Hebraic and Hellenic Conceptions of Wisdom in *Sefer ha-Bahir*

Elliot R. Wolfson
Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University

Abstract This article explores the question of the Hebraic and Hellenic heritage in the Jewish Middle Ages by examining the portrait of wisdom in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, considered by scholars to be the first kabbalistic work to surface in twelfth-century Provence. In more specific terms, I investigate the interplay of two different depictions of wisdom in the *Bahir* against the complicated cultural composite of Hebraism and Hellenism: the mythically oriented characterizations of wisdom as a divine hypostasis and the philosophic characterization of wisdom as the demiurgical Logos. In the bahiric text, the mythic/Hebraic element becomes entwined in philosophic/Hellenic discourse. Many of the scriptural interpretations in the *Bahir* related to the topic of wisdom reflect the conflation of the mythopoeic and the logocentric orientations. Rather than viewing the kabbalistic doctrine of wisdom as the internal, mythic antidote to the external, philosophical ideal, I propose to examine the more nuanced cultural mix that underlies the speculation on wisdom in the bahiric text. By reexamining this issue, then, we reopen the key question of the relationship of philosophy and mysticism in the period when kabbalistic literary creativity flourished.

Scriptural Philosophy: Merging of Hebraism and Hellenism

The tapestry of medieval Jewish intellectual history is woven from a variety of different threads. Beyond the mastery of scriptural and Rabbinic

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texts, the Jewish scholar in the High Middle Ages had to be well-versed in theological discourse, which in varying degrees had its roots in the philosophy of Antiquity. The decisive impact of Islamic culture on Jewish literacy, particularly in the Iberian Peninsula, but to an extent in the Franco-German and Provençal contexts as well,[1] greatly altered the perception of what constituted an educated Jew as the base of knowledge was expanded to include some of the philosophical classics of ancient Greece (principally the works of Plato and Aristotle), which had been rendered into Arabic and later Hebrew translations. The medieval Jewish philosopher, like his Muslim and Christian counterparts, sought to synthesize the scriptural heritage, on the one hand, and philosophical wisdom, on the other. The encounter of Hebraism and Hellenism yielded what Harry Wolfson called the "double doctrine of truth" (1973, 1: 583–618), that is, the belief that there are two equally legitimate modes of expressing the single truth, the scriptural and the philosophical. The hermeneutical principle underlying this theory is predicted on the belief that the truth of Scripture is based on faith or revelation but is nevertheless self-evident and rationally demonstrable. Hence, if the claims of Scripture blatantly contradict the dictates of reason, it is necessary to recast those claims in light of what is accepted as logically true. The narrative formulation of truth characteristic of Scripture was viewed as an alternative, but not contradictory, way of articulating the logical postulates of philosophy. Ultimately, there is one truth, but that truth can express itself in two ways. Furthermore, for the medieval Jewish philosopher, the faculty of reason itself was thought to be divine in nature and thus could not contradict what is found in the book of God's revelation.

This view is the very foundation of the "scriptural philosophy" (in contrast to "pagan Greek philosophy") that characterized the three revealed religions in the Middle Ages. Harry Wolfson employed this term to designate the belief shared by the religious philosophers of the three monotheistic traditions regarding the symbiotic relationship of the two sources of truth, revelation and reason, an orientation that he traces back to Philo of Alexandria (1965: 1–26). Although Philo clearly recognized that the scriptural conception of God contrasts with that of the Greek philosophers,

1. The impact of philosophy on Jewish thinkers was not limited to Europe, as is attested, for instance, in the pronounced influence of Maimonides on Yemenite Jews from the middle of the thirteenth century. See Langermann 1995, and the relevant scholarly literature that he cites in the notes that accompany his study. For the purposes of my own study I will concentrate on the encounter of Hebraism and Hellenism on the European continent. All references to the Babylonian Talmud are from the Romm edition. All references to the Palestinian Talmud are from the Venice edition. All references to *Sefer ha-Bahir* are from the edition of Reuven Margaliot (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978). All references to the *Zohar* are from the 1960 edition of Reuven Margaliot, 3 vols (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook).

that revelation surpasses reason, and that philosophy itself is subordinate to Scripture, he was nevertheless committed to the belief that the content of revelation cannot contradict philosophical truth. This commitment is exemplified in Philo's allegorical hermeneutic, which is predicated on the assumption that philosophical wisdom is the handmaiden of Scripture. The inner meaning of Scripture therefore accords with philosophical conceptions, and any problematic passage is to be interpreted in such a way that the potential conflict would be resolved (H. Wolfson 1947: 87–163). The intrusion of Greek philosophical ideas into Jewish thought in the Middle Ages resulted in the formation of a "religious philosophy" that sought to reconcile Judaism and Hellenism in a manner similar to Philo's own exegetical enterprise (H. Wolfson 1973, 2: 127–28).

A number of medieval Jewish philosophers applied this principle of accommodation, but none as boldly as Maimonides did. In a number of his writings, but perhaps nowhere more forthrightly than in his discussion of the problem of creation versus eternity in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides unabashedly draws the logical conclusion implied in this hermeneutic: If reason necessitated the notion of eternity, it would be incumbent on the philosophic exegete to interpret the biblical account of creation accordingly. However we understand Maimonides' true position with respect to this major theological question,[2] the fact is that he has provided an unambiguous statement regarding the subordination of Scripture to reason, as Spinoza correctly noted in his *Theological-Political Treatise*.[3] We may well grant the point made by Leo Strauss: The discussion of the creation of the world versus its eternity demonstrates that Maimonides affirmed "the inferiority of the intellect in comparison with revelation" since he concludes that it is impossible for one to reach a definitive answer to this question by way of science (1995: 91), and hence scientific reasoning illustrates the possibility of revelation by setting its own limits (Strauss 1965: 160–61; see Green 1993: 84–85). Nevertheless, the fact remains that in this context Maimonides confirms the general hermeneutical principle to which he subscribes: The literal sense of Scripture must be interpreted figuratively if it contradicts a demonstrable philosophical or scientific truth, as in the case of biblical anthropomorphisms.

Strauss perceptively notes that the attempt on the part of medieval rationalists (in Judaism and Islam) to explain revelation philosophically, as well

2. A vast amount of scholarly literature deals with the position of Maimonides regarding the creation of the world. For a balanced survey of this topic that reviews many of the major scholarly discussions, see Fox 1990: 251–96.

3. See Strauss 1965: 123, 148–50, 174–76; Polka 1992: 32–37. For a discussion of Strauss's defense of Maimonides' hermeneutics against the critique of Spinoza, see Green 1993: 77–80.

as the political grounding of the act of philosophizing in the revealed law, are based ultimately on the affirmation of the "pre-philosophic premise of the fact of revelation" (1995: 81–82). Notwithstanding the reasonableness of this position, it still can be argued that the law stands under philosophy even though ostensibly philosophy is legitimated as a source of religious dogma because it is commanded by the law. To express the matter in somewhat different terms, it is not the inadequacy of human reason that necessitates revelation, but rather the rational character of revelation that renders philosophy legitimate.[4] Strauss himself acknowledges that Spinoza may have underplayed the extent to which Maimonides' allegorical orientation was guided by a concern with Scripture, but he is quick to point out that this orientation is based on the supposition that the "original meaning of Scripture is apparently or in fact put aside in favor of philosophemes, i.e. doctrines totally alien to Scripture" (1965: 174). Indeed, even a thinker like Judah Halevi, who passionately opposed the philosophical interpretation of the prophetic-historical basis of Judaism and who drew a sharp contrast between the logical God of Aristotle and the empirical God of Abraham (H. Wolfson 1977, 2: 120–60), would have acquiesced to the hermeneutical claim that nothing in Scripture can contradict reason, as may be gathered, for example, from his acceptance of the incorporeal and transcendent nature of God and the consequent need to explain biblical anthropomorphisms.[5] Revelation supersedes, but does not clash with, rational truth. It is appropriate to consider this hermeneutic as the key to the merging of Hebraism and Hellenism in the Middle Ages.

The significance of the rationalist attempt to harmonize reason and revelation in the history of medieval Jewish thought is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the resistance expressed by several prominent Ashkenazi, Provençal, and Spanish Talmudic scholars and/or pietists to the works of Maimonides in the course of the thirteenth century. Sensing that the integrity of the scriptural foundation of Judaism was potentially undermined by the adoption of the foreign wisdom of the Greeks, the antirationalists directed their attention to the condemnation of Maimoni-

4. Here I take issue with the argument put forth by Strauss (1965: 156–60) that, according to Maimonides, reason needs revelation because the latter alone can offer a solution to the ultimate questions posed by the former, especially concerning the human understanding of God.

5. It is important to emphasize, however, that Halevi's approach is fundamentally different from the allegorical method adopted by the philosophers, for he accepts the literalness of the anthropomorphic images inasmuch as they may be attributed to the imaginal representations of God in space and not to God in his essence. That is, the invisible God appears in concrete, sensible images apprehended by the imagination in the moment of the theophanic experience. See E. Wolfson 1994a: 163–73; Silman 1995: 188, 226, 246–47, 328–30.

des' philosophical interpretation, which led to the eventual burning of his *Moreh Nevukhim* (*Guide to the Perplexed*) in Montpellier in 1240 by the Christian authorities.[6] The actual controversies that evolved in the thirteenth century around Maimonidean rationalism were, of course, more complex as the claims and counterclaims involved subtler perspectives on the volatile issue of the viability of appropriating the external science and wisdom of Hellenic origin. But, for the purposes of this study, it is valid to portray the debate in these stark (if somewhat undialectical) terms because there is no question that the basis for the Maimonidean controversy was the acceptance or rejection of Greek philosophy as a legitimate tool in the formulation of the theological and anthropological beliefs of Judaism. Solomon ibn Adret stated the point explicitly when he wrote in the ban of 1305, which prohibited the study of works on physics and metaphysics (excluding the treatises of Jewish philosophers) by anyone under the age of twenty-five, "Lest these sciences entice them and draw their hearts away from the Torah of Israel, which transcends the wisdom of the Greeks" (cited in Silver 1965: 41). What this leading medieval Rabbinic figure expressed has been reiterated in a critical fashion by Strauss, who noted that traditionally the essential task assigned to the Jew was to expound and follow the teachings of Torah. In a fundamental sense, then, being a Jew and being a philosopher are mutually exclusive: Jerusalem stands in diametric opposition to Athens.[7] One can be a perfectly competent Talmudist without philosophical training or disposition. From a sociological point of view, philosophy has always had a precarious role in the spiritual economy of Judaism (Strauss 1988: 19–20).

Kabbalah and the Hebraic-Hellenic Encounter

Another major domain of medieval Jewish thought, the trend in Jewish esotericism known as the theosophic Kabbalah, was beginning to evolve at precisely the time the Hebraism-Hellenism synthesis and its opposition took root among Jewish intellectuals in the European centers of Jewish learning. The main elements of this esoteric tradition include the imaging of God in terms of ten hypostatic powers (most frequently referred to as the *sefirot*), which are divided into a male-female polarity, and the theurgical

6. See Silver 1965: 136–98; Septimus 1982: 61–103; Dan 1992–93.

7. The essentially foreign nature of philosophy in Judaism is underscored by the opening remark of Julius Guttmann in his comprehensive history of Jewish philosophy: "The Jewish people . . . received philosophy from outside sources, and the history of Jewish philosophy is a history of successive absorptions of foreign ideas which were then transformed and adapted according to specific Jewish points of view" (1964: 3). See Myers 1995: 101.

understanding of normative religious practice such that fulfillment of the traditional precepts increases the stature of the divine structure and, conversely, failure to do so weakens it. Although it is very likely that the roots of Kabbalah lay in much older sources of both Jewish and non-Jewish provenance, it is clear that this multifaceted phenomenon crystallized in a systematic form only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, primarily in Provence and northern Spain. In great measure, this process of crystallization can be explained as a response to the impact of the rationalist tradition on the Rabbinic elite during this time. This influence can be seen in both a negative and a positive way. Negatively, the Kabbalists provided an alternative hermeneutic and conceptual framework to that of the rationalists. It is thus not a coincidence that some Kabbalists played an active and instrumental role in the Maimonidean controversy (see Graetz 1894: 522–45; Silver 1965: 162–98; Septimus 1982: 104–15). The tendency to draw a sharp line separating philosophy and Kabbalah, which is evident in the writings of some of the mystics themselves, is well attested in contemporary scholarship. Philosophical rationalism and kabbalistic mysticism are typically distinguished along the following binary lines: The former represents the external, intrusive, and logocentric, whereas the latter represents the internal, native, and mythopoeic. From this perspective, the literary emergence of Kabbalah appears as a reaction to philosophy, not in the sense proposed by Heinrich Graetz, who maintained that the Kabbalah was an innovation to counteract the spread of Maimonidean rationalism (1894: 547–57), but in the sense that philosophical interpretations of esoteric topics served as the historical catalyst that forced the Kabbalists to respond by composing treatises that established the true, internal sense of the mysteries of the tradition.[8] The response to what may be called the Hellenization of Jewish esotericism is evident especially in the thirteenth-century kabbalistic commentaries on the account of the chariot (*ma'aseh merkavah*) and on the account of the creation (*ma'aseh bere'shit*), which must be seen as the Hebraic corrective of the philosophical approach to these topics adopted by Maimonides.[9]

The influence of philosophy on Kabbalah, however, can be seen from a positive perspective.[10] As one scholar mused, "What was the early Kab-

8. On this matter, I am in agreement with the position of Moshe Idel. See following note.

9. See Idel 1988: 252–53; 1990: 31–50; E. Wolfson 1990–91: 182–83. Also relevant here is the theory of David Neumark that philosophy and Kabbalah represent two parallel disciplines that explain the content of the Rabbinic esoteric traditions of the account of creation and the account of the chariot (1971: 96).

10. A separate question is the appropriateness of the term *philosophy*, in a somewhat less technical sense, to describe theosophic Kabbalah, as one finds, for example, in the title of

balah but a sophisticated philosophic mysticism in Hebraic dress?" (Silver 1965: 163). Indeed, a distinctive feature of the Kabbalah consists of the obvious tendency on the part of Jewish mystics to clothe their insights and experiences in philosophical modes of discourse. The esoteric teachings of the Kabbalah merge in a dynamic, but not always harmonious, way with the philosophical currents that ran through the intellectual landscape of medieval European centers of Jewish communal life and learning. Even if one were to accept the opinion of Gershom Scholem that at the core of theosophic Kabbalah is a Gnostic orientation whose mythologizing character is to be contrasted in an essential way with discursive rational philosophy (1954: 24–25, 32, 34–37; 1969: 88–89, 96–99, 119; 1987: 67; 1974: 87–88, 115), there is little doubt, as Scholem himself readily admitted, that the mythic teachings of the Kabbalists are expressed philosophically, reflecting in particular the language of Neoplatonism (1954: 166, 175, 203; 1987: 221–22, 228, 316–20, 327–30, 363–64, 389).[11] Beyond the issue of description, however, I would add that the forms of experience are frequently

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Adolphe Franck's classic, *La Kabbale ou la philosophie religieuse des Hebreux*, published in 1843, or in David Joel's *Midrash ha-Zohar: Die Religionsphilosophie des Sohar und ihr Verhältnis zur allgemeinen jüdischen Theologie*, published in 1849. See Neumark 1971: 47. Idel detects in these scholars (as well as in Nachman Krochmal and Elijah Benamozegh) an echo of the "Renaissance philosophization of Kabbalah," which privileged the speculative over the practical or experiential (1988: 13–14). This same bias, writes Idel, is found to a degree among modern scholars, including Scholem, for whom "Kabbalah is less a religious phenomenon using philosophical terminology in order to express idiosyncratic views than a philosophy reminiscent of other brands of speculations, albeit expressed in strange terms." Leaving aside the important question regarding whether or not "religious philosophy" as used by the nineteenth-century scholars implied a dichotomization of the speculative and the experiential, with respect to Scholem the issue is more complex. Consider, for example, Scholem's remark concerning the kabbalistic attitude toward prayer: "There is perhaps no clearer sign that Kabbalism is essentially a religious and not a speculative phenomenon" (1954: 33). Idel's portrayal of Scholem is, however, supported by other comments that he makes in his scholarly writings, which tend to emphasize the theoretical over the practical. For discussion of Scholem's somewhat equivocal attitude with regard to this question, see E. Wolfson 1994a: 278–79.

11. It must also be noted that Scholem occasionally acknowledged the mystical element in medieval Jewish philosophical literature. Consider, for example, his description of prophecy as union with the active intellect both in Isma'ili thought and in the philosophy of Maimonides as a form of *unio mystica* (1969: 10); see also 1954: 23–24; 1974: 44, 50–51). On the relation of philosophy and mysticism in Scholem's understanding of medieval Jewish thought, see Schweid 1985: 41–45, 117–32. The position of Scholem on this score has been more recently reaffirmed by Liebes 1993: 1, 4, although the author presents his view as a radical departing from that of Scholem. In brief, Liebes argues that the mythical element did not erupt in the medieval Kabbalah, but rather it received therein a systematic formulation under the influence of philosophy, which led to a weakening and devaluation of the personal and vital nature of Jewish myth. Philosophical concepts, therefore, had an instrumental role in changing the shape of the myth.

comprehensible only when the formative impact of philosophy on the mystics' way of being in the world is taken into account. Experiences of God, self, and cosmos, attested in medieval kabbalistic sources, were consistently and recurringly mediated by philosophical concepts.[12] Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that within the lifeworld of the Kabbalists in Provence and northern Spain no radical differentiation between mythos and Logos exists. To be sure, the expression of truth in narrative form is not treated as equivalent to the expression of truth in logically deduced propositions. My point is, however, that even in the case of Kabbalists such as Naḥmanides, who explicitly deny the validity of reason as a tool to ascertain esoteric wisdom, the nature of the theosophic structures and the experiences thereof were conditioned by philosophical conceptions and assumptions based on rational and scientific principles accepted by intellectuals of the medieval period. It is one thing to deny rhetorically the appropriateness of reason, but it is quite another to ignore the ontological and epistemological assumptions that shape one's mode of being in the world.

The historical/textual influences of philosophical sources on medieval Kabbalah have been previously discussed in scholarly literature, but there has been little examination of these influences in terms of the larger question of the Hebraic and Hellenic heritage in the Jewish Middle Ages. No sustained attempt has been made to study the complex and composite nature of these different cultural matrices as they intersect and interact in kabbalistic literature. In this essay, I explore this question by examining the portrait of *ḥokhmah* in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, considered by scholars to be the first kabbalistic work that surfaced in twelfth-century Provence.[13] The centrality of the figure of wisdom in the theosophy formulated in the *Bahir* and expanded in much greater detail in subsequent kabbalistic texts justifies the use of the phrase "sophianic mysticism"[14] to characterize this major current of Jewish esotericism. In more specific terms, I investigate the interplay of two different depictions of *ḥokhmah* in the *Bahir* against the complicated cultural composite of Hebraism and Hellenism: the mythically oriented characterizations of *ḥokhmah* as a divine hypostasis and the philosophic characterization of wisdom as the demiurgical Logos. The first of these

12. A good example of this is the experience of *devequt*, conjunction with the divine, which involved communion or union. The kabbalistic understanding of *devequt* clearly betrayed the influence of philosophical sources. See Idel 1988: 42–49.

13. For a list of relevant scholarly discussions regarding the literary provenance of the *Bahir*, see E. Wolfson 1995a: 187–88 nn. 1–2. See also Abrams 1994: 1–54, and the comprehensive bibliography on 293–336.

14. I have borrowed the expression from Versluis 1994: 157. Note Scholem's use of the phrase "mysticism of the Sophia" to refer to the doctrine of *ḥokhmah* in the *Bahir* (1987: 88).

depictions falls under the rubric of Hebraism in contrast to the second, which falls under the rubric of Hellenism. By applying the term *Hebraism* to the mythic representations of *ḥokhmah*, I am deliberately eschewing Scholem's theory regarding the Gnostic origin of the bahiric images of Sophia (Scholem 1987: 91–97; 1991: 162–70). In particular, Scholem related the twofold *ḥokhmah* either explicitly mentioned or alluded to in the *Bahir* to the double doctrine of Sophia in Valentinian Gnosticism.[15] I do not wish to debate the merit of describing medieval Kabbalah in terms of the syncretistic Gnosticism of late antiquity. Let me point out, however, that Scholem himself equivocated on this issue and at times intimated that the Gnostic motifs that made their way into the *Bahir* and later kabbalistic compositions may have originated in an internal Jewish tradition parallel to the classical systems of Gnosticism, which he even calls on occasion "theosophic aggadah" (Scholem 1987: 91, 234; 1991: 158). Interestingly enough, in one context, Scholem argued that the feminine images of the *Shekhinah* and the identification of the latter with Torah/wisdom either "were taken from the legacy of Gnostic speculation" or "they took shape in course of the creative reflection of anonymous Jewish God-seekers of the twelfth century upon the meaning of the images of their own tradition" (1991: 170–71).[16]

With respect to the question of the provenance of the mythopoeic image of wisdom in the *Bahir*, I adopt a functionalist as opposed to an historicist perspective. That is, I am not concerned with tracing the historical origins of the concept since it may be well-nigh impossible to establish this fact with any certainty. I am concerned with the way that the term functions in the given intellectual environment, which is reflected in a specific literary context. From that perspective the mythical portrayal of *ḥokhmah* in the *Bahir* should be classified as Hebraic. Even in its most extreme and explicitly transgressive form, which is discussed in more detail below, the dual depiction of *ḥokhmah* as the father and daughter must be perceived as an exegetical and homiletical elaboration of the ancient Jewish teaching regarding wisdom/Torah. In the late Second Temple and early Rabbinic periods, it can be argued, the identification of Torah as *ḥokhmah* most likely

15. Briefly, this doctrine is predicated on the idea that the last of the divine potencies or Aeons, Sophia, has two manifestations, one connected to the Pleroma or the divine pneumatic realm of light and one that descends as a result of a crisis (related to Sophia's generative activity without her male consort) into the material world of darkness from which she must be liberated and restored to her source. See Jonas 1963: 181–97; Good 1987: xiv–xv, 16–17, 76–78.

16. The situation is rendered even more complex by the fact that the Valentinian doctrine of Sophia itself may have been derived from Jewish Wisdom literature. See MacRae 1970 and Rudolph 1980.

reflected a merging of the Hebraic notion of wisdom, itself perhaps betraying some influence of the Hellenistic concept of Sophia, and the doctrine of the Logos derived from Stoic philosophy.[17] By the Middle Ages, however, this idea is so fully assimilated in Jewish sources that its mark of identification is Hebraic with all traces of Hellenism obscured. Surely, for the medieval Kabbalists there is no question of appropriating a "foreign" concept when they developed the aggadic notion that Torah is God's wisdom.

By contrast, the cosmological conception of wisdom as the demiurgical Logos is more aligned with the Hellenic orientation expressed in medieval Jewish philosophic sources, especially of a Neoplatonic orientation, whose terminological and conceptual influence is certainly detectable in the final redactional strata of the *Bahir*. In the bahiric text, the mythic/Hebraic element has thus become entwined in philosophic/Hellenic discourse. Even though the philosophical depiction of *ḥokhmah* is not fully developed in the *Bahir*, it is misleading to conclude that the ideas expressed in this document are "far removed . . . from the philosophic conceptions that prevailed in the Middle Ages" (Scholem 1987: 67). On the contrary, many of the scriptural interpretations in the *Bahir* related to the topic of *ḥokhmah* reflect the conflation of the mythopoeic and the logocentric orientations. Rather than viewing the kabbalistic doctrine of *ḥokhmah* as just the internal, mythic (or what Scholem would have called Gnostic) antidote to the external, philosophical ideal, it is also important to appreciate the more nuanced cultural mix that underlies the speculation on wisdom in the bahiric text. By reexamining this issue, then, we open the key question of the relationship of philosophy and mysticism in the period when kabbalistic literary creativity flourished. The particular analysis of the motif of *ḥokhmah* provides a window through which to view the central question of the impact of Hebraism and Hellenism on this seminal chapter of medieval Jewish literary and religious culture.

Secrecy of the Gift: Mythopoeic Depiction of Wisdom/Torah/Shekhinah

The most prevalent mythical description of wisdom that occurs in the *Bahir* is that of the feminine persona that complements the masculine. In line with classical Rabbinic texts, the bahiric author identifies Torah and *ḥokhmah*, which he further associates with the *Shekhinah*, the feminine hypostasis of the divine pleroma, also characterized as the wellspring (*berekhah*) of God's blessing (*berakhah*) (*Sefer ha-Bahir* secs. 3, 54–55, 63–65,

17. For a list of some of the relevant scholarly discussions of the identification of Torah and *ḥokhmah*, see E. Wolfson 1995b: 123–24 n. 1.

77–78, 105).[18] The structure underlying this myth is expressed frequently in the *Bahir* in terms of the symbolic triad of father, daughter, and son (in some passages the latter is identified as Solomon).[19] In a primeval state, the daughter is integrated fully in the father, together constituting the androgynous form of divine wisdom, but in a secondary stage the daughter splits off from the father. In order to restore the original unity, the daughter is given to the son, for she can no longer be united with the father.[20] The dynamic of the mythic structure is particularly transparent in the following passage, which appears early on in the text: "There is no beginning (*re'shit*) except for wisdom (*ḥokhmah*), as it says, 'The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord' (Psalm 111:10), and there is no wisdom except for blessing, as it says,[21] the Lord blessed Solomon, and it is written, 'The Lord had given wisdom to Solomon' (1 Kings 5:26). This may be compared to a king

18. See Scholem 1987: 70, 92; Stern 1991: 221; E. Wolfson 1995b: 11–12. In *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 142, which is part of the section in which the ten divine sayings are delineated, wisdom is identified as the second of these hypostases.

19. The relationship of the father and the daughter, the upper and lower wisdom, is a repeated theme in later kabbalistic literature, especially prominent in the zoharic corpus. Of the many passages that could have been cited, I mention only one from *Zohar* 1: 156b (*Sitre Torah*) for it clearly draws on the language of the *Bahir*: "The desire of the father is constantly towards his daughter, for the daughter, his beloved, is always near him since she is the only daughter amongst the six sons." An even more striking repetition of the structure underlying the bahiric myth is found in *Tiqqune Zohar*, "When [Solomon] ascended in his kingship, it said concerning him, 'Solomon's wisdom was greater [than the wisdom of all the Kedemites and than all the wisdom of the Egyptians]' (1 Kings 5: 10). It increased until it reached that place whence it was taken, the place of the supernal wisdom, for he is the wisdom in the beginning and she is the wisdom in the end" (Margaliot 1978: sec. 64, 95b). Cf. ibid., sec. 21, 44b, where the elevation of the *Shekhinah* to the supernal *yod* or *ḥokhmah*, which is designated as the father, is related exegetically to the verse, "The Lord founded the earth by wisdom (Proverbs 3: 19)."

20. The relationship of the father and daughter is also expressed in the theosophic reworking of the aggadic motif (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 16b) regarding the daughter given to Abraham in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 78. See Scholem 1987: 87–88; 1991: 168. Consider also the parabolic reference to the signs (*simanim*) of the king and of his daughter in *Sefer ha-Bahir* sec. 93, and the parable in sec. 156 about the prince who hides the riches of his father's house in the inner chamber where his bride is hidden. In that context, the phallic potency is identified with the east, which stores its semen in the feminine west. On the occultation of the feminine in order to protect her from Satan, compare the parable of the king and his daughter in sec. 162. The restoration of the original unity of the feminine in the masculine is also implied in the symbol of the crown ascending to the head in sec. 91. (Compare also the depiction of the precious pearl, which served as a crown, in sec. 72.) The use of this image to depict the masculine transformation of the feminine became a standard motif in subsequent kabbalistic literature. See E. Wolfson 1994a: 275 n. 14, 362 n. 123, 363; 1995b: 116–20, 231–32 n. 198. I have also explored this symbolism in the writings of Haside Ashkenaz in the concluding part of "Sacred Space and Mental Iconography: Imago Templi and Contemplation in Rhineland Jewish Pietism," to appear in the *festschrift* for Baruch Levine.

21. As various commentators have pointed out, what immediately follows is not a direct citation of a biblical verse. See Scholem 1923: 6 n. 2; *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 3 n. 6.

who gave his daughter in marriage to his son, and he gave her to him as a gift,[22] and he said to him: 'Do with her as you wish' " (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 3).

Wisdom is thus compared parabolically to the gift bestowed by the king upon his son. But what in the nature of this bestowal of wisdom necessitates its being characterized as the giving of a gift? The clue is provided in the concluding remark: "Do with her as you wish." To appreciate the intent of this comment, it would be useful to recall Jacques Derrida's reflection on the nature of the gift as that which opens the circle of economy, the circular exchange of goods, so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry, for "the *given* of the gift (*that which* one gives, *that which* is given, the gift as given thing or as act of donation) must not come back to the giving (let us not already say to the subject, to the donor). It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. . . . It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible" (1992: 7).

Derrida's account of the gift can be well applied to the bahiric context. The prince is given the princess as a gift by the king, which signifies that the act of giving is not a symmetrical relation: Nothing the son does can reciprocate the action of the father, for there is no exchange of gifts, no reciprocal giving and taking. Moreover, the son who receives the daughter as gift cannot donate this gift to another; the daughter belongs exclusively to the son to whom she has been given as a gift. Finally, in the absence of reciprocity, the recipient of the gift assumes complete control and mastery over that which is given; in the act of giving, the donor relinguishes all claims of ownership and possession with respect to the gift. In the bahiric passage, the power of entitlement is of a decidedly sexual nature—thus, the prince is instructed by his father to do as he pleases with the princess. Indeed, the symbolic import of the parable blatantly contradicts the normative strictures of biblical law, for the taboo of siblings mating (Leviticus 18:9) is undermined by the relationship that is described between the son and the daughter of the king. The secret alluded to here, which later Kabbalists relate to the mystery of illicit sexual relations (*sitre ʿarayot*) mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud (Ḥagigah 11b), is that the sexual prohibitions necessary to preserve the fabric of human society can be transgressed in a symbolic manner in the divine realm (see Stern 1991: 222). In that sense, the gift of wisdom is truly the impossible, that which defies the limits of

22. Here I follow the reading in ms. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 2b (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 118), *bematanah*, "as a gift," rather than the reading in other versions, including the edition of Margaliot, *beḥatunah*, "in the wedding."

temporal possibility. The only time of the gift, therefore, is the present, the paradoxical instant that is an effraction in the circularity of time, the repetitious pattern of the natural cycle (Derrida 1992: 9).

The transgressive element discloses the essential nexus of gift and secrecy. Again, Derrida's language is helpful, for he notes that the paradox of the gift (revealed in the thought of Jan Patocka) is such that it is always "the gift of something that remains inaccessible, unpresentable, and as a consequence secret. . . . The gift is the secret itself, if the secret *itself* can be told. Secrecy is the last word of the gift which is the last word of the secret" (Derrida 1995: 29–30). The very essence of the gift is linked to secrecy, for if the nature of the gift is revealed to the one who is to receive the gift, then the giving of the gift is annulled. To apply this insight to the specific context of the *Bahir*, the giving of the daughter to the son as a gift on the part of the father is the secret of the emanation of divine wisdom. The transgressive nature of the gift precludes the disclosure of the secret. Mystical gnosis, therefore, is predicated on the attribution of an incestuous relationship to God: What is sexually forbidden in the human domain can alone symbolically express the mythic truth of the *hieros gamos* in the divine.[23]

The giving of the gift entails the intentional transgression of a sexual norm, implied as well in the following passage:

> What is his heart (*libbo*)? He said to him: If Ben Zoma is on the outside,[24] then you are with him! The heart (*lev*) refers to the thirty-two[25] and they are hidden, and by means of them the world was created.[26] What are the thirty-two? He said to him: The thirty-two paths. This may be compared to a king who was in the innermost of his chambers. The number of chambers was thirty-two and each chamber had a path. Is it fitting for this king to gather everything into his chambers by way of his paths? You would say: No! Is it fitting for him to reveal his pearls, treasures, precious things, and gems? You would say: No! What did he do? He touched the princess and comprised all the paths in her and in her garments. The one who wants to enter should look here. She was married to the king and she was also given to him as a gift. On account of his love for her, he sometimes calls her "my sister," for they are from one place, and sometimes he calls her "my daughter," for she is his daughter, and sometimes he calls her "my mother." (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 63)[27]

23. I owe the formulation of this insight regarding the symbolic meaning of incest to Neumann 1954: 16–17.

24. Based on the statement in Babylonian Talmud, Ḥagigah 15a.

25. That is, the numerical value of the consonants of the word *lev* equals thirty-two, *lamed* (30) and *bet* (2).

26. *Sefer Yeṣirah* 1:1.

27. I have corrected the text according to ms. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 18a (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 140). See Scholem 1987: 168–69; 1991: 162–63.

The heart of God, associated in other bahiric passages with the feminine,[28] is related specifically to the thirty-two paths of wisdom mentioned at the beginning of *Sefer Yeṣirah*. What is most significant to note in this text is the intricate use of gender symbols to convey the process of emanation of the feminine potency from the masculine. Again, we see that, in open contradiction to the normative sexual taboo, the king "touches" his own daughter, an obvious euphemism for sexual intercourse, and thereby comprises the thirty-two paths within her.[29] The incestuous relationship is conveyed as well by the image of the daughter being given to the king as a gift, which is contrasted with the image of her being married to him. It is likely, moreover, that the paths contained within the feminine potency are related to the phallus.[30] Ontologically, the being of the female is constituted by the phallic energies derived from the male; indeed, the female comprises within herself the thirty-two paths of the masculine wisdom. Finally, based on an earlier midrashic pericope, the love relationship between the king and the princess is construed in terms of three feminine images: sister, daughter, and mother.[31] The image of sister, the reader is told explicitly, indicates that the two derive from the same source and the image of daughter suggests that the female comes from the male. The image of mother at first blush would seem to signify that in some sense the male comes from or is sustained by the female. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that even the image of the mother does not challenge the ontic dependency of the female on the male, for in fact the three feminine images depict different levels or kinds of love that the

28. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 97, 98 (in that context the heart of the tree is identified as the citron, for it comprises the thirty-two paths of mysterious wisdom), 106, 134 (in that context the heart is identified as the glory, based on the numerical equivalence of *lev* and *kavod*). See Scholem 1987: 92; 1991: 162.

29. In light of this obvious sexual innuendo, I cannot agree with Scholem's observation that in the *Bahir* the "explicitly sexual sphere of female symbolism is here quite clearly and visibly rejected" (1991: 163). Scholem notes one exception, a passage that refers to the feminine as the matron of the king (see sec. 131), but he neglects to note the sexual aspects of other feminine images, including most significantly the relationship of the father and the daughter. Incest is also implied in the parable in sec. 181, which explains the sexual praxis related to the Sabbath: The king invites his sons to join him in rejoicing on the day of his joy with his bride.

30. Compare the parable of king's garden with thirty-two paths in sec. 92. The phallic connotation of the paths is suggested by the statement that the king utters to the guard appointed over the paths: "Guard them and traverse them each day, and at any time that you tread through them peace will be upon you." I assume that "peace" (*shalom*) also has a phallic connotation in this context as it does elsewhere in the *Bahir* and other kabbalistic writings. See below, note 42. On the notion of the thirty-two paths and the forms that guard them, see also *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 98.

31. See *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* (Mandelbaum 1962: 1: 3, 7); *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 3:21; *Shemot Rabbah* 52:5; *Bemidbar Rabbah* 12:8; *Midrash Tanḥuma'*, Pequde, sec. 8, 133 (Buber 1946).

king has for the princess, as may be deduced from the midrashic tradition that served as the basis for this remark. The original parable, linked exegetically to the verse "O maidens of Zion, go forth and gaze upon King Solomon wearing the crown that his mother gave him on his wedding day, on his day of bliss" (Song of Songs 3:11), is offered as a way of delineating three levels of God's love for Israel, the highest one being that of the love of the son for the mother. Clearly, the intent here is not to imply that Israel is the mother of God, but only that God can love Israel even as a son loves his mother. The same explanation should be applied to the bahiric text, although the referents in that context are the king and the princess.[32]

The imagery of incest between father and daughter is employed explicitly in another passage. In this context, the divine attributes of mercy and judgment are referred to respectively as silver (*kesef*) and gold (*zahav*), based on the verse, "Silver is Mine and gold is Mine—says the Lord of Hosts" (Haggai, 2:8). Focusing on the word *zahav*, the reader is told that the attribute of judgment is called by this name because it is said to comprise three attributes signified by the three letters that make up the word *zahav*, the masculine (*zakhar*) symbolized by the *zayin*, the feminine or the soul (*neshamah*) symbolized by the letter *he'* (since there are five names for the soul[33] and the letter *he'* has the numerical value of five), and the foundation (*qiyyum*) of the other two designated by the *bet* (since the numerical value of this letter is two and the foundation is the attribute that unites the male and the female) (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 53. See Scholem 1991: 165–66). The function of the *bet* is further elucidated by the following parable:

> This may be compared to a king who had a good, pleasant, beautiful, and perfect daughter, and he married her to a prince. He clothed her, crowned her, adorned her, and gave her to him for a lot of money. Is it possible for the king to sit outside his house? You would say: No! Is it possible for him to sit all day with her constantly? You would say: No! What does he do? He places a window between himself and her, and whenever the daughter needs her father or the father the daughter, they join together through the window, as it is written, "The royal princess, her dress embroidered with golden mountings, is led inside to the king" (Psalm 45: 14–15). (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 54).[34]

32. Elsewhere in the *Bahir* (sec. 105) the mother is depicted as the source of the seven hypostases, which are rendered symbolically as the seven sons or the seven days of creation. See also the parabolic use of the symbol of mother to characterize the divine glory in sec. 131. It is not uncommon in the mythic imagination for the mother and daughter to be identified as one persona. See the discussion of the identification of Demeter and Kore in the Eleusian mysteries in Neumann 1963: 142, 197, 305–9, 332, and Kerényi 1967: 32–33, 130.

33. The five names are *neshamah*, *ruaḥ*, *ḥayyah*, *yeḥidah*, and *nefesh*. Cf. *Bereshit Rabba* (Albeck and Theodor 1965: 14: 9, 132).

34. The bahiric passage is based on a midrashic parable in *Shemot Rabbah* 33: 1. See Scholem

It would also appear from this tradition-complex that the basic myth involved the division of an androgynous male into a male (*zayyin*) and a female (*he'*) connected in turn by their foundation (*bet*). It is likely that "foundation," *qiyyum*, has a phallic connotation (see Liebes 1976: 358 n. 13). The implication of the mythic structure is disclosed by the parable: The king gives his daughter to a prince, but he continues to unite with her indirectly by way of the window. Despite the separation necessitated by the unfolding of the cosmic process, the father and daughter must have a mechanism to unite; these unifications reflect the fact that father and daughter are ontically of the same nature. The father-daughter incest, therefore, functions as a symbol to denote the sacred union above, which entails the reintegration of the lower and upper wisdom.

The giving of the gift is in defiance of the natural order and social convention. The point is substantiated by another passage in which the mythical conception of wisdom is placed by the redactor of the text in a somewhat different context:

> There is no judgment if there is no wisdom, for it says, "The Lord had given wisdom to Solomon" (1 Kings 5:26), and afterwards he judged the case [of the two mothers and the one infant] correctly, as it says, "When all Israel heard the decision that the king had rendered, they stood in awe of the king; for they saw that he possessed divine wisdom to execute justice" (3:28).
>
> What is the wisdom that the Holy One, blessed be he, gave to Solomon? Solomon bears the name of the Holy One, blessed be he, as it says,[35] "every Solomon mentioned in the Song of Songs is holy except for one." The Holy One, blessed be he, said: Since your name is like the name of my glory, I will marry you to my daughter. But she is married! Let us say that she was bestowed upon him as a gift, as it is written, "The Lord had given wisdom to Solomon." [The nature of that wisdom] is not explained. Where, then, is it explained? In the continuation when it is written, "they saw that he possessed divine wisdom to execute justice." This refers to the very wisdom that God had given him,[36]

1923: 40 n. 2; 1987: 170; Margaliot's note in his edition of *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 54 n. 3; E. Wolfson 1995b: 11–12. For a different interpretation of this parable, see Scholem 1991: 164.

35. Babylonian Talmud, Shavu'ot 35b. According to some versions of the bahiric text, e.g., ms. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 8a (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 140), the Rabbinic comment is transmitted in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan. Concerning this Talmudic text and the possibility that it preserves an older theosophic tradition, see E. Wolfson 1995a: 205 n. 71.

36. Ms. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 8b (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 142) reads: "The very wisdom that was given to God." Scholem prefers this reading and suggests that it was changed in later manuscripts because of the bold theological implication regarding God's union with the feminine *ḥokhmah* (1987: 92). I am not convinced, however, that this alternative reading actually makes better sense in context.

> which is with him in his chamber and in his midst to execute justice. What is [the meaning of] "to execute justice?" Whenever a person executes justice, the wisdom of God is in his midst, to assist him and to draw him near. If not, it keeps him at a distance and even punishes him, as it is written, "I, for my part, will discipline you" (Leviticus 26:28). (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 64–65)

The nature of the gift is explicated in this passage by the contrast that is made between betrothal and the giving of the gift. Wisdom, which is identified as the hypostatic daughter of God, is already married, but she can still be given as a gift to Solomon. Reflecting on this remark, Scholem surmised that since wisdom is already married in the upper spheres, she was offered as a gift to Solomon in the terrestrial world (1987: 92).[37] I would add that this bestowal can take place because of the ontic resemblance between Solomon and God, a resemblance that is depicted in terms of the image of Solomon bearing the name of God. The meaning of this remark can be decoded only in light of two Talmudic traditions: First, the name of God is "peace" (*shalom*) (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 10b, Sanhedrin 55b), and, second, the etymology of Solomon (in Hebrew: *shelomo*) mentioned in Song of Songs is *melekh sheha-shalom shelo*, "the king to whom peace belongs" (Babylonian Talmud, Shavu'ot 35b). The more specific theosophic connotation is related to the fact that in a number of bahiric passages the word *shalom* functions as a technical term to designate the attribute of God that corresponds to the phallus (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 11, 59, 75, 92). This is certainly the import of the statement that the name of Solomon is like the name of the glory. We may deduce from this passage that the technical term for the divine glory, *kavod*, itself has a phallic connotation.[38] Now we can better understand the comment concerning the fact that *ḥokhmah* was already married and thus had to be given to Solomon as a gift. This does not imply, as Scholem explained, that *ḥokhmah* is married to the divine potency in the upper sphere and therefore must be given to Solomon as a gift in the terrestrial realm. On the contrary, the feminine wisdom is given as a gift to Solomon precisely because he symbolically represents the masculine potency of the divine.[39]

The interpretation of *kavod* I have offered is supported by a series of passages wherein the nature of the divine glory is explicated in detail:

37. Scholem's interpretation is accepted by Stern (1991: 222).

38. Compare the use of the term *kavod* in *Sefer ha-Bahir* sec. 50, analyzed in E. Wolfson 1995a: 209 n. 85.

39. I thus take issue with Scholem's remark that the Solomon to whom Sophia is given as a gift is "the Solomon of history and not a symbolic Solomon" (Scholem 1987: 92). In fact, the bahiric parable (in both secs. 3 and 65) makes little sense if one does not appreciate the symbolic character of Solomon.

> What is [the meaning of] "and His glory filled all the earth" (Isaiah 6:3)? The earth that was created on the first day, which is above corresponding to the land of Israel, was filled from the glory of the Lord. And what is it? Wisdom, as it is written, "The wise shall obtain glory" (Proverbs 3:35), and it says, "Blessed is the glory of the Lord from his place" (Ezekiel 3:12).
>
> And what is the glory of the Lord? This may be compared to a king who had the queen in his room and all his troops delighted[40] in her, and she had sons who came every day to greet the king and to bless him. They said to him: Our mother, where is she? He said to them: You cannot see her now. They said: Blessed is she in whatever place she is.
>
> Why is it written "from his place"? On account of the fact that there is no one who knows his place (Babylonian Talmud, *Ḥagigah* 13b). This may be compared to a daughter of a king who came from afar and they did not know whence she came. When they saw that she was a woman of valor, beautiful and worthy in all her deeds, they said: This one certainly was taken from the side of light, for her deeds illumine the world. They asked her: From where are you? She said: From my place. They said: If so, the men of your place are great. Blessed are you and blessed is your place.
>
> Is this glory of the Lord not one of his hosts? And is it not inferior? Why, then, do they bless it? To what may this be compared? To a man who has a beautiful garden, and outside the garden and close to it there is a beautiful field.[41] . . . At the beginning he irrigated his garden and the water went all over the garden but not upon that field that is not connected, even though everything is one. Therefore he opened a place for it and irrigated it separately. (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 130–33)[42]

The opening exegesis of Isaiah 6: 3 allows the author of the bahiric text to express the idea that the feminine potency, symbolized by the supernal earth that corresponds to the land of Israel, is filled with the masculine glory of the Lord.[43] In the continuation of the text, however, there is an apparent gender reversal: The glory is compared parabolically to the matron

40. The Hebrew translated as "delighted" is *mishta'asha'in*. On the sexual connotation of this and related words, see E. Wolfson 1995b: 70–71, and further references to both primary and secondary sources given on 190–92 nn. 175–80. Compare the use of this term in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 5.

41. On the feminine aspect of the field, with a decidedly sexual component connected to the motif of walking, compare *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 62. See Scholem 1991: 162. On the image of the field as a metaphor for the feminine in classical Greek writings, see duBois 1988: 39–64. See also O'Flaherty 1980: 29–30.

42. For discussion of this passage in light of Gnostic symbolism, see Scholem 1991: 166–67.

43. Cf. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 95–96. In that context, the feminine potency is associated with the following images: the earth that is hewn from heaven, the throne of glory, the precious stone, the sea of wisdom, and the blue thread in the ritual fringed garment.

of the king who is hidden from her children. The feminized portrayal of the glory is enhanced by the second parable wherein the glory is compared to the princess who is exiled from the world of light and inhabits this world of darkness that she illumines (see Scholem 1987: 94–96; 1991: 166–67). Notwithstanding the overtly feminine images of the glory as matron, mother, and daughter, the ontological status of the glory is such that it is both masculine and feminine because the latter is ultimately derived from and dependent on the former. The point is underscored in the final section, in which the glory is compared to a field: Just as the field is unified with yet separate from the garden, so the feminine potency of the divine is distinct from yet unified with the other masculine potencies. The same symbolic structure is expressed in different imagery in another bahiric passage, which is an exposition of the esoteric significance of the letter *dalet*: "The students [of Rabbi Amorai] asked him: What is the *dalet*? He said to them: To what may this be compared? To ten kings who were in one place and all of them were wealthy. One of them was wealthy, but not like the rest of them. Even though his wealth was great, he is called poor (*dal*) in relation to the wealthy ones" (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 27). By an obvious play on the words *dalet* and *dal*, the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet comes to symbolize the divine gradation that is impoverished. In this context, the impoverished gradation is not distinguished in terms of gender from the other potencies that are depicted parabolically as kings. However, in subsequent kabbalistic literature, in some cases based on this very passage, the impoverished one, symbolized by the *dalet*, is associated more explicitly with the feminine *Shekhinah*. The state of poverty is linked essentially to the character of femininity, for the female is portrayed in kabbalistic literature as that which has nothing of her own but only what she receives from the beneficent male. The feminine quality of the *dalet* is implicit in the *Bahir* itself (secs. 28, 36), for there is something distinctive about the potency symbolized by that letter inasmuch as it is both wealthy like the other potencies and poor in relation to them. Structurally, this parallels the image of the field that is connected to yet separate from the garden. The ontic condition of the feminine is that she is a weakened or inferior male.[44]

It may be concluded that, according to the myth proffered in the bahiric text, the upper wisdom is valorized as male and the lower wisdom as female, but even the latter is ultimately masculine. The point is epitomized in the parable of the seven sons of the king:

44. Scholem suggests that the twofold description of the one king who is wealthy but poor signifies the active and passive elements in the *Shekhinah* (1991: 165). Although my formulation differs from that of Scholem, in substance my position resonates with his.

> He sat and expounded for them, "There is the *Shekhinah* below as there is a *Shekhinah* above."[45] And what is this *Shekhinah*? I would say that it is the light that emanates from the first light, which is wisdom. This one, too, encompasses everything, as it says, "all the earth is filled with his glory" (Isaiah 6: 3). What is its function here? To what may be this compared? To a king who has seven sons and he placed each and every one in his place. He said to them: Sit one atop the other! The lowest one said: I will not sit below and I will not be far from you! He said to them: Behold, I will rotate and I will see you all day. This is the meaning of "all the earth is filled with his glory." Why is he amongst them? In order to establish and to sustain them. (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 171; see Scholem 1991: 173)

As we have seen, the lower *Shekhinah*, the light that emanates from the first light or wisdom, the upper *Shekhinah*, is often described in feminine images. Here, however, the lower *Shekhinah* is treated parabolically as one of the seven sons of the king. The ontic containment of the feminine in the masculine is reinforced in the continuation of this passage. The seven sons are related to the "seven holy forms," which are the seven limbs that make up the divine image with which Adam was created. The limbs are delineated as follows: two thighs, two hands, the phallus, and the head. The seventh is found in the woman who was constructed from the side (or rib) of the man (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 172; see E. Wolfson 1994b: 171).

The primordial androgyny is further illustrated by a second parable in the same context: "To what may this be compared? To a king who decided to plant in his garden nine male trees, and all of them were to be palm-trees. He said: If all of them will be of the same species, they will not be able to exist. What did he do? He planted a citron-tree (*'etrog*) amongst them, and it is one of the nine that arose in his mind to be male, but the citron is female" (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 172; see Scholem 1991: 169). The imagery employed in this parable is derived from the ritual of the four species (based on Leviticus 23:40) that each Jew is obligated to take on the festival of Tabernacles. The two central species are the palm-branch (*lulav*) and the citron (*'etrog*), which correspond symbolically to the masculine and

45. Based on a passage in *Seder Rabbah di-Bereshit*; see Schäfer, Schleuter, and van Mutius 1981: secs. 440, 745: "Just as his *Shekhinah* is above so it is below." See Scholem 1987: 178–79; 1991: 173, 296 n. 59. On the distinction between the lower and upper *Shekhinah*, see also the magical text *Sidre deShimusha Rabba weSidre Hekhalot*, in A. Jellinek, *Bet Midrash*, previously cited by Scholem (1923: 124 n. 2). Scholem's statement that, according to the doctrine of the *sefirot*, the double *Shekhinah* refers respectively to the third and tenth of the *sefirot*, is valid for later kabbalistic texts, but it does not reflect the approach of the bahiric passage. As I have argued in the body of this paper, in the *Bahir* itself, the upper *Shekhinah* is wisdom or the first light and the lower *Shekhinah* is the light that emanated from that light, the divine glory that is immanent in the world and the aspect of wisdom that is imaged as feminine. The assumption here is that the divine comprises eight powers, the seven sons and the king.

feminine attributes of the divine. The tree that is female was initially one of the males, which symbolizes that the female aspect of the divine pleroma, represented by the image of the garden (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 5, 6, 23, 92, 133), is itself part of the masculine. The point is emphasized once again in the continuation of the *Bahir* where the citron is associated symbolically with the beloved described in Song of Songs 6:10: "What is the splendor (*hadar*)? That is, the splendor of the All (*hadar ha-kol*), and that is the splendor of the Song of Songs concerning which it says, 'Who is it that shines through like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, radiant as the sun, awesome as bannered hosts' (Song of Songs 6: 10). This refers to the feminine and on account of her the female was taken from Adam, for the upper and lower worlds could not exist without the female" (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 173).[46]

Significantly, the feminine potency, related symbolically to the citron, is designated by the expression "splendor of the All," *hadar ha-kol*. Beyond the obvious connection to the biblical idiom, *peri 'eṣ hadar* (Leviticus 23:40), interpreted already in targumic and classical Rabbinic literature as a reference to the citron,[47] this phrase connotes that the feminine is the glory or majesty of the masculine designated by the term *kol*, the All.[48] The splendor of the phallus is indeed the female that is taken from the male inasmuch as the process of creation only unfolds through the agency of the feminine principle. Here the kabbalistic symbol accords with a view expressed in any number of mythical complexes wherein the feminine is associated with the patterns of creation and the rhythms of the natural world. Ontically, however, the female is part of the male.[49]

46. My translation follows the reading in ms. Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 23b (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 202). See Scholem 1987: 142.

47. See Targum Onkelos and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan *ad locum*; *Sifra*, 'Emor, 16:4; *Leviticus Rabbah* 30:8; Palestinian Talmud, Sukkah 3:7; Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 35a.

48. Scholem suggests that the expression *hadar ha-kol* may be an ellipsis of *hadar kol ha-'illanot*, "the splendor of all the trees," and thus it has the signification of *hadar 'al ha-kol*, the "most splendid of all" (Scholem 1923: 126 n. 3). Scholem even suggests that the word *kol* in the expression *hadar ha-kol* may be a technical name for the last *sefirah*, the *Shekhinah* (127 n. 1). In support of this claim he refers the reader to sec. 78. In my opinion, however, the term *kol* denotes the male potency, or the phallus, and hence I have rendered the expression *hadar ha-kol* as the "splendor of the All." Similarly, in § 78 the daughter given to Abraham is called *ba-kol* (based on the Talmudic reading of Genesis 24: 1 in Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 16b) and not simply *kol*. That is, the feminine is in the masculine, literally, "in the All," *ba-kol*. The point was well understood by subsequent interpreters of the bahiric text. For example, compare the discussion of Naḥmanides' commentary to Genesis 24:1 and Numbers 15:31 in E. Wolfson 1989: 134 n. 90, 144 n. 116, 166–67. On the demiurgic and phallic connotation of the term *kol* in the *Bahir*, see E. Wolfson 1995a: 63–88.

49. The androgynous nature of the palm tree, based on earlier Rabbinic texts (compare Babylonian Talmud, Pesaḥim 56a), is emphasized in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 198: "Why was she called Tamar and not by other names? For she was a female. You think [that this is so] be-

Home/Coming: Wisdom as the Demiurgical Logos

Up to this point I have explored in detail the mythical portrayal of *ḥokhmah* in select passages from the *Bahir*, which I have classified as the Hebraic orientation. However, as I have already noted, the Hebraic image of wisdom as God's feminine Torah is suffused with Hellenic elements most likely extracted from Neoplatonic sources. Unlike the attempted synthesis of Hebraism and Hellenism in medieval Jewish philosophical literature, which sought to harmonize two distinct modes of knowledge and authority, revelation and reason, in the case of the kabbalistic texts in general, and in the *Bahir* in particular, the Hebraic-Hellenic synthesis facilitated the bridging of the transcendent and the immanent, the metaphysical and the physical. To express the matter in slightly different terms, the philosophical layer superimposed on the mythopoeic provided the mechanism by which the abstract symbolism could be concretized in the empirical realm of space and time.

The point can be seen in the bahiric passage wherein the mythical portrayal of wisdom (or the *Shekhinah*) is expressed in an idiom drawn from philosophical discourse: The lower wisdom, like the upper wisdom, encompasses everything, *mesovev ha-kol* (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 171). The likelihood that this passage belongs to a later redactional stratum of the *Bahir* is supported by the fact that a similar expression "encompassing everything," *sovevet ha-kol*, is used to describe the attribute of divine wisdom in the writings of the Provençal Kabbalists, Isaac the Blind and Asher ben David.[50] Both of these Kabbalists were, no doubt, influenced by philosophical jargon. What is important to emphasize is that in the *Bahir* the purpose of this image is to underscore the demiurgical role of *ḥokhmah* as that which provides a sense of the immanent dwelling and localized habitation of the divine in the world. God is made accessible to human beings through the agency of the all-encompassing wisdom. For the human being to exist means to dwell in the shelter of the divine. This is related in the *Bahir* to

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cause she was a female? Rather, she comprised male and female, for all palm trees comprise male and female. How is this? The palm-branch is masculine and the fruit from the outside is masculine, but from the inside it is feminine. How is this? The nucleus of the date is split like a [vagina of a] woman, and corresponding to her is the power of the moon above. The Holy One, blessed be he, created Adam male and female, as it says, 'He created them male and female' (Genesis 1:27)."

50. See Isaac's *Perush Sefer Yeṣirah* in Scholem 1970: 2 (appendix); Asher ben David, *Perush Shem ha-Meforash*, published by M. Hasidah in *Ha-Segullah* 1 (1934): 11. For discussion of this expression, see Scholem 1970: 177. The relationship of *Sefer ha-Bahir* and strands of theosophic Kabbalah that crystallized in Provence is a complex issue that has been addressed by various scholars. See Scholem 1948: 64–65; 1987: 209–11; Idel 1981: 239; and Pedaya 1990.

the orthographic form of the letter *bet*, which is symbolic of the feminine hypostasis of Torah/wisdom: "Why is *bet* closed on every side and opened from the front? To teach you that it is the house of the world (*bayit le-ʿolam*), and thus the Holy One, blessed be he, is the place of the world but the world is not his place (*Bereʾshit Rabba* 68:9, pp. 777–78). Do not read *bet* but *bayit*, as it is written, 'A house is built by wisdom, and is established by understanding' (Proverbs 24: 3)" (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 14; cf. sec. 55). Sophia is the "house of the world," the space in which the edifice of creation is constructed.

The application of this cosmological function to feminine wisdom is underscored in the following passage, which provides a mystical explanation of the *sukkah*, the temporary booth erected for Tabernacles: "What is *Sukkot*? He said to him: The house (*bayit*), as it is written, 'A house is built by wisdom' (Proverbs 24:3). Whence do we know that *Sukkot* is a house? As it is written, 'But Jacob journeyed on to Sukkot, and built a house for himself and made stalls for his cattle; that is why the place was called Sukkot' (Genesis 33:17)" (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 105). The identification of the *sukkah* with the house built by wisdom is meant to convey the idea that the booth serves as the tangible symbol for the *Shekhinah*. This symbolic association enables one to move from the speculative to the practical, from the theosophical to the mystical. It is not simply the complex symbol of the divine hypostasis that matters, but the concretization of that symbol in a sensible form. The philosophical conception of the immanent Sophia/Logos is precisely what enables the author of the *Bahir* to move in the direction of concretizing the transcendent in the intimacy of the dwelling of the world. To exist means to dwell in God's glory, for the cosmos itself is nothing but the habitation of the *sukkah*, the feminine dwelling in which the *Shekhinah* is empirically manifest.

The substantiation of the symbolic in the concrete can also be seen in the *Bahir*, in that the structure of the divine is imaged in distinctly moralistic terms. From this vantage point, then, it may be said that the synthesis of Hellenism and Hebraism in the Kabbalah was to harmonize the theosophical and the ethical. Here we encounter a fundamental dimension of the theosophic Kabbalah that has not been sufficiently appreciated in the scholarly literature.[51] Building on the biblical and Rabbinic conceptions of an innately ethical God, confirmed as well in the philosophical treatises, the Kabbalists intensified the convergence of theosophy and ethics by

51. A study of the relationship of ethics and mysticism in kabbalistic sources remains a scholarly desideratum. Two preliminary studies on this theme are Dan 1986 and Shokek 1991.

turning the moral attributes into hypostatic emanations.[52] Hence, in one of the bahiric passages cited above, the mythical portrayal of divine wisdom as the daughter given to Solomon is correlated with a pietistic conception of wisdom as that which facilitates the execution of justice. The wisdom God gave to Solomon, therefore, is connected to the specific task of rendering judgments of a just nature. From the perspective of the theosophic symbolism that evolved in the *Bahir* and in later kabbalistic texts, there is no reason to differentiate sharply between the mythical and the ethical. In the realm of the divine potencies, the phallic gradation, which is named Solomon, possesses the feminine gradation of wisdom. Parallel to this in the mundane realm, Solomon is in possession of God's wisdom, which enables him to judge wisely. It is thus no coincidence that elsewhere in the *Bahir*, the *Shekhinah* is identified specifically with the attribute of justice (*ṣedeq*) (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 75, 120). In one passage, the issue is expressed in gendered terms:

> What is the repetition [of the word *ṣedeq* in the verse] "Justice, justice shall you pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20)? He said to him: As it is written, "Out of the brilliance before him" (Psalm 18:13). The first *ṣedeq* is the actual justice, and this is the *Shekhinah*, as it is written, "justice dwelt within her" (Isaiah 1:21). What is the second *ṣedeq*? This is the justice that frightens the righteous. Is this justice (*ṣedeq*) charity (*ṣedaqah*) or not? He said: No. What is the reason? It is written, "He donned righteousness (*ṣedaqah*) like a coat of mail," and *ṣedeq* is the "helmet of triumph on his head" (Isaiah 59:17). His head is nothing but truth, as it says, "The beginning of your word is truth" (Psalm 119:160), and truth is nothing but peace, as it says, "There shall be peace and truth in my time" (Isaiah 39:8). (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 75)

The *Shekhinah*, therefore, is the feminine attribute of *ṣedeq* that complements the masculine attribute of *ṣedaqah*. Significantly, the feminine attribute is depicted in the image of the helmet that sits on top of the male's head, an image that I decode as a reference to the restoration of the feminine to the masculine (see above, note 20). In the posture of sitting as the helmet on the head, the feminine assumes the valence of the attribute of justice. The transvaluation of the feminine Sophia is expressed in slightly different terms in a second passage:

> What is [the meaning of] "Though angry, may you remember compassion" (Habakkuk 3:2)? He said: When your children sin against you, and you get angry over them, "may you remember your compassion." And what is "may you

52. This convergence of theosophy and ethics is evident in the correlation in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 135, 137, and 190, of the three patriarchs and the attributes of lovingkindness, truth, and fear (or strength).

> remember your compassion"? That of which it is said, "I adore you, O Lord, my strength" (Psalm 18:2). He gave him this attribute, which is the *Shekhinah* of Israel, and he remembers his son who inherited it and to whom he gave it, as it is written, "The Lord had given wisdom to Solomon" (1 Kings 5:26). And he remembers their father Abraham, as it is written, "Seed of Abraham, my friend" (Isaiah 41:8). (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 77)

The ethicizing of the mythopoeic, which results from the mingling of the Hebraic and Hellenic conceptions of wisdom, sheds new light on the transgressive element discussed above. Within the narrative framework of the engendering myth, the *hieros gamos* can only be portrayed in terms of the incestuous relationship of the father and daughter mediated through the union of the son and daughter. The inherently moralistic nature of these very attributes mitigates against the performative application of the transgressive symbol. In the final analysis, the theosophic system developed in the *Bahir* does not allow the separation of metaphysics and ethics. The gnosis of God imparts moral responsibility to the mystic, for the divine gradations are configured as ethical attributes. The point is driven home poignantly in the following passage:

> What is [the meaning of] the verse, "Does a wise man answer with knowledge of the spirit?" (Job 15:2). What is the "knowledge of the spirit" (*da'at ruaḥ*)? The knowledge that is proximate to the spirit, as it is written, "The spirit of the Lord should alight upon him; a spirit of wisdom and understanding" (Isaiah 11:2), wisdom and afterwards understanding. And in understanding there is "counsel" and "strength," "knowledge" and the "fear of the Lord" (ibid.). You have told us that counsel is lovingkindness, strength[53] is the attribute of judgment, knowledge is truth . . . and the fear of the Lord is the treasure of Torah. . . . The fear of the Lord is above, it is the in the palm (*kaf*) of the Holy One, blessed be he, and it is his might. That palm is called the "scale of merit" (*kaf zekhut*) because it inclines the world towards the scale of merit. Thus it is written, "He shall sense the truth by his fear of the Lord; he shall not judge by what his eyes behold, nor decide by what his ears perceive" (Isaiah 11:3). Rather, he should incline the world towards the scale of merit. From there counsel shall come forth, and from there health shall come forth to the world, "from there, the shepherd, the rock of Israel" (Genesis 49:24). This is the place that is called "there," as it says, "There is the concealment of his power" (Habakkuk 3:4). (*Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 186–87)

The ultimate task of the master of esoteric knowledge is to emulate the ethical attributes of God. From the selection of verses cited above, it is

53. Here I have followed ms. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 209, folio 26a (reproduced in Abrams 1994: 212) because it corresponds to the sequence of the attributes listed in the biblical text.

evident that the bahiric author conceived of this gnosis in sotereological terms. The messianic figure embodies the synthesis of the theoretical and the practical, the theosophical and the ethical, the Hellenic and the Hebraic.

Looking Beyond Jerusalem and Athens

I have explored here the hermeneutical strategies exemplified by the authors of *Sefer ha-Bahir* in their interpretation of concepts and symbols related to the idea of divine wisdom. It is possible to chart these images in binary terms as internal and external. The former is related to the indigenous notion of wisdom (*ḥokhmah*) that may be extracted from the Hebraic sources themselves, whereas the latter refers to the conception of wisdom (Sophia) that is derived principally from external, philosophical sources equated with the Hellenic. Upon further reflection, however, it becomes evident that these are relative judgments: What is "outside" at one historical stage becomes appropriated and assimilated to the "inside" at another. Given the inherent bipolarity of human consciousness, we tend to distinguish the inside from the outside and the outside from the inside, but it would be more accurate to presume that the two are dialectically interrelated at any moment of historical construction. That is, the process of appropriation and internalization of an external influence occurs by means of a creative leap through which the boundaries are traversed, resulting in the destabilization of the inside-outside dichotomy. To the extent that this destabilization is mollified and the outside becomes inside, the cultural balance is regained temporarily so that for the moment one knows one's bearings. To apply this model more specifically to the Hebraic-Hellenic dichotomy: What is inside assumes the position of the Hebraic pole and what is outside, that of the Hellenic pole. But this spatial orientation is always subject to disruption by the creative mind, which challenges the dichotomy by looking outside in (as in the case of the heretic) or inside out (as in the case of the radical believer).

The particular example analyzed here at great length underscores the difficulty of establishing rigorous lines separating the inner Hebraic from the outer Hellenic conception of wisdom. The idea of *ḥokhmah* in the *Bahir* is colored by a distinctively Hellenic notion of *Sophia*. Thus, wisdom is described as the feminine potency of the divine that imparts gnosis to the one enlightened in her mysterious ways. On the other hand, this Sophianic depiction had already been assimilated as an internal Jewish conception, highlighted by the identification of wisdom as Torah. The portrayal of *ḥokhmah* in the *Bahir*, which had a major impact on subsequent kabbalis-

tic literature, illustrates the insufficiency of the bipolar approach. What is to be gained by calling the mythical concept of wisdom "Gnostic" or by the more generic adjective "Hellenic?" Do either of these terms accomplish more than illuminating the cultural matrix that may have produced such a complex web of symbols? There can be little doubt that the mythical depiction of wisdom in the *Bahir*, including the blatantly transgressive element of the incestuous relationships implied by the various parabolic clusters surrounding the image of *ḥokhmah* as the daughter of the king, are products of an originally Hellenic context. However, as it has been appropriated and adapted in the bahiric text, this mythical depiction is presented as an indigenous Jewish idea. Moreover, in compliance with a major concern of the sapiental tradition in Judaism, going back to its biblical roots, the idea of wisdom contains an explicit moralistic dimension. Possession of wisdom is not merely cognitive; it implicates the one to whom it is granted with the imperative to act in the way of God's wisdom, which is inherently ethical and just. It is precisely this characteristic that bestows upon the ideal of *ḥokhmah* in the *Bahir* the decisively Hebraic quality that allowed for the assimilation into kabbalistic lore of some of the most daring Hellenic notions about divine wisdom expressed in Jewish sources.

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