

Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law

EDITED BY

Adam Mintz and Lawrence Schiffman

Robert S. Hirt, Series Editor

The Orthodox Forum Series
is a project of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary,
an affiliate of Yeshiva University

THE ORTHODOX FORUM

The Orthodox Forum, convened by Dr. Norman Lamm, Chancellor of Yeshiva University, meets each year to consider major issues of concern to the Jewish community. Forum participants from throughout the world, including academicians in both Jewish and secular fields, rabbis, *rashei yeshiva*, Jewish educators, and Jewish communal professionals, gather in conference as a think tank to discuss and critique each other's original papers, examining different aspects of a central theme. The purpose of the Forum is to create and disseminate a new and vibrant Torah literature addressing the critical issues facing Jewry today.

The Orthodox Forum
gratefully acknowledges the support
of the Joseph J. and Bertha K. Green Memorial Fund
at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary.

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Series Editor's Preface

We are delighted to introduce the 10th volume in The Orthodox Forum Series, *Divine Law and Human Spirituality*, edited by Dr. Lawrence Schiffman and Rabbi Adam Mintz. The editors of the volume have skillfully guided the formulation and exploration of the spirituality theme across a wide range of disciplines.

The Orthodox Forum Series has become a significant resource for scholars, advanced students and serious laymen seeking clarification of major intellectual and theological questions facing the Jewish people in the modern world.

At a time when Jewish identity and commitment are being challenged by apathy and ignorance of primary sources, it is critical that clear exposition of our classical values be widely disseminated by knowledgeable leaders in a thoughtful and engaging manner.

We are confident that the community will warmly welcome this timely volume.

October 2003
(editor's introduction 10-8-03)

Robert S. Hirt

Introduction

Adam Mintz

In 1989, the Orthodox Forum was established by Dr. Norman Lamm, then President of Yeshiva University, to consider major issues of concern to the Jewish community. Academicians, rabbis, *rashei yeshiva*, Jewish educators and communal professionals have been invited each year to come together for an in-depth analysis of one such topic. This group has constituted an Orthodox think tank and has produced a serious and extensive body of literature.

In the spirit of its initial mandate, the Forum has chosen topics that have challenged Jews and Judaism throughout history. One of the themes addressed in this series is the numerous confrontations that have existed, both in past eras and in the present time, between the central principles of Orthodox belief and practice, on the one hand, and the widely-accepted values of the contemporary secular society. In the 1992 Orthodox Forum, which examined the tension between rabbinic authority and personal autonomy, Dr. Moshe Sokol pointed out that this tension between authority and personal autonomy which is a central problem for Western religions gener-

ally “can be a particularly sharp problem for Jews who maintain a commitment to the observance of *halakhah*.”¹

Similarly, spirituality, the topic of the conference held in the year 2000, presents, on first consideration, an apparent clash between spirituality and law and breaches the divide between the subjectivity inherent in the one and the objective requirements of practice and belief essential to *halakhah*. In addition, the seeming New-Age faddishness of spirituality stands starkly against the deep historical roots of the Jewish tradition. In a passage quoted by several of the volume’s contributors, Dr. Lamm formulated the delicate balance between law and spirituality:

The contrast between the two – spirituality and law – is almost self-evident. Spirituality is subjective; the very fact of its inwardness implies a certain degree of anarchy; it is unfettered and self-directed, impulsive and spontaneous. In contrast, law is objective; it requires discipline, structure, obedience, order. Yet both are necessary. Spirituality alone begets antinomianism and chaos; law alone is artificial and insensitive. Without the body of the law, spirituality is a ghost. Without the sweep of the soaring soul, the corpus of the law tends to become a corpse. But how can two such opposites coexist within one personality without producing unwelcome schizoid consequences?²

The risks of producing the “ghost” and the “corpse” and the need for coexistence and integration are issues that have confronted Jews for centuries.

The primary purpose of the conference and this resulting volume has been to demonstrate through a spectrum of diverse views, that spirituality and Orthodox Judaism are actually not hostile to one another, but, to the contrary, complement and enrich one another.

¹ Moshe Sokol, “Preface”, in *Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy*, edited by Moshe Sokol (Northvale, NJ, 1992), p. xii

² Norman Lamm, *The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism* (Philadelphia, 2000), p. 6.

other. The issue is first approached from a historical perspective, in essays dealing with ancient Judaism, the medieval period and the contemporary period. The following essays then consider the interplay between spirituality and traditional Judaism in synagogue art and in prayer. Essays by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein and Dr. Chaim Waxman frame the discussion and present an overview of the wide-ranging philosophical and sociological implications of the topic.

In an attempt to guarantee that our society's current search for spirituality is not overlooked, a colloquium was added to the conference to address the role of spirituality within our synagogues and *yeshivot*. Rabbi Daniel Cohen, Cantor Sherwood Goffin, Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot, Dr. David Pelcovitz and Prof. Suzanne Last Stone explored the possibilities for spirituality in our institutions focusing on the "Carlebach phenomenon" and the perceived need for enhanced spirituality in Orthodox institutions. While the intention was not to produce a written record of the colloquium, it served to enhance the conference and helped to maintain the delicate balance required between the theoretical and the practical.

In the first essay of this volume, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein defines both the values and the risks of spirituality and law. He utilizes Maimonides' distinction between law, which relates to the public sphere, and spirituality, which is highly personal, as the basis for his understanding of the terms. According to Rabbi Lichtenstein, while we must abandon neither, we also must achieve the proper balance between the two. Spirituality provides expression for the *halakhah* while *halakhah* prescribes necessary forms and constraints to our spiritual impulses. We have to prevent our commitment to the minutiae of law from robbing our actions of meaning and feeling just as we must be careful not to allow our desire for spirituality to cause us to ignore those laws considered non-spiritual.

Rabbi Lichtenstein concludes his paper with an analysis of the contemporary Jewish scene. He sees the risks inherent in the move toward excess spirituality both in the realm of prayer and Torah study. He writes, "I'm afraid, however, that votaries of current spirituality often tend to erode the status of *yirah* (awe); and, together with it, the status of the very essence of *yahadut*: *kabbalat*

ol malkhut shamayim (acceptance of the yoke of heaven) and *kabbalat ol mitzvot* (acceptance of the yoke of commandments).” Is this fear reasonable or is this critique of contemporary spirituality too harsh? The remaining articles in the volume provide the necessary background to consider this question.

Professors Lawrence Schiffman and Yaakov Elman explore the uses of spirituality in the ancient period, concentrating on the eras of the Bible and second temple and of the Talmudic period. Professor Schiffman focuses on the approach to religion, which centered on the Temple and its service and how this religious expression evolved as people began to move away from the Temple. Professor Elman examines human spirituality as it was construed in the rabbinic era through a study of specific incidences and testimonies of key Talmudic figures.

Professors Brill and Lasker examine spirituality in medieval literature. Professor Brill argues that the study of Kabbalah is crucial in order to add meaning to *mitzvot* and Torah. He takes issue with those who exclude Kabbalah from the canon of Judaism or advocate for finding certain aspects of Kabbalah outside the normative framework of Judaism. Professor Lasker begins his paper by stating that, “Medieval Jewish philosophers did not have a specific concept of human spirituality in its modern usage.” He goes on to present two models of medieval philosophy’s understanding of the soul and its place in establishing a relationship between man and God. The ability to frame spirituality in the world of medieval terminology and thought allows us to begin to formulate a definition of spirituality that is relevant in different historical and cultural settings.

Professors Fine and Mann further expand the scope of the discussion with an exploration of spirituality and the arts. Professor Fine examines the mosaics found within synagogues of the fourth through sixth centuries CE. While the use of mosaics was common in public places during this period, the presence of these mosaics in synagogues and the later opposition to this artistic representation in the synagogue points to a spiritual aesthetic that was both communally and culturally driven. Professor Mann traces the rabbinic attitude towards Jewish ceremonial art. While rabbinic opposition

points to the potential distractions caused by these works of art, certain rabbis were also sensitive to the spiritual value of decorative ceremonial objects especially within the synagogue setting. These surveys broaden our appreciation for the role of spirituality beyond the intellectual world.

Having presented a picture of the historical, intellectual and cultural images of spirituality, the challenge remains how to understand these images and how to transmit them to others. Rabbi Moshe Sokolow and Erica Brown explore the experience of teaching spirituality. Rabbi Sokolow presents a model for the introduction of spirituality in Jewish day schools and yeshiva high schools. Spirituality must play a role in the formulation of the school's vision as well as in its curriculum and teacher's training programs. Ms. Brown looks at the field of adult education and points out a unique educational problem – namely that adults tend to be interested in acquiring new information and are not especially interested in seeking the spiritual value of this information. She shares with us her experiences in the field and her strategies for overcoming this obstacle and transmitting this spiritual essence to a class of adults.

The challenge of transmitting spirituality is particularly relevant in the arena of prayer. Professor Hyman explores the Maimonidean position on prayer and concludes that according to Maimonides, spirituality is part of the process of prayer but that ultimately it plays only a minor role in the complex halakhic and philosophic definition of prayer. Professors Bleich and Lowenthal trace the evolution of spirituality and prayer in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Professor Bleich looks at the Reform innovations to the synagogue service and the response of the Orthodox who attempt to maintain the tradition while incorporating the needs of the spiritual. Professor Lowenthal examines the innovations of the Hasidic community in the realm of spirituality as a response to the potential encroachment of the modern world into the Jewish community. His emphasis on the value of spirituality for the youth, especially the girls in the early days of the Bais Yaakov movement and in the Chabad community, provides an important perspective on the relevance and importance of spirituality in pre-war Eastern Europe. Professor Carmy concludes

the discussion on prayer and spirituality by posing the question, “Can thinking about prayer improve the quality of our prayer?” He goes on to examine prayer in the context of the religious and halakhic philosophies of both Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik.

The final essay in the volume by Professor Waxman is entitled “Religion, Spirituality and the Future of American Judaism” and explores the sociology of spirituality in America today. He claims that spirituality is a manifestation of the privatization of religious practice today in which people are moving away from institutions and looking for personal expressions of religious observance. This phenomenon has served to weaken the traditional institutions of Judaism. Waxman argues that what is needed is for our institutions to provide avenues for spirituality thereby enabling the quest for spirituality to be realized within traditional Judaism and not outside of it.

Professor Waxman’s paper provides an appropriate segue from our discussion of the past to the necessity of developing a plan for the future. Contemporary Jewish society has much to gain from an appreciation of this subject as seen through the variety of vantage points presented in this volume. Yet, at the same time, modern culture introduces its own challenges and unique personality that must be addressed by the committed Jew. Rabbi Lichtenstein articulates this challenge at the conclusion of his paper:

This brings us, finally, back to our primary problem: How to attain optimal fusion of divine law and human spirituality, committed to both while eschewing neither. We live by the serene faith that it can be done. We refuse to believe that we are doomed to choose between arid formalism and unbridled sensibility... The apocryphal remark attributed to an anonymous *hasid*, גישט – נישט, חסידים דאווען – אין צייט; מתנגדים דאווען נישט – אין צייט (Misnagdim daven not, but on time; H~~ä~~asidim daven, but not on time) is both facile and tendacious. It is also false. It is our mission to assure that legalists and spiritualists both pray – on time.

The volume has been compiled with the hope that it will contribute to the realization of that mission.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge those people who have been instrumental in the completion of this volume. The project has been spearheaded by Dr. Norman Lamm, Chancellor of Yeshiva University and convener of the Orthodox Forum. My own spiritual development is a product of his many years of leadership and I am honored to participate in this project. Rabbi Robert Hirt, Senior Advisor to the President, Yeshiva University, is deeply committed to the mission of the Forum and the dissemination of its material. Rabbi Hirt has provided guidance and direction for me since my first day at Yeshiva College and his invitation to participate in the Orthodox Forum and to co-edit this volume is just one of the many things for which I am grateful. Mrs. Marcia Schwartz's gracious assistance has made this job significantly easier and I am thankful to the members of the steering committee for their involvement in developing and formalizing this challenging topic. Miriam and Yonatan Kaganoff served as editorial assistants and were instrumental in the preparation of the manuscripts for publication. Finally, it was a pleasure to co-edit this volume with Professor Lawrence Schiffman; his passion, expertise and experience made this process an enjoyable and enlightening one for me.

4

Dwelling with Kabbalah: Meditation, Ritual, and Study

Alan Brill

The English word mysticism has its origins in the word mystery. Jewish mysticism may be understood similarly as a process of opening oneself up to the mystery of the Torah. It is a means to cultivate a sense of the wondrous powers of Torah, thereby initiating one into the presence of God: “Open my eyes that I may see wonders out of your Torah” (Psalms 119:18). Naḥmanides uses this verse to explain that the Torah is greater than is apparent from an ordinary empiricist perspective; it transcends the natural realm to reveal the divine powers. The same verse is invoked in the *Zohar* to indicate that Torah is not an ordinary document but a subtle secret pointing to an alternate divine reality. One reaches this mystical Torah by accepting the existence of these higher realms and then dwelling within

them.¹ My working definition of the Kabbalah is the knowledge of this higher realm. One becomes a kabbalist in order to experience the wonders of Torah, to attain an experience of God, and to view reality as infused with the divine.² This paper will discuss the definition of spirituality and then apply this definition to the halakhic realms of prayer, *mizvot*, and study.

How does this spiritual Torah of Kabbalah relate to the halakhic realms of prayer, *mizvot*, and study? Sociologists (Wade Clark Roof and Robert Wuthnow)³ describe the contemporary return to spirituality as being undertaken by a “generation of seekers.” They present contemporary spirituality as a novel phenomenon, as a journeying to create something new. In contrast to that sociological perspective, this paper will assume that one can dwell within the traditional kabbalistic spirituality, and that one who is engaged in a quest for spirituality need not seek new models. The traditional texts offer resources and possibilities for spirituality beyond the currently available approaches. The most significant conflict presented by the return to kabbalistic spirituality is not between Kabbalah and *halakhah*, but rather between piety and modernity. Modern Jewry has generally turned a blind eye to traditional spiritual approaches. We need to reawaken the ability to dwell in the kabbalistic wondrous, while at the same time acknowledging the differences between the Kabbalah and modern perspectives.

SPIRITUALITY

If Kabbalah presents the hidden reality, then what is the relationship of this reality to spirituality as it is currently understood? I would like to start by defining my terms. A working definition useful for the Kabbalah is the following statement by Bouyer who, in his

¹ “Torat Hashem Temimah” in *Kitvei Ramban* ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1963), vol. 1, p. 142; *Zohar* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1944), 3:152a.

² Moses Cordovero, *Or Neerav* (Jerusalem, 1965).

³ Wade Clark Roof, et al. *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993); Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950's* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998).

introduction to his multi-volume work on spirituality, discusses the work of his predecessors, especially the great project of Pourrat.

Pourrat in the first of his four volumes on Christian spirituality distinguishes spirituality or “spiritual theology” not only from “dogmatic theology which teaches what must be believed,” but also from moral theology which, according to him, teaches only “what must be done or avoided so as not to sin mortally or venially.” “Spirituality,” on the contrary, includes “ascetic theology” which has “as its object the exercises to which every Christian who aspires to perfection must devote himself,” together with “mystical theology” which is concerned with “extraordinary states...such as the mystical union and its secondary manifestations...”⁴ While Bouyer’s categories have been formulated for his particular denominational purposes, from this short citation I would like to select five basic themes of spirituality.

First, spirituality is not the study of philosophy, dogma, or theology in the abstract. Rather, it is the effect of the divine on religious consciousness. Spirituality is concerned with the doctrine’s experiential or performance elements. For example, the study of Maimonidean philosophy is not the same as a study of Maimonides on prayer, ritual performance, spiritual direction, or mystical development. Even a theological analysis of Maimonidean prayer is not the same as the spiritual question of how to perform Maimonidean prayer, or the consciousness that such prayer seeks to evoke. Similarly, study of the language of the Kabbalah is not spirituality if it limits itself to a history of ideas and does not include religious psychology. Most academic studies of the Kabbalah are restricted to describing its theosophy, devoid of implications for ritual and prayer.

Within the academy, Moshe Idel’s writings offer a corrective to earlier scholarship by attempting to catalog the mystical experi-

⁴ Louis Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality: Volume One: The Spirituality of The New Testament and the Fathers* (New York: Desclee Company, 1963), p. vii, citing P. Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality* (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1922), p. v.

ences and techniques of the Kabbalists.⁵ While Idel's history of ideas do address the experiential aspects of Kabbalah, in his writings the spiritual still remains elusive because he does not attend to the psychology of the texts. Idel warns against the reductionist tendencies of psychological analysis and emphasizes the impossibility of reconstructing psychology.⁶ His sobering caveats have been heeded by many of the scholars in the field. Nevertheless, Idel himself admits:

If the approach proposed here to see Kabbalah far more in terms of experiential phenomena than has been previously done is correct, then psychology, as an invaluable tool, must gradually be integrated into further study of this kind of mysticism.⁷

Current trends in the academic study of mysticism understand mysticism as a psychological universal. A contemporary position associated with Robert Forman assumes that mysticism is not a universal philosophy, but an innate psychological capacity for mystical experience, which is influenced by particular cultures and religions.⁸ The main theorist in the field, Ken Wilber, explains that this innate human capacity is achieved through a fixed pattern of growth in which ordinary perceptions lead to a transpersonal sense of oneness

⁵ In a recent interview Idel stated, similar to James, that the Kabbalah is based on experience and that the theology is accidental. Mysticism is the experience, and the Aristotelian, Platonic, and Hermetic languages are cultural constructs. *She'elot al Elohim: Dialogim*, eds. Yizhar Hes, Elazar Shturm (Or Yehudah: Hed Arzi, 1998), pp. 131–46.

⁶ “Any reconstruction is mostly an approximation based more on the presuppositions and tendencies of the scholar than on recombination of the authentic components of the original experience.” Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 35–6.

⁷ Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 25.

⁸ “The transformative efficacy of practices like meditation lies in the stripping away of learned cultural and linguistic categories to expose an underlying ‘innate capacity’ for experiencing mystical ‘pure consciousness.’ This state of ‘pure consciousness’

with the divine, then to symbolic thinking. From there, the inner capacity culminates in reaching the Absolute.⁹

Yet, there is no free-form mysticism. In a lived context, the dogma and practices of a given religion always inform the process of developing this innate capacity. In the case of Judaism, it is the *halakhah* which informs Jewish spirituality. While Kabbalah reverberates with psychological universals, the kabbalistic experience is based on Jewish theology and *halakhah* and cannot be separated from them. There is no abstract feeling of spirituality that is not a lived sense of the theological structure of the divine attributes and of the extensive discussions concerning those attributes that are found in Jewish mystical and philosophical texts. In spirituality “the reference to God is not only explicit but immediate.”¹⁰ These theoretical discussions map the interdivine structures perceived in the religious experience and can be used to chart the spiritual journey.

Ethics

The second point made by Bouyer in the introduction to his work

is cross-culturally and historically stable. Forman argues, in other words, that mystical experiences of pure consciousness, made possible by transformative processes like meditation, transcend historical and cultural differences and are in some way ‘innate.’” Diane Jonte-Pace, “The Swami and the Rorschach” in *The Innate Capacity*, ed. Robert Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 137.

Her own research shows the convergence of Rorschachs of meditators from a variety of traditions despite their cultural categories. James H. Austin’s *Zen and the Brain: Towards an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1998) provides an excellent presentation of the innate capacity for mystical experience from the perspective of neurology (including cognitive psychology), explaining that meditation and mystical experience occur along specific habituated neural pathways.

⁹ Ken Wilber, *Eye to Eye: The Quest for the New Paradigm* (Boston: Shambala, 1990). Wilber presents hierarchical levels of spiritual experience, offering a more nuanced perspective than Forman whose focus is on the moment of pure consciousness. An approach similar to Wilber’s was offered by the psychologist Erich Neumann in *The Mystic Vision* (Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks, 6; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); *idem*, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

¹⁰ Bouyer, p. v.

on spirituality is that even though the mystic's ethical path reflects his spiritual experience, spirituality is not to be confused with ethics. Spirituality is the lived consciousness of the divine; spiritual ethics are the applications of the divine imperative to life. While a discussion of the relationship of ethics to mysticism is beyond the scope of this paper, the difference between ethics and mysticism is apparent in a quick survey of crucial kabbalistic thinkers. If we use Nahmanides as a case in point, something of a distinction can be drawn between his mystical doctrines and his ethical sensitivity. The imperative to do "the good and the right" and to seek the "will of the creator" is his ethical doctrine, while "you shall cleave unto Him" characterizes his mysticism. Nahmanides' ethics and his spirituality are of course very much related, but their processes and goals are quite different.¹¹

By comparison, in the *Zohar*, divine character traits are translated into ritualism through the modeling of human behavior on the divine structure and the acceptance of the reward for good behavior in the form of divine blessing or plenitude.¹² In the Kabbalah of Moses Cordovero, the diffusion of divine goodness in all things is emphasized. The Cordoveran tradition tends towards a monistic ethic of love in which one sees the divine even in the lowliest gnat. Nahmanides and others, in contrast to Cordovero, accentuate the transcendent nature of the divine, tending towards an ascetic dualism.

Ascetic Theology

The discussion of ethics brings us to our third point, that beyond ethics there is a practical discipline designed to prepare one to relate

¹¹ We would do well to lay to rest the ignorant old canard that mysticism is non-ethical. However, it should be acknowledged that social planning or any other modern social and political topic is not the concern of Kabbalah. The field of inquiry of Kabbalah is God more than it is Jewish peoplehood. See William Wainwright, *Mysticism: A Study of its Nature, Cognitive Value, and Moral Implications* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981).

¹² Demonology is not its major ethical approach. This paper does not develop a kabbalistic ethic and such an ethic needs its own discussion.

to the influx of the holy. The analysis of this discipline is sometimes called ascetic theology. To return to the case of Naḥmanides, it is imperative to “be holy” – *kedoshim*. According to Nachmanides this state of holiness is attained through the reduction of physical experience, the rejection of sexuality, and the development of a spiritual body. Naḥmanides considers the ascetic lives of Elijah and Enoch as paradigms of piety. In his spiritual writings, writing from the standpoint of a pietist, he advocates the need to avoid this-worldly pleasure and sexuality, yet he does not permit this ascetic stance to influence his halakhic decisions.¹³

Traditional pietistic works, such as the anonymous *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, Cordovero’s *Tomer Devorah*, or Elijah DeVidas’s *Reshit Hokhmah* are usually read only for their moralistic content. In fact, they provide direction on a range of ascetic theological practices including the control of mind and body, the channeling of emotions, and healing. The field of kabbalistic *mussar* has not been extensively studied in the academy, but it is there that one finds the most extensive descriptions of the spiritual path. For example, scholars, even in the new *Encyclopedia of Religion*, do not generally discuss the awe and fear of God central to any traditional pietistic approach. Ascetic behavior takes many forms: mortification of the flesh, control of the passions, mild limitations on food and sleep, the imaging of pain and the experience of death for God’s sake, extensive *mikveh* use, and the elimination of negative character traits. Moderns seek the discipline of asceticism but not the dualism or the mortification that accompanies it. (There are still today some who seek the pain, deprivation, and asceticism in mysticism. While the efforts of this small constituency are noble and important, this is not the concern of our paper.) Traditional ascetic paths are now packaged in attractive forms as meditation and activities that promote well-being. Ascetic

¹³ On directives beyond the *halakhah* see Leviticus 19:2, 23:36; Deut. 6:18, Exod. 20:8, 32:13. On Naḥmanides’ ascetic transformation of the body see Jonathan Feldman, “The Power of the Soul Over the Body: Corporeal Transformation and Attitudes Towards the Body in the Thought of Naḥmanides” (Unpublished Dissertation N.Y.U., 1999).

practices are returning, but with an avoidance of the language of body/soul dualism.

One of the basic texts of early Kabbalah describes, as a prerequisite for advanced work, the need for meditation in order to still the emotions and attain equanimity.

A sage once came to one of the Meditators (*Mitbodedim*) and asked that he be accepted into their society.

The other replied, "My son, blessed are you to God. Your intentions are good. But tell me, have you attained equanimity or not?"

The sage said, "Master, explain your words."

The Meditator said, "If one man is praising you and another is insulting you, are the two equal in your eyes or not?"

He replied, "No, my master. I have pleasure from those who praise me and pain from those who degrade me. But I do not take revenge or bear a grudge."

The other said, "Go in peace my son. You have not attained equanimity... You are not prepared for your thoughts to bond on high, that you should come and meditate (*hitboded*). Go and increase the humbleness of your heart, and learn to treat everything equally until you have become tranquil (*hishtavut*). Only then will you be able to meditate."¹⁴

The ascetic texts emphasize the necessity of engaging in psychological self-scrutiny and analyzing one's personality traits in preparation for transcending the self in kabbalistic practice. They also take for granted that mindfulness and the ability to transcend ordinary concerns are a prerequisite for a serious form of mystical experience.

¹⁴ Aryeh Kaplan, *Mediation and the Kabbalah* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1982), p. 143.

Extra-ordinary and monastic

Bouyer's fourth point is that spirituality is extra-ordinary, experienced beyond ordinary life. The term spirituality originally was used to describe the activities of the clergy. However, in seventeenth-century France, the term was used reproachfully with regard to mystics and their separation from material life. From there, Samuel Johnson was influenced already by 1755 to use the word to refer to "pure acts of the soul." Later the term took on positive connotations, and became a designation for the cultivated inner life, especially one focused on prayerful piety. Following the suppression of the monastic orders during the French Revolution, their restoration in both charter and ideology during the post-Revolutionary period sought to recapture the best of monastic spirituality and to revive it, through extensive publishing projects, for a nineteenth century audience.¹⁵ Parenthetically, the writings of Franz Joseph Molitor, one of those known for the revival of spirituality, were influential in Gershom Scholem's decision to study Kabbalah. These nineteenth-century reprints of spiritual volumes made possible comparative studies across the various works. No longer was it necessary to choose a monastery and accept the traditional set of doctrines. Now, one scrutinized the differences between the Benedictine, Carmelite, Franciscan, Jesuit, and Dominican orders, and other spiritualities. Each order was understood now as a discrete path, with its own approach to inner spiritual work and a distinct spiritual dynamic. As spirituality became accessible to the educated general public, spiritual works were read and applied to the lives of ordinary clerics, not just monks.

A similar phenomenon occurred in Judaism. Originally, Jewish spirituality was monastic in its elitism, otherworldliness, and the extreme demands made of its practitioners. Jewish mystics lived lives that were equivalent to those of monks; they were married and had leadership roles, but they were nonetheless monks. A recent author termed R. Akiva "a married monk" to describe the twenty-four year leave that he took from his wife in order to teach

¹⁵ Louis Bouyer, p. xxiv.

his students.¹⁶ While we know little about the social structures according to which the early Kabbalists lived, in particular those of the circle responsible for the authorship of the *Zohar*, we do know of the otherworldliness of the Safed mystics, the Ḥasidic rebbes, and the Vilna Gaon. The early modern period brought the monastic culture to a broader public through the printing press, the prestige enjoyed by Safedian kabbalists, lay devotions, and by popular movements such as Ḥasidism, but the practice of spirituality as such remained otherworldly and limited to the few.

Following the advent of modernity, much of Jewry discarded the experiential traditions, including Kabbalah. Instead, Jewish philosophy and *halakhah* were read by nineteenth-century readers as abstract texts in an Enlightenment spirit. Traditional Jewish metaphysical understandings of God, prophecy, providence, and eschatology were transformed by modern scholarship from a Platonic encounter with the infinite divine, to a limiting negative knowledge or a supernatural theism. The world of the Vilna Gaon, R. Yonatan Eibenschutz, and the Ḥatam Sofer was still connected to the traditional monastic, elite, meditative, magical, and God-infused world,¹⁷

¹⁶ On the literary ideal of R. Akiva as a married monk see Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). On R. Akiva and mysticism see C.R.A. Murray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited," *HTR*, 86:3 (1993): 265–292; Dalia Hoshen, "Torat ha-Ḥimzum u-Mishnat R. Akiva: Kabbalah u-Midrash," *Daat*, 34 (1995): 34–40; idem, "Torat ha-Yissurim be-Tefisat ha-Elohut shel R. Akiva," *Daat*, 27 (1991): 3–33; Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "Four Entered Paradise Revisited," *HTR*, 88:1 (1995): 69–133. The former two authors consider the attribution of mysticism to R. Akiva credible, while the latter does not.

¹⁷ It would be helpful if we had quantitative data for different decades, populations, and topics within this breakdown of tradition, instead of generalizations and impressionistic accounts. Rather than broad discussions concerning the influence of the Enlightenment, we need studies of the incremental changes in the observance of *mizvot*, belief in the supernatural, and the decline in the acceptance of the spiritual. For some models based on the de-christianization of French peasants in the sixteenth-nineteenth centuries, see Gabriel Le Bras, *Introduction à la pratique religieuse en France* (Paris: PUF, 1942); Michel Vovelle, *Piété baroque et dechristianisation en Provence au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Editions du C.T.H.S., 1997) *Idem*, *Les métamorphoses de la fête en Provence de 1750–1820* (Paris: Aubier/Flammarion, 1976); *idem*, *Mourir autrefois: attitudes collectives devant la mort aux XVII^e*

whereas Orthodoxy, in all its modern forms, rejected these beliefs and practices, including kabbalistic spirituality, as obsolete.¹⁸

Orthodoxy's break with traditional elite spirituality is reflected in many documents, including Neẓiv's famous essay entitled "Right and Left."¹⁹ The essay was a response to the Maḥẓikei ha-Dat of Belz, who had presented Judaism as consisting of a left, a center, and a right; corresponding to sinners, average observers of the commandments, and saints. Neẓiv rejected this tripartite analysis. First, he excluded sinners from his analysis of the community since all Jews are required to keep *mizvot*.²⁰ Then he proceeded to explain away the saints as phenomena of the past – most people are not on that level anymore. He focuses on the distinction between the average people in the center and those on the right who have a mystical love of God, seek illumination, and separate themselves from the world. He presents a Maimonidean distinction between two types of love of God. The first is the love of God available through self-sacrifice and the sanctification of God's name, which is available to all Jews (*Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 5:7). The second love of God is achieved through developing a continuous sense of His grandeur (*Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:1). A person who has achieved the second level of love of God cleaves to the divine in thought and strives for divine inspiration (*ruah ha-kodesh*) and mystical illumination. Neẓiv comments, based on Maimonides' description, it is understood that "not everyone is worthy to reach this."

Neẓiv, unlike Maimonides, finds fault in an isolationist spirituality that lacks social involvement. In a creative rereading of Ḥatam Sofer, he comments that only Moshe was able to cleave to God and to

et XVIII^e siècles (Paris: Gallimard, 1974); Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire* (London: Burns and Oates, 1977).

¹⁸ We must also move beyond the nineteenth-century rhetoric that the East is spiritual and Judaism is this-worldly.

¹⁹ R. Naftali Zevi Yehudah Berlin (Neẓiv), *Meshiv Davar* (Warsaw, 1894), 1:44.

²⁰ In contrast to Neẓiv's assumption that all Jews are to keep the *halakhah*, Maḥẓikei ha-Dat's approach might be the more traditional answer in terms of what was expected from the laity. The change of the status of the laity deserves a separate study.

show leadership simultaneously. All others, according to his reading, including Abraham, were aloof when cleaving to God, and able to show leadership only after descending to deal with other people.²¹ Like many late nineteenth century theologians, Neẓiv limits mysticism to a feeling that is only felt “in the alone,” and asserts that the social world remains non-mystical or even anti-mystical.²² Furthermore, he views contemplative piety as dependent on and supererogatory to the learning in the *Beit Midrash*, as the learning ensures that piety remains within halakhic parameters. *Mizvot* are portrayed not as acts of Safedian style, which, when performed properly, are able to raise one to mystical rapture, lead one to illumination, and affect the cosmos. Rather, *mizvot*, for Neẓiv, are a step down to the social realm from the plane of mystical vision. Similarly, Neẓiv’s vision of society includes no mention of Safedian concepts of mystical leadership or its monistic ethic of love. Neẓiv comments that “someone who separates himself to serve God in isolation, whose mind is immersed in the love of God...nevertheless is warned to stop his cleaving to God in order to perform the *mizvah* in the proper time.” In contrast, Neẓiv glorifies the center as always capable of great devotion to Torah, prayer, *mizvot*, and communal service. Therefore, according to Neẓiv, those in the center are not mediocre but may attain the status of piety (*hasidut*); they are the pious ones described in the Bible and *Gemara*.

The far-reaching changes associated with modernity had their effect even on those of Neẓiv’s contemporaries who were still on the elite path, having taken what Habermas called “a leap into foreign history,” and becoming alienated from their own traditions. I find particularly vivid the account of this process of alienation from the

²¹ On Maimonides and solitude see Guide III.51 (Pines 621); Harry Blumberg, “Alfarabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides on the Governance of the Solitude: Sources and Influences,” *Sinai* 78 (1976): 135–45. Notice how far Neẓiv’s position is from Maimonides’ contemplative one.

²² Neẓiv, *Meshiv Davar* 52. For one of the most influential anti-mysticism theologians, whose influence extended into Karl Barth’s Neo-Orthodoxy, see, Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, English translation H.R. Macintosh and A.B. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902).

tradition in *The Sins of My Youth* by the *Haskalah* writer Moses Leib Lillienblum:

On *Rosh ha-Shanah* in 1861, I was filled with religious ecstasy. Wherever I was, wherever I went, I concentrated on the Tetragrammaton. The two days of *Rosh ha-Shanah* and the Sabbath of Return I was in this frenzy. On the fourth day, a frightening idea suddenly floated into my consciousness: "Who can prove there is a God?"²³

Lillienblum continues his story describing how he accepted the entire Enlightenment program including its invalidation of all traditional Judaism. He lost his faith, piety, and observance. Even his meditative practice and ability to achieve high religious levels could not withstand the challenge of modernity. His Enlightenment philosophy did not allow him to accept his own experience as valid. Nevertheless, his autobiography provides valuable evidence as to how recently these kabbalistic techniques were still part of the accepted tradition. Ultimately, his heresy left him removed from the entire rabbinic world. Yet, four years later, he remained nostalgic for his lost ecstasy:

When I recited the prayer *u-ve-khen ten pahdekha*, proclaiming man's recognition of God's sovereignty, the song of unity, which most deeply touches the heart of everyone who loves God, I was immediately affected. To those who do not know what this is like, I can tell them that it is like embracing one's beloved.²⁴

Lillienblum, like so many others, rejected meditative practice as worthless to the modern Jew who can no longer believe in spiritual entities. Lillienblum's experience is instructive: not only for

²³ Cited in Lucy Dawidowiz, *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe* (Boston: Beacon, 1968), p. 122.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 126.

nonbelievers but also for those who remained within the fold despite modernity, spirituality was pushed aside and prayer was transformed from a meditative and theurgic act into a communal one.

Ordinary Life

Let us proceed to our fifth point, derived from Bouyer, concerning spirituality: the applicability of these doctrines to modernity. Is it only in the extraordinary life that one may find spirituality? While the historian of Jewish spirituality studies the works of the religious virtuosi of past centuries for scholarly purposes, the spiritual seeker reads these texts in order to integrate their teachings into a religious life. Just as the elitist and esoteric teachings of Maimonides who wrote for those who were training for the true knowledge of God, and not for the vulgar masses, have been adapted for modern needs, so too the Kabbalah needs adaptation and popularization. Even those of us who look to our tradition as the locus of spirituality must appreciate that there is no naïve sameness with the past that can overcome the historical distance and otherness. The theological question which then arises is what aspects of traditional Jewish mysticism can be integrated into the life of the spiritually sensitive Jew?

For a new definition of spirituality, we turn to a recent book series that consists of reprints of many earlier spiritual texts, called *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, and their companion volumes, the *World Spirituality* series. The series' general editor, Ewert Cousins, set forth as a guiding principle that the study of spirituality remain distinct from philosophy of religion or history of religion. Cousins used the following as his working hypothesis.

The Series focuses on the inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions "the spirit." This spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendental dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality. The series explores the discovery of this core, the dynamics of its development, and its journey to the ultimate goal. It deals with prayer, spiritual

direction, the various maps of the spiritual journey, and the methods of advancement in the spiritual sense.²⁵

This approach to spirituality looks at the texts through a modern lens by correlating their medieval cosmologies with the transpersonal psychological aspects of the person, namely his 'core'; this is the part of him that is capable of experiencing the ultimate reality. Rather than leaving these peak experiences as romantic flight, disjointed from the world of rational discourse, a contemporary approach to spirituality points toward a way to cultivate these experiences by providing a map of the journey. While this approach may perhaps downgrade mysticism to a psychology of spirituality, this modernizing trend does not flatten out the experience and maintains its contours.

My definition of Jewish spirituality encompasses the traditional categories of love and fear of God, trust in God, holiness, and knowledge of God found in the traditional kabbalistic *mussar* literature. It is these traditional kabbalistic definitions of spirituality which can serve as our guide to achieve an experience of the ultimate reality. In order to overcome the modern non-spiritual definitions of these terms, it is important to carefully translate their mystical meanings into a modern mystical idiom.

Amidst the contemporary return to tradition and search for a religious path, "spirituality" has become a catch-phrase for all existential commitments and quests for meaning. The new Jewish spirituality that has been created is free from the historically tangible, objective, and articulated kabbalistic traditions, and instead constitutes a subjective appropriation of these traditions. In contrast, the approach which we are suggesting here retains the classic definition that one becomes a Kabbalist in order to experience the wonders of Torah, to attain an experience of God, and to view reality as infused

²⁵ Ewert Cousins, "General Editor's Introduction to the Series" in *World Spirituality: Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, eds. Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroads, 1985), p. xiii.

with the divine.²⁶ Kabbalistic spirituality is a circumscribed realm; it does not encompass all that ennobles humanity, all transcendent quests, and all inwardness. Nor does it address the crisis of not having a presence of God in one's life. As a means to address these modern needs the spiritual approach Cousins presented in his introduction to *World Spirituality* is the best alternative.

The vagueness with which the term spirituality has been misused in a contemporary context, exacerbated by the widespread skepticism towards organized religion that has become increasingly prevalent in the last few decades, has caused people to look for a religious practice without dogma, and 'spirituality' became the odd term of choice for what everyone was now seeking, an anemic term, spirituality devoid of clarity. Spirituality is not simply a balm to ease the pain of conflict with the times, or an apologetic instrument with which to reach out to the marginally affiliated. It is not to be identified with neo-Hasidism, limited to the enthused homiletics of 'tisch Torah,' or confused with the search for a spiritual essence outside of traditional forms. Spirituality is not the creation of new categories from the unusable shards of the past or from the sterility of academic philology. And certainly Kabbalah is not to be identified with the irrational and the absurd.²⁷ Jewish spirituality needs to be developed from within the corpus of traditional Jewish mystical and ethical texts that provide instruction in the cultivation of the soul.

Enthusiasm, including song, dance, and the many outreach techniques that excite the emotions (generally called *hitlahavut*, or *ruhaniut*), should not be confused with kabbalistic spirituality.²⁸

²⁶ Cordovero, *Or Neerav* (Jerusalem, 1965).

²⁷ Prior ages more attuned to spiritual differences were willing to label many lay devotions as forbidden, even as *ov ve-yidoni*. See the current work of R. Yaakov Moshe Hillel, *Kuntres Tamim Tihyeh ha-Shalem*, third edition (Jerusalem: Ahavat Shalom, 1995), the first edition was abridged and translated as *Faith and Folly: The Occult in Torah Perspective* (Spring Valley, NY: Feldheim, 1990). The book was written against the contemporary turn to magic and fortune telling among Israeli rabbis. Traditional Jewish idolatry and folly is still idolatry and folly.

²⁸ *Hasidut* has become (under the influence of Perez, Dubnow, and others) a word to describe all the folkways, customs, *yiddishkeit*, and *heimishe* practices of the common people, and has little to do with the actual doctrines of *Hasidut*. The

Spirituality, rather than being the affective high of inflaming the heart, is the slow development of this psychological core by means of traditional techniques.²⁹ Enthusiasm is not a mystical experience of the divine, but rather an emotional expression of self.³⁰ Originally a derogatory term for false religious emotion or deluded claims of divine communication, enthusiasm is known for its antinomian, trans-denominational, sectarian, and anarchistic elements. Enthusiasts in many religions are renowned for their blasphemous state-

rabbinic and Ḥasidic elite tended to remove themselves from the values of the people. While common Ḥasidic householders did enthusiastically drink on Purim, in Poland, the elite did not. Ḥasidic texts include stern warnings concerning the evils of drinking, see R. Elimelekh of Lizhensk, *Hanhagot Adam*, no. 18. Since the late nineteen-eighties, Modern Orthodox neo-Ḥasidism has become associated with drinking and going to pubs. In my opinion, this equation is a result of several factors: (1) The death of Shlomo Carlebach and the replacement of his ecstatic spirituality with the creation of a 'Shlomo Lite' that is basically entertainment. (2) The influence of contemporary Breslov that teaches the importance of primal emotions and getting beyond the intellect. (3) The use of Alcoholics Anonymous doctrines as spirituality within the Orthodox world. (4) Our bringing in various "Chasidic" bands into our day schools and calling it "ruah", "spirituality" or "Chasidus" (rather than teaching them real *Chasidus*) and then not understanding that our students will, as a consequence, find the same brand of "spirituality" in pop music.

²⁹ This paper takes issue with the widespread neo-Ḥasidic approach within modern Orthodoxy of identifying spirituality with the outpouring of the heart. On the Ḥasidic position itself, see R. Joseph I. Schneersohn, *Bikkur Chicago* (Brooklyn: Ozar HachḤasidim Lubaviz, 1944), p. 21ff., who presents a Ḥasidic approach for the modern city worker in which the unquenchable burning of the heart of an ordinary Jew is greater than that of the rabbinic scholar. R. Ḥayyim of Volozhin, in his *Nefesh ha-Ḥayyim*, unnumbered section between sections 3 and 4, already rejected the foolishness of thinking that enthusiasm of the heart alone is the standard of piety. Kabbalistic spirituality is like Torah study: it takes years of application and diligence.

³⁰ Ḥasidic tradition itself differentiates between different types of experiences and considers enthusiasm induced by nigun, song or alcohol to be a lower experience, "a hearing from afar" compared to a self-generated inner fire of contemplation that transforms the person. See Dov Baer of Lubavitch, *On Ecstasy*, trans. Louis Jacobs (Chappaqua: Rossel Books, 1963). On the role of the emotional enthusiasm generated by music within religion, the best discussion remains Al-Ghazali's discussion of *sama* in *Ihya Ulam al-Din*, or *The Alchemy of Happiness*. Al-Ghazali accepts the enthusiasm of music against those who limit religion to a sense of transcendence, but values mystical use over emotional use.

ments in which they identify themselves with God. The expression of enthusiasm in an ordinary religious context remains safe, provided that one is not reaching for the hidden reality. However, once one sets one's attention on the mysterious realm, then spirituality without the relinquishing of selfhood has always been – and still is – dangerous. The turn to kabbalistic metaphysics without the requisite meditative awe of self-abnegation leads to a mistaken identification of the self with divine metaphysics and revelation. When the eighteenth-century writers warned against enthusiasts, they were well aware of this hazard.³¹

If Ramḥal (1707–1747) wrote that in his age so-called piety was limited to fools who fail to understand the meaning of true piety and squander their effort on needless activities, then all the more so in this impious century.³² Several social critics (Neil Postman, Wendy Kaminer) have labeled the nineteen-nineties as one of the most superstitious decades of the century. Tragically, pseudo-Kabbalah has been swept up in this trend.³³

RENEWAL

Although, there is a great renewal of interest now in Kabbalah, *Ḥasidut*, Safed piety, Jewish meditation, and the reading of pietistic

³¹ The classic work is Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion with Special Reference to the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950). In antiquity, the term enthusiasm referred to those participating in Dionysus rituals that, “had the god within.” In modern centuries it was used to refer to those deluding themselves. On Ḥasidism as enthusiasm (*schwärmer*) and superstition (*aberglauben*) see Naḥman Krokhmal, *Moreh Nevukhei ha-Zeman* (Berlin: L. Lamm, 1924), chap. 1.

³² One example of the modern trend toward accepting kabbalistic practices in a totemistic way is the increased popularity of the annual festivities in Meron. Most participants do not know that R. Yosef Karo rejected the practice as halakhically and kabbalistically questionable lay piety. Meir Benayahu, “Devotional Practices of the Kabbalists of Safed in Meron” (Hebrew), in *Sefer Zefat* (Jerusalem: Makhon Ben Zvi, 1962), pp. 1–40.

³³ Wendy Kaminer, *Sleeping with Extra-Terrestrials: The Rise of Irrationalism and the Perils of Piety* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999); Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).

works, their traditional practice in fact has never completely disappeared. The fifth and sixth Lubavitcher Rebbes continued the *Ḥabad* meditative tradition and expected their followers to meditate, in addition to the fixed daily prayers, for at least an hour and a half a day. Some of these followers were still teaching meditation in the nineteen-forties, and many older *Ḥabad Ḥasidim* in the nineteen-seventies and even in the early nineteen-eighties were still practicing this tradition. However, the seventh Rebbe was modern, “scientific,” and this-worldly, and he transformed a devotional *Ḥasidism* into an outreach movement. Meditation was downplayed, and many of the writings of the earlier Rebbes were not reprinted. Is the restoration of the meditative tradition, and the reprinting of the earlier devotional works to be considered neo-*Ḥasidism*? A new movement? Or a restoration of earlier traditions, continuously practiced, but temporarily eclipsed? The restoration of these activities involves transformations necessary to accommodate modern sensibilities but, unlike the New Age varieties, the practices that emerge have not been created *ex nihilo*. Meditation is an ancient practice, requiring living models as well as appropriate texts. The new generation currently involved in meditation brings to bear different values in different circumstances. Similar statements apply in the practice of the kabbalistic tradition of Rabbi Yehudah Ashlag which, under leadership of his grandson, Rabbi Baruch, returned to meditation, as well as to the Vilna Gaon tradition of meditation found in the writings of Rabbi Sherayah Deblinsky of Ponovezh and popularized by Yehiel Bar-Lev. The practice of meditation skipped two generations and took a new direction, but it is not a new creation.³⁴ During most of the present century, meditative practices have been eclipsed by the concerns of modernity. Nevertheless, in Jerusalem currently, there exist at least ten *minyanim* that use Lurianic intentions (*kavvanot*).

³⁴ There is a contemporary three-volume set of meditation techniques produced anonymously within the *Ḥasidic* community, showing how widespread is this revival. See *Sheva Einayim* (Jerusalem, 1995). Many of the comments here also apply to the teachings of R. Moshe Shapiro in Israel and R. Moshe Wolfson in Brooklyn.

Meditation

Kabbalistic practices have deep roots in the halakhic tradition, and can still be practiced in the modern world. Ultimately, to dwell in kabbalistic spirituality, we need a broad reorientation to the mystical. As a start, we will consider that today a serious Orthodox kabbalistic path would include immersion in at least the three halakhic realms of prayer, *mizvot*, and study. Many topics need to be addressed in order to develop a modern Kabbalah in all of its fullness. These include: images of God, God language, mystical psychology, dreams, the soul, afterlife, health and healing, science and the natural order, and magic.

Jewish Meditation is popular because it can offer a direct experience of the divine to a broad cross-section of Jews, from yeshiva high school and college-age students, to mature *baalei batim*, and the elderly. It is self-validating and brings immediate changes to one's life. In fact, traditional texts have a broad and complex program of Jewish spiritual praxis that extends far beyond simple meditation exercises. The pious person is expected to visualize God's name continuously, sense His providence constantly, respond to the inner meaning of the Sabbath and holidays, and before prayer, to visualize that he is standing before the divine.³⁵ It involves a hierarchical ladder of internal states. In its initial stages, it provides a tether to still the mind and calm the emotions.³⁶ This enhances intention both in the ordinary

³⁵ Gershom Scholem, "The Concept Of Kavvanah in the Early Kabbalah," in *Studies in Jewish Thought*, ed. Alfred Jospe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981); Moshe Idel, "R. Isaac Sagi Nahor's Mystical Intention of the *Shemoneh Esreh*," in *Massuot: Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb*, eds. M. Oron and A. Goldreich (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1994), pp. 25–52; Moshe Idel, "Kabbalistic Prayer in Provence," in *Tarbiz* 62:2 (Jan.–March 1993); Moshe Idel, "Kabbalistic Prayers and Colors" in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, vol. 3, ed. David Blumenthal (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984–1987), pp. 17–28; Moshe Idel, "Hitbodedut As Concentration" in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Green; R. Shalom Dov Baer Schneersohn, *Tract on Prayer* (Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 1992); Aryeh Kaplan, *Meditation and the Kabbalah* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1982); Mark Verman, *The History and Varieties of Jewish Meditation* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996).

³⁶ When I teach meditation, the first sessions are on how to sit properly, relax the

practice of prayer and in the continuous focus on God's presence. In its higher stages, it leads to equanimity, freedom from emotional entrapment, a control of the mind's processes and an overall sense of wholeness and balance. The next level is the development of an internal life in which one plays out contemplative dramas in order to enter the divine hierarchy. The highest levels involve the bringing of an influx of the divine into the world.

Meditation has particular halakhic relevance when utilized as a means to pray with intention. Many medieval legal commentators, especially those influenced by philosophy or pietism, assume that prayer requires intention on the part of the devotee.³⁷ Therefore, one of the first goals of Jewish meditative practice is to learn to still the mind and, before one sits down to pray, to bring about a consciousness of God's glory. Some of these practices are explained in the corpus of halakhic literature. However, for a more detailed and fuller spectrum of kabbalistic prayer techniques, ranging from the fairly simple focusing of one's mind on God's glory and light (*kavod*), to Cordovero's visualizations of the divine names, to the complex Lurianic *kavvanot*, it is necessary to refer to kabbalistic works.

An example of a method of increasing intentionality during prayer that is significant for a halakhic community is R. Ḥayyim of Volozhin's method as described in his *Nefesh ha-Ḥayyim*. R. Ḥayyim divides the performance of worship into several distinct elements: stillness, emotions, and visualization. The first element involves the contemplative practice of turning one's mind from its ordinary

body, and tether one's busy mind. Next there follows an instruction on letting go of distractions by allowing them to gently flow away. Even these basic exercises require months of practice before one can perform them properly, and I suggest that my students take their early steps in meditation outside of formal prayer. At the second level, students try various techniques of Jewish meditation and develop the needed internal mental framework for actually using these methods.

³⁷ For example see Tur's paraphrase of the *Talmidei Rabbenu Yonah*, Yaakov ben Asher, *Arbaah Turim: Oraḥ Ḥayyim, siman 98*: "Arouse your concentration and remove all disturbing thoughts from your mind, so that when you pray, your thoughts will be pure.... Pious men of deeds used to meditate and concentrate in prayer until they divested themselves of the physical. They attained a spiritual strength almost on par with prophecy."

business with matters of the world, to the meaning of the words, to allowing those words to complete and deeply affect the heart. This requires one to wait before prayer in order to still the mind and then fill it with prayerful content. Distracting thoughts in prayer are avoided by training the mind to attain this stillness.³⁸

The second element in R. Ḥayyim's method of prayer-readiness is the turning of the object of one's emotions from worldly desires to the Holy One, blessed be He. The worshipper turns a loving gaze upon the divine and receives pleasure from the words of the prayers. R. Ḥayyim of Volozhin models this practice on the custom of the early pious ones, *ha-Haṣidim ha-Rishonim*, who sat for an hour before prayer in order to attain an ecstatic taking leave of their senses, as explained by the students of R. Yonah in their commentary on Tractate *Berakhot*. Finally, he exhorts his readers to use R. Yosef Karo's technique of visualizing the words of prayer. He calls it "a tried and tested method" for stilling the mind, acquiring purity of thought, and bringing down blessing. From R. Ḥayyim's statement that this method has been proven to be effective, it is clear that he is not writing merely in the abstract, but that he actually practiced these techniques. This visualization of the letters as a means to provide purity of mind seems to function on two levels simultaneously: it tethers the mind to allow the requisite stillness and it brings down blessing from above. After passing through the emotional, contemplative, and imaginative prerequisite states, the process culminates in the use of kabbalistic intentions (*kavvanot*).

In addition to these preparatory meditations, Naḥmanides and his school, the *Zohar*, R. Moses de Leon, R. Joseph Gikkatilla, and R. Moses Cordovero all describe meditations on divine lights and names in a variety of spatial configurations which allow for an ascent into the higher realms of divinity. Initially, they envision a lower level of divinity, immanent and embodied in this world, receiving its light from above, similar to light shining into a prism. A higher

³⁸ *Nefesh ha-Ḥayyim* (Vilna, 1859) 2:1, p. 47. The method was distilled into a small tract by his student R. Zundel of Salant. See Eliezer Rivlin, *Sefer ha-Zaddik R. Yosef Zundl mi-Salant* (Jerusalem, 1927).

light is bestowed on it from a higher realm of God's manifestation and power. Finally, they image an infinite realm of brilliant shining light that is the source of all light, energy, and power. One reaches the infinite realm through slow ascent by creating and following a spatial map of the divine. To successfully work with this map, one must develop, over time, clarity, breadth, and depth of vision and provide oneself with psychological safety nets. Only then can one bind oneself in emotion, will, and intellect to this transcendent infinite vision. Afterwards, one slowly descends and brings the infinite light down into the lower lights, letting this light grow and give energy. Finally, the light cascades into the lower level of divinity – the prism, as it were – then into the mind of the devotee, and finally into his body. One has to make certain that it is channeled slowly and safely to avoid being overwhelmed. Kabbalists used this meditation during prayer, ascending before the silent *Amidah*.³⁹ There are many variants of this meditation using a candle flame, regions of different colored lights, divine names, *sefirot*, or various parts of the soul. Each provides a ladder of psychic development, which parallels the gradual entrance into God's manifestation.

In the study and pursuit of spirituality, the central concerns of meditation are identifying the mental states of consciousness in which one finds oneself during those activities. One notices the different mental processes of the various forms of meditation which include intellectual contemplation, visualizations, stillness exercises, imagination meditations, loving-kindness meditations, focused meditations, free-form meditations within daily life, and meditations reserved for prayer. Furthermore, serious study needs to address the questions of the spiritual practices of meditation. How to still the mind, attain focus and concentration, and relax the body? How does one focus on the mental icon, in the mind's eye or in the imagination? Is there a mental screen, as it were, on which one envisions the divine? Are there particular bodily

³⁹ In contrast, Lurianic Kabbalists focus on restoring a single configuration of the divine, with many discrete intentions, before the start of the *Shema* and then again at the start of the *Amidah*.

sensations associated with the encounter; or is the experience one of synesthesia? Is the process active or passive, one of habituation, or de-automatization, one with a single focus or with two foci?

Aryeh Kaplan wrote great introductions to the world of Jewish meditation, but he was negligent in omitting the most primary preparatory stages of meditation from his works. A reader of Kaplan's works who does not possess these rudimentary meditational tools risks entering the meditative realm with an excess of self-concern. Basic exercises in visualization techniques are necessary in order to commence meditation without the distraction of thoughts and emotions. These initial exercises also provide a release of tension and emotions in order to prevent anxiety, depression, and other forms of psychic harm which might otherwise arise from the practice of these techniques. If one were to use the advanced techniques in Kaplan's books without preparation, one runs the risk of burning up in self-effacement or self-delusion. R. Ḥayyim Vital had a terrible reaction the first time R. Isaac Luria gave him a *yihud* to perform. It is necessary to confront one's emotions, pains, and past traumas before beginning to practice advanced kabbalistic techniques. The expertise required in order to block pain and fend off distracting thoughts, or to use the Ḥasidic technique of raising distractions to their source, is a slow and gradual process. The objective of these techniques is ultimately to enable prayer as meditation, as an encounter with an awareness of the divine, and as an outpouring of the self.

Mizvot

Formerly, Neoplatonic writers downplayed the role of external ritual; Bahye's *Hovot ha-Levavot* is paradigmatic of this tendency. In opposition to this emphasis on internal piety, the Kabbalah stresses ritual performance, including the importance of the proper recitation and enunciation of words. The importance of *mizvot* is amplified through this integration of body and mind, especially when combined with correlated requirements in ascetic theology. Rituals invoke a sense of awe in the participation within the timeless divine.⁴⁰ By provid-

⁴⁰ Another more psychological approach is the re-sanctification and ritualization

ing cosmic reasons why one must have three meals on the Sabbath, say one hundred blessings a day, and be exacting in the minutiae of the *halakhah*, the Kabbalah heightened rabbinic requirements in an almost obsessive manner.

In the thirteenth century, Kabbalists developed traditions concerned with a theology and set of practices in which cosmic effects are produced through the performance of *mizvot*. There are several kabbalistic approaches to ritual,⁴¹ among them the idea of ritual as participation in a cosmic drama, or as an entering into sacred time in order to capture the ontic status of the liturgical calendar. Mystical ritual provides an entrance through the boundaries and heterogeneity of sacred time and space. This realm is one of cosmic drama and visionary antecedent to the performance itself. The ritual and its ocular prerequisites create an experience that is qualitatively different from ordinary life. Transformative experiences can occur when human actions are considered a portal to the realm of the divine.

Sometimes, ritualization provides a sense of participation in the divine through parallel modeling – creating harmonies between the worlds in the form of a “just as” (*kegavna*) parallel of the higher world. Ritual becomes sacramental. At other times, ritual acts to provide a sense of blessing. The effect of ritual in bringing down blessing in the form of influx from above (*shefa*) is described in the *Shaarei Oraḥ*.

The thirteenth-century emphasis on ritual was developed further in the spiritually charged community of sixteenth-century Safed. Safed mystics applied the teachings of the *Zohar* to their own systems

of everyday life. Eating, work, and leisure are to be sanctified beyond the general framework provided by the observance of *mizvot*.

⁴¹ I am pointing out approaches to the performance of ritual here rather than cataloging the myriad of different kabbalistic explanations of the *mizvot*. For explanations of the commandments, see Isaiah Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar* (Oxford and New York: Littman Library, 1989), pp. 867–1323; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. xiii–v; Charles Mopsik, *Les grands textes de la kabbalah: les rites qui font dieu* (Paris: Verdier, 1993); Elliott R. Wolfson, “Mystical Rationalization of the Commandments in Sefer ha-Rimon,” *HUCA* 59 (1988): 217–51.

of ritual practice. Cordovero discusses the importance of focused awareness during ritual. According to him, all of one's intentionality while performing *mizvot* brings *ruhaniut* (quanta of spiritual blessing) from the realm of the divine. In his *Reshit Hokhmah*, R. Elijah DeVidas, of the Cordoveran school, presents this process of bringing down *ruhaniut* as a journey, a cyclical but differentiated spiritual path. R. Yosef Karo, also a member of this school, is a prime exemplar of one who achieved mastery in the areas of both *halakhah* and Kabbalah. His spirituality, methods of visualization, and the combination of *halakhah* and Kabbalah which he represented, served as a model for mitnaggedic piety.⁴²

An entirely different approach is that of the Lurianic drama in which one identifies oneself with the High Priest in order to rectify the sin of Adam. Luria postulates a cosmic fall of man as a consequence of the Sin of Adam and the need for theurgy, unifications (*yihudim*), and universal reincarnation to restore a lost harmony. In a theurgic modeling of the Temple structure, one eats on a four-legged table, with twelve loaves for *hallot*, and closes one's eyes to avoid gazing on the *shekhinah*. One also binds oneself to the dead, engages in *yihudim* for illumination, and performs many preparatory immersions in a *mikveh*.

In the literature of nineteenth-century Polish Ḥasidism *mizvot* are considered to have been fulfilled properly only when their performance is accompanied by total mental concentration. One does not perform the *mizvah* until one is able to have complete intent of the holiness specific to the particular *mizvah*. The intentionality found in Polish Ḥasidism is revelatory of the sacredness of the *mizvah*.

In contrast to these kabbalistic approaches, the early modern Polish *Aḥaronim* (c. 1630–1800) seem to have a mixed canon without clear lines of demarcation between works of law, custom, piety, and Kabbalah. Many of their readings of Kabbalah suffer from misplaced

⁴² R.J.Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977), pp. 158–61, 311–2.

concreteness and a weakness in their exteriorization. They should be judged as early modern, and not as kabbalistic, phenomena. An example of this tendency which troubles many of my contemporaries is the transformation of the *Zohar's* panegyric on the beauty of the daily recitation of the chapter from the Mishnah on the Temple incense offering into a fearful early modern debate on the dangers of missing out a word in the recitation. This kind of error of omission was considered to be as dangerous as leaving out one of the ingredients from the offering which was punishable by death.⁴³

Similarly, myth, folklore, and lay devotions should not automatically be associated with the Kabbalah. The citation by early modern halakhic authorities of the custom to refrain from eating nuts on *Rosh ha-Shanah*, or for women not to taste of the *havdalah* wine, are indigenous Ashkenazic customs that were only later associated with Castilian demonology.⁴⁴ Just as a weak halakhic comment in an eighteenth-century devotional *siddur* is not to be confused with sophisticated halakhic thinking, so too, these kabbalistic-style comments should not be confused with rigorous kabbalistic thought. For example, the recitation of *le-Shem Yihud* became a magical act intended to serve as a shortened exteriorized substitute for the requisite hours of daily Lurianic intentions. According to the Kabbalists one should either perform the meditations of the Lurianic path in all their extensive detail, or not at all. Although in earlier centuries these methods of recitation and externalization served the purpose of popularizing kabbalistic ideas, in our age in which far more people possess a highly developed sense of self, a yearning for personal

⁴³ The formalistic stringencies of Polish seventeenth-eighteenth century Jewish culture, many of them based on externalization, demonization, recitation, and magic for personal benefit, are a widespread early modern phenomena and are not intrinsic to the Kabbalah. Cf. Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*, translated by Bernard Dov Cooperman (New York: New York University Press, 1993), pp. 190–4.

⁴⁴ For example, according to R. Isaiah Horowitz, *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit, Masekhet Shabbat*, women should not taste of the *havdalah* wine because women are identified with Lilith. This is in contrast to the Spanish and Safed traditions of Kabbalah, in which women are not identified with the demonic.

authenticity, and the ability to engage in serious intellectual study, these contracted versions are far less beneficial.⁴⁵

Scholarly and spiritual readings of Kabbalah also differ on questions of heresy, and concerning their normative and halakhic status. It is instructive to remember that Rashba issued sharp warnings against using Abraham Abulafia's methods of meditation and those of other lay mystics such as the prophet of Avila. While it is true that Cordovero and others did indeed cite whole paragraphs from Abulafia's texts, they took care to integrate his ideas into a rabbinic system. When Idel comments that anomic practices were integrated into nomic systems, it should be taken as more than a passing scholarly observation. The integration of a text into a nomic context alters its meaning, just as Maimonides changes the meaning of Al-Farabi's ideas when he cites his works.⁴⁶ A different and difficult case for the halakhic community is that of Ḥayyim Vital whose integration of Kabbalah and *halakhah* that is taken by many as paradigmatic of the Kabbalah is for at least three reasons problematic.⁴⁷ (1) He situates kabbalistic practice in the world of emanation (*azilut*), hierarchically above rabbinic Judaism. (2) He uses kabbalistic explanations to generate *halakhah*. (3) He downgrades rationality as a guide to Judaism in favor of revelation and intuition. While R. Ḥayyim's approach was acceptable to many Lurianic practitioners because it values Kabbalah

⁴⁵ On the history of the recitation of *le-Shem Yihud* from its origins as a medieval devotional formula before *mizvot*, to a short substitute for Lurianic intentions, see Moshe Halamish, *Ha-Kabbalah bi-Tfillah, be-Halakhah, u-ve-Minhag* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan Press, 2000), pp. 45–105.

⁴⁶ Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. xv–vii. On Rashba's rejection of Abulafia see *Responsa of R. Shlomo ben Avraham ben Adret*, ed. Ḥayyim Dimotrovsky (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1990), Responsa 34, p. 101.

⁴⁷ *Tikkunei Zohar* 28; R. Hayim Vital's *Introduction to the Shaar ha-Hakdamot* (also printed as the introduction to the *Ez Ḥayyim*) presents a distinction between the enclothed *halakhah* and the inner light of the Kabbalah. Scholem used Ḥayyim Vital in order to read the *Tikkunei Zohar* as implying an anarchistic heterodox transvaluation through the Kabbalah of the written Torah; see Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 66–86. By comparison, R. Zadok uses the same *Tikkunei Zohar* passage to develop a halakhic approach to these texts. For him, the written Torah is enclothed and limited while the Oral Law, consisting of both *halakhah* and Kabbalah, is liberating.

over *halakhah*, it would not be suitable for an halakhic approach to spirituality. The Vilna Gaon expressed similar reservations concerning R. Ḥayyim's understanding of Lurianic Kabbalah. He affirmed that Luria could not override the Talmud, the *Zohar*, or the intellect, therefore the Gaon was criticized by others of for rejecting Lurianic Kabbalah, even though he uses the Lurianic corpus extensively as a commentary on the *Zohar*.⁴⁸

Study: From Philosophy to Kabbalah to Torah

Kabbalah, rather than being a form of subversive spirituality resting on the shards of rationalism, or a type of mythopoesis favored by those seeking to amplify the imaginative element in Judaism through an emphasis on Kabbalah, Midrash and literature, is the study of a canon of texts concerning the divine throne and divine names combined with a real celestial hierarchy. The study of the Kabbalah includes exegesis that deals with events in higher realms adding deeper meaning to *mizvot* and Torah. While much of this scheme is not translatable into modern categories, the basic frameworks need at least to be acknowledged. It must lead to a partial knowledge of God, a sense of the celestial hierarchy, and the development of positive language about God.

Those who exclude Kabbalah from the canon of Judaism or those who advocate finding the imaginative element outside of

⁴⁸ For an example of the followers of Luria appealing to an authority, both textual and charismatic, higher than the halakhic tradition, see Yaakov Gartner, "The Influence of the Ari on the Custom of Wearing Two Pair of Tefillin," *Daat* 28 (1992): 51–64 (Hebrew). The Ḥatam Sofer and the Vilna Gaon offer models of accepting Kabbalah without it overriding *halakhah*. Compare Ḥabad, which accepts the charismatic cult around the memory of Luria and therefore has to deal with these problems of the Vital tradition. See Moshe Dober Rivkin, *Kuntres Ashkavta de-Rebbi* (Brooklyn, 1976). Contemporary spiritual practitioners would also be troubled by the magic and necromancy found in Vital. An opposite case, not without some irony, is that of Nathan of Gaza's ideas. Both *Sefardim* and *Mitnaggedim* use them as interpretations of particulars within Safed Kabbalah. When Luzzatto wrote that he uses Sabbatean Kabbalah but he is not a Sabbatean, he should be taken at his word. His statement is reflective of the tradition of the selective use of Sabbatean writings.

Judaism would do well to read the recriminations of Rashba, Rama, Maharasha, and Gra, all of whom castigate those who seek to limit the tradition to *halakhah* and ignore the Kabbalah.⁴⁹ The early Kabbalists themselves pointed out that Kabbalah is part of the Oral tradition, hence the name “received tradition” (*kabbalah*), the tradition. According to the aforementioned halakhic authorities, one cannot select only those parts of the tradition that one likes. Furthermore, to limit Judaism to *halakhah* is to ignore the gamut of literary and pietistic works produced within Jewish culture that describes religious experience. R. Akiva’s journey to paradise in the *Heikhalot* and the spiritual descriptions found in the *Zohar*, Karo, Cordovero, Vital, Komarno, R. Nahman, Rav Kook, or even those of the Vilna Gaon, rival anything in the Christian writings.

Reinhold Niebuhr comments on the hubris of those modernists who reduced the Christian trinity to a matter of culture, a Neoplatonic

⁴⁹ The descriptions of religious experience in Rav Soloveitchik’s writings, including *u-Vikashtem mi-Sham*, are generally of a William James, this-worldly, variety, in which mysticism consists of deep feeling in prayer, emotionalism, powerful dreams, acceptance of transcendence within one’s life, or redemptive sacrificial acts. They are all experiences that come on without preparation, training, meditation, or a clear divine object. Rav Soloveitchik offers *halakhah* as a means of articulation, control, and deepening of these experiences. However, neither William James nor Rav Soloveitchik recognizes anything similar to the halakhic tradition of figures like R. Yosef Karo. R. Karo explicitly states that beyond *halakhah* is Kabbalah, and that neither the *halakhah* nor natural human emotions are sufficient to relate to God. R. Karo’s own practice consisted of the following: (1) one should cultivate continuous consciousness of Torah in one’s mind in order to have a sense of Unity of Being. (2) One should cultivate this unity of thought even in one’s dream states. (3) One should pray using Cordovero’s kabbalistic intentions, meaning that prayer is not just an outpouring of the soul (as in James or neo-Hasidism) but it is a trained ascent through the celestial realms, throne rooms, and then up to the *Ein Sof*. (4) One who is on a sufficiently elevated level should recite *mishnayot* in order to have the spirit of the *Mishnah* or various *tannaim* come to visit him. (5) R. Karo himself did *yihudim* using the secrets of the divine name and the secret of the Chariot Vision. (6) *Mizvot* affect the *sefirot* in order to bring down blessing. Halakhic authorities did not expect to find spirituality within *halakhah*. One can find a similar range of spiritual practices that transcend the *halakhah* in the thought of other halakhic figures.

vestige to be replaced in the modern era, rather than assuming that the trinity constitutes the believer's efforts to formulate the religious experience. Similarly, Nahmanides' and Cordovero's mystical attempts to express their religious experience mediated through biblical and rabbinic texts cannot be dismissed as cultural vestiges. Recontextualized in their original context, the *sefirot* do not become a special problem of arbitrary symbolism and structures. Moderns find medieval symbolism, especially cosmology, numerology, and angelology, difficult to appreciate, and so these symbols have fallen into disuse. But is the number symbolism and cosmology of the *Zohar* any more arbitrary or medieval than those of Ibn Ezra? Just as Yehudah ha-Levi and Maimonides have been re-read in a Modern Orthodox context without their attendant medieval worldviews, so too medieval features of Kabbalah need not be seen as an obstacle to our acceptance of the Kabbalah as an authentic understanding of Judaism.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there was an intellectual commitment to the study of the Platonic cosmology contained in both Neoplatonic and Platonic-Aristotelian thought. Eventually, this was succeeded by the acceptance of a kabbalistic realm that lay beyond the philosophical. R. David Kimhi's biblical commentary contains a Platonic reading of Maimonides, in which he discusses such topics as attaining knowledge of the *kavod*, how creation leads to knowledge of the sacred, the importance of the soul, and the role of angels in the cosmic chain. Neoplatonic Maimonideanism works well in high school education. Those topics can be smoothly integrated into the study of *Navi*, and may lead to discussions of meditation, the divine *kavod*, and the service of God through contemplative knowledge. However, by the time students reach college age, there tends to be an implicit bifurcation between the secular sciences and Torah, and spirituality must be added artificially to the realm of philosophy. Many students who are interested in metaphysics travel the same route as Gikkatilla, from the *Guide of the Perplexed* to eventually arrive at an acceptance of an objective divine realm. Other students become attracted to the panentheism of Cordovero,

still others find their place in the responsibility of R. Ḥayyim of Volozhin's chain of Being.⁵⁰

The textbooks used mostly widely on college campuses to teach Kabbalah are those authored by Gershom Scholem. But Scholem's presentation of Jewish mysticism is far from a spiritual reading of the Kabbalah. Many students, having read Scholem, associate the Kabbalah only with the doctrine of the *sefirot*, a thirteenth-century cluster concept that is an attempt to make sense out of the plethora of referents to God in *Tanakh*, rabbinic literature, and Neoplatonism, and the *merkavah*, magical, and angelic traditions. In the Bible, God is referred to as warrior, bride, king, as the ancient of days, as crashing waves, dew, and ice. In the rabbinic and midrashic traditions, God appears as *shekhinah* and *gevurah*, as being en clothed in his *tiferet*, crowned, wearing *tefillin*, moving from His seat of judgment to His seat of mercy, and as incomplete until His name becomes complete. The medieval tradition offers us awe of the grandeur of God as presented in Ibn Gabirol's *Keter Malkhut*, and the love of the divine manifestation as an *anthropos* in Ashkenaz's *Shir ha-Kavod*. In thirteenth century Kabbalah these references are treated as a holistic cluster concept. They are understood as hypostases of the divine in a variety of forms – a tree, a macrocosm of the human body, or a cosmological chart.

Yet, neither this rich forest of symbols, nor Gershom Scholem's presentation of Jewish mysticism is the message of the Kabbalah in its entirety. Although Scholem wrote that there is no such thing as “the doctrine of the Kabbalists,” nevertheless, he limited his studies mostly to the sefirotic realms. There are many kabbalistic texts – mystical, meditative, ethical, devotional, philosophic, or contemplative works – which are not specifically theosophic. And

⁵⁰ This dualism reflects the majority of later Kabbalists, such as Cordovero, who place Kabbalah above philosophy, while medieval Kabbalists tend to identify Kabbalah with the natural order and philosophy. See Yosef Ben-Shlomo, *The Mystical Theology of Moses Cordovero* (Jerusalem: Bialik Press, 1986), pp. 32–5 (Hebrew). Cordovero uses philosophy dogmatically as metaphysical scaffolding, or as cultural background. While avoiding philosophy, he nevertheless does not negate the autonomy of philosophy.

those texts that are concerned with theosophy present many images of the divine other than *sefirot*, such as names of God, angels, lights, celestial realms, and the divine in the form of a human figure. Even the classic work by R. Yosef Gikatilla, *Shaarei Oraḥ*, is as much about the divine Name, a spiritualized body, and meditation, as it is about the *sefirot*.⁵¹

The genealogies of texts that are so important in the philological study of the Kabbalah are far less significant for those who study these texts as part of a spiritual practice. Just as the philological study of Maimonides focuses on Alfarabi and Geonic fragments while studies of Maimonides' spirituality use a different canon, so too in spiritually oriented study of the Kabbalah, historically significant works are not necessarily of greatest importance. The most central works of Jewish spirituality are not the *Heikhalot* texts, the *Bahir*, Castilian works, or Sabbatian texts. The Castilian texts are certainly antecedents of the *Zohar*, but the role they play in exegesis or in the spiritual usage of the text is minimal.⁵² The *Zohar* itself is important because it became a canonical work used for spiritual purposes in later centuries. A spiritual text must readily be applicable for pietistic purposes. For example, *Heikhalot* spirituality, which was alive until the nineteenth century, refers to the *Heikhalot* of the *Zohar* rather than the less spiritually accessible *Heikhalot* of the rabbinic period. Gikatilla's *Shaarei Oraḥ*, a bestseller in its own day and ever since, stands in marked contrast to the Hebrew writings of Moses de Leon, which were unread in his time and are today read only by scholars. The basic texts for a spiritual reading of the Kabbalah include the *Zohar*, *Tikkunei Zohar*, Naḥmanides, Gikatilla, Recanati, Cordovero and his students, and Ḥayyim of Volozhin.⁵³

⁵¹ Moshe Idel, "Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names" in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typologies* ed. R.A. Herrera (New York: Lang, 1993), pp. 97–122; Moshe Idel, Introduction to R. Joseph Gikatilla, *Gates of Light*, trans. Avi Weinstein (Sacred Literature Trust Series; San Francisco: Harper, 1993), p. xxviii.

⁵² I do not want to overly simplify the issue because R. Moshe de Leon's *sodot* of the commandments were cited in later centuries.

⁵³ Those students returning from study in Israel are inclined to read later theological works including those by Maharal, Ramḥal, and R. Eliashiv's *Leshem Shevo*

Cordovero's voluminous corpus is so widely read because it includes a synthetic reading of the *Zohar* and other kabbalistic schools, and integrates them with rabbinic and philosophic material. Notwithstanding Cordovero's lack of theosophic innovation or of a radical turn on the system worthy of scholarly attention, his mild synthesis was read and used extensively by most Kabbalists from the sixteenth century up to and including today. Concerning his integrated formulation of the Kabbalah, Cordovero quotes Maimonides' requirement to know God (even though Maimonides was not a Kabbalist), explaining that Kabbalah is the fullest version of that knowledge. In order to study Kabbalah he states that one should be twenty years old, possessed of a rabbinic education, including the ability to learn in depth (*be-iyyun*), observant, and of sound character.⁵⁴ Cordovero lays out a path that enables one to read Kabbalah as a resource for theology, meditative prayer, ritual creativity, and for the purpose of the psychological internalization of a kabbalistic worldview. Cordovero's reading of Kabbalah sustains an integrated approach to spiritual development because it is founded on a broad and firm basis of *halakhah*, *minhag*, and philosophy.

In addition to the earlier models of studying the Platonic divine

ve-Aḥlamah. However, I find that Yeshiva University students do not relate well to *Tikkunei Zohar* with its highly specific letter and shape visualizations.

⁵⁴ Even though Kabbalah should not be studied before the age of twenty, the process of "softening of the soul" by introducing spirituality, meditation, and snippets from Kabbalah should be initiated far earlier, already in the eighth grade. From this age until the age of twenty the students' souls are prepared through a variety of spiritual works that do not involve explicit discussions of theosophy. The reading list should include the famous non-sefirotic passages of the *Zohar* "How to Look at Torah" or "Guests in the Sukkah," discussions of Nahmanides' *sod*, the beginning of the third section of Yehudah ha-Levi's *Kuzari* on visualizing during prayer, discussions of the soul and afterlife from Cordovero, selections from Luzatto, and Maimonides' *Guide* III.51. The writings of R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira of Piaseczna including his *Ḥovot ha-Talmidim*, and *Hakhsharat ha-Avreikhim* are replete with suggestions for introducing spirituality to high school students based on his own experience educating adolescents. By the time students reach my university class, they are approximately twenty years old, have spent at least one year in Israel, have the requisite background in *Gemara* and *halakhah*, and are committed to observance.

hierarchy and of studying Kabbalah, some mystics used halakhic study as a means of achieving *deveikut*. Moshe Idel points out that R. Yosef Karo was able to have nightly mystical encounters because his meditative method was based upon his daily study of Torah and not on extra-ordinary techniques. Similarly, Polish Ḥasidut used ordinary *Beit Midrash* learning as a path to mystical experience.⁵⁵ In Poland, Ḥasidism took an intellectual turn and created the *Ḥasid-Lamdan* who sought to cleave to God by means of studying Torah in purity and holiness. The *Ḥasid-Lamdan* is devoted to Talmud and *halakhah*, but not to Kabbalah, and finds his piety in Talmud study itself. The approach is best typified by the son-in-law of Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kozk, Rabbi Avraham Borenstein, who, in his introduction to his book *Eglei Tal* on the laws of the Sabbath, understands the continuous study of Torah as a means by which to cleave to God. The learning is to be done in purity and holiness, in order to maximize the effect on the individual. God's grandeur can be experienced as a mental presence, asserts R. Borenstein, and behind all the varied manifestations of the modern world, one can find consciously the hidden will of the divine. Torah study cultivates the requisite feeling of awe before the divine; the rabbinic tradition becomes a dwelling for a mystical life.⁵⁶

Finally, dwelling reaches its peak in a psychological sense of indwelling and a feeling of oneness. Only when one accepts the hierarchal structure of reality and avoids enthusiasm in one's study of Kabbalah can theologies of indwelling safely be navigated. An example of this sense of indwelling that can be found even in Torah study is typical of the thought of R. Zadok ha-Kohen of Lublin, who develops the rabbinic exhortation to learn for its own sake (*Torah li-shmah*) into a mystical psychology. According to R. Zadok, one studies the Torah for its own sake with a passion for the divine so that "by means of desire man is a receptacle for the indwelling of God in the midst of the heart."⁵⁷ This ardent study continues until God recognizes the student as "my dove, my beloved," (Song of

⁵⁵ On R. Zadok, see Alan Brill, *Thinking God: The Mysticism of Rabbi Zadok Ha-Kohen of Lublin* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2002).

⁵⁶ Introduction to *Eglei Tal* (Pietrkov, 1905, reprinted with corrections 1931).

⁵⁷ *Zidkat ha-Zaddik*, sec. 251.

Songs 5:2). The Midrash reads the word “beloved” (*tammati*) as twin (*te'omati*), showing that the relation between man and God is one of lovers twinned in union. R. Zadok extends the meaning of the verse “my dove my twin” to express that the bond of love is so intense that man, by means of his passionate knowledge, makes himself the veritable twin of God.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*