

F O U R

*Mystical Language and
Magical Language*

*‘Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels . . .
and though I have the gift of prophecy and
understand all mysteries . . .’*

Rabbi Israel Ba’al Shem Tov, may he rest in peace, taught: An opening for light shalt thou make for the ark, for in each and every letter there are worlds and souls and divinity.

Tsava’at harivash (The Testament of the Besht), §75

Bezalel was able to combine letters through which heaven and earth were created.

BT *Berakhot* 55a

The Names are like keys to each and every thing that a human being needs for any matter or issue in the world.

GIKATILLA, *Sha’arei orah*

He is His Name and His Name is Him. He is in Him and His Name is in His Name. Song is His Name and His Name is song.

Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur, §588

IN MYSTICAL THOUGHT the basic assumption for understanding reality is that the upper and lower worlds are joined and related. The hidden world is implied in the revealed world and is seen in its unity despite its various contrasts, whereas the revealed world reflects in its variety the hidden world and draws its life and essence from it. Everything is included in everything else, and every aspect has depths of reflections and endless reciprocal interrelations.

This reciprocity is based on language, which according to the mystical point of view has a divine source whose existence is multifaceted.¹ Speech is the unfolding of the divine being in language, and reality, as we know it, is simply the unfolding and revelation of the divine word. Divine language is thus a revelation in perceptible concepts of the infinite power of God within creation, understood by

¹ On the mystical language see Bialik, ‘Language Closing and Disclosing’; Scholem, ‘Meaning of the Torah’; Scholem, ‘Name of God’; S. Katz, ‘Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism’; Dan, *On Holiness*.

mystical doctrine as an infinite stream of letters or as a chain of letters and divine names whose links are connected from the highest level of the unknown being down to its revealed end.² The letters are thus understood as a 'ladder placed on earth whose top touches heaven'. Creative power is embodied in the letters of the sacred divine language, which constitute the building blocks of being and join one another in the process of creation. Each letter is a doorway to one of the upper worlds, which are successively connected in revelation and concealment to all the other worlds.

According to Jewish mysticism, language develops in two opposite directions: (i) it constructs (or synthesizes) from the abstract to the concrete in the creation of the material world, and (ii) it deconstructs (or analyses) from the concrete to the abstract in the process of stripping away the material world. It is thus a two-way bridge that embraces all opposites and connects God and man, the hidden and the revealed, the infinite and the finite, the past and the present. Cleaving to the letters provides an opportunity for the enclosure of the upper worlds and for the human spirit to adhere to them.

The early mystical work *Sefer yetsirah* discusses the divine meaning of letters and numbers, which form a bridge between the Creator and the created and are understood as the basis and secret of being. This work begins with a statement that points out the essential role of the letters in the creation process in both its concealed and revealed stages:

In thirty-two wondrous paths of wisdom engraved YH the Lord of Hosts, God of Israel, the Living God, El Shadai, high and exalted, dwelling all the way to the heights, whose name is holy, and he created his world through three books (*sefarim*) of *s-f-r*: through *sefer* (book) and *sefor* (number; or *sefar*, counting) and *sipur* (story). Ten *sefirot* of infinite nothingness and twenty-two elemental letters.³

The mystical tradition, early and late, sought to express both the infinite divine revelation embedded in the Holy Scriptures and the power of the perpetual presence of God. The tradition combined the twenty-two letters of the holy language into the ten spheres (*sefirot*). These were interpreted in their unity as *sefer* (the Torah), the eternal divine language composed of written letters, *sipur* (the story or the history of the creation of the world, of language, and of men by God according to the biblical tradition composed of written letters as elements of eternal being), *sapir* (the translucent reflection of the divine—the reference is to the word *sapir*, usually translated 'sapphire', which appears in two places in connection with a vision of the

² On names and letters in the mystical tradition see *Sefer yetsirah* 1: 1; Talmage, 'Apples of Gold'; Fine, 'The Contemplative Practice of Yihudim in Lurianic Kabbalah'; Idel, *Golem*; Green, *Keter*; Gruenwald, 'Writing, Epistles, and the Name of God'; Grözinger, 'Names of God'; Zak, *In the Gates*; Lesses, *Ritual Practices*; Arbel, *Beholders*.

³ *Sefer yetsirah*, 1: 1. In Hebrew the words 'book', 'number', and 'story' share a common root; see above, Ch. 1 n. 85. On *Sefer yetsirah* see Aloni, 'Date of *Sefer yetsirah*'; Dan, 'Religious Significance of *Sefer Yetsirah*'; Gruenwald, 'A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezira*'; Liebes, *Creation Doctrine of Sefer Yetsirah*.

divine, Exod. 24: 10 and Ezek. 1: 26), and *mispar* (the ten elements of being corresponding to ten *sefirot*).⁴ The mystical tradition explained their divine source and creative power: 'And why are they called *sefirot*, because it has been written in Psalm 19: 2 that the heavens declare [*mesaperim*] the glory of God.'⁵ 'The meaning of the word *sefirah* [first mentioned in *Sefer yetsirah*] was understood as "counting", based on *mispar* [number], and there are those who say it stems from *sapirut* ['sapphirehood'] and clarity, as suggested in the commentary, that it is a work of the stone of sapphire.'⁶ 'And as I have heard . . . that God, blessed be He, made a book which is the world and the commentary on that book is the Torah, because the Torah is like an interpretation of the possessions of God, blessed be He, within creation.'⁷

This description of creation by letters (the interpretation of which is based on the common meaning of letters and 'coming', as in the phrase *yeteh veyavo*, which means 'coming all the time'; see Isa. 21: 12, Deut. 33: 2, Isa. 44: 7, Job 3: 25) and *sefirot* (the interpretation of which is based on all the derivations of the root *s-f-r*) demonstrates the nature of mystical language as a language that crosses boundaries or as a language of mirrors and reflections that culture holds up to itself. While the concepts of creation commonly used are limited by their application to a single occurrence, in contrast an ongoing creation is suggested by means of a hidden cosmic reflection through the images of mystical paths, spheres (*sefirot*), books (*sefarim*), numbers (*sefar*) and sapphire (*safir*), which shed new light on ordinary understanding, which distinguishes among them. The linguistic reflection of a hidden reality, where letters and numbers, spheres and paths of wisdom, books and divine creation are united in an eternal ongoing process, is juxtaposed with revealed reality, where the creative process is associated with language, numbers, and letters, with books and human wisdom. The mirror of a mythical past and a mystical present is held up to a particular present reality. The reflection of the vastness of the creative divine language is contrasted with human speech and human thought.

This conception of mystical language is based on the dialectical assumption that language is a limited physical revelation of the infinite abstract being of God, which needs to be concealed and contracted in order to be revealed. According to this conception, the concealed divine being animates the revealed language and eternalizes it by giving it many layers and infinite meaning:

And God enacted a covenant [with Abraham] . . . and it is the holy language. He tied twenty-two letters in his tongue. And God revealed to him their secret, he moistened them in water, enflamed them with fire, whirled them with wind, enflamed them in seven stars, led them in twelve signs of the zodiac. (*Sefer yetsirah* 6: 8)

⁴ On the numerical value of letters, note that the arabic numbers that we use today to signify numbers are a late historical development. In the Jewish tradition letters signify the numerical value in calculations of dates from antiquity to the present. The first ten letters denote the first ten numbers; the next nine letters denote the decades starting with 20, 30, etc.; the last three letters denote 200, 300, 400.

⁵ *Sefer habahir*, §125.

⁶ R. Shem-Tov, *Sefer ha'emunot*, Gate 4, ch. 4, p. 28b.

⁷ Zadok Hakohen of Lublin, *Tsidkat hatsadik*, 216.

The source of mystical language is divine and its letters and words are divine names, signs, hints, meanings, and secrets, which conceal depths of meaning. This language is understood to be the essential representation of the reciprocal link between the divine and the human. This link in turn is understood as a unity of opposites, such as being and nothingness, ebb and flow, elusive appearance and essential reality, the physical and the abstract, the finite and the infinite. It is the source of the influence that places its stamp on all of being and its representations in language. These opposites exist in a regular dialectical relation in which the existence of the revealed is contingent upon the concealed nothingness, and the revelation of the abstract nothingness is contingent upon physical existence.⁸ That is to say, the revealed parts of language are nothing but a cover over its hidden and divine essence. The revelation of the divine essence of language in turn is contingent upon its contraction into words and its concealment in letters.

The following quotation from Israel Ba'al Shem Tov cogently expresses the double meaning of language, in which every unit and word reflects at one and the same time nothingness and being, or the hidden divine infinitude and the revealed material finitude: 'Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, may he rest in peace, taught: An opening for light shalt thou make for the ark [*tevah*, which also means 'word'] [Gen. 6: 16] . . . [which] teaches that in each and every letter there are worlds and souls and divinity.'⁹ In the mystical tradition language blends metaphysical and real essences, units of thought, speech, writing and reading, pronunciation and signifying. These form a bridge between human experience and its divine source. The mystic translates the reality beyond language into a linguistic reality and deconstructs linguistic reality into its generative elements—letters, units, names, words, numerical values, musical notes, signs, and meanings. Like a musician who puts life into the score, the mystic is an inspired artist who animates the written text to express the power of the hidden divinity embodied in the revealed language. The physical and abstract dimensions of the letters and words, their animating power and cosmic existence, their sacred character and their hidden communicative essence (which exists at one and the same time in heaven and on earth) have been extensively interpreted throughout the mystical literature: in explicit studies, in visionary illuminations, and by means of suggestive poetic and symbolic methods. In 3 Enoch, written between the third and sixth centuries CE, one of the first stages of the mystical path is presented.¹⁰ During this stage linguistic principles familiar from earthly reality simultaneously gain an animating divine power, a visual appearance, and a cosmic existence. This transformation

⁸ On the dialectic relation between the divine and the human in the hasidic tradition see Elior, *Paradoxical Ascent to God*.

⁹ [Israel Ba'al Shem Tov], *Tsava'at harivash* (The Testament of the Besht), §75. On this work see Dubnow, *History of Hasidism*, 387–8 and index; Gries, *Book, Author, and Story in Early Hasidism*.

¹⁰ On 3 Enoch see 3 *Enoch*, ed. Odeberg; 3 *Enoch*, ed. Alexander; *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §§1–80; Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, i: *Late Antiquity*; Elior, *Three Temples*; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*; Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets*.

takes place during the course of a poetic description of the animating letters guarded in heaven, which are shown by Enoch–Metatron to Ishmael as he ascends to heaven:

Rabbi Ishmael said: ‘Metatron said to me: “Let me show you letters out of which heaven and earth were created. Letters out of which oceans and rivers were created. Letters out of which mountains and hills were created. Letters out of which trees and grass were created. Letters out of which the stars and constellations, the moon and the sun, Orion and the Pleiades and all kinds of lights of the firmament were created. Letters out of which the ministering angels were created, each letter flashed time after time like bolts of lightning, time after time like torches, time after time like flames, time after time like the rising of the sun, moon, and stars.” I approached him, and he seized me with his hand, lifted me with his wings, and showed me all those letters that were engraved with a pen of fire on God’s throne, and fiery sparks and lightning were coming out of them and covering all the chambers of the seventh heaven.’¹¹

Through their animating power these glowing letters testify to the precedence of divine language over human language and to the divine and non-communicative source of language. They are not only cosmic entities or divine animating forces latent in the fundamentals of creation, but also form a creative conceptual essence and a creative human category. This is because the letters, or their symbolic representations, single out human beings who are familiar with the letters’ physical and abstract qualities, as readers and writers, speakers and thinkers, who use them creatively in their thought, speech, and action by abstracting and realizing, building and destroying, representing and decoding, annihilating and commemorating.

The world of kabbalists and mystics is a world of language and speech, revelation and concealment, names and letters. At times it is the world of those who create being out of nothingness, those who seek a new language capable of expressing a previously unknown reality, a reality for which the commonly used language is too narrow and which it is incapable of containing or expressing. It is the world of those who expose the deep meanings that resonate within language. The hidden private language of the mystics and beholders of secrets draws from the psyche and the realm of holiness. Their language creates a world of its own and interprets reality according to its own principles. In contrast, conventional language is based on tradition and existing reality and defines its meaning according to social conventions of communication. The mystic rebels against what seems to him to be imprisonment by the denotative language, which defines and limits. Often he tries to create a new language that interprets the world as a symbolic or metaphoric system or a system of mirrors and reflections. The mystic is an idiosyncratic creator who sees the brightness of the sapphire (*livnat hasapir*) through number (*mispar*), and ‘worlds, souls, and divinity’ through the letters, and who ‘blows the letters back up to their source’. He sometimes enflames and illuminates the letters or

¹¹ *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §59. Cf. 3 *Enoch*, ed. Alexander, 265–6.

engraves them in his spirit or combines letters like Bezalel, 'who was able to combine the letters through which heaven and earth were created'.¹² He sometimes believes that 'the names are like keys to each and every thing that a human being needs for any matter or issue in the world'.¹³ Sometimes the mystic expresses himself in an obscure language—a language of symbols and allusions—and sometimes he penetrates to the depth of a meaningless language, decodes its secrets, and, by illuminating its hidden meanings, forms a new creation, and sometimes he exclaims: 'The Torah and the souls and the *sefirot* are all one thing.'¹⁴

The mystical tradition regards the letters involved in thinking, reading, writing, speaking, praying, and intending as a bridge between what is above and what is below. It presents language as 'a ladder placed on the earth whose top reaches heaven and angels of God are ascending and descending on it' (Gen. 28: 12). This is because the divine word, which constitutes the 'forms of the Name, blessed be He' and is delivered through language, is embodied in the letters of the Torah, and transmitted to humans as the ever changing abstract spirit along with the unchangeable concrete form:

And here, all the letters of the Torah, in their forms, in combinations and separately, entangled, crooked and distorted, added and missing, small, big and crowned, and the letters' calligraphy, and the closed, open, and arranged portions are [the forms of the Name, blessed be He] the patterns of the ten *sefirot* . . . because in its entirety it is a divine structure, carved in the name of the Holy One, blessed be He . . . in addition all of the Torah is the names of the Holy One, blessed be He, and therefore it is forbidden to add to it or to subtract from it, even one letter.¹⁵

According to *Sefer yetsirah*, God engraves, carves, and brings down an infinite stream of letters throughout the creation process. By combining letters he transforms the abstract into the material, the infinite into the finite, and the spiritual into the physical. By means of a linguistic whirlpool that blends the metaphysical and the physical, voice, sound, and form, he creates the material world. In contrast, a human being 'turns the material into the abstract' or 'divests corporeality' from its physical constraints: he deconstructs and separates, analyses and distinguishes, studies and decodes the combinations, in his quest for the common linguistic element that exists beyond distinctively material being. He abstracts and elevates letters and combinations of names according to their roots in a process of exaltation, and creates new combinations and beings in his imagination. In contrast to God, who perpetually creates the world through letters and combinations, going from nothingness to being, the human strips off materiality, using letters and combinations, going from being to nothingness. Shneur Zalman of Lyady described it as follows: 'but here we see a kind of annihilation of being into

¹² BT *Ber.* 55a.¹³ Gikatilla, *Sha'arei orah*, 88.¹⁴ Moses Cordovero, *Or yakar*, iv. 36a.¹⁵ Menahem of Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah*, 'Lekh lekha'; corrected according to Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS num. 62, p. 113b.

nothingness in all that was created, which is the opposite of creating being out of nothingness'.¹⁶ The letters are the dialectical creative element shared by God and man. The detachment of the letters from the word (*tevah*) of the written canonized text, and their devoted recitation in thought and speech (in such a way that 'the word [*tevah*] becomes an illuminating opening'),¹⁷ revive their animating power and influence the upper and lower vitalities. Following Ezekiel's vision, the dialectical creative element is referred to as 'the vitality running back and forth' (derived from Ezek. 1: 14). It includes abstraction and concretization, creation and annihilation, obfuscation and clarification, and this is an infinite thinking process that abstracts materiality and materializes the abstract:

When a human being recalls the letters he shakes the upper vitality. And when he wholeheartedly cleaves in his mind to the Name, blessed be He, he reanimates the vitality that has been emanating from the highest thought until it is ready to be spoken and put in the mouth of the human, and through the words of the prayer he yearns for the Name, blessed be He, and by it he blows the letters back up to their source.¹⁸

The poetical words of Judah Halevi express the vocalization of the letters, offering the mystic the unifying moment that he is yearning for:

I sought You,
With all my heart I called out to You.
When I sought You,
I discovered You seeking me.¹⁹

Throughout its history, mystical thought has been based on the assumption that the world as perceived through language is the unfolding of the divine being through the Hebrew language. The language, however, has two poles: the concealed, which is inaccessible and connected to the divine name, and the revealed, which is accessible and connected to the letters. Often in mystical literature it seems that everything exists within a dynamic process that revolves around a linguistic reality revealed in the letters and a reality, hidden in the names, that goes beyond the language. According to this tradition the world was created out of letters: 'everything was created according to the Torah, into which the Holy One, Blessed Be He, looked as if into a blueprint while he created the world. Thus, the letters of the Torah exist in everything in the world.'²⁰ The author maintains that the letters are the divine element sustaining all creation and argues that human duty is to decipher the divine letters in every corporeality.²¹ In the Heikhalot literature God's hidden image (known as *shmur komah*) is depicted as an infinite body

¹⁶ Shneur Zalman of Lyady, *Torat hayim*, fol. 1^v.

¹⁷ [Israel B'al Shem Tov], *Tsava'at harivash*, §75.

¹⁸ Meshulam Feivush of Zbarazh, *Likutim yekarim*, 132b.

¹⁹ Judah Halevi, 'Yah, 'anah 'emtsa'akha', *Shirim nivharim*, p. 8.

²⁰ Ze'ev Wolf, *Or hame'ir*, a sermon for Shavuot, 170a, 186b; see *Bereshit rabah* 1: 1; cf. Zohar I. 134a, II. 161a.

²¹ Wolf, *Or hame'ir*, 84a, 28a, 131a, 139.

covered with letters which compose divine names ascribed to separate limbs of the divine stature.²² The ineffable name of God in the biblical tradition is a mysterious combination of letters. God is 'The Name'. The power of 'The Name' in the ritual tradition is described in a prayer recited on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur interchanging the ritual past and the mystical present:

The Name of God is a tower of strength. By means of it the righteous can run and be exalted. Master of the universe, from the day the Temple was destroyed we have nothing that promotes atonement: no sacrifices, priestly garments, grain offering, slaughtering, and no altar—only Your great Name sustains us. (*Mahzor rabah*, 207)

In the introduction to his commentary on the Torah, Nahmanides argues that the whole Torah is the hidden name of God. The letters are the limbs of the Shekhinah, which is referred to as the 'world of speech'.²³ The 'garment', another divine concept in kabbalah, is an entity woven out of all the letters of the alphabet, and exists between the worlds of emanation and infinitude.²⁴ *Sefer hate-munah* interprets the phrase 'He sees the likeness of God' to refer to the form of the letters and the form of the name of God. Many other kabbalistic traditions would agree with the sixteenth-century kabbalist Joseph Ibn Tabul that 'the whole emanation doctrine is the name of God'.²⁵

Within the mystical tradition the holy language consists of 'lower, second, and third' levels. There are letters that join together into meaningful words, creative clarifying materializing elements that turn chaos into creation and establish being. In contrast to this, there are letters that join into meaningless words and hidden and abstract elements, that turn creation back to chaos and 'blow the letters back up to their source'. Mystical language is concerned with the letters that join into words of infinite meaning, while magical language is concerned with the letters that merge into meaningless names. These two languages function alongside the language of human communication. The mystical language expands human knowledge, consciousness, and meaning by creating a new vocabulary that affects human creativity and imagination. The magical language gives up on all these realms, resorting to meaningless combinations of letters, which are considered to be understood beyond the human realm and believed to be effective for human needs. The mystical language adds on to the conventional language, expanding human expression. The magical language is sometimes associated with the ritual language, which is not preconditioned by understanding.²⁶

The relation between the mystical and conventional languages, on the one hand, and the magical and ritual languages, on the other, is the relation between a

²² On *shiur komah* see *Shiur komah*, in *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al.; Cohen (ed.), *Shi'ur Qomah*; Scholem, 'Shi'ur Qomah'; Farber-Ginat, 'Studies in Shi'ur Komah'; Arbel, *Beholders*.

²³ See Ch. 3 n. 94.

²⁴ On the 'garment' see Cohen-Alloro, 'Magic'. ²⁵ Joseph Ibn Tabul, *Derush heftisvah*, p. x.

²⁶ See Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*; Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, Introduction.

creating language and an annihilating language, or a spoken language and a mute language. Mystical language deciphers the hidden reality of heaven and earth. Conventional language evaluates meaning according to comprehensibility and expressed intentions. In contrast, the magical and ritual languages are mute languages of names. Humans cannot evaluate them according to their comprehensibility, because they do not have a revealed explicit meaning and do not relate to immediate reality. The reciprocal relation between the mystical and conventional languages, on the one hand, and the magical and ritual languages, on the other, reflects the divine 'running back and forth'.²⁷

If we look at the relation between mystical language and magical language as the relation between creation and destruction, or as the relation between construction and deconstruction, then, by any meaningful naming, claiming, defining, distinguishing, or construing of words or sentences, we move from chaos to creation. That is to say, by naming, by establishing distinctive physical or abstract entities, one limits chaos or participates in the process of moving from nothingness to being. This process involves the 'growing of letters from their roots', a meaningful naming or apprehensible embodiment that defines borders and meaning. In contrast, by deconstructing one strips the sentence of its meaning, erases the word, the name, and the distinct existence, and participates in the process of moving from being back to nothingness. The process of 'unnaming', disembodiment, and disclaiming blows the letters back up to their source and moves creation back to chaos, the state in which nothing is limited by words.

Mystical literature specifies the holy names.²⁸ These names are combinations of letters that have a mystical and magical meaning but lack a communicative meaning. This literature includes the letters of the ineffable name of God and the tradition of the explicit names. These names have a visual combination of letters as signs, icons, or symbols, but do not have a sound or a comprehensible meaning that can be explained or translated. Creative letters are mentioned, as well as 'sealing' letters, 'binding' letters, and 'connecting' and 'conjuring' letters, and letters functioning as containers and units of the divine word. Mystical writings mention combinations of letters capable of creating, destroying, adjuring, blessing, and cursing. This literature contains different traditions referring to the formulation of adjurations, divine names, magic words, amulets, and linguistic traditions connected to the creation of a *golem*²⁹ and the ascent to the upper worlds. Many

²⁷ On magical and ritual language, see Tambiah, 'A Performative Approach to Ritual'; Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.

²⁸ On the holy names see Urbach, *Sages*, ch. 7; Grözinger, 'Names of God'; Elior, 'Mysticism, Magic and Angelology'; Elior, 'From Earthly Temple'; Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*. For examples of the use of holy names see *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al.; *Geniza Fragmente*, ed. Schäfer, concordance under *shem*, *shemot* (name, names); *Heikhalot zutarti*, ed. Elior. For English translations of adjurations in the Heikhalot literature, see Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 63–101, 161–73, 412–25; cf. Arbel, *Beholders*.

²⁹ A *golem* is a magical figure invented in the writings of the medieval German-Jewish pietists. It is

mystical traditions deal with Holy Names, and many writings begin in a way similar to the beginning of *Heikhalot rabati*: 'This is a book of seven sanctuaries of holiness in which the seventy Holy Names are specified.'³⁰ The holy names comprise strings of letters that do not have any communicative or semantic meaning. But just because of their incomprehensible combinations as meaningless names, they become identical to the creative infinite divine being that is beyond comprehension.

The early mystical tradition of the Heikhalot literature identified the hidden God with his revealed name:³¹ 'He is His Name and His Name is Him, He is in His Name and His Name is Him';³² 'His Name is in His Might and His Might is in His Name, He is His Strength and His Strength is His Name'.³³ God's essence is identical with His Name. Therefore knowing the names means knowing His essence. This knowledge, which humans cannot understand, is dangerous, as is reflected in the following warning: 'The one who uses the crown [the names of God] will vanish [from the world].'³⁴

The hidden Name is one of the attributes of the divine essence and possesses creating and annihilating powers. Because of its overwhelming power as well as its ability to empower, it is desirable and dangerous.³⁵ The ineffable Name represents the mystical-magical element of the divine essence in its manifestation in language. It is obtained from a heavenly source such as an angelic revelation or through a mystical revelation to a human being ascending to heaven and gazing upon the upper sanctuaries. Obtaining the Name enables a human being, on the one hand, to control the domain of his heavenly revelation and to become a magical instrument in the recurring human ascent to heaven, and on the other hand to bring upper powers down by the withdrawal of discursive understanding and consciousness.

The divine Name contains an infinite essence and a finite meaningless embodiment. It is a morphologically inexplicit assembly of letters, which paradoxically is

created through a mixture of letter magic and meditative practices aimed at producing ecstatic states of consciousness. The *golem* came to life only while the ecstasy of his creator lasted. The creation of the *golem* was considered a sublime experience felt by the mystic who became absorbed in the mysteries of the alphabetic combination described in the *Sefer yetsirah*. Pseudo-Sa'adiah, in his commentary on the book, says that recitation of the alphabets of the book has the God-given power to produce a *golem* and to give it vitality and soul. MS Munich 40, as quoted by Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 192.

³⁰ *Heikhalot rabati*, in *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §81.

³¹ On the identity between the hidden God and the revealed name of God in Heikhalot literature see Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*; Elior, 'Mysticism, Magic and Angelology'; Elior, 'Concept of God'.

³² *Ma'aseh merkavah*, in *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §588. ³³ *Ibid.* 557.

³⁴ *Heikhalot zutarti*, ed. Elior, 26 and 68. Cf. *Pirkei avot* 1: 3. *Avot derabi natan* 12: 13. Cf. the author of *Sha'arei tsedek* on the danger of death to the student of mysticism engaged in the ineffable Name (Scholem, *Kabbalah of Sefer hatemunah*, 249).

³⁵ On the bitter destiny of people who use divine names see *Heikhalot zutarti*, ed. Elior; Urbach, *Sages*, ch. 7; Dan, 'Story of Joseph della Reina'; Scholem, *Kabbalah of Sefer hatemunah*, 249–53.

called the Explicit Name (*hashem hameforash*). However, since there is no tradition of vocalization of this name, it is an ineffable name or names—one may write it but not pronounce it. Mystics, who believe that, in spite of being meaningless, name and power are synonyms, try to discover the holy names, which are connected with the upper worlds and a reality surpassing language. They look for names that emerge from the hidden divine language, in spite of the dangers attached to breaching boundaries, and in spite of explicit threat:

When you wish to mention this glorified name engraved in heaven with its vowels, ornament yourself and meditate in a special place, so that your voice is not heard by anyone else, and purify your heart and soul of any earthly thoughts. Imagine that at that time your soul separates from your body and dies in this world to live in the next world, which is the source of the existing life that is scattered in all that lives, and it is the intellect . . . and is in the image of the King of Kings.³⁶

Magical language is mystical language whose meaningful functional dimensions have been suppressed in order to express meaningless intentions that draw from ritual and magical traditions. The magical tradition, like the mystical tradition, is based on the assumption that letters and words possess a wondrous creative power.³⁷ This power is ascribed to the divine and human word alike. Nevertheless, while the mystical tradition relates to the formative elements of what is hidden, symbolic templates, and visionary paradigms of the concealed reality, the magical tradition relates to meaningless names, meaningless phrases, meaningless unifications, adjurations, circles of letters, angelic language, magic words, amulets, and other context-free combinations of letters that do not convey any semantic meaning. While the mystical tradition refers to a system that has a hierarchy and semantic meaning that can be linguistically conveyed, the magical tradition gives expression to a chaotic system that avoids terminological crystallization. An example of both languages is found in *Heikhalot rabati*:

when a person wishes to descend to the *merkavah* he should call to Suriaa, the prince of the countenance, and adjure him one hundred and twelve times by TWTRWSYY YWY who is called TWTRWSSYY . . . the God of Israel.³⁸

He should not add to the one hundred and twelve times nor should he take away from them—his blood is on his head. His mouth brings out the names and the fingers of his hand count one hundred and twelve. Immediately he descends and rules over the *merkavah*.³⁹

³⁶ Abraham Abulafia, *Or hasekheh*, Munich MS 62, cited in Scholem, *Kabbalah of Sefer hatemunah*, 225; cf. 210–11.

³⁷ On mysticism and magic see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*; Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*; Cohen-Alloro, 'Magic and Sorcery in the Zohar'; Dan, 'Story of Joseph della Reina'; Gruenwald, 'Magic and Myth'; Gruenwald, 'Writing, Epistles, and the Name of God'; Schäfer, 'Jewish Magic Literature'; Idel, *Golem*; Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*.

³⁸ *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §204.

³⁹ *Ibid.* §§204–5.

The words in small capitals, which cannot be translated because they lack semiotic meaning, reflect the magical language, while the rest of the text conveys mystical language.

Magical language uses names and meaningless words to create a connection with a supernatural power. One calls out for God by pronouncing his Explicit Name (an act that is forbidden) and his names that seem to be explicit but in reality are hidden.⁴⁰ These names are created by an infinite combination of letters. One calls upon the spirits ('winds' in Hebrew) by using the language of winds—a construction of vowels without consonants.⁴¹ One calls upon the angels by meaningless names constructed of consonants without vowels.⁴² This meaningless language is tied to God's Name and to different combinations of the letters of the alphabet. The assumption behind the meaningless language is that, although it is unintelligible in this world, it is decoded and intelligible in the upper worlds, and it influences the upper powers to carry out the person's request. In the *Heikhalot* literature, which includes a variety of magical elements, examples can be found of the use of this kind of language: 'These are the twenty-two letters that are twenty-two names [made out of] one letter of the Torah. ZYXW VTSR QPN MLKJ HGFE DCB. KI BIH COR OLMIM ADONAI AH YHA HAYU YAH VHI VHI VH YAH HAYAH YAH . . . This is the crown of the explicit name.'⁴³

No specific date or distinctive religious-cultural place can be assigned to the magical way of thinking. Magical language belongs to the most ancient and sacred domains of the religious corpus. It is constructed out of sacred names, which are not evaluated according to their intelligibility to human beings but rather by their power to influence the upper worlds. Magical language may also include names that convey a sacred ritual tradition that empowers its users with the knowledge of the past and the future and enables them to control hidden beings. The users of magical language give up any syntactic structure and semantic meaning in order to participate in the language used by the inhabitants of upper worlds, or to influence hidden beings through meaningless language:

This is the sword of Moses [= the hidden name] that was given to him in the burning bush, and was revealed to Rabbi Ishmael son of Elisha in the Deed of the Chariot and this is the procedure: First call upon Malkiel . . . PATW AYR AMTDAL SRWPA GRA GTI TLBI . . .⁴⁴

These meaningless names are called secrets, divine names, and adjurations, and are often connected to Metatron, the heavenly high priest:

⁴⁰ For examples of the language of holy names see *ibid.* §§655, 569, 657, 629, 580, 636; cf. *Heikhalot zutarti*, ed. Elior; Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 69, 381–425.

⁴¹ See e.g. the incomprehensible names in the adjuration 'its explanation in the language of purity with *yod he* how it is said: YHWH YW YHWY WW YHWH HW HW YHWH YH HYH YHWH HY WHYY HYW HYH YH YH HHW YH YYH . . .'. *Synopse*, §673.

⁴² See Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 72.

⁴³ *Synopse*, §364.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* §598.

Rabbi Ishmael said: 'Any scholar who understands this great mystery . . . will state and explain and adjure and remind and decree and fulfil by the name HVZYAH ZHVBD YHVH YYAH MN MH, which is the name referring to Metatron. MRGVYEL is Metatron, SASGIRIA is Metatron, SNDIA is Metatron, PZKK is Metatron . . .

And one called to the other and said: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. And he decreed decrees over them.⁴⁵

Dialectically, it is the giving up of meaning and intelligibility, context and intention, that allows a deeper knowledge, drawing from heavenly forms and projecting them onto the earthly level. This process also uncovers unknown powers in the human psyche and the divine being. The person who uses this language chooses to give up meaning and intelligibility in order to control, in a formulaic meaningless mode, hidden powers that might affect the revealed realm through invocations and adjurations. The hidden names, connected to the secrets of creation and cosmic powers, are obtained from angels or during mystical ascent to heaven, as is depicted in the First Book of Enoch, written in the circles of separatist priests in the second century BCE:

This is the order of Kazvi'el, the minister of oaths, which he showed to the angels when he gloriously dwelt in heaven . . . He told Michael to show him the hidden name, so that he might mention it in an oath and make them tremble at the name and the oath, those who showed mankind everything that was hidden. And this is the power of this oath that is huge and enormous, and he put the oath in Michael's hand. And these are his secrets in this oath and he is powerful by his oath, and by it heaven has been created since the creation of the world to eternity. And by that oath the ocean was created . . . and by that oath the depths have been fortified and fixed to their place without moving from eternity to eternity.⁴⁶

Meaningless names and powerful oaths, in the possession of angels and delivered to human beings during a mystical revelation or through magical tradition, control the hidden world because the names and the oaths represent the secrets of the eternal creative element that captures, binds, and dominates being.

Magic deals with the dialectical relation between unintelligible expression in the earthly world and its desired interpretation in the heavenly world. It is interested in the relation between 'deconstructed' language (combinations of letters that are meaningless in standard language and can be found in magical texts), which has been delivered to mankind in secrets, adjurations, and unifications, and language that is decoded and fully coherent only in the upper world. As previously said, in magical speech, poetry, ritual, or writing there is a process of dis-

⁴⁵ *Synopse*, §682.

⁴⁶ 1 Enoch 69: 13–14. On the quotation from Enoch cf. *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. Charlesworth, i. 48–9, which offers a different version. The dating of the different sections of 1 Enoch is a subject of scholarly controversy. On the section that this quotation is taken from see Nickelsburg, '1 Enoch'.

mantling constructed beings, or essentializing meaning from a comprehensive sentence to a single word, or from a word to a letter. The language created by letters of the alphabet that do not combine into meaningful words or units is the language of secrets, unifications, or adjurations.⁴⁷ Using this language can cause the disintegration of consciousness that is followed by the deconstruction of being. Both losing control over consciousness and using meaningless speech in magical language are found throughout the mystical-magical tradition from antiquity to the present. Hayim Vital, the sixteenth-century kabbalist, gives us an unusually nuanced description of an internal and external disintegrative experience. In his diary, published as *Sefer hahezzyonot* (The Book of Visions), Vital attests to the 'confusion of the mind' or the disintegration of consciousness that he experienced through unification and its magical language, and to the loss of physical and mental control. He learnt the art of unification from his teacher, Isaac Luria.⁴⁸ The unification was tied to the transcendence of time and place and prostration on the graves of the righteous (*tsadikim*) in order to connect with their souls in the upper worlds:

In Tamuz 5331 [=1571] I asked my teacher to teach me a unification in order to reach a mystical experience. He told me I was not ready yet. I begged him and he gave me a short unification. And I got up in the middle of the night and I used it. And I felt a shock in my body and my head became heavy and I was losing my mind and my mouth was twisted to one side and I stopped performing the unification.⁴⁹ On the first day of the month of Elul 5331 [=1571] my teacher, of blessed memory, sent me to the cave of Abaye and Raba. And I prostrated there on the grave of Abaye, of blessed memory, and I first unified the unification of the mouth and the nose of the ancient divinity,⁵⁰ and sleep overtook me and I woke up and saw nothing. Then I prostrated again on Abaye himself and unified the unification written by the hands of my teacher, may he rest in peace. While I was composing and combining the letters of [the name] *hvyh* and the name of God *'dnvt*⁵¹ and the name *'dny* as *y'hdhvny*, as it is known, my mind became confused and I could not compose them . . . and I stopped thinking while composing that composition, and then it appeared to me in my mind as if a voice was telling me: 'Reconsider, Reconsider' many times . . . and here, all this appeared to me at that time in my mind, and then a great fear fell upon me, and all my body was shaking enormously and my hands were shaking. Also my lips were shaking unusually, and moving rapidly and frequently, running anxiously as if a voice was sitting on my tongue between my lips, saying anxiously over a hundred times these words: what shall I say, what shall I say. And I have been holding myself and my lips to prevent them from moving without being able to

⁴⁷ On mysteries and adjurations see *Sefer harazim*; Lesses, *Ritual Practices*; Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*.

⁴⁸ On unifications see Vital, *Shemonah she'arim*, 'Sha'ar ruah hakodesh' and 'Sha'ar hayihud'; Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*; *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies*, trans. Faierstein; Fine, *Physician of the Soul*; *Safed Spirituality*, trans. Fine.

⁴⁹ Vital, *Sefer hahezzyonot*, 237.

⁵⁰ A unification referring to the anthropomorphic picture of God in Lurianic kabbalah.

⁵¹ A combination of the letters of the name *hvyh*.

calm them down at all . . . And then a voice has been blasting in my mouth and on my tongue saying: 'Wisdom, Wisdom', over twenty times . . . and all this happened very quickly, a wonderful thing, many times, while awake, while I was prostrating in the cave of Abaye.⁵²

Paraphrasing Paul Valéry, it can be said that magical language creates a world of words, the logic of which is not semantic but phonetic, that is, the words do not serve to represent a distinct meaning but a distinct sound. Dialectically, the names of these sounds denote their opposite: 'explicit names', 'unifications', 'combinations', 'holy names'. Often, these names do not have a vowel system or a phonetic tradition or earthly meaning. Therefore it is to a great extent a silent ritual language. The users of this language are participants in a process of deconstructing the language and disintegrating consciousness and reality. They turn creation back from the defined stage to the abstract stage, from the spoken language to the ancient language of sounds, recited or sung as rituals lacking meaning. It is not surprising that in many languages 'chant', 'enchantment', 'canto', and 'incantation' belong to the same semantic field.

The deviation of magical language from the limits of existing standards is suggested in the biblical descriptions of prophets in a trance, where they are referred to as people out of their minds, or people invaded by spirits: 'every man who is demented and considers himself a prophet' (Jer. 29: 26); 'The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is insane' (Hos. 9: 7). This deviation is fascinatingly expressed in ancient Greek. 'Our greatest blessings', says Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, 'come to us by way of madness' (Plato, *Phaedrus* 244 A), 'provided the madness is given us by divine gift.'⁵³ The word denoting insanity in Greek (*mainomai*) is the same word for the utterances of the oracle at Delphi, the mystical sayings of the priestess and the Sibyls, and the enthusiastic followers of Dionysus while in a prophetic trance.⁵⁴ All of them are referred to after the Common Era as 'speaking in tongues', following Paul's words to the Corinthians: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels' (1 Cor. 13: 1–2; cf. 1 Cor. 14: 23). 'Speaking in tongues' is the uttering of meaningless sounds and is not an outcome of intentional thought but is created through a different process, sometimes described as the Holy Spirit, that is not part of discursive thought. In this process, of 'speaking in tongues' or glossolalia or *mania* or *mainomai*, man serves as a passive vehicle for automatic uncontrolled speech in an unintelligible language, as described in the story of the apostles: 'And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance' (Acts 2: 4), or in the previously cited testimony of Hayim Vital. The magical meaning of this kind of speech rests on the assumption that through it one is able to participate in what is explicit and implicit in the

⁵² *Sefer hahezzyonot*, 170–1.

⁵³ See Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 64–82.

⁵⁴ In Greek *mania* and *mainomai* denote one who was taken over by a deity and refers to manic prophecy. See Dodds, *ibid.* 70–4, 85.

language used by the inhabitants of the upper worlds. Following this logic, if intelligible and controlled rational speech relates to human language and to the revealed world, unintelligible, irrational, and uncontrolled speech relates to God's language and the hidden world.

The dialectical kabbalist tradition stipulates that 'each creation is a judgement [= limit]' and each 'being' is limited by words and 'dressed in letters', while 'the nothingness' exists 'beyond the reason that is obtained through letters', as formulated by Shneur Zalman of Lyady (*Tanya* 165). If the 'running' (*ratso*) is the transition from nothingness to being, culminating in *yesh*, being, and the 'back' (*shov*) is the transition from being to nothingness (culminating in *ayin*, nothingness), then 'nothingness' refers to the limitless undefined realm, rich in its infinitude and obtainable through the magical and ritual language, and 'being' refers to the defined, limited, finite, and double-sided realm, which is reached by conventional and mystical language. The boundless spirit returning to its divine source relates to the magical language, which transforms the concrete into the abstract, while the creative language, which flows from the divine to the human, and transforms the abstract into the concrete, relates to the mystical language. Magical and ritual language, which covers everything from divine inspiration to mental derangement,⁵⁵ may relate to the realm of nothingness with the intention of influencing being, and conventional and mystical language, which covers everything from creation to annihilation, relates to the realm of being in order to reveal its divine aspects.⁵⁶

The bi-directional language, which stems from a source that is divine, that is, infinite, eternal, multidimensional, multilayered, and ambiguous, turns into a ladder of ascent from materiality to divinity. The deconstructed words are released from their fixed denotations and open up to infinite new possibilities in their reassembled forms. Concepts limited by words are released from their experienced materiality and enriched by additional meanings latent in thought. In his book *Or hame'ir*, Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir, a late eighteenth-century hasid, clearly expresses the freedom embedded in this way of seeing the infinite meanings of language.⁵⁷ He also clarifies the dynamic relation between the letters of the holy language and the plain meaning of the text, on the one hand, and the freedom to create and retell the story anew, on the other:

The truth of the matter is that the Torah as a whole is nothing but letters, and any one of Israel, according to his understanding and ability, forms combinations of the letters. And behold, these combinations recreated now through his [the person's] talent and the depth of his understanding were latent in the letters from the beginning, waiting to be formed by a person enlightened by his enormous knowledge and effort in the worship of the Creator.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See Tambiah, 'A Performative Approach to Ritual'.

⁵⁶ See Elior, *Paradoxical Ascent*, 25–30, 63–73, 127–38.

⁵⁷ On the freedom of interpretation in mystical literature see Elior, 'Changes in Religious Thought'.
⁵⁸ *Or hame'ir*, 'Vayehi', 38b.

The magical-mystical relation to the letters is a relation of deconstruction (*peruk*) and reconstruction (*tseruf*). Deconstruction means the separation of language from its conventional common meaning and the separation of consciousness from its conventional limitations. It also means cutting off ties with revealed reality and its plain literal expressions in order to participate in a hidden reality reflected in secrets. Reconstruction and transposition mean creating new linguistic combinations that illuminate the depth of the language and stipulate new meanings, thus reaching new levels of consciousness. An example of mystical language reconstructing a new reality hidden from the eye is to be found in the hymns of thanksgiving from the Dead Sea Scrolls:

[I thank Thee, O God,
for] Thou hast placed me beside a fountain of streams
in an arid land,
and close to a spring of waters
in a dry land,
and beside a watered garden
[in a wilderness].

[For Thou didst set] a plantation
of cypress, pine, and cedar for Thy glory,
trees of life beside a mysterious fountain
hidden among the trees by the water,
and they put out a shoot
of the everlasting Plant.
But before they did so, they took root
and sent out their roots to the watercourse
that its stem might be open to the living waters
and be one with the everlasting spring.
And all [the beasts] of the forest
fed on its leafy boughs;
its stem was trodden by all who passed on the way
and its branches by all the birds.
And all the [trees] by the water rose above it
for they grew in their plantation;
but they sent out no root to the watercourse.

And the bud of the shoot of holiness
for the Plant of truth
was hidden and was not esteemed;
and being unperceived,
its mystery was sealed.
Thou didst hedge in its fruit, [O God],
with the mystery of mighty Heroes
and of spirits of holiness

and of the whirling flame of fire.
 No [man shall approach] the well-spring of life
 or drink the waters of holiness
 with the everlasting trees,
 or bear fruit with [the Plant] of heaven,
 who seeing has not discerned,
 and considering has not believed
 in the fountain of life,
 who has turned [his hand against] the everlasting [bud].⁵⁹

In the mystical dialectical language deconstruction is called *yihud* (unification), and refers explicitly and implicitly to magical language. For example:

These are the codes, combination, utterance, sum, and computation of the explication of the Ineffable Name—unique in the branches of the root of vocalization that is magnified in the thirteen types of transformation. How is the code accomplished? It derives the word through the utterance and the utterance through the word . . . the sum through the computation and the computation through the sum. Until all the words are positioned in the font of the flame and the flame in the font—until there is no measuring or quantifying the light that is hidden in the superabundance of the secret darkness.⁶⁰

Reconstruction is called *devekut* (adherence) and refers to the mystical language. The deconstruction of the infinite word of God represents by itself the freedom of interpretation—the reader's freedom to ignore the plain meaning, reject it, replace it, and fill in the text with new content. The principles of mystical language, which are based on deconstruction and reconstruction, and on the ongoing dynamics of meaning, reflect the desire to go beyond the plain meaning of the Torah, and, analogously, to rescue reality from its limitations, that is to say, to grasp the hidden content of the Torah, and to reveal its metaphysical meaning and its intricate relation to upper worlds.

Mystical freedom is anchored in the belief that an infinite number of combinations exist in each word. Thus nothing is closed or permanent. This freedom stems from the certainty that each being is made of a spiritual essence and a physical garment, and the relations between the two fluctuate and alternate. The intellectual power of mystical thought, which perceives the divine as a dialectical process of unity of opposites, lies in its deconstruction of the univocality of material revelation, and the infinite reconstruction of new spiritual essences. The fluidity of letters that are perpetually combined and taken apart in the human mind is nothing, then, but an imitation of the divine unity of opposites, which unites within the infinite process of creation: expansion and annihilation, revelation and concealment, covering [= materializing] and uncovering [= abstracting]. In his mind, the human being, who uncovers [= abstracts, divests] the single meaning of

⁵⁹ Vermes, *Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 213–14.

⁶⁰ *Ma'ayan hokhmah* (The Fountain of Wisdom), trans. Verman in *Books of Contemplation*, 50–1.

the plain text and covers [= invests, concretizes] it with new combinations, imitates the word of God, which covers and uncovers being all the time:

Whoever possesses the knowledge of God and puts his effort into learning Torah for its own sake really understands that the Torah is nothing but combinations of names, holy appellations. And as we mentioned above with regard to the book named 'The Two Tables of the Covenant', the Torah is called *pekudei YHVH* because the main issue written about in the Torah from the beginning until its revelation to the eyes of Israel has been entrusted (*pekudah* and *pikadon*) and hidden in the name *HVYH* . . . and the righteous one through the depth of his comprehension strips off the fables she [the Torah] puts on herself, and clothes her in spiritual forms, heavenly lights, and supernal mysteries made out of holy names suggested in these stories . . . The Torah is called *pekudei YHVH*, because it means a deposit [*pikadon* in Hebrew], that is, that the Torah as a whole, from the beginning until its revelation to the eyes of Israel, is nothing but holy names, whose purpose is to indicate the substance of *HVYH*, blessed be He. In that name the principles and the details of the matters are hidden and deposited . . . because in this holy name all the Torah is deposited and hidden . . . and everyone is free to choose if one improves and straightens his ways and grasps the clothing of God by contracting His holy and pure dimensions. If so he is able to divest the Torah of its materiality and clothe it in spirituality and form combinations as incumbent upon him through his talent . . . The obligation is laid upon everyone of Israel to divest the letters of the Torah of their materiality and to raise them to their source, that is to say, to form holy combinations within the Torah and the liturgy.⁶¹

The kabbalist who discovers within his mind the divine foundation of material reality—the letters—the one who deconstructs and reconstructs language, or the one who regards all the elements of being as details capable of being reconstructed, breaks through the limits of time and space: 'And behold, the God-fearing righteous person . . . remembers in each and every minute before whom he is standing, and he strips himself of materiality, as if he is above this world beyond the rule of time.'⁶² If the principle of enveloping the infinite divine light within the confines of the finite, permitting the manifestation of the world, is the main principle of the relation between God and reality, then for the mystical consciousness, the principle of 'uncovering', the stripping off of materiality, follows for the mutual relations among man, God, and the world. These two principles also apply to the relations between God and the Torah (covering—the concealment of God in the revealed) and between man and the plain meaning of the text (uncovering—abstracting the revealed to expose the concealed). These two principles are embodied in the Torah, which reflects the covering and the uncovering and demonstrates the process by which God at one and the same time is revealed in creation and in the plain text and is concealed 'in wonderful hidden secrets': 'There is no doubt that there is not a word throughout our holy Torah that does

⁶¹ Wolf, *Or hame'ir*, Ruth, 175a; 'Vayehi', 38–9; Ruth, 178a.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 'Vayehi', 39b.

not hold hidden awesome wonderful secrets, ideas that the human heart cannot grasp, for who can penetrate the secrets of God, and who will find them, so deep and profound are they.⁶³

Mystical literature, which is founded to a great extent on penetrating contemplation into the depth of language and the ancient memories embedded in it, and on deciphering its mysteries and uncovering hidden dimensions, includes many genres and a rich variety of forms of expression, relying on unique names and combinations that are perpetually deconstructed and reconstructed. It contains side by side unrestricted automatic spontaneous writing, writings influenced by the subconscious and myth, and visionary writings that reflect dreams and revelations. Often one can find in mystical literature a new reading of a well-known text that dismantles the conventional frameworks and reconstructs new combinations that create beautiful as well as unclear linguistic forms. In addition, this literature includes unexpected confessions in poetical language as well as autobiographical writing, anonymous pseudographical writing, meaningful imaginative stories retelling well-known texts, rigid frameworks for codification, and systematic rational writing, which explains abstract mystical concepts within the framework of traditional commentary on the reasons for the commandments. It includes visionary, didactic, and magical writing, provocative and anarchic writing presented as commentary, and nihilistic writing that rejects the yoke of the Torah.⁶⁴

Sometimes mystical language is metaphoric or synecdochic. It represents the obscure totality by an unconventional detail, and blends realistic and imaginary entities, as suggested in *Sefer habahir*:

The Holy One, blessed be He, has one tree in which there are twelve diagonal borders, an east-north border, an east-south border . . . and they widen for ever, and these are the arms of the world, and within them there is the tree. And what is that tree that you mentioned? These are the forces of the Holy One, blessed be He, one on top of the other, and they resemble a tree. As this tree produces fruits the Holy One, blessed be He, by water strengthens the tree. And what is the water of the Holy One, blessed be He? It is wisdom and the souls of the righteous who fly from the spring to the great pipe that ascends and clings to the tree.⁶⁵

This text joins together elements from the *Sefer yetsirah* and from the Midrash but creates a new world and a new conceptual language that has no objective correlative—it has only mythical associations and mystical combinations.

⁶³ Ibid., Ruth, 177a.

⁶⁴ For examples of anarchic and nihilistic Jewish mystical literature see Atiash, Scholem, and Ben-Tsevi (eds.), *Songs and Praises of the Shabateans*; Frank, *Divrei ha'adon*; Aaron b. Moses Halevi Horwitz of Starsielce, *Sha'arei ha'avodah*; Mordecai Joseph Leiner, *Mei hashilo'ah*. On their historical context in Shabateanism, hasidism, and Frankism see Scholem, 'Redemption through Sin'; Atiash, Scholem, and Ben-Tsevi (eds.), *Songs and Praises of the Shabateans*; Elior, *Theology in the Second Generation*, 244–88; Kraushar, *Jacob Frank*; Balaban, *History of the Frankist Movement*; Elior, 'Jacob Frank's *Divrei ha'adon*'; Faierstein, *All is in the Hands of Heaven*; Brill, *Thinking God*.

⁶⁵ *Sefer habahir*, §95; §119. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*.

Mystical language, which combines the hidden and the revealed, renews itself through visions and dreams that go beyond the limits of reality and expose previously unknown layers of language. Sometimes the renewal occurs through unifications, adjurations, and situations of loss of control, and sometimes through the study of sacred texts that requires the utterance of the renewed version of the written text and its transformation into 'a speaking word'. Mystical language renews itself through the unique experience of the mystic, who finds through his imagination new meanings in previously known concepts, and who revives popular symbols. A mystical poetical tradition mentioned in the Talmud (BT *Avodah zarah*) relating to the Ark of the Covenant that was made of acacia wood (Exod. 25: 10) is revived in a third-century *merkavah* hymn, part of *Heikhalot rabati*, which speaks of a mystical transformation of the Ark of the Covenant, turned into a singing heavenly throne:

Sing, oh sing, acacia tree, ascend in all thy gracefulness. With golden weave they cover thee, the *Devir* palace hears thy eulogy, with diverse jewels art thou adorned. (BT *Avodah zarah* 24b)

Rejoice, rejoice, throne of glory, sing for joy, seat of the Most High! Exult, exult, O precious vessel, so marvellously fashioned! You will gladden the king upon you, as a bridegroom is gladdened in his bridal chamber.⁶⁶

The unique experience that is embedded in the assumption 'that each [deliverance] of his imagination is true, because the purpose of creation was to reveal his Divinity, blessed be He, precisely through the imagination',⁶⁷ and the transformations of the sacred text into a new speech are regarded as the revelation of the word of God. 'The source of the word that comes to humans is the Shekhinah.'⁶⁸

Mystical visions are often tied to a translanguistic experience stemming from a sacred textual system that had been deconstructed and reconstructed, becoming a new text. They may also be tied to an actual experience that had been deconstructed in the visionary's imagination, gone through a visual metamorphosis, and been re-experienced and rewritten. In contrast, the symbol in mystical thought is the representative of a concept, substance, or process, which by itself is not revealed in any way and cannot be expressed in any conventional way. The mystic defines it arbitrarily or in accordance with a mystical interpretative tradition. Alongside the popular symbols in the written tradition, a mystic creates images, detailed visionary descriptions, poetic expressions, and new combinations that are revealed in visions, which blend reality and imagination to create a new reality.

An example of a mystical description of a new reality, relying on the deconstruction and reconstruction of a biblical text, can be found in a segment of the

⁶⁶ *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §260.

⁶⁷ Aaron b. Moses Halevi Horwitz of Starosielce, *Sha'arei ha'avodah*, Preface.

⁶⁸ Elijah b. Moses de Vidas, *Reshit hokhmah*, ch. 10, §24.

‘Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice’.⁶⁹ This work was written by the priests of Qumran, who left the Temple in Jerusalem in the second century BCE because of disagreements over important questions regarding the order of service, the true calendar, and rights to the priesthood.⁷⁰ Each word in this song is familiar, but almost none of its combinations are otherwise known. It combines a visionary tradition linked to Ezekiel’s chariot with angelic-priestly traditions related to the Temple:

For the Master.

Song of the burnt offering of the twelfth sabbath on the twenty-first of the third month.

Praise the God of cycles of wonder and exalt Him.

Glory is in the tabernacle of the God of knowledge.

The cherubim fall before Him and bless Him.

As they rise the sound of divine stillness [is heard] .

There is a tumult of jubilation;

as their wings lift up the sound of divine stillness [is heard].

The cherubim bless the form of the chariot throne [which is] above the firmament of the cherubim;

and they sing and praise the splendour of the luminous firmament, [which is] beneath His glorious seat.

And when the wheels move, the holy angels return. They emerge from his glorious wheels

like sights of fire, spirits of the holy of holies round about, between the appearance of [mighty] streams of fire like *hashmal*.

And there is radiance, embroidery of glorious and wonderful colours, wondrously hued, a pure blend.

The spirits of living godlike beings which move continuously with the glory of the wondrous chariots.

There is a still sound of blessing amid the roar of their

Movement; they praise His holiness as they return to their paths.

As they ascend they ascend wonderfully, and when they settle, they stand still.

The sound of joyful praise falls silent. There is a stillness of divine blessing in all of the camps of godlike beings;

Sound of praises. . . [coming] from among all their divisions.

On their sides each of their number in his turn praises while passing by and all their mustered troops rejoice, each one in his station.⁷¹

The fragmented text, through its exalted celestial language, focusing on praises raised to the Lord from every corner of his heavenly Temple by all his angels, clearly reveals that the praising, singing, blessing, and joy in the heavenly Temple

⁶⁹ See *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, ed. Newsom; Elior, *Three Temples*.

⁷⁰ On the priests from Qumran see *Megilat hahodayot*, ed. Licht; *Megilat haserakhim*, ed. Licht; *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, ed. Newsom, 1–80; *Pesher havakuk*, ed. Nitzan.

⁷¹ 4Q 405 20 ii–22: 6–14, in *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, ed. Newsom, 303.

are ascribed to cherubim, chariot throne, spheres, wheels, spirits of the living God, and chariots of wonder. In other words, in the vision of the priests of Qumran, the earthly service of the earthly Temple is released from its earthly limits and is reconstructed anew garbed in its heavenly form—a new mystical poetry sung by angels.⁷² This text alludes to Ezekiel's chariot, the biblical tradition of the angels' chanting, and the glory of the inhabitants of heaven.

It is possible that these poems, some of which are enigmatic, were influenced by the ancient tradition of magical names, which was connected to priestly traditions during the First Temple period.⁷³ In the biblical tradition priestly magic is related primarily to holy and explicit names, which are always treated with awesome reverence. These ineffable names are partially derived from the priestly ritual tradition of the Temple⁷⁴ and the priestly mystical tradition concerning the angelic world.⁷⁵ Later mystical tradition refers in a suggestive manner to the antiquity of the tradition of names, while alluding to the high priest's breastplate and *Sefer yetsirah*:

These are the twelve precious, illuminated, explicit names of Israel's twelve tribes . . . all of which are included in the thirty-two [paths] of heaven and are divided into twenty-four names; male and female are included and counted in Teli [a heavenly constellation], wheel and heart, and they are the source of wisdom.⁷⁶

From Ben Sira and Philo to the Mishnah and the Talmud, Jewish literature has explicitly taught us that the tradition of engraved ineffable names is a priestly tradition connected to the tradition of God's name. It is related to the explicit name that was forbidden to be pronounced, the explicit name that the high priest used to pronounce in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur that could not have been heard by others, the priestly benediction used at the Temple to bless in the name of God, the name that was engraved on the ornament the high priest wore, and the names connected to taking an oath, writing, and uttering God's name both within the Temple and outside it.⁷⁷ One example that combines the tradition related to the Explicit Name, the priestly benediction,⁷⁸ and the mystical-magical tradition is found in *Sefer habahir*:

⁷² On the angelic liturgy as mystical poetry see *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, ed. Newsom; Elior, 'From Earthly Temple'; Elior, *Three Temples*, 165–200.

⁷³ On the connections between the Temple and the tradition of holy names see Urbach, *Sages*, ch. 7; Elior, 'From Earthly Temple'; Lesses, *Ritual Practices*.

⁷⁴ See the biblical and mishnaic-talmudic tradition about God's name on the crown of the high priest. The priests are pronouncing God's name in the priestly blessing in the Temple; the high priest is pronouncing the Name of God on Yom Kippur in the Temple. See Urbach, *Sages*, ch. 7.

⁷⁵ Elior, 'Mysticism, Magic and Angelology'.

⁷⁶ *Sefer habahir*, §§111, 112.

⁷⁷ On the centrality of Temple worship as reflected in the 'halakhic' literature in Qumran see Suessmann, 'Research on the History of Halakhah'; on its centrality in the mystical literature see Elior, *Three Temples*.

⁷⁸ On the priestly blessing and the tradition of holy names see Urbach, *Sages*; Elior, 'From Earthly Temple'.

Rabbi Ahilai sat and taught: why is it written God is Ruler [*melekh*], God has been ruling [*malakh*], God will be ruling for ever and ever [*yimlokh*]. Because this is the explicit name, which we are permitted to use and mention in combinations, as it is written: 'Thus they shall link my name with the people of Israel, and I will bless them' (Numbers 6: 27). And it is a name of twelve letters [which is included] in the priestly benediction—The Lord bless you etc.—which are three, and they are twelve . . . and if one sacredly and purely guards and mentions it, all his prayers are accepted, and as if this were not enough, he is loved in the lower [world] and the upper [world], desired in the lower [world] and the upper [world], attended and helped immediately. This is the explicit name written on Aaron's forehead. And in the explicit name there are seventy-two letters. And the explicit name, which is twelve names, was delivered by the Holy One, blessed be He, to the angel Masmeryah, who had been standing in front of the curtain, and he delivered them to Elijah on Mount Carmel, and by them he was elevated and did not experience the taste of death.⁷⁹

In the writings of the German pietists of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries there are various traditions of the transmission of the divine names. In the book *Sodei razaya* of R. Ele'azar of Worms (c.1165–1230) the ritual of transmission is described as follows: 'The one who deals with the *merkavah* or with the honoured name should go, he and his student, to whom he wishes to transmit the name, and they should wash in water and cleanse all their body in water . . . and immerse themselves in the water . . . they should immerse their bodies and dress in white clothes and stand in water up to their thighs.'⁸⁰

Significant parts of the tradition of names are connected to the world of the angels who serve in the upper sanctuaries, who are the mystical counterparts of the priests who served in the earthly Temple. There are no doubts regarding the priestly identity of the circles in which the hymns of the Sabbath sacrifice were composed,⁸¹ and the tradition described by Josephus, Joseph ben Matityahu, ascribes to them a special interest in the names of angels. It is interesting that the prayer of sanctification (Kedushah), sung by humans and angels alike in the upper and lower worlds praising the name of God, exists in different forms in Qumran and the Heikhalot literature. If one part of the tradition of names is connected to the Temple ritual, priesthood, and angels of upper temples in charge of the divine worship and heavenly liturgy, then a second part is connected to the benefits for humans as explicitly expressed in the previously quoted promise to the guardians of the names: 'And if one sacredly and purely guards and mentions it, all his prayers are accepted, and as if this were not enough, he is loved in the lower [world] and the upper [world], desired in the lower [world] and the upper [world],

⁷⁹ Ibid., §III. The name of seventy-two letters is discussed in *Bereshit rabah* 44: 19; the names of twelve letters and of forty-two letters are mentioned in BT *Kid.* 71a. Cf. Rashi, commentary on BT *Suk.* 45b.

⁸⁰ Ele'azar of Worms, *Sefer sodei razaya*, 149–50; see Dan, *Occult Theories*, 74–5.

⁸¹ *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, ed. Newsom, 1–80; Elior, *Three Temples*, ch. 8.

attended and helped immediately.' These versions can be found for the first time in the texts of *Shiur komah*, written in the early centuries of the Common Era, which directly tie the knowledge of God's names to benefits for humans, such as the ability to control nature.⁸²

The link between the knowledge of names, which were connected with the priestly blessing and divine grace, and 'being attended and helped immediately' applies to all human needs, especially for the healing of the body and the soul. This link is clearly reflected in all magical literature starting with the Heikhalot literature, fragments of the Genizah, and *Sefer harazim*, through *Ma'ayan haḥokhmah* (Fountain of Wisdom) and *Shimushei torah* (Uses of the Torah), and concluding with Abraham ben Isaac of Granada's *Berit menuḥah*, *Shivḥei habesht*, and dozens of volumes in between of amulets, adjurations, and magical formulas.⁸³ One should not be surprised by this link, for the magical ritualistic language is grasped as the path to the concealed, the hidden knowledge, the mysteries of controlling the heavenly world, and also regarded as a source of power, knowledge, and benefit in the earthly world.⁸⁴ From the beginning, magical language has been connected to rituals, mysteries, adjurations, blessings, and ceremonies in the domain of the Temple priests. This language has also been linked to medicine and magic,⁸⁵ witchcraft and spells, and the total complex of rituals capable of interfering with natural causality, and not confined to a ritual centre such as the Temple. The use of magical language takes place through the conviction of the few who believe in their ability to impose human will on heavenly powers, and through those around them who believe in the power of names they possess.

Mystical language is often a poetic language that connects the earthly and the heavenly, as is expressed clearly in the opening of *Heikhalot rabati*: 'What makes it unique? By poetry one descends to the *merkavah*. One starts by saying poetical praises.'⁸⁶ This is obvious in *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, which describe the singing of the angels in a mysterious place in which 'all those who are present in

⁸² See Cohen, *Shi'ur Qomah*.

⁸³ For examples of magical literature see *Sefer harazim* (Book of Secrets), ed. Margalioṯ (magical tradition and Heikhalot literature, according to Genizah manuscripts from the talmudic period). *Heikhalot zutarti*, *Shimushei tehilim*, *Sefer haḥeshek*, *Ma'ayan haḥokhmah*, and *Harba demosheh* are examples of books which contain magical traditions. On these books see Dan and Liebes (eds.), *Library of Gershom Scholem*. On these texts see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 75–83, 94–100; *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al.; *Geniza Fragmente*, ed. Schäfer; Schäfer, 'Jewish Magic Literature'; Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*; *Harba demosheh*, ed. Harari; Lesses, *Ritual Practices*; Idel, 'Perception of the Torah'; Grözinger, 'Names of God'.

⁸⁴ On the role of magic in Jewish tradition in different periods see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*; Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*; Schäfer, 'Jewish Magic Literature'; Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*; Elior, 'Mysticism, Magic and Angelology'; Cohen-Alloro, 'Magic and Sorcery in the Zohar'; Dan, 'Story of Joseph della Reina'; Gruenwald, 'Magic and Myth'; Idel, *Golem*; Gruenwald, 'Writing, Epistles, and the Name of God'; Idel, *Hasidism*; Etkes, 'Magic and Masters of the Name'; Lesses, *Ritual Practices*.

⁸⁵ On magic and healing see Bilu, *Without Bounds*, and Lesses, *Ritual Practices*.

⁸⁶ *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §§1.

the *devir* [Holy of Holies] feel the wonderful praises in a wonderful *devir*, from *devir* to *devir* in a voice full of holiness . . . together they praise the chariots of his *devir*.⁸⁷ The poetic mystical language which enlarges the scope of human horizons constructs the hidden heavenly sanctuary. The purpose of using the magical ritual language of names (which gives up on human understanding) through invocations, adjurations, and unifications is to obtain either knowledge hidden in the world of the dead or the eternal world of the angels or the secrets that control the upper and lower worlds, by stripping language of its content. The magical names are derived from combinations of letters beginning or ending verses, by a numerological principle. For example, the name containing seventy-two letters, which is mentioned in *Bereshit rabah* 44: 19 and explained by Rashi in his commentary to BT *Sukah* 45*b*, is derived from the vertical reading of three consecutive verses, each one containing a total of seventy-two letters, mentioned in Exodus 14: 19–21. Another name of forty-two letters is derived from the first letters of all the verses in one of the prayers. Many other names are obtained by rearranging the letters in the biblical names of God. The unintelligible language, constructed of meaningless or imperceivable names in the human domain which are fraught with hidden meaning in the divine realm, becomes numinous, divine, powerful, and frightening because of the unexplained powers it holds: ‘and you should attest according to the book *Shimushei torah*, which extracts a number of names from a number of Torah portions and changes the letters’ order and combinations until one works awesome deeds by means of them’.⁸⁸ Magical language achieves this status by returning language to its primal stratum, the stratum of heaven, in a mythological time preceding distinct categories of time and space, context and meaning. It transcends rational thought and returns, as it were, to the depth of consciousness that precedes rational distinctions. Magical literature clearly shows that one seeks power and influence over, and contact with, supernatural entities through both intelligible and unintelligible language. An example of using the Holy Name and the preconditions for its proper use are found in the magical chapters of *Heikhalot* literature, where the adjuration of angels through holy names, fasting, and praying is described:

R. Ishmael said: I sought this secret and I sat twelve days fasting. When I saw that I was not able [to persevere in the fast], I made use of the great name of forty-two letters and PDQRS the Angel of the Countenance descended in anger so that I trembled and fell back.

He said to me: Son of the stinking drop . . . you made use of the great name, you took for yourself the orders of the Torah. I will not give it to you until you sit forty days in fast.

Immediately I hastened and pronounced three letters and he ascended: ZH BR BYH greatness TYTBYT. I sat forty days in fast and prayed three prayers in the morning and

⁸⁷ 4Q403 l ii 13–15, in *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, ed. Newsom, 226, 229.

⁸⁸ Matitiah Delacrut, commentary on *Sha'arei orah* (Jerusalem, 1960).

three prayers in the afternoon and three prayers in the evening . . . and I mentioned twelve words at every one. On the last day I prayed three times and I mentioned twelve words and PDQRM the Angel of the Countenance descended and with him angels of mercy and they caused wisdom to settle in the heart of R. Ishmael.

R. Ishmael said: I myself sealed seven seals at the time that PDQRS the Angel of the Countenance descended. Blessed are you, YY, you who created the heaven and the earth in your wisdom and your understanding. Your name is forever. HYWP SYSY PYYW LWSM BY KYY TNY name of your servant.⁸⁹

As the visionary literature shows, contact with such entities occurs within mystical language or dreams, which are free to recombine the perceptible and the abstract without being restricted by reality. One example of the way in which secrets are revealed through the inspiration of dreams and ‘visions of the night while half-awake, half-asleep’ can be found in the testimony of the anonymous author of the mid-sixteenth century *Galya raza* or *Raza gali* (the Revealer of Mysteries), who links his mystical revelation to a mission imposed on him by heaven:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who revealed to me these secrets of the uppermost that until now had never been revealed to a human being in this generation since the shining light [= Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai] disappeared from this world . . . And all this that I wrote was awakened in my heart to write and publish [because I] was awakened from heaven as I was on my bed, and through visions of the night while half-awake, half-asleep they put in my mouth to say . . . And in the morning, when I returned from the synagogue, I sat and wrote what they summoned me to put in my heart . . . because Gabriel is in charge of dreams and his name is *Raza gali* (Revealer of Mysteries) . . . Therefore, I named my work the Revealed Secret, because through dreams at night and sometimes while awake I composed all the compositions that I made.⁹⁰

The feeling of approaching the end of days often causes the kabbalist to break the restrictions of esotericism and write down his words. Solomon Almoli, in sixteenth-century Istanbul, ascribed his heavenly revelations to the approach of the messiah and to divine inspiration, probably influenced by the Zohar tradition, which links the approach of redemption to the revelation of secrets:

And I realize that by God’s mercy secrets and wonderful teachings were revealed to me, which had never been revealed, so much so that it makes me wonder, who am I and what is my life that I am worthy of this. It must be the sign of our redemption and the salvation of our souls . . . And this composition is completely new because all its teachings . . . came to me through profound and vigorous study by the providence of God, blessed be He, who bestowed them upon me.⁹¹

⁸⁹ *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. Schäfer et al., §§565–6. On the text see Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 420; Janowitz, *Poetics of Ascent*, 48.

⁹⁰ *Galya raza*, 15–16. Cf. Elior, ‘The Doctrine of Transmigration in *Galya Raza*’.

⁹¹ *Sha’ar adonai hehadash*, 13a; 2a.

The content of the revelation can be mystical and abstract, embedded with messianic hopes for the benefit of the entire exiled community, or magical and ritual, intended for the benefit of the individual who wishes to gain power or knowledge. The words 'secrets and mysteries' refer to both mystical and magical language, and their content might be revealed in a dream or in a vision. Sometimes mystical language is prosaic and philosophical in an attempt at exaltation through systematic analysis and scholarly observation, as is reflected in the kabbalistic works of the medieval anonymous author of *Ma'arekhet elohut* (System of Divinity) and the sixteenth-century author of *Pardes rimonim*, Moses Cordovero, and the books of Shneur Zalman of Lyady, his student Aaron Halevi Horwitz of Starosielce, and his son Dov Ber of Lubavitch in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sometimes it is a magical language that tries to reach exaltation by giving up meaning and using meaningless names and fixed formulas, as one can see in the Heikhalot literature, in the *Shiur komah* texts, and in *Sefer harazim* from late antiquity and the Byzantine period. Sometimes it is a symbolic language that through mystical symbols expresses attributes and entities that are unreachable through the senses. These different aspects of mystical language refer to the hidden divine being, the beginning of time, unknown periods, *shiur komah*, *merkavot*, worlds that were destroyed, and worlds conceived in thought, the revelation of the Shekhinah, the singing of the angels, the different 'faces' of the divinity that creates itself, and much more. These expressions, which refer to the prehistory and metahistory of the divine and human world, are expressions of the inner world of man, who is revealed through language and exposed through his unique experience of worlds that transcend the constraints of materiality.

A meaningful mystical work enables the reader to experience the decoding of hidden meanings through the exposure of different layers of language. This is possible because of the infinitude ascribed to the divine text, the decoding of which is an ongoing process, and the complexity of terms, images, and pictures used by a mystical text, which embodies additional terms, images, and pictures from earlier periods. Key mystical concepts often touch the depths of myth, the heart of the biblical tradition, the mysteries of priestly traditions connected to holy names, angels, and heavenly chariots, and the secrets of the aggadic tradition, in which the immediate and the distant, the yearned-for and the lost in history are united. Surprisingly, these concepts suggest, symbolize, or apply universal human concepts to the divine realm and project divine concepts onto human reality. They sometimes express the mythologization and mystification of ordinary concepts, which turn into mythical and cosmic concepts such as 'eternal life', 'metempsychosis', 'sing, oh sing, acacia tree', or 'tree of souls'. They sometimes personify divine powers such as 'the redeeming angel who is sometimes male and sometimes female', or 'incest is the king's sceptre', referring to an exceptional prerogative in heavenly realms which is prohibited in earthly society. These kinds of concepts demonstrate 'a condensed concept'. They offer a multilayered associative fabric

that reflects the abstraction of a ritual and textual tradition on the one hand, and the materialization of mystical and mental symbols on the other. Both are embedded in collective memory attested in written texts and ancient ritual-liturgical tradition and both are connected to unexpected domains of the concealed and the revealed. Mystical concepts par excellence previously mentioned, describing the hidden world as 'seven words of wonder', 'seven temples', 'ten *sefirot* of infinite nothingness', 'thirty-two mystical paths of wisdom', 'emanation', 'ancient man' or 'primordial man', 'countenances', 'breaking of the vessels', 'the death of kings', and others, illustrate the mixture of the perceptible and the imaginary, the lost and the invented, the poetical and the mystical, the mythical and the historical, the human and the divine. Mystical concepts, describing God as 'beauty that sets depths on fire' and 'a face in the image of spirit and soul', when no earthly representation of the divine presence is available any more, and defining the desired future in a language of defiance and hope as 'the land of Israel floating on water' or 'the yearned-for age of mercy', or as a language that will have one new letter which will transform accepted definitions and will take on reality in a new era, demonstrate that fundamental concepts of mysticism often 'project' feelings, contexts, and meanings from one domain onto another, and establish new perspectives with respect to hidden and revealed reality. Mystical metaphor symbolizes and condenses popular concepts, and deepens their associative space. It refers to the beginning of days, the end of days, the passages among worlds, the depths of the human soul, the infinity of language, and the relations between God and the world in a language of freedom which defies any earthly constraints, and offers alternatives to existing order. The image of God as a being without shape, as spirit without a body, as creative power with no borders, the decoding of the hidden world—its mythic creation and its mystical principles, the reciprocal relations between the upper and lower worlds, the application of the principle of opposites to the human soul and to the divine being, destruction and redemption, the beginning of the soul and its end—are all described by concepts rich in meaning, through metaphors, names, and secrets that illustrate the ability to interpret the text from a different point of view, initiating a new and powerful dialogue between the concrete and the abstract.

*

Jewish mysticism, written across three millennia in numerous places, demonstrates a remarkable chapter in the history of freedom, where people who suffered from the arbitrary hardship of history challenged the loss of the Temple and the continuous exile, the ongoing persecutions, and the recurrent expulsions by anchoring their hopes and yearnings in the heavenly domain, where memories of the lost glorious past could be deposited (from Temple to chariot to sanctuaries; from priests to angels), where ongoing creative freedom was secured ('in thirty-

two paths of wisdom . . . in book, story, and number . . . God created his world'), where lost bodies could be transformed into eternal souls (the 'tree of souls' theory of reincarnation), and where structure, meaning, order, and purpose could be established as against chaos, meaningless catastrophe, and suffering in historical reality. In the mystical tradition there are always numbers and structures (ten *sefirot*; thirty-two paths of wisdom; seven sanctuaries; four faces of the chariot; twelve diagonal borders) and there is always an active plan which assists commemoration of the lost past or assists activation of the hoped-for future. The former was embedded in the mystical liturgy of the Merkavah tradition that transformed the lost priestly venue on earth into seven heavenly sanctuaries where the eternal divine service is performed by the angels, and the chariot of the cherubim is glowing and singing as if there were never a destruction on earth. 'Descenders of the chariot' and mystical adepts describe in detail the hidden heavenly world of the *merkavah*, where the Temple worship was continuously performed for close to a thousand years. The latter, the activation of a hoped-for future, took place for 800 years, from the twelfth-century *Sefer habahir* to the twentieth century. The Book of Splendour and *Magid meisharim*, *Ets hayim*, and the vast kabbalist–hasidic library participate in building the passage from the past to the future. They further elaborate on the passage from exile to redemption through contemplation and unification, free interpretation and mystical ascension, revival of prophetic inspiration and renewal of messianic hopes, and alternative perceptions of existence. The new perceptions of language ('in every letter there are world, souls, and divinity') and the new perception of the deity (Shekhinah and *Kudsha berikh hu*; ten *sefirot*, *adam kadmon*, the responding angel, the messiah in heaven), where distinctions between the divine spirit and the human spirit are blurred and erased, paved the way to new avenues in the history of freedom, where human beings succeeded in changing the course of history against all odds and managed to transform historical exile into different forms of human liberation.

