

...All is One: Rambam's Doctrine of Divine Cognition as a Pillar of *Habad* Thought
 Abstract: This essay traces R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi's use of Rambam's complex and contradictory Doctrine of Divine Cognition. In his classic formulation of the Doctrine at *Mishneh Torah*, *Yesodei HaTorah* 2.10, Rambam paradoxically writes that although Divine Cognition appears to be a complex intradivine process, in fact, "all is one" meaning, cognition adds no complexity to the Divine. As we trace R. Shneur Zalman's use of the Doctrine, we see it re-read to ground myth and mysticism, ultimately supporting the assertion that "all is One" the metaphysical claim that only One substance exists. Rambam's doctrine becomes a linchpin for R. Shneur Zalman's acosmic mystical monism – and his most central doctrines.

1. Introduction

Rambam remains among Judaism's most influential thinkers. His Halakhic *Mishneh Torah* has been widely analyzed from its composition to the present. His philosophical *Moreh Nevukhim* merited narrower study, but deeply influences Jewish thought. Since he wrote, Rambam has been read as an arch-rationalist, opposing mystical and mythical currents in Judaism exemplified by Kabbalah, and later, *Hasidut*. Rambam's characterization as a rationalist took on polemical import in the conflict between conservative traditionalists and the *Haskalah* during the modern period.¹

Nonetheless, many Kabbalists and Hasidic masters warmly accepted Rambam, seeing his teachings as compatible with their own.² This essay explores how Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi's used Rambam's philosophical theology, particularly, Rambam's doctrine of Divine Cognition (DDC). R. Shneur Zalman uses DDC to ground, or serve as a premise in philosophical arguments for, *Hasidut*'s most iconic doctrines: the Jewish Soul's Divine character, the *Tzadik* as a conduit for the Divine, mystical conjunction through Torah study, and Divine Immanence. For

¹ See for example *Tsemah Tsedek's Sefer HaHakirah* (2003) which in large part attempts to marshal the Rambam for the Hasidic/ traditionalist camp. See philosophical analysis in Gottlieb (2009) Ch. 3. For a historical study of the conflict from an internal Habad perspective, see *Kuntres Admor HaTsemah Tsedek U'Tnuat HaHaskalah* by R. Yosef Yitshak Schneerson, beginning on p. 214 of *Sefer HaHakirah*. See also Lurie (2006) for historical discussion from an academic perspective.

² See sources and discussion in Dienstag (1990), (1991), Horodetzky (5695/1945), Jacobs (1990), Scholem (5695/1946).

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each doctrine, I show how R. Shneur Zalman used Rambam's DDC to support it, and assess the extent to which R. Shneur Zalman reads the doctrine according to Rambam's intentions.

To achieve his interpretive aims, R. Shneur Zalman often fuses Rambam's doctrine with statements from the Zohar and Lurianic writings. However, in some cases, R. Shneur Zalman's reading is plausible within Rambam's original philosophical framework. Ultimately, R. Shneur Zalman understands DDC in its original context, and uses its complex details, while subordinating it to, and harmonizing it with, his unique Kabbalistically informed theology.

To illustrate R. Shneur Zalman's (re)reading of Rambam's DDC, I begin by holistically presenting Rambam's DDC, a doctrine which appears throughout his voluminous oeuvre. During that presentation, we will address the contradiction between DDC and Rambam's apophatic reading of Divine attributes. Informed by this integrated account of DDC, we can explore how R. Shneur Zalman creatively uses DDC.

2. Kabbalah, Hasidut, and Rambam

Rambam's explicitly rationalist orientation challenges Kabbalah's mystical/ mythical orientation. Kabbalists were aware of this conflict, so Rambam's philosophy challenged them. Some rejected Rambam's philosophy as heretical³, or more charitably, as written for a "perplexed" audience, but not reflective of Rambam's genuine opinion.⁴ Others tried to "save" Rambam by arguing that he adopted Kabbalah later in life⁵, or more boldly, that Rambam esoterically knew Kabbalah, encoding it in his works.⁶

³ See Septimus (1982)

⁴ Gottlieb (2009) p. 28 ascribes this position to R. Menahem Mendel Schneerson. This opinion circulates widely as an oral tradition in conservative Jewish communities. It is endorsed by contemporary traditional scholars such as R. Moshe Wolfson.

⁵ See Gottlieb (2009) pp. 29-30 example Scholem (5695/ 1946). Shmidman (1985)

⁶ *Avodat Melekh* (by R. Menahem Krakowsky, cited in *Mefarshei* (5766) p. 57) suggests that Rambam's DDC reflects teachings in *Sefer Bahir* and later in R. Moshe Cordovero's *Pardes*. Ergo concludes R. Krakowsky, Rambam was an esoteric Kabbalist. See also Idel (1991)

Moshe Idel (1991) and other scholars⁷ have convincingly argued that in addition to providing an ideological corrective to Kabbalah, Rambam influenced Kabbalah, spurring its revelation. According to Idel, Kabbalists held an ancient oral esoteric tradition, which they felt Rambam's philosophical theology threatened to displace. To counteract Rambam's co-opting the Jewish esoteric tradition, they began to write and teach their tradition. Beyond reactionary influence, other Kabbalists integrated Rambam's thought with Kabbalah, harmonizing his teachings with their own.⁸ The Hasidic movement, a religious revival movement beginning in the 18th century, and continuing to flourish in the present, operates primarily with Kabbalistic mythical and mystical theological doctrines. Despite this non-rational orientation, R. Shneur Zalman, founder of the Habad school⁹ and one of Hasidism's few systematic expositors,¹⁰ uses Rambam's philosophical theology to ground those very doctrines.

3. Rambam's Doctrine of Divine Cognition

It is worth presenting Rambam's DDC on its own terms. First, understanding Rambam's doctrine clarifies DDC's evolution from Rambam's original theory to R. Shneur Zalman's. Second, since R. Shneur Zalman uses the doctrine in all its complexity, and addresses hermeneutic issues relating to it, understanding the doctrine as it appears in Rambam is essential for properly understanding R. Shneur Zalman's theory.

⁷ Kellner (2006)

⁸ Gottlieb (2009) shows how Habad thinkers did this. Idel (1991) discusses Abulafia's harmonistic approach.

⁹ Elijior (1993) provides a philosophical overview of the Habad school's first three generations. Schwartz (1990) surveys the development of central topics in Habad thought across its seven generations. Lowenthal (1990) offers a social historical perspective on Habad's first two generations from the vantage point of its communicative agenda.

¹⁰ Perhaps the only others are some of R. Shneur Zalman's descendants who continued to write systematic Hasidic treatises. Notably his son R. Dov Ber, grandson *Tzemah Tzedek* in *Derekh Mitsvotekha*, and his great, great grandson *Rashab*.

Rambam discusses Divine cognition in each of his three-major works: *Perush HaMishnayot (PHM)*¹¹, *Mishneh Torah (MT)*¹², and *Moreh Nevukhim (MN)*¹³.

DDC= He (God) is the intellectually cognizing subject, the intellectually cognized object, and the intellect itself, all in one.¹⁴

DDC originates in Aristotle's writings, where Aristotle applies it to both human¹⁵ and Divine¹⁶ cognition. Medieval Muslim philosophers¹⁷ integrated the doctrine into their philosophies, and Rambam adopted the doctrine as mediated through their philosophical lens, which contained both Aristotelean and Neoplatonic elements.¹⁸

Beyond its independent import, DDC is important in Rambam's philosophical theology, allowing him to affirm two premises about God that he is committed to:

- (1) Divine Omniscience: God knows everything – every fact that will ever be.
- (2) Divine Unity: God is simple, non-composite, and does not possess any added qualia, elements, or attributes, beyond his unified essence.

DDC accounts for both desiderata. It stipulates that God has omniscient knowledge that does not disturb his unity. Yet, DDC is cryptic. In MT *Yesodei HaTorah (YHT)* 2.10, Rambam tells us: “Concerning this matter (DDC) the mouth is incapable of saying it, the ear incapable of hearing it, and the human mind incapable of clearly understanding it.”¹⁹ This formulation suggests that

¹¹ Rambam (5774) p. 265-266 *Shmonah Prakim, HaPerek HaShmini* from s.v. *V'Lo Nishar B'Inyan Zeh*. And briefly at p. 285 *Avot* 3.20 s.v. *Kavanato Bazei*.

¹² At MT *Yesodei HaTorah* 2.10, *Tshuvah* 5.5.

¹³ At MN 1.53,68; 3.20-21

¹⁴ This formulation appears at MT *Yesodei HaTorah* 2.10. A similar formulation appears at MN 1.68 and in the aforementioned citations from PHM.

My translation follows Pines translation of the relevant terms at MN 1.68. p. 163

¹⁵ *De Anima* 3.4, 5. See analysis in Norman (1969).

¹⁶ *Metaphysics* Book 12.9 pp. 342-344 in Aristotle (1995).

¹⁷ See Pessin (2014) and Schwartz (1990)

¹⁸ See above and Rambam (1963) in Pines “Philosophical Sources of the *Guide of the Perplexed*” pp. xcvi-xcviii.

¹⁹ דבר זה אין כח בפה לאמר, ולא באוזן לשמעו, ולא בלב האדם להכירו על בורין

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DDC transcends human comprehension, a sort of paradox or contradiction. Divine cognition's three elements are one, but in a way that we cannot understand.²⁰ This reflects Rambam's general approach to Divine cognition. Throughout his works, Rambam repeatedly invokes verses like "My thoughts are not your thoughts, and My ways are not your ways"²¹ or "Can you successfully investigate God?"²²

However, at MN 1.68, Rambam does not quote such verses, instead presenting DDC as given to rational demonstration. Rambam writes:

How many there are pretending to knowledge who have great difficulties with regard to this, and who hold that the minds cannot attain the knowledge that it is correct that this matter should be necessarily true. Yet, this notion is a matter of demonstration, and it is quite clear as the theologizing philosophers have explained. Here I shall make clear to you what they have demonstrated.²³

Rambam here presents DDC as non-mysterious, claiming that a person with sufficient philosophical sophistication can rationally grasp its truth. This points to a contradiction within Rambam's teachings on DDC. Generally, he shrouds it in mystery and protestations against our ability to understand it. Here however, he teaches that it is understandable.

Before addressing the contradiction, I will discuss Rambam's presentation of DDC at MN 1.68. This presentation is the clearest Rambam offers in his scattered comments on the topic, providing a working understanding of DDC going forward. This will help us understand Rambam's own position, and R. Shneur Zalman's use of DDC, our ultimate focus.

²⁰ This would undercut Rambam's anti-trinitarian polemic at MN 1.50. While we will see Rambam explain DDC, understanding how Rambam escapes his own critique at 1.50 is challenging.

²¹ Isaiah 55.8 Cited at MN 3.20, MT *Teshuvah* 5.5.

כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם ולא דרכיכם דרכי

²² Job 11.7. Rhetorically, the answer is: of course not. See how Rambam employs this verse at PHM *Shmonah Praqim* Ch. 8. Kapach ed. p. 226.

²³ MN 1.68. Pines p. 163.

In 1.68, unlike elsewhere²⁴, Rambam conflates the mechanics of human and Divine cognition, following Aristotle. He offers the following example of human cognition to illustrate Divine cognition. Before a human “cognizes” an object, three individuated entities exist:²⁵

- (1) A subject – a given human being who has the quality of intellect. “the man who supports that potentiality and who is the intellectually cognizing subject in potentia.”
- (2) The cognitive faculty “the potentiality that is the intellect in potentia”
- (3) An object. “The thing apt to be intellectually cognized, which is the potentially cognizable object.”

To illustrate this abstract presentation, Rambam offers the humble example of a human cognizing a wooden block. Before the human has cognized the wood, a human exists. That human possesses an added quality, intellect. The wood exists independently. So, we have three objects. This describes what Rambam would term “intellect in potential.” When however, the intellect becomes “active”, cognizing something, the three elements become one. This is not a magical, mystical, or suprarational process. Instead, Rambam clearly philosophically describes the process’ mechanics.

Intellect becomes actualized when it cognizes/ apprehends a given object. But, it does not cognize the physical object. Instead, it “strips the object of its matter” isolating the bare form.

Rambam tells us that there can be no actualized intellect without it thinking *something*.

Similarly, no form exists in the abstract.²⁶ Forms only come into being through cognition. So, the

²⁴ Like in MT YHT 2.10, Tshuvah 5.5 and MN 3.20-21.

²⁵ For each of the three, I present Rambam’s own characterization in quotation marks, following Pines’ translation pp. 165.

²⁶ In this chapter Rambam operates with an Aristotelean view of forms, where forms do not exist in a separate realm, but instead partake in matter/ form compounds. Thus, Rambam appears to reject the Platonic view of forms which sees forms as independently apprehensible. Alternatively, Rambam might accept a Platonic view of forms, but hold that humans cannot apprehend them. However, Rambam’s comments in chapter 8 of *Hilhot Tshuvah* imply that he would endorse a Platonic view.

actualized intellect, and the abstracted form are co-dependent. Neither can exist without the other. The actualized intellect *just is* the abstracted form, and the abstracted form *just is* the actualized intellect. The two derive from separate sources but become one in the cognitive act.

Rambam explicitly identifies the actualized intellect and abstracted form:

Intellect realized in actu is the pure abstract form, which is in his mind, of the piece of wood. For intellect is nothing other but the thing that is intellectually cognized. Accordingly, it has become clear to you that the thing that is intellectually cognized is the abstract form of the piece of wood, that this form is identical with the intellect realized in actu, and that these are not two things – intellect and the intellectually cognized form of the piece of wood.²⁷

Thus far, Rambam argued for identifying two elements in his triad: the intellect, and the

cognized object. He argues for unifying the third member of the triad, the human subject, as

follows. A human being, the subject of intellectual cognition, is **essentially** an intellectually

cognizing subject. Its essence is to intellectually cognize.²⁸ Following the Aristotelean idea that

an essence represents the necessary and sufficient conditions to be something²⁹, the act of

intellectually cognizing constitutes a human actualizing their essence, becoming themselves.

Humans only become human through intellectual cognition. So, a “human” depends on

intellectual cognition for its existence. It follows that the three elements are one, since each one

depends on the other for existence, and they actualize as an interdependent unit.³⁰

The act of cognition then, brings the three elements into existence as one unit, which can only be separated conceptually. Thus far, Rambam’s discussion pertained to human cognition.

Human cognition has two modes: potential, and actual. When a human is not actively cognizing,

the three elements are distinct. When a human actively cognizes something, the three become

²⁷ Pines pp. 164.

²⁸ See *MT YHT* 4.8. and *MN* 1.1-2

²⁹ See sections 5 and 9 of Shields (2016).

³⁰ This interdependence is bidirectional. The subject grounds the union of the intellect and the object, since the intellect needs a ground to exist. The intellect and the object ground the subject, since the subject only becomes human (an essentially intellectually cognizing thing) because of its grounding the union of the intellect and the object.

one, per Rambam's explanation.³¹ Now, Rambam has all the elements necessary to prove the unity of Divine cognition.

- (1) Whatever is actively cognizing possesses unity of subject, object, and intellect.
- (2) God is always actively cognizing.

Therefore,

- (3) God always possesses unity of subject, object, and intellect.

Rambam ends the chapter by defining God's **essence** as "the intellectually cognizing subject, intellectually cognized object, and the intellect"³² a point which will become important later.

Thus far, we have stated Rambam's DDC, explained it, and examined his philosophical motivation for it, allowing us to understand Rambam's view of cognition's mechanics. But, Rambam's view of Divine cognition is more complex. In 1.68, Rambam straightforwardly compared human cognition with Divine cognition following Aristotle. Rambam then argued from the nature of human cognition to Divine cognition, and to a proof about Divine cognition's constant unity. Since Rambam has stipulated that God's essence *is* intellect,³³ God's cognition does not create any intradivine multiplicity. However, as we observed, throughout his oeuvre, Rambam repeatedly teaches that this doctrine transcends human understanding, given Divine cognition's radical otherness.

To sharpen the contradiction, I will present the sources in detail. In context, chapter 2 of MT *Yesodei HaTorah* discusses the directive to love and fear God.³⁴ Rambam teaches that to cultivate these emotions, one must *know* God, a project which entails studying metaphysics and

³¹ Note, Rambam never suggests that the person's *body* becomes one with the compound. Instead, he thinks that humans qua their essence as thinking things become one with the subject/ object/ intellect compound.

³² Pines p. 166.

See Schwartz p. 176: "והיא המשכלת, והיא המושכלת, והיא השכל" עצמותו היא המשכלת. Emphasis added.

³³ At MN 1.68, and 1.53

³⁴ MT *Yesodei HaTorah* 2.1

physics.³⁵ Rambam adds however, that human knowledge is intrinsically limited, and that any creature, even the disembodied intellects inhabiting Rambam's cosmology (whose intellectual abilities far transcend humans) cannot fully know God, certainly, not as God knows himself.³⁶ It would appear to follow that humans cannot grasp Divine cognition's nature, a conclusion Rambam draws. He states DDC, but then qualifies it by saying that it is beyond human understanding.

In each of his major works³⁷, Rambam discusses Divine cognition in connection with the apparent contradiction between freewill and Divine foreknowledge. The challenge runs: if God knows everything before it happens, how can humans be held accountable for their actions? God's foreknowledge makes their ultimate decision a determined fact before it happens. Here, Rambam uses DDC to argue for the fundamental dissimilarity between human and Divine knowledge. Rambam writes that since, unlike humans, God is constantly unified with his knowledge, the two sorts of knowledge cannot be compared.

He, the Exalted, and His name, and His knowledge are one. And no person can apprehend this matter fully. And just as no one has the ability to apprehend and find the creator's true nature... no one has the ability to apprehend and find the true nature of the creator's knowledge. This explains what the prophet meant when he said "for My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your paths are not My paths." Since the matter is thus, we lack ability to know how the Holy One Blessed be He knows all creatures and actions. But we know without a doubt that man's actions are within his control.³⁸

This passage contains a further argument which Rambam makes explicit at PHM *Shmonah*

Praqim Ch. 8, and MN 3.20-21: everyone would agree that we cannot grasp God's essence.

Similarly, says Rambam, we cannot grasp the nature of God's knowledge. This argument works by asserting that God is wholly other, so we can understand no part of Him. It may also hinge on

³⁵ MT *Yesodei HaTorah* 2.2. More broadly all of chapters 2,3. For a very sharp formulation, see MT *Teshuvah* 10.6.

³⁶ MT *Yesodei HaTorah* 2.8

³⁷ PHM *Shmonah Praqim* Ch. 8. MT *Teshuvah* 5.5. MN 3.20-21.

³⁸ MT *Teshuvah* 5.5

הוא יתעלה שמו ודעתו אחד ואין דעתו של אדם יכולה להשיג דבר זה על בוריו וכשם שאין כח באדם להשיג ולמצוא אמתת הבורא ... אין כח באדם להשיג ולמצוא דעתו של בורא, הוא שהנביא אמר כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם ולא דרכיכם דרכי, וכיון שכן הוא אין בנו כח לידע היאך ידע הקדוש ברוך הוא כל הברואים והמעשים.

the claim that God's knowledge is identical with his essence, and thus, if one cannot understand God's essence, they cannot understand God's knowledge.

Thus far, Rambam's has taught that humans have epistemic limitations which preclude them from understanding Divine cognition. Divine cognition belongs to a metaphysical category that is beyond human cognition.

Rambam further claims that Divine knowledge is not at all like human knowledge, and that the term "knowledge" is merely homonymous when applied to humans and to the Divine. Puzzles concerning Divine cognition arise because we mistakenly conflate human and Divine knowledge.

His knowledge is His essence, and His essence His knowledge... the selfsame capacity that prevents our intellects from apprehending his essence also prevents them from apprehending his knowledge of things as they are. For this knowledge is not of the same species as ours so that we can draw an analogy with regard to it, but a totally different thing... between our knowledge and his knowledge, there is nothing in common, as there is nothing in common between our essence and His essence. With regard to this point, only the equivocality of the term "knowledge" occasions the error; for there is a community only in the terms, whereas in the true reality of things, there is a difference. It is from this that incongruities follow necessarily, as we imagine that things that obligatorily pertain to our knowledge pertain also to His knowledge... [Rambam proceeds to discuss a number of Divine cognition's unique features] ... All the contradictions that may appear in the union of these assertions are due to their being considered in relation to our knowledge, which has only its name in common with His knowledge... the difference between things ascribed to Him and those ascribed to us have been explicitly stated, as have been mentioned above, in its dictum: *Neither are your ways My ways*.³⁹

In this formulation, Rambam proclaims a chasm between human and Divine cognition, stating the two have no commonality. This passage recalls Rambam's apophatic theology, where he says that all qualities we predicate of God are wholly dissimilar to familiar human qualia – and not given to our grasp. Rambam places the predicate "knowledge" into the apophatic bin, along with other God-predicates.

³⁹ MN 3.20, Pines pp. 481-484

We now have a contradiction in Rambam's writings. On the one hand, he describes God's essence as knowledge in MN 1.68, in terms that recall human cognition, and appeal to its mechanics. Even here in MN 3.20, Rambam defines God's essence as knowledge. At the same time, he says that God's knowledge is wholly other, so we cannot predicate "knowledge" of God in a way that meaningfully compares to our own.

a. A Contradiction between DDC and Apophasis?

Asserting that Rambam overlooked the contradiction is absurd, since, in nearly every case where Rambam defines God essence as knowledge, or predicates knowledge of God, he mentions apophatic theology in the discussion.⁴⁰ What underlies the apparent contradiction, and how might we resolve it? In discussing Divine cognition, Rambam has three conflicting theological desiderata. He wants to affirm:

- (1) Divine unity (including intradivine simplicity)⁴¹.
- (2) Divine perfection (including synchronic and diachronic Divine omniscience).
- (3) Freewill (Human moral responsibility).

The claim "God knows" supports (2), but challenges (1), since added qualia add complexity. To resolve this tension, Rambam offers a rational explanation, namely, DDC, with its attendant Aristotelean framework at 1.68. However, (2) also contradicts (3). Here DDC's philosophical details do not help resolve the contradiction. So, Rambam says that Divine knowledge radically differs from our own to alleviate this tension. Rambam offers philosophical resolutions, to the extent he can. But ultimately he appeals to God's radical otherness. Rambam endorses DDC, and even explains it, but believes we cannot understand its ultimate meaning.

⁴⁰ For example, in the quote we just saw from MN 3.20, in 1.68, 1.53. In PHM *Shmonah Praqim* Ch. 8.

⁴¹ For a discussion of Rambam's view of Divine Unity and different conceptions of Divine unity, see Wolfson (1965)

It appears to me that the cumulative evidence places Divine Cognition or God's "knowledge" into the category of apophatic attributes. Divine knowledge might be a privileged attribute in the category, but it is a member nonetheless. Pace Rambam's contemporary Muslim philosophers, Rambam says that God cannot have attributes in the simple sense, because if so, God would be a composite entity, with diverse inherent qualities.⁴² It must be, then, says Rambam, that when the Torah ascribes attributes to God, they are meant non-literally. As Rambam summarizes his position at MT *Yesodei HaTorah* 1.12:

All (Divine Attributes) are parabolic and a figure of speech. Of all these, our sages said, the Torah spoke according to human language. Among the attributes that God does not literally possess are "Neither folly nor wisdom, like the wisdom of a human sage."⁴³

Again, we see Rambam rejecting the claim that God can be defined as intelligence in the human sense.

In his more careful presentation at MN 1.53, Rambam writes: "Every attribute that is found in the books of the deity, may he be Exalted, is... an attribute of action and not an attribute of His essence, or is indicative of His absolute perfection."⁴⁴ It appears that Divine cognition falls into either of these categories. Divine cognition might be an "action" when stated concerning God's knowledge of the world. This would mean that it appears to us that God is a rational agent given that everything in the world is purpose driven according to the Aristotelean teleology that Rambam accepts.⁴⁵ And Divine cognition can indicate God's absolute perfection when speaking of God's knowledge qua God. Given that God is perfect, and knowledge

⁴² See Schwartz's discussion of the Ashirite and Mutazilite positions in notes to MN 1.53 Rambam (5763) pp. 125-128.

⁴³ MT *Yesodei HaTorah* 1.11

⁴⁴ Rambam (1963) MN 1.53. Pines p. 121

⁴⁵ See MN 3.25

describes the highest rank of human perfection in Rambam's axiology⁴⁶, God must have the perfection of knowledge. This reading clarifies Rambam's repeated insistence on identifying God's knowledge with God's essence. We might read that as Rambam allegorically describing God's absolute perfection. Rambam's views here, however, are perhaps not given to complete comprehension without understanding the Neoplatonized Aristotelean philosophy current in Rambam's intellectual milieu.

Having offered a possible resolution to the contradiction, I will briefly survey the primary solutions suggested in contemporary scholarship. Pines⁴⁷ suggests that the contradiction derives from Rambam's dual influence by Neoplatonic and Aristotelean sources. The Neoplatonic tradition endorses an apophatic position, while Aristotle explicitly defines God as intellect. Pines explains the contradiction's intellectual history, but as I have observed, Rambam usually mentions apophasis whenever discussing DDC, thus he must have been aware of the apparent contradiction.

Hannah Kasher (1994) suggests that while we can resolve the tension by saying that Rambam ultimately is apophatic, the contradiction is not troublesome. She proposes that the contradiction highlights an inherent tension in religion. Apophasis points to the religious desideratum of God's radical otherness. Resultantly, nothing meaningful can be said about the transcendent God. Defining God as an intellect fills the religious need to describe God as superlatively perfect, something we can only articulate by using adjectives from human experience. Rambam teaches both to achieve both desiderata.

⁴⁶ For a similar argument, see Tanya 85b where R. Shneur Zalman argues that praising God in intellectual terms just parabolically describes that God has ultimate perfection, borrowed from the lexicon of human experience.

⁴⁷ See Rambam (1963) Pines's Translator's Introduction pp. xcvi-xcviii.

Ehud Benor (1995) suggests that Rambam ultimately adopts apophatic theology and does not believe we can describe God. However, as religious people, we need a language to talk about God. So, Rambam constructs a language which allows us to do so. We refer to God symbolically as an intellect, to articulate His unity and perfection. Benor's reading nicely explains Rambam's lengthy discussion of Divine cognition at MN 1.68, since even if Rambam is ultimately apophatic, 1.68 explains how intense the union of the different parts of the intellect are, illustrating how describing God as intellect describes his inner unity. Benor's solution extends Rambam's general characterization of what Divine attributes mean to include the intellect. Despite their solutions, neither Benor nor Kasher analyze the complex details of Rambam's DDC, thus, work remains to fully address the contradiction.

4. R. Shneur Zalman's (re)reading of DDC

R. Shneur Zalman's written works demonstrate that he was familiar with DDC's complexity, and studied its appearances in *PHM*, *MT*, and *MN*. While in Tanya's text, he only explicitly points the reader to *MT*, his discussions of DDC often include citations, paraphrases, and explanations from *PHM* and *MN*. R. Shneur Zalman was also thoroughly familiar with Rambam's apophatic view of Divine attributes.⁴⁸

R. Shneur Zalman creatively employs Rambam's DDC; at times as a standalone premise, and at others using its detailed presentation to prove or illustrate doctrines. The doctrines R. Shneur Zalman uses DDC to support typify Hasidut within academic discourse. In order of their appearance in Tanya, R. Shneur Zalman's central work, they are: (a) The Jewish soul's Divine

⁴⁸ See *Likkutei Torah, Vayikra 6c* and *Tsemah Tsedek's* expansion in *Derekh Mitsvotekha* 46b.

nature⁴⁹ (b) The Tzadik's Divine Nature⁵⁰ (c) Torah's Divine Nature⁵¹ (d) The immanence of Divine transcendence⁵² and relatedly, (e) a non-literal reading of the Lurianic doctrine of *Tzimtzum* amounting to acosmicism.⁵³ In what follows, I explore each doctrine individually, assessing how R. Shneur Zalman used Rambam's DDC to argue for, or formulate them.

a. The Jewish Soul

i. DDC underwriting the Doctrine of the Divine Soul

Tanya's first major doctrine is the two-soul doctrine, according to which every Jew,⁵⁴ possesses two souls. The first "derives from the shell (*Kelipah*) and the Other Side (*Sitra Ahra*)."

⁵⁵ R. Shneur Zalman later defines this soul as the "animal soul"⁵⁶ an egoistic consciousness grounding base desires. The second is "Literally, a portion of the Divine from above" (הלך אלוה) (ממעל ממש). This doctrine is critical within R. Shneur Zalman's thought, since the soul's Divine source allows the Jew to overcome evil and transcend egotism.⁵⁷

R. Shneur Zalman proves that Jews have a Divine soul using the following argument:

- (1) The Jewish people are God's child (A Biblical premise based on verses like "My firstborn son is Israel"⁵⁸)

⁴⁹ Tanya 1.2, 1.18-25.

⁵⁰ Tanya 1.2, 1.42.

⁵¹ Tanya 1.4-5, 23, 35. More obliquely, 1.51-53

⁵² Tanya 1.48, 2.7. See also 1.42.

⁵³ Tanya 2.7

⁵⁴ R. Shneur Zalman distinguishes between Jew and non-Jew. For a litany of sources discussing Kabbalah's tendency to metaphysically distinguish between the Jew and the non-Jew (on which Tanya's distinction is based) and an ethical critique, see Wolfson (2006) Ch. 1. And Balk (2013).

See also the antecedent R. Shneur Zalman's distinction in *Kuzari* 1.25, 27, 41, 43, 47.

⁵⁵ נפש אחת מצד הקליפה והסט"א

In Lurianic Kabbalah, *Kelipah* and *Sitra Ahra* denote an evil, demonic element of reality. See Tishby (1965) Tanya Ch. 1 p. 5b

⁵⁶ The term first appears in Tanya Ch. 9, p. 13b. R. Shneur Zalman borrows this term from the *Zohar Hadash*, where it appears numerous times. See for example *Zohar Hadash* Vol. 1 (Torah) Parshat Bereishit 16a.

⁵⁷ See Tanya ch. 19.

⁵⁸ Exodus 4.22. In context, Moses is delivering a message from God, where God characterizes the Jewish people as His "firstborn son."

(2) Children physically derive from their father's brain (A Talmudic or scientific premise)⁵⁹

So,

(3) The Jewish people derive from God's "brain"/ mind. (From 1,2)

(4) Any element of the Divine intellect is unified with the Divine intellect. (By Rambam's DDC).

So,

(5) The Jewish people are unified with the Divine intellect (and thus with God). (From 3,4).

To illustrate how R. Shneur Zalman uses DDC, I will quote the relevant passage:

“My firstborn son is Israel...just as a child is derived from his father's brain, so – to use an anthropomorphism – the soul of each Israelite is derived from G-d's (blessed be He) thought and wisdom. For He is wise, but not with a knowable wisdom⁶⁰, because He and His wisdom are one; and as Rambam says, that he is the Knowledge and the Knower etc., and this is not in the power of any man to comprehend clearly, etc. as it is written – “If you investigate God, will you succeed?” And it is also written, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts”⁶¹

Here, R. Shneur Zalman uses Rambam's DDC as a premise, but takes it out of context. In

Rambam's context, DDC just meant that God is omniscient and simple, so when we predicate

“knowledge” of God, that knowledge cannot generate multiplicity. The Divine intellect is non-

composite. R. Shneur Zalman re-reads the doctrine to mean that whatever the Jewish revelatory

canon associates with God's thought is one with Him. This way, DDC can support a mythic

teaching.

R. Shneur Zalman immediately follows DDC up with three hedges, all taken from

Rambam's diverse writings on DDC. In context, the first “and this is not in the power of any man

⁵⁹ See BT *Niddah* 31a. It is unclear that the Talmud's statement that the father's semen is responsible for generating the child's brain underwrites this premise. The premise may derive from ancient or medieval science, perhaps mediated by Kabbalistic writings.

⁶⁰ As Mindel notes, this phrase comes from the Introduction to *Tikunei Zohar* 17b. Notably, R. Shneur Zalman reads *Tikunei Zohar* and Rambam as a seamless unit, using Rambam's doctrine to philosophically explain *Tikunei Zohar*'s mysterious pronouncement!

⁶¹ Tanya Ch. 2 6a. Mindel trans. pp. with modifications.

to comprehend clearly” from MT *Yesodei HaTorah* 2.10 shows that we cannot understand DDC. The second and third “If you investigate God, will you succeed?” and, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts” from the discussions in *PHM Shmonah Praqim* and MN 3.20 respectively are Biblical prooftexts for Rambam’s argument that comparing human cognition to Divine cognition is a category error. R. Shneur Zalman revels in the aura of incomprehensibility that Rambam shrouds DDC with. It licenses R. Shneur Zalman’s creative reading. The citations also demonstrate R. Shneur Zalman’s awareness of Rambam’s full range of discussion on DDC, and that R. Shneur Zalman reads those diverse discussions as a holistic unit.

DDC is a decisive premise in the argument for the Divine soul as presented. However, R. Shneur Zalman likely could have derived a similar conclusion by basing himself only on Kabbalistic sources.⁶² Why did he use DDC? First, Rambam’s doctrine becomes a central hinge for many of R. Shneur Zalman’s doctrines, so he may have decided to employ it as fully as possible. However, as we will see, R. Shneur Zalman does not use the doctrine uniformly. In different cases, he appeals to different details of DDC, or uses different logic to derive his conclusion.

More speculatively, R. Shneur Zalman may have used Rambam’s name for political reasons. He may have wished to invoke Rambam’s support when formulating controversial doctrines which would anger the *Mitnagdim*, the conservative Rabbinic faction,⁶³ and the doctrines he uses DDC to support are in fact controversial. In the opposite direction, he may have wished to appropriate Rambam for the Hasidic camp against the nascent *Haskalah* movement who used Rambam’s philosophical rationalism to oppose Kabbalah and Hasidut.⁶⁴

⁶² As he does in Tanya Ch. 18.

⁶³ Gottlieb (2009) p. 30 makes a suggestion along these lines.

⁶⁴ R. Shneur Zalman’s grandson, and third leader of Habad, *Tsemah Tsedek* actively polemicized against *Haskalah*, fighting them both on philosophical and political fronts. Gottlieb (2009) p. 13 makes this observation, see also the

In some cases, R. Shneur Zalman may have felt that he was arriving at Rambam's genuine esoteric intention or spelling out the logical conclusion of Rambam's teachings. Even though R. Shneur Zalman takes Rambam's DDC out of context, he and his successors in the Habad school considered that a legitimate hermeneutic maneuver, according to the Habad school's view of Rambam's teaching as revelation. In Habad hermeneutics, a piece of earlier revelation can be taken out of context and used to reflect new revelatory principles. This is a new revelation that which was concealed within the original revelation all along.⁶⁵

ii. DDC, the Divine Soul, and Contemplative Ethics.⁶⁶

R. Shneur Zalman puts the theoretical doctrine of the Divine soul to practical ethical use later in Tanya. There, DDC grounds not only metaphysical doctrine, but also an extended contemplative practice that R. Shneur Zalman develops to cultivate ethical behavior. Rambam's DDC grounds what R. Shneur Zalman considers Tanya's most powerful contemplative strategy.⁶⁷

The exercise runs as follows: R. Shneur Zalman maintains that every Jewish soul ultimately derives from God's wisdom. God's wisdom is one with God, so Jews are one with God.⁶⁸ R. Shneur Zalman teaches that given a Jew's essential union with God, the Jew would

sources cited in note 1.

R. Shneur Zalman can be read in discourse with Haskalah given that the movement began before his time. Solomon Maimon's (1754-1800) autobiography (2001) is evidence of at least one individual connected to both Hasidut and Haskalah. Moses Mendelsohn, forerunner of the Haskalah was a contemporary of R. Shneur Zalman's. Internal Habad tradition relates that R. Shneur Zalman engaged "Shimon HoKofer" an early Maskil who attempted to penetrate the Eastern European Jewish educational system. See Bartal (1993).

⁶⁵ Gottlieb (2009) pp. 16-17, 26

⁶⁶ On the topic of mysticism and ethics in Tanya, from an internal perspective, and a comparative religion's perspective, see Orent (2007)

⁶⁷ See the beginning of 1.18 in Tanya, where R. Shneur Zalman explains that the contemplative exercise he develops from 1.18-25 is "very achievable", for anyone, even "the most base, and transgressors of Israel" unlike the contemplative exercise outlined in chapters 1.12-17 aimed at people of greater spiritual health.

⁶⁸ In the presentation at 1.18, which I am summarizing here, R. Shneur Zalman does not explicitly invoke Rambam's doctrine, choosing instead to build his argument entirely on Kabbalistic sources.

rather sacrifice their life than separate from God. R. Shneur Zalman proves this assertion by appealing to the prevalent phenomenon of Jewish martyrdom, where even simple, illiterate Jews would often die as martyrs rather than practice, or profess⁶⁹ Christianity. R. Shneur Zalman explains that the Jewish soul's source in *Hokhmah*, Divine wisdom, causes it to have a latent mystical impulse.

So the *neshamah* (soul) of man... naturally desire... to separate itself and depart from the body in order to unite with its origin and source in God, the fountainhead of all life, blessed be he, though thereby it would become null and void, completely losing its entity therein, with nothing remaining of its former essence and being. Nevertheless, this is its will and desire by nature... this nature stems from the faculty of *Hokhmah* (Wisdom) found in the soul, wherein abides the light of the blessed *En Sof*.⁷⁰

The Lurianic view of *Hokmah* as completely one with the *En Sof* – a lofty rank of the Godhead, (perhaps the ultimate rank) superficially dovetails with Rambam's view of knowledge being unified with God's essence. The difference is, that in the Lurianic reading, *Hokmah* is one with the *En Sof* since it exists in a state of complete nullification to the *En Sof*, a state beyond the ego and beyond intellectual comprehension. As R. Shneur Zalman puts it:

This is a general principle in the whole realm of holiness – it [holiness] is only that which is derived from *Hokmah* called “supreme holiness” whose existence is nullified in the light of the blessed *En Sof* which is clothed in it, so that it is not an independent entity... this stands in direct contrast to the aspects of *kelipah* and *sitra ahra*... who work for themselves alone, demanding “Give, give!” and “Feed me!”⁷¹

Hokmah and its attendant mystical impulse lie latent in the soul, awakened only when the Jew perceives that she will be separated from God by denying God's unity through some idolatrous

⁶⁹ Tanya 1.19, 25b. R. Shneur Zalman does not explicitly mention Christianity. But given the Rabbinic tendency to view trinitarian doctrine as imputing multiplicity within the Godhead, R. Shneur Zalman's characterization that Jews engage in:

self-sacrifice to the extent of even refusing to do some single act that is contrary to the faith in one God, such as for example, to bow to an idol, even without acknowledging it in his heart at all, or to utter any false notion heaven forbid, regarding the unity of G-d.

can be read within a Christian context. This reading is especially plausible in Europe, but even more so in R. Shneur Zalman's time where the Russian government was slowly beginning to intensify its persecution of the Jewish people as part of a long-term plan to assimilate them into broader Russian society.

⁷⁰ Tanya 1.19, 24b.

⁷¹ Ibid.

act. Using a contemplative exercise, R. Shneur Zalman psychologically expands this mystical impulse harnessing it in service of ethical behavior.

The contemplative exercise runs as follows:

- (1) The doctrine of acosmicism (nothing (truly) exists except for God).
- (2) Performing Torah and Mitzvot mystically connects one with God, since through Torah and Mitzvot, one expresses their nullification to God's will. Performing Torah and Mitzvot thus affirms acosmicism.
- (3) Egotism, and transgressing the Torah, are identical to idolatry, since egotistic actions and transgressing the Torah negate (1), Divine unity's true meaning.
- (4) Empirically, Jews willingly sacrifice their lives rather than engage in idolatry/ reject Divine unity. Therefore, given the new more sophisticated concept of idolatry, Jews should resist sin and egotistic action by awakening the same visceral, self-sacrificial impulses they use to resist idolatry.

In this section, we have seen DDC conceptually ground a contemplative ethical exercise. Next, we will explore the Doctrine of the Divine soul's theological implications.

iii. The Soul as Divine Incarnation?

What theological implications does unifying the Divine soul with God's have? The term "Literally, a portion of the Divine from above" calls to mind incarnation.⁷² However, nothing indicates that R. Shneur Zalman endorses anything like a Christian theory of incarnation with an identity between God and the Jewish soul. Nor does R. Shneur Zalman view the Divine soul as an object of worship or ascribe to it the ability to exercise control over the world. R. Shneur

⁷² Wolfson (2000), Magid (2014)

Zalman limits the doctrine by writing “the root and the source of all Jewish souls is in the Supreme Wisdom, and He and His Wisdom are one and the same.”⁷³ This means the soul is not an occurrent Divine incarnation, instead, it is *ultimately* sourced in Divinity. This explains imperfection and sin. Another important point to recall is that given R. Shneur Zalman’s monism, everything on some level, even evil, contains the Divine presence.⁷⁴ So, the Divine soul’s “Divinity” lies in its being a locus of intense Divine revelation and connection to God.

The following passage also limits the Divine soul’s divinity. R. Shneur Zalman counsels the spiritual seeker to contemplate:

“Truly... I am far removed from God... Yet... that is the ... vivifying [animal] soul. Yet, there is within me, a literal part of God, which is found even in the most base, namely the divine soul, with a spark of Divinity... clothed in it... except that it is... in exile... therefore I shall make my whole aim and desire to extricate her [(the soul)] from exile... [so that she] be absorbed and united with Him... if I set my entire goal to Torah and *mitsvot*.⁷⁵

This passage limits the Divine soul by saying that “a spark of Divinity [is] clothed in it”

implying that the Divine soul itself is not a *completely* Divine entity. Furthermore, in most people the Divine soul is “in exile” not fully revealed or active.

The final source I will cite on the Divine soul decisively shows that the doctrine of the Divine soul does not make a Jew a literal Divine incarnation:

The *Shekhinah* does not rest on a man’s body which is likened to a wick, except through good deeds alone, and it is not sufficient that his soul which is a portion of the Divine from above [serve as a conduit for the *Shekhinah* revelation] for the soul of person, even if he be perfectly virtuous, serving God with fear and “love of delights”⁷⁶ nonetheless, does not become nullified out of existence, to be literally nullified and encompassed in the Divine light, to become one and unified in absolute unity, rather he is a separate entity, who fears God, and loves Him.⁷⁷

⁷³ Tanya 1. 24, 31a. Mindel trans. p.105.

⁷⁴ See for example Tanya 1.6, 11a.

⁷⁵ Tanya 1.31, 40a.

⁷⁶ R. Shneur Zalman (and the Habad school in general) operate with a complex taxonomy of religious emotions. “Love of delights” refers to a love of God reserved for the righteous, who as a result of their intense religious service, merit spontaneous ecstatic love of God.

⁷⁷ Tanya 1.35, 44a-b.

This passage shows that while the Divine soul may grant the Jew a relationship with God, it by itself does not cause a Jew to become identical with God, or a Divine incarnation. Nor can it independently allow a Jew to achieve mystical union. We thus see that while R. Shneur Zalman uses DDC to argue for a radical theological doctrine that suggests incarnation, closer reading shows him softening the doctrine. As we move forward, however, we will see DDC used to support more radical conceptions of unity with the Divine.

b. The *Tzadik*

The doctrine of the Divine soul is egalitarian. The Divine soul rests in every Jew, even in “the most base, and sinners of Israel.”⁷⁸ Hasidut however teaches another, non-egalitarian doctrine: that of the *Tzadik*. R. Shneur Zalman explains and grounds this doctrine using DDC as well. Following Lurianic Kabbalah, R. Shneur Zalman compares the Jewish people to a body. In this metaphor, the head symbolizes the righteous, specifically Moses. The heels, and nails⁷⁹ symbolize “The horde and the ignorant” (ההמון ועמי הארץ) and “the most base” (קל שבקלים).

R. Shneur Zalman uses the Lurianic body metaphor to two ends.⁸⁰ First, he reads it in an egalitarian mode. Just as the entire human body (including the lowliest elements like the toenails) emerges from the seminal drop which is ultimately sourced in the father’s brain, even the lowly ultimately derive from God’s thought. Thus, following DDC, even the lowly are unified with God, using the logic we discussed at length in the previous section.

Next, R. Shneur Zalman uses the brain metaphor hierarchically:

Even now, in the son, the nails receive their nourishment and life from the brain that is in the head... The souls of the ignorant and lowly... are still bound and united with a wonderful and essential unity with their original essence and entity, namely, the extension of Supernal Wisdom, inasmuch as the nurture of the souls of the ignorant

⁷⁸ Tanya 1.2, 6b. 1.18, 23b-24a.

⁷⁹ As in, fingernails and toenails. Presumably the intention here is toenails, given their proximity to the heel.

⁸⁰ Tanya 1.2, 6b.

derives from souls of the virtuous and wise men, the heads of the Jewish people in their generation. This explains the comment of our sages on the verse “and to cleave to Him” – he who cleaves unto a scholar is deemed by the Torah as if he had literally cleaved to the *Shekhinah*. For, through attachment to scholars, the souls of the ignorant are bound up and united with their original essence and their root in the Supernal Wisdom, He and His wisdom being one, and “He is the Knowledge” etc.⁸¹

The logic here is: every part of the body only continues to live and grow as a result of its association with the brain. Were part of the body separated from the brain, it would die (the fingernails, for example, would stop growing). Similarly, says R. Shneur Zalman, the entire Jewish people derive both their physical and spiritual life from the *Tzadik*. The *Tzadik* (or *Tzadikim*) is the “brain” to the body that is the Jewish people. The *Tzadik* acts as a conduit for the Divine, connecting God and the Jewish people. To prove this doctrine, R. Shneur Zalman invokes DDC. He reasons that the *Tzadik* is described as the “brain.” The brain is the intellect’s source, and following from Rambam’s DDC, which teaches that God is completely unified with his intellect, the brain is one with God, so, the *Tzadik* is one with God. Here like in the case of the Divine soul, R. Shneur Zalman employs DDC as a standalone phrase, using it for his own ends, taking out of Rambam’s philosophical context, and importing it into a Kabbalistic one. The following principle appears to me to underwrite R. Shneur Zalman’s use of DDC here:

Anything that the Jewish tradition (Hebrew Bible, Rabbinic Literature, Medieval Jewish Philosophy, Kabbalah etc.) associates with God’s mind is one with God, given Rambam’s DDC which states that all elements of God’s mind are one with God.

R. Shneur Zalman expresses no concern over the fact that Rambam would have rejected this use of DDC.

R. Shneur Zalman expands the *Tzadik*’s role in common-folk’s spiritual life.⁸² He focuses on the *Tzadik*’s role in providing deeper religious understanding and helping cultivate religious emotion. This characterization gives the *Tzadik* a particularly Habad slant. While the first

⁸¹ Tanya 1.2, 6b-7a.

⁸² The forthcoming discussion deals with Tanya 1. 42.

characterization we saw is common to Hasidic groups, Habad limits the *Tzadik's* overwhelming religious influence, placing responsibility on the individual.⁸³

R. Shneur Zalman teaches that the *Tzadik* provides *Da'at* (literally, knowledge) to the people. *Da'at* in Habad means taking a predicate one knows and has contemplated deeply. One works with this predicate, trying to make it become “real” to themselves, so that it will generate an emotional reaction.⁸⁴ Unlike *Tzadikim* in other Hasidic movements, the Habad *Tzadik* provides *Da'at* for his constituency by providing complex theology for a devotee to contemplate upon. Using this contemplative material, the devotee achieves religious knowledge and emotion.

The *Tzadik* derives power to provide *Da'at* through his union with God as the Jewish people's “brain”, and because the faculty he provides, *Da'at*, is intellectual. This power follows from DDC in R. Shneur Zalman's reading. R. Shneur Zalman develops the *Tzadik's* religious power by discussing Moses, the paradigmatic *Tzadik* in Habad literature, and invokes DDC to explain it:

Our teacher Moses... is called the totality of them all [meaning, of the Jewish people], and he is called “the faithful shepherd.” This means that he brings down the quality of *da'at* (knowledge) to the community of Israel that they may know the Lord each according to the capacity of his soul and its root above, and its nurture from the root of the soul of our teacher Moses... which is rooted in the *Da'at Elyon* (supernal knowledge) of the Ten *Sefirot* of *Atzilut* which are united with their blessed Emanator, for He and His Knowledge are One, and He is the Knowledge...⁸⁵

In this paragraph, we see a few new points. R. Shneur Zalman focuses the spiritual element of the *Tzadik's* sustenance, offering a fundamentally rational explanation: the *Tzadik* provides “knowledge” to the people. Second, he introduces the faculty of *Da'at*, which he had not used in

⁸³ Lederberg (5774) offers a comparative analysis of R. Shneur Zalman's more egalitarian doctrine of the *Tzadik* in contrast to the R. Elimelech of Lizhensk's doctrine of the *Tsadik* which accords the *Tsadik* a far more central role. Green (1977) offers insight into the *Tzadik's* role as a locus of Divine revelation.

⁸⁴ See Tanya 1.3, 7b. *Derekh Mitsvotekha* 46a.

⁸⁵ Tanya 1.42, 59b. Mindel p. 217.

connection with DDC before. Once again, R. Shneur Zalman understands DDC to mean: anything associated with the Divine intellect is one with God. *Da'at* is associated with the Divine intellect. Therefore, it is one with God.

R. Shneur Zalman makes matters slightly more egalitarian by saying:

Each and every soul of the house of Israel contains within it something of the quality of our teacher Moses... the essence of knowledge is not... knowing... the greatness of God from authors and books; but the essential thing is to immerse one's mind deeply into the greatness of God and fix one's thought on God with all the strength of the heart and mind, until his thought shall be bound to God with a strong and mighty bond, as it is bound to a material thing that he sees with his physical eyes and concentrates his thought on it. For it known that *da'at* connotes union as in the phrase "And Adam knew Eve..." This capacity and this quality of attaching one's knowledge to God is present in every soul of the House of Israel by virtue of its nurture from the soul of our teacher Moses.⁸⁶

This passage teaches that while Moses (and similarly the "sparks from the soul of our teacher Moses" in every generation) had a qualitatively superior connection with God, every Jew connects with God through their connection with Moses and must exert their own religious effort. Thereby, they can also achieve intellectual communion/ union with God.

We have explored the doctrine of the *Tzadik* and seen how DDC grounds it. R. Shneur Zalman reads DDC to mean that the *Tzadik* is one with God. Does this oneness connote incarnation? The *Tzadik* has greater powers than an ordinary Jew, given his role as provider of physical and spiritual sustenance, and conduit for connecting to the Divine.⁸⁷ However, the *Tzadik* is not a Divine incarnation but rather a locus of intense Divine revelation. He occupies an elevated rank within the cosmological hierarchy of Divine *shefa* (effulgence) but is not the *source* of that *shefa*.⁸⁸ The *Tzadik*'s complete unification with, or nullification to, God makes the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ R. Shneur Zalman limits the awesome powers ascribed to the *Tzadik* by Hasidic thinkers like R. Elimelech of Lizhensk. He stresses the *Tzadik*'s role as a source of spiritual guidance and discourages viewing the *Tzadik* as a miracle worker or source of worldly advice. See Tanya 4.22, p. 134a.

⁸⁸ On the concept of cosmological agency in distributing Divine *shefa* and the risk of this concept leading to idolatry, see *Derekh Mitsvotekha* 4b-8b.

Tzadik a vehicle for God's revelation, it does not turn the *Tzadik* into God. R. Shneur Zalman explicitly characterizes the *Tzadik* as a vehicle for Divine revelation writing that God is revealed in the world "through *Tzadikim*, and the miracles of the Torah"⁸⁹

R. Shneur Zalman's association of the *Tzadik* with the brain recalls another passage in Tanya which decisively proves that the correct way to read the *Tzadik* is as a locus of Divine revelation. In Tanya 1.51, R. Shneur Zalman describes his theory of the brain's relation to the body in order to illustrate the meaning of "Indwelling of the Divine presence" (השראת השכינה) in the Holy of Holies, and in general. The soul, says R. Shneur Zalman, is a simple entity, which permeates each element of the body equally. However, the soul is:

- a) Most revealed in the brain.
- b) Its life-force spreads from the brain to the entire body.

R. Shneur Zalman's comparison of the *Tzadik* to the brain mirrors this conception. The *Tzadik* is not the "soul" the simple entity that permeates the world's "body" and gives it life. The soul corresponds to God.⁹⁰ The *Tzadik*⁹¹, corresponds to the brain, the locus of Divine revelation, and serves the point from which the Divine life-force spreads. The *Tzadik* then is functionally analogous to the temple, he is a human temple, an *axis mundi*.⁹²

c. Torah

R. Shneur Zalman views Torah as a unique avenue for mystical union with God. He uses DDC to articulate Torah's ability to allow for mystical union. Previously, we saw R. Shneur Zalman's rationale in employing DDC as:

⁸⁹ Tanya 2.5, 79b-80a.

⁹⁰ As R. Shneur Zalman makes explicit in Chapter 51's continuation, and in the metaphor which extends to chapter 53. He describes God as the world's soul in Tanya 1.42, 60a-b and 2.7, 83b.

⁹¹ Among other things like the Holy of Holies, and the Torah (as we will soon see).

⁹²See Green (1977)

- (1) The Jewish tradition associates x with God's mind.
- (2) Rambam's DDC posits the union of all elements in God's mind.
- (3) Therefore, x, is one with God.

In the case of Torah, R. Shneur Zalman employs similar reasoning. He begins by Rambam's DDC to explain a Zoharic passage:

As the Zohar writes, "The Torah and the Holy One Blessed be He are all One." Meaning, the Torah is Holy One Blessed be He's Will and Wisdom, and the Holy One Blessed be He is all One, for he is the Subject of Knowledge, and the Intellective power etc. as was written above in Rambam's name.⁹³

The Zohar teaches "God and the Torah are One." R. Shneur Zalman interprets this in light of Rambam's DDC, using the rationale I just illustrated. R. Shneur Zalman continues to develop his doctrine of Torah by appealing to Rambam's disanalogy between human and Divine wisdom:

the Holy One Blessed be He is called *En Sof*, and "it is impossible to understand his greatness," and "no thought grasps Him at all" and so it is concerning his will and wisdom, as it is written: "it is impossible to understand his understanding" and it is written "If you investigate God, will you succeed?" And it is also written, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts"⁹⁴

Given the inscrutability of God's wisdom, R. Shneur Zalman asks why the Torah as God's wisdom does not transcend human perception. He answers by invoking the doctrine of *Tsimtsum* which, on his reading, means full ontological Divine presence with mere epistemological occlusion.⁹⁵ Despite this occlusion, R. Shneur Zalman teaches that Torah is the only path toward cognitive union with God.

The Holy One Blessed be He, in his Holiness and Substance: no thought grasps Him at all, except when it apprehends and is clothed in, the *Torah* and its *Mitsvot*; only then does it truly apprehend and is clothed in the Holy One Blessed be He, inasmuch as the Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are one and the same.⁹⁶

⁹³ Tanya 1.4 p. 8a. Mindel Trans. pp. 13-14.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Elior (1993) formulates R. Shneur Zalman's doctrine of *Tsimtsum* this way.

⁹⁶ Tanya 1.4, 9a. Mindel p. 17

Torah allows one to transcend the limits of human cognition and apprehend God, (although one might not be *consciously* aware of what they are apprehending.⁹⁷) Through Torah study, one achieves the paradoxical Messianic revelation of Divinity that transcends revelation.⁹⁸

Thus far, Rambam would disagree with this use of DDC, since Rambam never uses DDC in the logical schema that R. Shneur Zalman does. However, R. Shneur Zalman's doctrine of Divine conjunction through Torah shows that he deeply understood Rambam's presentation of DDC and relates to it as more than a stock phrase. He uses Rambam's detailed explanation of DDC from MN 1.68 to illustrate the precise mechanics of unifying with God through Torah study. Rambam agrees with R. Shneur Zalman's claim that through Torah study, one's mind unites/ conjoins with the Torah. Rambam would disagree with the further claim that conjunction with the Torah equals conjunction with God.

R. Shneur Zalman presents a philosophical account of cognitive union with Torah as follows:

To further explain... the expression *tefisa* (apprehension) [lit: grasping] in the words of Elijah "No thought can apprehend you"⁹⁹

When an intellect conceives and comprehends a concept with its intellectual faculties, this intellect grasps the concept and encompasses it. This concept is in turn, grasped, enveloped, and enclothed within that intellect that conceived and comprehended it.

The mind... is also clothed in the concept at the time it comprehends and grasps it with the intellect.

For example... when a person knows and comprehends in his intellect a verdict in accordance with the law as it is set out in the *Mishnah*, *Gemara*, or *Posekim* (codes), he has thus comprehended, grasped and encompassed with his intellect the will and wisdom of the Holy one Blessed be He, Whom no thought can grasp, nor His will and wisdom, except when they are clothed in the laws that have been set out for us. Simultaneously, the intellect is also clothed in them [the Divine will and wisdom]. This is a wonderful

⁹⁷ See the discussion at Tanya 1.23, 29a

⁹⁸ In Habad literature, this paradoxical revelation is called *Gilui HaSovev* (גילוי הסובב). R. Shneur Zalman invokes it with respect to Torah study at Tanya 23, 29a.

התורה למעלה מכולם, והיא היא רצונו ית' הנקרא סובב כל עלמין שהיא בה' מה שאינו יכול להתלבש בתוך עלמין... והיא היא המתלבשת בנפש ולבושה בבח' גילוי ממש כשעוסקים בד"ת.

The Messianic connotations of *Gilui HaSovev* are pervasive in Habad literature. See for example *Derekh Mitsvotekha* 2b, and 16b read in conjunction with Tanya 36.

⁹⁹ Citing the passage in *Tikkunei Zohar* 17a which presents a lecture attributed to Elijah.

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...All is One: Rambam's Doctrine of Divine Cognition as a Pillar of Habad Thought

union, which has no parallel in the material world, whereby complete oneness and unity from every side and angle could be attained.¹⁰⁰ In these paragraphs, R. Shneur Zalman offers an abstract cognitive theory, applying it to Torah study, explaining how Torah study unites one with God's will and wisdom, and by extension, God. cursory reading suggests that R. Shneur Zalman's theory differs from Rambam's at MN 1.68, as R. Shneur Zalman implicitly employs a container metaphor, comparing the mind to a container which grasps intellectual objects. This reading suggests that the mind and the intellectual objects remain two separate things, pace Rambam's theory of unity between the elements of cognition.

Closer reading, however, implies that R. Shneur Zalman's presentation here is just a more basic version of Rambam's cognitive theory. R. Shneur Zalman stresses the bi-directional relationship of the intellect and object of intellection. The intellect does not only "grasp" the object of intellection, it is also grasped *by* the object of intellection. This bi-directionality undermines the container metaphor, since each element is "contained" within the other and suggests that R. Shneur Zalman used it so as not to overcomplicate his discussion with the difficult Aristotelean material from MN. The bi-directionality recalls Rambam's argument at MN 1.68, where he explains that the intellect and object of intellection depend on one another for existence, and are effectively identical, though they derive from different sources. Bi-directional encompassment may be a parabolic illustration of union. If A encompasses B, and B encompasses A, neither one is a primary "container" which absorbs the other. Instead, the two are on equal footing, encompassing one another, implying unification.

A further clue that R. Shneur Zalman adopts Rambam's cognitive theory comes from the paragraph's last line where R. Shneur Zalman writes: "This is a wonderful union, which has no

¹⁰⁰ Tanya 1.5, 9a-b. Mindel trans. p. 17-19.

parallel in the material world, whereby complete oneness and unity from every side and angle could be attained.” This sentence directly paraphrases MT *YHT* 2.10, where Rambam describes Divine cognition. Notably our citation demonstrates that R. Shneur Zalman, follows Rambam (and Aristotle) in ascribing identical formal structure to *both* human and Divine cognition.

Despite his deep use of Rambam’s DDC in connection with Torah, R. Shneur Zalman diverges from it in an important detail. Rambam limits DDC to *cognition*, and at 1.68, does not extend it to any other attributes. Elsewhere, however, at MT *YHT* 2.10 and MN 1.53, Rambam explains that God’s quality of *life* is also unified with his essence, although he does not offer any extended philosophical explanation. In MN 1.53, Rambam raises the possibility, following currents in his contemporary Muslim philosophy, that God’s *will* (רצון) and *ability* (יכולת) might also be one with God’s essence. But, Rambam rejects this possibility, instead demoting Divine *will* and *ability* to the category of “attributes of action” meaning attributes that merely describe human perception of God, but do not meaningfully describe God. While in *PHM*, Rambam tells us that *all* of God’s attributes are one with God¹⁰¹, he rejects this view in later works. R. Shneur Zalman ignores this distinction, smuggling Divine will into his discussion of Divine cognition, teaching that the Torah is one with *both* God’s will and wisdom as a consequence of DDC. R. Shneur Zalman’s logic for this extension is likely his belief that although Divine Cognition has a privileged status of union with God, all other Divine attributes are also “unified with God.”¹⁰²

Thus far, we have seen three entities unified with God by virtue of DDC: the Soul, the *Tzadik* and the Torah. As we saw when comparing the soul and the *Tzadik*, there appears to be a hierarchy of union, where some entities enjoy more intense Divine union. Although the Jewish soul is unified with God, most Jewish souls must connect to the *Tzadik* to manifest their union

¹⁰¹ Rambam (5744) p. 266.

¹⁰² Tanya 2.8. For greater expansion of this point, see *Derekh Mitsvotekha* 47b-51a.

with God. We also probed the question of incarnation in connection with the various doctrines of union. Torah is hierarchically higher than the Jewish soul in terms of its degree of union with God, and likely “higher” than the *Tzadik* as well. But still, Torah doesn’t count as a Divine incarnation if we define incarnation as a physical object taking on Divine qualities, such as volitional power and becoming an object of worship.

In discussing the Jewish soul (p. 19), we examined a passage in Tanya which taught that the Divine soul’s inherent union with God is not sufficiently intense to generate mystical union, defined as “nullification” or “encompassment in the Divine light.” Emotional ecstasy and contemplation using the Divine soul cannot generate this union either. However, Torah study can generate this union:

The meaning of the “indwelling” of the *Shekhinah* is the revelation of His blessed Divinity and of the light of the blessed *En Sof* in any thing... such a thing merges into the light of God, and its reality is completely dissolved in Him. Only then does the One God abide and manifest Himself in it. But any thing whose reality is not completely nullified in Him, the light of God does not abide nor manifest itself therein, even if one be a perfect *Tzadik* who cleaves to Him with abundant love, since no thought can truly apprehend Him at all. For the truth of “The Lord is the true God” is his unity and Oneness – that he is One Alone, and there is no reality whatsoever apart from Him. Hence, the person who loves God and [*ipso facto*] exists apart and is not null and void – cannot by his thought apprehend Him at all; and the light of God cannot abide and reveal itself in him, except through the fulfillment of the commandments which constitute in reality His blessed will and wisdom without any concealment of countenance. Therefore, when a person occupies himself in the Torah... his Divine soul, with her two innermost garments only, namely, the power of speech and thought are absorbed in the Divine light of the blessed *En Sof*, and are united with it in perfect union. This constitutes the resting of the *Shekhinah* on his divine soul.¹⁰³

The theory here is that God is present everywhere, but only becomes revealed when reality is nullified with respect to Him. When a person loves God, she, as an independent entity loves God. Resultantly, she is a separate being. The Torah however is completely nullified with respect to God, since the Torah is just an occluded version of God’s will and

¹⁰³ Tanya 1.35, 44b-45a.

wisdom. So, when a person studies Torah, they achieve “perfect union” with God. Torah then, is in a higher state of union with God than the Jewish soul.

The passage we just examined teaches that even a perfect *Tzadik* is not in an actualized state of union with God, and must study Torah in order to achieve that union. Hence, Torah appears to be more deeply unified with God than the *Tzadik*. Another passage in Tanya also implies that the Torah is more deeply unified with God than are *Tzaddikim*. That passage discusses the patriarchs and interprets the Rabbinic “the patriarchs are truly the *Merkavah* (“chariot”)” as meaning: “all their organs were completely holy and detached from mundane matters, serving as a vehicle solely for Supreme Will alone throughout their lives.”¹⁰⁴ In contrast, the Torah is:

completely merged in perfect unity with the Supernal Will, and are not merely a vehicle. For the Supreme Will is identical with the very subject of the *Halakhah* wherein one thinks and speaks, inasmuch as all the laws are particular streams flowing from the inner Supreme Will itself, since His blessed Will willed it that a particular act be permissible... so are the letters of the Torah... a promulgation of His will and wisdom which are united with the Blessed *En Sof* in perfect unity, since he is the Knower and the Knowledge, and so forth. This then is the meaning of “The Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are altogether One.

The Torah enjoys “perfect unity” in contrast to *Tzaddikim* who consummately fulfill God’s will and wisdom but are not *identical* with God’s will and wisdom.

Identifying the Torah with God’s will and wisdom shows that the Torah is not a Divine incarnation. It is not *God*, it is God’s will and wisdom. Thus, it is a locus of absolute nullification to the Divine, or Divine revelation. This shows that the Torah’s unity with God has a further aspect. In R. Shneur Zalman’s system, Torah is not only one with God by virtue of DDC, it is also one with God using a Hasidic doctrine. According to R. Shneur Zalman’s master, Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezritch, the *En Sof*, God’s unified essence only manifests in the aspect of

¹⁰⁴ Tanya 1.23, 28b.

*Hokmah*¹⁰⁵(wisdom) given that *Hokmah* represents an awareness of reality's total nullification with respect to God. To recall an earlier quotation:

This is a general principle in the whole realm of holiness – it [holiness] is only that which is derived from *Hokmah* called “supreme holiness” whose existence is nullified in the light of the blessed *En Sof* which is clothed in it, so that it is not an independent entity. Therefore, it (כ"ח מ"ה) is called the power of abnegation (ה"ח מ"ה)¹⁰⁶

Given that Torah manifests God's will and wisdom, it reaches the highest degree of union with God that anything not wholly identical with God could have. DDC entails union with God, but the *Maggid's* doctrine of *Hokmah* introduces a higher standard of union which Torah satisfies, while the Jewish soul and *Tzadik* do not.

d. Immanent Divine Transcendence

Throughout his works, R. Shneur Zalman distinguishes between two sorts of Divine illumination. *Or HaMemaleh Kol Almin* (“light that fills/ is immanent in all worlds” henceforth *Memaleh*) and *Or HaSovev Kol Almin* (“light that surrounds/ transcends all worlds” henceforth *Sovev*).

Memaleh is a limited Divine illumination, calculated to fit every existent's precise limitations.¹⁰⁷ On R. Shneur Zalman's metaphysic, every object, every watch, glass, book, tree, or turtle for example, requires constant Divine illumination to continue existing. *Memaleh* is tailored to each creature's needs. It is Divine immanence. Through it, the Divine is present in, and enlivens, everything. R. Shneur Zalman's grandson, *Tsemah Tsedek*, wrote that one need not have faith in the immanent God that *Memaleh* describes given how empirically obvious

¹⁰⁵ See the note at Tanya 1.35, 44b-45a.

¹⁰⁶ Tanya 1.19, 24b.

¹⁰⁷ Tanya 2.7, 84a.

Memaleh's existence is.¹⁰⁸ While philosophically controversial, this claim illustrates *Memaleh* as a pantheistic thesis.

While R. Shneur Zalman's concept of *Memaleh* does generate a pantheism,¹⁰⁹ his concept of "Sovev" (surrounds) speaks of a God who is wholly transcendent and other. However, R. Shneur Zalman qualifies this characterization by teaching that *Sovev* is only *epistemologically* transcendent, not *ontologically* transcendent.¹¹⁰ Meaning, *Sovev* is fully physically/metaphysically present in *every* aspect of reality, we merely lack the ability to perceive it. As R. Shneur Zalman writes:

The meaning of *Sovev* is not that it encircles and encompasses from above spatially, God forbid, for in spiritual matters the category of space is in no way applicable. But the meaning is that it "Encircles and encompasses from above" insofar as the so-called "revealed" influence is concerned, for influence which is in the category of "revelation" in the worlds is referred to as "investiture," being "clothed" within the worlds, for the influence that they receive is clothed and comprehended by them; whereas the influence which does not come within the category of "revelation" but remains in the occultation and concealment and is not apprehended by the worlds is not described as being "invested" but as "encircling and encompassing".¹¹¹

This passage illustrates that the term *Sovev* (surrounding or transcending) is used parabolically to express Divinity which is beyond comprehension, but which is completely present. For R. Shneur Zalman, this means that God's most rarefied transcendent ranks the *Ein Sof* and even the very Substance and Essence of Divinity (*Atsmut U'Mehut*), are fully ontologically present in the physical world.¹¹² This doctrine collapses the distinction between Divine immanence and

¹⁰⁸ *Derekh Mitsvotekha* 45a.

¹⁰⁹ *Memaleh* itself is not *only* a pantheistic worldview. It goes beyond pantheism in recognizing a transcendent dimension of Divinity. It shares with pantheism the thesis that God is present in everything. So, *Memaleh* itself presents a view of Divinity closer to pantheism.

For a discussion of how R. Shneur Zalman's thesis differs from Spinozism, see Teitelbaum (1913) Ch. 4.

¹¹⁰ I take this neat philosophical characterization of R. Shneur Zalman's view from Elijor (1993). Careful reading of Tanya 1.48 and 2.7 shows that Elijor precisely captures R. Shneur Zalman's intent here.

¹¹¹ Tanya I.48, 67b-68a. Mindel p. 253-4.

¹¹² See Tanya 4.20 for a radical presentation of a similar doctrine where R. Shneur Zalman argues that God's "substance and essence" is *most* present within the physical world. This position does not reduce to pantheism, for while God is fully present in nature, God is not *identifiable* with the sum total of nature, its laws, or history.

transcendence. It limits the gulf many theologians imagine between God and the world. According to R. Shneur Zalman, God's transcendent aspect is immanent as well.

R. Shneur Zalman's doctrine thus does not neatly fit into the category "pantheism" since it recognizes a God beyond history and the laws of nature. However, it does not precisely fit panentheism¹¹³ either, since even God's transcendent aspect is fully present in the world.¹¹⁴

To illustrate *Sovev's* full presence in the world, R. Shneur Zalman appeals to the cognitive metaphor he used in the context of Torah, drawing upon Rambam's development of DDC at MN 1.68:

Let us make this more intelligible by means of an example. When a man forms an image in his mind of something that he has seen or sees, - although the entire body and essence of that thing, both its exterior and interior and its very core are completely mirrored in his mind and thought, for he has seen it or is seeing it in its entirety – this is expressed by saying that his mind encompasses that object completely, and that thing is enveloped by his mind and thought. But it is not encompassed in actual fact, only in the imagination of the man's thought and mind.¹¹⁵

In this passage, R. Shneur Zalman implicitly appeals to Rambam's DDC at MN 1.68, where Rambam illustrates the union of the intellect and object of intellection. R. Shneur Zalman observes that when a human cognizes something, they only grasp its form, not the physical object itself. Rambam would agree to this point, and to the extent that he believes Divine cognition can be characterized, would probably say the same of Divine cognition.¹¹⁶

R. Shneur Zalman however maintains that although human and Divine cognition operate using the same formal model (stated at MN 1.68) they radically differ in how the model operates. In human cognition, the human mind only grasps the object's *form*. In Divine cognition, the Divine mind also grasps the matter, the *physical object*.

¹¹³ On Panentheism, see Culp (2017)

¹¹⁴ Although, God's transcendent aspect is not *limited* to presence in the world.

¹¹⁵ Tanya Ch.48, 68a-b. Mindel p. 253

¹¹⁶ Pines (Rambam (1963))] reads Rambam this way in his Translator's Introduction p. xcvi

The Holy One, blessed be He, however, of Whom it is written: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts...” surely His thought and Mind knowing all created things, encompass each and every created being from its beginning to its end and its inside and very core, all in actual reality.¹¹⁷

Using Rambam’s consistent refrain to distinguish between human and Divine cognition, R.

Shneur Zalman teaches that God’s mind *physically* encompasses every object. Thus, God is physically present in every element of the world.¹¹⁸ As R. Shneur Zalman continues:

To illustrate: in the case of the orb of this earth, His blessed knowledge encompasses the entire diameter of the globe of the earth, together with all that is in it and its deepest interior to its lowest depths, all in actual reality.

Then R. Shneur Zalman adds a critical line:

For this knowledge constitutes the vitality of the whole spherical thickness of the earth and its creation *ex nihilo*.

Meaning, God’s knowledge must be present within physical creatures, since physical creatures depend on God’s knowledge in order to exist. R. Shneur Zalman reads this claim within Rambam’s overall doctrine. At *MT YHT* 2.10, Rambam identifies God’s knowledge with God’s life. R. Shneur Zalman may have derived the conclusion that God gives everything life by virtue of His knowledge through combining the following Maimonidean premises:

- (1) God’s Knowledge = God’s life (*MT YHT* 2.10)
- (2) All existent things depend on God in order to exist. (*ibid.*)
- (3) God knows all existent things. (*ibid.*)

So,

- (4) By virtue of knowing all existent things, God gives life to all existent things. (This is R. Shneur Zalman’s claim – Rambam does not explicitly make the connection between knowledge and giving life).

This leads R. Shneur to the acosmic conclusion that nothing exists independently of God, and that God is present in all things, since everything that God knows is unified with God.

Although this reading may strike the reader as unfaithful to Rambam’s thought, Shlomo Pines thought a similar reading accurately reflected Rambam’s intent. According to Pines,

¹¹⁷ Tanya Ch.48, 68a-b. Mindel p. 253-4

¹¹⁸ This may not violate the Jewish Philosophical dogma of Divine incorporeality given that the doctrine does not *limit* God to being a body, or *define* him as a body. Instead, it says that God is *present within*, and *encompasses* all bodies.

pantheism is a logical consequence of Rambam's DDC, since all the forms are in God's mind, and are one with God.¹¹⁹ Since all of nature derives from the forms, Pines views God's mind as a unified collection of the forms, and hence God just is the unified collection of the ground of nature. R. Shneur Zalman takes a different approach but accords with Pines' basic insight that unity of Divine cognition identifies nature with God.

A final point on Rambam's DDC and immanent Divine transcendence: R. Shneur Zalman functionally identifies "God's knowledge" with the concept of *Or Hasovev*.¹²⁰ Since God's knowledge is ever present, it follows that *Or HaSovev* is present everywhere as well. This identification illuminates the concepts of the Jewish soul, the Tzadik, and Torah. By virtue of being one with God's knowledge, they are one with modes of revealing *Or HaSovev*. Thus, they are loci of revealing Divine transcendence in a world that occludes the Divine presence.¹²¹

e. Acosmicism

The previous section discussed how R. Shneur Zalman used Rambam's DDC to underwrite the claim that God's transcendent aspect is immanent in the world. R. Shneur Zalman's doctrine of acosmicism follows from this claim. In the present section, I will develop how R. Shneur Zalman uses DDC to prove acosmicism.

In the second section of Tanya, *Shaar HaYichud V'Haemunah*, R. Shneur Zalman develops a monistic acosmicism arguing for two central theses:

- (1) Divine unity means that God is the only thing that exists. Nothing (truly) exists outside of God despite appearances to the contrary.

¹¹⁹ Pines (Rambam (1963)) p. xcvi.

¹²⁰ Tanya 1.48 and 2.7.

¹²¹ See above note 96. For an articulation of this occlusion, see *Derekh Mitsvotekha* 5a-8b.

(2) God is internally¹²² unified, as one simple substance. The Kabbalistic descriptions of apparent intradivine multiplicity do not in fact mean that God has any multiplicity.

R. Shneur Zalman uses Rambam's DDC to prove both claims.

Lurianic Kabbala teaches¹²³ that in order for the world to come into existence, God engaged in an act called *Tsimtsum*, or contraction. *Tsimtsum* allowed for creatures to exist independently of God, since, so long as God was manifestly present everywhere, nothing could exist without being annihilated within God. The ensuing Kabbalistic tradition hotly debated two understandings of *Tsimtsum*. The first *Tsimtsum K'Peshuto* (*tsimtsum* taken literally) understood *Tsimtsum* ontologically, meaning that some physical or analogically physical event took place. The second *Tsimtsum lav K'Peshuto* (*tsimtsum* taken non-literally) taught that *Tsimtsum* is merely epistemological. No ontological facts changed in the *Tsimtsum* process, God is physically or analogically physically present in the world. He merely occluded himself so that independent consciousness could exist.

R. Shneur Zalman argues for the epistemological view of *Tsimtsum*. In *Shaar HaYichud*, he presents two arguments for this view. The first appeals to the (Maimonidean) doctrine of Divine incorporeality. Given that God is incorporeal, R. Shneur Zalman reasons that it would be absurd to say that God actually contracted himself, since this imputes some physical or analogically physical event to God.¹²⁴

¹²² Following H.A. Wolfson's (1965) characterization of internal unity which means that the Godhead itself is a non-complex entity.

¹²³ For basic descriptions of Lurianic cosmology and cosmogony, see Fine (2003) Chapter 4 pp. 124-149. and Scholem (1946) pp. 244-286.

For articulations of the Habad view on *Tsimtsum*, see *Likkutei Torah* s.v. *L'Havin Mah Shekatuv B'Otsrot Hayyim* 51b-53a. *Derekh Mitsvotekha: Shoresh Mitsvah HaTfilah* 133a-138b.

¹²⁴ Tanya 2.7 83a-b.

The second argument for the epistemological view of *Tsimtsum* proceeds from the doctrines of Divine omniscience and Divine providence coupled with Rambam's DDC. R. Shneur Zalman reasons that proponents of ontological *Tsimtsum* are:

Believers the sons of believers that the Holy One, Blessed be He, knows all the created beings in this lower world and exercises providence over them, and perforce His knowledge of them does not add plurality and innovation to Him, **for He knows all by knowing Himself. Thus, as it were, His Essence and Being and Knowledge are all one.**¹²⁵

The argument here is:

- (1) God literally knows all particulars.
- (2) If particulars existed independently of God, then God's knowledge of them would imply multiplicity in God, since the cognitive act would be complex.
- (3) It is not the case that there is multiplicity in God.
- (4) So, particulars do not exist independently of God.
- (5) If *Tsimtsum* were understood literally, then God would know things outside of himself.
- (6) It is not the case that God knows things outside of himself, (since, by the previous argument, particulars do not exist independently of God).
- (7) So, *Tsimtsum* is not to be understood literally.

Here R. Shneur Zalman explicitly employs DDC to explain how Divine knowledge accords with Divine unity. Given that God knowing independent objects would disturb his unity, and that DDC teaches that all elements of God's cognition are unified with God, DDC allows for all existence to be unified with God. If God cognizes all elements of reality, then they occupy the role of "the object of intellection" and, according to DDC, the object of intellection is one with God. On R. Shneur Zalman's reading, this means that means that everything is one with God, and thus Rambam's formulation "All is one"¹²⁶ written in the context of the Divine intellect takes on new meaning: for R. Shneur Zalman "All is **One**" – acosmicism follows from DDC.

5. God's Knowledge: Apophasis in R. Shneur Zalman's Cosmology

¹²⁵ Tanya, 2.7, 83b. Mangel p. 315.

¹²⁶ MT, YHT 2.10.

The second half of *Sha'ar HaYichud V'Haemunah*, chapters 8-12 argue for the claim that the Godhead is internally unified, despite the apparent complexity that Kabbalistic metaphysics attributes to it, with its descriptions of ten *Sfirot*. Here again, R. Shneur Zalman invokes Rambam to support his view.

Now, what Maimonides... has said that the Holy One, blessed be He, His Essence and Being, and His Knowledge are completely one, a perfect unity and not composite at all, applies equally to all the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He... such as Gracious, Merciful... and the like... His Will and His Wisdom and His Kindness do not add plurality and composition to his Essence and Being, but his Essence and Being, and His Will and Wisdom... and His attribute of Kindness and His Might... and likewise His other Holy attributes are all an absolutely perfect unity, which is His very Essence and Being.

And as Maimonides... has stated: "This is beyond the power of speech to express, beyond the capacity of the ear to hear, and of heart of man to apprehend clearly"¹²⁷ In *MN* 1.53, Rambam identifies God's wisdom and life with God's Essence, however, he rejects the claim that God can be described as possessing "Will" and "Potential" at all, or as essential attributes.

R. Shneur Zalman employs DDC, and then extends it to *all* Divine attributes, even those which Rambam explicitly teaches cannot be said to be unified with the Divine essence. So, although R. Shneur Zalman invokes DDC, here he doesn't respect its mechanics.

Further examination shows that R. Shneur Zalman's position is closer to Rambam's view of Divine attributes as attributes of action, as R. Shneur Zalman writes:

As for the Holy One, blessed be He, being called "Wise" in Scripture... the reason is that he is the source of wisdom... and likewise, [is he is called] Merciful and Kind because he is the source of mercy and kindness; and likewise the other attributes, for they all proceeded and emanated from him.

So, all attributes are unified with God in that they ultimately proceed from God. This places R. Shneur Zalman closer to Rambam in that while these attributes are unified with God's essence in not generating any multiplicity, they do not characterize God's essence. However, this

¹²⁷ Tanya 2.8, p. 85a Mangel p. 374.

clarification still drives a wedge between Rambam and R. Shneur Zalman. Rambam appears to explicitly identify God's essence with knowledge, and that identification plays a role in DDC. R. Shneur Zalman however develops the following principle throughout his writings:¹²⁸

It is only after the light of the *En Sof* was clothed within the vessels of ChaBaD [the intellectual *sfirot*] that it can be stated what Maimonides said: "He is the Knowledge, and He is the Known, and by knowing himself... Without the aforesaid *Tsimtsum* and investiture, however, it is not at all proper to say that "He is the Knower and He is the Knowledge..." for he is not within the realm and limitation of knowing and knowledge at all God forbid, but infinitely elevated above the even the quality and limitation of wisdom.¹²⁹

This principle relativizes DDC saying that DDC does not describe God in ultimate terms, but only describes Divine manifestation. Ultimately speaking, God's essence cannot be characterized in intellectual terms at all. This relieves the tension of extending DDC to other Divine attributes, since it emerges that R. Shneur Zalman is not claiming that the other Divine attributes characterize God's essence. It does however show, that in contrast to clear formulations in Rambam's writings where Rambam does appear to characterize God's essence in intellectual terms,¹³⁰ R. Shneur Zalman does not accept any characterization of God. Hence, his apophysis is even more pronounced than Rambam's. But then, as we showed in discussing the internal contradiction between Rambam's apophysis and his characterization of God as intellect, R. Shneur Zalman may accurately reflect Rambam's true position. Rambam's apophysis likely means that he ultimately does not define God as intellect.

6. Conclusion

¹²⁸ This principle is expressed at Tanya I.2, p 6a. I.48, p. 68b. and *Derekh Mitsvotekha* p. 46b-51a

¹²⁹ Tanya 2.9, p. 87a. p. 330 Mangel trans.

¹³⁰ Consider MT YHT 2.8-10 and MN 1.58, particularly the striking formulation in Rambam (5763) p. 128

אך מה שאתה יודע הוא שעניין הידיעה בו יתעלה הוא עניין החיים. שכל המשיג את עצמותו [הוא] חי ויודע במשמעות אחת... [כאשר מדובר באל], העצמות המושגת הוא בלי ספק עצמות המשגת, שכן אין הוא לדעתנו מורכב משתי עניינים, דבר המשיג ודבר אחר שאינו משיג, כאדם המורכב מנפש המשיגה ומגוף שאינו משיג.

Rambam and R. Shneur Zalman operate with divergent metaphysics and hermeneutics. Given R. Shneur Zalman's primary commitment to Lurianic language and metaphysics, as well as to the Zohar and R. Moses Cordovero, this is expected. Yet, R. Shneur Zalman used Rambam's DDC as a piece of Divine revelation which he could employ within his own metaphysical and hermeneutic system. In this essay, I examined how R. Shneur Zalman used DDC to underwrite his doctrine of the Jewish soul, the Tzadik and the Torah, positing a unification of these sacred objects with God. Perhaps more strikingly, R. Shneur Zalman ultimately uses DDC which in its original form states that the seemingly disparate acts of the Divine cognitive act are one, to claim that all elements of reality are one with God, an acosmic conclusion, given that all elements of reality are objects of God's knowledge.

While Rambam would almost certainly not accept most of R. Shneur Zalman's conclusions (though an esoteric reading of Rambam's DDC might support a pantheism in the conceptual neighborhood of R. Shneur Zalman's acosmicism) I have shown how R. Shneur Zalman employed DDC, most often out of context, but with a deep understanding of its full complexity within Rambam's oeuvre. He used DDC as a creative tool to ground, articulate, and perhaps legitimate the Chabad school's most central doctrines.

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