

T H R E E

The Mystic: Life without Limits

And he pressed on to the limits without limits,
where opposites unify.
And he pressed on further, and discovered the crooked
most straight of all paths,
And took it until he arrived some time at a place
without time and without place.

HAYIM NAHMAN BIALIK
'Hetsits vamet' ('He Glanced and Died')

WHO IS A MYSTIC? One who is gifted with spiritual greatness, vision, imagination, inspiration, and the ability to be exalted; one who is able, awake or in dreams, to cross boundaries of consciousness and to experience a feeling of immediate contact with higher worlds; one who experiences a transition from one reality to another through visions or dreams. The mystic ascribes a profound meaning to dreams and other manifestations of a personal inner world and regards them as sources of inspiration. The mystic is able to decipher the complexities of language and fathom the sacred text. By using mystical metaphors or kabbalistic symbols he is able to reinterpret the literal meaning of the text. These symbols and metaphors represent imaginative entities and invisible voices and intricately convey a reality that is invisible or beyond rational comprehension. The mystic is capable of denying reality to a certain extent; this releases him from the constraints of his time and place and enables him to offer an alternative reading of historical circumstances. By virtue of inner illumination or inspiration and authority from higher worlds, the mystic shatters existing frameworks, deconstructs established distinctions, and lives in the enigmatic world of Torah mysteries. The mystic has the courage to go beyond the bounds of the conventional point of view and the determinate state of the world and to free reality from its inflexibility. He grasps revealed and hidden reality in its ambiguity and multifariousness as an ongoing process in which he perceives endless possibilities, meanings, and interpretations.

In the Jewish tradition people blessed with these qualities have been called prophets, visionaries, masters of secrets, kabbalists, *tsadikim*, or holy people. Their essential attributes were defined by a variety of concepts expressing the blurring of boundaries and the transcendence of limitations. In his consciousness

and in the consciousness of those around him, a mystic ‘transcends nature’.¹ He ‘ascends to higher worlds’,² ‘enters the *pardes*’,³ and ‘descends to the chariot’.⁴ He is blessed by the ‘ascent of the soul’⁵ and ‘the revelation of Elijah’.⁶ He listens to heavenly mentors and to the ‘voice of the Shekhinah’.⁷ The mystic is able to describe the unseen entities revealed to him in a dream or while awake. He experiences meaningful contact with the other reality or can draw upon mystical moments from the past in a meaningful way which bridges the mythological past and the mystical experience of the present. The anonymous author of 1 Enoch in the second century BCE describes the moment of mystical metamorphosis, relating the story of Enoch son of Jared (Gen. 5: 21–4) and his ascension to heaven:

And behold I saw the clouds: And they were calling me in a vision: and the fogs were calling me: and the course of the stars and the lightnings were rushing me and causing me to desire, and in the vision, the winds were causing me to fly and rushing me high up into heaven. And I kept coming (into heaven) until I approached a wall which was built of white marble and surrounded by tongues of fire; and it began to frighten me. And I came into the tongues of the fire and drew near to a great house which was built of white marble, and the inner walls were like mosaics of white marble, and the floor of crystal, the ceiling like the path of the stars and lightnings between which (stood) fiery cherubim and their heaven of water; and flaming fire surrounded the walls, and its gates were burning with fire . . .⁸

The mystic is able to perform wonders and interpret omens, and, directly or indirectly, orally or in writing, express the manifestations of his transcendent spirituality in a way that is significant to his generation. By virtue of his spiritual traits, a mystic might experience an imaginative rush, an inspiration, a dream, a transcending consciousness, or hear voices coming from the depth of his soul or from higher worlds. The mystic is a herald who sees ahead of and beyond his time, who opens the eyes and the minds of those incapable of seeing, or who has a prophetic vision releasing him from the limitations of conventional reality. The mystic dares to burst into unknown domains, to blur the boundaries between reality and imagination, to cross the demarcation between heaven and earth, holiness and impurity, the forbidden and the permitted. An anonymous author from the rabbinic and

¹ On ‘one who is above nature’ and on mystical ‘ascent of the soul’ see Elijor, ‘R. Joseph Karo’; Nigal, ‘Ahijah the Shilonite’.

² See 1 Enoch 14: 8–15; *Heikhalot zutarti*, ed. Elijor, 22–3.

³ Tosefta *Hag. 2: 3–4*; BT *Hag. 14b–15a*; *Heikhalot zutarti*, ed. Elijor, 23.

⁴ See *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §§1–20, 216, 344–8.

⁵ See *Toledot ha’ari*, ed. Benayahu, 155.

⁶ See Luzzatto, *Igerot*, ed. Ginzburg, 39, and Scholem, ‘Religious Authority’, 19–21.

⁷ On revelation of angelic mentors see Karo, *Magid meisharim*; Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*; Elijor, ‘R. Joseph Karo’; Benayahu, *Joseph, my Chosen*; Ginzburg, *R. Moses Hayim Luzzatto*; Scholem, ‘The “Divine Mentor”’; Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*.

⁸ Trans. Ephraim Isaac in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. Charlesworth, i. 20.

Heikhalot period retells the vision of Ezekiel within the context of the priestly concepts of seven firmaments and ministering angels:

Thus Ezekiel stood on the Chebar river and was gazing in the water when the seven heavens opened up for him and he saw the holy Glory and the holy Creatures and the ministering angels and the celestial hosts and the fiery angels and the winged beings attached to the Chariot. They were traversing Heaven and Ezekiel saw them in the water.⁹

The mystic is able to obscure the boundaries between the individual and the public domains, to express the loss of the border between the internal and the external, to obliterate the boundaries of past, present, and future. The medieval author of the *Zohar* offers a beautiful example of such obliteration, describing in the thirteenth century the moment of mystical transport that took place 1,300 years earlier when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur:

He took a further three steps, closed his eyes, and attached himself to the world on high. He then entered the place he had to enter, where he heard the sound of the wings of the cherubim and they sang and they beat their wings that were spread out above in unison. As he burned the incense, the sound of their wings ceased and they came together in a whisper. If the priest was worthy that there should be rejoicing on high, then here below, too, there came forth an illumination, expressing acceptance, sweetened from the hills of pure balsam on high.¹⁰

The mystic's activities may occur because of historical circumstances, which give rise to acute questions regarding the arbitrariness of a meaningless reality, or because of personal circumstances, involving hardship and unbearable pain or religious controversies and social disputes. All these factors widen the gap between the desirable and prevailing reality and intensify the desire to fathom the hidden meaning of the real world. The mystic, without being influenced by external circumstances, sometimes might accomplish all the above solely by virtue of his spiritual qualities, his inclination to the mysterious beauty of the sacred text, or his mystical talent. The latter is unique and inborn rather than an acquired skill.

In a moment of inspiration the mystic is able to transcend reality by a vision or a dream, after hearing a heavenly voice or *magid*, or voices from higher worlds, while studying sacred texts in this world. Similarly, he may use a special faculty to reanimate a written text with a penetrating dialectical observation, or with his unusual talent for linguistic analysis, or by his ability to narrate a dream or to recount stories and secrets that are revealed to him at the 'Heavenly School'.¹¹ He may be gifted with spiritual greatness, charismatic radiance, social sensitivity, or a sense of divine vocation and earthly mission that causes him to establish groups,

⁹ *Re'uyot yehezkel* (The Visions of Ezekiel), ed. Gruenwald, 113–14. On the text see Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 134–41.

¹⁰ *Zohar* III. 67a.

¹¹ See *Toledot ha'ari*, 155, 165.

sects, and congregations.¹² His observations might deviate from the norms of his time and place, by virtue of a unique understanding that is ahead of his time. Often he makes radical changes in the interpretation of reality by virtue of his charismatic religious authority, which has been acquired through contact with the inhabitants of higher worlds.¹³

Joseph Karo, in his mystical diary *Magid meisharim*, written between 1533 and 1575 in Turkey and Safed, demonstrates some of the fascinating aspects of this breaking of boundaries. While reciting *mishnayot* (paragraphs of the Mishnah), he hears in his imagination a divine voice, the voice of the Shekhinah speaking from within the Mishnah, which converses with him in Hebrew and Aramaic, the languages of the Zohar. The Shekhinah promises Karo that like Solomon Molcho (who had been burnt at the stake in Mantua in 1532 by order of the Catholic Church), he too will be privileged to sanctify the Holy Name and to ascend to higher worlds. In his mystical autobiography Karo describes the transition from being a reader of holy texts to becoming a vessel for the word of God. He records the words spoken to him by the Shekhinah/Mishnah regarding his present life and the future awaiting him:

I started to recite *mishnayot* and read five sections. While I was reading the *mishnayot* a voice began pulsing within my mouth, playing music by itself, and said: 'Wherever you go God is with you, and in anything you have been doing or will do God will make you succeed, as long as you cleave to me, my worship, my Torah, and my *mishnayot*. Your thought will not disengage from my Mishnah even for one minute. And behold, I put you in charge of my people . . . And I have warned you that you shall not disengage your thoughts from my worship and my Mishnah even for one minute, and you shall not drink or eat for pleasure at all . . . and shall only think that, had it been possible to maintain the body without any pleasure, you would have desired it very much. So just cleave to God, blessed be He, and you will be granted the ability to perform miracles as were performed by the *rishonim* [the early sages], and the people will know "that there is [a] God in Israel" (1 Sam. 17: 46) . . . and after all this I will award you the privilege of sanctifying my name by being burnt at the stake and all your transgressions and sins will be drawn out by the fire and you will leave this place for heaven like clean wool. And all the righteous people of paradise will come out to greet you with the Shekhinah at their head. They will greet you with songs and praises; they will treat you among them like a groom walking in front of them; and all of them will escort you to your *hupah* [bridal canopy]'.¹⁴

¹² See Schechter, 'Safed in the Sixteenth Century'; Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 38–83; Ginzburg, *R. Moses Hayim Luzzatto*.

¹³ See Scholem, 'Tradition and New Creation'; cf. Elior, 'Breaking the Boundaries'. In Coenen, *Ydele vermachtinge der Joden* (1669), 55, Shabetai Tsevi is said to have promised equality to Jewish women, telling them that he came into this world to redeem them from their punishment, enslavement to their husbands, and from any form of discrimination. The social innovation is based on his self-perception as endowed with divine revelation. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*.

¹⁴ Karo, *Magid meisharim*, p. 8, 5–6. On the vision of Karo see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*; Elior, 'R. Joseph Karo'; Benayahu, *Joseph, my Chosen*.

Creation of a new perspective, shattering of boundaries of worlds, and foreseeing new horizons reflecting spiritual greatness are dependent on the breaking of norms and the transcendence of conventional ways of thinking. Such deconstruction and breaking of frameworks lacks external sources of authority. It therefore requires an internal validity and inner justification. This is obtained through mystical, ecstatic, or visionary experiences that are integrated into the traditional system, in order to gain legitimacy and authority.

Thus, great spiritual innovators, all of them reformers who transcended the constraints of tradition, needed either heavenly validation and proof from higher worlds or pseudepigraphic authority from the distant past. This led them to claim inspiration from heavenly mentors or angelic voices, visions, revelations of souls, prophets and sages from the past, and similar ecstatic phenomena, in which man did not control the content of speech but allowed it to flow out of his mouth unimpeded. Both 'inner speech' and higher inspiration were legitimate contemporaneous sources of validation for change. They were needed in order to shed new light on traditional modes of thought and change established conventions, a surprising phenomenon in a society that drew all its values from the past. Traditional society, which anchored its authority in the sanctified past and its eternal unchangeable values, resented innovation or social reform and denied meaningful changes that involved critical observations concerning its values. This society, which disapproved of changes and opposed novelties, did not validate revelations of the human spirit and rejected individual originality and autonomous thought as a source of authority. Hence, consciously or unconsciously, the innovators, the creators, and those who sought change projected their inner world onto higher worlds and attributed their spiritual experiences to the hidden world and its messengers or to the heavenly sources of the law. Therefore, their new insights, their yearnings for change and novelty, their hopes and fears, the flow of their creativity and doubts, as well as the source of their authority for an alternative perspective of the traditional world, were ascribed to heavenly beings who externalized what the mystics heard within.

The need for support from higher worlds or pseudepigraphic authority from the distant past is demonstrated by the lives of mystical creators and great spiritual innovators such as the Teacher of Righteousness (*moreh hatsedek*) of Qumran, who wrote in the second century BCE on the mystical space in which his spirit dwells: 'For you, O God, have hedged in its fruit on every side with the mystery of angels, mighty creatures, and of holy spirits, with a whirling, flashing fire.'¹⁵ Paul, at the beginning of Christianity in the first century CE, wrote in the third person of his celestial ascension: 'I know a man . . . who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man . . . caught up to paradise.

¹⁵ *Megilat hahodayot*, ed. Licht, 135.

He heard inexpressible things that man is not permitted to tell.¹⁶ The authors of 1 Enoch in the second century BCE described the ascent to the heavenly sanctuary: ‘fear covered me and trembling seized me. And as I shook and trembled . . . and I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne—its appearance was like crystal and its wheels like the shining sun; and I heard the voice of the cherubim; and from beneath the throne were issuing streams of flaming fire.’¹⁷ Other examples are the author of the Book of Jubilees, who relied on the angel of the presence, and the authors of the Heikhalot literature in antiquity, who ascended to the heavenly sanctuaries; Isaac Sagi Nahor and Abraham Abulafia in the thirteenth century; the anonymous authors of *Sefer habahir* in the twelfth century and the Zohar in the thirteenth century; the author of the *Sefer hamalakh hameshiv* (Book of the Answering Angel) in the fifteenth century; Solomon Molcho, Joseph Karo, the anonymous author of *Galya raza*, Isaac Luria (the Ari), and Hayim Vital in the sixteenth century; Shabetai Tsevi and Nathan of Gaza in the seventeenth century; Moses Hayim Luzzatto (Ramhal), Israel Ba’al Shem Tov (the Besht), the anonymous authors of *Hemdut yamim* (Beloved of Days), Jacob Isaac Horowitz the Seer of Lublin, all in the eighteenth century, and Isaac Safrin (1806–74) in the nineteenth century. Safrin, who was a hasidic master in Galicia, wrote in his diary about his mystical initiation, which paved the way to his becoming a hasidic mystic:

While studying Talmud, in the middle of the day, suddenly a great light fell on me. The house became filled with light, a marvelous light, the Shechinah resting there. This was the first time in my life that I had some little taste of His light, may He be blessed . . . afterwards I fell down once again for a time so I came to realize that I must journey to the saints who would draw down His light, blessed be He, upon me, since I already had a refined vessel wherewith to receive the light.¹⁸

In each generation this need for divine support required the recognition of supernal heralds, the observation of visions, the sense of divine illumination, or the hearing of voices of heavenly teachers.

The persecuted Italian kabbalist Moses Hayim Luzzatto (Ramhal), in letters to his friend the kabbalist Benjamin Hacoheh, describes the moments of inspiration involved in the transition from the revealed to the concealed:

On the first day of the month of Sivan, 5487 [1727], while I was reciting in order to reach mystical meditation, I fell asleep and when I woke up I heard a voice saying: ‘I am descending to reveal hidden secrets of the Holy King.’ I was standing and trembling for a while and then I became composed. And the voice did not stop, and [he] told a secret as he had said. The second day, at the same time, I was trying to meditate while alone in the room and the voice returned and told another secret. Afterwards, one day, he told me

¹⁶ 2 Cor. 12: 2–14 (New Testament, New International Version).

¹⁷ 1 Enoch 14: 14–19; *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. Charlesworth, i. 21.

¹⁸ *Megilat setarim*, trans. Jacobs in *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, 240.

that he was a herald sent from heaven and delivered to me specific mystical meditations to perform daily so that he would come. And I did not see him; I only heard his voice speaking through my mouth. Then he also permitted me to ask questions. And then, for three months, he gave me personal vigils to perform every day so I would be worthy of the revelation of Elijah, of blessed memory. And then he ordered me to write a book on Ecclesiastes, the verses of which he has been interpreting to me one by one. Then came Elijah and told the secrets that he told . . . and all these things I was doing while I was lying prostrate and I saw the holy souls in the image of man, as within a dream.¹⁹

The members of Luzzatto's circle used the expression 'the angel begins to reveal to him wonderful secrets' to describe this phenomenon. Luzzatto himself, however, skilfully describes the unclear nature of the highest being that reveals secrets to him while speaking through his mouth in a half-awake, half-asleep state, when he hears 'as if in a dream'. Joseph Karo's *magid* spoke through his mouth while he was in a trance and had no control over his words; as he said numerous times in his diary, *Magid meisharim*, using the words of the Song of Songs, 'the voice of my beloved is knocking [pulsing] speaking by itself'. In these instances the boundaries between the sacred texts being read in his own voice (while he was awake) and the higher voice heard through his mouth (rewriting these texts while he was half-awake, half-asleep) were blurred. Luzzatto's *magid* caused him to speak in the same way. In moments of inspiration the *magid* reanimated the written tradition with a new inner voice and ordered him to write a new Zohar. He too burst the boundaries of consciousness and blurred the distinctions between the revealed and the hidden, the writer and the written, the eternal and the temporal. Karo's *magid* confirmed his doctrine, and regarded Karo as the redeemer of the Shekhinah and as the mystical incarnation of Moses and Shimon bar Yohai, the prolific writers of the divine word in previous historical periods and the great liberators and freedom fighters. Similarly, Luzzatto's *magid* regarded him as the redeemer of the Shekhinah, just like Moses and Shimon bar Yohai, and commanded him to write like them legal and mystical treatises that would lead to liberation and redemption. Luzzatto heard the *magid* telling him:

Blessed are you and blessed is your share [in life]. You have been the Shekhinah's support through her exile. Now you will prepare for her a Throne of Glory to redeem her from her bondage. You will lead her . . . You have lit the light for her with your supreme light. She will ascend through it from her exile when [the] time for redemption comes. Blessed are you and blessed is your share. The mysteries of the world were revealed to you . . . The people who have been walking in darkness saw a great light—the light that will be revealed in your books.²⁰

¹⁹ Luzzatto, *Igerot ramhal*, ed. Ginzburg, 39. On Luzzatto see Ginzburg, *R. Moses Hayim Luzzatto*; Bialik, 'Young Man of Padua'; Tishby, *Kabbalah Research*: Rubin, 'R. Moses Hayim Luzzatto and the Zohar'.

²⁰ Luzzatto's letter, as quoted in Bialik, *Collected Works*, 158.

The Shekhinah, being at the same time the spiritual entity representing the exiled community of Israel, the oral law, the Mishnah, and the human soul (*neshamah*), is the voice heard by the Jewish mystics living in exile, a voice embodied as ‘the redeeming angel’, the ‘angelic mentor’, or as the exiled bride or widow that has to be redeemed through the eternal process of reciting the Mishnah and the divine law. The mystical revelation is the revival of the eternal divine voice in its many manifestations in the sacred text and the human soul.

Luzzatto and Karo intensively experienced the divine presence through the material world and in their consciousness realized the transition between the material and the spiritual. Borrowing from Thomas Mann, we may say that the mystic is one who dives into ‘the well of the past’ and revives the images of the people there, or who soars from the real world to imaginary places that offer hope, comfort, and an alternative interpretation of reality. The mystic dares to break through the limits of the spirit and penetrate the depths of language, decode ‘the mysteries of the world’, and challenge the limits of consciousness and accepted norms. The mystic is not afraid of physical and mental experiences even though they sometimes involve exaltation and downfall, devotion and loss of control, madness and breaking through consciousness. This mental exaltation exacted a heavy price: in Molcho’s case it led to persecution and death at the stake; in Ramhal’s case it involved persecution and excommunication. In the case of Shabetai Tsevi it cost him imprisonment and enforced conversion; so too was the case with Jacob Frank, who was excommunicated and imprisoned. The hasidic mystical tradition ascribed the utmost importance to an ecstatic condition in which the human being allows the Shekhinah (which is referred to in kabbalistic literature as ‘the world of speech’) to speak through his mouth ‘as a harp playing by itself’. This tradition examined the meaning of the annihilation of existence and the loss of control over consciousness, which enable the discovery of the divine element but also threaten madness:

Sometimes when the holy sparkle of the Shekhinah that exists in his soul expands, it really speaks the words in his mouth and it seems as if he does not speak but the words come out of his mouth by themselves. And this is a great achievement. And this is also what we see, on the other hand, in the insane.²¹

The hasidic authors of such traditions were persecuted and excommunicated by the Jewish community between 1772 and 1815. The spiritual innovations and mystical renaissance experienced by hasidic leaders who were inspired by what they had read in the diary of Karo and the letters of Ramhal in the eighteenth century met with enthusiastic responses in some quarters and with severe persecution in other parts of the traditional community.²²

²¹ Meshulam Feivush of Zbarazh, *Likutim yekarim*, sign 172. Cf. Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, ch. 8.

²² See Elior, *Mystical Origins of Hasidism*, chs. 3 and 7. Cf. Wilensky, *Hasidim and Mitmagdim*. A number of the hasidic masters were labelled as insane. Israel Ba’al Shem Tov, the founder of the

The Heikhalot tradition is linked to the ‘four who entered the *pardes*’.²³ Three of the four paid with their lives or sanity for observing the hidden world. Their story gives us a glimpse of the experience of transcending consciousness, the dangers of doing so, and the reasons it is forbidden. That experience is described from the point of view of the mystic, who ascends to the upper worlds, observes what is beyond observation, and listens to the forbidden:

Who can be compared to our Creator, who can be compared to our Lord, who is like Him among the angels who crown Him? In six voices the bearers of His glorious throne, the cherubim, the *ofanim*, and the holy creatures sing His attributes aloud before Him. Each voice differs from and improves upon the previous one: the first voice drives the listener out of his mind, trembling and falling. The second voice immediately causes the listener to go astray and never come back. The third voice causes convulsion and the listener dies instantly. The fourth voice immediately breaks the listener’s skull and his ribs and body fall apart. The fifth voice melts down the listener and he is covered in blood. The sixth voice causes his heart to pound and his excitement causes him to vomit and his blood runs cold, becoming like water, as it is said: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts. All those hymns Rabbi Akiva heard, while descending to the chariot, and obtained them from the angels singing in front of the throne of Glory, and from whom he learnt them.²⁴

These heavenly hymns, which expel the listener from the realm of sanity and cast him into the realm of confusion and madness, describe the fear of being in the presence of the terrible sublime (called by Rudolf Otto ‘*mysterium tremendum*’, deriving from the Latin root *tremere*, to tremble, to lose control of the body). Another testimonial from this tradition, describing an ascent to heavenly temples, also expresses the intensity of the mystical experience and the breaking of the limitations of conventional conceptions: ‘Rabbi Ishmael said about the angelic prince Mishtak who stood at the first entrance and attended the main gate: “When I saw him my hands burned, and I was standing without hands or feet.”’²⁵

The pre-eminent reality in the mystic’s world is his own internal reality, which is informed by the infinite horizons of the mysterious hidden realm revealed in his spirit. There he exposes new layers of meaning through his visions, dreams, and

hasidic tradition, had periods of ‘losing his mind’, and this was also the case with his grandchild R. Nahman of Bratslav and with the Rabbi of Kotsk and the Seer of Lublin. On madness in the hasidic leadership see Mark, *Mysticism and Madness*; Elijior, ‘Changes in Religious Thought’; Green, *Tormented Master*.

²³ On ‘the four who entered the orchard’ see Tosefta *Hag. 2: 3*; Hai Gaon, *Otsar hage’onim*, ed. Levin, iv. 14; Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 14–19; Liebes, *Sin of Elisha*; Elijior, ‘Mysticism, Magic and Angelology’. On the Heikhalot tradition see Scholem, *Major Trends*, ch. 2; Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*; Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, i: *Late Antiquity*; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*; Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien*; Elijior, ‘Merkabah Mysticism’; Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*; Elijior, ‘From Earthly Temple’; Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*; Elijior, ‘Concept of God’.

²⁴ *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §§103–4.

²⁵ *Heikhalot zutarti*, ed. Elijior, 36.

poetic consciousness. In the tenth-century Geonic responsa literature that was published in *Otsar hage'onim* (The Geonic Treasury, originally written as an answer to a question about the essence of Heikhalot literature and the meaning of the heavenly ascent described in this literature), a striking account is offered of this internal reality: 'It is not that they ascend to heaven, but that they look and see within their heart, as one looks and sees with his eyes a clear thing, and they hear and say and speak as those who see through the holy spirit.'²⁶ This inner reality may be expressed by extraordinary phenomena, which demonstrate exceptional spirituality in an overwhelming or frightening way. It may also have charismatic manifestations, which serve as a source of assertion and authorization for the novelties immanent in these insights, which are the focus of hostility, criticism, and even persecutions and excommunication.

Phenomena that do not accord with standard behaviour are usually interpreted according to the status of the individual involved and the cultural norms of the place and time. The fine distinctions between prophecy, divine inspiration, and dream on the one hand and hallucination, derangement, and mental disturbance on the other, or between a mystic who sees visions and hears supernal heralds and the prophet who is regarded as a fool or insane, are often defined by the public according to the identity of the specific prophet, his social status, and the circumstances of his time and place. The determining factor lies within the cultural milieu and not in the content or meaning of the person's message. One should bear in mind that many cultures regard exceptional people, even the mentally ill, as holy people, and the development of physical and mental abnormalities as symbols of the transition between the profane and the holy. The mystical tradition teaches that experiencing prophecy, the revelation of the Shekhinah or the visitation of Elijah, divine and angelic visitations, or the hearing of heavenly heralds usually occurs in a situation in which the person has lost self-control or full consciousness. These experiences were regarded in certain periods as completely plausible and highly desired for some kabbalists and masters of secrets, and they were the accepted religious-cultural norm. In contrast, there were other periods in which the evaluation of these phenomena went to the opposite extreme, and visionary revelation was considered illusion, hallucination, false prophecy, or even mental illness.²⁷

The mystic demonstrates that divine language is not mute. He disproves the assumption that heavenly visions have been blocked and the divine word sealed. He claims that revelation, along with continuous observation of heavenly visions

²⁶ Hai Gaon, *Otsar hage'onim*, iv. 61.

²⁷ On the essence of the mystic in different cultural traditions see Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 88–139, 251–74; Weber, *On Charisma*; James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*; Erikson, *Young Man Luther*; Louth, *Eros and Mysticism*; Buber, *Ecstatic Confessions*; Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*; Jacobs, *Jewish Mystics*; Liebes, 'Messiah of the Zohar'; Idel, *Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*; Bilu, *Without Bounds*; Scharfstein, *Mystic Experience*; Elior, 'Between Yesh and Ayin'; Elior, 'R. Joseph Karo'; Green, 'Zadik as Axis Mundi'; Green, 'Typologies of Leadership and the Hasidic Zaddiq'; Dan, *On Holiness*.

and listening to the divine word, is ongoing and he defies any counter-argument. The mystic does not regard divine revelation as a single occurrence that took place at Sinai at a specific historical moment in biblical times alone, but rather as an event that might reoccur in the consciousness of unique individuals across various historical periods and changing circumstances. The mystic defies the invalidation of 'a divine voice'.²⁸ He disagrees with the statement that the prophetic period is over and the holy spirit no longer inspires.²⁹ The mystic cannot share the assumption that messengers of God do not reveal themselves anymore, because he hears angels, listens to supernal heralds, and sometimes even hears the word of God and sees in his mind new divine texts inspired through prophecy or by the Shekhinah. The mystic prophesies through the holy spirit and sees heavenly visions through his own spirit. In the words of the Ba'al Shem Tov, 'The soul becomes a throne for the light of the Shekhinah above the head. And it is as if the light spreads round him and he is within the light, sitting and trembling with joy'.³⁰ The mystic seeks the continuation of religious creativity, which relies on revelation or on direct contact with the upper world, offering an alternative perspective on the revealed and concealed reality.

This mystical assumption, that revelation continues for extraordinary people who are capable in their imagination and through their spirit of gazing at the *merkavah*, 'entering the *pardes*', experiencing visions, or hearing voices, is demonstrated in the Heikhalot tradition by the testimonies of Ishmael and Akiva.

Mystical conversion, initiating the adept into the pathways of heaven or the depth of his illuminated heart and soul, is described both as an illumination and as an experience of rebirth:

Rabbi Ishmael said in the name of Rabbi Nehuniah ben Hakanah, my master: 'When I was engaged in observing the *merkavah*, I saw exalted glory, the inner sanctum, awesome princes, the most pious, who were burning and fearful, their fire burning and their fear frightening . . . since I heard this message from Rabbi Nehuniah ben Hakanah, my master, I stood up and I asked him all the names of the ministering angels of wisdom, and from the question I asked my heart was lit up as the brightness of heaven . . . and since I heard this great mystery my eyes lit up . . . and my world was renewed in purification and it was as if I came from a new world . . .' Rabbi Ishmael said: 'Since my ears heard this great mystery my world has changed to become purified and my heart felt as if I came to a new world, and every day it feels like when I stood before the throne of Glory.'³¹

Rabbi Akiva said: 'When I ascended to the chariot a voice came out from under the throne speaking Aramaic. And in that language it said: "Before God created heaven and

²⁸ 'The Torah has already been given to Israel and one does not bring testimony based on a divine voice'; BT *Ber.* 52a.

²⁹ 'Since the latter prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—the holy spirit ceased to inspire Israel'; Tosefta *Sot.* 13: 4.

³⁰ *Keter shem tov*, 48, §§192–3.

³¹ *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §§309, 579–80, 680.

earth He installed a path to the firmament to enter and to exit it. And He installed a permanent entrance by which anyone can enter.”³²

A thousand years later the medieval poet Judah Halevi describes the ‘ladder of ascent’ or the ‘path to the firmament’:

Go outside at midnight in the footsteps of the men of renown,
Upon their lips are praises;
They embody neither guile nor extortion.
Their nights are devoted to prayers;
Their days to fasts.
Their hearts are pathways to God.
There are places for them in His throne.
Their way—a ladder upon which to ascend to God, our Lord.³³

R. Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye sums up the mystical perception of his teacher Israel Ba’al Shem Tov in the eighteenth century in relation to the ladder of ascension: ‘Man is a ladder planted on earth whose head reaches heaven and the angels of God ascend and descend it.’³⁴

This enigmatic testimony, which describes in a mystical legendary style the experience of hearing heavenly voices and seeing higher worlds, refers to the variety of experiences that deviate significantly from the biblical tradition and are called arcana, ascents, revelations, or mysteries. This testimony clearly shows that the mystic, in his imagination, in his heart, or in his spirit, comes and goes through the gates of heaven. He is able to see or hear the hidden world; he experiences the elimination of time and space in his consciousness. He ascribes a decisive importance to his psyche and his dreams and utilizes them to break through conventional limitations. He does this by virtue of thinking that he has direct contact with the holy and higher worlds, through prophetic revelation, mystical exaltation and divine inspiration. He does this also by virtue of being acknowledged by others for his exceptional spirituality and charisma, which grant him ‘divine visions’ or a revelation that casts a new light on reality. In the tradition of the *geonim* (the heads of the Babylonian academies, from the end of the sixth century until the middle of the eleventh), a fascinating description of the essence of the ascent is offered: ‘And they do not ascend to heaven but watch and understand the wisdom of the heart as a person who looks and sees in a mirror that does not shine.’³⁵

An example of what they ‘watch and understand [in] their heart’ can be found in the mystical hymns of *Heikhalot rabati* that describe the splendorous beauty of the heavenly sanctuary that is revealed to the ‘descender of the chariot’ who is ascending on high and sees the invisible beauty of the divine realm:

³² *Heikhalot zutarti*, ed. Elior, 23, 63.

³³ Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 518.

³⁴ *Toledot ya’akov yosef*, 50.

³⁵ See above, n. 26.

when [the man who has made the ascent] stands before the throne of glory, he begins by reciting the hymn that the throne of glory sings each day:

King of Kings, God of Gods and Lord of Lords, encircled by wreaths of crowns, surrounded by boughs of glowing princes—He who covered the heavens with His glorious bough and appeared from the heights in His majesty. The deeps were set ablaze by His beauty, the firmaments were kindled by his radiant stature. The proud angels burst out of His stature, the mighty explode from His crown, the precious erupt from His garment. And all the trees rejoice in His word, the grasses exult in His joy, and as He speaks perfumes flow forth.³⁶

The multi-sensory experience that takes place in the ‘other reality’ includes seeing, hearing, and smelling and is available to the mystics who alienate themselves from the sensory reality of this world and concentrate on the ‘understanding of the heart’. The description of the heavenly sanctuary and its splendid beauty is recited after the destruction of all earthly expression of divine worship in the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. The mystical transformation of the lost temple and the priestly service was one of the ways of defiance against the arbitrary conquest and the catastrophic results of the ‘Hurban’. The two ‘earthly’ heroes of Heikhalot literature, R. Akiva and R. Ishmael, are the renowned sages who continued to teach when the Romans prohibited teaching the Torah and both sanctified God’s name and were martyred in 135 CE as a result of the Roman persecution that followed Bar Kokhba’s rebellion. (See the poem ‘Eleh ezkerah’ (These shall I mention), recited on Yom Kippur.)

The Besht’s words in *Igeret hakodesh*, written in the middle of the eighteenth century as a private letter to his brother-in-law, the kabbalist Gershon of Kutov (then living in the Land of Israel), reveal something of the hidden meaning of the understanding of the heart (i.e. intuitive observation), incorporating textual tradition, ritual memory, and mystical experience informed by transformations of the lost past and hopes for eternal continuity in heaven of what was lost on earth.³⁷ These words explain the essence of the self-observation of the mystic who ascends through his spirit from the earthly to the heavenly and gains direct contact with the inhabitants of higher worlds at the time of ‘spiritual ascent’:

What will certainly amaze and please you, as it amazed me, regarding the vision that God showed me through my ascents, are the wondrous things one knows through spiritual ascents. I saw wondrous things that I have not seen since I reached maturity. What I have seen and learnt while ascending there is impossible to tell or to discuss even face to

³⁶ *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §253. English translation in *Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, 200. Cf. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism*, 20–30.

³⁷ On Israel Ba’al Shem Tov see *Shivhei habesht*; Dubnow, *History of Hasidism*; Kahana, *Rabbi Israel Ba’al Shem Tov*; Scholem, ‘Historical Image of Israel Ba’al Shem Tov’; Dinur, *At the Turn of the Generations*, trans. in Hundert (ed.), *Essential Papers on Hasidism*; Rapoport-Albert (ed.), *Hasidism Reappraised*; Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism*; Idel, *Hasidism*; Elior, ‘R. Joseph Karo’; Elior, *Mystical Origins of Hasidism*; Etkes, ‘Magic and Masters of the Name’; id., *The Besht*.

face. But while returning to the lower Garden of Eden I saw a few souls of the living and the dead known to me as well as countless unknown to me, and some were running back and forth with great happiness, [trying] to ascend from world to world by means of the pillar known to those who are acquainted with the hidden wisdom [*kabalah*]. It would be tiring for the mouth to tell and difficult for the physical ear to hear . . . And the pleasure, which cannot be achieved physically, is as great as at the revelation at Mount Sinai. And I was frightened and shocked by this vision because I thought maybe this was done for my sake and the time had arrived, God forbid, to leave this world. And perhaps because of that [my approaching death], it should have been done and a hint is enough. And I felt sorry for my soul and for my friends who died abroad until I came and entered the King Messiah's palace and I saw face to face that which I have not seen from the time I reached understanding until now. And I was told revelations that I cannot share with you and also they revealed to me awesome wonderful things within the depths of the Torah that I have neither seen nor heard nor has any ear heard for some years. And it occurred to me in my heart and in my mind to ask him [the messiah] whether this great happiness is taking place in expectation of his arrival. I asked: 'And when will you be coming, sir?' And his exalted answer was: 'No, it is impossible to reveal. By this you will know, when your teaching is spread and discovered by the world and your springs gush forth [your name will go forth], and [by] what I taught you and you understood. And they will also be able to achieve ascensions and mystical meditations as you have, and at that time all the evil forces will be annihilated and it will be an age of favour and redemption.' I felt great sorrow about the length of time and I was wondering when it could possibly come to pass. But because of what I have heard, the three words, *segulot*, and three holy names, which are easily learnt and interpreted, my mind cooled off. And I thought that it was possible by this for precious people of my circle to come to my level and be like me, that is, be able to exalt [their] spirit to heaven and study and understand as I do. And permission was not given to reveal it as long as I live. And I requested [permission] to teach you and they absolutely did not permit it and I am sworn by them and I am bound by this. And this is the information I deliver and may God be with you and be aware of your virtues . . . And particularly in this world while you pray and study, in each word and utterance you will intend mystical meditation because in each letter there are worlds and spirits and divinity which ascend and connect and unify with each other and with God and then connect and unify the letters and become a word and they absolutely unify with God and your soul will be included in it in each and every aspect of the aforementioned. And all the worlds are unifying together and ascend and become a measureless joy and pleasure . . . This vision occurred while awake and not in a dream, in a vision and not in riddles.³⁸

³⁸ 'Igeret aliyat haneshamah' (Letter Concerning the Ascent of the Soul), in *Sefer shivhei habesht* (The Praises of Israel Ba'al Shem Tov), ed. Mondshine, 233–6; see also the discussion on pp. 229–42. On the 'Holy Epistle' see Scholem, 'Historical Image of Israel Ba'al Shem Tov'; Kahana, *Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov*, 44–5; *Shivhei habesht*, ed. Mintz; Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism*, 99–113; Elior, *Mystical Origins of Hasidism*, 41–58; Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, 148–55, offers another English translation of *Igeret aliyat haneshamah* according to its first printed version (Korets, 1781).

The complex words of the Besht clearly attest to the transformation that occurs in the psyche of someone who experiences a passage from one reality to another through ‘an ascent of the soul’, a vision or a dream. They reveal something of the new world-view that follows the experience of a heavenly revelation. They also show the critical importance that the Besht ascribes to his personal revelations, to the enigma of the destiny of his people reflected in the depths of his soul, and to the arcane world of his dreams.³⁹ His words demonstrate the blurring of the distinctions between the upper worlds and the lower worlds that takes place during mystical exaltation. They also reveal the yearning to merge the eternal and the earthly by exposing the divine character of language. The Besht’s words are a complex combination of new insights with transfigurations of previous mystical traditions of heavenly ascensions that he read and internalized and relived in his being. An example of this kind of metamorphosis can be found in his references to ‘the lower Garden of Eden’, ‘the pillar known to the kabbalists’,⁴⁰ and ‘the revelation at Sinai’, and also in the link between his words and the description of the soul’s ascent which Isaac Luria, the Ari, was granted two centuries before him in Safed:

Also [Luria] had the privilege that each night his soul would ascend to heaven. And ministering angels would come and accompany his soul to the school of heaven and would ask him to which school he wanted to go. Sometimes he would say to the school of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai or to the school of Rabbi Akiva or of Rabbi Eliezer the Great or other *tana'im* and *amora'im* [sages of the mishnaic and talmudic periods] or prophets (*nevi'im*) and he would be led to the school of his choice and on the following morning he would tell the sages what he had received at that school.⁴¹

These hagiographic narrative traditions about the spiritual ascent of Luria to higher worlds circulated in both manuscript and print, throughout the Jewish world from the beginning of the seventeenth century, in works like *Shivhei ha'ari* (Praises of the Ari) or *Toledot ha'ari* (Biography of Isaac Luria).⁴² It is hard to doubt that they influenced the Besht, who internalized the mystical figure of Luria and the heavenly sources of his doctrine and relived the stories connected with them. Joseph Karo provided detailed descriptions in his mystical diary, written between 1533 and 1575 and published in the early seventeenth century, of his nocturnal ascent to heavenly schools and conversations with supernatural figures

³⁹ On the role of dreams in the world of the Besht see the testimony of his grandson, Moses Hayim Ephraim of Sudylkov, in his book *Degel mahaneh efrayim*, 282–5. On the role of dreams in mystical thought see Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 102–34; Elijior, ‘Reality in the Test of Fiction’; Oron, ‘Dream, Vision, and Reality’; Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*; *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies*, ed. Faierstein.

⁴⁰ On ‘ascending the pillar known to the masters of mystery’ see the ‘Holy Epistle’ in *Shivhei habesht*, ed. Mondshine, 229–42; and *Toledot ha'ari*, ed. Benayahu, 155, 165.

⁴¹ *Toledot ha'ari*, ed. Benayahu, 155.

⁴² On *Shivhei ha'ari* and *Toledot ha'ari* see Benayahu, ‘In Praise of the Ari’.

associated with the Shekhinah. In these descriptions the Shekhinah makes him promises referring to his future and to the dissemination of his teachings and his books using the language of the verse mentioned in the *Igeret hakodesh*: 'and your springs gush forth'.⁴³ These descriptions nourished the Besht's imagination; they influenced the illuminations he experienced and the messianic mission that he accepted on behalf of heavenly revelation.

Hayim Vital's detailed spiritual portrait of his teacher Luria in the introduction to his book *Ets hayim* (written in the sixteenth century)⁴⁴ demonstrates the essence of mystical perception from the perspective of an outsider who regards those who had achieved such spirituality as 'men of great holiness'. His testimony defines the ideal image of the mystic for generations to come:

And behold today I will utter enigmas and wonders . . . because in each generation God has been amazingly generous to us and he showed us his grace by remnants that God calls on . . . and he pitied his people and sent us an angel and holy person who came down from heaven, the divine great rabbi, the righteous one, my master and rabbi, our teacher our rabbi the Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi [the Ari], may his memory be alive in the next world, crammed with Torah as a pomegranate [is with seeds], filled with Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, dialectics (*pilpul*), Midrash, and legends, *ma'aseh bereshit* (the deed of creation), *ma'aseh merkavah* (the deed of the mystical speculations of the *merkavah*), competent in the language of trees, in the language of birds, in the language of angels, familiar with the discipline of physiognomy . . . familiar with all that human beings have done and will do, who knows the intentions of human beings before they act on them, who knows the future and everything that exists on the Earth and everything that has been determined in heaven, who is acquainted with the transmigration of souls old and new . . . is able to read wonderful things in the flame of a candle and the flame of a fire, looks at and observes with his eyes the spirits of the former (*rishonim*) and latter (*aharonim*) holy people (*tsadikim*) and studies kabbalah (*hokhmat emet*) with them . . . and my eyes, and not [the eyes of] an alien, saw frightening things that have not been seen nor heard in the whole universe from the time of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, may he rest in peace, until today . . . all this he achieved by himself, by his piety and his asceticism, after occupying himself for days and years with books old and new, dealing with the discipline of kabbalah, and in addition, piety and asceticism and purity and holiness which brought him to the prophet Elijah, who always revealed himself to him and used to speak to him face to face and taught him this discipline . . . and even if prophecy ceased, the holy spirit through Elijah did not cease.⁴⁵

⁴³ Interestingly, to Karo, who was a prolific writer, the Shekhinah promised that his books would be widely spread and well accepted. To the Ba'al Shem Tov, who did not write down his teachings, the messiah promised that his teachings would be widely spread.

⁴⁴ On the introduction to *Ets hayim* see Elijior, 'Messianic Expectations'; Avivi, 'R. Hayim Vital's Writings on Lurianic Kabbalah'.

⁴⁵ *Ets hayim*, 'Hakdamat sha'ar hahakdamot' (introduction to the 'Gate of Introductions'), 8. On the end of prophecy see Urbach, 'When did Prophecy Cease?'; Elijior, *Three Temples*, 214. For further descriptions of the extraordinary knowledge of Luria see Vital, *Sefer hahezyonot*.

The outstanding qualities ascribed to Luria in this hagiographic testimony and the proclamation of the heavenly source of his doctrine portray him as a charismatic superhuman or as a man who transcends the boundaries of knowledge as well as the limits of time and space. These qualities correspond to the definition of charisma given by Max Weber: 'Charisma is the quality of an individual's personality by virtue of which he is separated from ordinary mortals and is treated as if he were endowed with supernatural, superhuman qualities, or at least with specific extraordinary qualities.'⁴⁶ These qualities attribute to him a divine perspective, a unique timeless insight, and hidden knowledge. This knowledge establishes a new perspective and grants mystical authority to reinterpret heavenly and earthly reality. Luria is a model of the mystic who dares to penetrate the forbidden domain by means of his imagination, 'to enter the *pardes*', 'to descend to the *merkavah*', to observe 'higher palaces', to mingle with high angels, and to decode hidden mysteries. He is able to establish contact in his imagination with a world of angels, to listen to heavenly voices referred to as *magidim*, and to be granted a 'spiritual ascent' or 'revelation of Elijah'. He is privileged to hear the words of the Shekhinah or see the messiah, to receive teachings from heavenly teachers, dream about studying the secrets of the Torah in heavenly schools, and see angels. He is privileged to understand the conversation of birds and palm trees, to experience speech speaking by itself or writing written by itself, and to experience other interactions between this world and worlds beyond it, which take place through asceticism and the study of legendary traditions and holy texts that bridge heaven and earth.

From another perspective it might be noted that Luria is the first mystic known to us in Jewish history whose mystical biography was told in great detail by a pupil who devoted his life to editing the oral teachings of his master and recounting his spiritual life. Lurianic kabbalah and Luria's mystical biography are the result of two and a half years' encounter between Luria and Vital in 1572–5 in Safed. Vital's writing created Lurianic kabbalah and the pattern of mystical behaviour that to a great extent shaped many later developments in the following centuries.⁴⁷

The study, reading, and memorization of mystical works, recitation of halakhic and aggadic books, as well as prayer and ritual imbued with mystical intentions, induce new life in mystical symbols and in hidden beings. These activities occur during wakefulness or in a dream, in conjunction with seclusion, mortification, abstinence, and purification. They disengage the visionary from daily routines and create a holy space in which spiritual experiences take place. Study and seclusion turn the archaic written text into a 'speaking text' which one hears, experiences or envisages in one's mind. This turns ancient symbols into a contemporary living speaking being. One example of how the study of a sacred text brings about

⁴⁶ Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 258–9.

⁴⁷ See Scholem, *Major Trends*, ch. 7; Fine, *Physician*.

a deep metamorphosis in the scholar's soul can be found in the words of the thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalist Abraham Abulafia:

And I, while in Barcelona at the age of 31, was awakened by God from my sleep and studied *Sefer yetzirah* with its commentaries, and the word of the Lord came to me, and through it I wrote a book of wisdom and books of wondrous prophecies, and my spirit was revived and the spirit of the Lord reached my mouth and a spirit of holiness rose in me and I saw many and wondrous awesome visions through miracles and omens.⁴⁸

The mystic in whom 'a holy spirit arose' is one who revives and reanimates the entities described in the written traditions. He listens to their words and observes their revelations recreated in his soul. In his imagination he causes a transition from a subject-object relation between separate things (reader/text) to a reflexive relation (the text 'speaking' within the reader). That is to say, he experiences the transition from reading and praying about the messiah to listening to the messiah's words directly or sometimes becoming the messiah himself, from reading about the *merkavah* or enquiring into it to observing it and hearing its singing, from reading about 'the pillar known to the kabbalists' in the Book of Splendour, relating to the pathway to the heavenly world, to ascending it, or from praying to the Shekhinah to being in direct contact with its words. These encounters of consciousness (which are nurtured by the reanimation of prophetic and written mystic traditions and by their renewed dramatization and unique verbalization in the mind of the visionary) inspire him and grant him new insight and hidden knowledge. This knowledge provides a new perspective and grants mystical authority to overturn traditional modes of thinking by virtue of direct contact with the upper worlds.

It appears that the mystic projects the depths of his soul and the powers of his imagination onto the divine being and internalizes God's attributes within a human being. These two dialectical aspects in the image of the mystic express the creativity shared by God and man in mystical thought.⁴⁹ Just as God creates through his spirit—creating worlds through language, commanding and decreeing, exercising an infinite, multidimensional mastery of freedom, transcending distinctions and boundaries, unifying opposites and reconciling oppositions—so, to a great extent, does the mystic create through his imagination. He too creates new worlds through his spirit, in his thoughts, and in his soul. He too creates and decrees, examines and knows, bursts finite boundaries, unifies opposites, overturns principles, interchanges divine and human, inner and outer, creates and forms metamorphoses, and in his spirit continually renews the work of creation.

⁴⁸ *Otsar gan eden haganuz* (Treasure of the Hidden Paradise), quoted in Scholem, *Kabbalah of Sefer hatemunah*. On Abulafia see Scholem, *Kabbalah of Sefer hatemunah*; Idel, *Mystical Experience*; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*.

⁴⁹ On the two faces of the mystic see Elior, 'Metaphorical Relationship'; Jacobs, *Jewish Mystics*; Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*.

The creation of the world according to mystical thought is, to a great extent, creation by the poetic spirit shared by God and man. This is a creation free of the conventional limitations of time, space, reality, plain meaning, realistic awareness, and rational judgement.

An example of the creative spirit of the mystic can be found in the description of the throne addressing God in one of the Heikhalot hymns, described by Gershom Scholem in the following words: 'Their immense solemnity of style is unsurpassed in Hebrew hymnography.'⁵⁰ One may add that their wondrous heavenly beauty is in complete contrast to the devastation of the priestly lore on earth after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

King of miracles, King of power, King of wonders, King of marvels: Your throne hovers yet does not move, ever since You set the peg of the loom which fixes the world's course and its perfection, all these many years and endless generations. Your throne has never set foot on the floor of the seventh heaven, but hovers like a bird and does not move. The proudest of the proud, adorned with crowns, and all the royal living creatures whom You created stand close together beneath Your throne of glory, bearing it with might, strength, and power. They too have never set foot upon the floor of the seventh heaven, but hover like a bird and do not move. Thrice daily Your throne of glory prostrates itself before You and says: 'Zohariel, Adonai, God of Israel, sit upon me in glory, resplendent King, for Your burden is most dear to me and does not weigh me down.'⁵¹

A mystic who has been granted contact with the upper worlds might become a person who recognizes a secret in everything or a visionary who postulates a hidden perspective on plain reality that bestows an unknown meaning upon human experience. This meaning arises from the assumption that, behind revealed mundane reality, there is a hidden mystery. Beyond meaningless arbitrary time, eternity unfolds. Beyond human existence limited by time and space, an abstract metaphysical existence of the human soul continues. Even more so, beyond a meaningless history, which seemingly is the result of the arbitrary actions of man, and is reflected in the exile, there is hidden a meaningful metahistory guided by God towards redemption. And beyond meaningless commandments in this world lies hidden decisive metaphysical meaning in the upper worlds. It often seems that in mystical consciousness, unity behind the distinction between God, the world, and the human being is revealed. Beyond apparent reality, its mythical being and its mystical meaning are concealed. Beyond the concrete exile, a hidden redemption exists. Beyond the destroyed temple and the abandoned priesthood, the heavenly eternal *merkavah*, the singing throne, and the angelic priesthood exist for ever. Beyond the arbitrariness of the physical world, which is ruled by demonic

⁵⁰ Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 21.

⁵¹ *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §98. Trans. Carmi in *Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, 198–9.

powers that bring destruction, exile, misery, and death, exist angels and heavenly creatures that foster eternity, redemption, and hope for the continuity of life and faith. Beyond the husks of mundane reality, sparks of holiness exist. Beyond the spoken language exists a hidden language of holy names and letters. Beyond the revealed 'harsh judgement' there is hidden 'divine mercy'. Beyond the mythical catastrophe that shaped history, known as the 'destruction of the world', there is the mystical hope known as 'the repair of the world'. Beyond the reality of endless exile ruled by 'the forces of darkness' exists the world of the 'forces of light' that symbolize the coming redemption. The transition from the revealed aspects of reality to its hidden yearned-for aspects is carried out within the spirit of the mystic, who blurs the sharp distinctions between imagination and reality on the one hand, and the divine and the human on the other, and offers a new vision that gives meaning to arbitrary human experience. The mystic experiences the hidden reality through his spirit by reinterpreting revealed reality, redeems it from its chaotic arbitrariness, grants it meaning, vision, and structure, endows it with mysterious beauty, and connects past, present, and future through hope and purpose.⁵² The study of mystical literature often shows that phenomena and facts that might be considered by most people as insignificant, fragmented, and arbitrary are turned by the mystic into visionary materials and metaphors representing alternative existence, yearning and desires, or mainstays of personal and collective memory.

The anonymous author of *Galya raza*, a mystic from the first half of the sixteenth century who lived in the shadow of the horrors of the expulsion from Spain and who yearned for redemption, demonstrates the new insights that arise from blurring the distinctions between the heavenly and the earthly. He does it by studying the secrets of the numbers and measures mentioned in the Bible and the Mishnah and connects the present and the future by examining the revealed and hidden meanings of the measures of the *mikveh* (240 *kabin*).⁵³ In his vision he sees the transition from earthly time and space to eternity, and observes the moment when the Land of Israel floats on the surface of the waters free of the constraint of time towards the consolation of eternity. He describes the change in the regulation of the world and explains the connection between numbers relating to a ritual reality (measurements of the *mikveh*) and mystical reality (*shiur komah*), or the way in which the hidden reality explains the revealed reality:

And it has been discovered that the measurements of the ritual bath suggest that the number of years since the beginning of the world is 6,000 years minus 240 years,⁵⁴ because in those years there is no procreation and no ploughing and no harvesting and

⁵² On hidden reality beyond revealed reality see Elior, 'Doctrine of Transmigration'; Goldish (ed.), *Spirit Possession*; Chajes, *Spirit Possession*.

⁵³ A unit of measurement of liquid volume.

⁵⁴ $6000 - 240 = 5760$, referring to the 240 years before the end of the present cycle that is expected to come to an end in the year 6000 of the Hebrew calendar.

only the completely righteous who have repented will survive and there will be no reincarnation any more. And those who survive in those 240 years are called the family of *resh-mem*,⁵⁵ such as Abraham Amram Elihu from the family Ram [see Job 32: 2]. During those 240 years the lower waters will rise and cover the whole earthly world and nothing will remain except the Land of Israel by itself in its borders 400 parasangs by 400 parasangs,⁵⁶ and it will float on the water like Noah's ark, and it will come close to the earthly Paradise where the four rivers emerge. And those who are named after the family Ram [will] immerse themselves in the river and purify themselves and become spiritual. And this is what *resh-mem* suggests: it is 240 [*resh-mem*] *kabin* that shows that they are purified by a material *mikveh* and a spiritual *mikveh*, where they immerse themselves in a river of fire and enter the seventh millennium . . . and stand in the earthly Paradise.⁵⁷

The numerical value of letters and biblical names becomes closely affiliated in the mystical imagination that strives to transcend borders of time and constraints of space. The story of the Flood and the end of the world are associated with the idea of purity by water and its transformative effect. The defiled world of exile will drown and the new world of redemption will be created in paradise, containing only the Holy Land from the past and the holy people who can enter the new seventh millennium. Only the depth of misery of the historical reality of the persecuted Jews can yield such an apocalyptic vision that foresees the drowning of the world as we know it and creation of a new time and a new place that will retain only the Holy Land and a fraction of the Jewish people from the previous existence.

The combination of the real visions that the kabbalist carefully describes and the academic abstractions that grow out of them sometimes engenders visions that are spectacularly beautiful and mesmerizingly profound. The beginning of the deciphering of secrets hidden in being is often connected to the deconstruction of the plain text, by reducing it to letters, names, and numbers that turn into objects of devotion through recombination. The mystical way is nourished by the investigation of the mysteries of numbers, letters, and the hidden layers of language, which bridges the upper and lower worlds by its revealed and hidden combinations. The way the mystical point of view is established is described in the words of two thirteenth-century Sephardi kabbalists, Azriel of Gerona, the author of *Perush ha'agadot* (Commentary on the Aggadot of the Talmud),⁵⁸ and Abraham Abulafia, the author of *Or hasekhel* (Light of the Mind):

The most important part of the service of the enlightened and those who contemplate His name is: [And you shall] Cleave to Him. And this is an important principle in the

⁵⁵ The numerical value of the Hebrew equivalent is 240; the letter *resh* is 200 and the letter *mem* is 40.

⁵⁶ A parasang is about 3¼ miles.

⁵⁷ *Galya raza*, ed. Elior, 56–7. On the mystical concepts 'immersing in the river of fire' and 'gazing on the beauty of the king' see *Heikhalot zutarti*, ed. Elior; *Synopse*, ed. Schäfer et al.; 3 *Enoch*, ed. Alexander.

⁵⁸ On R. Ezra and R. Azriel see R. Azriel, *Perush ha'agadot*, ed. Tishby; Scholem, *Origins of Kabbalah*; Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary*.

Torah for prayers and blessings to combine one's thought and belief as if they have cleaved to God, and to compose the name through its letters and to include in it the ten *sefirot* as the flame is connected to the burning coal; with his mouth he shall remember Him by His [pronounced] name [*adonai*] and in his heart he shall compose Him through the [possible] structural combinations of [the letters of] His written name [YHVH].⁵⁹

When you wish to mention this glorified name engraved above with its vowels, adorn and seclude yourself in a special place so that your voice will not be heard by anyone else, and purify your heart and soul of any thoughts of this world. Then you should think that your soul separates from your body and you are dead as far as this world is concerned, and you live for the next world, which is the source of the life that exists and is scattered in all that lives, which is wisdom . . . and is in the image of the King of Kings.⁶⁰

The mystic often displays mythic traits by being able to transcend boundaries between the living and the dead, to move between textual reality and physical reality, and to live through his consciousness simultaneously within the present, the past, and the future. These features can be found in myths about overcoming death by descending to and returning from the world of the dead, and about the struggle against the forces of evil by descending to the world of husks or the world of demons beneath the earth and returning after their defeat. Other characteristics are presented in myths about a hero who ascends to the upper worlds and returns with hidden knowledge acquired through risk and struggle, which he bequeaths to his contemporaries and future generations, or the hero who struggles with angels who revile man in the upper worlds, and who is transformed from a human being into a superhuman creature transcending his time and place.

The description of the exaltation of Enoch, who was taken to heaven by God (Gen. 5: 23–4) and transformed into the angel Metatron, illustrates the crossing of boundaries and the mystic metamorphosis connected with it, as conceived by the authors of the Merkavah tradition.⁶¹ The following segment from *Sefer heikhalot* (Book of Heavenly Sanctuaries = 3 Enoch) describes the conversion of holy fire as a metaphor for the transition from earth to heaven and from the domain of mortals to the domain of immortals:

Rabbi Ishmael said:
Metatron, the ministering Angel of the Countenance
who resides above all, told me:
because the Holy One, blessed be He,
took me by fire to serve the Throne and the wheels of
the chariot and the needs of the Shekhinah

⁵⁹ *Perush ha'agadot*, ed. Tishby, 16.

⁶⁰ *Or hasekheh*, 62, cited in Scholem, *Kabbalah of Sefer hatemunah*, 62.

⁶¹ On the elevation of Enoch–Metatron see 3 *Enoch*, ed. Odeberg; *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §§1–80; *Geniza Fragmente*, ed. Schäfer, 105–10; Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*; Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*; Elior, 'From Earthly Temple'; Elior, *Three Temples*, 88–110.

immediately my flesh turned into a flame
 and my veins into a burning fire
 and my bones into hot coals of a broom tree
 and the light of my eyes into the splendour of lightning
 and the orbs of my eyes into a torch of fire
 and the hairs of my head into a blaze and flame
 and all my limbs into wings of burning fire
 and all my body into blazing fire
 and on my right burning flames of fire
 and on my left a burning torch
 and around me stormy gusty winds were blowing
 and clamorous sounds in front of me and behind me.⁶²

The Heikhalot tradition describing apotheosis and ‘angelification’ by divine eternal fire alludes to a holy fire, a purification in fire, the eternal sacred fire of the Temple, the fire and lightning during the revelation at Sinai, and the *hashmal* (light or fire) and torches in the vision of Ezekiel. Here, it describes a kind of ‘projection’ of the mystical conversion that is taking place within the mystic, when his mythical counterpart Metatron describes the transformation he went through when he was summoned to serve in heaven and turned into a blazing immortal. A later description, which interprets the Merkavah tradition from a kabbalistic point of view, demonstrates the mystical metamorphosis that occurs through studying and the ecstatic experience that follows. While studying the *merkavah*, the mystic transcends his physical being, concentrates on upper worlds, turns into an atemporal being surrounded by a blazing fire, and secrets are revealed to him, as described in the Midrash and in *Perush ha’agadot* by Azriel of Gerona:

Ben Azai used to sit and study while the fire blazed around him (*Shir hashirim rabah* 1: 2 (10)) . . . Because he used to sit and study and concentrate his thought on what is above, the awesome words were engraved in his heart, and because of that emanation and the concentration of that mind the words accumulated and expanded, and out of that joy they were revealed to him.⁶³

With respect to the blazing fire, the *midrash* links Ben Azai’s story to the revelation at Sinai:

And the fire blazes around them and the words were joyful as if they had been given at Sinai, because was it not the fire in which they were given at Mount Sinai that was the most important? As it is written: and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven. Ben Azai was sitting and studying and the fire blazed around him.⁶⁴

The language describing Ben Azai alludes to the angels in Psalms, ‘His ministers are a blaze of fire’ (Ps. 104: 4), and to the holiness of the inner sanctum as it is

⁶² *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §19.

⁶³ R. Azriel, *Perush ha’agadot*, ed. Tishby, 40. ⁶⁴ *Shir hashirim rabah* 1: 2 (10).

described in the Jerusalem Talmud: 'A fire came out of the Holy of Holies and blazed around him.'⁶⁵ Ben Azai, who studies the *merkavah* while 'the fire is blazing around him', relives and revives the divine revelation at Sinai, its heavenly succession in angelic being, and its earthly continuation in the Holy of Holies, all of which are connected to the *merkavah*. Ben Azai, about whom it was said in the story about the four sages who entered paradise (*pardes* = orchard = Garden of Eden) 'he glimpsed and died',⁶⁶ turns into a prototype of the mythic mystic who encounters the holy and timelessly unites within himself heavenly and earthly holiness. An ancient poetic priestly tradition from the beginning of the second century BCE conveys the moment of illumination that followed the encounter with the holy. The most sacred place—the Holy of Holies—and the most sacred time, Yom Kippur, are associated with the divine service of the high priest, who emerged glowing with the exquisite beauty surrounding him from the Holy of Holies:

Chief among his brethren and pride of his people,
Simeon son of Yohanan the priest in whose time the House
was repaired and in whose days the Temple was fortified . . .
How glorious he was as he looked out
from the Tent of the Presence, as he emerged
from the curtained shrine!
Like a star shining through the clouds,
or the full moon on feast days.
Like the sun glittering on the king's palace
or the rainbow seen in the cloud:
like a blossom on the bough at spring time,
or a lily by a flowing stream.
Like a flower of Lebanon on a summer day,
or the fire of frankincense upon the offering . . .
when he clothed himself in his splendid robes
and put on his glorious diadem;
when he ascended the majestic altar
and filled the Temple Court with his splendour . . .⁶⁷

The poetical mystical depiction of the sacrificial service on Yom Kippur in the Temple of Jerusalem is closely associated with the tradition of the *merkavah* because the cherubim in the Holy of Holies (1 Chron. 28: 18, 2 Kgs. 7–8) were the earthly representation of the glowing cherubim in the heavenly chariot and the divine throne (Ezek. 1: 10) as well as of the awesome cherubim of paradise (Gen. 3)—the heavenly domain which the high priest was entering on Yom Kippur (Zohar III. 67a), according to the mystical tradition. When the high priest enters the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur,

⁶⁵ JT *San.* 10: 52.⁶⁶ Tosefta *Hag.* 2: 2.⁶⁷ Simeon Ben Sira: *Ben sira* 50: 1–14.

he hears the sound of the wings of the cherubim, who sing and beat their wings that are stretched out towards the heavens. He burns the incense-offering; the sound of their wings subsides and they cleave together in silence . . . When he has finished, the cherubim lift up their wings as they did before and begin to sing. Then the priest knows that it has been accepted, and it is a moment of joy for all.⁶⁸

Mystics are those who mediate in their dreams and visions, in their thoughts and consciousness, in their soul and spirit, in their poetry and ritual, between the fire blazing at Sinai and the fire blazing around the beholders of the *merkavah*, between the fire of the angels and the heavenly fire that envelops Ezekiel's chariot. The mystics connect the Holy of Holies and the heavenly temples; the human temporal world associated with the mystical priestly service and the timeless world of the angels; the cherubim of the Holy of Holies, the cherubim of the Garden of Eden, the cherubim of the heavenly chariot and the blazing fire of Sinai. They are mediators between the world of emanation and the world of man, the world of the dead and the world of life, ancient days and the end of time, mythical time and real time. They also mediate in their imagination and consciousness between utopian yearnings and earthly reality, revealed and hidden souls, the world of demons and the world of man, and the realm of holiness and the realm of husk. They do all this because they are able to ascend spiritually to 'the world of emanation', or descend to the world of the dead and return, to ascend to the Garden of Eden and return to see in their imagination the world of 'the children of light' through the world of 'the children of darkness'. By means of their spirit they are able to hear angels, enter the *pardes*, ascend and observe the heavenly sanctuaries, the divine chariot, the cherubim of paradise, the chariot of the cherubim in the Holy of Holies, which is described in Ezekiel's vision of the heavenly chariot. These are all associated with the heavenly pattern of cherubim that Moses saw at Sinai (Exod. 25) and that the high priest saw in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur when he entered the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary simultaneously. The mystic was able to see and hear with closed eyes and open heart/mind the cherubim and the Shekhinah. He was able to foresee the future and proclaim it, speak with Abraham, Moses, and Ahijah, with Elijah and Akiva, with Metatron and Shimon bar Yohai. In his imagination he is able to make the Shekhinah and the messiah speak; listen to angels and heralds in heavenly schools; speak with living and dead souls, with 'transmigrating souls' and 'transformed souls'; descend to the husk and raise himself above it; conjure the souls of the dead and return to the world of the living; wander in the heavenly temples; observe the mystical worlds of 'emanation, creation, action'; observe the depths of 'the light that does not contain thought' and 'the light that contains thought'; 'ascend the middle pillar known to the masters of secrets' and join together with holy association. He was able to 'ascend to the chariot' and 'descend into the

⁶⁸ Tishby (ed.), *Wisdom of the Zohar*, iii. 92–3.

abyss' and return; be in immediate contact with textual realities; connect in his mind the different worlds of imagination and reality; peruse in his imagination the secrets of human experience and thought, and tie them to both their historicity and their metaphysical meaning.

Mystical literature depicts the mediating ability of the mystics, their mythical traits, and the transcendent meaning of their experience. It includes the complex images of their imagination and their heavenly counterparts. These earthly and heavenly figures, by means of their spirit, break through the confines of human existence and establish new interrelations between the human and the divine. Often these mystical figures display penetrating observation of the psyche, careful attentiveness to the secrets of language, and profound observation of mysteries of the upper worlds, and they hearken to new divine, angelic, and human voices. Some of the outstanding characters among them are described in the Ethiopic and Slavonic books of Enoch from late antiquity (1 and 2 Enoch).⁶⁹ These characters were transformed from human beings into angels living in heaven, combining the human and the angelic. These books, which tell of the ascent of a human being to heaven, what he heard, and what was revealed to him by God and His angels, offer new insights into heaven and earth, mysticism and ritual, God in the image of man and man in the image of God. They suggest a totally new conception of God, a totally new creation story, a complex myth about the revolt of the angels against God, a detailed description of the solar calendar that is contradictory to the accepted lunar calendar,⁷⁰ a concept of the human being that differs from its biblical counterpart, a description of the angelic liturgy in the upper world, and many other topics that convey a sense of disagreement, struggle, defiance, and criticism of sanctified values and a reawakening that formulates new insights in an ancient mythic language.⁷¹ Enoch plays an important role in the Book of Jubilees, where he is the incarnation of knowledge imparted by the angels to a man taken into paradise (Jubilees 4).⁷² The figure of Enoch in the priestly mystical literature unites within himself the characteristics of knowledgeable man, priest, seer, mystic visionary, and scribe, a messenger who brings from heaven all the divine knowledge pertaining to the priestly service—numbers and calendar; letters and history; singing and liturgy; incense and books; records and laws. Enoch-

⁶⁹ On 1 (Ethiopic) Enoch, found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Pseudepigrapha see *Books of Enoch*, ed. Milik; VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition*; id., *Enoch, a Man for All Generations*; 1 Enoch, trans. Black; 1 Enoch, ed. Charlesworth, 5–89. On 2 (Slavonic) Enoch see *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. Charlesworth, i. 91–222; Böttrich, *Weltweisheit*; VanderKam, *Enoch, a Man for All Generations*; Nickelsburg, '1 Enoch'; Orlov, *The Enoch–Metatron Tradition*.

⁷⁰ On the significance of Enoch in the priestly literature that associated him with a holy calendar see Elior, *Three Temples*, chs. 4–5; on Enoch's significance in apocalyptic and mystical literature see Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*; VanderKam, *Enoch, a Man for All Generations*.

⁷¹ On Enoch's role in mythical literature see Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets*.

⁷² See Elior, *Three Temples*, 99–110, and 'From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines'.

Metatron in 3 Enoch, composed after the destruction of the Temple and the abolition of the priestly service on earth, when all aspects of Temple worship were transformed into the heavenly sanctuaries known as *heikhalot*, unites within himself the characteristics of God, man, and angel and, amazingly enough, regards all three of them from the point of view of suffering, vulnerability, and punishment, ascribing to them mythical aspects and human traits.⁷³ Metatron transforms into a mediating entity, communicating among the human, the divine, and the angelic, for he is known as ‘the little Yahweh’ whose ‘name is as his Lord’s’,⁷⁴ and ‘his crown is as his King’s crown’.⁷⁵ Enoch was a human being who was taken to God (Gen. 5: 24), set in paradise as a scribe, and was renamed by the sages as the angel Metatron, who was punished by fire because of the sin of Elisha.⁷⁶ But he is also a heavenly character who resembles God to such an extent that God fears him and tells the descender to the chariot ‘Don’t worship him’⁷⁷ and ‘Don’t replace me with him’.⁷⁸

Similarly, the historical and pseudepigraphic figures of the *tana'im* Akiva and Ishmael in the Merkavah literature, who ‘descend to the *merkavah*’, ‘ascend to heaven’, ‘observe the King in his beauty’ in upper sanctuaries, and ‘enter the *pardes*’ and ‘the innermost place of the sanctuary’, testify to the deep meaning of the crossing of boundaries between the revealed and the hidden, the real and the imaginary, the ritual and the mystical, and the physical and the spiritual. In addition, they unite human and angelic existence, crossing boundaries between heaven and earth by serving in the earthly temple, which continues to exist only in their memory, and in the upper sanctuaries, eternalized in their imagination.⁷⁹

If Jewish mysticism in late antiquity and during the Byzantine period was focused on the glorious lost past, on the mystical transformation of the lost Temple and the abolished service, transforming them into heavenly sanctuaries, heavenly chariots, and ministering angels, the next stage of Jewish mysticism was focused on the future, that is, on redemption, on the messianic redemption, and on the hidden schemes and structures that will hasten redemption and the return to the Holy Land.

The mythological accounts of the literary protagonists of antiquity and the Middle Ages, mystics such as Nehuniah ben Hakanah in *Sefer habahir* or Joseph

⁷³ On 3 Enoch see 3 *Enoch*, ed. Odeberg; 3 *Enoch*, ed. Alexander. On Enoch-Metatron cf. BT *Hag. 14b–15a*.

⁷⁴ *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §19.

⁷⁵ *Geniza Fragmente*, ed. Schäfer, 105.

⁷⁶ BT *Hag. 14b–15a*; *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §§1–20. Cf. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 14–19, 43–55.

⁷⁷ *Geniza Fragmente*, 105.

⁷⁸ BT *San. 38b*. Elisha ben Avuyah’s sin was substituting Metatron, the angelic entity, for the divine entity. BT *Hag. 14b–15a*.

⁷⁹ On the role of Akiva and Ishmael in the mystical tradition see Scholem, *Major Trends*, ch. 2; Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 14–19; Urbach, ‘The Traditions about Merkavah Mysticism’; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*; Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*; Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*; Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*; *Heikhalot zutarti*, ed. Elior.

della Reina in the magical narratives referring to him, were all concerned with the upper worlds and the revelation of secrets learnt therein, often pertaining to the secrets of redemption. Moreover, these accounts significantly influenced the formation of the mystical portraits of various kabbalists (some known to us by name and others only through their anonymous works).⁸⁰ Sixteenth-century figures—Solomon Molcho in *Hayat hakaneh*, Solomon Turiel in *A Sermon on Redemption*,⁸¹ Joseph Karo in his mystical diary *Magid meisharim*, and the anonymous author of *Galya raza*, who in their life and action maintain a reciprocal relation with visible and audible heavenly entities revealing to them the secrets of redemption and the mysteries of the hidden divine plans for changing the course of history—well express the mythical and mystical characteristics of the mystic in the Jewish tradition. They illustrate the meaning of life within a textual reality unlimited by time, space, rational thinking, or physical reality, informed mainly by memories of the lost past and hopes and yearning for a redeemed future. The meaning of mystical transcendence, the merging of the written text with the revived text within the reader, and the blurring of distinctions between the imaginary and the real and between the temporal and the atemporal in their experience are clearly demonstrated by the anonymous authors of *Sefer hamalakh hameshiv*, *Galya raza*, and *Avodat hakodesh* (Holy Worship) in the first half of the sixteenth century, and the charismatic hagiographic figures of Luria in the introduction to Hayim Vital, *Ets hayim*, and in Vital's *Sha'ar hagilgulim* (Gate of Reincarnations) and *Sha'ar ruah hakodesh* (Gate of the Holy Spirit), of Moses Cordovero in *Sefer gerushin* (Book of Banishments), and of Vital in *Sefer hahezzyonot*, in the second half of the century.

The literary portraits of Nathan of Gaza and Shabetai Tsevi in the seventeenth-century Shabatean literature and the biographies of their followers, Barukhyah Russo, Samuel Primo, Abraham Michael Cardozo, Mordecai Ashkenazi, and Jacob Frank, are similar examples of mystics who perceived themselves and were often perceived by their contemporaries as liberators, redeemers, or messianic figures who were able to alter the course of the history of the exile and promote or facilitate earthly/heavenly redemption. They too demonstrate the variety of concepts that mediate and connect times, spaces, and archetypal figures linked to the revival of the mystical tradition in the spirit of its creators and students. In general, it is possible to say that the mythical portrait serves as the strongest source of validity for introducing new ideas regarding the hidden world and its relation to the revealed world. Mystical themes—concerning the worlds of *sefirot* and souls, the end of the exile and the time of redemption, reincarnation, apotheosis, the world of the angels, the solar calendar, the heavenly sanctuaries, the secrets of Torah, the coming of the messiah, the defeat of the forces of evil and the redemption of the Shekhinah, the Divinity that creates itself, and the

⁸⁰ On the characteristics of the mystics, the kabbalists, and the 'descenders of the chariot' see the Appendix, which includes bibliographical references.

⁸¹ See Scholem, 'A Homily on Redemption'.

human being created in its image—these themes are all validated by their linkage to mythical figures and their association with memories of the glorious past and yearned-for future. Those figures ascend to the upper worlds and transcend the limitations of time and space. They bring from there the previously unknown insights that reshape the concepts of time and space. That is to say, the atemporal mythical garment is a cover for mystical renewal that simultaneously takes place within the boundaries of time and space and transcends them.

The exceptional portrait of Moses Hayim Luzzatto (emerging from his letters to his contemporaries in the first half of the eighteenth century) and the autobiographical descriptions of the Besht in *Igeret hakodesh*, written in the middle of the eighteenth century, demonstrate the internalization of the images of the mythical protagonists who wish to hasten redemption and to bring the messiah, the new era of liberation and the revival of the mythical kabbalistic tradition. These descriptions reflect the moulding of the writers' images in relation to mythological figures and voices from the upper worlds that were revealed to them in a dream or while awake. Similarly, the autobiographical testimonies of Mordecai Ashkenazi in the notebook of his dreams, of Jacob Isaac Horowitz of Lublin in the volume of his sermons, *Zot zikaron* (This to Remember), and Isaac Safrin of Komarno in his book *Megilat setarim* (Scroll of Secrets)—referring to visions, to voices that spoke through their mouths, and words of Torah that were divulged to them from heaven—reveal the complex relations with the written mystical tradition that reappeared and was revived in their visions and dramatized in their imagination. The biographical sketches of Nahman of Bratslav in *The Life of my Teacher Rabbi Nahman*, of Nathan Adler in *Ma'aseh ta'atuim* (Deed of Mischief), of Jacob Frank in *Divrei ha'adon* (Words of the Lord), of Jacob Wazana in *Lelo meitsarim* (Beyond Boundaries)—as well as the images of additional mystics drawn from autobiographical notes, dream books, scholarly letters, and biographical descriptions which are hagiographical, historical, and literary—attest to the complexity of those who live in the presence of the holy, who mediate between the hidden and the revealed and unite within themselves earthly and heavenly entities. These writings likewise reflect the lack of demarcation among those qualities representing the literary, mythic, mystical, fictional, imaginary, and real. The overwhelming majority of the written mystical documents that have come down to us describe changes in the creative imagination that give rise to previously unknown beings and alternative categories. These changes take place when the mystic opens the written word to new meanings connecting past and future and turns the sacred words and symbols into living entities and uncovers the reciprocal connections between the written text and its hidden meaning and between inner consciousness and memories and the divine, as a depository of hopes and yearnings attached to the literary memories of the past.

A comparative study of these biographies and autobiographies often shows that the inner link among them has been created by internalization that is revealed

through the obvious similarities between fictional literary images and historical realistic figures. In many works of mystical literature the extraordinary identification with earlier mystical figures, both real and literary, is manifested by the inclusion of visionaries from the past in the portrait of the contemporary mystic, and by the adoption of the language and doctrine of previous mystical authorities in the new doctrines. This kind of internalization, incorporation, and identification between past and present establishes contact with the holy and is a source of primary inspiration and authorization for new conceptions. In the Book of Ezekiel the prophet-priest (who lived in the sixth century BCE at the end of the First Temple period) describes visions concerning the heavenly chariot, the true Temple, and the priests descended from Zadok. Inspired by those visions, the Teacher of Righteousness of Qumran (*moreh hatsedek*), in the second Temple period (second century BCE), a time of crisis and dispute, sees himself as a chosen one who has been granted prophecy and revelation of supernal mysteries. He internalizes the image of the prophet Ezekiel and polemically describes the future of the cult and its ritual practice. He praises the priests descending from Zadok and writes mystical poetry on heavenly sanctuaries and angelic service around the heavenly chariot. The anonymous authors of the Heikhalot literature (who lived in the first centuries CE after the destruction of the Second Temple and saw themselves as being granted heavenly revelation) identified with Akiva, who 'ascended to the *pardes*', as described in BT *Hagigah* 14a, and with Ishmael, the high priest who entered 'the Holy of Holies', as described in BT *Berakhot* 7a. These two traditions, which were based on Ezekiel's vision, demonstrate the eternalization of the heavenly Temple in contrast to the destruction of the earthly Temple and depict Akiva and Ishmael as Moses and Aaron, the symbols of prophecy and priesthood, in relation to the divine chariot, *merkavah*, and the angelic liturgy.⁸² These traditions became a foundation for the exaltation of the mystic in the Heikhalot literature, which eternalized in heaven that which had been destroyed on earth.

In addition to the mystic figures of the two *tana'im*, the authors of the Heikhalot literature also developed the many-faced figure of Enoch-Metatron, the mortal man who turned into an immortal angel, escaped from time into eternity, and was exalted into a figure who united the divine, angelic, and mythic with the human, priestly, and mystical. Upon completion of the apotheosis, Enoch-Metatron is given seventy names, among them 'Little Yahweh', 'For my name is within him', and 'Michael, high priest who sacrifices on the altar of heaven'. They portrayed him in the image of the hidden God and the high priest in the heavenly Temple.⁸³

⁸² On the mystical metamorphosis of the priesthood and the temple rites see Elior, 'From Earthly Temple'; *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifices*, ed. Newsom; Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*; Morray-Jones, 'Paradise Revisited'; id., *A Transparent Illusion*.

⁸³ See 3 *Enoch*, ed. Odeberg; Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 43–55; 3 *Enoch*, ed. Alexander; VanderKam, *Enoch, a Man for All Generations*; Nickelsburg, '1 Enoch'; Elior, 'You Have Chosen Enoch'; Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*; Orlov, *Enoch–Metatron Tradition*.

This apotheosis is tied to their self-conception as guardians of the mystical tradition of ascent to heaven and the priestly tradition of the open pathways between the earthly Temple and upper temples on Yom Kippur. While in antiquity mystical revelations are connected with a heavenly metamorphosis of priesthood, ritual, the Temple, the liturgy, and the angels, in the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern period they are strongly connected with exile and redemption and the multifaceted figures of the Shekhinah and the messiah. The Shekhinah represents the earthly and heavenly congregation of Israel on different levels—mystical and ritual, spiritual and textual—linked to the burden of exile and the hope of redemption.⁸⁴ The messiah represents the heavenly entity who promises redemption and eternal continuity.

In medieval mystical writings, a masculine–feminine archetypal conception stands out, based on the mythical–mystical identity of the cherubim in BT *Yoma* 54a–b and *Bereshit rabah* 21: 24.⁸⁵ This conception sees the divine realm as having both male and female aspects that are manifested in the following couples: the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Shekhinah; Glory and Kingdom; Messiah and the Shekhinah; Moses and the Torah; Bridegroom and Bride, *hashmal* and *hashmalah*: ‘This is its sign: “cherub, lions and palms according to the spacing of each, and wreaths encircling” (1 Kgs 7: 36). There is in this the secret of the cherubs: an allusion to . . . “male and female He created them” (Gen. 5: 2).’⁸⁶ ‘Know, my sons, that *Hashmal* and *Arafel* are two powers: “male and female He created them.” *Hashmal* is the great cherub; sometimes it is transformed into a male and sometimes into a female. Accordingly you will find in Ezekiel’s prophecy [both] *Hashmal* and *Hashmala*, which is the feminine.’⁸⁷

Many symbols, images, visions, and biblical and midrashic figures are connected with masculine (the redeemer) and feminine (the one who is in exile) elements. In the kabbalistic literature the mystic often sees himself linked to the male figure (the redeemer and legislator, representing the eternal continuity and stability from the past to the future) and to the female figure (the one who is in exile, representing changes and transformations, oppression and yearnings, who is being redeemed), thus containing within himself both aspects. Moses, the archetype of mystic ascension, associated with prophecy, law, divine covenant, and redemption, represents the male aspect of divinity. The Shekhinah represents the feminine aspect and is linked to the Torah, the congregation of Israel, the experience of exile, and the yearning for redemption, memories of the ‘daughter of Zion’ who is in exile according to the biblical tradition, and hopes for restitution and transformation, liberation and redemption.

⁸⁴ On the mystical metamorphosis connected to the Shekhinah and to redemption see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 9–23, 206–33; Scholem, ‘Shekhinah’; Ginsburg, *Sabbath*; Elior, ‘R. Joseph Karo’; Green, *Keter*; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*.

⁸⁵ *Bereshit rabah*, ed. Theodor-Albeck, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1912), i. 203.

⁸⁶ Verman, *Books of Contemplation*, 203; cf. 207, 208.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 208.

Moses, who came closer than any other mortal to the divine realm, serves as an archetype for many mystics throughout the ages. In their imagination the mystics follow his footsteps. Moses ascended to heaven and returned with the word of God. They too ascend to heaven, seeking the word of God and returning with new doctrines. According to the mystical tradition the following verses refer to Moses, who ascended to heaven from Mount Sinai (Exod. 19–25): ‘God’s chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai in holiness. You went up to the heights, having taken captives, having received tribute of men . . .’ (Ps. 68: 18–19).⁸⁸ These verses combine the revelation at Sinai, Ezekiel’s chariot, the ascent to heaven, and the return with gifts for men.⁸⁹ The author of the Zohar identifies with the messianic and mystical figure of Shimon bar Yohai, which was constructed in the image of Moses. The highest moments in the life of Moses and Shimon bar Yohai are associated with the holiday of Shavuot, the time of the Sinai revelation, according to the mystical tradition that was interested in re-enacting the covenant between heaven and earth. *Ra’aya mehemna*, from the medieval Zohar literature, refers to Moses, ‘the faithful shepherd’⁹⁰ and connects him with the new mystical messianic figure of Bar Yohai. Joseph Karo, at the beginning of the modern period, internalizes Moses, the legislator, redeemer, and carrier of the word of God. Karo interprets the verse ‘For I will speak to him face to face’ as referring to himself and ascribes to himself the revelation of the Shekhinah, the hearing of the divine voice, who beseeches him to settle in the Land of Israel, to redeem the Shekhinah, and to reinterpret the laws and the commandments while he is engaged in the comprehensive codification of Jewish law in *Beit yosef* and *Shulhan arukh*, thinking of himself as the new Moses.⁹¹ Moses Hayim Luzzatto, who makes the connection between Moses and his own name, and marries a woman named Zipporah out of identification with his biblical counterpart, internalizes the image of Karo’s *magid*, who requires that he compose a new Torah and redeem the Shekhinah from her exile. Luzzatto too says about himself in the name of his angelic mentor: ‘you [Luzzatto] have been a support for the Shekhinah in her exile. Now you will prepare for her a throne to redeem her from her bondage.’⁹²

Solomon Molcho identifies with the prophet Daniel and his visions of redemption when he unfolds his own messianic vision and the calculation of the designated messianic era in his book *Ḥayat hakaneh* (Creature of the Reeds). Luria and Luzzatto deeply identify with the mystic and messianic image of Shimon bar Yohai and, inspired by him, they write a new Zohar and continue to cultivate

⁸⁸ On the heavenly ascent alluded to in Ps. 68: 18 and the chariot tradition see Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 171–5 and 355.

⁸⁹ On the Sinai revelation and the chariot tradition see *ibid.* 262–89; Elijior, ‘Earthly Temple’, and *Three Temples*, 136–7, 143, 154–61.

⁹⁰ See Liebes, ‘Messiah of the Zohar’; Hellner-Eshed, *A River Issues Forth*.

⁹¹ See Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, and Werblowsky, *Karo*.

⁹² Bialik, ‘The Young Man of Padua’, 158; *Igerot ramhal*, 408–9.

hopes for redemption. The *magid*'s words to Luzzatto clearly reflect this link: 'And the enlightened shine as the splendour of heaven [*zohar harakia*]'—the two enlightened ones: the one, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, the holy light, and the other, you, the holy *hasid* (pious disciple). Each one in his own splendour [*zohar*]: this one, the beginning, and this one, the end.⁹³ The Besht internalizes both the image of Joseph Karo, who transcended boundaries and regarded his innovations as the outcome of a heavenly *magid*'s revelation (as suggested in his book *Magid meisharim*), and the charismatic figure of Isaac Luria, who attributed his doctrine to Elijah's revelation (as is suggested in the book *Shivhei ha'ari*). Like Karo, Luria, and Luzzatto, the Besht also sees himself as one who ascends to heaven and regards his doctrine as delivered to him in the upper worlds by the messiah during an 'ascent of the soul' and as given through the 'world of speech'.⁹⁴ Jacob Frank, who regards his words as based on a revelation of the Shekhinah (to whom he refers as 'Rachel'), identifies with the biblical figure of Jacob who struggled with God and men and bested them and with the figure of his brother Esau. He also identifies with Shabetai Tsevi and Barukhyah Russo, the Shabatean-mystical redeemers, and, indirectly, with Jesus and the Virgin Mary, all of whom break conventions.⁹⁵ The Seer of Lublin internalizes in detail two figures: that of Joseph Karo, who referred to the divine voice that he heard as 'a voice of my beloved beating in my mouth, a harp playing by itself', and that of Moses, the faithful shepherd who inspired his hasidic doctrine of the *tsadik*. The Seer uses Karo's language to describe the illumination granted to him as 'the voice of my beloved beating within my mouth' (in his book *Zot zikaron*), and also regards himself as 'the tabernacle of testimony', a spokesman who speaks words (of Torah) from Heaven, a religious renewer, a redeemer, and a faithful shepherd.⁹⁶ Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica, author of *Mei hashilo'ah* (Waters of Shiloah), in turn identifies with the Seer of Lublin.⁹⁷

Jewish mysticism shows not only how one mystic is influenced by an earlier mystic and shaped in his image, but how the vision of a previous mystic returns and is revived by a later one. The visionary reads and internalizes visions from the sacred literary text, inserts new imagery into the original visions, and thus transforms them into a living reality within himself. In addition, the mystical tradition

⁹³ *Igerot ramhal*, 409.

⁹⁴ On the mystical hasidic tradition that considered ecstatic states as the highest spiritual achievements and described them as 'the world of speech', 'the speech of the Shekhinah', and 'a violin singing by itself' see Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, chs. 8–9; Weiss, 'Via Passiva'; Elijior, 'Between *Yesh* and *Ayin*'; Idel, *Hasidism*. On the mystical ascent of Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, see above, n. 40.

⁹⁵ On Jacob Frank see Elijior, 'Jacob Frank's *Divrei ha'adon*'; Scholem, 'Redemption through Sin'. On the interiorization of Shimon bar Yohai, the messiah of the Zohar in Shabatean imagery, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*; Goldish, *Sabbatean Prophets*.

⁹⁶ On the mystical life of the Seer of Lublin see Elijior, 'Between *Yesh* and *Ayin*'.

⁹⁷ On Mordecai Joseph Leiner see Weiss, *Studies in East European Jewish Mysticism*, 209–48; Elijior, 'Changes in Religious Thought of Polish Hasidism'; Fairstein, *All is in the Hands of Heaven*.

demonstrates how a vision or a mythological concept, which functions in the sacred text as a multilayered symbol, a visionary reality, or a kabbalistic metaphor, becomes the object of a mystical experience of the author of another text. This tradition shows that the mystic draws from his historical, literary, and visionary predecessors in a manner that allows him to rely on voices from the heavenly school.⁹⁸ Reliance on the voices of Metatron, Shimon bar Yohai, the Shekhinah, Elijah, the redeeming angel, the responding angel, the *magid*, or the messiah and the other residents of the heavenly schools (*metivta direkia*) exempts the mystic from reliance on an earthly authority and from being evaluated according to accepted traditional norms. This reliance on ‘answers from heaven’ allows him to establish new concepts that are interwoven with heavenly revelation and divine authority.

During the course of ancient history extraordinary changes occurred in the meaning and focus of mystical expressions involving the *merkavah* (from Ezekiel’s vision of the chariot)—‘visions of *merkavah*’, and ‘the cherubs’ *merkavah*’, ‘descenders to the *merkavah*’, ‘pattern of the *merkavah*’, ‘gazing upon the *merkavah*’, ‘one should not expound the *merkavah*’, ‘one should not *lehaftir bamerkavah*’ (conclude the reading of the Shavuot Torah portion with Ezekiel’s chariot, i.e. Ezekiel 1 and 10)—as well as ‘entering into paradise’ and ascending to the ‘Throne of glory’. These changes attest to the complex transitions between ritual reality and written, experienced, visionary, and mystical reality. The full range of mystical terms that were renewed during the Middle Ages within mystical circles also demonstrates the personifications of God and the abstractions of divinity as ‘ten *sefirot* of infinite nothingness ending where they begin’, ‘splendorous brilliant light’, the ‘voice of the Shekhinah’ and the ‘speech of the Shekhinah’, ‘the world of speech’, ‘the revelation of the Shekhinah’, ‘redemption of the Shekhinah’, ‘kingdom’, ‘*kelipot*’ (the evil realm), ‘sevenfold cosmic cycles’ and ‘emanation’, ‘primordial man’, ‘big image’ and ‘small image’, ‘father’ and ‘mother’, ‘conception’ and ‘suckling’ in divinity, ‘the tree of souls’, ‘infinitude and spheres’, as well as ‘the sanctuary of the bird’s nest’ (*heikhal ken tsipor*), the heavenly residence of the messiah and the depth of the Shekhinah, the abyss or *nikbat tehom rabah*. All these concepts, which are revived by the kabbalists by using the sacred texts and reinterpreting them according to their own visions and understanding, together with the ongoing modification of the images of Moses, Enoch, Metatron, Shimon bar Yohai, Elijah, Ahijah, and many others, reflect the dialectical process of creating new concepts from remnants of ancient ones. This process sanctifies the traditional text, deconstructs and reconstructs it anew by inspiration, exaltation, and vision, internalization, and by the profound analysis of language and the unrestrained poetic mystical creative insight and impulse to write. In addition, these

⁹⁸ On heavenly voices as the new source of authority see Scholem, ‘Religious Authority and Mysticism’; Scholem, ‘“Divine Mentor” of Rabbi Yosef Taitazak’; Idel, ‘Inquiries into the Doctrine of *Sefer hameshiv*’.

concepts demonstrate the complex meaning of the revival and internalization of a living mystical tradition, released from the limitations of time and space, taking off on the wings of imagination.

In Jewish mysticism we witness a repetitive twofold mythical pattern—on the one hand the ascent to heaven and direct contact with the holy, and on the other the return with a new vision or with the previously unknown Torah, which has been revealed to the visionary in the upper worlds. Moses, who ‘went up’ and returned with the Ten Commandments, serves as a prototype. Among those who exemplify this pattern are the following: Akiva, who ascended to the upper world, entered the *pardes*, and returned with the Oral Torah and the Merkavah tradition; Enoch, who was taken to heaven and returned with the book of Enoch, the priestly tradition, and the solar calendar; and Shimon bar Yohai, who exalted himself by his asceticism in the cave through which he was granted a divine revelation and wrote the Zohar, a revelation that he shared with his followers, named in the zoharic tradition as ‘the workers of the field’.⁹⁹ Others are Solomon Molcho, who was awarded a visionary exaltation and as a result wrote *Hayat hakaneh*; Joseph Karo, who through his vision exalted himself to the upper worlds and heard the voice of the *magid* and as a result wrote his book *Magid meisharim* and parts of his halakhic works; and Moses Hayim Luzzatto, who was granted a revelation from a *magid* and as a result wrote *Adir bamarom* and his Zohar-related mystical works. Additional mystical figures act in accordance with this model; among them are Isaac Luria, Shabetai Tsevi, Israel Ba’al Shem Tov (the Besht), and the Seer of Lublin. Charisma, the direct contact with the divine that takes place in the mystic’s consciousness and is validated by his circle, may be interpreted in many ways and can be expressed in a variety of ways.¹⁰⁰ However, the new doctrines, implicit and explicit, and the new rituals are almost always sanctified and become obligatory. This type of consciousness, independent of external recognition, often exists in contrast to conventional legitimacy, established rabbinic authority, and accepted customs.

Often by dint of charisma the mystic modifies the tradition by which he has been nourished. Sometimes he does so in the name of the upper worlds. Extreme modifications and meaningful changes are demonstrated by the following examples: the names of the angels in the tradition of the priestly cult of the Judean desert, the struggle over the solar calendar and its modification in the mystical writings found at Qumran, and ‘beholding the *merkavah*’ according to the cult of the Judean desert.¹⁰¹ The relation between the earthly and the divine was viewed

⁹⁹ On the mystical meaning of ‘the workers of the field’ in the Zohar see Liebes, ‘How the Zohar was Written’, and ‘Messiah of the Zohar’.

¹⁰⁰ See Weber, *On Charisma and Theory of Social and Economic Organization*; Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*.

¹⁰¹ On legal and spiritual changes in Qumran derived from mystical inspiration see *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*, ed. Newsom, 59–73; Suessmann, ‘Research on the History of Halakhah’; Elijior, *Three Temples*.

from a new perspective, causing a profound debate on the ritual of divine service during the Second Temple period. This change was influenced by the Teacher of Righteousness (*moreh hatsedek*), ‘the priests of *korev*’, or ‘the people of the unification’ (*anshei hayaḥad*), priests who viewed themselves as united with the angels, and the ‘beholders of the *merkavah*’, who wrote the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (*shiroṭ olat hashabat*) before the Common Era and the hymn of the *merkavah* and *heikhalot* after the destruction of the Temple. The relation between the earthly and the heavenly was grasped from a new perspective owing to written testimony following heavenly revelations, which stirred a fierce debate on the services performed during the Second Temple period and on the nature of the sacred calendar that was the basis of the eternal cycles of rituals. The extreme changes that occurred in the concepts of God and angels in Heikhalot circles influenced prayer. The purpose of these changes was to perpetuate the Temple service in the common prayer of the Jewish people.¹⁰² Expressions of these changes in the medieval period can be found in: (i) modification of the reasons for the divine commandments (*ta’amei hamitsvot*) in the kabbalistic tradition, the spread of the *sefirot* doctrine, and the rise of the status of the Shekhinah, following the increased popularity of the Zohar, and (ii) the modification of the practice of ritual slaughter and the concepts of *yibum* and *ḥalitsah*¹⁰³ in kabbalistic and hasidic circles in accordance with the doctrine of reincarnation that was popular in the kabbalistic tradition.¹⁰⁴

In a similar way the vigil of Shavuot (*tikun leil shavuot*), midnight vigil (*tikun ḥatsot*), *kabalat shabat* (welcoming the sabbath), and *melaveh malkah* (literally ‘accompanying the queen’, a ceremonial conclusion of the sabbath) in Safed kabbalah are novelties that were introduced following a new conception that was mystically inspired. This conception equated God with the Shekhinah, Moses with the Torah, and the mystic with both the earthly and the heavenly congregation of Israel. The mystic who is engaged in Torah study unites with the Shekhinah and redeems the heavenly congregation of Israel. The terms ‘devotion’, ‘prayer’, ‘vigil’, ‘*tikun*’ (rectificatory prayer), ‘mystical meditation’, and ‘unification’, commonly used in kabbalistic language, are concerned with combining within the mystic the two redemptive mystical aspects of the deity—the redeeming male and

¹⁰² See Elior, ‘From Earthly Temple’.

¹⁰³ *Yibum* is levirate marriage, the practice of a childless widow being married to her late husband’s brother in order to perpetuate his memory by giving birth to a child; if the widow (or the brother) do not wish to do this, the brother must perform the *ḥalitsah* ceremony, in which the widow unties his shoe and spits as a ritual expression of disdain for his neglect of his duty to his dead brother. The origin is biblical: Deut. 25: 7–10.

¹⁰⁴ On substantial changes introduced in the mystical tradition as a result of mystical revelations see Scholem, ‘Tradition and New Creation’; Tishby (ed.), *Wisdom of the Zohar* (on the new meaning of the commandments); Gottlieb, *Studies in Kabbalah Literature, vikuah hagilgul* (on the transmigration of souls); Ginsburg, *Sabbath*; Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*; Wirschowsky, ‘Shabatean Ideology of the Messiah’s Conversion’; Liebes, *Secret of Shabatean Faith*; Wirschowsky, ‘Shabatean Theology of Nathan of Gaza’; Elior, ‘R. Nathan Adler’.

the redeemed female. Innovations introduced by dint of the mystical tradition include modification in dress and in the mode in which the tefillin are tied, following the customs of the Ari; the cancellation of the Tishah Be'av fast (mourning the destruction of the First and Second Temples) within Shabatean circles, following the assumption that the Shekhinah has been resurrected; annulment of the thirty-six transgressions punishable by excommunication or death (*karet*) in Shabatean circles, on the premiss that the messianic age has arrived, and with it also the promise 'that a new law will proceed', meaning that laws that prohibit and permit are inverted. The modifications of liturgical patterns and leadership within hasidism, and the modifications of the meanings of the prohibition of incest in Shabateanism and Frankism, which had extreme social and religious ramifications, stem from the clash between mystical authority and the establishment.

The mystic is made capable of this kind of change through inspiration from the hidden world structure revealed to him, by the autonomous power of determination which he adopts through his direct contact with upper worlds, or by the sense of transcending boundaries that characterizes mystical inspiration and prophetic revelation. Indeed, an anarchic, antinomian, revolutionary potential is embedded in the mystical tradition, which strives to attain the hidden worlds and ascribes only relative importance to the revealed world. The mystic expresses an anarchic position regarding reality and an antagonistic attitude that subverts the absolute validity of sanctified establishments. This type of mystic believes that the world is close to its end and that its institutions are worthless in comparison with the new world that is to come. The anarchic position towards reality is expressed in various ways: 'everything is divinity' or 'the world is nothing but a grain of mustard' (as the Besht said in the *Tsava'at harivash*), or 'all the worlds are an absolute lie' (as Shneur Zalman of Lyady said in *Torah or*). Those supporters of the messianic mystical position fought over the truth of their conception and its advantages, and demonstrated in the course of history the anarchic subversive quality arising from their vision. The most extreme antinomian examples and anarchic positions are to be found in the words of the eighteenth-century Shabatean teacher Jacob Frank in his autobiography 'The Words of the Lord' (*Divrei ha'adon*): 'I came to destroy all laws' (§890); 'You should [he is addressing his followers] step and trample on all the commandments, the laws, and the religious customs' (§724). In compensation for this blunt antinomianism he says 'I promise you eternal life' (§408).¹⁰⁵ The messianic hopes for a new world and a new era are the background for the above contentions, which reflect the misery of living in exile and alienation from the entire symbolic order and traditional norms. The communities' reactions—polemics and opposition, persecutions and excommunications, book burning and denunciations to the authorities—often attest to the ways in which the mystic potential was sometimes interpreted by the religious establishment. The mystic

¹⁰⁵ See Scholem, 'Redemption through Sin'; Elior, 'Jacob Frank's *Divrei ha'adon*'.

threatens the social order, both actually and symbolically, and often creates a desire to impose supervision on him, limit his authority, and restrict his influence. The history of Jewish mysticism is marked by a continual confrontation of mystics (beholders of mysteries, visionaries, prophets, and innovators inspired by divine revelation) with the guardians of convention and tradition (the rabbinic leadership or other members of the religious establishment). The persecutions and excommunications of some of the most outstanding teachers and creators of Jewish mysticism demonstrate the explosive and anarchic potential embedded in mystical thought.¹⁰⁶

Drawing their inspiration for exceptional innovation from upper worlds and direct contact with supernatural entities, many of these dreamers, prophets, and mystics demonstrate by their often tragic lives the destiny of those who actualized the yearning to observe the forbidden and reveal that which should be left unseen. They ruptured the norms of their time and place and, consciously or unconsciously, threatened the social order and the foundations of the symbolic order, for which they paid a heavy price more than once. The Teacher of Righteousness was persecuted mercilessly in the second century BCE.¹⁰⁷ The *tana* Shimon ben Azai 'glimpsed [into the forbidden realm] and died'. His friend Ben Zoma 'glimpsed and was injured' (became insane). Elisha ben Avuyah, known as Aher ('the Other'), denied the uniqueness of God as a result of a mystical experience and was excommunicated after he perceived two powers in heaven.¹⁰⁸ Akiva and Ishmael were martyred in sanctification of the divine name.¹⁰⁹ Enoch-Metatron was punished with *pulsa de nura* (smitten with fire).¹¹⁰ All the biographies, historical, literary, or legendary, of these figures (from the second century BCE to the second century CE) attest to the price paid for crossing boundaries and being an outsider. The bitter fates of Jesus and Paul probably belong to this category as well. The anonymity of many writers of the mystical tradition in various centuries probably signifies the sense of danger and threat that those who had these experiences encountered.

The lives of many figures from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries illustrate the meaning of breaking down normative conventions and the personal and public price paid for it. The author of the *Sefer habahir* chose anonymity in the twelfth century.¹¹¹ Abraham Abulafia was excommunicated in the thirteenth century.¹¹² The author of *Ra'aya mehemna* (fourteenth century) chose anonym-

¹⁰⁶ On the history of the persecuted mystics and the excommunicated writers in the Jewish mystical tradition see the Appendix, especially the articles about Solomon Molcho; Abraham Abulafia; Nathan Adler; Moses Hayim Luzzatto; Jacob Frank; Shneur Zalman of Lyady; Jacob Isaac Halevi Horowitz, the Seer of Lublin; Menahem Mendel Morgenstern of Kotsk; and Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica.

¹⁰⁷ See Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 49–67.

¹⁰⁸ See Urbach, 'Traditions'; Liebes, *Sin of Elisha*.

¹⁰⁹ BT *Ber. 5b* for the Day of Atonement, lamentation 'Eleh ezkerah'.

¹¹⁰ BT *Hag. 14b–15a*.

¹¹¹ See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*.

¹¹² See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 126–55; Idel, *Mystical Experience*.

ity,¹¹³ and the author of *Sefer hameshiv* (fifteenth century) hid under the cover of angelic pseudographa.¹¹⁴ Asher Lemlein, who prophesied on redemption, was persecuted in the fifteenth century.¹¹⁵ Solomon Molcho was burnt at the stake in Mantua in 1532, after being informed on by his Jewish opponents, who were worried about the consequences of his messianic propaganda in the Christian world and their effect on the Italian Jewish community living there.¹¹⁶ The author of *Galya raza* hid under cover of anonymity because of opponents and scoffers during the middle of the sixteenth century.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Joseph della Reina was punished by Satan or by God for his efforts to hasten redemption,¹¹⁸ and Luria died at an early age as punishment because he revealed secrets, according to the kabbalistic tradition of his disciples.¹¹⁹ The fates of Shabetai Tsevi, Nathan of Gaza, and Luzzatto also testify to the price paid by mystics who experience in their consciousness direct contact with the upper worlds, are granted celestial visions, break through the boundaries of accepted norms, and threaten the existing order. Shabetai Tsevi was a manic-depressive and spent the last part of his life in prison. Nathan of Gaza suffered from epilepsy.¹²⁰ Both were persecuted, incarcerated, and excommunicated in the seventeenth century.¹²¹ Similarly, Luzzatto was excommunicated and persecuted throughout Europe and in the 1730s was forced to be present while his books were burned in front of him.¹²² There are legendary traditions related to the Besht suggesting that he was persecuted and also that he suffered from 'weakness of the brain' (first half of the eighteenth century).¹²³ Jacob Frank, who saw himself as the follower of Shabetai Tsevi and Barukhyah Russo, was persecuted and incarcerated in the second half of the century, and eventually converted to Islam and then to Christianity as a way to find refuge from the persecution of the Jewish community.¹²⁴ During the course of the controversy between the hasidim and their opponents at the end of the eighteenth century, which in a sense was a dispute between mystical innovators and the leaders of the rabbinical establishment, Shneur Zalman of Lyady was incarcerated as a result of being denounced by his opponents in Russia,¹²⁵ and Nathan Adler from Frankfurt was excommunicated and persecuted in Germany.¹²⁶ At the turn of the nineteenth century, in the course of the internal hasidic disputes over the

¹¹³ Giller, *Enlightened Will Shine*.

¹¹⁵ See Kopfer, 'Visions of Asher'.

¹¹⁷ See *Galya raza*, ed. Elijior.

¹¹⁹ See Liebes, "Two Young Roes".

¹²⁰ On him see Wirschowsky, 'Shabatean Theology of Nathan of Gaza'.

¹²¹ See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*.

¹²³ See Dov Ber of Linitz, Eng. trans. by Ben-Amos and Mintz, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*; Dubnow, *History of Hasidism*.

¹²⁴ See Elijior, 'Jacob Frank's *Divrei ha'adon*'; Kraushar, *Jacob Frank*; Balaban, *History of the Frankist Movement*.

¹²⁵ Mondshine, *Kerem Habad*; Hilman, *My Master's House*; Wilensky, *Hasidim and Mitnagdim*.

¹²⁶ Elijior, 'R. Nathan Adler'.

¹¹⁴ See Scholem, "Divine Mentor".

¹¹⁶ See Aescoly, *Messianic Movements*.

¹¹⁸ See Dan, 'Story of Joseph della Reina'.

¹²² See Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy*.

succession of leadership and over conflicting mystical and social ideological positions, Moses, the son of Shneur Zalman of Lyady, converted to Christianity,¹²⁷ as did Wolf, the son of Jonathan Eibenschutz, who was a Shabatean kabbalist, persecuted in the eighteenth century.¹²⁸ Nahman of Bratslav was persecuted and became ill,¹²⁹ the Seer of Lublin suffered ‘a fall’,¹³⁰ Menahem Mendel of Kotsk went out of his mind and isolated himself from his followers,¹³¹ and Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica, the author of *Mei hashilo’ah*, was silenced, persecuted, and excommunicated and his book was burnt upon its publication in Vienna in 1860.¹³² In the early part of the twentieth century R. Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, who was a renowned mystic and a rabbinic authority, was severely persecuted by the religious establishment in Jerusalem,¹³³ and the followers of the messianic leader Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, were excommunicated and persecuted by fellow Jews in the USA, who resented his halakhic tolerance and visionary broadmindedness, which informed each other.¹³⁴

This shows the price of the confrontation between those who defended the norms and those who challenged them. It also demonstrates that what one person regards as the holy spirit or divine inspiration another may regard as madness that endangers the community.¹³⁵ The historical and social contexts of the mystical corpus and its creators’ fates reveal new considerations that have not always been taken into account. It should be pointed out that the evaluations of many of the aforementioned cases have been reversed during the course of history.¹³⁶ Many of those visionaries and innovators who were excommunicated while alive were regarded as respected kabbalists, founders of intellectual movements and leading spiritual innovators after their death. Sometimes their followers tried to defend them by publishing their works and by bringing to light their true intentions. Sometimes other independent spirits, such as writers and poets who identified

¹²⁷ Elijior, ‘The Controversy over Habad’s Legacy’. ¹²⁸ See Liebes, *Secret of Shabatean Faith*.

¹²⁹ See Green, *Tormented Master*.

¹³⁰ On his biography see Elijior, ‘Changes in Religious Thought’.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² See Fairstein, *All is in the Hands of Heaven*.

¹³³ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Messianic Idea*.

¹³⁴ Berger, *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*.

¹³⁵ On mysticism and madness see James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*; Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 64–101; Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*; Mark, *Mysticism and Madness*.

¹³⁶ On later changes in attitude towards the excommunicated mystics see Bialik, ‘Young Man of Padua’ (on Luzzatto); J. Katz, *Halakhah and Kabbalah*, 356–61 (on Adler); Elijior, ‘R. Nathan Adler’; Aescoly, *Messianic Movements*; Molcho, *Hazon shelomoh molkho hayat hakaneh*, ed. Aescoly; Idel, ‘Solomon Molcho as a Magician’; Scholem, ‘Redemption through Sin’; Kraushar, *Jacob Frank*; Balaban, *History of the Frankist Movement*; Elijior, ‘Jacob Frank’s *Divrei ha’adon*’; Scholem, *Studies in Shabateanism* (on Frank); Wilensky, *Hasidim and Mitnagdim* (on Levi Isaac of Berditchev and Shneur Zalman of Lyady); Elijior, *Paradoxical Ascent*; Hilman, *My Master’s House* (on Shneur Zalman of Lyady); Weiss, ‘Question in Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav’s Doctrine’; Green, *Tormented Master* (on Nahman of Bratslav); Elijior, ‘Changes in Religious Thought of Polish Hasidism’; Brill, *Thinking God: Mysticism of Rabbi Zadok of Lublin* (on Leiner); Elijior, ‘Controversy over Habad’s Legacy’ (on Moses, the son of Shneur Zalman); Emden, *Megilat sefer* (on Eibenschutz); Liebes, *Secrets of Shabatean Faith*.

with those who were persecuted, came to their rescue. Sometimes the people's opinion brought about the change, and sometimes further investigation changed the public perception of those who had formerly been excommunicated. Those actions and changes did not reduce the suffering of those who were persecuted, but the lesson to draw from this historical injustice is that changes in the public arena can be very slow. While public reaction is swift and rigid in opposing any attempt to undermine conventional norms, to threaten or break down boundaries, it is very slow to adjust to novelties and accept extraordinary spirituality. Historical distance allows one to re-examine from a different perspective the positions of both the 'innovators', who relied on heavenly revelation and the holy spirit's illumination, and the 'guardians of the city', who tried to support earthly existence and maintain the social order and the boundaries of tradition. All this demonstrates the relativity of 'absolute truths' in changing historical, social, and cultural circumstances.

At the base of cultural and religious conceptualization and the foundation of reality are several sharp distinctions between heavenly and earthly, divine and human, hidden and revealed, internal and external, life and death, temporal and eternal, present, past, and future, as well as the unequivocal distinctions between permitted and forbidden, the religious duty of observing the divine commandments (*mitsvot*) and transgression. The abrogation of these dichotomies or their shift from absolute to relative, along with the blurring of other distinctions and the adoption of the principle of metamorphosis, may shatter the foundations of reality and break down its accepted boundaries. Drawing distinctions by means of laws, norms, regulations, conventions, religion, and language shapes important aspects of human life and, to a great extent, defines its destiny. The blurring of dichotomies, the shattering of accepted categories, and the establishment of passages (whether clear or obscure) among the different domains are forbidden for earthly creatures and are the privilege solely of the inhabitants of heaven. Sometimes, however, the narrators of myths, people blessed with creative imagination, liberators, innovators, and freedom lovers, those gifted with exceptional spirituality, people with profound human understanding and great social sensitivity, prophets and mystics, thinkers, visionaries and dreamers, poets and preachers, free themselves from established dichotomies and deviate from traditional laws, rules, and norms in order to participate in changes and metamorphoses, in mystical meditations, combinations, and reincarnations, and the fluctuations of 'fixed distinctions'.

The mystical tradition demonstrates the extraordinary ramifications of the ability to redefine the reasoning behind religious acts and to reposition the boundaries of the traditional world in the light of a changing mystical reality. The mystic tries to free himself from cultural and social conventions. He outlines the relation between actual historical reality and mystical reality (the hidden structure of the world). Sometimes the mystic feels free to interpret the relation between

past divine revelation and its modified meaning in the present and to decide independently what the implied will of God is and how to respond to it.¹³⁷

In some schools of mystical thought there is a discrepancy between God's will as it had been revealed in the past and His will as revealed to the mystic. In the past, God's will was embedded in a single historical revelation and reflected in the plain meaning of a sacred canonical text and in commands that required obedience and fear. God's hidden will, disclosed to the mystic as part of an ongoing process of revelation, is not based on a written text but on a new divine voice heard in the spirit of the mystic. It requires a new response of love, the shattering of boundaries, and the creation of a new text. Through his connections with both the sacred text and the new revelations he experiences, the mystic eliminates the dimension of time in the relation between God and man and establishes ongoing direct contact with God. This position is best attested in Mordecai Joseph Leiner's *Mei hashilo'ah*, burnt immediately upon its publication in Vienna in 1860.

The mystic also establishes new ties between the present and the future—an outcome of the distinction between different cycles of time and the consequent modification of eternal commands according to time and circumstance. Examples can be found in the distinctions between the following pairs: the plain meaning of the text as known in the present and its secret meanings that will be revealed in the future; the 'doctrine of the Tree of Knowledge' as known in the present and the 'doctrine of the Tree of Life', which will be valid in the future; the 'Torah of Creation' and the 'Torah of Emanation' (presented in *Ra'aya mehemna*); the Torah that was revealed in Ancient Days in the 'Age of Judgement', and the Torah that will be revealed in the End of Days in the 'Age of Mercy' (as discussed in the 'Shemita' Treatise' in *Sefer hatemunah*); the 'World of Disruption' (*shevirah*, Breaking of Vessels) and the 'World of Reformation' (*tikun*, Restitution of the Broken Vessels, described in Lurianic kabbalah); 'shade' (seemingly literal truth as perceived by human beings) and 'depth' (a complex divine perspective of reality) (discussed by Leiner in *Mei hashilo'ah*); and 'the worship in fear' and 'the worship in love' (related to traditional worship and mystical worship), which are part of the doctrine of the Seer of Lublin. All these distinctions belong to categories that refer to the 'relative eternity' of the tradition, the assumed unequivocal meaning of the Torah and its actual multiplicity of meaning, and the many changes that take place in the meaning of the divine word, which is recognized as thus reinterpreted by mystics and masters of secrets in different periods.

A few examples of new categories created by the mystics can be found in antiquity in the distinction between an enslaved existence and a redeemed existence in connection with the war between 'the children of light and the children of darkness'. A new religious and social meaning was given to existence as a whole by

¹³⁷ On new categories comparing indirect revelation in the past and an ongoing direct revelation in the present see Elior, 'Changes in Religious Thought'; Faierstein, *All is in the Hands of Heaven*.

the Teacher of Righteousness, who aspired to the End of Days and to the return of the rightful priests to power—those priests who will reinstate in the Jerusalem Temple the sacred solar calendar of 364 days that was replaced wrongly with a lunar calendar of the usurping priesthood of the Hasmonean period. Time and space acquired new meanings in the world of the descenders to the *merkavah*. A new conception of God connected to ‘God’s stature’ (*shiur komah*) was established and in the angelic world a new ladder of ascent was created to bridge the hidden and the revealed, the prayer of angels and that of humans, which are described in the Heikhalot literature. During the Middle Ages the doctrines of the *sefirot* and reincarnation and the concepts of the Shekhinah and the tree of souls were developed in *Sefer habahir* and the mythological world of the Zohar.

The Zohar describes the domains of the holy and the evil as worlds embodied respectively in two couples, God and the Shekhinah, Satan and Lilith. The female aspects of divinity known as the Shekhinah or Kingdom symbolize the feminine exiled part of the Godhead, and her evil counterpart, Lilith, symbolizes the feminine destructive power of the other side. The gazelle (or the queen) symbolizes the Shekhinah, and the *kelipah* (husk) symbolizes Lilith. The king (or the lover) symbolizes the holy male powers, and the snake and the crocodile symbolize the evil male powers. The relations between these powers are dialectical, with the world of holiness ‘hanging down and emanating from the crocodiles’ fins’. In addition, the book *Ra’aya mehemna* describes the differences between the ‘Torah of redemption’, Torah that will be revealed in the future, as against the present ‘Torah of exile’. This is also the time when kabbalists create the world of spheres as a new foundation for the religious world and the worship of God, as suggested by the author of *Mare’ot hatsove’ot* (The Reflecting Mirrors), David ben Judah Hehasid, and the fourteenth-century kabbalist Menahem of Recanati, the author of a commentary on the Torah. Both the fallow year treatise in *Sefer hatemunah*, which describes alternative worlds that operate according to a different temporal system, and God’s direct speech in *Sefer hameshiv*, which draws an alternative image of God, belong to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

In the sixteenth century, in the books *Sefer hayat hakaneh* and *Sefer hamefo’ar* Solomon Molcho reinterprets the reasons for the commandments and the kabbalistic metaphysical requirement hidden within them in the light of an ascetic perception of the human being and a mythical conception of the messianic vision. Joseph Karo, in *Magid meisharim*, redefines asceticism and ecstasy, the death of the body and the birth of the spirit, as the basis for mystical worship—following Molcho’s death at the stake and the revelation of the Shekhinah he was granted. Solomon Alkabets creates new rituals for the redemption of the Shekhinah and the hastening of the arrival of the messiah.¹³⁸ Solomon Turiel has visions of the End of Days. The author of *Galya raza* describes the struggle between holiness

¹³⁸ See Kimelman, *Lekha Dodi; Safed Spirituality*, trans. Fine.

and impurity and the secrets of reincarnation as the key to decoding the dates of the exile and redemption.¹³⁹ Moses Cordovero, the author of *Pardes rimonim*, presents a systematic mystical world based on the Zohar's philosophy and Lurianic kabbalah, distinguishing among contraction, destruction, and restoration as fundamental categories of the conceptions of God's creation and divine worship.¹⁴⁰ These mystics, who see themselves as the redeemers of divinity, and the divinity as the redeemed Shekhinah, and regard themselves as the decipherers of the Torah's secrets who have influence in the upper worlds, create and establish new categories for the relations between God and humans. They reshape the mutual relations between the revealed and the concealed, and redefine the active role of the human being in the process of Jewish history and its development from exile to redemption.

Proceeding to the modern era, in the seventeenth century Shabetai Tsevi and Nathan of Gaza define the boundaries of the permitted and the forbidden. They believe that the messianic era has commenced and the time has come for a new Torah, superseding the old one.¹⁴¹ After them, in the first half of the eighteenth century, Luzzatto is granted supreme revelations, writes a new Zohar, hears within himself 'an angel who reveals wonderful secrets to him', and arranges his marriage to the Shekhinah, and because he believes that the End of Days is close, he nourishes messianic hopes.¹⁴² At about the same time, the Besht argues that 'everything is divinity', and that everyone is expected to worship God in every way, because 'God wants to be worshipped in all possible ways'.¹⁴³ Also at this time Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezhibezh, formulates the principles of hasidism based on the assumption that 'one should release oneself from any materiality to the extent that it will allow one to ascend through all the worlds and be united with the Holy One, blessed be He, and only when one is released from reality will he be called a human being'.¹⁴⁴ Jacob Frank, during the second half of the eighteenth century, preaches nihilism and destruction in *Divrei ha'adon* (The Words of the Lord) in the name of an anarchic messianic vision, following a blend of wrathful prophecies in the style of the Zohar and Shabatean antinomian traditions. He illustrates the argument that the mystic may highlight as meaningless not only the conventions of his time, but also the established classifications commonly used in the Jewish social-religious tradition and in the surrounding Christian culture.¹⁴⁵

At the end of the eighteenth century, Jacob Horowitz, the Seer of Lublin, demonstrates the norm and the way to break through it with respect to the con-

¹³⁹ See Elior, 'Doctrine of Transmigration'.

¹⁴⁰ On Cordovero see Ben-Shelomoh, *Theology of Moses Cordovero*; Zak, *In the Gates*.

¹⁴¹ See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*; Goldish, *Sabbatean Prophets*.

¹⁴² See Tishby, 'The Messianic Agitation'.

¹⁴³ See Rosman, *Founder*; *Die Geschichten vom Ba'al Schem Tov*, ed. and trans. Grözinger.

¹⁴⁴ *Magid devarav leya'akov*, ed. Schatz-Uffenheimer, 38–9.

¹⁴⁵ See *Hakeronikah*, ed. Levin; Elior, 'Jacob Frank's *Divrei ha'adon*'; Balaban, *History of the Frankist Movement*; Scholem, 'Redemption through Sin'.

cepts of 'fear' and 'love'. He argues in favour of 'a religious act achieved through transgression' and of 'a transgression done for the sake of God's name'. He formulates the doctrine of the *tsadik* with regard to spiritual and physical matters, and offers new categories for an autonomous social leadership.¹⁴⁶ In the nineteenth century in Nahman of Bratslav's teaching, found among the hasidic writings in Bratslav, there is the term *kushya* (a question), which requires doubting conventional conceptualization and known reality.¹⁴⁷ In the hasidic writings of Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica one can find the terms 'depth' and 'shade', 'scepticism' and 'tranquillity', which distinguish between the hidden and the revealed, require a critical sceptical stance towards the tradition, and establish new categories of freedom and autonomy.¹⁴⁸

The mystic is free to determine God's will in his time as well as the appropriate response to it. He is free to determine his relationship to the divine will embedded in the commonly accepted norms and based on divine revelation in the past. He reinterprets the sacred texts in the light of his own vision and outlines how actual reality relates to the desired mystical reality. A clear example of a person who sees himself as a vessel serving God is provided by the Seer of Lublin. He reminds himself in his diary that what gives him the autonomy to make independent decisions and enables him to mould new religious patterns—the extraordinary spirituality granted to him—was not given to him for his own sake but for the community's: 'It should be permanently in your heart that you reached this point not because of your righteousness but because of the kindness of God, who helps those whose aim is to purify.'¹⁴⁹ In addition, the Seer tells himself in circular reasoning that he should speak only under ecstatic inspiration, endowed from heaven when he imagines himself speaking to the holy creatures in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 10):

[The phrase] 'The speaking burning holy living creatures' means that one should not speak unless by the vitality of the Torah and the ecstasy of the love of the Creator, blessed be He, and the fear of Him, which is called the flame of God which is love and fear from God which generate human vitality from above, meaning that one should not speak until reaching the great vitality and ecstasy endowed by God that is the creatures uttering fire fiercely.¹⁵⁰

The Seer feels free to define himself as the tabernacle for the essence of divinity, a status he was granted (according to him) to help all of Israel in physical and spiritual matters: '[The phrase] "the tabernacle of testimony" means also that

¹⁴⁶ On the theory of the *tsadik* in general see Green, 'Typologies of Leadership and the Hasidic Zaddiq'; Green, 'Zadik as Axis Mundi'; Rapoport-Albert, 'God and the Zaddik'; on the theory of the *tsadik* in the writings of the Seer of Lublin and his mystical perception see Elijior, 'Between *Yesh* and *Ayin*'.

¹⁴⁷ See Weiss, *Studies in East European Jewish Mysticism*.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.; Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*; Faierstein, *All is in the Hands of Heaven*; Elijior, 'Changes in Religious Thought'.

¹⁴⁹ *Zot zikaron*, 25–6.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 18.

[God] dwells in us in order to perform miracles and wonders for the sake of Israel and this is testimony to the inspiration of the Shekhinah within us that responds to all of our calls.¹⁵¹ His contemporary Solomon of Lutsk, a student of the Maggid of Mezhirech and an eminent publisher of hasidic books in Korets, regards the *tsadik* as a medium for divine revelation in the present, or as the expression of God's will revealed in the world through a human being:

He is called a *tsadik* because through him the abundance of the divine blessing and His vitality are drawn. And He contracts His glory, blessed be He, in this world and lets His divinity in this world be known . . . Through Him the existence in the whole world of the Creator, blessed be He, will be revealed . . . The rule that follows is that the *tsadik* has to know and to let all of this be known, which means that the Holy One, blessed be He, creates and maintains everything to make His lordship and authority known and His name will be blessed in the universe.¹⁵²

In the name of this new understanding regarding the relations between God and man, the Seer of Lublin redefines the limits of his religious duty as the leader responsible for the redemption of Israel:

For the *tsadik* has to be careful about two things: one, that his soul is always pure and free of any sin . . . in order to be prepared for the inspiration of the holiness of God, blessed be He, on him and within him; and in addition, he has to take actions to fulfil God's will, to ensure that His holiness is magnified, blessed be He, in the universe and to act for the redemption of Israel and [for] miracles and wonders.¹⁵³

After reading these works of mystical literature, it often seems that the mystic's experiences precede those of the general public. The reason is that the mystic is anxious to be 'prepared for the inspiration of the holiness of God, blessed be He, on him and within him', and yearns to explore the limits of his psyche and establish the truthfulness of its unique faculties. Mystical experience is the seedbed of the recognition of many voices in the human spirit, the discovery of opposites, multiplicities, and different identities within one psyche at one and the same time. It also underlies the awareness of the capability of consciousness and creative imagination to break through the boundaries of conventional limitations of time and space. Mystical experience, which involves inspiration or idiosyncratic observation and imaginative interpretation, is the origin of the recognition of the profound linkage between the human psyche and the secrets of the divine being and of the complex relations between the inner dimensions of man and outer reality. The awareness of the relativity of concepts to place and time, the changing conceptions of God and man, the place of dreams and thoughts in an associative sequence, the freedom to create, and the absence of an unequivocal authority can also be traced to mystical experience. The same is true for the acknowledgement of the decisive importance of scepticism and questioning, the importance of per-

¹⁵¹ *Zot zikaron*, 73.¹⁵² *Divrat shelomoh*, 'Mikets', 33.¹⁵³ *Zot zikaron*, 73.

sonal criticism of accepted authority, the significance of autonomous decision-making, and the freedom of the imagination to create alternative worlds and idiosyncratic language. It is the mystical literature that accepts, for the first time, a relativistic reading of traditional obligations, the autonomous spirit granted to unique individuals, the relativity of reality, and the possibility of alternative worlds, and even a different concept of man. Within the framework of the traditional world, it was mystical thought that accepted irrational expressions, extraordinary experiences, transcendence of conventional borders, and subversive ideas.