

## 4 Forms of Visionary Ascent as Ecstatic Experience in the Zoharic Literature

In a recently published volume, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, Bernard McGinn has noted that, in the history of scholarship on Western Christian mysticism, an “overconcentration on the highly ambiguous notion of mystical experience has blocked careful analysis of the special hermeneutics of mystical texts.”<sup>1</sup> As a corrective to this scholarly imbalance, McGinn calls for the “recognition of the interdependence of experience and interpretation.” A growing sentiment amongst scholars of Jewish mysticism, spurred especially by the work of Moshe Idel,<sup>2</sup> is that the opposite claim can be made with respect to the dominant scholarly approach to kabbalistic texts. That is, there has been for the most part in the academic treatment of medieval Jewish mysticism an overconcentration on the hermeneutics of mystical texts and a concomitant neglect of the ecstatic experiences that often underlie these literary compositions. In an effort to counter the description of kabbalah as predominantly theoretical rather than practical, Idel has in his own research paid far greater attention to the experiential side of kabbalistic thought, including the motifs of *devequt*,<sup>3</sup> *unio mystica*,<sup>4</sup> and a variety of other meditative or contemplative techniques intended to induce religious ecstasy.<sup>5</sup> Even in his discussion of kabbalistic hermeneutics Idel includes a section on pneumatic interpretation and union with the Torah, thereby focusing on a relatively neglected aspect of the Jewish mystical tradition concerning the experiential dimension of study.<sup>6</sup> What is necessary to redress the imbalance of which I spoke above is not a focus on experience divorced from interpretation, for, heeding McGinn’s words, we must recognize the interdependence of one on the other. It is evident from the kabbalistic sources themselves that one cannot separate the interpretative and experiential modes: the

nature of mystical experience is such that it is conditioned and shaped by the concepts and symbols that inform the particular kabbalist's worldview as it is applied hermeneutically to the canonical texts and prescribed rituals of the tradition. It is certainly the case, therefore, that the ideas expressed in Jewish mystical literature represent a lived experience rather than some detached realm of imaginative speculation. In that sense, the scholar must ultimately focus on the "anthropology of experience"<sup>7</sup> to assess the cultural and religious significance of Jewish mysticism in its different historical phases. What I have just said is equally appropriate to both theosophical and ecstatic kabbalah, but my immediate concern in this study is one specific instance of the former trend, viz. the Zohar, arguably the most influential work of Jewish mysticism in the Middle Ages, which in time helped change the face of Judaism.

Any attempt to understand the Zohar must take into account the fact that the theosophical ruminations contained in this anthology are not merely speculative devices for expressing the knowable aspect of God, but are practical means for achieving a state of ecstasy, i.e., an experience of immediacy with God that may eventuate in union or communion (most frequently designated by the traditional term *devequt*). The texts themselves – at the compositional level – reflect a state wherein the mystic experienced the divine pleroma and reintegrated his soul with its ontic source. This point, so basic to the understanding of the religious experience underlying this work, was well understood by the anonymous author of the *Tiqqunei Zohar*, who thus reflected on the verse, "And the enlightened will shine like the splendor of the sky" (Dan. 12:3): "The enlightened are R. Simeon and his colleagues; they were illuminated when they gathered to produce this composition. Permission was given to them and to Elijah who was with them, and to all the souls of the [celestial] academy to descend amongst them, and to all the angels."<sup>8</sup> I am employing the word "ecstasy" to refer to an experience whereby the mystic transcends the confines of the spatio-temporal world; this transcendence may be experienced either as translation to otherworldly realms or as intense illumination in this world. In my usage, therefore, "ecstasy" denotes a category of religious phenomenology rather than a phenomenological typology. Indeed, I hope to advance the discussion on the nature of ecstasy in medieval Jewish mysticism by cutting across the phenomenological boundaries and suggest that matters of theosophy are not merely

speculative forms, but rather are ontic paradigms that are experienced in a state of ecstatic illumination, essentially facilitated by the hermeneutic process. The point is well expressed in the following comment in an anonymous kabbalistic commentary on the ten divine emanations (*sefirot*): “For the one who merits this wisdom these awesome entities are inscribed upon his heart and they increase upon him all day; these entities are joyous in his heart and all the secrets of Torah are revealed to him.”<sup>9</sup>

It is evident that the authorship of the Zohar likewise assumed that when the kabbalist gained knowledge of the divine potencies he ecstatically entered a state of mind, such that he was illuminated by these potencies and united with them. Thus, one finds in the Zohar applied to the mystical comrades engaged in theosophic speculation an Aramaic equivalent of the expression used to describe Aqiva’s successful experience of the mystical orchard (*pardes*), to enter and to exit.<sup>10</sup> In the case of the relevant zoharic texts the expression *ma’n de-al we-nafaq*, “the one who enters and exits,” denotes entering into and exiting from an ecstatic state of illumination wherein the mystical secrets are revealed.<sup>11</sup> To cite a few examples: “Happy is the lot of one who cleaves to his Master, who enters and exits.”<sup>12</sup> “Happy is the lot of one who enters and exits and who knows how to contemplate the secrets of his Master to cleave to Him, for by means of these secrets a person can cleave to his Master and know the perfection of wisdom in the supernal mystery.”<sup>13</sup> “Happy is the lot of the one who merits to know His ways and who does not deviate from or err with respect to them, for these matters are hidden, and the supernal holy ones shine in them like one who shines from the light of a flame; these matters are transmitted only to one who enters and exits.”<sup>14</sup> “Happy is the one who enters and exits to know the ways of the Holy One, blessed be He. Thus it is written, ‘The path of the righteous is like radiant sunlight [ever brightening until noon]’ (Prov. 4: 18), and it is written, ‘And your people, all of them righteous [shall possess the land for all time]’ (Isa. 60:21).”<sup>15</sup> To be sure, in one section of the Zohar, the *Idra Rabba* (“Great Assembly”), this terminology seems to be used in a spatial sense, i.e., the frame of reference of the entry and departure is a gathering of the group of mystics:

R. Simeon sat and wept, and said: Woe if I reveal! Woe if I do not reveal! The comrades who were there were silent. R. Abba rose

and said to him: If it pleases the master to reveal, as it is written, “The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him” (Ps. 25: 14), and these comrades are fearers of the Holy One, blessed be He, and they have already entered the assembly of the Tabernacle, some of them have entered and some of them have departed.<sup>16</sup>

On one level the reference to the assembly of the Tabernacle (*idra de-vei mashkena*) refers to an apparently lost literary unit that dealt with the secrets of the Tabernacle in a form and style comparable to the other Idrot sections of the zoharic anthology.<sup>17</sup> In that sense, the meaning of the above passage is that R. Simeon can feel confident about disclosing the deepest secrets, for some of the rabbis present at the moment had already been tested by a previous gathering wherein esoteric matters were revealed, i.e., those rabbis underwent the experience and survived: they entered in peace and exited in peace. On another level, this assembly may be a symbolic reference to the Presence (*Shekhinah*), the last of the ten divine emanations.<sup>18</sup> That is, the entry into and departure from the assembly of the Tabernacle (another standard symbol for the *Shekhinah* in kabbalistic literature in general and the *Zohar* in particular)<sup>19</sup> signifies the union of the mystic with the Presence. The two explanations are not contradictory, for the textual account itself probably would have been based on precisely some such experience of union: the entry into the *Shekhinah* engenders the knowledge of mystical truths about the structure of the Tabernacle, for the earthly Tabernacle is ontically parallel to its supernal archetype.<sup>20</sup> One might go further and suggest that, from the vantage point of the *Zohar*, the gathering of mystics to expound the mysteries of Torah is a collective experience of union with the Presence;<sup>21</sup> those who survive the experience depart therefrom, whereas others who are unworthy die,<sup>22</sup> although in some cases the death that ensues from the ecstatic union is viewed in a positive light.<sup>23</sup>

The mystical aspect of theosophic gnosis in the *Zohar* was duly noted by Gershom Scholem in the opening paragraphs of the sixth lecture in his pioneering study, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, on the theosophic doctrine of the *Zohar*: “If I were asked to characterize in one word the essential traits of the world of Kabbalistic thought, those which set it apart from other forms of Jewish mysticism, I would say that the *Zohar* represents Jewish theosophy,

i.e., a Jewish form of theosophy.”<sup>24</sup> Scholem goes on to clarify his terminology: “theosophy signifies a mystical doctrine, or school of thought, which purports to perceive and to describe the mysterious workings of the Divinity, perhaps also believing it possible to become absorbed in its contemplation. Theosophy postulates a kind of divine emanation whereby God, abandoning his self-contained repose, awakens to mysterious life; further, it maintains that the mysteries of creation reflect the pulsation of this divine life.”<sup>25</sup> It is evident, then, that in this context, Scholem placed primary emphasis on the doctrinal aspect of zoharic theosophy, but he nevertheless considered the experiential dimension associated with this system of thought: the theosophist does not merely describe the workings of the divine in a detached manner; he perceives them and may even be absorbed in mystical contemplation. In the continuation of the above text Scholem remarks that in the history of kabbalah an “original perception, born from deep meditation, of a given mode of divine reality, was externalized and transformed into mere book-learning, in which the symbols lost their tremendous meaning and unfettered allegory filled their empty husks.” In the case of the Zohar, however, the object of gnosis, the *sefirot*, “still had the unbroken reality of mystical experience.”<sup>26</sup> This is consistent with other statements made by Scholem to the effect that experience of ecstasy, encounter with the Absolute, or even mystical union, often lie at the bottom of many kabbalistic writings, even though most kabbalists were reticent to discuss such experiences at length.<sup>27</sup>

The important insight that theosophical speculations cannot be understood without an awareness of the mystical aspect that underlies them has not always been appreciated by scholars of the Zohar; even Scholem himself at times veered from this orientation and assumed a more rationalist or intellectualist approach to kabbalistic sources. Thus, in *Major Trends*, Scholem comments that while experiences of ascent or visualization do not disappear altogether from kabbalistic texts, “on the whole, Kabbalistic meditation and contemplation takes on a more spiritualized aspect.”<sup>28</sup> In the continuation, Scholem signals out the Zohar by noting that this work “has little use for ecstasy; the part it plays both in the descriptive and dogmatical sections of this voluminous work is entirely subordinate. Allusions to it there are, but it is obvious that other and different aspects of mysticism are much nearer to the author’s heart.”<sup>29</sup>

Scholem even goes on to suggest that part of the success of the Zohar can be traced to “this attitude of restraint which struck a familiar chord in the Jewish heart.”<sup>30</sup> It is possible that one might remove any contradiction here by stating that Scholem distinguished between ecstasy proper, involving an ascent or translation to otherworldly realms, and mystical experience of the *sefirot*, although I am not inclined to resolve the tension in Scholem in this way.

It seems rather that with respect to this central issue, as in some other cases, Scholem was genuinely ambivalent, contradictory, or dialectical. On one hand, he understood the centrality of mystical or ecstatic vision for the taxonomy of kabbalistic theosophy, but, on the other, he tended to marginalize the place of ecstasy and mystical experience in the history of theosophic kabbalah. The force of his denial of the mystical or ecstatic component is captured in his claim that kabbalistic contemplation takes on a more “spiritualized aspect.” What Scholem intended by this expression is made clear in another passage (written much later) where he is even more emphatic in his denial of the visionary element in theosophic kabbalah: “The concentration on the world of the *Sefirot* is not bound up with visions, but is solely a matter for the intellect prepared to ascend from level to level and to meditate on the qualities unique to each level. If meditation activates at first the faculty of imagination, it continues by activating the faculty of the intellect.”<sup>31</sup> This is not the place to discuss at length Scholem’s phenomenology of mystical experience as it applies to Jewish mysticism, for my ultimate purpose is to discuss the Zohar, and not Scholem. But it must be noted that Scholem’s characterization, especially in the passage I have just cited, not only flies in the face of the explicit claims of many kabbalists, but also contradicts his own earlier account of the visionary underpinning of kabbalistic theosophy. It is probable that Scholem took as his model the descriptions of the *ascensio mentis* in Isaac the Blind and/or his disciples in Gerona.<sup>32</sup> But Scholem presents an over-rationalized reading of these sources, for, as I have argued elsewhere in great detail, in the case of these kabbalists (and subsequent authors influenced by them) the mental or contemplative ascent to the divine pleroma, culminating in a state of *devequt*, union or communion, is facilitated by the faculty of the imagination and not the intellect.<sup>33</sup> It is important to emphasize as well that a central concern of theosophic kabbalists, in line with older forms of Jewish esotericism, was

the visualization of the divine in the form of an *anthropos*. The point is underscored in one particular zoharic passage which notes that the one who “knows the secret of wisdom,” connected especially to the *botsina de-qardinuta*, the hard (or dark) flame that gives shape to the various gradations of the sefirotic pleroma,<sup>34</sup> “can comprehend and produce a measure in all aspects, until he knows the supernal secrets, the secrets of his master, the secrets of wisdom so that he may know and comprehend.”<sup>35</sup> By contemplating the process of emanation above through the mechanism of the *botsina de-qardinuta*, the kabbalist himself measures or constructs the divine form.<sup>36</sup> The locus of that form is the imagination, for the latter was understood by kabbalists, largely owing to neo-Platonic influences, as the faculty wherein the imageless and incorporeal spiritual entity can assume form. In that sense it is impossible to separate the experiential and ecstatic elements in theosophic kabbalah, for any gnosis of the *sefirot* involves some sort of imaginative translation into the divine pleroma that is properly speaking an ecstatic state.

The degree to which this insight has been neglected by modern scholars can be gauged by a cursory glance at the learned contributions to the volume, *The Age of the Zohar, Proceedings of the Third International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism*, published in 1989: of the seventeen articles pertaining to the Zohar or related literature, not a single one deals in any sustained manner with mystical techniques or experiences. The only study that broaches the subject in any manner is Ithamar Gruenwald’s “The Midrashic Condition: From Talmudic to Zoharic Hermeneutics.”<sup>37</sup> After acknowledging the contributions of both Isaiah Tishby and Moshe Idel in emphasizing (*contra* Scholem) the phenomenon of *unio mystica* in Jewish sources, Gruenwald asserts that one of the more interesting hermeneutical problems in the modern research into kabbalah remains the need to establish a method that would enable us to evaluate whether a particular kabbalist “passes from the state of theoretical description to an actual realization of his mystical wishes.”<sup>38</sup> From his study of the zoharic interpretation of the priestly blessing, especially as compared with the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, Gruenwald finds a strong theurgical or magical orientation, but not much evidence for an ecstatic–mystical approach. Apart from Gruenwald’s essay, the majority of the studies in the volume are concerned with textual, compositional, historical, or exegetical issues, especially the decoding

of the complex theosophic symbolism that fills the pages of the Zohar. Yet, behind the multifaceted symbols and interpretations of biblical verses found in the Zohar is the mind of a mystic (or group of mystics, following the suggestion of Yehuda Liebes<sup>39</sup>) ecstatically transformed by contemplation of the divine light refracted in nature, the soul, and the Torah. Genuine ecstatic experience indeed underlies the hermeneutical posture of the Zohar, as I suggested in several studies that pre-dated the publication of the aforementioned volume.<sup>40</sup> One cannot, from the vantage point of theosophic Kabbalah in general, and the Zohar in particular, separate theory and praxis, gnosis and ecstasy, contemplation and imaginative representation.

In honoring the jubilee anniversary of the publication of Scholem's seminal work, I would like to delve more deeply into the experiential and mystical dimensions of the Zohar by focusing on one particular motif, to wit, visionary ascents of the soul to the celestial realms. To date, as far as I am aware, no systematic analysis of this critical typology of mystical experience in zoharic literature has been studied.<sup>41</sup> While other forms of experience are certainly emphasized in the Zohar, it is true that the zoharic authorship placed great emphasis on the experience of heavenly ascent. In this regard, the Castilian kabbalists were not exceptional, for the older tradition of celestial journeys was preserved – in a practical and not merely theoretical way – by the pietists of northern France and Germany<sup>42</sup> and the theosophical kabbalists of Provence and northern Spain. In the case of the latter, the upward journey was understood in a neo-Platonic vein as a contemplative ascent achieved by means of words or prayer and/or Torah study.<sup>43</sup> The motif of the heavenly ascent in zoharic literature clearly draws upon these earlier kabbalistic sources, although the nuances of the Zohar are somewhat different. Beyond the obvious merit of providing the first in-depth analysis of this motif in the different literary strata of the Zohar, the ensuing study should contribute to our appreciation of the deeply mystical and ecstatic nature of theosophic gnosis in the zoharic corpus. Central to the lived experience underlying the Zohar is the belief that the mystical sages, designated by several technical terms, including the righteous (*tsaddiqim*), masters of faith (*ma'rei meheimanuta*), or those who are worthy of faith (*benei meheimanuta*), reapers of the field (*mehatsdei haqla*), and the enlightened (*maskilim*), occupy a



place in the divine pleroma. The mystic can, and on occasion does, transport himself to that ontic sphere. In such a state the individual is transformed from normal sensory perception and rational intellection to a mode of experience that in a most exact sense should be called ecstasy.

That the interest in the structures of ancient Jewish mysticism had immediate practical implications for the zoharic authorship is attested in the opening comments to the literary unit that deals in an extensive manner with the palaces (*heikhalot*) from the side of holiness:<sup>44</sup>

R. Simeon said: It has been taught that there are palaces that exist for the sake of arranging the order of praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, whether the order is that which exists in word or that which exists in will, for<sup>45</sup> there is an order that exists in word and an order that exists in the will and intention of the heart, to know and contemplate, i.e., to contemplate above until the Infinite, for there are fixed all the intentions and thoughts, and they cannot be uttered at all. Rather, just as He is hidden so too all His words are hidden. Come and see that which has been said regarding these palaces: All these orders are one principle for the sake of comprising the lower in the upper.<sup>46</sup>

In the continuation of this text, mention is made of the long and short prayers arranged by Moses, for in a fundamental sense the ascent through the celestial palaces is a liturgical act.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, throughout the descriptions of the palaces (in both the abbreviated and extended versions) the vertical flight of the soul is linked to the rising of the words of prayer. This is epitomized, for instance, in the following words:

R. Simeon said: Who is the one who knows how to arrange the prayer of his Master like Moses who when he needed it arranged a long prayer and when he needed it arranged a short prayer?  
R. Simeon said: I have found in the books of the ancients the order of the secret of secrets in one bond, the times when it is necessary to arrange one's prayer as is appropriate, and to bind the knots<sup>48</sup> to ameliorate [the judgments of] the Master as is

appropriate, and to know how to unify the perfect unity, to rend the heavens and to open the gates and doors so that no one will stay his hand. Happy are the righteous who know how to appease their Master, to annul the decrees, to cause the Presence to dwell in the world, to draw down blessings.<sup>49</sup>

The theurgical task of prayer is to unite the different cosmic forces. “When one worships his Master in prayer with desire and the intention of the heart, his will cleaves [to the divine] like a flame to coal,<sup>50</sup> to unify those lower heavens on the side of holiness, to crown them with one name below, and from there to unify those inner, supernal heavens, so that all will be one in that supernal heaven that stands over them.”<sup>51</sup> In one zoharic passage the very term *ma’aseh merkavah* (usually rendered “account of the chariot”) is connected with the fact that Adam has the capacity to combine (*leharkiv*) one thing with another, thereby uniting the different links in the chain of being.<sup>52</sup> What needs to be emphasized again is the fact that according to the Zohar, the visual contemplation of the palaces in the mind’s eye provides an occasion for an ascent of the soul to the uppermost reaches of the divine, the Infinite; by means of that flight one combines all grades of being, which results in the overflow of the divine influx upon earth. “All of these orders,” reflects the zoharic authorship, “are to cause the Presence to dwell in the world.”<sup>53</sup> In the main body of zoharic literature the mystic ascent of intention in prayer (*kawwanah*) and the contemplative ascent of the soul are combined in such a way that it is difficult to differentiate the two, especially in the sections that describe the ascent through the celestial palaces. To cite one final example:

It is written [“My beloved is like a gazelle or like a young stag; there he stands behind our wall] gazing through the windows” (Song of Songs 2:9). These exist so that he might see all those worshippers who come first to the Synagogue and are counted amongst the first ten.<sup>54</sup> Then they ascend and are written above for they are called comrades (*ḥaverim*) in relation to Him, as it is written. “Lovers (*ḥaverim*) are listening; let me hear your voice” (ibid., 8: 13). Happy are the righteous who know how to set their prayer as is appropriate, for when that prayer began to ascend they ascend by means of that prayer, and they enter all

the heavens and all the palaces until the gate of the upper opening [i.e., the *Shekhinah*] and that prayer enters before the King to be crowned.<sup>55</sup>

A perusal of the relevant sources indicates that in most cases, the zoharic authorship has contextualized the heavenly ascent in a soteriological framework, i.e. the principal type of celestial voyager is the righteous one who has departed from this bodily life. On numerous occasions in the Zohar, one reads about the soul of the righteous, separated from the body at death, entering the earthly Garden of Eden, and from there, ascending through the various palaces to the divine pleroma, particularly to the last of the emanations which is called, inter alia, the *tseror ha-ḥayyim*, bundle of life, the ontic source to which the soul returns.<sup>56</sup> In some passages, the zoharic authorship notes that the visual ascent of the soul occurs at specific times, viz. Sabbath, the Festivals, and the New Moon.<sup>57</sup> This may, properly speaking, be called a flight into union,<sup>58</sup> for the goal of the ascent is the unification of the soul and the Presence, a unification that is often described in intensely erotic terms. Here we note a curious element: it is the soul that rises to the heavenly regions and is ultimately absorbed in the divine feminine, yet the soul experiences the ecstasy of flight and union in bodily sensations. After separating from the physical body and entering the earthly Garden of Eden, the soul assumes a celestial or astral body,<sup>59</sup> sometimes depicted as the garment woven from the deeds of the soul<sup>60</sup> or alternatively described as being composed of the celestial light or ether characteristic of the paradisiacal state.<sup>61</sup> In virtue of this spiritual garment, which is in the likeness of the physical body, the soul undergoes kinesthetic and tactile experiences in the course of its ascent, and ultimately enjoys a tangible sense of delight in the moment of the visual encounter with the divine.<sup>62</sup> It is evident, moreover, from the zoharic accounts of the celestial palaces that the subject of ascent is the soul that has separated from the body.<sup>63</sup> The very structure of the palaces is predicated on the ontological parallelism between the seven palaces or halls in the lower Garden of Eden, a physical place in the sublunar world, and the seven palaces in the supernal Garden of Eden, i.e., the divine Presence,<sup>64</sup> which in turn correspond to the seven lower emanations in the divine pleroma (at times it appears that the seventh palace is itself the last of those emanations, the *Shekhinah*<sup>65</sup>). In these

descriptions as well one can typically find the employment of corporeal images to describe the experience of the soul.

The primary concern of this study, however, is not the ascent of the soul through the palaces after death, but rather those instances in zoharic literature where the soteriological model is applied to mystical states achieved during the corporeal life of the individual. In the first instance, according to one zoharic passage, an ecstatic ascent to the spiritual realm recurs every Friday afternoon at the liminal point between the cessation of mundane time and the inception of Sabbath.<sup>66</sup>

When R. Hamnuna the Elder would come out of the river on Friday afternoon he would sit one moment, and raising his eyes in joy he would say that he sat there to see the gladness of the supernal angels, some ascending and others descending. Every Friday evening a person dwells in the world of souls (*olam ha-neshamot*). Happy is the one who knows the secrets of his Master.<sup>67</sup>

The Zohar thus presents the legendary Hamnuna the Elder as the prototypical ecstatic. In sixteenth-century kabbalistic sources this narrative was sometimes used as the textual basis to ground the custom of ritual ablution (*tevilah*) on Friday afternoon.<sup>68</sup> While the zoharic context probably implies bathing before Sabbath rather than the specified ritual of ablution,<sup>69</sup> it is nevertheless interesting that the protagonist is portrayed as coming out of a body of water before he sits down to raise his eyes joyously and have a visionary experience. One may assume that implied here is some kind of purificatory rite of passage (if not technically ritual ablution) that must precede the ecstatic vision. The reference to the body of water is also relevant insofar as it may function here, reflecting a much older Jewish tradition, as a medium for visualization.<sup>70</sup> The physical posture and gestures by which Hamnuna enters the ecstatic state are also noteworthy: he sits and casts his eyes upward to see the ascending and descending angels. The ecstatic vision is thus facilitated by a sitting pose as well as the raising of the eyes.<sup>71</sup> It is not reported that Hamnuna himself experienced an other-worldly journey; on the contrary, it seems that he saw events of the celestial realm as he bodily sat upon earth near the river and gazed heavenward. By

contrast, the Zohar informs the reader that on Sabbath eve one is transported to the world of souls. The language here is critical, “every Friday evening a person dwells in the world of souls,” which implies that one has ascended and does not merely see the angels going up and down. That this entails some kind of prescriptive, and not merely descriptive, knowledge is underscored by the concluding remark, “happy is the one who knows the secrets of his Master,” i.e., the one who possesses the practical knowledge that includes techniques of ascent.

The details of the ascent experience are offered in the passage immediately preceding the text that I have cited. The Zohar presents an intensely mythical and dramatic account of the concomitant ascent and descent of souls at the time of the arrival of Sabbath, an account that is prefaced with the remark, “this mystery is given to the wise.”<sup>72</sup> The souls of the righteous in the lower Garden of Eden ascend to the upper Garden of Eden at the same time that the extra souls descend to crown the people of Israel. “Souls ascend and souls descend to crown the holy people; on Sabbath eve there is a rotation of souls, some come and others go, some ascend and others descend.”<sup>73</sup> This rotation of souls, also described in terms of the image of holy chariots, is set into motion just before the beginning of Sabbath, but reaches some kind of stasis at the moment that the Sabbath is sanctified in the *Amidah* of the evening prayer:

So it goes until the [angelic] announcer rises and proclaims: “Sanctified! Sanctified!” Then rest is found and contentment for all. The wicked in Gehinnom are appeased in their places and they have repose. All the souls are crowned, the ones above and the ones below. Happy are the people who may partake of this!<sup>74</sup>

However, at a later point during the course of the night there is another rotation of souls and the state of restfulness is disrupted:

At midnight of Sabbath eve the wise are aroused to have their intercourse (*mit'arin le-shimmusha dilhon*) [in] the upper spirit in which they were crowned when the day was sanctified. When they are asleep on their beds and their other souls want to ascend to see the glory of the King, then that upper spirit that

descended at [the inception of] Sabbath eve takes that soul and elevates it above. That other soul is cleansed by the aromatic fluids of the Garden of Eden, and there it sees what it sees. When it descends to rest in its place at midnight, that soul returns to its place. Those who are wise should say one verse for the arousal of that upper holy soul, the crown of Sabbath, e.g., “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me as a herald of joy to the humble etc.” (Isa. 61:1), “When those moved, these moved; and when those stood still, these stood still; and when these were borne above the earth etc.” (Ezek. 1:22), “Wherever the spirit impelled them to go, they went etc.” (ibid., 20), for they are crowned by that spirit in virtue of their arousal in the joy of intercourse, and the emanation of that upper spirit of Sabbath is in that devotional act of intercourse.<sup>75</sup>

Without entering into all the technical details of this fascinating passage, suffice it to say that it clearly demonstrates that the zoharic authorship entertained the possibility of visionary ascent for a living soul. It is evident, moreover, as I have already noted, that through prayer, one can ascend in a way comparable to the post-mortem ascent of the soul. Thus, for example, one reads in the context of the explication of the dynamic processes of the third of the seven palaces, “The one who knows the secrets and achieves perfection cleaves to his Master and abolishes all harsh decrees, and he crowns his Master and draws down blessings on the whole world, and this is the person who is called the righteous, pillar of the world.<sup>76</sup> His prayer does not return empty, and his portion is in the world-to-come, and he is counted amongst those of faith (*benei meheimanuta*).<sup>77</sup> Through the utterance of prayer, one mystically ascends to the sefirotic pleroma and then theurgically draws down the divine energies. Mention should also be made here of a passage that recurs several times in the Zohar that deals with an explication of the uppermost aspects of the divine thought, especially as it relates to the human capacity to attract this effluence from the supernal source.<sup>78</sup> The theosophic exposition begins with the statement (based on Gen. 14:22), “R. Simeon said: I raised my hands above in prayer.” The implication of starting with this well-known prayer gesture<sup>79</sup> is clear enough: by raising his hands in prayer, R. Simeon draws

down the divine overflow from the highest realm of the Godhead. As a result of this process, the mystic is illuminated by the light of the divine potencies, and only by virtue of this illumination can he expound secrets that have been concealed.<sup>80</sup> This topos is repeated in several contexts in the Zohar. Thus, in the beginning of the section containing secrets of physiognomy and chiromancy, called *Raza de-Razin* ("Secret of Secrets"), one reads, "R. Simeon said: I have raised my hands in prayer to the One who created the world, for even though the ancients revealed in this verse [Gen. 5:1] supernal secrets, one must contemplate and look at the secrets of the book of primordial Adam, for from there is derived the hidden book of King Solomon."<sup>81</sup> The lifting of the hands thus serves as a propaedeutic to contemplate and reveal the hidden secrets that are registered in the ancient esoteric works. The point was well understood by the anonymous author of *Tiqunei Zohar*, who commented on the same verse, no doubt reflecting the aforesaid passage, "This is the book of the generations of Adam (Gen. 5:1). R. Simeon began to expound and said: I raised my hands to the One who created the world, so that He would reveal to us hidden and concealed secrets, to utter them before the *Shekhinah* and her 60 myriad hosts of holy angels above and 60 myriad holy angels below, so that I would not enter in shame before You."<sup>82</sup> Lifting of the hands in supplication implores and impels God to reveal concealed truths through the agency of the mystic. The same technique is alluded to at the beginning of the Great Assembly, but in that case, all of the comrades are said to raise their fingers before entering the field to hear the esoteric matters revealed. The master, R. Simeon, prays and then begins to expound about the disclosure and concealment of secrets.<sup>83</sup> Finally, in another passage, one similarly reads, "R. Simeon said: I raised my hands in prayer to the supernal Holy One so that these matters would be revealed by me in the world as they are hidden in my heart."<sup>84</sup> All of these examples indicate that the raising of the hands serves as a device by which the mystic draws down the influx of light from above before he begins to disclose concealed secrets. To break the code of esotericism, it is necessary for one to enter an ecstatic state, and the means to so enter is through prayer. In these passages, however, it does not appear that the gesture of raising the hands induces a flight of the soul.

From other passages in the various literary strata of the Zohar it is evident that the study of Torah can serve as the mechanism to

actuate the visionary ascent to the supernal realms of being. Thus, for instance, in a passage from *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* we read,

R. Judah taught: Whoever is occupied with [the study of] Torah as much as is required, his soul is elevated above when he is asleep, and he is taught from the depths of Torah ... R. Isaac taught: Whoever is occupied with Torah for its own sake, when he is asleep at night his soul rises and he is shown those matters that will be in the world in the future.<sup>85</sup>

The theme of nocturnal ascent is developed more fully in other zoharic contexts wherein it is emphasized that during sleep the soul separates from the body and rises upward. If the soul is worthy, then it ascends without any obstruction until it reaches the *Shekhinah*; if, however, the soul is unworthy, the ascent is blocked and it is forced to roam about the world.<sup>86</sup> In some passages of the Zohar this theme is connected with the idea that at midnight God takes delight with the righteous in the Garden of Eden. It is the latter idea that serves as the mythic underpinning of the ritual (expressed, of course, in the literary guise of R. Simeon and his colleagues) of rising at midnight to study esoteric matters.<sup>87</sup> As it is put in one zoharic text,

At midnight R. Abba and the rest of the comrades rose to be occupied in [the study of] Torah. R. Abba said: From here on let us say words to crown the righteous in the Garden of Eden, for now is the time that the Holy One, blessed be He, and the righteous in the Garden of Eden listen for the voices of the righteous who are on earth.<sup>88</sup>

The comrades who study kabbalistic matters at midnight thus join the souls of the righteous located at that moment in the upper Paradise, i.e., the divine Presence; it is through this study, moreover, that the righteous are crowned. Just as the crown of God is made from the words of prayer, so too the crowns of the righteous souls in the supernal Garden of Eden are composed of words of Torah that rise from the mouth of the righteous individuals below, i.e., the kabbalists.<sup>89</sup> The kabbalists who occupy themselves with Torah-study at midnight are, therefore, the righteous below who



correspond to the righteous souls who ascend from the lower to upper Garden of Eden:

Each and every night the souls of the righteous ascend, and at midnight the Holy One, blessed be He, comes to the Garden of Eden to take delight in them. In whom? R. Yose said: In all of them, those who are in their habitations in that world and those who sit in their habitations in this world; the Holy One, blessed be He, takes delight in them at midnight. Come and see: The world above needs the arousal of the world below. When the souls of the righteous depart from this world and ascend above, they are clothed in the supernal light in a glorious image, and in them the Holy One, blessed be He, takes delight and desires them for they are the fruit of His actions ... R. Yose said: [The Holy One, blessed He, delights in] even those in this world. How is this so? He said to him: At midnight all the truly righteous rise to study Torah and to hear the praises of Torah. It is said that the Holy One, blessed He, and all the righteous that are with Him in the Garden of Eden come to hear their voices. A thread of mercy extends to them during the day, as it says, "By day may the Lord vouchsafe His faithful care, so that at night a song to Him may be with me" (Ps. 42:9).<sup>90</sup> It follows that the praises that rise before Him at night are a complete praise.<sup>91</sup>

In several passages dealing with this motif, the Zohar cites the verse, "O you who linger in the garden, lovers are listening; let me hear your voice" (Song of Songs 8:13), for the garden is the feminine Presence, the lovers the masculine element of the divine and the souls of the righteous, and the voice is that of the kabbalist occupied with study of Torah.<sup>92</sup> The kabbalists, therefore, are truly partners (*haverim*) of the divine, for by means of their study they ascend to join the pleroma, specifically the last of the emanations, which is the opening that receives them. The homologous relation between the righteous below, who group together to study the esoteric meaning of Scripture, and the righteous souls above in the Garden of Eden is not merely horizontal; there is a vertical intersection as well, for the righteous below ascend to join the righteous above:

The souls of people ascend, each one as is appropriate ... Happy is the lot of the righteous for their souls ascend upward and they

are not obstructed in another place that is not necessary. At midnight the herald stands and calls out, and the opening is opened. Then the wind of the north side is stirred, and it strikes the harp of David that plays by itself ... Happy is the lot of the one who wakes at that time and is occupied with Torah. Whoever rises at that time and is occupied with Torah is called a partner of the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Community of Israel.<sup>93</sup>

From these passages, and many others that could have been cited, it is clear that individuals occupied with esoteric study are themselves united with the divine Presence<sup>94</sup> at the culmination of their nocturnal ascent:

Come and see: When the north wind is stirred up the Community of Israel is received in the left ... and the Holy One, blessed be He, comes to take delight with the righteous who are in the Garden of Eden. Whoever is aroused at that time to study Torah joins her, for she and her hosts praise the supernal King. All those who participate with her in the praise of Torah are written amongst those who belong to the palace and are called by their names, and these are inscribed in the day.<sup>95</sup>

The point is reiterated in slightly different language in the following passage:

R. Hizqiyah was sitting before R. Isaac. They rose at midnight to study Torah. R. Isaac began to expound, saying: "Now bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord [who stand nightly in the house of the Lord]" (Ps. 134:1). This verse has been established by the comrades. But this praise relates to all those who are faithful (*benei meheimanuta*). Who are the faithful? Those who study Torah and know how to unify the Holy Name as is appropriate. The praise of those faithful is that they rise at midnight to study Torah and cleave by means of it to the Community of Israel [*Shekhinah*], to praise her before the Holy One, blessed be He, in words of Torah. Come and see: When a person rises at midnight to study Torah and the north wind stirs at midnight, the doe [*Shekhinah*] rises and praises the Holy One, blessed be

He. When she rises several thousand and tens of thousands rise with her, and they all begin to praise the Holy King. The Holy One, blessed be He, listens to the one who is righteous and rises at midnight to study Torah ... as it is written “O you who linger in the garden, lovers are listening; let me hear your voice” (Song of Songs 8:13) ... You are the glory of the Holy King, You are the crown of the King. That doe is crowned by those people and she stands before the King and says: See with which son I have come before You, by which son I have been aroused in relation to You, they who are the most praiseworthy of all before the King! He answered and said: “Those who stand nightly in the house of the Lord,” these are the servants of the Lord who are worthy to bless the Holy King, and their blessing is a blessing, as it says, “Lift your hands toward the sanctuary and bless the Lord” (Ps. 134:2).<sup>96</sup>

Midnight is a propitious time to study Torah in a kabbalistic vein, inasmuch as at that precise moment the masculine potency of the divine (the Holy One, blessed be He) enters the feminine (the Garden of Eden) to delight with the souls of the righteous. Through study of Torah, the kabbalists ascend to cleave to the divine Presence, a theme connected exegetically in the above passage to Psalm 134, which begins “a song of ascents,” *shir ha-ma‘alot*. Torah study leads to an ecstatic ascent that ultimately serves a theurgical function insofar as the kabbalists who “stand in the house of the Lord,” i.e., are in union with the *Shekhinah*, are capable of blessing the divine. Alternatively, the kabbalists become crowns on the head of the *Shekhinah* (symbolized as the doe) so that she can stand before the masculine deity and offer praises. Not only do the kabbalists cleave to the Presence (symbolically depicted by the image of their being crowned by the *Shekhinah*), but they assist in the unification of the latter with her masculine consort (expressed by the image of their crowning the *Shekhinah*). “Come and see: When the north wind stirs at midnight ... those who belong to the supernal palace rise to be involved with the praise of Torah, and they join the Community of Israel until the day shines; when morning comes she and all those who belong to the palace come before the Holy King, and they are called sons of the King and Matrona ... At night they were occupied with the Matrona, now they come with the Matrona to unite her with the King.”<sup>97</sup> In this

respect, the kabbalists fulfill the role of *Yesod*, the conduit that connects the masculine and feminine aspects of the Godhead:

At midnight the Holy One, blessed be He, enters the Garden of Eden to take delight with the righteous. At that time one must rise to study Torah. Thus it is said that the Holy One, blessed be He, and all the righteous in the Garden of Eden listen to their voice, as it is written, “O you who linger in the garden, lovers are listening; let me hear your voice” (Song of Songs 8:13). The one who lingers in the garden, i.e., the Community of Israel, for she praises him before the Holy One, blessed be He, by virtue of the praise of Torah at night. Happy is the lot of one who joins her to praise the Holy One, blessed be He, by means of the praise of Torah. When morning comes the Community of Israel comes and takes delight with the Holy One, blessed be He, and he extends to her the sceptre of mercy [i.e., the *sefirah* of *Yesod*, which corresponds to the phallus].<sup>98</sup> She does not enter alone but together with those who join her. Thus is it written, “By day may the lord vouchsafe His faithful care, so that at night [a song to Him may be with me, a prayer to the God of my life]” (Ps. 42:9).<sup>99</sup>

Hence, the kabbalist who rises at midnight to study Torah is in the place of *Yesod*, the attribute that bestows the divine effluence upon the *Shekhinah*. This is consistent with the view expressed in sundry ways in the *Zohar*, as well as in other thirteenth-century kabbalistic literature, to the effect that this particular gradation is the locus of esoteric knowledge. Consequently, the *maskil* corresponds to *Yesod*, and in the moment of mystical illumination it is precisely that divine element that overflows to the kabbalist.

R. Ḥizkiyah said: Whoever is occupied with Torah at that hour certainly has a constant portion in the world-to-come. R. Yose said: What is the meaning of constant? He said to him: Thus I have learnt that every midnight when the Holy One, blessed be He, is aroused in the Garden of Eden all those plants of the Garden are irrigated more from that river, which is called the “raging torrent,”<sup>100</sup> the “refreshing stream,”<sup>101</sup> whose waters never cease. For the one who rises and studies Torah it is as if that river pours forth upon his head and waters him from those plants of the Garden of Eden.<sup>102</sup>

The ascent experience of the kabbalist, brought about through the study of Torah at the midnight hour, culminates in the ecstatic experience of ontic transformation. In the passage just cited, the transformation is characterized as the pouring forth of *Yesod*, the ever-gushing stream, upon the heads of the kabbalists such that they draw sustenance from the sefirotic entities, the plants of the Garden of Eden. Implicit here is the symbolization of the coronation motif as some form of unification.<sup>103</sup> It is worthwhile to cite here a passage from one of Moses de León's Hebrew theosophic works that helps illuminate the zoharic conception:

The secret of the splendor of the supernal light, the good that is hidden for the souls of the righteous, "no eye has seen, O God, but You" (Isa. 64:3). We must believe and know that the supernal Garden of Eden is the secret of the bundle of life, and the Holy One, blessed be He, desires that Garden constantly, and the souls of the righteous are bound there, and they enjoy its splendor. The splendor<sup>104</sup> of the supernal Garden of Eden is nothing but the light of the splendor of the river that comes forth from Eden, which enters into it and bestows upon it the light and inner splendor from the secret of the world-to-come, which is the supernal holy of holies of which it says "no eye has seen, O God, but You."<sup>105</sup>

De León's description of the souls of the righteous in the supernal Garden of Eden is applied in some zoharic texts to the souls of the kabbalists that gain entry into this grade of being and shine with the splendor of the river, i.e., *Yesod*, the gradation that corresponds to the *membrum virile* of the divine *anthropos*. The image of the river overflowing upon the heads of the kabbalists<sup>106</sup> indicates that they are in a state of ecstatic illumination linked especially to that grade, the source of all secrets, which is characterized by a dialectic of disclosure and concealment appropriate to esoteric matters.<sup>107</sup> In another zoharic passage, the transformation of the kabbalist who studies at midnight is depicted in the following way:

"Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power" (Exod. 15:6).  
R. Simeon said: When the morning shines and the doe rises, she is filled from every side, and she enters hundreds of palaces of

the King. When the north wind stirs and the desire of the doe is to be aroused in the world, the one who at midnight is involved in [the study of] Torah comes with her before the King. When the morning shines the thread of mercy is drawn upon him. He looks heavenward and the light of understanding of the holy gnosis rests upon him, and he is crowned by it, and everyone is afraid of him. At that point that person is called a son of the Holy One, blessed be He, a son of the palace of the King. He enters all the [heavenly] gates and no one obstructs him. When he calls to the palace of the King, concerning him it is written, "The Lord is near to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth" (Ps. 145:18). What is truth? As it has been established, "You will give truth to Jacob" (Micah 7:20), for he knows how to unify the holy name in his prayer as is appropriate. And this is the worship of the Holy King.<sup>108</sup>

Thus, the kabbalist who rises at midnight to study is totally transformed in the morning light. He has not only assisted the *Shekhinah* in her unification with the masculine aspect of God, but he has himself become a full-fledged member of the divine pleroma; he is, in the language of the zoharic text, a son of the Holy One, blessed be He, a son of the holy palace. On account of this transformation, the prayers of the mystic are guaranteed to be successful, for no one in the celestial realms has the power to block the passage of his prayers; indeed, at that moment the mystic has attained a higher ontic status than any of the angelic beings who populate the heavenly palaces.

The analysis of the material cited in this study indicates quite convincingly that the zoharic authorship considered visionary ascents of the soul a real possibility. While all souls, to some extent, experience a nocturnal ascent during sleep, the kabbalist is given a privileged position in terms of attaining this peak religious experience. More specifically, the mechanism by means of which the kabbalist ascends to the heavenly realms and beyond to the divine pleroma consists of recitation of prayer and study of Torah. The two ritual acts converge in what is one of the central ecstatic experiences described in the Zohar regarding the midnight study of Torah on the part of the kabbalist. As a result of studying Torah at this hour, when God enters the supernal Garden of Eden and takes delight with the

souls of the righteous, the kabbalist himself is transported from the terrestrial realm to the heavens, culminating in a union with the *Shekhinah*. The transformative quality of the mystical experience is underscored in the way that Moses de León refers to the kabbalists in one of his writings, viz. “the holy enlightened ones, servants of the Supernal One” (*maskilim ha-qedoshim meshartei elyon*).<sup>109</sup> This is not simply a rhetorical phrase of approbation but rather a precise attribution: the kabbalist is ontically transformed as a result of his ascent through study to the higher realms of being. This transformation is most fulfilled in the ecstatic state wherein the kabbalist participates, indeed becomes one, with the *Shekhinah*. It is through this union, moreover, that the kabbalist merits to receive knowledge of the divine secrets.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the Torah-study of the kabbalist has the theurgical function of assisting the *Shekhinah* in standing before the masculine aspect of the deity to utter prayers, and ultimately facilitating the union of the male and female poles of divinity. In the process, the kabbalist himself is transformed and receives the divine influx from either *Yesod* or the *Shekhinah*. At that stage his own (morning) prayers are offered before God and readily received as he is now a member of the divine pleroma, that is, he has been divinized.

We are left to wonder if behind these dramatic and highly visual characterizations, the zoharic authorship had some concrete reality in mind. That is, are we justified in reading these passages as allusions to a contemporary mystical rite that the Spanish kabbalists in the last decades of the thirteenth century (and perhaps also the first decades of the fourteenth century) experienced? Were there midnight study groups in Castile that provided the context for communal kabbalistic study and visionary ascents to the divine pleroma? It is likely that the zoharic description of a similar ritual connected with the night of Pentecost, involving the study of different aspects of Torah throughout that night, was in fact rooted in some actual practice on the part of this circle of kabbalists, which, as Liebes has argued, may have had messianic implications.<sup>111</sup> It seems to me that the zoharic references to the communal midnight study of Torah also reflect actual practice and are not to be construed simply as imaginative constructions of one idiosyncratic individual (Moses de León). These actual gatherings set the stage for the narrative drama that unfolds in the pages of the Zohar. The biographical data of the thirteenth-century mystics are cloaked in the mythical garb of

Simeon ben Yoḥai and his colleagues.<sup>112</sup> Like all mythologies, however, the mythic portrayal in the Zohar is anchored in a historical reality. If that is the case, then perhaps some of the kabbalistic practices discussed in zoharic literature are not, as Scholem suggested, “rites which its author had only dreamed of and projected back into a remote archaic past. Many of these new rites recommended by the Zohar, which attributed them to Simeon ben Yoḥai and his circle, were practiced for the first time in Safed.”<sup>113</sup> That the mystical rites mentioned in the Zohar were projected back to second-century Palestine cannot be denied; however, the question of when they were first actually practiced (or whether the zoharic descriptions sometimes represent kabbalistic interpretations of existing rituals) remains open. It may be the case that some of the rites described in the Zohar refer to actual practices that were preserved in small circles of kabbalists<sup>114</sup> or were recovered by the Safedian kabbalists and eventually popularized through the influence of Lurianic kabbalah on pietistic, devotional, and moralistic literature as Scholem concluded. The determination of whether or not actual practice underlies the kabbalistic rites recorded in the Zohar depends upon one’s orientation towards the literary nature of this work and the priority that one gives to practice and experience as opposed to symbols and myths.<sup>115</sup> In point of fact these two issues are not unrelated: by shifting the focus from single to multiple authorship, scholars will begin more readily to acknowledge the historical group behind the fictional fellowship of Simeon ben Yoḥai, and will therefore appreciate the lived and living experiences underlying many of the theoretical and exegetical deliberations in the Zohar. The particular motif of visionary ascent, analyzed in detail in this study, provides an excellent window through which one can view the profoundly ecstatic and mystical elements of zoharic theosophy.

### Notes

1. Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. xiv.
2. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 27–29.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–58.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 59–73.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 74–111.



6. Ibid., pp. 234–249. See also my studies referred to in note 40, and Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through A Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 326–392.
7. Victor Turner and Edward Bruner (eds), *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).
8. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, Introduction, 1a.
9. MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 824, fol. 108a. On this text, see Gershom Scholem, “Index of Commentaries on the Ten *Sefirot*,” *Qiryat Sefer*, 10, 1933–34, pp. 499 n. 7 and 508 n. 95 (Hebrew). The language of this text resembles Recanaṭi’s paraphrase of Ezra of Gerona in his *Perush al ha-Torah*, 37d.
10. According to some versions of this legend, the fate of Aqiva is described as ascending and descending in peace. For the variant readings, see Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah*, Part V: Order Mo’ed (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962), p. 1290 n. 21; see also Ephraim E. Urbach, “The Traditions about Merkabah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period,” in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ephraim E. Urbach, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, and Chaim Wirszubski (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), p. 14 n. 59 (Hebrew section); David Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980), p. 92.
11. Liebes, “Messiah,” pp. 154–155, 240–241; Matt, *Zohar*, p. 279, s.v., “entered ... emerged.”
12. *Zohar* 1:44a. Cf. *Zohar* 2:176a, 179a (*Sifra di-Tseni’uta*); *Zohar Ḥadash*, 2b (*Sitrei Otiyyot*) and 6c (*Sitrei Otiyyot*).
13. *Zohar* 2:213b.
14. Ibid. 3:290a (*Idra Zuta*).
15. Ibid. 297a.
16. Ibid. 127b (*Idra Rabba*).
17. Liebes, “Messiah,” pp. 153–154. The section in the printed *Zohar* marked as the *Idra de-Mashkena* (2:122b–123b) appears to be a mistake, even though it does properly belong to the *Idra stratum* of zoharic literature. See Liebes, “Messiah,” pp. 88 n. 7, 153 n. 238. It may be relevant to consider here as well the section printed in *Zohar* 2:159a–160b, which begins, “From here are [disclosed] the hidden secrets of the Tabernacle from the mouth of the light” (i.e., Simeon ben Yoḥai; cf. Liebes, *Sections*, pp. 137, 139–140, 158). It is evident from the end of the passage that this is a discrete textual unit that is incomplete. Finally, in this connection it is of importance to note that a significant portion of one of Joseph of Hamadan’s works, *Sefer Tashaq*, is an elaborate kabbalistic commentary on the Tabernacle (exegetically linked to Exod. 25 and Song of Songs 1:1–2:5). It will be shown, moreover, that precisely this theme (which involves the *hieros gamos* of the King and the Matrona) is the central issue and organizing principle of the entire work. Cf. Gershom Scholem, *Einige kabbalistische Handschriften im Britischen Museum* (Jerusalem: Soncino-Blätter, 1932), pp. 11–29; Alexander Altmann, “Concerning the Question of the Authorship of *Sefer Ta’amey ha-Mitswot* Ascribed to R. Isaac Ibn Farḥi,” *Qiryat Sefer*, 40, 1964–65, pp. 256–276, 405–412 (Hebrew); Jeremy Zwelling, “Joseph of Hamadan’s *Sefer Tashak*: Critical Text Edition with Introduction,” Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, 1975, pp. xix–xx. It is possible that Hamadan was drawing upon the zoharic text, entitled *Idra de-Vei Mashkena*, which dealt with

- the secrets of the Tabernacle. It should be recalled that in *Sefer Tashaq*, there are passages that emulate the style and content of the Idrot. On the complex relation between Joseph of Hamadan and the Zohar, see Liebes, "How the Zohar Was Written," pp. 25–34.
18. On the use of the word *idra* as a symbol for the feminine Presence, see Liebes, *Sections*, pp. 94, 99, 104–105; Matt, *Zohar*, p. 279, s.v., "crossing the threshold of the Dwelling." See esp. the comment of David ben Yehuda he-Ḥasid, cited by Matt, *Zohar*, p. 278, s.v., "the threshing house": "The secret [is clear] ... to anyone who has entered the threshing house." See also Joseph Angeleṭ, *Livnat ha-Sappir* (Jerusalem, 1913), 28a: "I have understood from the *Idra de-Vei Mashkena* in the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* [Angeleṭ's standard way of referring to the Zohar] that every time it says in the midrash they entered the house of assembly it means that they entered to see the splendor of the Presence." Angeleṭ goes on to cite a passage that appears in Zohar 2:128b; see Liebes, "Messiah," p. 153 n. 239. The possibility that the gathering of the mystical fellowship symbolically represents the *Shekhinah* is strengthened by the fact that the entire group consists of ten rabbis who correspond to the ten divine gradations, which, in turn, are all comprised within the last of them. On the meaning of the gathering of the fellowship, see Liebes, "Messiah," pp. 128–134.
  19. See, e.g., Zohar 2:130a, 159a (in that context the lower Tabernacle, or the Tabernacle of Metatron, symbolizes the *Shekhinah* in contrast to the upper concealed Tabernacle identified as *Binah*), 234b, 238a (although it should be noted that on this very page the Tabernacle is also interpreted as a reference to Wisdom), 239b–240a; 3:114b. Needless to say, the examples could be greatly multiplied.
  20. This motif can be traced to much older sources, adumbrated in the Bible itself (cf. Exod. 25:9, 40). For a convenient summary of the biblical motif in its ancient Near Eastern context, see Carol L. Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol From the Biblical Cult* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 172–173. For the development of related motifs in rabbinic literature, see Victor Aptowitz, "The Celestial Temple as Viewed in the Aggadah," trans. Aryeh Rubinstein, in *Binah: Studies in Jewish Thought*, ed. Joseph Dan (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 1–29.
  21. This is evident from any number of passages in the zoharic anthology. See, e.g., Zohar 2:163b, where the comrades (*havrayya*) are designated the "face of the *Shekhinah*," for she "is hidden within them, [s]he is concealed and they are revealed." Perhaps one of the more poignant accounts of the collective state of ecstatic union with the *Shekhinah* occurs in Zohar 1:8a, which describes the ritual of studying on the night of Pentecost: "R. Simeon was sitting and studying Torah the night [of the day] that the bride [the *Shekhinah*] unites with her husband [the Holy One]. It has been taught: All the comrades, who belong to the palace of the bride, on the night the bride is prepared to enter the next day into the nuptial chamber with her husband must be with her the whole night. They must rejoice with her in her adornments with which she is adorned, to study Torah, from the Pentateuch to the Prophets, from the Prophets to the Writings, the collections of midrash of scriptural verses, and the secrets of Wisdom, for these are her adornments and ornamentation. She and her maidens enter and stand upon their heads and she is adorned through them and is gladdened by them all that night. On the next day she does not enter the nuptial chamber except with them, and they are called sons of the nuptial chamber. When they enter the nuptial chamber the Holy One, blessed

be He, inquires concerning them, blesses them, and crowns them in the crown of the bride; praiseworthy is their lot." The mystical fellows adorn the *Shekhinah* by means of their novel interpretations of Torah, especially pertaining to esoteric matters (on the image of the different parts of traditional literature being the adornments or ornamentations of the feminine Torah, cf. *Midrash Tanhuma*, Ki Tissa 18, pp. 412–413). On this passage and its relationship to the *Idra Rabba*, see Liebes, "Messiah," pp. 187–188, 208–209. See parallel in *Zohar* 3:97b–98a, which also speaks of the "ancient pietists" staying up the whole night of Pentecost to adorn the *Shekhinah* for her union the next day. Those who fulfill this act are said to be crowned by the *Shekhinah* at night and by the Holy One and the *Shekhinah* during the wedding ceremony of the day. That passage ends with the statement: "in the world there is no one who knows how to adorn the ornaments of the bride except for the comrades." This is clearly a reference to the group of practicing kabbalists active in late-thirteenth-century Castile. Cf. the testimony of Moses de León in his kabbalistic explanation of Pentecost, extant in MS Vatican 428, fol. 37b: "The ancient ones, blessed be their memory, the pillars of the world who know how to draw down the grace from the exalted heights, practiced the custom of not sleeping these two nights of Pentecost. All night they would study the Pentateuch, Prophets, Writings, and from there they would skip over to Talmud and haggadot, and then read in the wisdom of the secrets of Torah (*hokhmat sitrei ha-torah*) until the morning light. This is a tradition of the fathers in the hands of these select individuals, the 'remnant whom the Lord calls' (Joel 3:5)."

22. *Zohar* 3:141a (*Idra Rabba*).
23. *Zohar* 3:144a (*Idra Rabba*; cf. *Zohar* 1:217a); 3: 287b (*Idra Zuta*). See also *Zohar H'adash*, 18d–19a (*Midrash ha-Ne'elam*), and see Liebes, "How the Zohar Was Written," p. 6 n. 20, and Elliot R. Wolfson, "Hai Gaon's Letter and Commentary on 'Aleynu: Further Evidence of Moses de León's Pseudepigraphic Activity,'" *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 81, 1991, pp. 400–401 nn. 149–150.
24. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 205.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 207. It is curious that, in his paraphrase of Scholem, Mircea Eliade ignores entirely the dimension of mystical experience or contemplation underlying zoharic theosophy. "According to Scholem," Eliade writes, "the Zohar represents Jewish theosophy, that is, a mystical doctrine whose principal goal is the knowledge and description of the mysterious works of the divinity" (*A History of Religious Ideas*, trans. Williard R. Trask [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978], vol. 3, p. 170). This is a very partial (perhaps biased) reading of Scholem, for the latter, as I have indicated, insisted on the experiential and contemplative dimension of zoharic theosophy. To be sure, as will be noted in the continuation of this study, Scholem is not always consistent on this issue, but the remark of Eliade simply ignores the dialectics of Scholem's thinking.
27. Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 15, 121–122. It is appropriate here to recall Scholem's characterization of ancient gnosticism as a "mystical esotericism for the elect based on illumination and the acquisition of a higher knowledge of things heavenly and divine" (*Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965], p. 1). In a fundamental sense this seems to be an accurate reflection of Scholem's own view of kabbalistic gnosis.
28. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 122.

29. Ibid., p. 123.
30. Ibid.
31. Idem, *Kabbalah*, p. 370.
32. Scholem discussed contemplative mysticism of this school in several studies during the course of his career: Gershom Scholem, "Der Begriff der Kawwana in der alten Kabbala," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 78, 1934, pp. 492–518 (English translation by Noah Jacobs, "The Concept of Kavvanah in Early Kabbalah," in *Studies in Jewish Thought*, pp. 162–180); *Re'shit ha-Qabbalah*, pp. 114–122; Scholem, *Origins*, 299–309. For more recent reviews of the topic of *devequt* in kabbalistic texts, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 35–88, and Seth Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Worship and Mystical Experience in Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1991, pp. 264–395. Brody's work reached me after the completion of this study and thus I did not have the opportunity to assimilate his discussion of relevant material that intersects with my study in the body of the paper. See note 41.
33. See Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 270–325.
34. Some kabbalists, and modern scholars following them, explain this expression as "dark light," although the more precise translation is "hardened flame;" the term *bohsina de-qadrinuta* would be the Aramaic equivalent of "dark light." See Scholem, *Origins*, p. 336 n. 278; Tishby, *Wisdom*, pp. 325–326; Liebes, *Sections*, pp. 145–151, 161–164; Matt, *Zohar*, pp. 207–208.
35. *Zohar Hadash*, 58c–d. Cf. *Zohar* 2:233a, 258a; *Zohar Hadash*, 49b–c.
36. Liebes, *Sections*, pp. 146–147; idem, "Messiah," pp. 199–200.
37. Ithamar Gruenwald, "The Midrashic Condition: From Talmudic to Zoharic Hermeneutics," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 8, 1989, pp. 255–298 (Hebrew). It should be noted that Roland Goetschel's study included in the same volume, "The Conception of Prophecy in the Works of Moses de León and Joseph Gikatilla," pp. 217–238 (Hebrew), provides a detailed analysis of the doctrines of prophecy in these two kabbalists but does not deal with the issue of actual prophetic experience. Noteworthy as well is the study of Liebes (see note 17), which provides the theoretical basis for a more nuanced appreciation of the mystical elements that underlie many of the theoretical and exegetical deliberations in the zoharic literature; see note 112.
38. Gruenwald, "Midrashic Condition," p. 293.
39. See note 17.
40. Elliot R. Wolfson, "Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol," *History of Religions*, 27, 1987, pp. 189–215; idem, "The Hermeneutics of Visionary Experience: Revelation and Interpretation in the Zohar," *Religion*, 18, 1988, pp. 311–345 (a revised version of this study appears in chapter 7 of *Through a Speculum*).
41. A preliminary discussion of some aspects of this phenomenon can be found in Tishby, *Wisdom*, pp. 587–595. See *ibid.*, pp. 809–814, where Tishby discusses the various themes connected with the ascent of the soul to the divine realm during sleep. See also the reference to Elliot Ginsburg cited in note 66. For discussion of ascent of the soul in other Jewish mystical sources, from the Merkavah mysticism of Late Antiquity to the Hasidic writings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 88–96 (in that survey, however, Idel does not discuss zoharic texts). See Brody, "Human Hands," pp. 334–379, who develops the zoharic notion of *devequt* as "visionary assimilation" into divinity in contrast to the Catalonian ideal of *devequt* as "intellective vision" of thought cleaving to God. While the

distinction between the Catalanian and Castilian material may not be as sharp as Brody suggests, I share his sensitivity to the visionary aspect of the zoharic treatment (see my studies referred to in previous note utilized by Brody) and accept with him the need to appreciate the “new paradigm of transformation experience” in the Zohar whereby “*devequt* is depicted as the attainment of ontic assimilation into the mystery of sefirotic unity and visionary participation in the holy coupling of the celestial lovers Malkhut and Tiferet” (pp. 337–338). Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere and in this chapter, I would agree with Brody’s contention that in the Zohar one cannot separate vision and ontic participation (see pp. 352–353), i.e., the act of seeing the divine entails participation in the sefirotic pleroma. Although Brody mentions my study “The Hermeneutics of Visionary Experience” (p. 126 n. 70), it is regrettable that in his extended discussion of the Sinaitic theophany as the paradigmatic visionary experience (pp. 354–361) he does not refer to my study, even when citing some of the exact zoharic sources that I discussed.

42. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 373 n. 77; idem, *Origins*, p. 248 n. 98; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 27, 91–92. See also Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 37–38; Abraham J. Heschel, “On the Holy Spirit in the Middle Ages,” *Alexander Marx Festschrift* (New York, 1950), pp. 182–186 (Hebrew). See also the tradition discussed by Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 78, of Yehudai Gaon (eighth century) to the effect that the ascent of the penitent to God is through the seven heavens, a theme that is apparently based on the talmudic dictum that “repentance reaches the throne of glory” (Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 86a). An interesting elaboration of this tradition of ascent through repentance, clearly indicating kabbalistic influence, can be found in the penitential poem of Abrekh ben Isaac; see Leon J. Weinberger, *Rabbanite and Karaitic Liturgical Poetry in South-Eastern Europe* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1991), pp. 17–18 of the English introduction and pp. 49–52 (poem no. 23) of the Hebrew text. In that poem the soul of the penitent ascends by recounting and contemplating the divine attributes (*middot*) at a propitious time. Some mystical technique of visual contemplation of the *sefirot* seems to be implied in this text.
43. See the references to Scholem’s studies in note 32; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 42–46; idem, “Types of Redemptive Activity in the Middle Ages,” in *Messianism and Eschatology*, ed. Zvi Baras (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1984), p. 274 (Hebrew).
44. There are two versions of the text dealing with the palaces (*heikhalot*), the abbreviated one in Zohar 1:38a–45b and the longer one in Zohar 2:244b–269a.
45. It is noteworthy that the reading here in both the Cremona and Mantua editions is significantly different from the received text in the standard editions: “for there is an order that can be known and contemplated and there is an order that exists in the will in order to contemplate above up to the Infinite.”
46. Zohar 2:244b.
47. Cf. *ibid.* 245b.
48. The word “knot” is used in zoharic literature, reflecting a much older semantic tradition, to refer to a magical or theurgical bond. See Liebes, *Sections*, p. 397; Wolfson, “Left Contained,” p. 35 n. 40.
49. Zohar 1:41a.
50. Based on the image in *Sefer Yetsirah* 1:6 describing the relationship of the first and last of the ten *sefirot*.

51. Zohar 2:213b.
52. Cf. *ibid.* 260a and see discussion in Tishby, *Wisdom*, p. 594 n. 27; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Letter Symbolism and Merkavah Imagery in the Zohar," *Alei Shefer: Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought Presented to Rabbi Dr. Alexandre Safran*, ed. Moshe Hallamish (Bar-Ilan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990), pp. 220–221 (English section).
53. Zohar 2:245a.
54. Based on the talmudic dictum concerning the first ten men who make up the required quorum receiving the reward of all those who follow; cf. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 47b. See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Mystical–Theurgical Dimensions of Prayer in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, vol. 3, ed. David Blumenthal (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 52–56, and see other references cited on p. 72 n. 92.
55. Zohar 2:250a. This text reflects the idea expressed in older sources concerning the glory being crowned by the prayers of Israel. For some references see Wolfson, "Mystical–Theurgical Dimensions of Prayer," pp. 77–78 n. 146.
56. Cf. Zohar 1:7a, 38b, 65b–66a, 81a (*Sitrei Torah*), 224b; 2:11a, 156b. Cf. "Sefer ha-Mishkal," pp. 47–63, esp. 60–62. The reverse of this process, the descent of the soul from the divine pleroma to the physical world, also involves traversing the palaces of the upper and lower Garden of Eden. See Tishby, *Wisdom*, pp. 740–747.
57. Cf. Zohar 1:81a (*Sitrei Torah*), 2:156b. See also 1:224b; *Livnat ha-Sappir*, 3c. On the ascension of the souls of the righteous from the terrestrial to the celestial Garden of Eden on Friday afternoon as the extra souls (*neshamot yeterot*) descend, see Elliot Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 132.
58. I have borrowed this expression from the title of chapter 4 of Clive Hunt, *Images of Flight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
59. For discussion of this motif in kabbalistic writings, see Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel; ed. Jonathan Chipman (New York: Schocken, 1991), pp. 251–273. On the genesis of the idea of the subtle or astral body in neo-Platonic sources, see the studies of Mead and Dodds cited by Scholem, pp. 313–314 n. 17.
60. See, e.g., Zohar 1:224a–b; 2:247a; Gershom Scholem, "The Paradise Garb of Souls and the Origin of the Concept of *Halūqa de-Rabbanan*," *Tarbits*, 24, 1954–55, pp. 290–306 (Hebrew); Tishby, *Wisdom*, pp. 188–189, 835; Cohen-Alloro, *Secret of the Garment*, pp. 60–67, and the relevant zoharic sources cited on pp. 106–114. Scholem thought that the image of the eschatological garment woven from a person's deeds parallels, indeed may ultimately derive from, the Iranian notion of the *Daena*, i.e., the image of the higher self that accompanies the deceased, which comes into being from one's good works. See *On the Mystical Shape*, pp. 264–265 and references cited on p. 315 nn. 30–32.
61. Cf. Zohar 1:7a, 38b, 91a; 2:11a, 150a. This tradition, which may go back to Persian sources, is already apparent in the apocalyptic and mystical texts of ancient Judaism as well as in early Christian and Mandaean literature. See Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape*, p. 262, and references cited on p. 315 n. 26. For a later development of this motif in Persian writings, see Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 34, 84–86, 100–101, 207–209.

62. See Hunt, *Images of Flight*, pp. 136–137. On the near-physical quality of the visual experience of the souls of the righteous and their cleaving to the Presence, see esp. Zohar 1:232a (*Tosefta*).
63. See, e.g., Zohar 1:38a–b.
64. Tishby, *Wisdom*, pp. 591–594.
65. See, e.g., Zohar 1:246a; Tishby, *Wisdom*, pp. 593–594, 749–770.
66. Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, p. 133, which duly notes the ecstatic element implied in this zoharic text. My discussion is indebted to Ginsburg's insightful analysis.
67. Zohar 2:136b.
68. See, e.g., Elijah de Vidas, *Totse'ot Hayyim* 91, published together with *Re'shit Hokhmah ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem, 1984), 3:340; Moses Cordovero, *Zohar im Perush Or Yaqar* (Jerusalem, 1976), 9:64; Hayyim Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Kawwanot* (Jerusalem, 1963), 62a. The first two sources are cited by Ginsburg; see the reference in note 69.
69. Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, p. 248 n. 34. On the history of the practice of ritual ablu-tion before the arrival of the Sabbath, see *ibid.*, pp. 227–231, 249–251 nn. 37–42.
70. As already noted by Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, pp. 183–184 n. 287, who cites as well the relevant scholarly discussions by Gruenwald and Idel.
71. It is of interest to note here that occasionally in the Zohar the closing of the eyes (sometimes specified further as the rotation of the closed eye) is singled out as a means to have an ecstatic vision of the luminous emanations of the divine pleroma. See, e.g., Zohar 1:18b, 42a, 97a–b (*Sitrei Torah*); 2:23a–b, 43b; 3:187b; *Zohar Hadash*, 63b. The technique is mentioned as well in Moses de León's Hebrew writings; see Liebes, *Sections*, pp. 291–292; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 140. For discussion of various opinions regarding the position of the eyes during worship, see Eric Zimmer, "Poses and Postures during Prayer," *Sidra*, 5, 1989, pp. 89–95 (Hebrew); Zeev Gries, *Conduct Literature (Regimen Vitae) Its History and Place in the Life of Beshtian Hasidism* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1989), pp. 220–222 (Hebrew). On the closing of the eyes and meditation in the Abulafian tradition, see Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 134–136.
72. Zohar 2:136a.
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Ibid.*
76. Cf. Prov. 10:25; Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 38b.
77. Zohar 1:43a.
78. Cf. Zohar 1:65a; 2:268b–269a. See also 2:226a. According to Liebes, "Messiah," p. 97, this text is part of the Idrot literature.
79. Zimmer, "Poses and Postures," pp. 95–107, esp. 100, where some kabbalistic sources are discussed.
80. Liebes, "Messiah," pp. 97–98, explains the use of this expression in the Zohar in terms of the obligation to reveal secrets, on the one hand, and the humble feeling that the disclosure of secrets is forbidden, on the other. My explanation is nuanced in a slightly different way, focusing on the ecstatic experience of illumination that ensues from the raising of the hands. On the theurgical implication of raising the hands in prayer, see esp. Zohar 3:195b.
81. Zohar 2:70a.
82. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 70, 121a.
83. Cf. Zohar 3:127b (*Idra Rabba*).

84. Ibid. 287b.
85. *Zohar Hadash*, 28b.
86. Zohar 1:11a, 19a–b, 36b, 83a, 92a, 122a (*Midrash ha-Ne'elam*), 130a, 183a, 200a; 2:195b; 3: 21b, 120b, 260a.
87. Zohar 1:72a, 77a–b, 242b; 3:67b. In several zoharic contexts, this motif is associated with the rabbinic idea (cf. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 3b) that every midnight a north wind would blow and produce sounds on David's harp in order to wake him up to study Torah until the dawn. Cf. Zohar 1:178b.
88. Zohar 2:209a.
89. Cf. Zohar 1:178b, where this imagery is (following the aggadic passage in Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 3b) applied to David, who rose at midnight to utter hymns and praises before God: "The words of Torah that he uttered ascended and were crowned before the Holy One, blessed be He." See also Zohar 3:21b–22a.
90. See reference to the talmudic source in note 87.
91. Zohar 1:82b.
92. Zohar 1:77b, 92a, 178b, 231b; 2:46a; 3:13a, 22a, 213a.
93. Zohar 3:21b–22a.
94. In other passages as well it is emphasized that occupation with the Torah brings about unification with the divine Presence. See, e.g., Zohar 2:217a; 3:96a; *Zohar Hadash*, 27d. The examples could be greatly multiplied.
95. Zohar 3:156b.
96. Ibid. 12b–13a.
97. Ibid. 260a. Cf. description of the ritual of Torah study on the night of Pentecost cited in note 21.
98. Cf. Zohar 1:92a.
99. Ibid. 2:46a, translated in Tishby, *Wisdom*, pp. 1137–1139. Cf. Zohar 3:90b.
100. Judges 5:21.
101. Cf. Ps. 36:9.
102. Zohar 1:92a–b.
103. On the image of the crown or coronation in kabbalistic sources as a symbol for unification, see Wolfson, "Mystical–Theurgical Dimensions of Prayer," pp. 52–55; idem, "Female Imaging," pp. 292–293; Moshe Idel, "Universalization and Integration: Two Conceptions of Mystical Union in Jewish Mysticism," in *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1989), pp. 35–36, 199 n. 27; Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, pp. 112–16, 118, passim. I have elaborated upon the symbol of the crown in *Through a Speculum*, pp. 357–368.
104. I have here followed the reading of the *editio princeps* (Basel, 1608), as well as several other manuscript witnesses, rather than the text established by Wijnhoven (see note 105) which reads here, "and this is (*we-zehu*) the supernal Garden of Eden" rather than "the splendor (*we-ziv*) of the supernal Garden of Eden."
105. "Sefer ha-Mishkal," pp. 59–60.
106. This precise image is used by Isaac Luria in one of his poems; see Liebes, "Hymns for the Sabbath Meals Composed by the Holy Ari," *Molad*, n.s., 4, 1972, p. 551 (Hebrew).
107. Liebes, "Messiah," pp. 138–145. On the phallogocentric nature of kabbalistic hermeneutics, see also my article on circumcision referred to in note 40.
108. Zohar 2:56b–57a.



109. "Sefer ha-Mishkal," p. 53 (I have followed the variant from MSS Leiden 13 and Parma 1230 cited in the critical apparatus *ad locum*: this conforms to the reading in the Basel edition as well).
110. The orientation of the Zohar is well captured in the following language of Joseph Angelet, *Livnat ha-Sappir*, 56c, corrected by MS British Museum 27,000, fol. 134a: "Come and see: when a person comes close to the Torah, which is called good (*tov*), as it is written, 'I prefer (*tov li*) the teaching you proclaimed' (Ps. 119: 72), he then comes close to the Holy One, blessed be He, who is called good (*tov*), as it is written. 'The Lord is good (*tov*) to all' (ibid., 145:9). Then he comes close to being righteous, as it is written, 'Hail the just man, for he shall fare well (*tov*)' (Isa. 3: 10). And since he is righteous the *Shekhinah* rests upon him and instructs him about the supernal secrets of Torah, for the *Shekhinah* is united only with the good, for the righteous (*tsaddiq*, i.e., the masculine) and righteousness (*tsedeq*, i.e., the feminine) go as one."
111. See note 21.
112. This is the implication of Liebes' study, "How the Zohar Was Written," as well; see esp. pp. 68–71. And see idem, "New Directions in the Study of Kabbala," *Pe'amim*, 50, 1992, pp. 160–161 (Hebrew).
113. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 134.
114. See, for instance, the suggestive remark of Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, p. 250 n. 38, about the need to investigate the "possible connections between the ritual adaptations of Byzantine–Turkish provenance and the full-blown ritual creativity of Safed Kabbalah."
115. I do not intend to deny the correlation of myth and ritual in kabbalistic sources, a hallmark of Scholem's understanding of kabbalistic ritual as a mythic revitalization of rabbinic rites; see Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 29–30; idem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 94–100, 132–133; Isaiah Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy: Essays in Kabbalah and Sabbateanism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), pp. 11–22 (Hebrew); and see discussion in Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, pp. 186–216. The issue I raise, however, concerns the question of valence as reflected in the scholarly treatment of theosophic kabbalah, i.e., is priority to be given to ideas, myths, and symbols (generally the realm of discourse and language) or to the categories of action and experience (the realm of behavior). See Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), pp. 101–103.