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יהא זכרם ברוך

'Get wisdom, get understanding:
Forsake her not and she shall preserve thee'

PROV. 4:5

JEWISH MYSTICISM

◆
The Infinite Expression of Freedom

◆
RACHEL ELIOR

Translated by
YUDITH NAVE
and
ARTHUR B. MILLMAN

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*To my beloved family,
with whom I share great happiness in the present, and
everlasting curiosity about life*

MICHAEL
ABIGAIL, SHAHAR, and MIKA
ARIEL and NILI
DANIEL and FRANCES

*And to my dear friends,
with whom I share enthusiasm about the hidden past
revealed in books and conversation*

SANDY and MELANIE MARGOLIES
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Translators' Preface

THIS translation is the collaborative work of the Hebrew Institute of Boston, a non-profit organization whose mission is to translate Hebrew scholarly works into English. We believe that translation benefits from such collaborative effort because the process of discussion and mutual criticism that accompanies the pooling of linguistic resources allows for a more nuanced understanding of complicated texts and better interpretation of philosophical ideas. Teamwork taps into deeper wells of cultural allusions, and thus generates better solutions to the complex problems of translation.

We were particularly interested in translating this book because of the extraordinary challenges it presented and because of the importance of its inclusive cultural message. As we worked we found ourselves drawn deeper and deeper into the subject matter and the translation became a labour of love.

In building her thesis, Rachel Elior draws extensively on the source texts of Jewish mysticism, from antiquity to the modern era. Most of these texts are very obscure, even for the native speaker of Hebrew. The ordinary reader trying to grapple with an obscure text can generally make some sense of it without necessarily accounting for all its details. Translators, however, are accountable for every aspect: we have therefore tried to convey the meaning as clearly as possible while also capturing the style and content, in the hope of facilitating the reader's understanding of the use Elior makes of these quotations to advance her argument.

A couple of examples may help convey some of our considerations and choices. A quotation from *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, §19 (see pp. 78–9) is used to illustrate the transformation of a human being (Enoch; Gen. 5: 21–4) into a divine creature (Metatron). In the Hebrew text Metatron says that he was taken by God בַּשְׁמָשׁוֹת (*beshemashot*) to serve לְשָׁמֶשׁ (*leshamesh*) the Throne. The noun שְׁמָשׁוֹת (*shemashot*) can mean 'dusk', as in *bein hashemashot*, or 'suns'; the prefix ב־ (*be-*) can mean 'at' or 'by'; so *beshemashot* may mean 'at dusk' or 'by suns'. In addition, because Hebrew is written without vowels, the word שְׁמָשׁוֹת might equally be read *shamashut*, which means 'service'. This possibility needs to be considered since the context indicates that Metatron was taken for service. However, the combination *beshamashut leshamesh* is strange. Philip Alexander's translation of this verse reads: 'When the Holy One blessed be He, took me to serve the throne of Glory . . .' (*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. Charlesworth, i. 267). Alexander solves the problem by omitting any reference to שְׁמָשׁוֹת. Elior's main point is that this transformation takes place by means of fire. This led us to choose the English word 'fire', assuming that שְׁמָשׁוֹת means 'suns' (*shemashot*), which fits the dominant imagery of fire in the entire passage and best

illustrates Elijior's argument. Our translation then is: 'Because the Holy One, blessed be He, took me by fire to serve the Throne . . . '.

The translation of a passage quoted from *Shirot olat hashabat* 4Q405 20 ii, 21–2 (see below, p. 125) can illustrate the problems that arise from an unpunctuated source text. When we compared the translations by Carol Newsom and Geza Vermes we realized that their reconstructions of the fragmentary scrolls do not agree; there are significant differences in word choice and punctuation. Newsom's translation, ll. 6–8, reads:

[Praise the God of wo]ndrous [years] and exalt Him according to the Glory. In the tabern[acle of the God of] knowledge the [*cheru*]bim fall before Him; and they bl[es]s as they lift themselves up. A sound of divine stillness is [heard;] and there is a tumult of jubilation at the lifting up of their wings . . .

Vermes's translation reads:

[Praise the God of . . . w]onder, and exalt him . . . of glory in the te[nt of the God of] knowledge. The [*cheru*]bim prostrate themselves before Him and bless. As they rise, a whispered divine voice [is heard], and there is a roar of praise. When they drop their wings . . .

Elijior quotes a reconstructed Hebrew text. Nevertheless, because of its obscurity we decided to consult other translations based on variant reconstructions. In the end we had to take responsibility for our own choices. Our translation reads:

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 first line of the text in Elijior's book included the phrase 'years of wonder' following the Newsom English text. We, however, preferred 'cycles of wonder' because of the basic premiss of the Qumran literature that emphasizes sacred cycles. Since the syntax of the passage is indeterminate, our choice of syntax aimed at capturing the poetic imagery and rhythm of the text. The text conveys a vision all of whose details occur simultaneously. Thus we chose a sentence and line structure making use of enjambement with an eye to conveying this.

We consulted standard translations when they were available and incorporated them in our work in varying degrees. Our final versions are the result of considering word choice, syntax, and aesthetics while maintaining the highest level of accuracy we could. In each case we attempted to highlight the inferences the author invites. We would like to acknowledge the translations we consulted: for the Hebrew Bible, the new Jewish Publication Society translation of the Tanakh and the New King James Version; for the Talmud, the Soncino translation; for the

Translators' Preface

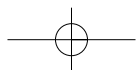
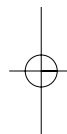
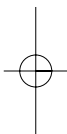
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Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, Carol Newsom's critical edition of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and Geza Vermes's translation in *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*; for *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, §19, Philip Alexander's translation; Aryeh Kaplan's translation of *Sefer yetsirah*; Louis Jacobs for *The Holy Epistle*; Jacob Immanuel Schochet's translation of *Tsava'at harivash*; Arthur Green's translation of 'The Sign' by S. Y. Agnon; and Ruth Nevo's translation of *Hetsits vamet* by H. N. Bialik.

The undersigned translated and revised the entire manuscript, with the exception of the Appendix and Bibliography, which were done by the author. We thank the following for their help with parts of the translation: Samuel Tarlin, Paul Solyn, Michael Isaacs, and Leonard Gould. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Posen Foundation for financial support. Finally, we thank Professor Elior for entrusting us with this work. It was a great pleasure to work with her throughout the project. We enjoyed her good advice, encouragement, appreciation, and the freedom to adjust her Hebrew text to make it more accessible to the wide range of readers interested in Jewish civilization.

Boston, June 2006

YUDITH NAVE
ARTHUR B. MILLMAN



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Note on Transliteration

THE transliteration of Hebrew in this book reflects consideration of the type of book it is, in terms of its content, purpose, and readership. The system adopted therefore reflects a broad approach to transcription, rather than the narrower approaches found in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* or other systems developed for text-based or linguistic studies. The aim has been to reflect the pronunciation prescribed for modern Hebrew, rather than the spelling or Hebrew word structure, and to do so using conventions that are generally familiar to the English-speaking Jewish reader.

In accordance with this approach, no attempt is made to indicate the distinctions between *alef* and *ayin*, *tet* and *taf*, *kaf* and *kuf*, *sin* and *samekh*, since these are not relevant to pronunciation; likewise, the *dagesh* is not indicated except where it affects pronunciation. Following the principle of using conventions familiar to the majority of readers, however, transcriptions that are well established have been retained even when they are not fully consistent with the transliteration system adopted. On similar grounds, the *tsadi* is rendered by ‘tz’ in such familiar words as *barmitzvah*. Likewise, the distinction between *het* and *khaf* has been retained, using *h* for the former and *kh* for the latter; the associated forms are generally familiar to readers, even if the distinction is not actually borne out in pronunciation, and for the same reason the final *heh* is indicated too. As in Hebrew, no capital letters are used, except that an initial capital has been retained in transliterating titles of published works (for example, *Shulḥan arukh*).

Since no distinction is made between *alef* and *ayin*, they are indicated by an apostrophe only in intervocalic positions where a failure to do so could lead an English-speaking reader to pronounce the vowel-cluster as a diphthong—as, for example, in *ha’ir*—or otherwise mispronounce the word.

The *sheva na* is indicated by an *e*—*perikat ol*, *reshut*—except, again, when established convention dictates otherwise.

The *yod* is represented by *i* when it occurs as a vowel (*bereshit*), by *y* when it occurs as a consonant (*yesodot*), and by *yi* when it occurs as both (*yisra’el*).

Names have generally been left in their familiar forms, even when this is inconsistent with the overall system.