

### 3 Beautiful Maiden without Eyes: *Peshaṭ* and *Sod* in Zoharic Hermeneutics

Scholars who have discussed the hermeneutical posture of thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalah in general, and that of Zohar in particular, have usually subscribed to the view that one of the controlling factors in kabbalistic exegesis is the distinction between the exoteric meaning, the *peshaṭ*, or *sensus litteralis*, and the esoteric, that is, the mystical or kabbalistic interpretation, the *sensus spiritualis*. The Torah is thus depicted as possessing an external and internal dimension, the hidden meaning and its revealed, literal counterpart. Correspondingly, the method of interpretation itself is characterized by this set of polarities, *nigleh* and *nistar*, the exoteric and esoteric. It should be noted, parenthetically, that with respect to this issue, scholars have also called attention to the fundamental similarity between the hermeneutical posture of philosopher and kabbalist, for both assumed a twofold sense in Scripture, the literal and hidden meaning, the latter corresponding respectively to either philosophical or mystical truths.<sup>1</sup>

It is generally thought, moreover, that the hierarchical view implied by this dichotomy was expanded further by Spanish kabbalists in the latter part of the thirteenth century by means of the well-known conception of the fourfold scheme of interpretation that eventually received the name *pardes*, an acronym for *peshaṭ* (literal), *remez* (allegorical), *derashah* (homiletical), and *sod* (esoteric). As the history and development of this notion have been discussed by various scholars, I will not enter into a lengthy discussion about the origin of this structure or a detailed analysis of each of its components.<sup>2</sup> My focus rather is on the question of hierarchy of meaning that this structure implies, and whether this is an appropriate characterization from the particular vantage point of the kabbalists' understanding of Scripture.

From a certain perspective it is indeed valid to view this fourfold structure in a hierarchical way. This does not imply, however, that the kabbalistic exegete himself progresses in some linear fashion from the plain sense, to the homiletical, then to the allegorical, and, finally, penetrating the ultimate meaning of Scripture, the mystical.<sup>3</sup> It is unlikely that any kabbalist, especially in the period under discussion, would have considered these different layers of meaning as absolutely distinct. It is nevertheless plausible to suggest that, for the kabbalists, the four senses of Scripture are to be arranged in some hierarchical manner, the literal sense occupying the bottom rung and the mystical the highest. After all, whatever the external influence on Jewish exegetes that may have fostered the articulation of four levels of meaning, there existed four well-defined exegetical methods that corresponded to each of these interpretative categories.<sup>4</sup> In that respect, it is necessary to emphasize what should be an obvious historical factor: the four layers of meaning must be understood in their proper literary or textual context. Hence, precedents for literal interpretation are to be found not only in the classical rabbinic texts but especially in the Andalusian and Franco-German traditions of scriptural exegesis; midrashic interpretation had a long history stretching from the formative period of rabbinic thought to the late Middle Ages; allegorical or tropological forms of interpretation were employed to a degree in rabbinic literature and highlighted by medieval Jewish philosophers; and an evolving theosophic system existed that could be, as indeed it was, applied exegetically by the kabbalists. From this vantage point it is entirely correct to view the stratification of the four layers of meaning in a hierarchical way.

Two important claims for the understanding of kabbalistic hermeneutics follow from the hierarchical approach. First, the literal meaning is assigned a secondary value with respect to determining the “true” meaning of Scripture, which is thought to consist of allusions to processes occurring in the divine world. Words of Scripture, kabbalistically interpreted, become *figurae* or *signa* of the supra-mundane, divine reality. Second, the dichotomy between the external and internal sense may lead one to the conclusion that, for the kabbalist, the *peshat* can obscure the true meaning of the biblical text, the *sod*. Expressed in slightly different terms, the mystical interpretation, much like the philosophic according to Maimonides,<sup>5</sup> is thought to arise out of a sense of conflict between the literal meaning

of Scripture and theosophical truth.<sup>6</sup> The mystical reading of the biblical text thus supplants the literal sense. This viewpoint has been most emphatically articulated by Gershom Scholem, who set out to explain how the mystic approach to Scripture embraces simultaneously a conservative and a revolutionary attitude:

But even where the religious authority of the same sacred book is recognized, a revolutionary attitude is inevitable once the mystic invalidates the literal meaning. But how can he cast aside the literal meaning while still recognizing the authority of the text? This is possible because he regards the literal meaning as simply nonexistent or as valid only for a limited time. It is *replaced* by a mystical interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

It must be noted that on another occasion, Scholem remarked with respect to the Zohar that its author “remains closely bound to the Scriptural text. Often an idea is not so much extrapolated and projected into the Biblical word but rather conceived in the process of mystical reflection upon the latter.”<sup>8</sup> In yet another context, Scholem commented that the critical effort “to determine whether the Biblical text inspired the [mystical] exegesis or whether the exegesis was a deliberate choice” may be “too rationalistic a view” to evaluate the creativity of the mystic, for the “thought processes of mystics are largely unconscious, and they may be quite unaware of the clash between old and new which is of such passionate interest to the historian.”<sup>9</sup> Although in these two instances Scholem does acknowledge that, from the internal, uncritical perspective of the mystics themselves, kabbalistic ideas may be thought to spring from the scriptural text, it is clear that his general orientation was to deny that concern with the literal sense figured in any prominent way in kabbalistic exegesis. In the final analysis, according to Scholem, kabbalistic hermeneutics is based on a radical dichotomy of the hidden and revealed meanings. Thus, after describing the assumption of theosophical kabbalists that the Torah is a *corpus symbolicum* of the hidden divine reality revealed in the *sefirot*,<sup>10</sup> Scholem concludes that “this method of interpretation has proved almost barren for a plain understanding of the Holy Writ.”<sup>11</sup> In yet another passage Scholem observes that, although the author of the Zohar advances examples of four layers of meaning, the literal, homiletical, allegorical, and

mystical, only the fourth matters to him, for the first three methods “are either taken from other writings or, at the most, developed from ideas not peculiar to Kabbalism. Only when it is a question of revealing the mystery of a verse – or rather one of its many mysteries – does the author show real enthusiasm.”<sup>12</sup> We may conclude, therefore, that, according to Scholem, genuine interest in problems of *peshat* does not figure prominently in zoharic – and, by extension, kabbalistic – hermeneutics.

Such a view has been shared by other scholars as well; here I will mention two others, Wilhelm Bacher and Isaiah Tishby, whose remarks are focused especially on the case of the Zohar. Although Bacher acknowledged that the method of literal interpretation, *peshat*, played a significant role in the Zohar,<sup>13</sup> it was clearly his opinion that, for the author of this book, the literal sense is superseded by the various other levels of meaning, including the internal, mystical sense. “Le sens littéral simple est, pour lui, le degré inférieur de l’interprétation biblique; c’est le *sens multiple* de l’Ecriture qui est le fondement de son système, et c’est à la doctrine du sens multiple de la parole de l’Ecriture qu’il emprunte la justification des mystères qui y sont contenus.”<sup>14</sup> For Bacher, therefore, the literal is quite distinct from the esoteric. A similar view is taken by Isaiah Tishby. After reviewing the critical passages in the Zohar, where there is a critique of those who accept only the literal meaning of Scripture, Tishby remarks that the “author of the Zohar concluded from the doubts that undermined the literal meaning of Scripture that the ‘Torah of truth’ was to be found in the internal part of the Torah, which is concealed by its external form.”<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere Tishby notes that, for the author of Zohar, “there is no comparison as to worth between the revealed meaning of Torah and the hidden meaning. The external significance of the Torah relates primarily to existence in the physical world, whereas the internal significance is connected with the system of the Godhead.”<sup>16</sup> To be sure, Tishby is careful to note that the Zohar does not reject the literal meaning, nor does it attack those rabbis who confine themselves to the study of Torah in its literal sense as we find, for example, in the case of the anonymous author of *Ra’aya Meheimna* and *Tiqqunei Zohar*.<sup>17</sup> Judged from the kabbalistic perspective, the value of *peshat*, together with the other forms of exegesis, *derashah* and *remez*, is that it functions as an aid to uncover the inner mystical truth.<sup>18</sup> In its essential nature, however, the literal

sense does not reveal anything of the esoteric matters that preoccupy the mind of the kabbalist, and indeed may impede the attainment of such knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

It is my contention that this scholarly approach prevents one from understanding one of the basic assumptions that underlies the hermeneutical stance of the Zohar and its unique conception of a text: insofar as the Torah represents not only the intention of the divine author but the configuration of the divine structure or form,<sup>20</sup> it follows that the *sensus litteralis* comprehends all the senses of Scripture, exoteric and esoteric. That is, the *sensus spiritualis* is part of the Bible's signification inasmuch as it is intended by the divine author.<sup>21</sup> The Zohar does not simply reject or denigrate the more normative literal–historical–grammatical understanding of *peshat*, but operates with a theological conception of *peshat* that assumes that the Torah, the divine image, comprehends the mystical meaning in its most elemental and ideogrammatic form. The hidden and revealed, therefore, are not distinct spheres of meaning from the vantage point of the divine author or the kabbalist who has penetrated the innermost depths of Torah, an experience compared in the Zohar and other kabbalistic sources to sexual union.<sup>22</sup> Scholars who have discussed zoharic hermeneutics in the past have not adequately taken into account the positive conception of the *peshat* operative in the Zohar. Yet, precisely this conception provides us with the zoharic notion of text, and, by extension, meaning. In a sense the kabbalistic conception, expressed especially by the Zohar, reverts to the conception of *peshat* that emerges from rabbinic writings where it signifies authorial intention,<sup>23</sup> as determined through an authoritative teaching, rather than the simple or literal meaning, connotations that become standard in the medieval exegetical tradition.<sup>24</sup> That is, from the vantage point of the rabbis, *peshat* designates the scriptural verse in its appropriate context, which, in turn, may be illuminated by literal or midrashic explanations. The simple or plain meaning, therefore, is one, but not the only, aspect of *peshat*, the semantic unity of the text.<sup>25</sup> The question of the zoharic conception of *peshat* thus lies at the center, and not the periphery, of a discussion on the hermeneutical principles and strategies of the Zohar. A key issue in determining this conception is the relationship between *peshat* and *sod* that I will investigate in detail in the remainder of this essay.

Before discussing the role of *peshat* in zoharic hermeneutics, it is of interest to consider several sources that provide more background for the position adopted by the Zohar. I begin with the hermeneutical posture espoused by Naḥmanides (1194–1270). It can be shown from any number of sources that Naḥmanides subscribed to the view that Scripture has an inner and an outer dimension,<sup>26</sup> or, as he put it in one context, “the verses of Scripture are true literally and figuratively,”<sup>27</sup> or again, “the Torah makes explicit and alludes.”<sup>28</sup> One passage is particularly striking in that he distinguishes three senses to a scriptural text (the example is Prov. 31:10), viz. the literal (*melitsah*), the figurative (*mashal*), and the esoteric (*sod*).<sup>29</sup> That Naḥmanides considered all these levels to be contained within the text of Scripture is most evident from his interpretation of the rabbinic dictum, “a biblical verse does not lose its literal sense,” *ein miqra yotsei midei peshuto*,<sup>30</sup> in his notes to the second principle in the introduction to Maimonides’ *Sefer ha-Mitswot*. Reacting to Maimonides’ claim that the rabbis occasionally derived laws from Scripture without any textual basis, and thereby denied their own principle stated previously, Naḥmanides emphasized that with respect to biblical interpretations connected with halakhic matters, the verse does not lose its literal sense because all these interpretations “are contained in the language of the text” (*kullam be-lashon ha-katuv nikhlalim*). Naḥmanides goes on to contrast his own conception of *peshat* with those “who lack knowledge of the language” – or, according to another reading, the “language of those who lack knowledge” – and the Sadducees, that is, the Karaites. It seems likely that by the former, Naḥmanides means those who would limit the literal sense to that which is established on purely philological and historical grounds. Such a group, like the Karaites, would fail to see the polysemous nature of Scripture. For Naḥmanides, by contrast, “the text contains everything ... for the book of God’s Torah is complete, there is no extra word in it nor any lacking, everything was written in wisdom.”<sup>31</sup> Scripture thus comprises both the literal and figurative meaning, the external and internal sense:

This is the meaning of their dictum, “a verse should not lose its literal sense;” they did not say, “a verse is only according to its literal sense.” We have rather the interpretation [of the verse] together with the literal sense, and it should not lose either of

them. On the contrary, Scripture must bear everything, and both are true.<sup>32</sup>

I do not mean to suggest that Naḥmanides rejects the idea of *peshaṭ* in the more restricted connotation as the *sensus litteralis*. On the contrary, from his comment that there is both *midrash* and *peshaṭ*, it is evident that he accepts the standard medieval conception of *peshaṭ* as the historical, grammatical, and philological meaning. What is crucial for Naḥmanides, however, is that this notion of *peshaṭ* is itself contained in a broader conception of a scriptural text that comprises all meanings, including the mystical.<sup>33</sup> As Bernard Septimus has pointed out, Naḥmanides advanced the Andalusian tradition of *peshaṭ* “by broadening the conception of interpretation” to include rabbinic – halakhic and aggadic – as well as kabbalistic modes of explanation.<sup>34</sup> For Naḥmanides, then, the term *peshaṭ* denotes the textual reality that comprises the literal and midrashic – and under the rubric of midrashic the kabbalist includes the mystical – explanations. The same point is made by another thirteenth-century kabbalist from Castile, Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen: “[The principle] ‘a verse should not lose its literal sense’ always applies to all the Torah; the literal sense (*ha-peshaṭ*) is the root, the homiletical (*ha-midrash*) the branch, and everything is true.”<sup>35</sup>

It is this notion of the text as comprehending the external and internal meanings that, in my view, provides the underlying principle for Naḥmanides’ repeated claim that the contextual meaning of certain biblical texts can be comprehended only through knowledge of the esoteric lore. In the vast majority of cases Naḥmanides keeps the literal and kabbalistic meanings distinct, treating the latter like an added dimension that enhances our understanding of Scripture but nevertheless should not be confused with the plain sense. It is thus that Naḥmanides often alerts the reader to the fact that he is divulging esoteric matters by the introduction, *al derekh ha-emet*, “by way of truth.” On occasion, however, Naḥmanides relates a kabbalistic explanation without identifying it as such. Furthermore, a significant number of examples in his commentary indicate that he entertained the possibility that the simple, plain, or contextual meaning was comprehensible only in terms of kabbalistic truths. Various scholars have discussed this phenomenon as it appears in the Torah commentary of Naḥmanides.<sup>36</sup> In a paper on

Nahmanides' kabbalistic hermeneutics, I have argued that one can distinguish two typologies wherein this convergence is operative: in some instances the literal and mystical meanings overlap because there is only one textual dimension corresponding to one reality outside the text, whereas in other instances there is an overlapping meaning, but the text allows for two levels, exoteric and esoteric, which correspond to two levels of reality, the mundane and the divine.<sup>37</sup> This exegetical posture challenges in a fundamental way the notion of an interpretative hierarchy applied universally and without qualification by the kabbalists. Not only is it the case that the literal sense does not always obscure the hidden signification, but the latter in some instances alone provides the key to read the text contextually. It is some such conception that underlies Ezra of Gerona's remark in his introduction to his commentary on Song of Songs to the effect that biblical exegetes do not understand certain sections of Torah, for they are based on the wisdom of kabbalah.<sup>38</sup> That is to say, the esoteric meaning is not ancillary, but rather is necessary, for the very comprehension of the plain sense of the scriptural text. To put the matter epigrammatically, *sod* is the depth of *peshaṭ*.

It is instinctive to compare Nahmanides' hermeneutic with that of Jacob ben Sheshet, an older contemporary Geronese kabbalist, though apparently belonging to an independent circle.<sup>39</sup> To begin with, it is necessary to mention, as Scholem did, the obvious contrast between the two kabbalists with respect to their stated positions regarding the nature of kabbalah.<sup>40</sup> Nahmanides for his part described kabbalah as a body of received tradition that must be transmitted orally from teacher to student and that cannot be comprehended by human reasoning or supposition.<sup>41</sup> The point is made in various contexts in Nahmanides' writings, but for the sake of comparing his view with that of Jacob ben Sheshet, I will cite the following passage from Nahmanides' "Sermon on Ecclesiastes," for it focuses on the mystical reasons for the commandments, precisely the principal concern of ben Sheshet:

With respect to these matters and others like them one cannot understand their truth from one's own mind (*mi-da'at atsmo*) but only through tradition (*be-qabbalah*). This matter is explained in the Torah to whoever has heard the rationale for the commandments through a tradition (*ta'am ha-mitsvot*)



*be-qabbalah*) as is fitting. This refers to one who has received from a mouth that has received, going back to Moses, our teacher, [who received] from God.<sup>42</sup>

Jacob ben Sheshet, in diametrically opposite terms, expressed the viewpoint that one can, indeed from a religious perspective must, innovate kabbalistic interpretations (or, more specifically, mystical rationales for the commandments) in order to propagate and glorify the Torah. This is epitomized in succinct fashion in the following directive offered by Jacob ben Sheshet in *Sefer ha-Emunah we-ha-Bittahon*: “Know that the words of the rabbis, may their memory be for a blessing, are the words of the living God and they should not be contradicted, but it is a commandment for every sage to innovate [interpretations] of the Torah according to his ability.”<sup>43</sup> To cite a second example from the same work: “For in every matter a person can give his own explanation from his mind, and there is nothing deficient in this.”<sup>44</sup> Elaborating on this theme in another work, *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, Jacob ben Sheshet writes,

I know that there may be some among the pious and sages of Israel who will blame me for I have written the reason for two or three commandments in the Torah, which may be an opening for one to give a reason for many other commandments by way of wisdom. I can bring a proof that every sage is capable of offering a reason for every commandment whose reason is not explicitly stated in the Torah.<sup>45</sup>

That the innovation is to be considered no less authoritative than a received idea is emphasized in Jacob ben Sheshet’s bold claim with respect to his view that the meaning of the Tetragrammaton, like the Torah in general, varies in accordance with its vocalization:<sup>46</sup> “If I had not innovated it from my heart, I would have said that it is a law given to Moses at Sinai.”<sup>47</sup> One should not, however, conclude from these comments that Jacob ben Sheshet was not the recipient of kabbalistic doctrine transmitted orally; on the contrary, on more than one occasion he reports having received traditions in just such a manner, as, for instance, from Isaac the Blind.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, it is evident that Jacob ben Sheshet did not think that the wisdom of kabbalah was exhausted by his own innovative views or even by those he received.<sup>49</sup>

The fact of the matter is, however, that he does maintain, *contra* the explicit claims of Naḥmanides, that kabbalistic explanations can be adduced through the exercise of one's own powers of discernment and scriptural exegesis. Although I myself have challenged the standard characterization of Naḥmanides as a "reserved"<sup>50</sup> or "conservative"<sup>51</sup> kabbalist, arguing that he is not merely the recipient of a limited corpus of secrets but rather expands the range of kabbalistic secrets through a consistent and innovative hermeneutical posture vis-à-vis Scripture as read often through the lenses of rabbinic *aggadah* (including in this category the kabbalistic treatise, *Sefer ha-Bahir*),<sup>52</sup> it still is evident that the distinction between Naḥmanides' and Jacob ben Sheshet's understanding of the kabbalistic enterprise must be upheld. Even if Naḥmanides is up to much the same task as Jacob ben Sheshet, his insistence that kabbalah is a received tradition is instructive and must be set against the overtly innovative orientation of Jacob ben Sheshet.

Having delineated in clear fashion the essential difference between Naḥmanides and Jacob ben Sheshet, it is necessary to draw one's attention to a basic similarity in approach between the two. It emerges from a few places in the latter's writings that he shared the hermeneutical assumption expressed by Naḥmanides to the effect that the *peshat* of the verse can overlap with the *sod*, indeed that occasionally the most appropriate way to comprehend *peshat* is through *sod*. One passage in particular is noteworthy for interpreting the rabbinic dictum, "a verse should not lose its literal sense;" Jacob ben Sheshet employs language that is remarkably close to that of Naḥmanides in his notes to Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Mitswot*, which I cited previously.<sup>53</sup>

From all the matters that I have written you can understand that there is no event in the world that does not have a force above that appears to be a paradigm (*dugma*) or image (*dimyon*) [of that which is below]. Therefore, when you find something in the words of our rabbis, blessed be their memory, or in the words of the Torah, or one of the reasons for the commandments, or the [speculation] of one of their rewards, do not think in your heart that it is said with regard to the lower matter. Rather it is said with respect to the supernal [matter] that corresponds to the lower. Regarding that which is written in the

Torah, our sages, blessed be their memory, already said, “a verse should not lose its literal sense.” Inasmuch as it says “a verse should not lose [its literal sense],” but not that Scripture is interpreted [only] according to its literal sense, we learn that even though the Torah has seventy aspects,<sup>54</sup> none of them can deny the *peshat*, and perhaps the *peshat* is one of the seventy. Thus, no sage has permission to offer an interpretation that contradicts the *peshat*, for the rabbis, blessed be their memory, have said [“a verse should not lose its literal sense”].<sup>55</sup> [Concerning] the *peshat* there are commentators who say that the verse is missing four or two words, or half of it is extra and unnecessary; yet, Scripture is as it is. In truth, there are many verses to which we must add a word or two in order to understand their *peshat*, but this is not due to a deficiency in Scripture but rather our deficiency, for we do not comprehend the holy language [Hebrew] except as it compares to the language in which we are immersed in the exile because of our sins.<sup>56</sup>

Like Nahmanides, then, Jacob ben Sheshet maintains that the principle of the rabbis is that a verse should not lose its literal sense, not that a verse is to be interpreted only in accordance with its literal sense. A careful scrutiny of Jacob’s writings, a project beyond the confines of this essay, would reveal, moreover, that, like Nahmanides, he too has extended the meaning of the word *peshat* so that the simple meaning (often rendered through the prism of rabbinic interpretation) can itself constitute the esoteric signification. The positive role accorded the *peshat* meaning is based on the hermeneutical principle articulated at the start of the preceding quotation, the principle that served as the cornerstone of biblical exegesis for the theosophic kabbalists: events later are to be understood in terms of their supernal patterns or images in the sefirotic pleroma. Biblical narrative and law, therefore, themselves are to be interpreted as symbolic of this upper realm. Just as in the ontic sphere, the mundane has its correlate in the divine, and the latter is only known through the former, so on the textual plane the esoteric or mystical signification is apprehended only through the exoteric or literal–historical–grammatical meaning. Discerning the *peshat*, therefore, enables the exegete to interpret the scriptural text kabbalistically. In the final analysis, for Jacob ben Sheshet, like other theosophic kabbalists of his time, the

Torah in its mystical essence is identical with the divine name.<sup>57</sup> This identity underlies his claim, alluded to earlier, that the unvocalized Torah scroll admits of multiple meanings, just as the Tetragrammaton allows for a multiplicity of vocalizations, each engendering a different vehicle for kabbalistic intention during prayer. Yet, despite Jacob ben Sheshet's claim that the meaning of each and every word of the Torah changes in accordance with its vocalization, the fact is that there is one text whose ideogrammatic form represents the shape of the divine. This principle underlies Jacob ben Sheshet's claim against the commentators who on occasion derive the *peshat* by adding or detracting words from Scripture: the written text is as it is – nothing more or less! This understanding of “Scripture as it is” provides the basic element in Jacob ben Sheshet's conception of *peshat*, that is, the “text” that encompasses the multiple levels of meaning. The rabbinic stricture against negating the *peshat*, therefore, does not preclude either rabbinic, especially aggadic, or kabbalistic interpretations. On the contrary, it may happen that the kabbalistic interpretation is itself the *peshat*, or, put differently, the *peshat*, when properly understood, allows one to comprehend the mystical sense of Scripture.<sup>58</sup> This view is affirmed as well in an anonymous text, attributed to Naḥmanides, called the “Treatise on the Inwardness of the Torah.” This text, *prima facie*, espouses an extreme form of the hierarchical view by clearly distinguishing between the literal sense (*derekh peshat*) and the internal sense (*derekh penimi*), which is identified further as the inner soul (*neshamah penimit*) of Torah.<sup>59</sup> The author even criticizes those who would limit their understanding of Torah to the literal sense and urges the reader to believe that alongside the literal meanings are deep secrets in Scripture.<sup>60</sup> He insists, moreover, like Jacob ben Sheshet,<sup>61</sup> that the Torah scroll is not vocalized because any received vocalization would limit the meaning of the verses in a set and fixed way.<sup>62</sup> In spite of his emphasis on the potentiality for infinite interpretability, the author is careful to note that all meanings “are contained within the simple verses of Scripture (*peshatei ha-miqra*), and all of Torah acts according to this literal sense (*peshat*).”<sup>63</sup> For those who can comprehend the inner soul of Torah, it is evident that the *sensus mysticus* is comprised within the *sensus litteralis*.

What has been stated with regard to Naḥmanides, Jacob ben Sheshet, and the anonymous kabbalist can, in my view, be

transferred to other mystic exegetes as well. To appreciate the way in which the theosophic kabbalists, especially in the formative period of kabbalistic literary history, looked at Scripture, it is necessary to grasp the dynamics of kabbalistic interpretation with respect to the fundamental issue of the relationship between *peshat* and *sod*. The position of the theosophic kabbalists in general, and that of the authorship of the Zohar in particular, is put into sharp relief when compared with the view of Abraham Abulafia, leading expounder of the ecstatic kabbalah in the second half of the thirteenth century. In his detailed discussion of the seven exegetical methods of Abulafia, Moshe Idel has pointed out that the *peshat*, according to Abulafia, is oriented toward the masses who cannot comprehend truths on their own accord. The literal sense thus serves a pedagogical purpose, transmitting the tradition in order to educate the masses to perform good deeds, to submit to the authority of the law, and to inculcate truth in accordance with the level of their comprehension.<sup>64</sup> Although Abulafia pays lip service to the rabbinic dictum, “a verse should not lose its literal sense,” it is clear that for him there is a radical dichotomy between the literal and mystical, the exoteric and esoteric.<sup>65</sup> A typical statement of this is found in his *Or ha-Sekhel* in the following passage:

Even though we have alluded to the hidden matters, the verses should not lose their literal sense. Insofar as there is nothing compelling us to believe that this is an allegory and should not be [understood] according to its literal sense in any manner, we should initially believe the literal sense as it is ... Afterwards it should be interpreted as much as it can withstand according to the hidden way, for all that which is interpreted according to what is hidden instructs about a deeper wisdom and is more beneficial to a person than the exoteric teaching. The exoteric is written to benefit the masses who have no analytic skill to distinguish between truth and falsehood, but this will not benefit the knowledgeable person who seeks felicity unique to the rational faculty.<sup>66</sup>

The negative view of *peshat* emerges with clarity from Abulafia's understanding of the mystical dimension of the text. This mode of interpretation, focused as it is on reading the text as a string of

separate letters that make up the different divine names, is, as Idel has aptly put it, a “text-destroying exegesis.”<sup>67</sup>

The theosophic exegete, by contrast, would maintain the equal validity and necessity of the literal meaning. Indeed, the insight of the mystical illumination is such that there is an awareness that the esoteric is inseparable from the exoteric and, in the last analysis, a full appreciation of the one is dependent upon the other. The point is well made by Menaḥem Recanaṭi: “In every place in the Torah that you can elevate the [meaning of] a particular narrative (*ha-ma’aseh*)<sup>68</sup> or commandment to an entity higher than it [i.e. the *sefirot*], you must elevate it ... provided that you do not say that the matter is not as it is in its literal sense.”<sup>69</sup> The necessity to preserve the literal meaning together with the esoteric emphasized by the kabbalists resonates with the following claim in an anonymous passage, presumably written by someone of Ashkenazi extraction, interpreting the statement attributed to R. Ḥanina bar Papa in Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 65a: “He whose wine is not poured in his house as water is not in the category of blessing”:

The Torah is compared to water and to wine,<sup>70</sup> that is, the Torah in its literal sense is compared to water and the hidden sense to wine, for the numerical value [of the word wine, *yayin*] is [that of the word] secret [sod], as it says, “The wine enters and the secret comes forth.”<sup>71</sup> That is to say, when one has learnt the mysteries of Torah, which are compared to wine as the literal meaning of Torah is compared to water, then the wine pours forth like water, that is, its mysteries together with the literal sense. In such a case there is certainly a sign of blessing!<sup>72</sup>

The concurrence of *pashaṭ* and *sod* from the perspective of the kabbalistic reading is made in the following statement of Isaac of Acre:

I have seen the truth of the revealed and hidden secret (*sod nokhah we-nistar*) in many verses and in prayers and blessings. The one who believes only in the hidden (*nistar*) is in the category of the heretics, and these are the foolish of the philosophers who philosophize and are dependent upon their speculations. They are wise in their own eyes, for they have no knowledge of the ten *sefirot belimah*, which are the name of the

Holy One, blessed be He. Their faith is evil and deficient, for they act negligently with respect to prayer and blessings and make light of all the commandments. The one who believes solely in the external (*nokhah*) are the foolish of the traditionalists (*ha-mequbbalim*), for it is inappropriate to separate the Holy One, blessed be He, and His name. It is certainly the case that the Holy One, blessed be He, is His name and His name is the Holy One, blessed be He. Thus the ten *sefirot belimah* are the boundary without boundary<sup>73</sup> ... through them one can comprehend the secrets of the *haggadot* and the establishment of the words of the rabbis, blessed be their memory, “a verse should not lose its literal sense.”<sup>74</sup>

Interestingly, Isaac of Acre classifies the philosophers as those who neglect the literal sense and believe only in the hidden, that is, the inner or allegorical meaning, a claim well known from other kabbalistic sources as well.<sup>75</sup> The traditionalists, on the other hand, believe only in the revealed sense and lack knowledge of the hidden meaning that is focused on the sefirotic world. The truth, one may presume, lies with the one who heeds both the revealed and the hidden meanings. Indeed, as Isaac says, it is only through knowledge of the *sefirot*, the *nistar*, that one can both comprehend the aggadic texts and fulfill the injunction of the rabbis that a verse does not lose its literal sense (*peshat*).

If we turn at this juncture to the Zohar, we will find that here too the notion of *peshat* is such that it comprehends within itself the *sensus mysticus*. This assumption underlies the hermeneutical strategy of the Zohar to discover in every minute detail of Scripture an allusion or symbol pointing to the hidden world of God. Far from being an impediment or obstacle to the mystical sense, therefore, the *peshat* (understood in its expanded sense) provides the key for unlocking kabbalistic truths. From the vantage point of zoharic hermeneutics the internal, mystical dimension of Torah, the *nistar*, is not concealed but rather revealed by the external form or garment, the *nigleh*. Indeed, biblical interpretation in the Zohar can be characterized as a form of hyperliteralism,<sup>76</sup> for the very words of Scripture are transformed into vehicles for God’s self-revelation<sup>77</sup> inasmuch as the letters are, to use the expression of the anonymous author of *Sefer ha-Temunah*, “the true image, as it is written, ‘he beholds the image

of the Lord' (Num. 12:8), and this is the secret of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He."<sup>78</sup> This is the force of the repeated identification in the Zohar of God's name and the Torah: the verses of Scripture refer to intra-divine processes in the sefirotic realm inasmuch as the latter is said to be constituted within the name that is the Torah.<sup>79</sup> In contemporary semiotic terms, the matter may be expressed as follows: the symbolic transformation of Scripture undertaken by the zoharic authorship is dependent on such a close reading of the conventional textual signs that this mode of anagogic interpretation engenders a kind of literalism whereby the gap between levels of discourse (like that between ontological spheres) is closed. The kabbalistic interpretation proffered by the Zohar thus necessitates, in Betty Roitman's telling expression, a "return to the text," for through the kabbalistic reading scriptural words "become elements of a lexicon and present themselves as independent syntagms of greater or lesser length, each of which functions as the statement of a semantic equivalence."<sup>80</sup>

To be sure, I do not deny that in some of the most important statements in zoharic literature affirming the diverse interpretative layers of Scripture the hierarchical view is evident. Thus, for example, there is the well-known metaphor employed in *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* on the book of Ruth, which compares the Torah to a nut: just as the nut has three external shells and a kernel within, so too the words of Torah have four types of meaning, the literal sense (*ma'aseh*),<sup>81</sup> the homiletical (*midrash*), the allegorical (*haggadah*),<sup>82</sup> and the mystical (*sod*).<sup>83</sup> In another context the Zohar at first notes that every verse can be interpreted according to three senses: literal (*peshat*), homiletical (*midrash*), and mystical referred to as the "supernal wisdom" (*hokhmah ila'ah*). The Torah is then described by the metaphor of the tree whose different parts are said to correspond to various types of meaning: literal, homiletic, allegorical, numerological, mystical, and halakhic.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, on several occasions the Zohar speaks of the Torah as being like the name of God in terms of being both hidden and revealed,<sup>85</sup> and in at least one place it is emphasized that the revealed meaning is appropriate for human beings whereas the hidden is reserved for God, though Simeon ben Yoḥai was granted permission to reveal the secret truths.<sup>86</sup> The hierarchical approach is evident as well in one of the more dramatic and imaginative sections in the Zohar wherein



the author describes the adventures of the fellowship of Simeon ben Yoḥai in the most wondrous and fantastic terms. They are said to be in a garden, which is described further as the place from which one enters the world-to-come. After having fallen into a deep sleep, they are aroused by an angelic voice. The narrative then unfolds three successive stages of revelation, each reaching higher limits than the previous one. The first entails an encounter with “masters of Scripture” (*ma’rei miqra*), the second with the “masters of Mishnah” (*ma’rei matnita*), and the third with “masters of *aggadah*” (*ma’reihon de-aggadah*).<sup>87</sup> From the context it is evident that each group reveals deeper matters, culminating with the masters of *aggadah* who are described as possessing “faces illuminated like the light of the sun ... for they see each day the light of Torah as is appropriate.” The comrades are not given permission to enter into the place where the masters of *aggadah* are located, presumably because their teachings are too esoteric. What is significant for our purposes is the hierarchical ordering of interpretative postures implicit here: Scripture, Mishnah, and *aggadah*, the latter, I suggest, being identical with kabbalistic meaning.<sup>88</sup>

Perhaps the passage that is most hierarchical in nature is the one that distinguishes four levels of meaning in the scriptural text: the narrative that is the garment, the laws that are the body, the mystical secrets that are the soul, and the innermost secrets – to be revealed only in the messianic future – that are the soul of the soul. These four are said to correspond respectively to the following ontological gradations: the heavens, *Shekhinah*, *Tif’eret*, and *Keter*.<sup>89</sup> The wicked are those who say that the Torah consists only of narratives and therefore look at the garment, the *peshaṭ*,<sup>90</sup> but not the body that consists of the laws and commandments. From the context it would appear that the wicked are Christian exegetes who are viewed as literalists in the sense that they look at and accept only the narrative of Hebrew Scripture, insofar as it serves as the background for their own Scripture. They do not consider the body underneath the external garment, for they explicitly reject the biblical laws as interpreted in the rabbinic tradition.<sup>91</sup> The righteous, by contrast, know how to look at the Torah to see what lies beneath the garment. It is essential to note that the body is correlated with the *Shekhinah* as well as the commandments, two themes that find expression elsewhere in the zoharic corpus.<sup>92</sup>

A careful examination of the key passages that suggest that the literal meaning hides or envelopes the mystical truth will demonstrate, however, that this is from the perspective of only the uninitiated or unenlightened. The process of mystical enlightenment or illumination consists precisely of the fact that the *ba'al ha-sod* sees the inner light (the esoteric matter) shine through the external shell (the literal sense) of the text. Perhaps this is nowhere more evident than in the following account:

The Holy One, blessed be He, enters all the hidden matters [or words] that He has made in the holy Torah, and everything is found in the Torah. The Torah reveals that hidden matter and immediately it is cloaked in another garment wherein it is concealed and not revealed. Even though the matter is hidden in its garment, the wise, who are full of eyes (*malyyan ayyenin*), see it from within its garment (*ham'an lah mi-go levushah*). When that matter is revealed, before it enters into a garment, they cast an open eye (*peqihu de-eina*) upon it, and even though it is immediately hidden it is not removed from their eyes.<sup>93</sup>

The disclosure of that which is hidden within the Torah occurs through the outer garment in which it is cloaked. This is the force of the claim that the wise, who are “full of eyes,” *malyyan ayyenin* (I return to this image later), see the concealed matter from within the garment, *ham'an lah mi-go levushah*. The function of the garment, paradoxically, is to concomitantly conceal and reveal: the secret is hidden from everyone by the garment, but it is only from within the garment that the secret is revealed to the wise.<sup>94</sup> The plausibility of this interpretation is supported by the famous parable of the beautiful maiden and her lover, which immediately follows the passage just cited. In this parable the maiden, who symbolizes the Torah, is said to disclose four levels to her lover, the mystic, in a gradual process of unveiling: the first stage corresponds to the level of literal sense (*peshat*), the second to homiletical or midrashic interpretation (*derashah*), the third to allegory (*haggadah*), and the fourth to the mystical or esoteric. The last stage is not given a specific name but is described as the maiden revealing herself “face to face” (*anpin be-anpin*) to the lover and disclosing “all her hidden secrets and hidden ways.”<sup>95</sup> When the mysteries or secrets of Torah are revealed

to the mystic, he unites with the Torah and is called *husband of Torah* and *master of the house*, epithets that signify that this union is of an amatory nature. In the moment of unification the maiden says to the lover,

Do you see the allusion that I alluded to at first [i.e. the initial disclosure that corresponds to the literal sense]? So many secrets were contained in it. Now he sees that nothing should be added or taken away from those words [of Scripture]. Then the *peshaṭ* of the verse is [revealed] as it is, not a single word should be added or deleted.<sup>96</sup>

At the end of the process, when one comprehends the mystical essence of Torah, and thus unites with her in an intimate relation akin to sexual union, then, and only then, does the plain sense of the verse become comprehensible. Traditional commentators on the Zohar have realized the full implication of this passage: mystical enlightenment culminates with a reappropriation of *peshaṭ*,<sup>97</sup> here understood as the text as it is, to use the terminology of Jacob ben Sheshet, which comprises all senses of Scripture, including the *sensus mysticus*.

The inclusion of *sod* within *peshaṭ* is highlighted as well in the following statement of Moses de León in one of his Hebrew theosophic works:

Those very stories [in the Bible] are the secret of God, and they are included in the wisdom of His thought, the secret of His name. When a person removes the mask of blindness from his face, then he will find in that very story and literal sense (*ha-ma'aseh*)<sup>98</sup> a hill of spices<sup>99</sup> and frankincense.<sup>100</sup> Then his blind eyes will be opened<sup>101</sup> and his thoughts will gladden, and he will say, "Whoever you are, O great mountain" (Zech. 4:7), exalted, "where you hid on the day of the incident"<sup>102</sup> (1 Sam. 20:19), as I explained in the book that I composed called *Pardes*. I called it by the name *Pardes* in virtue of the matter that is known, for I composed it in accordance with the secret of the four ways [of interpretation], according to its very name [as alluded to in the saying] "Four entered the *Pardes*,"<sup>103</sup> in other words, *peshaṭ*, *remez*, *derashah*, *sod*, this is the matter of *Pardes*. I explained there these matters pertaining to the secret of the

narrative and literal sense written in the Torah, to show that everything is the eternal life and the true Torah, and there is nothing in all the Torah that is not contained in the secret of His name, may He be elevated.<sup>104</sup>

In this passage, de León mentions his use of the fourfold method of interpretation but insists that all levels of meaning, including the literal narrative (*sensus historicus*), are contained in the secret of the name that is mystically identified with the Torah. It may be concluded, therefore, that the *peshaṭ* itself comprehends the *sod*. This last point is brought out in a striking fashion in another zoharic passage that serves as the preamble to the *Sifra di-Tseni'uta* ("Book of Concealment"). In the middle of that passage, a parable is given to describe the fate of one who is occupied with the study of *Sifra di-Tseni'uta*, a process referred to, on the basis of the description of Aqiva in the famous legend of four who entered *Pardes*, as "entering and existing." Such a person is compared to a man who lived in the mountains and knew nothing of life in the city. This man sowed wheat and ate the kernels raw. One day he went to the city and was given bread, cakes kneaded in oil, and fine pastry made with honey and oil. At each interval, he inquired about the ingredients used to make the item he was consuming and was told, in each case, wheat. After having received the last item, he proclaimed, "I am the master of all these (*ma'rei dikhol illein*), for I eat the essence (*iqara*)<sup>105</sup> of them all, which is wheat."<sup>106</sup> The one who successfully studies the "Book of Concealment" is thus compared to the mountain man who eats the essential ingredient used in making all the different items, viz. wheat. There seems to be in this parable a self-awareness on the part of the author of Zohar that the *Sifra di-Tseni'uta* somehow represents the kernel of zoharic theosophy whereas other parts, perhaps especially the *Idrot*, are further elaborations that are comparable to the various baked goods in relation to the wheat.<sup>107</sup> It is evident, moreover, that wheat functions here as a symbol for Torah, a well-known motif in classical rabbinic literature<sup>108</sup> in general and thirteenth-century kabbalistic sources in particular.<sup>109</sup> Of especial interest is the talmudic expression "masters of wheat," *marei ḥiṭya*, for those who have mastered the sources.<sup>110</sup> That the Zohar is probably drawing on this image is strengthened by the fact that the *Sifra di-Tseni'uta* is composed of five chapters, which perhaps are meant to call to mind the

five books of the Torah; that is, this part of the Zohar is structurally parallel to the Pentateuch.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, it is possible that the wheat, bread, cakes, and fine pastry allude to the four levels of interpretation, literal, midrashic, allegorical, and mystical.<sup>112</sup> The wheat, therefore, symbolizes the literal sense of Torah,<sup>113</sup> its essence or most basic ingredient, which is at the same time, as the Zohar points out, the principle (*kelala*),<sup>114</sup> i.e. that which comprises within itself all the other levels. The movement of zoharic hermeneutics may be thus compared to a circle, beginning and ending with the text in its literal sense. For the Zohar, the search for the deepest truths of Scripture is a gradual stripping away of the external forms or garments until one gets to the inner core, but when one gets to that inner core what one finds is nothing other than the *pashaṭ*, that is, the text as it is. To interpret, from the perspective of the Zohar, is not to impose finite meaning on the text, but to unfold the infinite meaning within the text. A description of the interpretation process as a form of appropriation by Paul Ricoeur is, I believe, particularly apt in characterizing the convergence of *pashaṭ* and *sod* in the Zohar: "Appropriation ... is the recovery of that which is at work, in labour, within the text. What the interpreter says is a re-saying which reactivates what is said by the text."<sup>115</sup> By decoding the text in light of sefirotic symbolism the theosophic kabbalist recovers that which is at work within Scripture, at least as viewed from his own perspective.

It is of interest to consider at this juncture the following description of Moses Cordovero (1522–70), for he has combined the negative attitude toward *pashaṭ* characteristic of *Ra'aya Meheimna* and *Tiqqunei Zohar* with a more positive orientation of the main body of the Zohar.

A person must remove the garments from the Torah and break her shells in order to comprehend her depth and her hidden spirituality<sup>116</sup> ... They must without doubt strip the Torah from all of her shells ... then they will understand without any external garment. This is the secret of the Torah that the Holy One, blessed be He, will create in the future ... All her shells will be broken and the inner core of the Torah will be comprehended ... The kabbalistic secret is clothed in the literal sense for one cannot know how to expound it except by way of the literal sense, as if one said Abraham was a merciful man [i.e., from the attribute of *hesed* or

mercy], and his going to Egypt [symbolizes] his descent to the shells ... In this manner one cannot speak of kabbalah without it being mixed with the secret of the literal sense and corporeality.<sup>117</sup>

Cordovero thus begins with a description of the necessity to break the shell of the literal sense, to remove its garment, in order to comprehend the inner core or mystical essence of Torah. The denuded Torah, without shell or garment, characterizes the state of affairs in the messianic age. The Torah in the preredemptive state must have these shells or garment. There is little doubt that with respect to this negative view of *peshaṭ* Cordovero was influenced by the formulation of *Ra'aya Meheimna* and *Tiqqunei Zohar*.<sup>118</sup> In the second part of the passage, however, Cordovero insists, in line with the main body of the Zohar, that the esoteric meaning can be comprehended only through the literal sense. *Sod*, therefore, is clothed in *peshaṭ*, and the only way to apprehend the former is through the latter.

What is perhaps an even more succinct presentation of the hermeneutical orientation of the Zohar, which I would term the retrieval of *peshaṭ*, is contained in the following statement of Moses Ḥayyim Ephraim of Sudlikov (ca. 1737–1800), grandson of Israel ben Eliezer, *Ba'al Shem Tov* (1700–60):

The secret of *teqi'ah*, *teru'ah*, *teqi'ah* is [to be explained] by [the rabbinic idiom] “a verse should not lose its literal sense.” That is, initially a person must study and comprehend the literal sense. Afterwards he should expand to [the comprehension of] the various lights and secrets of the Torah. And after that from the power of interpretation he should return and come [to an understanding of] the true literal sense (*ha-peshaṭ ha-emet*). This is [the significance] of *teqi'ah*, *teru'ah*, *teqi'ah*. At first there is the *teqi'ah* that instructs about the literal sense (*ha-peshaṭ*), i.e., a straight sound (*qol pashuṭ*).<sup>119</sup> Afterwards there is a *teru'ah*, which contains the letters *torah ayin*, i.e., the [Torah] is interpreted in seventy [the numerical value of *ayin*] ways. And afterwards a *teqi'ah*, to return to the true literal sense.<sup>120</sup>

In the case of the Zohar, one finds precisely the kind of “mystical literalism”<sup>121</sup> described by the Hasidic master that is predicated on the notion that the esoteric sense is contained within

the literal, an insight apprehended by the mystic who returns to the literal sense, that is, the true literal sense, *ha-peshaṭ ha-emet*, only after interpreting the text in its multiple aspects. The literal sense is a cover hiding the mystical light only for the unenlightened; the mystic, by contrast, sees that light through and within the cover. The rejection by the Zohar of a purely literal reading of biblical narrative does not imply a bifurcation of meaning between *peshaṭ* and *sod*, but only a failure to understand the inherent mystical dimensions of *peshaṭ*.<sup>122</sup> Even the *peshaṭ* contains *sod*, and one who looks at the *peshaṭ* without knowledge of the supernal realm cannot truly understand *peshaṭ*. This, I believe, is implied in the following passage: “Even though the narrative of the Torah or the [literal] account (*ovada*)<sup>123</sup> goes out from the principle of Torah (*mi-kelala de-oraita*) [i.e. the realm of divine emanations that in their collectivity are the Torah in its supernal form] it does not go out to instruct about itself alone but rather to instruct about that supernal principle of Torah (*kelala ila’ah de-oraita*).”<sup>124</sup> The function of the literal-narrative meaning is to instruct the reader about the supernal Torah, the divine pleroma. Without such knowledge, the Torah in its purely literal fashion is not even comprehended. This is the force of the mystical understanding of the *sensus litteralis* presented in the Zohar. Thus, in one of the contexts in which the Zohar emphasizes that the Torah, like the name of God, is hidden and revealed, the focus is an interpretation of “And she [Tamar] sat down at the entrance to Einayim” (Gen. 38:14).

R. Abba said: This section proves that the Torah is hidden and revealed. I have looked through the entire Torah and have not found a place that is called *petah einayim*. Rather all is hidden and it contains a secret of secrets ... What is *petah einayim*? [The word *petah* may be gathered from what] is written, “he [Abraham] was sitting at the entrance of the tent” (Gen. 18:1). It is also written, “and the Lord will pass over the door” (Exod. 12:23), and “Open the gates of righteousness for me” (Ps. 118:19). [The word] “eyes” [signifies] that all eyes of the word are looking upon this opening.<sup>125</sup>

It is obvious, then, that the hidden meaning of the expression *petah einayim* refers to the fact that it functions as a symbol for the last of the divine gradations, *Shekhinah*, the opening to which all eyes are

turned.<sup>126</sup> The kabbalistic signification, therefore, is the sole meaning that the term has for the Zohar; it does not represent a deeper meaning set over against a more straightforward literal meaning, for no “actual” place corresponds to that name.<sup>127</sup> The interpretation of the Zohar is based on a particular reading of the verse found in several rabbinic sources,<sup>128</sup> though the statement in *Genesis Rabbah* 85:7 is that which most closely resembles the language of the Zohar:

Rabbi said: We have reviewed all of Scripture and we have not found a place which is called *petah einayim*. What, then, is *petah einayim*? This is to teach that she cast her eyes to the opening to which all eyes are cast. And she said: Let it be Your will that I should not leave this house empty handed.<sup>129</sup>

Like the midrashist, the kabbalist begins from the assumption that there is no actual place known by the name *petah einayim*.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, the simple meaning of the biblical expression must be sought elsewhere. The explanation in the midrashic compilation attributed to Rabbi, that is, Judah the Prince<sup>131</sup> – which itself is intended as an explanation of *peshat* and not an interpretative layer superimposed on the text – that this refers to the “opening” to which all eyes are cast, that is, a figurative characterization of God,<sup>132</sup> is appropriate and transformed by the Zohar into a theosophic symbol. That is, this opening is none other than the divine Presence, the last of the *sefirot*, which is often characterized in theosophic kabbalistic literature as the gateway or openness through which one enters into the sefirotic pleroma. Hence, the *peshat* here is comprehensible only in light of the *sod*, though the formulation of the latter is based on the midrashic (and decidedly non-mystical) reading. In this case, therefore, the claim that the Torah is hidden and revealed should not be construed as an affirmation of dual meaning in the text, but rather as saying that the revealed meaning is itself intelligible only in light of a hidden signification or symbolic correspondence. In this respect, the Zohar follows Naḥmanides and Jacob ben Sheshet, who, as I mentioned earlier, affirmed that on occasion the mystical meaning alone provides an adequate explanation for the *peshat*. To take another illustration from the Zohar:

R. Simeon said: If people only knew the words of Torah, then they would comprehend that there is no word or letter in the



Torah that does not contain supernal, precious secrets. Come and see: It is written, “Moses spoke and God answered him with a voice” (Exod. 19:19). It has been taught:<sup>133</sup> What is [the meaning of] “with a voice”? With the voice of Moses. This is correct, the voice of Moses precisely (*dayqa*), the voice to which he was attached and through which he was superior to all other prophets.<sup>134</sup>

In this particular example, the kabbalistic recasting of the midrashic reading is offered as the *peshat* of the verse, the plain meaning. Hence, the voice through which God responded to Moses is, as reflected already in the midrashic interpretation, the voice of Moses, but in the Zohar the latter is transformed into a symbol for one of the *sefirot*, viz. *Tif'eret*, the gradation to which the earthly Moses is attached.<sup>135</sup> The transformation of the midrashic into the kabbalistic is noted by the author of Zohar by his use of the expression *dayqa* in connection with the phrase “voice of Moses,” which I have rendered as “precisely.” The Zohar uses this term in many contexts to emphasize the kabbalistic intent<sup>136</sup> of the given passage, as, for example, in the following:

It has been taught<sup>137</sup> [concerning the verse] “For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins” (Lev. 16:30). It should have been [written] “this day” (*ha-yom ha-zeh*). But it says “on this day” (*ba-yom ha-zeh*) precisely (*dayqa*), for on that day the Holy Ancient One is revealed to atone for everyone’s sins.<sup>138</sup>

The pretext here is a presumed problem with *peshat* – a repeated phenomenon in the Zohar to which I will return later on – which is answered by stressing that the precise form of the biblical text instructs the reader about a mystical process. It will be noted that the same role is played by the word *mammash*, which served already as a technical term in rabbinic literature to denote that a given biblical expression should be understood in its factual or real sense and not in some imaginative, figurative, or allegorical way.<sup>139</sup> In the Zohar the word *mammash* can designate that a specific term is to be understood in its kabbalistic signification.<sup>140</sup> Thus, for instance, one reads,

He began to expound again and said: “From my flesh I will see God” (Job 19:26). Why [is it written] “from my flesh” (*u-mibesari*)? It should have been “from myself” (*u-me’atsmi*). Rather, from my flesh literally (*mammash*)! And what is it? As it is written, “The holy flesh will pass away from you” (Jer. 11:15), and it is written, “Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh” (Gen. 17:13). It has been taught: Whenever a person is marked by the holy sign of that covenant, from it he sees the Holy One, blessed be He. From it literally (*mammash*)!<sup>141</sup>

This is a striking example of the hyperliteralism that characterizes the zoharic reading of Scripture. By means of the technique of *gezerah shawah*, the linking of seemingly disparate contextual fields based on identity of expression,<sup>142</sup> the Zohar determines that the occurrence of the word “flesh” (*basar*) in Job 19:26 must be explained as denoting the *membrum virile*; hence, it is from the phallus that one sees God.<sup>143</sup> The meaning of this is clarified by the mystical notion, itself rooted in earlier midrashic modes of thinking, that the sign of the covenant of circumcision is a letter inscribed on the body.<sup>144</sup> In that sense it can be said that one sees God from the very flesh on which the sign of the covenant has been inscribed.

Another example of the hyperliteralism of the Zohar may be gathered from the following passage: “The first tablets were inscribed from that place [*Binah*]. This is the secret of the verse, ‘incised on the tablets’ (Exod. 32:16). Do not read ‘incised’ (*harut*) but rather freedom (*herut*).<sup>145</sup> *Herut* indeed (*mammash*) – the place upon which is dependent all freedom.”<sup>146</sup> Utilizing the midrashic reading of the biblical expression *harut* as *herut*, the Zohar renders the plain sense of the verse as referring to the *sefirah* that is designated by the term *herut*, the ontic source of all freedom, that is, *Binah*, which is the source as well for the tablets of law, the subject of the verse in question. On occasion the Zohar uses both of these expressions together, *mammash* and *dayqa*, to note that the literal meaning is comprehensible only in terms of the kabbalistic significance.<sup>147</sup> To cite one pertinent example:

R. Judah: Israel did not come close to Mount Sinai until they entered the portion of the Righteous One [*Tsaddiq*, i.e. the ninth emanation or *Yesod*, Foundation] and merited it. From

where do we know? It is written, “On that very day they entered the wilderness of Sinai” (Exod. 19:1). “On that very day” indeed (*mammash dayqa*)! And it is written, “In that day they shall say: This is our God; we trusted in Him [and He delivered us]” (Isa. 25:9).<sup>148</sup>

The kabbalistic explanation that Israel approached Mount Sinai only after having entered the divine grade of *Yesod*, or *Tsaddiq*, is derived from the literal expression *ba-yom ha-zeh*, “on that very day,” for the word *zeh*, the masculine demonstrative pronoun, is one of the standard symbols for this particular *sefirah*.<sup>149</sup> Further support for this reading is adduced from Isaiah 25:9, where the demonstrative *zeh* is again used, as read by the theosophic exegete, as a name of this attribute of God. The kabbalistic truth is, in the last analysis, revealed to a careful reader of the text in its most elemental sense through the rabbinic hermeneutical technique of *gezerah shawah*.<sup>150</sup>

That the implication of the expressions *dayqa* and *mammash* is to signify the convergence of *peshat* and *sod*, such that the determination of kabbalistic meaning is channeled through the linguistic signification of the terms in the given utterance,<sup>151</sup> can be seen unambiguously from the following passage:

R. Simeon said: it is written “And new moon after new moon, and sabbath after sabbath” (Isa. 66:23). Why is the one [new moon] compared to the other [sabbath]? Everything amounts to one gradation, the one coupled with the other. The happiness of the one is not found in the other except when the Holy Ancient One is revealed; then the happiness of all [is found]. It has been taught: “A psalm. A song, for the sabbath day” (Ps. 92:1), to the sabbath day literally (*mammash*)! This is a praise that the Holy One, blessed be He, utters. At that time the happiness is found and the soul is increased for the Ancient One is revealed and the union is set. Similarly, when the moon is renewed the sun illuminates her with the happiness of the light of the Ancient One above. Therefore this sacrifice [offered on the New Moon] is above so that everything will be ameliorated and happiness will be found in the world. Thus [it is said] “they should bring a sacrifice for me,” the word [*al*] precisely (*dayqa millah*). It has been taught: It is written, “A burnt offering for

sabbath in addition to the regular burnt offering” (Num. 28:10). One must focus one’s mental intention higher than the rest of the days. Thus [it is written] specifically (*dayqa*) “in addition to [i.e. *al*, which can be read as the preposition ‘atop’ or ‘over’] the burnt offering.” It has been taught: [with respect to] Hannah it is written, “she prayed to (*al*) the Lord” (1 Sam. 1:10). [The word] *al* indeed (*dayqa*), for children are dependent on the holy *mazzal* [i.e. *Keter* or the Holy Ancient One]<sup>152</sup> ... There is no word or even a small letter in the Torah that does not allude to the supernal wisdom, and from which are suspended heaps of secrets of the supernal wisdom.<sup>153</sup>

In this highly compact passage, the Zohar draws various mystical conclusions by effectively overliteralizing the verses under discussion. In particular, attention is paid to what would appear to be a rather innocuous word, the preposition *al*, which, when read kabbalistically, is decoded as a sign for the uppermost aspects of the divine. Having determined the meaning of this term, it is possible to link together disparate textual units – in this case derived both from biblical and talmudic sources – by means of the technique of *gezerah shawah*. What would appear from the outside as an obvious imposition of an external and autonomous system upon the biblical text is in fact presented as the precise and literal meaning of the relevant verses. Therefore the concluding statement is to the effect that every word, indeed every letter, of Scripture alludes to a supernal secret. In the case of the Zohar we might say, inverting the instructive phrase of one scholar, *peshat* is “deep midrash,”<sup>154</sup> if we understand by the latter a reference to theosophic symbolism.

Another, and by far the most frequently employed, term in the Zohar to mark the convergence of *peshat* and *sod* is the word *wadda’y*. With respect to this usage it must be noted that the Zohar is again drawing on rabbinic literature, wherein this word, like *mammash*, functioned as a *terminus technicus* to underscore or emphasize the factual or sensible meaning, the *peshat* as it came to be called in Amoraic sources, of a certain expression in contrast to a nonliteral or figurative connotation.<sup>155</sup> At least three different nuances can be discerned in the zoharic usage of the key term. It is used to emphasize the actual or real meaning,<sup>156</sup> to mark a kabbalistic symbol,<sup>157</sup> or to signify the convergence of the exoteric (literal)

and esoteric (symbolic) meaning,<sup>158</sup> I will mention only a few examples of countless possibilities found scattered throughout the landscape of the Zohar. From a purely statistical perspective the examples I will give are somewhat arbitrary in that they reflect only a very small portion of the passages that could have been cited. However, by calling attention to the limited cases where this exegetical device is used, I hope minimally to focus scholarly attention on an important, but neglected, phenomenon in zoharic hermeneutics. It is my intention, moreover, that the typologies established here will be tested, refined, and applied in other studies in the future.

Let me begin with the following zoharic interpretation of Esther 8:15:

Mordecai went out before the king in royal attire [*levush malkhut*, lit. in the garment of royalty], the garment of royalty indeed (*wadda'y*) [i.e.] the image of that [supernal] world ... R. Shim'on said: how sweet are these words, fortunate is my lot. I know that the righteous in that world are clothed in the garment called the garment of royalty, and indeed so it is.<sup>159</sup>

The expression *levush malkhut*, understood in its literal sense from the vantage point of the Zohar, signifies the luminous garment that derives from the *Shekhinah*, the divine attribute also called by the name *Malkhut*. The verse informs us, then, that when Mordecai went before the King he was cloaked in just such an aura, which is construed as an image of the garment of the righteous in the sefirotic realm. There is here no second meaning for the expression *levush malkhut*; its plain meaning indicates the mystical notion. Another way of putting this matter is that the literalism of the text instructs the reader about the esoteric doctrine. The same approach is apparent in the zoharic interpretation of the verse, "When the men of the place [of Gerar] asked him [Isaac] about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister'" (Gen. 26:7):

This is similar [to the incident of] Abraham,<sup>160</sup> for the *Shekhinah* was with him and his wife, and on account of the *Shekhinah* [the statement] was uttered, as it is written, "Say to Wisdom, You are my sister" (Prov. 7:4). Therefore he was strengthened and said "She is my sister." By both Abraham and Isaac it was certainly

appropriate, for in the verse it is written, “My sister, my darling, my faultless dove” (Song of Songs 5:2). Thus it was indeed (*wadda’y*) appropriate for them to say “She is my sister.”<sup>161</sup>

Troubled by an obvious problem that has engaged the interest of biblical commentators through the ages regarding Isaac’s (like Abraham’s) overt deception, the Zohar provides an explanation that accounts for the *peshaṭ* but only by reference to a kabbalistic secret. The connotation of the word “sister” in the account of Abraham and Isaac is *Shekhinah*, a usage attested in the two other biblical verses – when read kabbalistically as well – cited in the preceding passage. The *peshaṭ*, when so understood, removes the problem of lying entirely, for both Patriarchs referred to the divine Presence and not their respective spouses. Even though the *peshaṭ* offered by the zoharic reading ignores the continuation of the verse itself, it is evident that the kabbalistic explanation of the word “sister” is indeed presented as the plain meaning of the idiom in this context.

Let me cite another example to illustrate the point:

R. Ḥiyya began to expound, “the glory of God is to conceal the matter, the glory of kings is to search out the matter” (Prov. 25:2). “The glory of God is to conceal the matter,” for a person does not have permission to reveal secret matters, as they have not been given permission to reveal matters that the Ancient of Days concealed, as it is said, “that they may eat their fill and cover that which the Ancient One [concealed]” (Isa. 23:18).<sup>162</sup> “To eat their fill,” up to that place wherein they have permission [to reveal] and no more. Thus it is said, *we-limekhaseh atiq*, verily (*wadda’y*) that which the Ancient One (*atiq*) covers.<sup>163</sup>

The author of the Zohar follows here the reading of the verse from Isaiah attributed to R. Eleazar in the Talmud (b. Pesahim 119a): “What is the meaning of *li-mekhaseh atiq*? That which the Ancient of Days (*atiq yomin*) has concealed. And what is that? The secrets of Torah.” The midrashic reading is accepted by the Zohar as the *peshaṭ* of the verse, signified by the usage of the *terminus technicus wadda’y*. In the case of the Zohar, moreover, the talmudic reference is transposed in light of sefirotic theosophy, for the word *atiq* designates the

first of the divine gradations, though already in the Talmud the word *atiq* has a specific theological reference. In this case as well, therefore, we have an instance where the *peshaṭ* of a verse is rendered by its esoteric meaning. That the word *wadda'y* serves as a kind of signpost to designate that the plain sense of the biblical expression is to be rendered by its sefirotic correlation is repeatedly stressed in the Zohar, as for example:

Why is it written, “Her ways are ways of pleasantness” (Prov. 3:17)? [R. Eleazar] said to [R. Hiyya]: How foolish are people of the world, for they do not know how to consider words of Torah, for the words of Torah are the way to merit that pleasantness of God, as it is written, “Her ways are ways of pleasantness.” The ways of pleasantness (*no'am*) indeed! What is this pleasantness? As it is written, “To gaze upon the beauty (*no'am*) of the Lord.” It has been taught that the Torah and its ways derive from that Beauty ... Thus, it is written, “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peaceful.”<sup>164</sup>

From the vantage point of the kabbalist, then, the expression *darkhei no'am*, “the ways of pleasantness,” refers to the gradation in the sefirotic pleroma out of which the Torah, itself a designation for the *sefirah* of *Tif'eret*, emerges. In that sense, the expression should be taken quite literally, for the ways of Torah are the ways of pleasantness; that is, pleasantness is the ontic source for the Torah.

The exegetical function that the author of the Zohar assigned to the word *wadda'y* as marking the overlapping of exoteric and esoteric signification can also be seen from the following passage:

What is [the meaning of what is] written, “So he [Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood (*ets*)” (Exod. 15:25)? The word *ets* is nothing but the Torah,<sup>165</sup> as it is written, “She is a tree of life (*ets hayyim*) to those who grasp her” (Prov. 3:18). And the [word] Torah is nothing but the Holy One, blessed be He. R. Abba said: the [word] tree is nothing but the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written, “For man [is] the tree of the field” (Num. 20:19),<sup>166</sup> the tree of the field (*ets ha-sadeh*) indeed (*wadda'y*), i.e., the tree of the field of holy apples.<sup>167</sup>

Using the ancient midrashic formula to derive semantic meaning from a specific expression, “the word X is nothing but Y,”<sup>168</sup> the author of Zohar sets out to show that the reference to the piece of wood in Exodus 15:25 refers to God or, to be more precise, the aspect of God that corresponds to the Torah and is called the Holy One, blessed be He, that is, *Tif’eret*. The first view achieves this by two steps: first, by following rabbinic exegesis and specifying that the word “tree” (or “wood”) signifies Torah; and second, that the word “Torah” denotes the Holy One, blessed be He. R. Abba, by contrast, reaches the goal with one step: the word “tree” itself denotes the Holy One, blessed be He. This is proven from the verse, “For man [is] the tree of the field,” which is read as the tree of the “field of holy apples,” that is, the *Shekhinah*. The tree that is in the field of holy apples is *Tif’eret*, also designated as the *anthropos*.

From the perspective of the zoharic authorship, then, the word *wadda’y* can signify that the literal sense of Scripture is to be sought in its kabbalistic meaning. That this is so may be seen clearly from one final example:

“The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: This is the ritual law that the Lord has commanded” (Num. 19:1–2). R. Yose began to expound: “This is the Torah that Moses set before the Israelites” (Deut. 4:44). Come and see: The words of Torah are holy, supernal, and sweet ... For he who is involved in [the study of] Torah it is as if he stands each day on Mount Sinai and receives the Torah ... The comrades have thus taught: Here it is written “this is the ritual law” (*zo’t huqqat ha-torah*) and [in the other case] it is written “and this is the Torah” (*we-zo’t ha-torah*). What is the difference between these two? This concerns a supernal mystery and thus have I learnt: “This is the Torah” to show everything in one unity, to contain the Community of Israel [*Shekhinah*] within the Holy One, blessed be He [*Tif’eret*] so that everything will be found as one. Therefore [it is written] “and this is the Torah.” Why is there the additional *waw* [in the word *we-zo’t*]? As it has been said, to show that everything is one without any separation. [The word] *we-zo’t* [signifies] the principle (*kelal*) and the exception (*perat*) as one, the masculine and feminine. Thus [it is written] “And this is the Torah” indeed (*wadda’y*)! But the word *zo’t* without the



additional *waw* [signifies] “the ritual law” (*ḥuqqat ha-torah*) indeed (*wadda’y*), and not the Torah, i.e., the law of the Torah and the decree of the Torah ... Thus [it is written] “and this is the Torah” literally (*mammash*), [signifying] one complete unity, the containment of the masculine and feminine, the *waw* and the *he* [the word signifies] the *he* alone, and thus [it is written] “this is the ritual law.”<sup>169</sup>

Ever a close reader of the biblical text, the zoharic author here heeds the distinction between the two expressions “and this is the Torah” (*we-zo’t ha-torah*), on the one hand, and “this is the ritual law” (*zo’t ḥuqqat ha-torah*), on the other. The former expression when decoded (perhaps “encoded” would be the more appropriate word) kabbalistically alludes to the unity of the feminine and masculine aspects of the divine, *Shekhinah* and *Tif’eret*, signified, respectively, by the words *zo’t* and *torah*, whereas the latter refers exclusively to the feminine aspect designated as *zo’t* as well as *ḥuqqat ha-torah*. The verse “and this is the torah” is thus being read as: this, *zo’t*, that is, *Shekhinah*, is one with the Torah, that is, *Tif’eret*. By contrast, the verse “this is the ritual law” is read as follows: this, *zo’t*, that is, *Shekhinah*, is the ritual law, *ḥuqqat torah*, both terms designating the same potency of the Godhead. The former verse, therefore, unlike the latter, is a statement that proclaims the divine unity, understood in its particular kabbalistic nuance. This point is related by the kabbalistic interpreter to the additional *waw* in the former case, *we-zo’t*, a letter that signifies the union of male and female. In the last analysis, therefore, the kabbalistic reading is indicated by the very orthography of Scripture, which constitutes the *peshat* in the extended sense of the term.

The centrality of the role of *peshat* in zoharic hermeneutics can be ascertained as well from the many instances in the Zohar wherein a problem with the simple meaning serves as the basis for a kabbalistic truth that, when exposed, illuminates the verse. Suffice it here to mention a few examples to illustrate this phenomenon. In one passage the claim of the Zohar that every word of Scripture has a secret is based on a problem with the literal meaning of Exodus 2:6, “When she [the daughter of Pharaoh] opened it, she saw that it was a child,” *wa-tiftaḥ wa-tir’ehu et ha-yeled*. The obvious problem, reflected in any number of medieval biblical exegetes,<sup>170</sup> is why the

word *wa-tir'ehu*, which contains the verb (“saw”) and the direct object (“him”), is followed by another direct object of the same verb, “the child,” *et ha-yeled*. This problem in *peshat* serves as the springboard for the mystical imagination of the author of Zohar, who notes that the extra letters in the word *wa-tir'ehu*, the *he* and *waw*, which symbolize the attributes of *Shekhinah* and *Tif'eret*, were inscribed on the infant Moses. This kabbalistic interpretation is based in part upon the following statement in Babylonian Talmud, Soṭah 12b: “When she opened it, she saw that it was a child.’ It should have been written *wa-tir'eh* (she saw) [instead of *wa-tir'ehu*, she saw him]. R. Yose ben Ḥanina said that she saw the *Shekhinah* with him.” In his commentary on the relevant verse, the eleventh-century exegete R. Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (Rashi) cites this talmudic interpretation as the midrashic one after he offers what he considers to be the *peshat*, viz. the direct object “the child” (*et ha-yeled*) modifies the prior expression “she saw him” (*wa-tir'ehu*). From the perspective of R. Yose ben Ḥanina, however, the midrashic explanation is itself the *peshat* of the verse. Scripture should have used the verbal form *wa-tera* followed by the direct object *et ha-yeled*. The seemingly superfluous expression, *wa-tir'ehu*, therefore, is interpreted as a reference to the *Shekhinah*. According to the opinion of some later Ashkenazi authorities, the reference to the *Shekhinah* is derived from the two extra letters in the word *wa-tir'ehu*, the *he* and *waw*, for these letters make up one of the names of God, *ho*.<sup>171</sup> Thus, for instance, Judah ben Eliezer (twelfth and thirteenth century), writes, “When she opened it, she saw that it was a child.’ R. Solomon ben Isaac (Rashi) explains that she saw the *Shekhinah* with him. This is derived from the fact that it is not written *she saw* (*wa-tera*) but rather *she saw him* (*wa-tir'ehu*), and this [the extra letters *he-waw*] is the name of the Holy One, blessed be He.”<sup>172</sup> Similarly, in the Torah commentary stemming from the circle of Judah ben Samuel the Pious, though erroneously attributed to Eleazar ben Judah of Worms, one finds the following formulation: “‘She saw him’ (*wa-tir'ehu*) should be read as she saw *ho* (*he-waw*), she saw the light of the *Shekhinah*.”<sup>173</sup> The Zohar continues this line of interpretation, but, in accordance with its own theosophic conception, distinguishes between the *he* and *waw*, referring, as was said earlier, to *Shekhinah* and *Tif'eret*. Although the kabbalistic explanation carries one far from the *sensus litteralis* in any conventional manner, it is

instructive that the mystical exegesis begins with a textual difficulty on the *peshat* level.

Another example of this phenomenon occurs in the zoharic interpretation of “The Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am El Shaddai’” (Gen. 17:1). The Zohar raises a question about the use of the particular divine name, El Shaddai, in this context. This question has been posed by most of the standard medieval biblical commentaries, including, for instance, Rashi, Abraham Ibn Ezra, Nahmanides, and Obadiah Sforno. It is clear, then, that the query of the Zohar must be understood within this context. The response of the Zohar involves a complicated kabbalistic exegesis that will illuminate this particular usage in terms of a mystical signification. That is, circumcision effects a change from the demonic realm, symbolized by the word *shed*, to the divine, represented by *Shaddai* or the last of the *sefirot*, the *Shekhinah*. The two words, *shed* and *Shaddai*, share the same consonants with the exception of the *yod* in the latter, the letter that corresponds to the sign of the covenant, *ot berit*, that is, the sign of circumcision. After having been circumcised Abraham can be called *tamim*, which the Zohar renders in accordance with the Targum as *shelim*, that is, “perfect.” Such a person is blessed by *Shekhinah* as is further attested by the verse, “May El Shaddai bless you” (Gen. 28:3). The kabbalistic exegesis is propelled by and returns to a concern with the literal sense of the text.

One can discern the same process in the following passage:

“Elohim blessed Noah and his sons” (Gen. 9:1). R. Abba began to expound, “It is the blessing of the Lord that enriches, and no toil can increase it” (Prov. 10:22). “The blessing of the Lord” (*birkat yhw*) is the *Shekhinah*, for she is appointed over the blessings of the world, and from her the blessings go out for everyone.<sup>174</sup>

According to the zoharic reading of Genesis 9:1, the *Shekhinah*, last of the ten gradations, blessed Noah. This is highlighted by the mystical exegesis of Proverbs 10:22, where *birkat yhw* is deciphered as a technical name for the *Shekhinah*. The point of the passage is that the verse in Genesis can be understood only when one is aware that Elohim is a name of the *Shekhinah*, the source of blessing. This is *peshuto shel miqra*, that is, the plain meaning of the text; no other

sense would serve as an outer shell or covering hiding the inner meaning. On the contrary, the text allows for only one meaning, the proper deciphering of which belongs in the hands of the enlightened kabbalist. Thus, in the continuation of this passage, the Zohar explains the semantic shift from the use of the name YHWH in “Then the Lord said to Noah, Go into the ark etc.” (Gen. 7:1), to Elohim in “Elohim blessed Noah and his sons” (Gen. 9:1): “As it is said, the master of the house grants permission for one to enter, and afterwards the wife tells one to exit. One enters at first with the permission of the master and in the end leaves with the permission of the wife.” When the allusions are properly decoded, it turns out that the Tetragrammaton corresponds to the masculine potency, *Tif’eret*, and Elohim to the feminine *Shekhinah*. The kabbalistic symbolism allows the zoharic authorship to account for a subtle shift in the text concerning the various divine names, an issue that has continued to provide grist for the mill of biblical scholarship. In this connection it should be noted that the Zohar often pays careful attention to the different names of God as they appear in the Bible inasmuch as they refer to particular *sefirot*. To take what may be considered a rather typical example of this phenomenon: “R. Eleazar said the *Shekhinah* was speaking with [Abraham] for through this gradation the Holy One, blessed be He, was revealed to him, as it is written, ‘I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the name El Shaddai.’ [R. Simeon] said to him: So it certainly (*wadda’y*) is!” In these cases it is unequivocally the case that the very *peshat* of Scripture can only be comprehended by way of kabbalistic explication.

Another typology that can be discerned in the Zohar concerns the interpretation of a verse wherein a problem with the literal sense functions as a stimulus for the kabbalistic interpretation. In these cases, unlike the ones previously discussed, the assumption is not that the *peshat* is the *sod*, but only that concern with the *peshat* serves as the pretext to develop the esoteric reading. An example of this may be seen in the following:

Come and see, it is written, “This shall be (*we-hayita zo’t*) to you a law for all time” (Lev. 16:34). It should have been [written] “this shall be for you” (*we-hayita lakhem*) [i.e. without the article *zo’t*]. What is the import of the word “this” (*zo’t*)? For it is said a law for all time (*huqqat olam*). In every place [the

expression] “a law for all time” (*huqqat olam*) is called the decree of the king, for all laws enter into that place and it seals them as one who seals everything in a treasure. “A law for all time” indeed (*wadda’y*)! In that [grade referred to as] *zo’t* is inscribed and engraved all its hidden and concealed matters.<sup>175</sup>

Beginning with an ostensible problem at the level of the simple meaning, the Zohar is able to interpret the seemingly extra word as a cipher for a deep mystical truth. The word is not superfluous, but rather indicates to us the kabbalistic significance of the whole verse: the law referred to is not simply the rituals specified for atonement on Yom Kippur, but it is a mystical symbol for the last of the gradations. In this case, and countless others that I could have cited, the literal sense does not entirely overlap with the mystical. The issue rather is that the latter is derived by a probing of the former. It is precisely such a strategy that fills the pages of the Zohar, the kabbalist exegete heeding each and every word of Scripture, maintaining the divinity and ultimate significance of the text as it is in its received form.

In sum, it may be concluded that the scholarly consensus that the interest in *peshat* in the Zohar is secondary, and unrelated to the internal meaning, must be corrected. From three distinct vantage points it can be argued that concern with the literal sense is essential to zoharic hermeneutics. First, the Zohar is operating with a theological conception of the *sensus litteralis* such that it is thought to comprise within itself all senses of Scripture, including the mystical. Second, numerous examples in the Zohar indicate that the authorship of this work accepted the view that in certain cases, the *peshat* of a verse is comprehensible only in terms of *sod*; that is, the kabbalistic meaning is not a supplementary one but is rather the exclusive sense of the text. Third, the search for the esoteric meaning in Zohar often begins with a standard problem of reading the verse contextually. While the mystical imagination carries the Zohar beyond the reaches of the literal meaning in any exact sense of the term, from the perspective of Zohar itself, by removing the external coverings, one opens up the text to see it as it is in its most basic form, viz. a self-revelation of God. Discovering *peshat*, for the authorship of the Zohar, means discarding the outer layers that conceal the inner light or soul of the text. Those who look only at the *peshat*, without knowledge of

what lies beneath, do not in the end really understand even the *peshat*; that is, they have no text. In that sense, the act of reading (i.e. interpreting) is constitutive not only of meaning, but of the text itself.

This point is depicted in a profound way in one of the parables spoken by the mysterious elder to R. Yose: “Who is the beautiful maiden who has no eyes, and whose body is hidden and revealed; she goes out in the morning and hides during the day, adorned in ornamentations that are not.”<sup>176</sup> From the continuation of this section it is evident that this maiden symbolizes the Torah who stands before her lover. Thus, we have a striking contrast between the description of Torah as the maiden without eyes and the mystic exegete who, as I noted earlier in another context, is referred to as the “wise one full of eyes.”<sup>177</sup> The force of the latter expression is clear enough, as may be gathered, for instance, from another passage in Zohar where the mystics are characterized as “masters of the eyes (*ma’rei de-ayyenin*) who know with their mind and contemplate the wisdom of the Master.”<sup>178</sup> This last description reflects a shift in the epistemological focus characteristic of the Zohar from the auditory to the visual as the essential modality by which gnosis of the divine is gained.<sup>179</sup>

But what does it mean to say of the Torah that it has no eyes? Yehuda Liebes has suggested two possible meanings: the first that it is invisible and the second that it has no aspect or color. The former explanation fits well into the context, for, as it has been pointed out already, the maiden is described as hiding and revealing herself in progressive stages before the lover. That is, the Torah is invisible to all but the kabbalist who knows how to “see” – that is, interpret – her. The difficulty with this explanation is a philological one, for the actual expression is that the maiden has no eyes. This implies that she cannot see, not that she cannot be seen. It thus seems to me more likely that the second explanation is the correct one. That the word “eyes” has the connotation of colors, aspects, or characteristics is attested already in biblical<sup>180</sup> and rabbinic<sup>181</sup> usage.

Specifically, in terms of kabbalistic precedents mention should be made of Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen’s statement to the effect that Tanin, the intermediary between Samael and Lilith in the demonic realm, corresponding to *Yesod* on the side of holiness, is described as having no eyes, that is, no characteristic.<sup>182</sup> In the zoharic parable, I would suggest, moreover, that this description of the maiden indicates that the parabolic image is operative simultaneously on

two planes, the hermeneutical and the ontic. That is to say, the maiden symbolizes not only Torah but the divine grade to which the latter corresponds, viz. the *Shekhinah*.<sup>183</sup> It can be shown from other passages in the Zohar that the Torah is identified as the feminine persona of God, the *Shekhinah*, a conception rooted in the older aggadic motif concerning the female image of the Torah,<sup>184</sup> even though, according to a widely attested conception in thirteenth-century kabbalah, the Written Torah corresponds to the masculine and the Oral Torah to the feminine. It is the case, moreover, that the *Shekhinah* is often enough described as that which has no form or color of its own, but only that which it receives from above. The maiden without eyes, therefore, signifies that the text in and of itself is “blind,” without sense; whatever meaning the text has is imparted to it by the open eye (*peqihu de-eina*) of the reader in the same manner that the *Shekhinah* assumes the forms that she receives from the *sefirah* of *Yesod*, the *membrum virile* in the divine organism. The interpreter thus stands in the position of the masculine *Yesod* when confronting the text, which is likened to the female *Shekhinah*, and the interpretative relation is essentially erotic in its nature.<sup>185</sup> The mystic, full of eyes, gives sense to the eyeless text by his bestowing glance, a glance that bestows by disclosing that which is latent in the text. The constitution of meaning in the hermeneutical relationship underlies the task of reading, according to the Zohar. Paradoxically, this act of bestowal is characterized as an appropriation of that which the text reveals from within its concealment. This is true for all levels of meaning; only at the end of the process, when the mystic stands face to face with the text, is the text finally disclosed.

The Zohar’s rejection of a purely literal reading of biblical narrative does not imply a bifurcation of meaning between *peshaṭ* and *sod*, but only a failure to understand the inherent mystical dimensions of *peshaṭ*. That is, even *peshaṭ* contains *sod*, and the one who looks at the plain meaning without knowledge of the supernal realm cannot truly understand the plain meaning. The relation between esoteric and exoteric levels of meaning is very much reflected, as Idel has noted, in the respective ontology of the given kabbalist.<sup>186</sup> Hence, the ontological assumption that the corporeal world symbolically reflects the divine, a common feature of theosophic kabbalah, in the realm of exegesis generates a positive attitude toward *peshaṭ* and its relationship to *sod*. This positive attitude is

even more pronounced in the case of the Zohar, where pantheistic tendencies are evident.<sup>187</sup> That is, all reality is said to form one continuous chain so that there are no radical breaks. It follows that entities in the mundane realm are but final links in this chain. Analogously, the literal sense comprises within itself the esoteric truths. The *peshat*, therefore, is not a shell that is to be broken or a garment to be discarded, but rather a veil to be penetrated so that through it one can behold the mystical insight – in the words of the Zohar, to see the secret matter from within its garment. The attitude of Zohar toward the written text of Scripture had an enduring influence on the kabbalistic tradition, which unfolded for several hundred years after the Zohar's appearance. For example, the noted kabbalist Ḥayyim Vital (1543–1620), who in his programmatic introduction to the *Sha'ar ha-Haqqdamot* launches, on the basis of zoharic passages drawn mainly from *Ra'aya Meheimna* and the *Tiqqunim*,<sup>188</sup> a sharp critique of those who adopt a literalist approach toward the Written and Oral Torah, in one place underlines the inherent necessity of the *peshat* and its organic relation to the *sod* or inner meaning:

This too [the attribution of physical characteristics such as wings to the angels] will be a wonder in the eyes of the literalists, and they will think that in this too there is form, and the matter is not [to be taken] according to its literal meaning. They do not understand that the literal sense (*peshat*) and the symbolic (*remez*)<sup>189</sup> are one thing like the soul and the body, for the one is the image and likeness of the other. If the soul would change its limbs from the limbs of the body, of necessity the former could not be clothed in the latter. A small vessel cannot contain a larger one; and if the latter goes inside the former, it cannot go inside with all its parts. In this manner the literal meaning of Scripture (*peshatei ha-torah*) must be like the soul of the Torah and its inwardness (*nishmat ha-torah u-penimiyutah*) for the body is the image of the soul. It is also necessary that the inwardness be something spiritual, for if not it would have no need to be clothed, as [it follows from] the way of the literalists who explain the beginning of the Torah.<sup>190</sup>

From this passage we can understand the thrust of Vital's attack on the literalists. He does not oppose the study of *peshat*; what



he does reject is the study of *peshat* divorced from any consideration of *sod*. In his view the literal and the symbolic meanings are one organic unity in a relationship like that of the soul and body. Just as there is a morphological resemblance between soul and body enabling the former to be clothed in the latter, so too there is correspondence between the literal and esoteric textual levels. The hidden signification is clothed in and ultimately known through the literal. The view expressed here confirms the posture of the Zohar which I have discussed at length in this essay.

The implicit principle of zoharic hermeneutics is rendered explicitly by subsequent kabbalists, such as Isaiah ben Abraham Horowitz (ca. 1565–1630), known as *ha-SheLaH ha-Qadosh*, the “holy Shelah,” based on the initials of his major work, the *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit* (“Two Tablets of the Covenant”). Commenting on the relation of the hidden (*nistar*) to the revealed (*nigleh*), the Shelah writes:

The revealed is the hidden, i.e., the revealed is the disclosure of the hidden and its dissemination. It follows that the revealed is the hidden. Thus it is with respect to matters of the Torah: the revealed is not an independent matter in relation to the hidden, in accord with the view of the masses who hold that the hidden way is separate and the revealed way separate. This is not the case, but rather the hidden evolves [through a chain] and is revealed. To this the verse alludes, “Like golden apples in silver showpieces is a phrase well turned” (Prov. 25:11). That is to say, just as the silver approximates the gold but it is on a lower level, so is the revealed in relation to the hidden.<sup>191</sup>

Although in the continuation of this passage the Shelah approvingly refers to Maimonides’ interpretation of the verse from Proverbs in the introduction to the *Guide of the Perplexed*, the fact is that the position he has articulated reflects that of the Zohar with respect to the essential correspondence of the two levels of meaning. Just as ontically the external (the material world) is the manifestation of the internal (the spiritual realm of the divine emanations), so textually the exoteric meaning (the literal sense) is the externalization or disclosure of the esoteric (the mystical sense). There is thus a complete identification of the esoteric and exoteric so that any potential

conflict between the two is resolved: the religious obligation to study talmudic disputes (*hawwayot Abbaye we-Rava*) is itself included in the mandate to study mystical matters (*ma'aseh merkavah*).<sup>192</sup>

I conclude with one final example, a statement of Shneur Zalman of Lyady (1745–1813), founder of Habad Hasidism, which likewise reflects the hermeneutical orientation of the zoharic authorship and indicates to what an extent the latter had a profound influence on the shaping of subsequent Jewish mystical conceptions about the text and its multivalent levels of meaning:

Thus [Scripture] is called *miqra*, for one reads (*qore*) and draws down the revelation of the light of the Infinite (*Ein-Sof*) by means of the letters<sup>193</sup> even if one does not understand anything ... This is not the case with respect to the Oral Torah, which is clothed in wisdom, and therefore if one does not understand one does not draw down [the light]. With respect to the Written Torah, however, one draws down [the light] even if one does not understand ... since the source of the emanation (*meqor ha-hamshakhah*) is above wisdom ... Thus the Written Torah is called *miqra*, for they read and draw down [the emanation] by means of the letters ... Included in the study of Scripture is also the study of *aggadot*, for most of the *aggadot* are on verses [in Scripture] and few are homiletical. Moreover, they are not comprehended and are thus considered to be in the category of Scripture. Included in Scripture is also the study of the inwardness of Torah (*penimiyut ha-torah*), for the midrash of Zohar is on the verses of Torah. Moreover, in the study of the secrets of Torah one only comprehends the reality (*ha-metsi'ut*) [of the divine] from the chain [of emanation] and not from the essence [or substance] (*ha-mahut*) [of God]. Therefore it is not the same as Mishnah or Talmud through which one comprehends the essence of His wisdom (*mahut hokhmato*).<sup>194</sup>

Shneur Zalman thus distinguishes between study of Scripture and kabbalah, on the one hand, and Mishnah and Talmud, on the other. Whereas by means of the former one comprehends the reality of the divine as expressed in the chain of emanation rather than from God's own essence, the latter enables one to comprehend the essence of God's Wisdom as clothed on those levels. Most important for our

purposes, Shneur Zalman includes study of kabbalistic secrets within the parameters of Scripture which, in its most fundamental sense, entails the mere reading of the text, for esoteric Wisdom is largely based on the delineation of the inwardness (*penimiyyut*) of the verses of Scripture, epitomized by Zohar. Against the background of the continuous chain of emanation, the Written Torah in its elemental form, that is, the very letters of the Torah scroll, is to be viewed as the final garment of the light of the *Ein-Sof*. By simply reading the letters of Torah, therefore, even without the slightest comprehension, one can draw down light from the Infinite.<sup>195</sup> In that sense there is a complete appropriation of the mystical claim that the Torah, in its literal sense, is the name of God:

“Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day” (Deut. 6:6). This is the Written Torah, *miqra*, from the verse “They shall serve you to summon (*lemiqra*) the community” (Num. 10:2), said with respect to the trumpets, for this is the expression of calling (*qeri’ah*) and gathering (*asefah*). Thus all the Torah is the names of the Holy One, blessed be He. By means of this [Scripture] one reads and draws down the light of the Infinite from above to below.<sup>196</sup>

Though embellished with their own particular terminology, the statements of Shneur Zalman are a faithful depiction of the attitude of the Zohar itself toward the text of Scripture. Indeed, the repeated claim in the Zohar that the Torah is the name of God affirms that in its literal sense – determined by the Massoretic orthography – Scripture comprises the mystical significations. By means of the open eye, the wise one will see the inner light in and through the very garment that at the same time conceals it from the purview of everyone else.

### Notes

1. See Tishby, *Wisdom*, pp. 1077–1082; Frank Talmage, “Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism,” in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible Through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), pp. 313–355.
2. See Wilhelm Bacher, “Das Merkwort PRDS in der jüdischen Bibelexegese,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 13, 1893, pp. 294–305; P. Sandler,

- “On the Problem of Pardes and the Fourfold Orientation,” in *Sefer Orbakh: ma’amarim be-heqer ha-Tanakh: Mugash li-khevod Eliyahu Orbakh li-melot lo shiv’im shanah* (Jerusalem: Ha-Hevrah le-heqer ha-miqra be-Yisra’el, 1955), pp. 222–235 (Hebrew); Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 53–61; Albert Van Der Heide “Pardes: Methodological Reflections on the Theory of the Four Senses,” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 34, 1983, pp. 147–159; Talmage, “Apples of God,” pp. 319–321.
3. See especially the article of Van der Heide referred to in note 2.
  4. A similar point has recently been made by Moshe Idel, “PaRDeS: Some Reflections on Kabbalistic Hermeneutics,” in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 249–268.
  5. See Alexander Altmann, “Maimonides’s Attitude toward Jewish Mysticism,” in *Studies in Jewish Thought: An Anthology of German Jewish Scholarship*, ed. Alfred Jospe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), p. 203: “the unsettling realization that there are contradictions between the literal meaning of Scripture and philosophical truth ... drives Maimonides to develop his theory of the layers of esoteric and exoteric meaning.” One could argue that even for Maimonides the conflict between the literal reading and the figurative is applicable only when the text is taken at face value as understood by the philosophically unenlightened. That is to say, the external meaning is, when properly understood, to be read figuratively. This indeed is the purport of the bulk of the first part of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, which consists of the lexical chapters treating various terms in Scripture, many of which suggest on the superficial level an anthropomorphic conception of God.
  6. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 33.
  7. *Ibid.*, p. 13 (author’s emphasis).
  8. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 205.
  9. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 33.
  10. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 209.
  11. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
  12. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
  13. Wilhelm Bacher, “L’Exégèse Biblique dans le Zohar,” *Revue des Études Juives*, 22, 1891, pp. 41–45.
  14. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
  15. Tishby, *Wisdom*, p. 1083.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 1085.
  17. See *ibid.*, pp. 1090–1092; and the recent analysis in Pinchas Giller, “The Tiqqunim: Symbolization and Theurgy,” Ph.D. thesis, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, 1990, pp. 106–109 (see the revised version of Giller’s dissertation, *The Enlightened Will Shine: Symbolization and Theurgy in the Later Strata of the Zohar* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993], pp. 65–68). Even in the case of this kabbalist, however, it can be argued that the denigration of the literal sense is directed at those who would affirm the exoteric meaning at the expense of entirely ignoring the esoteric; see Giller, *ibid.*, pp. 125–126 (*Enlightened Will Shine*, pp. 73–74). See, e.g., the representative statement in *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 43, 82a: “BeReShIT—there is a dry place [*atar yavesh*, the consonants of the word *bereshit*] ... Thus is one who causes the kabbalah and wisdom to be removed from the Oral Torah and the Written Torah, and he causes that no one will be occupied with them. For they say that there is only *peshat* in the Torah and the Talmud. Such a person is surely like one who removes the spring from the river and the garden.” *Ibid.*

sec. 69, 114a: “Woe to those foolish people whose hearts are closed and whose eyes are closed, concerning whom it is said, ‘They have eyes but they do not see’ (Ps. 115:5) the light of the Torah. They are animals who do not see or know anything but the straw of Torah, which is the external shell and its chaff ... The sages of Torah, the masters of secrets, throw away the straw and chaff, and eat the wheat of Torah that is within. The twenty-two letters of the Torah are the numerical value of the word wheat.” (Concerning this numerology, see note 109. See, by contrast, Zohar 3:275b [*Ra’aya Meheimna*], wherein the leniencies of *halakhah* are described as the straw of Torah and the restrictions as the wheat; both together are contrasted with the secrets of Torah.) Cf. *Zohar Hadash*, 118b (*Tiqqunim*): “R. Simeon began to expound: Woe to those people whose hearts are closed and whose eyes are shut, for they do not pay attention to the various secrets hidden in the Torah. They desire only to eat the straw of the Torah, which is the literal sense (*peshat*), the garment of the Torah, but they do not taste the kernel that is within.” See also *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 19, 38a. The claim I have made with regard to the author of the *Tiqqunim* and *Ra’aya Meheimna* can also be applied to Hayyim Vital’s discussion in the introduction to the *Sha’ar ha-Haqqdamot* (Jerusalem, 1909), 1a–4d, which is based largely on the relevant passages discussed or mentioned in this note. See discussion later and the text cited at note 190.

18. See Tishby, *Wisdom*, p. 1089.
19. See Talmage, “Apples of Gold,” p. 314, who notes in passing that the exoteric sense, the *nigleh*, “may impede, as is suggested in the mystical classic the Zohar.”
20. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 39; Tishby, *Wisdom*, pp. 1080–1081; Idel, “Concept of Torah,” pp. 49–58.
21. My formulation is indebted to the description of St. Thomas Aquinas’ hermeneutics in James S. Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 54. See also Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l’écriture*, second part, vol. 2 (Paris: Aubier, 1964), p. 160. For a different interpretation of Aquinas, see Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 55–56, 219 n. 14. See also the description of the symbolist mentality in Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 110–111: “Consideration of sacred history involved a biblical interpretation which took literal history (*littera*) as the basis for continuous reference to supra-historical realities figured in terrestrial events ... the very nature of the Judaeo-Christian revelation posits an ongoing interrelationship among things that underlay this hermeneutic approach ... it was the extent and the forms taken by the application of the principle that produced a generalized typology and so determined the scriptural symbolism common to the Middle Ages.” It follows, according to Chenu’s analysis, that allegorical readings of Scripture that destroyed the literal sense of the text are contrary to the nature of symbolism; see *ibid.*, p. 117.
22. See Liebes, “Messiah,” pp. 135–145, 198–203; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 227–228; Elliot R. Wolfson, “Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol,” *History of Religions*, 27, 1987, pp. 207–213; *idem*, “The Hermeneutics of Visionary Experience: Revelation

- and Interpretation in the Zohar,” *Religion*, 18, 1988, pp. 323–324; idem, “Female Imaging of the Torah: From Literary Metaphor to Religious Symbol,” in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding: Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernst S. Frerichs, and Nahum M. Sarna (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 295–298, 302–305.
23. I owe this formulation to David Weiss Halivni, who uses it, however, to describe “the peshat of a halakhic text.” See his *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
  24. See especially Raphael Loewe, “The ‘Plain’ Meaning of Scripture in Early Jewish Exegesis,” *Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies London*, 1, 1964, pp. 140–185.
  25. See Sarah Kamin, *Rashi’s Exegetical Categorization in Respect to the Distinction Between Peshat and Derash* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), pp. 31–32 (Hebrew).
  26. See *Sefer ha-Mitsvot le-ha-RaMBaM we-Hassagot ha-RaMBaM*, ed. Ḥayyim D. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1981), p. 45.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
  28. Naḥmanides, *Perushei ha-Torah* vol. 2, p. 203 (ad Num. 3:1). See also *ibid.* vol. 1, p. 4 (introduction). On the use of the word *remez* in Naḥmanides, see Elliot R. Wolfson, “By Way of Truth: Aspects of Naḥmanides’ Kabbalistic Hermeneutic,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review*, 14, 1989, pp. 164–165.
  29. See *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. Ḥayyim D. Chavel, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1982), vol. 1, p. 180. In my earlier study, “By Way of Truth,” pp. 128–129, I interpreted this passage in a somewhat different manner, arguing that in this context Naḥmanides used the word *mashal* synonymously with *melitsah*, both referring to the literal or external sense. After reconsidering the passage, however, it seems that the word *mashal* here, as elsewhere in Naḥmanides’s oeuvre, denotes the figurative or parabolic sense. Cf. Ezra of Gerona’s introduction to his *Perush le-Shir ha-Shirim* in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, p. 480.
  30. Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 63a; Yevamot 11b, 24a. This principle has been the focus of much scholarly discussion. For representative treatments, see Israel Frankel, *Peshat in Talmudic and Midrashic Literature* (Toronto: La Salle Press, 1956), pp. 71–77; Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1961), p. 66; Loewe, “‘Plain’ Meaning,” pp. 164–167; Kamin, *Rashi’s Exegetical Categorization*, pp. 37–43.
  31. *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, p. 44.
  32. *Ibid.*, p. 45. For a different understanding of Naḥmanides’ statement, see Kamin, *Rashi’s Exegetical Categorization*, p. 38.
  33. See Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, p. 215, who considers Naḥmanides an example of the maximalist approach that sees “the whole body of science and theology ... epitomized in the Bible.” The task of the interpreter is thus to decode that which is contained in the biblical verses. Funkenstein’s statement that “Ramban ... went as far as to claim that the philosophical translation actually constitutes the simple, literal sense of the Scriptures, while allegory is the mystical, kabbalistic dimension of understanding, in which the whole Scripture is nothing but a continuous name [of] God,” is to me problematic.
  34. Bernard Septimus, “‘Open Rebuke and Concealed Love’: Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition,” in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides (Ramban): Explorations*

- in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 18.
35. *Perush Mirkevet Yehezqel le-R. Ya'aqov ben Ya'aqov ha-Kohen mi-Qastilyah*, ed. Asi Faber, M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1978, p. 46.
  36. See Septimus, "'Open Rebuke,'" p. 21 n. 37; David Berger, "Miracles and the Natural Order in Naḥmanides," in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides*, p. 112 n. 19. See note 37.
  37. Wolfson, "By Way of Truth," pp. 129–153.
  38. *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, p. 479.
  39. See Moshe Idel, "La història de la càbala a Barcelona," *Curs La Càbala* (Barcelona, 1989), pp. 59–74; idem, "Naḥmanides: Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Spiritual Leadership," in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the 13th Century*, ed. Moshe Idel and Mortimer Ostow (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998), pp. 15–96. It is difficult to date Jacob ben Sheshet's career with any precision, though Scholem surmises that he was writing around 1240. See Scholem, *Origins*, p. 251.
  40. Scholem, *Origins*, p. 380.
  41. This understanding of Naḥmanides has been most fully worked out by Moshe Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This," in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides*, pp. 53–71; see also idem, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 215.
  42. *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 1, p. 190.
  43. *Sefer ha-Emunah we-ha-Bittāḥon*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, p. 364. In several contexts Jacob ben Sheshet notes that the kabbalistic reason he offers reflects his own opinion in contrast to something he has received either orally or from an authoritative text; see, e.g., pp. 361, 368, 385.
  44. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
  45. *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, ed. Georges Vajda (Jerusalem: Israel, 1968), p. 83. The passage is already cited, with a different rendering, in Scholem, *Origins*, p. 381.
  46. See *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, pp. 107–108; *Sefer ha-Emunah we-ha-Bittāḥon*, p. 370; Joseph Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Tsedeq*, printed in Gottlieb, *Studies*, p. 154; Recanaṭi, *Perush al ha-Torah*, 40b. For further discussion of these sources, see Moshe Idel, "Infinities of Torah in Kabbalah," in *Midrash and Literature*, pp. 146–147, 150.
  47. *Sefer ha-Emunah we-ha-Bittāḥon*, p. 370; see Idel, "We Have No Tradition," p. 68 n. 58; idem, "Infinities," p. 146. The innovative posture of Jacob ben Sheshet appears later on in Recanaṭi; cf. *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Mitsvot* (Basel, 1581), 3a, 4b.
  48. See, e.g., (a) *Sefer ha-Emunah we-ha-Bittāḥon*, p. 357: "Thus I have heard from the mouth (*shama'ti mi-pi*) of the Ḥasid, R. Isaac the son of the great R. Abraham, may his memory be for a blessing, who said in the name of his father;" (b) p. 362: "Thus I have heard this formulation (*shama'ti zeh ha-lashon*) in the name of the Ḥasid, R. Isaac the son of the great R. Abraham, may his memory be for a blessing;" (c) p. 364: "Thus I have heard from the mouth of the sage, R. Joseph the son of Samuel, may his memory be for a blessing" (cf. *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, pp. 193–196); (d) p. 380: "Thus I have received from the mouth (*qibbalti mi-pi*) of R. Isaac the Frenchman, blessed be his memory" (cf. p. 396; on the identity of this figure, see Scholem, *Origins*, p. 251); (e) p. 401: "Thus I received in the name (*qibbalti be-shem*) of the Ḥasid, R. Isaac the son of the great R. Abraham, may his memory be for a blessing;" (f) p. 409: "Thus I have heard this formulation in the name of the

- Hasid, R. Isaac the son of the great R. Abraham, may his memory be for a blessing.” Cf. *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, p. 82.
49. See, e.g., *Sefer ha-Emunah we-ha-Bittahon*, p. 369.
  50. Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 384–386.
  51. The term employed and popularized by Idel; see “We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition.”
  52. See “By Way of Truth,” pp. 103–129, 153–178.
  53. As already noted by Chavel in his edition of *Sefer ha-Emunah we-ha-Bittahon*, p. 379 n. 1.
  54. *Numbers Rabbah* 13:16.
  55. Cf. *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, p. 180.
  56. *Sefer ha-Emunah we-ha-Bittahon*, p. 379.
  57. See *ibid.*, p. 418.
  58. See *ibid.*, pp. 390–391, 402.
  59. See Scholem, *Peraqim le-Toledot Sifrut ha-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem: Azriel, 1931), p. 113.
  60. *Ibid.*, pp. 112, 113–114.
  61. See note 46.
  62. Scholem, *Peraqim*, p. 115.
  63. *Ibid.*
  64. Moshe Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 83–87.
  65. See *ibid.*, pp. 73–77.
  66. MS Vatican 233, fols. 43a–b.
  67. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 207–208.
  68. The same word is employed in *Midrash ha-Ne’elam* for the literal sense, and its Aramaic equivalent is used in the main body of the Zohar. See notes 81, 98, 123. On the word *ma’aseh* in Amoraic literature to denote narratives, see Wilhelm Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899), vol. 2, p. 116.
  69. *Sefer Ta’amei ha-Mitsvot* (London, 1963), 2a.
  70. Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit 7a.
  71. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 38a; Eruvin 65a.
  72. MS Oxford 352, fol. 189b.
  73. This expression reflects the language of Azriel of Gerona. See his *Sha’ar ha-Sho’el (Perush Eser Sefirot)*, in Meir Ibn Gabbai, *Derekh Emunah* (Jerusalem, 1967), 2b.
  74. MS Guenzberg 775, fol. 50a.
  75. See Isaac of Acre, *Sefer Me’irat Einayim*, pp. 58–59. where is cited the text criticizing the philosophers from Jacob ben Sheshet’s *Sha’ar ha-Shamayim*. See the editor’s comments on pp. 409–414, and especially 414 n. 16, where he cites the relevant passage from *Otsar Hayyim*.
  76. See Matt, *Zohar*, p. 31.
  77. See Idel, “Infinities of Torah,” p. 151.
  78. Printed in *Sefer ha-Malkhut* (Casablanca, 1930), 6b. For an analysis of this motif from the vantage point of the Zohar, see Elliot R. Wolfson, “Anthropomorphic Imagery and Letter Symbolism in the Zohar,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 8, 1989, pp. 147–181 (Hebrew).
  79. See note 20.
  80. Betty Roitman, “Sacred Language and Open Text,” in *Midrash and Literature*, pp. 171–172.
  81. See note 68.



82. See Frank Talmage, "The Term 'Haggadah' in the Parable of the Beloved in the Palace in the Zohar," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 4, 1985–86, pp. 271–273 (Hebrew).
83. *Zohar Hadash*, 83a.
84. *Zohar* 3:202a.
85. *Zohar* 1:234b; 2:230b; 3:71b, 73a, 75a, 98b.
86. *Zohar* 3:159a.
87. *Zohar* 3:162a–b.
88. The relation of *aggadah* to *kabbalah* is one of the critical questions in assessing the role accorded the theosophic doctrine within the system of normative Judaism (i.e. the Judaism determined by the rabbinic corpus) by medieval Jewish mystics. This question has been the focus of various scholarly accounts. For a review of the issue from the particular vantage point of Naḥmanides, cf. Wolfson, "By Way of Truth," pp. 153–178. It must be noted that kabbalists related the word *haggadah* to the Aramaic root *nagad*, i.e., to stretch, to draw or pull, to flow. They thus localized the discourse of *haggadah* in the divine gradation characterized by these verbs, viz. the *sefirah* of *Yesod*, which corresponds to the *membrum virile* in the divine realm. As such *Yesod* is the locus of *haggadah* and *sod* of esoteric gnosis; indeed, in some sense the two are identical. See Wolfson, "Circumcision, Vision of God," pp. 205–215. See also the telling remark of Moses Cordovero, *Zohar im Perush Or Yaqar* (Jerusalem, 1989), 17:144.
89. *Zohar* 1:152a. Cf. the formulation of Isaac of Acre, *Sefer Me'irat Einayim*, p. 110: "The words and letters [of Torah] ... are like the garment of a person ... the plain meanings and the commentaries are the body, the true *kabbalah* and the great powers and secrets ... are the soul, and this is [the import of] the verse, 'From my flesh I will see God' (Job 19:26)."
90. The identification of the *peshat* as a garment is quite common in kabbalistic literature, where the word is related to the verb *pashaṭ*, i.e. to remove one's garment. The noun, *peshat*, derived from the verb, *pashaṭ*, is understood as the object that is removed, i.e., the garment. An interesting exception to this rule is to be found in Elḥanan ben Abraham Ibn Eskira, *Sefer Yesod Olam*, MS Guenzberg 607, fols. 10a–b, wherein the *peshat* is described as the material substratum that receives the different forms as garments: "We must understand the matter concerning the *peshat* properly and thoroughly ... The word [is derived from] the language 'he removed his clothing,' for it takes off a matter and puts on a matter. And this is their saying, 'a verse should not lose its literal sense,' for the matter is permanent and the forms change. The written Scripture is like the matter and the forms are taken off and put on, but it endures."
91. For a similar critique of the Christian reading of Scripture, see Judah Barzillai, *Perush Sefer Yetsirah*, ed. Solomon J. Halberstam (Berlin: H. Itzkowski, 1885), p. 77. See also Frank Talmage, "R. David Kimhi as Polemicist," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 38, 1967, pp. 219–220, who cites a passage in which RaDaQ accused Christians of literalism connected to the anthropomorphic conception of God. On the other hand, as Talmage points out, RaDaQ on occasion accuses Christians of being extreme allegorists who deny the literal meaning of the legal portions of Scripture. See Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: étude sur les relations entre chrétiens et juifs dans l'Empire romain, 135–425* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1948), p. 181.
92. On the relation of *Shekhinah* to the body (*guf*), see Liebes, *Sections*, p. 178 n. 33; on the identification of *Shekhinah* as the locus of *mitsvot*, see Wolfson, *Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 18–19 n. 35, and 59–62.

93. Zohar 2:98b.
94. That the garment is a locus of vision is attested as well in the continuation of the zoharic passage (Zohar 2:99a): "That elder began to expound: 'Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain' (Exod. 24:18). What is this cloud? It is as it is written, 'I have set My bow in the cloud' (Gen. 9:13). It has been taught that the bow sent its garments and gave them to Moses, and by means of that garment Moses ascended to the mountain, and from it he saw what he saw and delighted in all." Cf. Zohar 2:229a. On the theme of the garment as the locus of vision or esoteric knowledge, see Dorit Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar* (Jerusalem: Research Projects of the Institute of Jewish Studies, 1987), pp. 69–74 (Hebrew).
95. Zohar 2:99a.
96. Ibid. 99b. For a slightly different interpretation of the expression used here, *peshatei di-qera*, see Tishby, *Wisdom*, p. 1085.
97. See, for example, the views of Moses Cordovero and Abraham Galante cited in Azulai, *Or ha-Ḥammah* 2:125a–b.
98. The same term employed to connote the literal sense in *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*. See note 68.
99. Song of Songs 8:14.
100. Ibid. 4:6.
101. Isa. 35:5.
102. The Hebrew expression used here is *yom ha-ma'aseh*, which may reflect the previous use of the word *ma'aseh* in this passage, denoting the literal sense of the biblical narrative.
103. Babylonian Talmud, Ḥagigah 14b and parallels.
104. *She'elot u-Teshuvot le-R. Mosheh de-Li'on be-Inyenei Qabbalah*, in Isaiah Tishby, *Studies in the Kabbalah and Its Branches: Researches and Sources* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), 1:56, 64 (Hebrew). Cf. "Sefer ha-Mishkal," pp. 49, 105.
105. Cf. Zohar 2:257b, where Mishnah is described as "the secret that exists within for one learns there the essence of everything (*iqara de-khola*)."
106. Zohar 2:176a. Cf. ibid. 61b–62a, where various levels of food are distinguished, and designated specifically for the "comrades engaged in Torah," i.e., the kabbalists, is the "food of the spirit and soul," which is said to derive from the second gradation, supernal Wisdom.
107. For an alternative explanation of this passage, see Yehuda Liebes, "How the Zohar Was Written," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 8, 1989, pp. 17–18 (Hebrew).
108. See note 110. The more frequent symbol for Torah in rabbinic literature is bread. Cf. *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, sec. 45, p. 104; Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 120a; Ḥagigah 14a; Sanhedrin 104b; *Numbers Rabbah* 13:16. Cf. the expression "the leaven of the Pharisees," in Mark 8:15; see also Matthew 16:11–12 and Luke 12:1. For a later use of bread as a symbol for Torah study, see Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhoh Yesodei ha-Torah, 4:13; *Guide of the Perplexed* 1:30. On bread as a symbol for the Oral Law, see *Zohar Ḥadash*, 50b. See also Zohar 3:33b (*Piqqudim*).
109. Wolfson, "Anthropomorphic Imagery," p. 155 nn. 33–34. To the sources mentioned there, see also Zohar 3:188b (*Yanuqa*), where the wheat is identified as the *Shekhinah* that comprises the twenty-two letters within herself, and cf. *Tiqunei Zohar*, sec. 69, 114a.
110. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 64a (already noted by Matt, *Zohar*,

- p. 203 n. 152); *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 7:7, p. 155 (where wheat refers more specifically to the cultic laws in Leviticus).
111. Cf. the anonymous commentary on *Sifra di-Tseni'uta* from a student of Isaac Luria, published in *Zohar ha-Raqi'a* (Jerusalem, n.d.), 119a; and the commentary of Elijah ben Solomon, the Gaon of Vilna, on *Sifra di-Tseni'uta* (Jerusalem, 1986), 1a.
  112. Matt, *Zohar*, p. 203 n. 152.
  113. This stands in marked contrast to *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 69, 114a, where the wheat is associated with the inner essence of Torah apprehended by the mystics, as opposed to the straw or chaff, which is identified as the literal meaning. Cf. *Zohar* 3:272a (*Ra'aya Meheimna*).
  114. *Zohar* 2:176b.
  115. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 164.
  116. Cf. Hayyim Vital in his introduction to *Sha'ar ha-Haqqadamot* (Jerusalem, 1909), 1b: "When [the Torah] is in the world of emanation it is called kabbalah, for there it is removed from all the garments that are called the literal sense (*pashaṭ*) from the expression 'I had taken off (*pashaṭti*) my robe' (Song of Songs 5:3), for [the literal sense] is the aspect of the external garment which is upon the skin of a person, sometimes spread (*mitpashaṭ*) over him, and this is the essence of the meaning of the word *pashaṭ*." See, however, *Sha'ar ha-Mitswot* (Jerusalem, 1978), p. 83 (*Peri Ets Hayyim*, ed. Meir Poppers [Jerusalem, 1980], p. 356), where Vital speaks of the containment of all four subjects, Scripture, Mishnah, Talmud, and Kabbalah, within the world of emanation insofar as the latter compromises within itself all that which is below it in the chain of being. Still, it is evident from the context that Scripture, the Written Torah, belongs most properly to the lowest of the four worlds, the world of *Asiyah*, whereas the three aspects of Oral Torah – Mishnah, Talmud, and Kabbalah – belong, respectively, to the remaining three worlds, *Yetsirah*, *Beri'ah*, and *Atsilut*.
  117. *Or Yaqar to Ra'aya Meheimna* (Jerusalem, 1987), 15:87.
  118. See note 17.
  119. Babylonian Talmud, Rosh ha-Shanah 26b.
  120. *Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim* (New York, 1984), 87b.
  121. Matt, *Zohar*, pp. 31, 253.
  122. Cf. *Zohar* 1:163a; 3:149a–b, 152a.
  123. The Aramaic *ovada* parallels the Hebrew *ma'aseh* used in *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* on Ruth for the literal meaning; see note 68.
  124. *Zohar* 3:149b.
  125. *Ibid.* 71b–72a.
  126. *Ibid.* 14a.
  127. Cf. the interpretation of Isa. 5:1 in *Zohar* 1:95b–96a.
  128. Cf. Palestinian Talmud, Ketubot 13:1 (ed. Venice, 35c); *Soṭah* 1:4 (16d), attributed to R. Ḥiyya; *Midrash Tanḥuma*, ed. Buber, Wa-yeshev 17, 93b–94a, in the name of R. Joshua ben Levi.
  129. *Genesis Rabbah* 88:7, p. 1041.
  130. See, by contrast, the comment of Rav reported in the name of R. Ḥanin in Babylonian Talmud, *Soṭah* 10a.
  131. The attribution to Rabbi is found in Palestinian Talmud, Ketubot 13:1, but in the other sources the attribution varies. See references in note 128.
  132. See, especially, the wording of the version in *Midrash Aggadah*, ed. Solomon Buber (Vienna, 1894), p. 92: "And she sat down at the entrance to Einayim"

- (Gen. 38–14). We reviewed all of Scripture and did not find a place whose name was *petah einayim*. Rather this [expression] is to teach that she cast her eyes upon the one (*be-mi*) to whom all eyes are cast. And she said before the Holy One, blessed be He, Let it be Your will that I do not leave this entrance empty.”
133. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 45a.
  134. Zohar 3:265a.
  135. Cf. Ibid. 7a.
  136. To be sure, there are instances where the word *dayqa* signifies not a kabbalistic meaning, but rather a more straightforward midrashic sense. See, e.g., Zohar 1:133b in connection with the interpretation of the verse, “Abraham willed all that he owned to Isaac” (Gen. 25:5).
  137. Zohar 2:185b.
  138. Ibid. 3:68b.
  139. Bacher, *Die Exegetische Terminologie der Jüdischen Traditionsliteratur*, vol. 1, p. 49 n. 1, 105; vol. 2, p. 113; Loewe, “‘Plain’ Meaning,” pp. 170–172.
  140. See, e.g., Zohar 2:61b; 3:73a, 188b. In other contexts the word *mammash* signifies the nonfigurative, though not necessarily kabbalistic, meaning. See, e.g., Zohar 1:133a, where the verse, “Isaac then brought her [Rebekah] into the tent of his mother Sarah” (Gen. 24:67), is interpreted in terms of the tradition that Rebekah was in the actual image (*diyogna mammash*) of Sarah. Thus the verse reads “the tent of his mother Sarah” (*sara immo wadda’y*). On this use of the term *wadda’y*, see note 156. See also Zohar 3:160b, where we find the expression *mitqashsherei be-qudsha verikh hu mammash*, which must be rendered, “they were bound to the Holy One, blessed be He, in actuality.” The Zohar also employs the term *be-gufa* to denote the sense of actuality as opposed to a figurative or metaphorical sense. Cf. Liebes, *Section*, p. 182 n. 45.
  141. Zohar 1:94a.
  142. For background on this hermeneutical principle, see Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962), pp. 58–62.
  143. See Wolfson, “Circumcision, Vision of God,” p. 206.
  144. I have studied this motif in depth in “Circumcision and the Divine Name: A Study in the Transmission of Esoteric Doctrine,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 78, 1987, pp. 77–112.
  145. Cf. Mishnah, Avot 6:2; Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 54a.
  146. Zohar 3:6b.
  147. Cf. *ibid.* 2:62a.
  148. *Ibid.* 61a.
  149. On the interpretation of demonstrative pronouns in kabbalistic literature and its relation to midrashic precedents, see Betty Roitman, “Sacred Language,” pp. 159–175, esp. 165 ff.
  150. The potential randomness of the hermeneutical technique of *gezerah shawah* is already evident from the statement of the rabbis to the effect that a person should not adduce a *gezerah shawah* on his own (Palestinian Talmud, Pesahim 6:1, 33a; Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 19b). See Lieberman, *Hellenism*, p. 61; Loewe, “‘Plain’ Meaning,” pp. 152–153 n. 79. See *ibid.*, pp. 164–165, where the author suggests that the Amoraic formula “a verse does not its literal sense,” originating in Pumbeditha, was employed “to counter exorbitant deductions from identity or close analogy of expression (*gezerah shawah*).”

151. My formulation here is deliberately lifted from Roitman, "Sacred Language," p. 167, which, however, takes the opposite position when describing the kabbalistic system of textual exposition: "Most important, this determination of meaning is not channeled through the linguistic signification of the terms in the utterance. Anagogic interpretation of this kind is dependent on a code which is not linguistic in the sense of natural language, although it integrates in its system certain linguistic elements not actualized in the discourse." In my opinion the system of exposition operative in the main body of Zohar functions precisely in the way which Roitman denies, viz. the symbolic encoding of the biblical text – what she calls the "anagogic interpretation" – is indeed dependent on the determination of meaning of the relevant terms (*parole*) in terms of normal modes of discourse (*langue*). Roitman herself reaches a similar conclusion; see pp. 171–172 (partially cited in note 80).
152. Based on the passage in Babylonian Talmud, Mo'ed Qatan 28a to the effect that one's children, livelihood, and sustenance are dependent on fate (*mazzal*) and not merit (*zekhut*). In the interpretation of the Zohar the word *mazzal* designates either *Keter* or, according to the more recondite doctrine of the *Idrot*, one of the aspects of the upper *partzuf*, *Arikh Anpin* or *Atiqa Qaddisha*.
153. Zohar 3:79b.
154. See William Braude, "Midrash as Deep Peshat," in *Studies in Judaica, Karaitica and Islamica Presented to Leon Nemoy on His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Sheldon R. Brunswick (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1982), pp. 31–38.
155. Bacher, *Die Exegetische Terminologie*, vol. 1, pp. 48–49; vol. 2, p. 60; Loewe, "Plain' Meaning," pp. 170–172.
156. Here (as in the next two notes as well) I will cite only a sampling of the relevant sources: See Zohar 1:8b, 10a, 45a, 63b, 87a, 91a, 95a, 108a, 110b, 133a (cited in note 92), 142a, 153b, 175a, 192b, 219a, 221b; 2:4a, 10a, 44b, 47b, 48a, 49b, 62a, 66a, 146a, 183b, 187b, 225a, 243a, 247b; 3:6b, 77a, 98b, 147b, 163b, 239b. This particular usage is prevalent in *Ra'aya Meheimna* and *Tiqqunei Zohar* as well. See, e.g., Zohar 3:28a (*Ra'aya Meheimna*), 264b (*Ra'aya Meheimna*); Zohar *Hadash*, 31c (*Tiqqunim*).
157. See Zohar 1:74a, 86a, 96a, 132b, 158b, 247b; 2:65b, 148b, 189b; 3:103a, 148a, 173b, 174a.
158. See Zohar 1:50b, 82b, 85b, 93a, 105a, 145a, 191b, 196b, 240a, 245b, 249a; 2:33a, 121b, 127b, 148b. It must be noted that kabbalists before the generation of the Zohar already employed the expression *wadda'y* to render the simple meaning in terms of a mystical truth. Thus, for example, this usage is found in a passage of Ezra of Gerona, alluded to briefly by Jacob ben Sheshet (See *Sefer ha-Emunah ve-ha-Bittahon*, p. 377) and cited more extensively by Recanati, *Perush al ha-Torah* 48d). The same usage is found in Joseph Gikatilla and Moses de León's Hebrew writings. See *Sha'arei Or*, 1:149 n. 3.
159. Zohar 3:169b.
160. Cf. *ibid.* 1:82a.
161. *Ibid.* 140b.
162. I have translated the expression *we-limekhasheh atiq* according to the reading of the Zohar, which follows that of Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim 119a. The more literal rendering of this expression is "clothe themselves eloquently."
163. Zohar 3:105b.
164. Zohar 2:57b.
165. Babylonian Talmud, Arakhin 15b.

166. I have translated the verse in light of the zoharic reading and not as an accurate rendering of the literal sense.
167. Zohar 2:60a–b.
168. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, pp. 49–51.
169. Zohar 3:179b.
170. See, e.g., commentaries of Solomon ben Isaac (Rashi), R. Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam), Abraham Ibn Ezra, and Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno on the relevant verse. See also Nahmanides on Exod. 36:5.
171. See, e.g., commentary of Rashi to the Mishnah in Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 45a, s.v., *ani wa-ho*.
172. Cited in J. Gellis, *Tosafot ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem, 1987), 6:42.
173. *Perush ha-Roqeah al ha-Torah*, ed. C. Konyevsky (Bene Beraq: 1980), 2:14.
174. Zohar 1:70b–71a.
175. Ibid. 3:69a–b.
176. Ibid. 2:95a.
177. The image of being covered with eyes is used in Ezekiel to describe the wheels (*ofanim*) of the chariot; see 1:18, 10:12. This very image is used in Heikhalot texts, where, however, the *ofanim* designate a distinct class of angels. See Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr 1981), sec. 40. Cf. *ibid.*, sec. 29, where the angels in general are said to be full of eyes. See *ibid.*, sec. 12, where God is said to have set 365,000 eyes in Metatron, who is the transformed Enoch. And *ibid.*, sec. 33, where the angel Kerubiel is described by this image, as well as *ibid.*, sec. 41, where the image is applied to Serapiel. See also *ibid.*, sec. 246, 596; *Masekhet Heikhalot*, in *Beit ha-Midrash 2:43*. In *Heikhalot Rabbati* we read about the eyes in the robe (*haluq*) of God; see *Synopse*, sec. 102. Cf. MS Oxford–Bodleian 1610, fol. 46a, where a tradition is cited in the name of the *ba'alei merkavah* to the effect that God is filled with eyes from inside and outside. I have not yet located a text from ancient Jewish mystical speculation that describes the mystic himself as full of eyes nor have I located in rabbinic literature the notion that a sage or exegete is so described. See, however, Philo, *Questiones et Solutiones in Exodum*: III:43, where the soul is said to be “all eyes” so that it may “receive lightning-flashes” of illumination. This is related to a motif repeated on a number of occasions by Philo concerning God’s implanting eyes in an individual so that the individual will be able to see God. See Gerhard Delling, “The ‘One Who Sees God’ in Philo,” in *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn, Earle Hilgert, and Burton L. Mack (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), pp. 33–34.
178. Zohar 2:235b (*Tosefta*).
179. Wolfson, “Hermeneutics of Visionary Experience,” pp. 317 ff., esp. 321, 340–341 n. 86.
180. Cf. Num. 11:7, and see Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:2.
181. See, e.g., Mishnah, Shabbat 1:6.
182. Scholem, “Kabbalah of R. Jacob,” pp. 262–263. This source was already suggested by Liebes, *Sections*, p. 190 n. 78. See also Ṭodros Abulafia, *Sha'ar ha-Razim*, ed. Michal Kushnir-Oron (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1989), p. 65.
183. See Liebes, *Sections*, who cites this interpretation as that of later kabbalists but rejects it as the intended or contextual meaning of the Zohar. But see note 184.
184. Cf. Wolfson, “Female Imaging,” pp. 295–297. To the sources mentioned there one should add *Zohar Hadash*, 55c–d (*Midrash ha-Ne'elam*).
185. See the references given in note 22.

186. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 208.
187. Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 222–224, 241; idem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 147–148; Joseph Ben-Shlomo, “The Research of Gershom Scholem on Pantheism in the Kabbalah,” in *Gershom Scholem: The Man and His Work* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1983), pp. 22–23 (Hebrew).
188. See note 17.
189. For this usage of the word *remez* in kabbalistic sources, see Wolfson, “By Way of Truth,” pp. 164–165 n. 188.
190. *Sha’ar Ma’amerei RaZaL* (Jerusalem, 1898), 8d.
191. *Shenei Luḥot ha-Berit* (Amsterdam, 1648), 3a.
192. See *ibid.* 16a–b; and Jacob Katz, *Halakhah and Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), p. 98 (Hebrew).
193. The notion that the letters of the Torah serve as a conduit to draw down the light of the Infinite is a commonplace in Hasidic literature, serving ultimately as the background for the notion of Torah study as a contemplative act. See Joseph Weiss, *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 56–68. For a comprehensive discussion of the earlier kabbalistic sources for this magico-mystical conception, which influenced the Hasidic formulation, see Moshe Idel, “Perceptions of Kabbalah in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 1, 1991, pp. 76–104. See note 195.
194. *Liqqutei Torah* (New York, 1984), *Wa-yiqra*, 5b–c.
195. Elsewhere in his writings Shneur Zalman characterizes Torah study as a vehicle by means of which one unites with the light of the Infinite (*or ein sof*) insofar as the Torah itself is the very expression of the divine will and wisdom rather than something ontically distinct from God. Cf. *Tanya* (New York: Kehot, 1979), I, 9a–10a, 29a–b; IV, 145a (in that context he distinguishes between two goals of Torah study, both rooted in Lurianic thought as transmitted by Vital, to redeem the holy sparks from the demonic shells and to unify the forces above by drawing down the light from the Infinite); and the recent discussion in Naftali Lowenthal, *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 59–60.
196. *Liqqutei Torah, Wa-ethanan*, 12c.