of the beasts are terrifying and very dramatic. However, a more breathtaking vision is still to follow and this takes place in chapter 7, verse 9-11:

I beheld Till thrones were placed, And one that was ancient of days did sit: His raiment was as white snow, And the hair of his head like pure wool; His throne was fiery flames, And the wheels thereof burning fire. A fiery stream issued And came forth from before him; Thousand thousands ministered unto him, And ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; The judgement was set, and the books were opened.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 54-56.

<sup>33</sup> *The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text*, 2028-2029.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 2029-2030.

Ellie Wiesel feels that it is obvious that Daniel has a confused soul, because it is not possible for a person to witness all that Daniel did in his visions and still not be apprehensive. He would have felt happier according to Wiesel if he could have discussed the vision with someone, but he is isolated. He therefore approaches one of the personalities in his own dream for clarification of his vision. The answer is given to him that the animals impersonate the kingdoms. There will be kingdoms which will collapse and others that will carry on but the most high and mighty of them will be punished the most. Daniel, of course was disturbed and then his illusions get the better of him. He visualizes a ram with horns that no other animal could confront. The ram is nevertheless whacked by a he-goat and his horn is blemished. Wiesel then explains that this vision insinuates a war between East and West.<sup>35</sup> Daniel then overheard two holy ones speaking and the one asked the other how long must they wait until the battle is over. The answer was: "Unto two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings, then shall the sanctuary be victorious."<sup>36</sup>

According to Wiesel, Daniel's temperature seems to be on the increase as he moves from dream to dream. He then has Gabriel, the angel explaining his vision to him. Gabriel tells him to keep his vision a secret as it describes a far away time. Gabriel and then Michael prophesize the future:

Persia will be conquered by Greece, the world will experience convulsions on a planetary scale. Battles between empires, violent conflicts between great powers, the humiliated will taste triumph; the proud will be humiliated ... But at the end of all these torments, which have nothing to do with the Jewish people, the Jewish people will be saved. Daniel knows when. But the angel commands him: "Daniel, you keep these words secret.." We are

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<sup>35</sup> Wiesel, *Sages and Dreamers*, 109.

<sup>36</sup> *The Holy Scriptures*, 2033.

coming to the denouement of the story. "Seal the book," says the angel. "Many will then read it and knowledge will grow."<sup>37</sup>

The fact that Daniel was told to seal the book throws light on the fact that mystery is crucial, otherwise if the secret was let out before the right time it would not have the same effect. All we are allowed to know is that there is a secret, as Wiesel concludes:

They are beautiful [the last chapters] - that is undeniable. But what do they signify? Thousand and thousands of rabbinical and mystical scholars and commentators have attempted to pierce their secret. And every exile, in every ghetto, there were spiritual guides who, in order to console their contemporaries, tried to use Daniel's predictions ... The angel will win. The secret remains secret.<sup>38</sup>

### **DEAD SEA SCROLLS**

The Qumranites were convinced that the Bible should not be read only at face value. They felt it was their duty to reveal many of the hidden truths in the Hebrew Bible. The writings of the Qumranites date back to the early years of the Common Era in the days of John the Baptist. According to Theodor Gaster, their writing has helped to shed light on the history of early Christianity. Their community consisted of about four thousand people and they lived in the Desert of Judah on the western shore of the Dead Sea. They lived in a sequence of camps and the one we are concerned about was located in the ominous gorge of Qumran at the northern end of the Dead Sea and consisted of about two hundred people. In 1947 an Arab boy discovered the scrolls in a near-by cave. This particular cave has since been excavated and coins were found which gave us evidence that people

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<sup>37</sup> Wiesel, *Sages and Dreamers*, 110-111.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

had been living there from about 125 B.C. until 68 A.D., excluding the period from about 31 B.C. to 5 B.C. owing to earthquakes.<sup>39</sup>

The Roman army was sent to try and quell the Jewish revolts. The Qumranites most probably placed their manuscripts in nearby caves. There were many Jewish sects around at that time and the Qumranites have been associated with an ascetic sect known as the Essenes. The Qumranites were convinced that they were chosen, as was Moses, to receive a new Covenant and this was probably why they chose to live in the desert as opposed to the city.

This new Covenant which they expected to be given was not in exchange for their old Covenant but was simply a new up-dated version of it. They felt that the Jewish tradition consisted of repeated occurrences of the Covenants which was made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. There is always a sense of permanence and succession in the Jewish tradition and accordingly the people of Qumran applied historical value to everything they did. Gaster gives us an example of the above whereby the Qumranites named their priests 'the sons of Zadok' in memory of the priestly family during the time of David (11 Samuel 8:17) and to those whom Ezekiel had appointed in his visions as the only justifiable priests.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it needs to be understood that the Qumranites were certainly not expecting to obtain any new Covenant as they made clear that they had already received it.

The people of this community were concerned that their Torah had an aura of gloom about it which needed to be lifted so that its real message could be set free. They felt that just as the prophets of old had guided Israel in the

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<sup>39</sup> Theodor H. Gaster, *The Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1957), 12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

past, a new prophet or teacher would emerge to help the ordinary people receive inner enlightenment. It is up to each person though if he will use that knowledge of inner enlightenment which does exist in each and every person. If one does apply this knowledge with one's utmost will, then one can accomplish a state of being which is at one with the whole cosmic system. Gaster explains what happens to a person when he achieves this state of inner enlightenment:

Automatically, he was embraced in the communion of eternal things; he became one with the great forces of the universe, with what we would call Nature, and with the non-mortal beings of the celestial realm - the 'holy ones' who stood for ever in direct converse with G-d. He achieved, in short, what mystics term the 'unitive state'. ...This was the ultimate goal of their entire spiritual adventure; the raison d'etre of the Torah and of the disciplined life which it enjoined.<sup>41</sup>

The Qumran community were not only concerned with trying to recall the past and to relate it to the political turmoil of their time. They were also inspired by the belief that they were about to experience the end of the world. They firmly believed that the chaos which was prevalent at the commencement of the world would again ensue. After the pandemonium there would be a birth of a new world. In this way, man could absorb himself in everlasting things and dissociate himself from the transitory and the worldly and as Gaster says, "find that in the midst of death he was in fact in life."<sup>42</sup>

A text in the Qumran scrolls which relates to this dissertation is called, 'The Words of Michael' and is in the Damascus Document from cave 4. Another name for it is 'The Vision of Michael' and it belongs to the literature of

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 17.

Heavenly Ascents. This literature is clearly visionary in nature and many other subsequent visions are accountable to it including those that went undercover and once again came forth in the Kabbalah of the Middle Ages and thereafter. The fact that the angel Gabriel is mentioned is of specific interest as Gabriel was also mentioned by Daniel in the Book of Daniel. Daniel is regarded as one of the most important visionaries within the Qumran apocalyptic genre.

As in the Islamic tradition, Gabriel fulfills his duty as the angel who discloses certain visions and informs the visionary of their meaning. This could be termed the Holy Spirit in Christianity. Eisenman and Wise show how Gabriel's position is related to that of other guides in various great literature. He is the guide in the highest Heaven just as Muhammad had heavenly ascents and also the part Virgil and Beatrice played for Dante.<sup>43</sup>

### **MERKABAH AND HEKHALOT**

The mystical visions in the apocalyptic literature are much more detailed and descriptive than the corresponding visions in the Hebrew Bible such as: 1 Kings xxii, 19; Isaiah vi, 1ff; and Ezekiel 1; 111, 22-24; viii, 1ff,x; Exodus xix, 16-18; xx, 15-18; xxiv, 16-18; Deuteronomy v, 19-24 and Daniel vii, 9-10. G-d appears in most of these visions as a man-like image on a throne. The best description of the above appears in 2 Kings, in Isaiah, in Ezekiel and in Daniel. The consistent distinguishing traits which occur in these visions are:

- a. G-d is sitting on a throne, b. He has the appearance of a man (Ezekiel) and particularly that of an old, white-haired man

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (London: Element Books Limited, 1992), 37.

- (Daniel); c. G-d is sitting in a palace (2 Kings, Isaiah, and Daniel);
- d. Fire occupies an important position in the vision (Ezekiel, Daniel and indirectly also in Isaiah); e. G-d is accompanied by angels who minister to Him (2 Kings, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel);
- f. The angels recite hymns (Isaiah and Ezekiel).<sup>44</sup>

These throne mysteries were the start of Jewish mysticism and set the pattern for later visionaries. The visionaries were not set on discovering the true nature of G-d, but rather they were interested in the vision of the throne and the chariot as described in the first chapter of Ezekiel which was known as Ma'aseh Merkabah. The first literature to describe in detail the mysteries of the world of the Throne and the mysteries of the Divine Glory was the Book of Enoch. This book became an example to a long visionary tradition which, Gershom Scholem says, "In addition to interpretations, visions, and speculations based on the ma'aseh merkabah, other esoteric traditions began to crystallize round the first chapter of Genesis, which was called ma'aseh bereshit."<sup>45</sup>

These traditions, according to Scholem were surrounded by a sacred aura. The talmudic aggadah tells of how fire from above surrounds the seeker of the Merkabah. When the rabbi ascended to the heavens they were not interested in the interpretation thereof, but rather the vision and personal experience of the revelation. The Talmud (Hag. 14b) tells of the fate of the four sages who entered paradise:

Simeon b. Azzai "looked and died"; Ben Zoma "looked and was smitten" (mentally); Elisha b. Avuyah, called *aher* ("other"), forsook rabbinic Judaism and "cut the shoots," apparently becoming a dualistic Gnostic; R. Akiva alone "entered in peace and left in peace ..."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 31.

<sup>45</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 11.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 13-14.

Therefore R. Akiva became a leading spokesperson in the later pseudepigraphic literature which was mostly concerned with the mysteries of the Merkabah. When trying to place this literature in a historical setting, various problems arise. One reason for this is that the authors of these texts gave pseudepigraphic names instead of their own. Wolfson does point out however, that the authors are of tannaitic origin so at least we have that information. There is also a common literary and conceptual viewpoint and it is from this basis that one can speak of a body of literature known as the Hekhalot literature. According to Wolfson, the common structure is what gives this literature its title, as he explains: "This title has been chosen because in the relevant texts the mystic is said to pass through the seven heavenly palaces or halls (*hekhalot*) in order to reach the throne of glory (*kisse' ha-kavod*) or chariot (*merkavah*). While the precise nature of the description of the journey through the heavenly chambers varies from text to text, it is this structure that allows one to speak of a common literary heritage."<sup>47</sup>

Gershom Scholem reckoned that the Hekhalot texts began in Palestine in the first and second centuries C.E. and that maybe other texts were added in the Geonic period and the Muslim East. He insisted that the Merkavah Mysticism in the Hekhalot literature began right at the beginning of rabbinic Judaism. Scholem appears to have had conflicting views as to how these mystics related to the rabbinic establishment. In Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, he says that the Yorde Merkavah were a specific "school of mystics" and kept their revelations most secret because it was "based on private religious experience" which may upset the rabbis' views. Scholem says that they were an unrecognized tradition and did not fit in with the established Jewish institutions such as the schools and talmudic academies.

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<sup>47</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 74.

Yet, in another breath Scholem says that these pseudepigraphic authors were determined to keep their writing within the norms of *halakhic* Judaism, even though the two seemed contradictory.<sup>48</sup>

From the above, one can gather that there is a paradox in Scholem's investigation. On the one hand he feels that the Jewish mystics operative in the first and second centuries C.E. took their inspiration from derivations other than that of orthodox Judaism, but that they still tried to acknowledge their original Jewish heritage. Then, in *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, Scholem says that the Hekhalot writings were consistent with the rabbinic writings:

The texts of Merkabah mysticism that have so far come to our knowledge also display what I have called an orthodox Jewish tendency, and are in no way heretical ... If what these texts present is Gnosticism - and their essentially Gnostic character cannot in my opinion be disputed - it is truly rabbinic Gnosis, and the illuminations and revelations granted to the adepts are such as conform to the Jewish vision of the hierarchy of beings. Indeed, all these texts go to great lengths to stress their strict conformity, even in the most minute detail, to halakhic Judaism and its prescriptions.<sup>49</sup>

Scholem argues that the Hekhalot literature with all its speculative and visionary stresses, was very much acceptable to the rabbinic tradition. Scholem reminds us of the talmudic legend whereby Yohanan ben Zakkai and his disciples had a vision of the divine chariot. Therefore, he is reminding us that the rabbis were most familiar with and even active in Merkabah mysticism.

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<sup>48</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 47; cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 75.

<sup>49</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1974), 10; cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 75-76.

Ithamar Gruenwald took the view that the Hekhalot mystics were actually based, both socially and historically on rabbinic Judaism. He does also see certain gnostic influences, but the major influence was of that of the rabbis. Going against both Scholem and Gruenwald's views is Peter Schafer who considers the Hekhalot mystics to be using magic to force their way to G-d and contrasting theirs and the rabbinic view of G-d and the Torah. Schafer says:

The authors and redactors of the Hekhalot literature rebel against this traditional conception of the world, which was brought forth by a grandiose literary effort. They were not unaware of the merits of prayer and the Torah, of course ... Nevertheless, the traditional repertoire is no longer sufficient for them. They no longer are satisfied with gaining access to G-d solely through the Torah. In the truest sense of the word, they storm heaven and force direct access to G-d.<sup>50</sup>

Schafer is adamant that these texts do not form a unity, however, in the majority of these texts there is a common visionary feature and this is what binds the literature together. The common feature is that the mystics' aim is to ascend through the seven celestial palaces which are in the seventh heaven. The climax of the ascent would be to enter into the throne room and have a vision of the *kavod* of G-d seated upon the throne.

The mystic would (if he was lucky) be seated upon a throne. The mystic would then be raised to the status of the highest angel who would be seated next to G-d. This was the point, according to Wolfson, which Scholem failed to write about and this is why Scholem felt that in the Jewish mystical tradition there was no complete union between the human soul and G-d, as he says: "The mystic who in his ecstasy has passed through all the gates,

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<sup>50</sup> Peter Schafer, *The Hidden and Manifest G-d: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*. Transl. by Aubrey Pomerance. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.), 161; cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 77-78.

braved all the danger, now stands before the throne; he sees and hears - but that is all."<sup>51</sup>

Wolfson disagrees with the above statement of Scholem because as has been pointed out before, most of the Hekhalot texts when telling of the mystical ascents, they describe the climax when the mystic is seated next to the throne of G-d in the seventh palace. Therefore, Scholem has failed to realize the most important fact of the mystical experience, as Wolfson says: "... indeed, the detail that in my opinion most precisely qualifies these texts as mystical."<sup>52</sup>

Wolfson goes on to explain how the enthronement of the mystic is actually what enables the mystic to have a vision of the divine glory. The mystic is transformed into an angelic being and is able to see even more than the other ordinary angels. What the mystic actually sees is light and through the imagination images come into being from the corporeal world. This 'light' will be discussed in greater length in the section of the Kabbalah. The Hekhalot literature does not describe in detail the anthropomorphic measurements as does the Shi'ur Komah. Martin Cohen compared the Hekhalot Rabbati with the Shi'ur Komah in the following way: "Both authors experienced the mystic union/communion with the G-d of Israel, but whereas the author of the Shi'ur Qomah was overcome by the divine *gedullah* [greatness], the author of the Hekhalot Rabbati chose to develop the equally authentic theme of beauty."<sup>53</sup>

The similarity which exists between the Hekhalot literature and the Shi'ur Komah is the mostly visual way in which the information is related therein.

<sup>51</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 56; cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 83.

<sup>52</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 84.

<sup>53</sup> Martin S. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Komah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism*. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983), 173-174; cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 87.

The Hekhalot texts stress the luminous form of the divine glory but they still give it an anthropomorphic form. However, it is not nearly as descriptive as the Shi'ur Komah material. Both sets of literature have the same tension which seems to exist in all Jewish literature. There are statements which say that nobody can actually see G-d, and not anything on or near G-d, and yet this was the precise aim of the mystic. Scholem describes this tension well when he says that for the Merkavah visionaries G-d is "at once visible and yet, by virtue of His transcendent nature, incapable of being visualized."<sup>54</sup> Scholem tried to explain the contrast between the invisible spiritual G-d and His visible tangible appearance:

The ascent of Merkavah mystics to heaven or, in a different version, to the heavenly paradise, was considered successful if it not only led the mystic to the divine throne but also brought them a revelation of the image of the G-dhead, the 'Creator of the Universe' seated on the throne. This form was that of the divine *Kavod* ... that aspect of G-d that is revealed and manifest; the more invisible G-d becomes for the Jewish consciousness, the more problematical the meaning of this vision of the divine *Kavod*.<sup>55</sup>

Another point made by Wolfson which can help us to understand this paradox, is that G-d is innately invisible, but if one actually sees G-d, one will more than likely be destroyed. This factor implies that it is possible to see G-d, but it is very dangerous. There is a tension between seeing G-d and the total danger of the actual vision.

The Hekhalot literature advises its adherents on certain exercises which are necessary in order to see the chariot. There are ascetic exercises, certain physical postures to follow and hymns to be recited. The mystic would have

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<sup>54</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 66; cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 87.

<sup>55</sup> Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape*, 20-21; cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 87.

to declare magical names and secret names of the Deity and of the angels. Once the seeker has prepared himself, he is then ready for heavenly ascensions and the divine manifestation of cosmological and other secrets. Scholem explains this phenomenon:

The Merkabah mystics occupy themselves with all the details of the upper world, which extends throughout the seven palaces in the firmament of *aravot* (the uppermost of the seven firmaments); with the angelic hosts which fill the palaces (*heikhalot*); the rivers of the fire which flow down in front of the Chariot, and the bridges which cross them; the *ofan* and *hashmal*; and with all the other details of the Chariot described by Ezekiel. But the main purpose of the ascent is the vision of the One Who sits on the Throne, "a likeness as the appearance of the Glory in the form of supernal man is the content of the most recondite part of this mysticism, called *Shi'ur Komah* ("measure of the body")."<sup>56</sup>

During the ascensions in the Hekhalot literature, there are frequent visual images of ladders, wagons and carriages, which are used as a means of ascension. Almost always, however, the journey from one heavenly palace to another is carried out with the assistance of two angels who escort the mystic on either side. New attendant angels replace the previous ones in each new palace. There are two incidents whereby the mystic is taken forcibly upon his knees until he arrives at the throne of Glory.

The *Shi'ur Komah* is not restricted to the Hekhalot writings, but is actually part of the ancient Merkavah tradition. However, according to Gruenwald, *Shi'ur Komah* is definitely the most controversial text amongst the Hekhalot writings as it outlines the physical measurements of G-d's appendages and gives them mystical names. The actual name *Shi'ur Komah* means "The Measurement of the Body," and it evolves from Song of Songs vii,8. It was first discovered in Tannaitic literature in association with the vessels

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<sup>56</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), 16.

belonging to the Temple. Nevertheless, 2 Enoch xxxix, 6 is probably the foremost mention of the Shi'ur Komah of G-d.<sup>57</sup>

Throughout this material there is the same old paradox of seeing something which is invisible. G-d cannot be seen by any human or angel, nevertheless all the exact measurement of G-d's limbs are written down. Throughout this literature there is the basic tension between the hidden and invisible G-d and the corporeal form of G-d with all His exact measurements and characteristics. There was much disagreement among the rabbis during the Middle Ages whether to believe in this material or not. Maimonides, as a youngster, believed in the book. However, when he had matured, he denied its Jewish origin. There is only one complete text which is printed in Musajoff's *Merkavah Shelemah* and commences in a customary manner of the Hekhalot literature: "Rabbi Yishma'el said: I saw the King of the Kings sitting on a high and exalted throne, and His servants were attending Him on His right and on His left."<sup>58</sup> Then Metatron comes into view and discloses to Rabbi Yishma'el the measurements of G-d's body. The use of anthropomorphism in Shi'ur Komah is unbelievable. There is a section whereby the measurement of G-d's beard is given, and even that of His eyebrows and curls. Of course Rabbi Yishma'el was disturbed by what Metatron had told him and therefore, Rabbi 'Akiva said to Rabbi Yishma'el: "Everybody who knows this measure of our Creator and His corporeal configuration which is hidden from the people, is promised life in the world to come."<sup>59</sup> The second part of Shi'ur Komah discusses the secret mystical names and enormous dimensions of G-d's arrows, sword, throne and living creatures. The third part of the text is about Metatron and the angels

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<sup>57</sup> Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 213.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 214.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 215.

performing the ritual of the heavenly Qedushah; and the Merkavah hymns and Psalms form the conclusion of the text.

There may be a few examples whereby the glory of the world to come is promised to the Hekhalot mystics but the comprehensive tone of the writing is certainly not eschatological. In opposition to the Hekhalot writings, the apocalyptic writings contain visions of the impending devastation of the world and of the messianic future. The apocalyptic visionaries describe their ascensions to heaven and with the supervision of various angels, they learn about the workings of Nature. The most extraordinary factor in these divine manifestations is that the visionary discovers the laws and regulations of how all these mysteries function. The knowledge of natural phenomena is revealed the most in the Enoch literature. Enoch reveals knowledge of divine retribution and automatically the secrets of nature are also revealed. Gruenwald reckons that the knowledge of nature and of G-d go hand in hand. He says; "In this respect, apocalyptic revelations claim to effect a substantial expansion of the capabilities of the human intellect not only in matters that pertain to man's understanding of the operation of natural phenomena, but also in his understanding of history and divine retribution."<sup>60</sup>

We now turn to the books of the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha which were composed at the time of the intertestamentary period which is from about the second century B.C.E. to the end of the second century C.E. These books were written at roughly the same time as the Qumran scrolls. Apocryphon means 'hidden' in Greek and the phrase apocrypha came to mean the religious literature which was not included in the Hebrew Bible. These books were nearly all written by Jews in either Hebrew or Aramaic. The pseudepigrapha are books which are ascribed by their writers to famous

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 8.

people mostly from the Hebrew Bible, such as Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Isaiah and Ezra. This is the only reason why the name is taken from the word 'pseudo'. In fact to adopt a name of a superior biblical character was quite a prevalent practice. The books of the pseudepigrapha and the apocrypha were similar in theme and method to the Bible and were also very holy in character. However, the rabbis did not altogether accept these books because they felt that their apocalyptic character was a negative influence to the Jews who were mourning the destruction of the Holy Temple. Then there was the same old problem of the authors giving G-d corporeal qualities. However, according to Margolies, the most worrying point was the "population explosion" of angels, that they even almost overpowered G-d.<sup>61</sup>

## ENOCH

The Book of Enoch is the most significant pseudepigraph of the first two centuries B.C. There were many authors of this Book and they belonged to the proper lineage of the prophets. However these authors had to work under names of ancient sages because the people of the time could not tolerate any new message from G-d. Therefore whenever people were inspired to reveal their visions, they had to use pseudonyms. R.H. Charles considers the Book of Enoch to be the result of many authors and written over a long time. The authors concerned themselves with all the subjects of the prophets, but of course it treats these topics in a progressive way. The oldest sections of the Enoch components are pre-Maccabean and the book was composed partly in Aramaic and partly in Hebrew with the authors belonging to the Hasids or the Pharisees. Opposing accounts are delivered "on the Messiah, the Messianic kingdom, the origin of sin, Sheol, the final

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 77.

judgement, the resurrection, and the nature of the future life. There is an elaborate angelology and demonology, and much space is devoted to the calendar, and the heavenly bodies and their movements."<sup>62</sup>

Enoch appears to be the most significant guide to the Seven Heavens where he describes the millions of angels. It is written in the Talmud that "the angel of G-d encamps round about them that fear G-d, and rescues them."<sup>63</sup> The explanation for this, says the Talmud, is that whenever a human renders an act in realization of G-d's desire, then that person produces positive energies apparent in angelic beings which prevail with him throughout his life and escort him to the spiritual world following death. In the same way as an angel is a materialization of the Divine will, so are angels which are created by human will, inasmuch as the human being is created in the image of G-d. Adin Steinsaltz explains: "Every mitzvah (good deed) that a man does is not only an act of transformation in the material world; it is also a spiritual act, sacred in itself ... the emotion, the intention, the essential holiness of the act combine to become the essence of the mitzvah as an existence in itself, as something that has objective reality. And this separate existence of the mitzvah, by being unique and holy, creates the angel ... "<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, Eleazar of Worms wrote that G-d "created glorious images and placed the thoughts of His decrees in the images, and among them is an image more splendid than the rest, and sometimes [it appears] in human form."<sup>65</sup> He is clearly discussing the creation of angels. Another quote which explains the manifestation of angels is from Sefer ha-Shem written by Eleazar: "It is customary for G-d to clothe the thoughts of His decrees, to

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>63</sup> Gershon Winkler, *The Soul of Matter* (New York: The Judaica Press, 1982), 79.

<sup>64</sup> Steinsaltz, *The Thirteen Petalled Rose*, 10-11.

<sup>65</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 206.

show [them] to the prophets so that they will know that G-d has set His decrees. The prophet knows His thoughts according to the vision that he sees. At times this vision is called an angel."<sup>66</sup>

The angels are considered as clothing G-d's edicts or thoughts, however the form the angel takes is dependent in each particular case on the specific person to whom the angels appears. There are various passages in the Talmud that says that angels often descend to the world with the appearance of human beings. One exceptionally notable legend is from the Hekhalot literature which tells about Gabriel who was ordered by G-d to show himself to the wife of the tanna Elisha in the appearance of her husband as she came forth from ritual immersion. The amazing climax to the tale is that the couple were eventually blessed with a child. The important thing to realize from this legend is that an angelic figure can take on the appearance of a specific human being and not solely a general human shape. G-d transmits an angel in harmony with peoples' thoughts and mental competence.<sup>67</sup>

However the rabbis were most alarmed by the manifold angels in the pseudepigrapha and the apocrypha which seemed to overwhelm G-d and their similarity to the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses. Therefore, the rabbis proceeded to quell and censure all of the literature in this genre. An example of the surplus of angels found in the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha can be found in Enoch 1, a section of which was also seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls whereby Enoch says that he saw a hundred thousand times a hundred thousand, ten million times ten million, an infinite

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 212-213.

and uncountable array who appear in front of the glory of the Lord of the Spirits. Then Enoch goes on to explain four of them:

I saw them standing - on the four wings of the Lord of the Spirits and saw four other faces among those who do not slumber, and I came to know their names, which the angel who came with me revealed to me. ... I heard the voices of those four faces while they were saying praises before the Lord of Glory ... And after that, I asked the angel of peace who was going with me and showed me everything that was hidden: "Who are these four faces which I have seen?" And he said to me, "The first one is the merciful and forbearing Michael; the second one, who is set over all disease and every wound of the children of the people, is Raphael; the third, who is set over all actions of repentance unto the hope of those who would inherit eternal life, is Phanuel (in other versions, Uriel) by name."<sup>68</sup>

Metatron has a considerable part to play in the pseudepigrapha, the Talmud, and particularly in the Zohar. The Zohar outlines exactly what caused the mortal Enoch's transformation into the heavenly Metatron. Because of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, he forfeited the divine spark which G-d had breathed into his body at the time of creation. That exact divine spark then penetrated into Enoch, empowering him to accomplish the spiritual perfection which Adam had failed to achieve. Whereas human beings cannot be flawless, it was necessary to have Enoch transported to heaven to become the angel Metatron. The flames that constantly emanate from Metatron bring about armies of angels, as his name is the numerical equivalent of *Shaddai*, which is one of the various portrayals of G-d Himself. The Zohar speaks of Metatron as "the shining light of the *Shekhinah*", or the divine presence. The Zohar recounts that Metatron was created before any earthly thing because he was to personify a sort of microcosmic spiritual perfection, completely independent from corruption and contamination. In a subsequent Zoharic work, the *Tikkunei Zohar*, Metatron is perceived as the

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<sup>68</sup> Margolies, *A Gathering of Angels*, 79-80.

biblical "tree of knowledge of good and bad." This insinuates that within Metatron are blended both human and angelic excellence which furnishes Metatron with the ideal characteristics to negotiate between the human and the Divine.<sup>69</sup>

Enoch describes visually his visit to the darkness of the underworld of *Sheol*, *Gehenna*, hell and the bottomless abyss. Firstly, the heavenly ascension will be discussed and thereafter those of hell. There are many factors of interest in the Enoch apocalypses, such as narrative and revelatory, however this dissertation is concentrating on the visionary experience. The following excerpts from the Book of Enoch have been chosen to demonstrate their tremendous visionary quality. The vision of the divine image is pivotal to Jewish apocalyptic writings and in some of these writings the vision of G-d represents the climax of the heavenly ascent. In Enoch's vision of the enthroned form of G-d (14:5-24), he also puts stress on G-d's invisibility:

And the vision was shown to me thus: Beyond, in the vision clouds invited me and a mist summoned me, and the course of the stars and the lightnings sped and hastened me, and the winds in the vision caused me to fly and lifted me upward, and bore me into heaven. And I went in till I drew nigh to a wall which is built of crystals and surrounded by tongues of fire: .... And I looked and saw therein a lofty throne: its appearance was as crystal, and the wheels thereof as the shining sun, and there was the vision of cherubim. And from underneath the throne came streams of flaming fire so that I could not look thereon. And the Great Glory sat thereon, and His raiment shone more brightly than the sun and was whiter than any snow. None of the angels could enter and could behold His face by reason of the magnificence and glory, and no flesh could behold him ...<sup>70</sup>

The writer of this vision sees a luminous anthropos on a throne and even though he states in verse 22 and 23 that neither angel nor human could see

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 80-82.

<sup>70</sup> Charles, *Book of Enoch*, 197-198.

this divine figure, he does just that and goes on to describe what it looks like. Wolfson points out that the language used in the description of the enthroned form of G-d is similar to that of Daniel in Daniel 7:10-11 and according to Wolfson: "Here, too, one can discern the clash between the vision of the enthroned form (thus allowing for the description of his hair and the mentioning of his garment) and the overwhelming sense that such a vision is impossible (thus the visionary falls to the ground)."<sup>71</sup>

Martha Himmelfarb considers 1 Enoch 14 to be based on Ezekiel's vision of G-d's glory on the chariot, which insinuates that G-d does not have His presence in the Temple in Jerusalem, but rather has His abode in a heavenly Temple. Himmelfarb explains that: "it is this desacralization of the earthly temple in favour of the heavenly that opens the way for Enoch's ascent in the Book of the Watchers."<sup>72</sup>

Gruenwald considers the crystal-like semblance of the wall which Enoch describes to probably have evolved from Ezekiel 1:22, whereby Ezekiel says that on top of the living creatures there was a shining crystal which resembled a firmament. There is also a similarity to Isaiah, "when you walk through fire you shall not be burned ..." as Enoch walked into the tongues of fire and was not burnt.<sup>73</sup>

In a third passage in 2 Enoch the apocalyptist sees the divine form which is so enormous that it goes beyond any measurement and for the purposes of this dissertation it is worthwhile quoting it:

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<sup>71</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 31.

<sup>72</sup> Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13.

<sup>73</sup> Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 33.

As for you, you hear my words, out of my lips, a human being created equal to yourselves; but I, I have heard the words from the fiery lips of the Lord. For the lips of the Lord are a furnace of fire, and his words are the fiery flames which come out. You my children, you see my face, ..., I am one who has seen the face of the Lord, like iron made burning hot by a fire, emitting sparks. For you gaze into my eyes, ..., but I have gazed into the eyes of the Lord, like rays of the shining sun and terrifying the eyes of a human being. You my children, you see my right hand beckoning you, ..., but I, I have seen the right hand of the Lord, beckoning me, who fills heaven. You, you see the extent of my body, ...; but I, I have seen the extent of the Lord, without measure and without analogy, who has no end. (39:1-6)<sup>74</sup>

In all the visions one can feel the tension of what it must be like to stand before the Creator. Enoch describes his fear and trembling and how he fell down on his face. However, G-d instructed Enoch to stand up and thereafter Enoch is transformed into an angelic being:

And the Lord said to Michael: 'Go and take Enoch from out his earthly garments, and anoint him with my sweet ointment, and put him into the garments of My glory.' And Michael did thus, as the Lord told him. He anointed me, and dressed me, and the appearance of that ointment is more than the great light, and his ointment is like sweet dew, and its smell mild, shining like the sun's ray, and I looked at myself, and was like one of his glorious ones .... (22:8-10)<sup>75</sup>

Enoch is later transformed into Metatron when he ascends alive into heaven. He is then appointed as one of the most important angels and even sits on a throne next to G-d. He is appointed as the High Priest of the heavenly Temple and because he knows all the secrets of the mysteries, divine and earthly, he is minister to the Divine Throne and of all wisdom. Enoch describes his transformation into Metatron to R. Ishmael:

R. Ishmael said: Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence, said to me: In addition to all these qualities, the Holy one, blessed by He,

<sup>74</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum than Shines*, 32.

<sup>75</sup> Charles, *Book of Enoch*, 443.

laid his hand on me and blessed me with 1,365,000 blessings. I was enlarged and increased in size till I matched the world in length and breadth. He made to grow on me seventy-two wings, thirty-six on one side and thirty-six on the other, and each single wing covered the entire world. He fixed in me 365,00 eyes and each eye was like the Great Light. There was no sort of splendor, brilliance, brightness, or beauty in the luminaries of the world that he failed to fix in me." (3 Enoch 9:1-5)<sup>76</sup>

Nature plays a very important part in the apocalyptic writings. The apocalyptists felt that the eschatological time was close and therefore the visions of nature were being revealed. When Enoch had completed his visit to the heavenly throne, he went on another journey. This journey he took with an assemblage of angels which took him to the ends of the earth whereby he had the most stunning visions, such as the following:

I saw the winds of heaven which turn and bring the circumference of the sun and all the stars to their setting. I saw the winds on the earth carrying the clouds: I saw the paths of the angels. I saw at the end of the earth the firmament of the heaven above. And I proceeded and saw a place which burns day and night, where there are seven mountains of magnificent stones, ... And as for those towards the east, one was of coloured stone, and one of pearl, and one of jacinth, and those towards the south of red stone. But the middle one reached to heaven like the throne of G-d, of alabaster, and the summit of the throne was as sapphire. And I saw a flaming fire. (2 Enoch, 18 4-10)<sup>77</sup>

The revelation of cosmological secrets occupy a very big part of the Enochic literature. With the guidance of various angels, the apocalyptist learns the laws of how natural phenomena operate. The climax of the ascent in 2 Enoch is the disclosure of Creation. Subsequent to Enoch's ascension through the Seven Heavens and after he had been transformed into an angel, then G-d showed him the contents of a secret which had never before been revealed, not even to any of the angelic realm. The biggest difference

<sup>76</sup> Wolfsohn, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 109.

<sup>77</sup> Charles, *Book of Enoch*, 200.

in this account of Creation and that of Genesis 1 is that here G-d speaks about a kind of prehistory of Creation whereby light and darkness were first created. G-d tells Enoch that before the world was formed G-d moved about and "from the invisible he made all things visible, himself being invisible."<sup>78</sup>

G-d related to Enoch how it happened that out of the very lowest darkness came the visible and the invisible:

I commanded in the very lowest parts, that visible things should come down from invisible, and Adoil came down very great, and I beheld him, and lo! he had a belly of great light. And I said to him: 'Become undone, Adoil, and the visible come out of thee.' And he came undone, and a great light came out.... And I summoned the very lowest a second time, and said: 'Let Archas come forth hard,' and he came forth hard from the invisible. And Archas came forth, hard, heavy, and very red. And I said: 'Be opened, Archas, and let there be born from thee,' and he came undone, an age came forth, very great and very dark, bearing the creation of all lower things, and I saw that it was good ... (2 Enoch 25:1-4, 26:1-3)<sup>79</sup>

2 Enoch was not content with the uncomplicated act of Creation in Genesis whereby light was simply brought into being by the act of speech. In 2 Enoch, as is written above, G-d allows creation to take place out of two very strange creatures. Martha Himmelfarb reckons that there is a particular reason for this as she explains in the following: "the problem so important to Hellenistic thought - how the immaterial, invisible G-d could come into relationship with the material visible world - was not a problem for the biblical authors, who know no radical divide between spirit and matter. But Hellenistic thinkers regularly interposed intermediaries between the highest god and the world he created."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 459.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 445-446

<sup>80</sup> Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 85.

M Gaster published for the first time in English one of the oldest Revelations of the Hebrew vision of hell which is the Revelation of Moses. Gaster assumes that this Revelation must have acted as a source to that of "Peter, then to that of Paul, Ezra, Abraham, Isaiah, Virgin Mary, St. Macarius, and the host of others down to Dante and St. Patrick."<sup>81</sup> Moses was given permission to go and see paradise and hell. As Enoch has given us quite a lot of information about paradise, we will focus on Moses' trip to hell as is revealed in the "Revelation of Moses."

Hanging is a very popular form of punishment in the next world. The reason for this is that it can be associated with any crime that one can imagine. A widespread measure-for-measure punishment in the next world was hanging the person by the limb which carried out the sin. The Hebrew Bible also implemented this law. Himmelfarb points out that when Joseph was in prison, his associate, the baker is first decapitated and then he is hung on a tree. In Joshua 10:26, Joshua first kills and then hangs five Canaanite kings. The bones of Saul and Jonathan are hung in a public square by the Philistines (2 Sam. 21:12).<sup>82</sup>

Moses saw angels torturing sinners while they were being hanged by their eyes and tongues. When Moses asked the Lord of Hell why they were being punished like that, he was told that they had looked at pretty and married women with evil eyes. They had also given false witness against their friends and were envious of their money. There were others hanging by their sexual organs because they had committed adultery and stolen and murdered.

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<sup>81</sup> M. Gaster, "Hebrew Visions of Hell and Paradise," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 23 (1893): 571.

<sup>82</sup> Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic form in Jewish and Christian Literature*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985), 83.

The stress on correct sexual behaviour is very prominent in early Jewish literature. The Hebrew Bible stressed sexual purity to encourage the Israelites to distinguish themselves from their neighbours. This issue was so significant that the prohibition of adultery became one of the ten commandments and death became the punishment for many sexual sins. This attitude was carried over into the apocrypha, the pseudepigrapha, to Philo's writings, to Qumran and also into rabbinic literature.<sup>83</sup>

An additional measure-for-measure punishment takes the form of tantalization. An example of this is when a person is unable to restrain from eating in this world, it results in an inability to eat in the next world. There were sinners who were pleading for death: "Woe unto us, for the terrible punishment of Hell; would we could die."<sup>84</sup> They were not allowed to die and instead they hanged by their feet with their heads downwards and their bodies were covered with long black worms.

The punishments seem to get more and more horrific. The sinners who wasted the money of others; accepted bribery; made themselves superior and refused to accept that G-d created the world and the Law, these people were given to the scorpions. This is how Moses related the avengence of the scorpions:

There the sinners were lying on their faces; and he saw two thousand scorpions swarming over them and stinging them and torturing them, and the sinners cried bitterly. Each scorpion has 70,000 mouths, and each mouth 70,000 stings, and each sting has 70,000 vesicles filled with poison and venom, and with these are the sinners imbued and thus are they tortured; and their eyes are sunk in their sockets for fear and dread, and they cry: "Woe unto us, for our sins, and for the day of judgement."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 69-73.

<sup>84</sup> Gaster, *Hebrew Visions of Hell and Paradise*, 582.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 582.

Another interesting as well as horrifying feature of the Tour of Hell are the angels which surprisingly carry out the acts of torture. Himmelfarb points out that although the angels of the Hebrew Bible have to carry out acts of punishment in this world according to G-d's commandment, they do not take pleasure in torturing sinners as in the Tours of Hell. Moses relates a scene he witnessed whereby the angels of destruction tie their victims up with chains made out of iron. They then lash them with fiery whips and break their teeth with fiery stones. This they repeat from morning until evening and then in the night they lengthen their teeth so as to start the stoning again the next morning. These angels are clearly cruel as Himmelfarb stresses when comparing them to the angels in the Bible: "Nor are the fiery angels of Revelation much like the angels of hell; they are not cruel demons, but G-d's agents in the final drama."<sup>86</sup>

## **KABBALAH**

We now move on to the literature of the Kabbalah. According to Steven Katz, the Kabbalah viewed the Torah as G-d's perfect word and as such the Kabbalah based all its information on the Torah and insisted on its validity. In fact, the Zohar is actually one long commentary on the Bible and regards the Torah as a living organism and as G-d's own truth. As Katz says: "The very novelty of the Kabbalistic interpretation of Scripture is grounded in the first instance in the high traditional, conservative belief in the authority of the Torah as G-d's own will."<sup>87</sup>

The Kabbalists based all their writings on the Bible and especially on the Song of Songs. This was seen in the Shi'ur Komah, in the Medieval

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<sup>86</sup> Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 121.

<sup>87</sup> Katz, *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, 17.

Kabbalah and in Hasidic literature. The Kabbalistic writers had their own innovative way of translating the Song of Songs according to their needs. For instance they took the symbol of G-d as the lover in the Song of Songs 5:10-16 and used this as the basis of the eroticism which exists in the Kabbalah. The main mystical symbol of the Kabbalah is the Tree of Life with the nine upper *sefirot* which are male and the tenth *sefirah* which is called the female *Shekhinah*. As can be seen the erotic Song of Songs is the source material even for the work of the *sefirot*, as the *tikkun* (the repair) of the world will be when there is a perfect sexual union between the male *sefirot* and the *Shekhinah*.

The Kabbalists insisted on the word of G-d as being perfect, and all Kabbalistic writings was full of biblical idioms and stories with the Zohar taking the form of biblical commentaries. This meant that the Kabbalists viewed the Torah as the ultimate truth with the sacred text as containing all the secrets as well as all the answers. Katz explains the relationship between the Kabbalah and the Torah:

The very novelty of the Kabbalistic interpretation of Scripture is grounded in the first instance in the highly traditional conservative belief in the authority of G-d's own will. ... The further Kabbalistic speculations which promulgated such esoteric beliefs as that the Torah was G-d's 'name', and also that the Torah was a living organism, odd as these doctrinal notions might be, are not only developments growing out of biblical and talmudic traditions, but even more importantly for our present discussion, are predicated on the traditional view of the Torah as *Torat Emet*, G-d's own truth.<sup>88</sup>

For the Kabbalists, the *Shi'ur Komah* took on a new significance. They were no longer interested in the particulars of the measurements, numbers and mysterious names which were written in these ancient fragments. What

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

concerned the Kabbalists was the mystical form of the G-dhead. They were no longer content with the *Ein Sof*, the infinite which exists hidden in the depth of its own being with no shape, no name, no imaginary depiction. The new trend of Kabbalah believed that the *Ein-Sof* is actually an Active Divinity which certainly has a shape even though it may be mystical. The Kabbalists went even further to say that this mystical shape can be communicated by images and names and can be manifested in symbols.<sup>89</sup>

The Kabbalists used various symbols to communicate this Active Divinity. Amongst others the main ones consist of the Tree of the *sefirot*, the mystical human form (Adam Kadmon) and in the names of G-d. The *Sefer Yetsirah* first mentioned the *sefirot* as being the ten primal numbers in which all existence originated. According to Adin Steinsaltz, these *sefirot* (which are the means of divine revelation) have the same relationship with the primary divine light as the soul has to the body. These ten *sefirot* can also be seen in the form of a standing human figure with the *sefirot* matching the main limbs. We relate to the hidden Divine through this manifestation in the ten *sefirot*. These *sefirot* have many functions and hidden levels.<sup>90</sup>

The Kabbalists assumed the term *sefirot* to explain the qualities which make up the Active Divinity and by which the concealed face of G-d is shown. The concealed face is known in Hebrew as the '*Anpin Penima'in*'. The secret movement of these *sefirot* are the law of motion of all Creation. The *sefirot* emanate from the *Ein Sof*. G-d obviously did not want to remain totally hidden and therefore revealed certain of His qualities to man. When the hidden G-d turned outward to create the world He ensured that the ten *sefirot* emanated from Him and these are powers which He uses to rule the

<sup>89</sup> Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the G-dhead*, 38.

<sup>90</sup> Steinsaltz, *The Thirteen Petalled Rose*, 37-38.

world. The *sefirot* are the different qualities of G-d as they appear to man and every person will perceive these qualities in a different way. These qualities were visualized as bright lights.

Wolfson points out that the most important phenomenon of a mystical vision is that of light. This light symbolism is different according to the different religions. What is common in the various religions is that they all have light symbolism in their mystical experiences. The light is what gives shape to the mystical experience and the mystic is then illuminated. This light symbolism is most prominent in the twelfth and thirteenth century Kabbalah. The way in which G-d is visualized in the Kabbalah is through light and the mystic who visualizes this light, then becomes enlightened as a result of the luminous quality of G-d. Wolfson picks out two of the many texts which speak about this illumination. One of these texts is taken from a comment on Ezekiel's chariot. It was written in the second half of the thirteenth century by the Castilian Kabbalist Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen and it describes the luminosity of the divine chariot:

The names above are the true essence, and they are divine powers hewn from the quarry of the intelligible light and from the pure, holy wondrous light. They are appointed to do everything, and every action is realized through them. They are interpreted truthfully by the holy prophets, the great sages, and the select few who make use of them in all good things before the Holy One, blessed by He, and not for another matter that is not the will of G-d ... All this comes to teach you that the names above with the true essence are hewn from the quarry of the light of life, for the intelligible grades are called kings and their glorious names are called princes. He who knows and comprehends the essence of the names, and knows how to mention them properly and correctly, as they are mentioned by the angels, his prayer is immediately received and approved. The enlightened will comprehend this secret that I have revealed concerning the matter of the name.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 271

The above passage involves the visual manifestation of the letters of the name in fiery form and also the proper recitation of the names. The mystic becomes illuminated when he has the knowledge of the names. The second example chosen by Wolfson is a text written by the Kabbalist Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi. He explained the words of the Sefer Yesirah 1:8, "Ten ineffable *sefirot*, their appearance is like lightning": "There are those who explain [the words] 'their appearance is like lightning' [in the following way]: when a prophet or a mystic comes to gaze upon these holy lights [i.e., the *sefirot*] he knows that at times they shine in relation to him and they appear as if they were lightning, and then they immediately are hidden, and they shine again and are hidden."<sup>92</sup> It needs to be understood that in order to be enlightened one needs to visualize the lights above, but one can only visualize them if one is enlightened.

This light imagery which appeared in the Kabbalah was from aggadic Merkavah and Neo Platonic literature as well as from the Sefer ha-Bahir. The word *sefirot* is from *sappir* in Hebrew, which means sapphire which insinuates luminosity. The divine emanations or *sefirot* are explained in the following text:

'And there in a cloud appeared the Presence of the Lord' (Exod. 16:10), in order that the glory that is within it would not be seen, as it says, 'He made darkness His screen' (Ps. 18:12), 'a cloud and thick darkness are around Him' (Ps. 97:2), that is, surrounding the Holy One, blessed be He, there is a cloud and thick darkness. This is to say, the inner glory that is within it is not seen, even by His servants and messengers who are sent before Him, but the thick darkness itself is the transparent and translucent light, as the sages, blessed be their memory, said in the prayer, '[You appeared to them] in bright clouds,' and these are the *sefirot*. Their light in relation to His light is like the light of the candle in relation to the sun, and they are like a clear glass

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<sup>92</sup> *Perush le-Sefer Yesirah*, attributed to the RABaD, in Sefer Yesirah, 27a; cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 271-272.

that shines and illuminates, showing to the eye what is within it. The tenth *sefirah* is the speculum that does not shine, and it is like a glass mirror, and the one who looks at it sees His image within it, and that which is within it is not seen outside it. ... Therefore this *sefirah* is called the cloud of glory, for the glory is concealed in it. The rabbis, blessed be their memory, called it the speculum that does not shine because of the glory that is hidden within it. When the Holy One, blessed be he, wills to talk to His prophets, this *sefirah* becomes filled from the inner glory, according to their level, and they hear the word, but the one who speaks is not seen by them, for His is hidden within it.<sup>93</sup>

These *sefirot* are seen as bright clouds which conceal the inner *kavod*. The *sefirot* as bright clouds have a double function. On the one hand they stop us from visualizing the Divine, but on the other hand they make visible what is actually invisible. The tenth *sefirah* which is the *Shekhinah*, allows us to see through her the rest of the *sefirot*. In other words the last *sefirah* is feminine and all those above are male, and she is called the "speculum that does not shine" which is a talmudic expression. She is passive and receives like a mirror the masculine inner glory. Therefore, although the inner glory is concealed, it can be seen through the *Shekhinah*. There are erotic undertones here which run through the course of the Kabbalah. Once again we have the underlying paradox that what is invisible can be visualised and what can be seen has no form. The Kabbalists believed that if one understood the *sefirot* and contemplated for a long and worthwhile time on them, one could have a prophetic experience.

The *sefirot* have infinite qualities and each has its own specific characteristics and function and even though they are divine they have limits because they exist in time. The *sefirot* were personalized even though they are shrouded in mystery as explained by Steinsaltz:

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<sup>93</sup> *MS New York - JTSA Mic. 1727, fols. 18a-b; cited in Wolfson, Through a Speculum that Shines, 273-274.*

To say that the first *Sefirah*, *Keter* ("crown"), is the basic divine will and also the source of all delight and pleasure, only touches the surface. As is true with *Hokhmah* ("wisdom"), which is intuitive, instantaneous knowledge, while *Binah* ("understanding") tends more to logical analysis. *Daat* ("knowledge") is different from both, being not only the accumulation or the summation of that which is known, but a sort of eleventh *Sefirah*-belonging and yet not belonging to the ten. *Hesed* ("grace") is thus the fourth *Sefirah* and is the irrepressibly expanding impulse, or *Gedulah* ("greatness"), of love and growth. *Gevurah* ("power") is restraint and concentration, control as well as fear and awe; while *Tiferet* ("beauty") is the combination of harmony, truth, compassion. *Netzah* ("eternity") is conquest or the capacity for overcoming; *Hod* ("splendor") can also be seen as persistence or holding on; and *Yesod* ("foundation") is, among other things, the vehicle, the carrier from one thing or condition to another. *Malkhut* ("kingdom"), the tenth and last *Sefirah* is, besides sovereignty or rule, the word and the ultimate receptacle.<sup>94</sup>

As the *sefirot* show, the *Ein-Sof* which is invisible is actually present during all the stages of the process of emanation and Creation in the subsequent materialization. In other words there is no shape that can claim independence from the *Ein-Sof*. To stretch the point even further, the more tangible the form, the more obvious is the existence of the *Ein-Sof* in it. Scholem explains how the Kabbalist moves away from concentration on the physical shape of the Divine even though still acknowledging the mystical shape: "The Divine is not only the shapeless abyss into which everything sinks, although it is that abyss too. In its turning toward the outside, it contains the guarantee of the existence of form - precarious and elusive by nature, but no less powerful for that."<sup>95</sup>

The *sefirotic* lights were visualized with the aid of the imagination. With this intense visualization one could attain an ecstatic ascent to the heavenly realms. It is only through the imagination that one is able to see the spiritual in terms of the latter. The *sefirot* comprise the imaginary forms of the

<sup>94</sup> Steinsaltz, *Thirteen Petalled Rose*, 38-39.

<sup>95</sup> Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the G-dhead*, 42.

spiritual G-dhead. An anonymous commentator on the *sefirot* written in about the thirteenth century in Castile illustrates the power of a visual comprehension of the *sefirot*:

I will enlighten you and lead you in this way, to inform you of the mystery of unity (*sod ha-yihud*) through which the King is unified and the knowledge of His truth through which He is elevated, to show you the force of His comprehension, the wealth of the glory of His splendor and His kingdom, and the majesty of the splendor of His greatness in all the places of His dominion. I will show you the splendor to secure you in the Supernal Crown [first Sefirah], to cover you in the splendor of the faithful Wisdom [second Sefirah], to open for you the gates of Understanding [third Sefirah], to allow you to cleave to the attributes of Mercy, Strength, and Beauty [fourth to the sixth Sefirot], to make you take delight in Eternity, Majesty, the Foundation, and the Crown [seventh to the tenth Sefirot]. Then your soul will don the garment of splendor and beauty, grace and love, and you will be crowned with the resplendent light that surrounds the Presence, and this is the secret in which is contained the mystery of the upper and lower knowledge.<sup>96</sup>

The interactions between the *sefirot* on the Tree are fundamental to the whole of existence and therefore the qualities of the *sefirot* can be related to all kinds of knowledge. They can also be applied to human experience and even the actual human being, because we are made in the image of G-d. The Kabbalah gave the highest place to man. The primordial Man was made up of the ten *sefirot* and existed as Adam Kadmon before the Adam of Genesis. He had a human shape and the difference between him and the Tree was that the Tree of Life extends downwards from the *keter*, whereas Adam Kadmon stood on his feet.

According to the Zohar, man incorporates everything that is above in heaven and everything below on earth, which includes all the celestial and terrestrial creatures. The Zohar is convinced it is because of this that G-d chose man

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<sup>96</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 284.

as His divine manifestation. The human being contains everything and the *sefirot* form his composition. Man was considered as the most perfect shape which contains all the other shapes which exist. Adam Kadmon who is the mystical human being in whose shape G-d is made apparent, and the earthly lower human being are always connected in an orderly world. The Zohar reiterates this: "The perfection of the universe resides [or: appears] in this shape of man; it was this shape seen by Ezekiel on the throne, and of this that Daniel spoke when he said, 'And, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the Ancient of Days, and he was brought near before Him.'" (Dan. 7:13)<sup>97</sup>

Another archetypal image which comprises all the *sefirot* with their shapes and names and all the upper and lower beings is the *Shekhinah*. The term *Shekhinah* appears often in talmudic literature. It has not been found in the Bible and what has been published of the Dead Sea scrolls. In the Talmud *Shekhinah* refers to G-d's "dwelling or presence which means G-d's visible or hidden presence in a given place, His immediacy."<sup>98</sup> The confusion sets in when one tries to discover if the *Shekhinah* was one of G-d's qualities, separate from G-d; or whether she was actually part of G-d. Many texts display one or the other meanings. There are texts in the Kabbalah whereby the *Shekhinah* is quite clearly only G-d's presence. Others speak about the *Shekhinah* as being one of G-d's qualities. Only in much later Kabbalistic works did the *Shekhinah* become linked to Divine Wisdom. The Hekhalot and Merkavah literature, like that of the aggadah identified the *Shekhinah* with the glory of G-d. Therefore the *Shekhinah* was one with G-d, not just one of His qualities.

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<sup>97</sup> Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the G-dhead*, 45.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

The first time when the *Shekhinah* appeared as a being separate from G-d was discovered by Scholem in the midrash on Proverbs 22:29:

When the Sanhedrin wished to designate him [King Solomon] along with three kings and four private individuals [as ones who have no share in the World to Come], the *Shekhinah* stood before the Holy One, blessed be He, and spoke to Him: "Lord of the Worlds! 'Seest thou a man diligent in his business?'[Prov. 22:29] - they wish to count him [Solomon] among the darklings [i.e., those to be damned]." At that moment a heavenly voice went out and said, "'He shall stand before kings' [ibid.] - and he shall not stand before darklings."<sup>99</sup>

Interestingly enough medieval Jewish philosophers all took the view that the *Shekhinah* was a manifestation of G-d, a created form which is known as the *kavod* of G-d (G-d's glory). This *kavod* of G-d was often depicted as primordial light. This is also an argument in favour of how Judaism is also a visual tradition and how the world was not created originally with only an auditory basis. Judah ben Barzillai al-Bargeloni who wrote just before the early stages of the Kabbalah describes the *Shekhinah* as the created light in the following beautiful passage on the divine *kavod*:

When the thought arose in G-d of creating a world, He first created the Holy Spirit, to be a sign of His divinity, which was seen by the prophets and the angels. And He created the image of the Throne of His Glory, to be a throne for the Holy Spirit, called the Glory of our G-d, which is a radiant brilliance and a great light that shines upon all His other creatures. And that great light is called the Glory of our G-d, blessed be His Name ... And the Sages call this great light *Shekhinah* ... And no creature can behold this great light in its primal existence, whether an angel or a seraph or a prophet, because of its great power at the beginning. And were a prophet to behold it, his soul would immediately separate itself from his body and he would die. ... For any "seeing" that is spoken of regarding an angel or a prophet, concerning this created light that the Holy One, blessed be He created, that he showed to the angels or prophets, refers to the Holy one, blessed be He showing them the end [or "back"] of that

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 152.

light to whom He wishes, but no man can see the beginning of the primordial light and the content of his glory and the image of his brilliance.<sup>100</sup>

The Kabbalists had two different views of G-d - one was the hidden *Ein-Sof* and the other was the creative dynamic G-d, revealed in the *sefirotic* Tree as has been discussed already in this chapter. There were further developments with the *Shekhinah* as she became known as the tenth and final *sefirah* and took on all the female roles which included mother, daughter, bride, as well as *Kenesseth Yisra'el*. Thereafter the *Shekhinah* manifested in two *sefirot*, *binah* and *malkhut*, *binah* having the more active qualities (as she is the one who gives birth) and *malkhut* being passive and receiving all from above. The author of the Zohar placed a lot of emphasis on the *Shekhinah* as the feminine presence of G-d. He conceptualises that the *Ein-Sof* has its female counterpart, the *Shekhinah*, and that only when the two are united, which is depicted in explicit sexual terms, does harmony truly govern the universe. Human sexuality (as long as it is performed under the *halakhah*), according to the theme that that which occurs in heaven is mirrored on earth, is also encouraged in the Kabbalah. When human coupling takes place the *Shekhinah* is present and therefore helps to bring harmony to earth.

According to Wolfson, the Kabbalists considered the last *sefirah*, the *Shekhinah* to have a further function and that is that she is the root of all visionary imaginings. In her are all the images of all the other *sefirot* and all the souls, angels and holy beasts and on her garments are inscribed all the things that have ever been created. A passage from Tikkune Zohar explains the *Shekhinah* In the following words:

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 155.

The Shekhinah is the image and appearance of everything. The image, as it is said, "and through the prophets I was imaged" (Hosea 12:11). Concerning her it is said, "he beheld the likeness of the Lord" (Num. 12:8). She is called image, for all the aspects [seen by] prophets are inscribed within her. And she is called vision, for all the lights that are above her are seen through her, as it is written, "I make myself known to him in a vision" (Num. 12:6) ... She rides upon the four beasts, which include the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of an ox, and the face of an eagle. To the one who is a human she appears in human form, and to the one who is like the other beasts she appears in the forms of the beasts of the throne, to each one in accordance with his capacity."<sup>101</sup>

Scholem presents us with a brilliant comparison between the *Shekhinah* and the feminine cosmic force in Indian Tantric religion, Shakti. By showing up the differences between the two Scholem explains how the *Shekhinah* in no way threatens the monotheistic concept which is so vital to the Jewish tradition. Scholem bases his argument on Heinrich Zimmer's masterpiece, *Kunstform und Yoga* (Berlin, 1926). The Shriyantra and the *sefirotic* Tree are both symbols "of the self-unfolding of the transcendent and unknowable."<sup>102</sup>

The absolute cannot be represented and is the energy point. From the absolute comes creative energy, Shakti, and the two continually unite. Shakti is symbolized by the innermost interpenetrating triangle of the Shriyantra. The first difference between the Shriyantra and the *sefirotic* Tree is that the author of the Zohar does not regard the *Ein-Sof* to be the primal point. The *Ein-Sof* is too unknowable, rather he sees *chokmah* (wisdom) as the primal point. *Chokmah* is always united with *binah* who represents the womb. She is considered as the upper *Shekhinah* who receives from the primal point of *chokmah*.

<sup>101</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 313.

<sup>102</sup> Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the G-dhead*, 194.

The second difference which is the most significant difference is that Shakti is itself the world of manifestation and is the dynamic part of the primal point. Although the *Shekhinah* also performs in everything and exists in everything, she is nevertheless in exile from the G-dhead. When the *Shekhinah* enters into tangible things, it elevates those things but it does not become one with them which means it is not the manifestation in which it is present. This, according to Scholem is the difference between the two systems: "The manifesting and the manifestation, Shakti and Maya, which are one for the Indian esoteric, are not identical for the Kabbalist."<sup>103</sup>

The Lurianic Kabbalah also focused its theory of Creation with the symbol of light. The Lurianic Kabbalah was formulated by the great visionary and mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria and reduced to theological terms by his associate Rabbi Chayim Vital in the sixteenth century. It was written in Safed after the expulsions of the Jews from Spain in 1492.<sup>104</sup> Before this expulsion, the focus of Jewish mysticism had been on *Maaseh Merkavah* (G-d's chariot and throne) and *Maaseh Bereshit* (how the world was created) which were in contrast to the focus the Lurianic Kabbalah later introduced. Luria's myth responded to the yearning for an explanation of Jewish suffering caused by the hardships and degradations of life as a minority among the gentile nations. Unlike his predecessors, Luria made exile the very basis of his conceptions of G-d, the world, man, and the people of Israel.

The exodus from Spain had repercussions on every sphere of Jewish life. The major effect was the modification of the Kabbalah from being an esoteric doctrine into a popular one. Lawrence Fine in his introduction to the volume: *Safed Spirituality*, explains:

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 195.

<sup>104</sup> Dan, *The Teachings of Hasidism*, 9.

The Safed mystics promoted a radically innovative doctrine according to which the practice of mystical devotion was no longer to be restricted to small conventicles or groups of initiates as had been the case at an earlier time, instead, it was held to be the legitimate domain of each and every individual. This attempt to democratise and popularise the mystical life, advanced by the leading Kabbalists of this community, proved to have historical consequences, the impact of which was felt long after Safed itself began to decline toward the end of the 16th century.<sup>105</sup>

Isaac Luria (1534 - 1572) was one of the most effectual characters in Safed during this period. He created original legendary doctrines that were of essential significance to virtually all Jewish mystical creativity after him.

According to Fine:

By the middle of the 17th century Lurianic theology and ritual life had spread through-out the Jewish world and had established a supremacy that was virtually unchallenged. Indeed, it has been observed that Lurianism was the last theological system to enjoy nearly universal acceptance within Judaism.<sup>106</sup>

And, according to Scholem, Luria's influence on Jewish history: " ... has certainly been no less considerable than that of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*."<sup>107</sup> The mysterious fact is that despite his popularity, Luria left no written treatises on his theological system. Nevertheless, his most substantial disciple wrote several renditions of Luria's system, the most intricate of which consists of five volumes, (Shemonah Shearim) which make up his life labour, *Ets Hayim (The Tree of Life.)* There are also other chronicles of his system, which are attributed to various of his followers.

Whereas, before the exile from Spain, the Kabbalists consumed all their energy on understanding how the beginning of time was created, their

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<sup>105</sup> L. Fine, *Safed Spirituality: Rules of Mystical Piety, The Beginning of Wisdom*, ed. and transl. by L. Fine (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>107</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 251.

meditation was now on how to arrive at the closing stage of the developing universe. If one understood the start of creation and revelation, then one could use it as a medium to speed up the ultimate world calamity. Scholem explains how the disaster of 1492 shaped the historic process of the new Kabbalah:

This process helped to merge the apocalyptic and Messianic elements of Judaism with the traditional aspects of Kabbalism. The last age became as important as the first, instead of reverting to the dawn of history, or rather to its metaphysical antecedents, the new doctrine laid the emphasis on the final stages of the cosmological process. The pathos of Messianism pervaded the new Kabbalah and its classical forms of expression as it never did the Zohar; the 'beginning' and the 'end'; were linked together.<sup>108</sup>

The way in which Luria did this is by teaching that the exile of the Jews was part of the divine order and not a chastisement for misdeeds. Creation itself began with a negative act, not a positive act. This theory of Luria's was given the name *Zimzum*, which according to Scholem was: "one of the most amazing and far-reaching conceptions ever put forward in the whole history of Kabbalism."<sup>109</sup> In order for G-d to make space for the world He had to withdraw a part of Himself so that He could then reveal Himself in the act of Creation. Adin Steinsaltz defines this process:

This transmutation involves a process, or a mystery, of contraction. G-d hides Himself, putting aside His essential infinitess and withholding His endless light to the extent necessary in order that the world may exist. Within the actual divine light nothing can maintain its own existence; the world becomes possible only through the special act of divine withdrawal or contraction. Such divine non-being, or concealment, is thus the elementary condition for the existence of that which is finite.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>110</sup> Steinsaltz, *Thirteen Petalled Rose*, 37.

In other words, the world came into existence because G-d approved of His exile from the space that was consequently created. This was the first act of creation and it was not one of revelation, but rather one of limitation. It was only in the second action when G-d sent out a beam of light, that the revelation began. This is how every cosmic process was to function. Each time an act of creation takes place, there is first a retraction and this is followed by an act of emanation. Scholem explains:

In other words, the cosmic process becomes two-fold. Every stage involves a double strain, i.e. the light which streams back into G-d and that which flows out from Him, and but for this perpetual tension, this ever repeated effort with which G-d holds Himself back, nothing in the world would exist.<sup>111</sup>

Scholem continues to explain the action involved when the beam of light is extended into the empty space. Luria named it *hitpashtut*, and it is the opposite of the first act, it is the breathing out which succeeds the breathing in. Scholem likens this to the breathing of a person when he says: "Just as the human organism exists through the double process of inhaling and exhaling and the one cannot be conceived without the other, so also the whole of Creation constitutes a gigantic process of divine inhalation and exhalation."<sup>112</sup>

The second phase of Luria's cosmic history, known as the "breaking of the vessels", describes events that took place after the *zimzum* and seeks to explain why G-d has allowed the terrible tragedy and suffering of the exile of the Jews. From the *Ein Sof*, the Infinite, came forth lights, and these lights assumed the forms of the ten *sefirot*. These ten *sefirot* were the ten powers or qualities within G-d that He used in creating the world. Each *sefirah* has

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<sup>111</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 261.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 263.

its own specific characteristics and function and although these ten powers are divine, they have limits because they exist in time, and can be described by means of mystical symbolism. The vessels were supposed to give the *sefirot* their shape and individuality. However, the action was never concluded as the vessels could not control the lights flowing in them and the vessels then shattered with isolated fragments of divine light falling downward, with the remaining lights ascending back to the *Ein Sof*. The waste matter was initially merged with the pure substance and it was only following the breaking of the vessels and the ensuing action of selection that the corrupt and evil forces undertook actual separate existence in a sphere of their own. Scholem once again comes to our assistance in explaining this intricate part of the myth:

... when the bowls were broken the light either diffused or flowed back to its source, or flowed downwards. The fiendish nether-worlds of evil, the influence of which crept into all stages of the cosmological process, emerged from the fragments which still retained a few sparks of the holy light ... In this way the good elements of the divine order came to be mixed with the vicious ones. Conversely the restoration of the ideal order, which forms the original aim of creation, is also the secret purpose of existence. Salvation means actually nothing but restitution, re-integration of the original whole, or *Tikkun*, to use the Hebrew term.<sup>113</sup>

The *nezonot* (sparks) that were trapped in the lower space because of the "breaking of the vessels", or *shevirah* in Hebrew, were enabling the evil realm to prevail because of their very presence. It now became the definite purpose of every Jew to rescue the trapped sparks and to therefore observe G-d's commandments as written in the Torah. Every act of every Jew influences the whole course of Jewish history and specifically affects the overall battle between good and evil. Adin Steinsaltz elucidates:

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<sup>113</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 268.

... man, who is the only creature capable of free action in the system, can cause alterations of varying degrees in the pattern and the operation. For everything man does has significance. An evil act will generally cause some disruption or negative reaction in the vast system of the *Sefirot*; and a good act, correct or raise things to a higher level. Each of the reactions extends out into all of the worlds and comes back into our own, back upon ourselves, in one form or another.<sup>114</sup>

After their expulsion from Spain the Kabbalists became frantic about their search for the Messiah. Each individual was called upon to become involved in a global Messianic venture by playing his or her part in the drama of the *tikkun*. Thus every person was conceived as contributing to the mending of what had been broken, or rescuing the trapped sparks, because each time he defeats his evil impulses then he/she helps to lift up all the imprisoned sparks and finally bring about the final redemption. The people, therefore, sought even deeper into the reaches of the soul which resulted in new mystical symbols which had a pure Messianic theme and concentrated on the perfection of the human soul. Steinsaltz explains this as follows:

This level of the perfection of all humanity, in which a new relation will exist between body and soul, and the world will be whole with itself, is called 'Heaven' or the 'next world'. It is the goal toward which all the souls of men, in discharging their private and specific tasks in life, aspire and strive.<sup>115</sup>

To conclude, the mystical vision is based on the mystic's particular religion and on the texts thereof as is evidenced from Ezekiel's vision and the contents of the Songs of Songs, among others. The Jewish mystics are always aware of every detail of their religious text, and express themselves using existing doctrine. The Torah is the most important factor in the mystical experience.

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<sup>114</sup> Steinsaltz, *Thirteen Petalled Rose*, 41.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

Above are numerous references to specific instances of visions recorded in the old writings where devout Jewish mystics were able to record depictions of G-d through their visual imaginings without transgressing the prohibition against creating images of G-d. The issue of G-d appearing as an anthropos appears right from the beginning of the Bible whereby Adam was created in the image of G-d. From thereafter G-d has often been imagined as an anthropos as is evident in many biblical texts and thereafter in apocalyptic texts. The books of the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha contained descriptive mystical visions of G-d sitting on a throne. The Hekhalot literature was full of speculative visionary emphasis and the climax of their mystical experience was a vision of the *kavod* of G-d. They were obsessed with seeing that which is invisible.

The Kabbalists focused on the mystical form of the G-dhead and felt that G-d manifested Himself in various symbols. The *sefirot* were the ten emanations and were visualised as bright lights and so they made visible what is actually invisible. The symbol of light plays a very important part of the Jewish mystical experience. Man is also a divine manifestation of G-d and he is formed from the *sefirot*. The *Shekhinah* also comprises all the *sefirot* and was often depicted as primordial light, as the *kavod* of G-d. The *Shekhinah* was also often depicted as the feminine presence of G-d.

The Lurianic Kabbalah focused on the ten *sefirot* as the qualities of G-d which He used in creating the world. New mystical symbols with a messianic theme were also introduced. In order to make room for the world to exist, G-d withdrew a part of Himself so that He could reveal Himself in the act of Creation. From all the examples above, the sense of sight held the highest position in Jewish mystical experience.

## CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION

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There are two basic dilemmas which run through this thesis. The first is whether it is possible for Jewish art to be reconciled with the Second Commandment. Is this Commandment to be interpreted literally? Has it affected the belief that Judaism is not a visual tradition but a solely auditory tradition?

The second is whether Jewish mystics are able to record their depictions of G-d without transgressing the above prohibition. This is where the concept of imagination was introduced, imagination being shown to have played a crucial role in the formation of Jewish visionary and spiritual literature.

Essentially two approaches were taken in attempting to resolve these issues. Firstly, the emergence of a rich artistic heritage of the Jewish people was traced from the beginning of biblical times and which is still very much evident today. The appreciation of the artistic artefacts was not analysed in depth and the artistic history of the Jewish people was not elaborated on as this would have been a digression. Rather, the thesis set out to explain the purpose of the Second Commandment, whether it affected the quantity and quality of a Jewish visual tradition and, if so, how. What one can deduce from the thesis is that Judaism is both a vibrant and creative faith, as can be seen from its artistic and its literary heritage.

This thesis has shown that many artistic practices have been used as a means of worshipping G-d, such as: synagogue art, illustration of Bibles,

*machzorim, siddurim, haggadot, megillot,* and the beautifully illuminated manuscripts. There were acclaimed artists dating from biblical times. The important point which arises from this is that the only art which was forbidden was the art that could and would be used for idol-worshipping. All other art was welcomed and encouraged and even thought of as the doing of a *mitzvah*. The important point is that art and aesthetics in the Jewish religion are not created simply as beautiful objects which may be admired. Rather they are to be seen as a means to assist the person to experience a closeness of G-d. Moreover, G-d was considered as a Supreme Artist and all artists were viewed as participating in G-d's grand design.

It can be seen from the various stages in Jewish history that some of the leaders were more lenient than others with regard to the nation's artistic output. It became obvious while trying to discover the underlying reasons for the lack of art at certain times, that it was because of the whims of the governing kings at the time. If the anti-iconic rules could further the power of the kings, then the law would be strictly implemented. As in all areas of creative expression, the appropriate laws were used or abused according to how they would affect the power of those in charge.

Secondly, a detailed explanation of the significance of imagination and the soul was undertaken. These two faculties of the human being had to be analysed in depth in order to gain an understanding of how the Jewish artist and mystic is able to visualize what he receives from above. It was precisely because of the Second Commandment that the mystics were driven to perceive G-d in their imagination. The mystical texts abound with descriptions of G-d and the various ways in which He appeared in the mystic's imagination. There were times when the mystical vision revealed itself at the moment of prophecy whereby the spiritual G-d became visible as

a material form. The prophet's explanation of this revelation is that it is not a phenomenon which is experienced through the five senses.

Although the Jewish philosophers and scholars differed as to how the imaginative faculty operated, there seems to be a general consensus that the visualization of G-d within the imagination managed to evade any sense of idolatry. The physical shape which was described by the prophets and mystics is only representative and is therefore not a form of idolatry.

The visual phenomenon differs from person to person and from religion to religion. By analysing a variety of Jewish mystical texts and the commentaries thereon it was shown that the Jewish mystic, like mystics everywhere, is very much influenced and reliant upon his religion and its related texts. It became apparent that the mystic, in order to have a visual experience, needs to be well-versed in the Bible and all subsequent sacred literature stemming from it. Even though at certain times in Jewish history, the mystic's visions appeared to be radical and out of line with his religious teachings, it was shown that the mystical texts were consistent with the orthodox scripture. The mystical writings were based on the old teachings and simply had a new guise which was a more personal way of understanding the existent doctrine. Instead of moving away from the affirmed religious text, the mystic treated the text as the absolute authority of his religion. The Torah is the most significant part of any further mystical texts. The mystic is a strict supporter of the *halachah* and this, coupled with his learning, enables him to ascend upwards on the *sefirotic* tree in order to have a vision of the *kavod* of G-d.

The Jewish mystic uses his imaginative faculty to visualize the spiritual realms. Through the imagination he enables the absent to become present and he is thereby able to encounter the physical in terms of the spiritual.

Imagination is therefore raised to a very high status. Although Plato and Aristotle did not accord imagination its rightful place of importance in the human make-up, they at least theorised about it and left a framework for later philosophers, including Medieval Jewish philosophers, to enlarge upon. The Kabbalists regarded the imaginative faculty as crucial for they believed it was the imagination which enabled one's soul to enter into the spiritual realms.

An in-depth analysis of the soul was then undertaken as it was evident that in order to visualize, one had to acknowledge that the ability to do so was dependent upon the existence of the soul. The soul enables the mystic to perceive the beauty of G-d and visit His sanctuary. It consists of different levels but its uppermost part, the *neshamah* is what enables the mystic to observe the higher wisdom. Our mind alone is not able to perceive G-d as it is the soul which allows us to move from the material world over to the incorporeal realms. Mystical speculation is dependent on the soul and therefore it is necessary for us to perfect and purify our soul so that we are able to imagine and experience G-d.

Even though the human soul consists of many levels, each person's soul is totally unique. The soul is that part of man which stems from G-d and therefore is also that part of man which enables him to reach out to G-d. The soul may be viewed as a divine spark which comes from the divine itself. This is why human beings, unlike animals, have free-will which enables them to create in order to assist in the creative process, or else to destroy.

The soul is made up of the *sefirot* which is how G-d makes Himself manifest in the world. A further complexity of the nature of the soul is that it has lived through many lifetimes and parts of it have been manifested in different

people. However, each soul returns to earth to carry out a particular function in the world. This makes each person unique with his own desires, fears, loves, hates and passions which gives each person his unique character. It is the soul which raises the human being from being a mere animal to being able to imagine and to dream and to dwell on the divine. When a person becomes aware of one's soul and strives to perfect it, then the journey of life becomes a trial, to try and raise the soul to a higher level and so arrive closer to the Divine. Therefore the journey of the soul is a desire to know G-d.

It is also the soul which enables the artist to create works of art. The aim of the artist is to create a union of within and without, of soul and world. The artist, by using his soul and his imagination is able to liberate the hidden beauty which lie hidden in the depths of the spiritual realms. The artist is therefore regarded as a respectable citizen in the Jewish community as his task in perfecting the world is to beautify it and to assist G-d in the creative process.

While analysing the Jewish mystical texts, it became evident that the sense of sight was crucial during mystical experience. It was shown by way of diverse examples, ranging from pictorial art to mystical visions that Judaism is not solely an auditory religion as the sense of sight assumed equal significance. Philo of Alexandria introduced a new concept when he explained how the two above senses were actually combined in a synesthetic method when Moses received the Torah on Mount Sinai. This argument opened up a new awareness whereby the word and the image of light emerged from above at the same time and with equal importance. Visual images were therefore part of the creative process with G-d fashioning the world according to His plans which were first conceived of in spirit.

The very factor of the non-existence of any iconic representation of G-d became the driving force of the Jewish mystics. They were determined to envision G-d in images and these images mostly took the form of an anthropos. The only acceptable way in which G-d could be visualized was by assembling symbols in the imagination. Therefore, the Second Commandment was the very factor which encouraged Jewish mysticism to progress in the way in which it did. The mystics became obsessed with visualizing that which that were not allowed nor able to see with the physical eye. Because there were no icons in the Jewish religion, it became necessary to see G-d in the imagination. This inspired many mystics to experience revelations which were clearly visual in their nature, although hidden from the ordinary human experience. This kind of mystical vision is not experienced by the five senses, but rather by the imagination which enables the spiritual entities to become visible.

The most common vision of G-d was as an anthropos as is made apparent from many of the biblical, apocalyptic and rabbinic texts. This vision of G-d as an anthropos began with Ezekiel and appeared through subsequent texts right through to Hasidic literature. The form which the divine glory assumed varied considerably according to the various literature, but still G-d appeared in these visions in an anthropomorphic form. The same tension can be deduced in all these writings, namely that while no-one can and should actually see G-d, to do so is the very aim of the Jewish mystic. The paradox of seeing something which is invisible is a theme running through all of the material considered in this thesis.

Another feature which proved to be important in the mystical visions was the use of the symbol of light. Bright light in mystical literature symbolises the presence of G-d. However, G-d's light is so radiant that it is not possible for

us to gaze upon it in its true brilliance. This light is therefore dimmed for our benefit. The *sefirot* are especially sent by G-d as spheres of His bright light. This concept was most prominent in the thirteenth century Kabbalah as is immediately recognised by the name of the Zohar, which means brightness. The *sefirot* were seen as bright lights which concealed the divine *kavod*. They are essential aspects of G-d through which the divine light is able to enter into the lower world. Each *sefirah* has individualistic characteristics and colours, yet appears as a single flame of light. Even though they are perceived as ten different lights, they are in actual fact one single light. The *sefirot* further served to enhance the basic tension running through the thesis, as they function to disallow us from seeing the divine, yet they actually make visible the divine to the mystic.

The *Shekhinah*, G-d's female presence is also characterised as a bright light and represents the glory of G-d. It is therefore through the phenomenon of light that the human being may experience G-d. Saadia Gaon, one of the greatest medieval Jewish philosophers explains this light as a light that is similar to angels and when it appears to the prophets it can manifest itself in various forms, mostly in the image of an anthropos. This light, he says, is also the light of the *Shekhinah*.<sup>1</sup>

It can be seen from the various forms of visual mystical experience that the spiritual realms only become visible through the imagination. Whether the visions take the form of prophetic vision or appear as scenes of the next world, it is precisely the imaginative faculty (which is in the domain of the soul) which allows the mystic to gaze on a representational form of G-d and on other-worldly phenomenon, which all takes place in the imagination. It is in this way that the mystic does not contravene the essential aniconism of Judaism. It also follows that in Judaism, whether from an artistic or spiritual

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1 Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 126-127.

point of view, the sense of sight plays a major role. This thesis does not set out to deny the importance of hearing, rather it highlights the existence of visionary experiences in some of the central mystical texts forming part of mainstream Jewish literature. It is hoped that by pointing to the rich visual tradition within Jewish mystical literature the reader will become aware how much emphasis Judaism places on sight and will thereby discover new ways of viewing and understanding Judaism.

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