Imago templi and the meeting of the two seas

Liturgical time-space and the feminine imaginary in zoharic Kabbalah

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The notion of *imago templi* articulated by Henry Corbin, deeply influenced by both Western phenomenology and Iranian-Islamic esotericism,[1] is a particular expression of his conception of the image as a theophanic apparition that challenges the dichotomization of the real and imagined. To cite one of many passages in his vast oeuvre in which he articulates his view:

> To say that the Image is mere "appearance" seems to conform to realistic common sense, for which it is "nothing other" than the unreal, the fantastic. But this "nothing other" is precisely an avowal of "realistic" impotence, compared with the exigency of "theophanism" . . . To say that "reality" is itself a "theophanic apparition," whose form (*maẓhar*) reflects the form of him to whom it appears and who is its seat, its *medium,* is to revalorize it to such a degree that it becomes the basic element of self-knowledge. This is what historical realism disregards in its critique of docetism, which it accuses of reducing "facts" to appearances, without so much as suspecting that "appearance" is here raised to the level of "apparition" or upon what stage *spiritual* facts are in *reality* enacted.[2]

From the standpoint of Corbin's theophanism, reality consists of the apparitional form, but this form, in turn, reflects and is reflected in the form of the one to whom the image is manifest, a conception that is rooted in the archaic principle (attested in philosophical and alchemical sources) that like can only be known by like.[3] The docetic interpretation of the Christological dogma of Incarnation, according to Corbin's approach,[4] can be seen as an instantiation of this principle, for the philosophical import of this orientation is not based on a distinction between appearance and reality as the historical realist might propose, but it rests, rather, on the more profound truth that spiritual reality can be apprehended only through the image of the celestial Anthropos configured in the imagination of the visionary,[5] typically located in the heart according to both Islamic and Jewish gnosis.[6] "The *subjectum Incarnationis,*" writes Corbin, "will never be found on the plane of materially realized existences, of events accomplished and known once and for all, but always in the transcendent dimension announced by theophanies—because 'true reality' is the internal event produced in each soul by the Apparition that impresses it. In this domain we require a faculty of perception and

1. For discussion of the unique features of Corbin's "phenomenology of the spirit" as opposed to the Western "phenomenology of religion," see Charles J. Adams, "The Hermeneutics of Henry Corbin," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* ed. Richard C. Martin (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), pp. 141–150. On Corbin's indebtedness to phenomenology, especially as espoused in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit,* see the dialogue between Corbin and Philippe Némo entitled "De Heidegger à Sohravardî," in Henry Corbin, *L'Imâm caché* (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 2003), pp. 173–211. See also Roberts Avens, *The New Gnosis: Heidegger, Hillman, and Angels* (Dallas: Spring Publications, Inc., 1984); Daryush Shayegan, *Henry Corbin: La Topographie spirituelle de l'islam iranien* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1990), pp. 41–47; Tom Cheetham, *The World Turned Inside Out: Henry Corbin and Islamic Mysticism* (Woodstock: Spring Journal Books, 2003), pp. 1–15.

2. Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī,* translated by Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 233 (emphasis in the original).

3. For discussion of this principle, see Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* (New Lebanon: Omega Publications Inc, 1994), pp. 68–73.

4. See Norman O. Brown, *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 54–63.

5. Corbin (see note 2), pp. 84–85. My use of the category of the "docetic" in *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), follows Corbin's understanding. A point of contact between the Islamic and Jewish mystical traditions, as Corbin himself noted, relates to the theosophic interpretation of the rabbinic notion of the "archon of the face," *sar ha-panim,* which is identified as Metatron, the Agent Intellect, the last of the ten separate intelligences according to the widespead cosmological scheme adopted in the Middle Ages, and related kabbalistically to *Malkhut,* the last of the ten emanations, in her angelomorphic manifestation. Regarding this theme, see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum,* pp. 255–263; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 69–70; and see below, n. 77. One can easily imagine the confusion of terminology that might have collapsed the distinction between *malkhut* and *malakūt.* See Henry Corbin, *Le Paradoxe du Monothéisme* (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 2003), p. 13; Corbin (see note 2), p. 35.

6. On the role of the heart in Sūfism, see the extensive discussion in Corbin (note 2), pp. 216–245.

mediation very different from the demonstrative or historical reasoning which judges the sensible and finite data relating to rationally defined dogmas or to the irreversible events of material history."[7] On the basis of these citations, and many others that could have been mentioned, we may conclude that the contrast between "imagined" and "real" is an altogether misguided formulation; the image of the Temple is accorded the status of reality only inasmuch as it is imagined as real. This is the import of the first part of the title of my essay, "*Imago templi* and the meeting of the two seas." I am here walking in the footsteps of Corbin who similarly used the expression "The Imago Templi at 'the meeting-place of the two seas'" as the heading of the opening section of his wide-ranging essay "The Imago Templi in Confrontation with Secular Norms."[8]

The image of the meeting place of the two seas (*majma' al-baḥrayn*) is derived from the remark attributed to Moses in the Qur'an "I will not give up until I reach the confluence of the two seas, or else walk on for years" (18:60). I note, parenthetically, that a similar locution occurs in another passage in which the divine creative force is said to have "unleashed the two seas so as to merge together" (55:19). Some interpreters take the expression "confluence of the two seas" literally as a reference to an actual geographic point, for example, the spot where the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gulf of Suez intersect in the Red Sea. There are others, however, who render the contextual meaning figuratively, that is, the statement of Moses that he would journey until the confluence of the two seas is equivalent to the way one might say: "I will travel to the ends of the earth," a declaration that underscores the apparent boundlessness of one's determination rather than an actual commitment to walk to the end of the earth wherever that might be.

The latter approach is supported by the overall negative portrait of Moses that emerges from this section of the Qur'an.[9] The assertion ascribed to Moses that he would not give up until he reached the confluence of the two seas is meant to convey a relentless and blinding ambition that ultimately led to his bypassing the very goal he sought to achieve—thus, when he finally reached the spot of confluence, he had forgotten the fish he had set out to catch and it slipped back into the sea (18:61). At that point, Moses encounters an unnamed person who is referred to scripturally as one of the servants of Allah to whom the knowledge that is close to him (*al-'ilm al-laddunī*) had been imparted, but identified traditionally as Khiḍr, also vocalized as Khāḍir, literally, the "green one" (*al-khiḍir*),[10] the human/angelic figure in Islamic esotericism who corresponds to Elijah in Jewish folklore and mysticism.[11] Through his exchange, Moses comes to realize that he had neither the wisdom nor the patience to be the leader to deliver the Israelites from their enslavement to the Egyptians.

In Sūfi exegesis, the qur'anic idiom typically assumed a positive valence, signifying not a physical locality but the metaphysical site where, in the words of Sara Sviri, "the sea of life and the sea of death meet, where the state of *fanā'* and the state of *baqā'* meet. . . . the meeting point of past and future, light and darkness, the transient and the eternal. The mystical journey is *always* a search for this meeting point."[12] According to the esoteric intepretation, the confluence of the two seas is not a spatial demarcation, but a symbolic delineation of what the sixteenth-century philosopher and mystic, Nicholas of Cusa, called the *coincidentia oppositorum,* the union of opposites that effaces all difference and distinction.

For the purposes of this essay, it is important to mention the particular appropriation and application of this figure attested in the theosophic ruminations of the Spanish mystic Ibn 'Arabi, because the latter served as the most important source of inspiration for Corbin's own visionary pronouncements. Ibn 'Arabi applied the qur'anic "meeting of the two seas" to the intermediate world of *barzakh,* "the place where the world of pure Ideas in their intelligible substantiality meets with the

7. Corbin (see note 2), p. 153.

8. Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation,* trans. Philip Sherrard and Liadain Sherrard (London: KPI Limited, 1986), p. 263.

9. Brannon M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), p. 125.

10. On the special status of green in Islamic mysticism, see Corbin (note 3), pp. 76–80.

11. Muhyi-d-din Ibn 'Arabi, *The Wisdom of the Prophets* (*Fusus al-Hikam*), trans. from the Arabic to French with notes by Titus Burckhardt, trans. from French to English by Angela Culme-Seymour (Swyre Farm, Aldsworth: Beshara Design Centre, 1975), p. 103 n. 28. See Corbin (note 2), pp. 53–67, esp. 56–57. On the function of Khiḍr as the angelic guide reflected in the writings of Corbin, see Cheetham (note 1), pp. 98–111. For a creative application of this aspect of Islamic spirituality, which continues in the path of Corbin, see Tom Cheetham, "Within This Darkness: Incarnation, Theophany and the Primordial Revelation," *Esoterica: The Journal for Esoteric Studies* 4 (2001): 61–95, esp. 67, and in more detail in Tom Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel: The Prophetic Tradition and the Battle for the Soul of the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

12. Sara Sviri, *The Taste of Hidden Things: Images on the Sufi Path* (Inverness: Golden Sufi Center, 1997), pp. 84–85.

world of the objects of sense perception."[13] Let me cite a passage from Ibn 'Arabi's *Futūḥāt al-makkiya:*

> The *barzakh* is the widest of presences and the Meeting Place of the Two Seas—the Sea of Meanings and the Sea of Sensory Things. The sensory thing cannot be a meaning, nor can the meaning be a sensory thing. But the Presence of Imagination—which we have called the Meeting Place of the Two Seas—embodies meanings and subtilizes the sensory thing. It transforms the entity of every object of knowledge in the viewer's eye.[14]

The two seas refer symbolically to the intelligible and phenomenal worlds, and the point where they meet, the *barzakh,* is the "world of image" (*'ālam al-mithāl*), also identified as the angelic realm (*malakūt*), the intermediate sphere wherein the suprasensible and formless realities of the realm of spirit are configured in the sentient forms of the material universe.[15] The *imago templi* reveals itself to the visionary at the crossing of these two seas.[16]

The *'ālam al-mithāl* is accorded an ontological status even if it is discerned as real only by the faculty of the imagination. In the context of commenting on the thought of Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, Corbin addressed this very point:

> Neither the matter nor the form of the image you see in the mirror originates in the mineral substance of the mirror. No, this image possesses, separately and in itself, its own matter and its own form, which are in no way part of the mirror and in no way derive from its mineral substance, for they neither blend with it nor alter it. This Image has autonomous existence; it was created separately. If the mirror is there, the image is projected on it and mirrored in it, looks at itself in it. If the mirror is not there, the Image nonetheless subsists in itself and for itself; it subsists in its own world, with own matter and its own form.[17]

It is for this reason that, following Corbin, we should use the word "imaginal" to characterize this plane of being rather than the more conventional and familiar "imaginary," a term that might suggest that what is imagined is not objectively real but only a subjective phantasm. But, insofar as the intermediate world is, as I have already noted, characterized by a coincidence of opposites, this perforce will include the presumed opposition between real and imagined and thus what is real is real as imagined precisely because what is imagined is imagined as real.

To appreciate Corbin's phenomenology, or what he prefers to call "temenology," since the experience of which he speaks is that of the *temenos,* the sacred precinct—alternatively, we might say that for Corbin the phenomenon that is disclosed is the mystery, and thus for him phenomenology is, properly speaking, the philosophical equivalent to the mystical quest of Sūfism rendered by the Arabic expression *kashf al-maḥjūb,* "unveiling the hidden"[18]—it is necessary to bear in mind that for him the *imago templi* is the symbol that stands metonymically for the entire intermediary realm. A crucial aspect of the *imago templi* that accords it this paradigmatic role is what Corbin refers to as the *double mirroring,* a construct that has informed my own speculative account of the visionary experience in Jewish mysticism in general and in medieval kabbalistic sources in particular.[19]

To cite Corbin's exact language, the in-between world of the imaginal is characterized by "two mirrors (*specula*) facing each other and reflecting, one within the other, the Image they hold. The Image does not derive from empirical sources. It precedes and dominates such sources, and is thus the criterion by which they are verified and their meaning put to the test."[20] The two mirrors are the phenomenal world, the "sea of sensory things," and the intelligible world, the "sea of meanings," and through the intermediary of the imagination the one reflects the other, the intelligible is

13. Corbin (see note 8), p. 266.

14. Text cited in William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 123.

15. Cheetham (see note 1), pp. 66–83.

16. Corbin (see note 8), p. 266.

17. Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shī'ite Iran,* trans.. Nancy Pearson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 247–248.

18. Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques,* 4 vols. (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971), vol. 1, p. xix; Henry Corbin, *Philosophie Iranienne et Philosophie comparée* (Paris: Éditions Buchet/Chastel, 1985), p. 33. See also Adams (note 1), p. 143.

19. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum* (see note 5), pp. 306–317; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being* (see note 5), pp. xiii and 32–33; and the study cited below, n. 23. See also the analysis of my hermeneutical reflections on the mystical vision in Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 258–298, esp. 292–296. On Corbin's engagement with Jewish mysticism, see Paul B. Fenton, "Henry Corbin et la mystique juive," in *Henry Corbin: Philosophies et sagesses des religions du livre,* ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Christian Jambet, and Pierre Lory (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005), pp. 151–164.

20. Corbin (see note 8), p. 267. On the "phenomenon of the mirror" and the "imaginal world" in Corbin's thought, see Adams (note 1), p. 145.

cast in the form of the sensible and the sensible in the form of the intelligible. The image, which serves as the *coincidentia oppositorum* that bridges transcendence and immanence, apophasis and kataphasis, invisibility and visibility, and thereby facilitates the epiphany of incarnational forms that escape the threat of idolatry,[21] is not derived from the corporeal world of space and time; it is what imparts meaning to the objects of that world. Corbin insists, moreover, that the reflexivity not be understood in allegorical terms since this would imply, given his understanding of allegory (which was shared by other prominent historians of religion of his time, most notably Eliade and Scholem), the depiction of something in terms of another thing that is fundamentally different.[22] For Corbin, therefore, the operative term is "tautegorical," as this implies an identity of the symbol and what is symbolized, albeit an identity that preserves the difference of that which is identified as the same.

The reciprocal reciprocity implied in the image of the double mirroring—the mirror is mirrored as the mirrored of the mirror—challenges the hierarchical alignment of heavenly and mundane. The play of (dis)semblance is not dependent on linear causality, whether charted vertically or horizontally, and hence even in the absence of an earthly temple the correlation of upper and lower is not severed in the imagination;[23] on the contrary, the correlation seems to be strengthened and its horizons expanded to the extent that there is no concrete instantiation of the symbolic paradigm.[24] It lies beyond the scope of this essay to unpack all that is implied in this comment, but suffice it to make a few additional remarks related specifically to the issues of time and space as they pertain to the world of the imaginal. As I have already remarked, the *imago templi,* the meeting point of the two seas, is not a geographical place; indeed, the imaginal Temple can serve as a symbol for sacred space because it is dislodged from any specific spatial emplacement. According to Corbin's elocution, the *metaphysics of the imaginal* is predicated on the assumption that "the Imago Templi is the form assumed by a transcendent reality in order for this reality to be reflected in the soul at 'the meeting-place of the two seas.' Without such a form, this reality would be ungraspable."[25]

Furthermore, it is precisely on account of the fact that the heavenly Temple cannot be delimited to any physical structure that it can serve as an archetype in the esoteric currents of varied religious cultures. That this mythic structure is the shared legacy of the three Abrahamic faiths is made explicit in Corbin's remark that "wherever we come across this theme in Islamic theosophy, we are dealing with the same theme as it appears in some form or other in the Jewish Kabbalah, as well as with the theme of the Temple in the tradition of Christian esotericism."[26] The place of the imaginal form is the soul, or more specifically the imagination, a place that cannot be charted on any graph or pinpointed on any map, the interior space of the heart that is everywhere, since it is nowhere.

Analogously, the imaginal form embraces a notion of sacred time that disrupts the commonsensical conception of temporality conceived either in linear patterns of progression or circular patterns of regression. Corbin thus insisted that one can only speak of the imaginal in terms of "sacred history," the transhistorical or metahistorical plane of being that is set in sharp contrast to a "secular history," which is predicated on the assumption that events unfold "in the continuous time of chronological history." The time of the angelic in-between is a *tempus discretum,* a "discontinuous time" that irrupts and cuts the conventional timeline, a time that is consequently "amenable neither to historical

21. Corbin, *Le Paradoxe du Monothéisme* (see note 5), pp. 233–241. See also Cheetham (note 11), p. 88.

22. Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 91–93.

23. Without denying that the Jerusalem Temple was viewed either as the earthly parallel to or as the mundane microcosm of its heavenly counterpart, my view seeks to shift the relationship of symbol and reality in a manner that accords with the imaginal orientation of Corbin. For a representative sample of scholarly discussions of the motif of the celestial Temple in Second Temple, rabbinic, and Christian literature, see the sources cited in Elliot R. Wolfson, "Seven Mysteries of Knowledge: Qumran E/sotericism Reconsidered," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel,* ed. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 183 n. 20, to which I would add George W. MacRae, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 12 (1978):179–199.

24. Wolfson (see note 23), pp. 183–184. For an approach to the Qumran material that resonates in some important ways with my own, see Ra'anan S. Boustan, "Angels in the Architecture: Temple Art and the Poetics of Praise in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice,*" in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions,* ed. Ra'anan S. Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 195–212.

25. Corbin (see note 8), p. 267.

26. Henry Corbin, "The Realism and Symbolism of Colors in Shiite Cosmology According to the 'Book of the Red Hyacynth' by Shaykh Muḥammad Karīm-Khān Kirmānī (d. 1870)," in *Color Symbolism: The Eranos Lectures,* ed. Klaus Ottman, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (Putnam: Spring Publications, Inc., 2005), p. 78.

criticism nor to historical causality. . . . It is through this rupturing of time that the truth of all history can finally shine forth; for through it history is liberated and transmuted into parable."[27] It is mistaken to characterize Corbin's thinking as an atemporal retreat from time. On the contrary, as he makes clear, events in the *'ālam al-mithāl* "are enacted in time, but in a time that is peculiar to them, a discontinuous, qualitative, pure, psychic time, whose moments can be evaluated only according to their own measure, a measure which in every instance varies with their intensity. And their intensity measures a time in which the past remains present to the future, in which the future is already present to the past, just as the notes of a musical phrase, though played successively, nevertheless persist all together in the present and thus form a phrase."[28] The notion of the hierophanic time operative in Corbin's thought and its relationship to the commonplace chronological conception of time is summarized succinctly in the following comment: "Nights and days, hours and minutes, are simply means of determining the *measure* of time; but these measurements are not *time* itself. In itself, time is the limit of the persistence of the eternal Form 'on the surface' of the accidental matter of this world."[29]

There is much to assess in Corbin's far-reaching claims, but I will limit my focus to the most pressing matters that impact my own analysis of the image of the Temple in the theosophy that informs the textual landscape of *Sefer ha-Zohar,* the main compilation of kabbalistic lore that was most likely the literary product of a fraternity that assembled in the region of Castile in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[30] The transmutation of history into parable is a perfectly apt formulation to capture a crucial dimension of the world view expressed by kabbalists. In the cultural ambiance of medieval kabbalah, language performs this function by expressing the inexpressible, rendering the invisible visible. The symbol brings the unknown into relation with the known, but without reducing the difference that binds the two incongruities into a selfsame identity. In the kabbalistic mind-set, accordingly, every signified becomes a signifier vis-à-vis another signified, which quickly turns into another signifier, and so on *ad infinitum,* in an endless string that winds its way finally to the in/significant, which may be viewed either as the signified to which no signifier can be affixed or the signifier to which no signified can be assigned.

In semiotic terms, one can meaningfully posit that speech—the linguistic gesture that may be expressed as verbal gesticulation, graphic inscription, or mental avowal of word-signs—has a terminus, but semiosis, the interpretation of those signs, is infinite. The impossibility of presence, the rallying call of postmodern hermeneutics, is inseparable from the impossibility of absence, inasmuch as there cannot not be presence but in the presence of absence, just as there cannot not be absence but in the absence of presence. The notion of the inherently symbolic nature of language and the further assumption regarding the linguistic nature of reality raise the possibility of a hermeneutic buttressed by an alternative conception of spatiality and temporality, one that would not necessarily privilege either a three-dimensional notion of space that insists on a vertical causality that aligns events horizontally or a linear conception of time that imposes upon the

27. Corbin (see note 8), p. 268. See also Corbin (note 2), p. 53; Corbin, *Le Paradoxe du Monothéisme* (note 5), p. 153; Christian Jambet, *La Logique des Orientaux: Henry Corbin et la science des formes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983), pp. 237–311; Wasserstrom (note 22), pp. 159–163.

28. Corbin (note 2), pp. 35–36. On the distinction between the "time of epiphany" and "historical time," see Christian Jambet, *Le Caché et l'Apparent* (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 2003), p. 27. For a brief discussion of Corbin's views in contrast to the perspective I enunciate based on a scientific model, see Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being* (note 5), p. xviii, and references cited on p. 394 nn. 23–25 (some of which are repeated here).

29. Corbin (note 17), p. 249 (emphasis in the original).

30. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1956), pp. 156–204; Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts,* trans. David Goldstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 1–126; Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar,* trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 85–138; Boaz Huss, "Sefer ha-Zohar as a Canonical, Sacred and Holy Text: Changing Perspectives of the Book of Splendor between the Thirteenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1998):257–307; Boaz Huss, "The Appearance of Sefer ha-Zohar," *Tarbiz* 70 (2001):507–542 (Hebrew); Charles Mopsik, "Le corpus Zoharique, ses titres et ses amplifications," in *La Formation des Canons Scripturaires,* ed. Michel Tardieu (Paris: Cerf, 1993), pp. 75–105; Charles Mopsik, "Moïse de León, le Sheqel ha-Qodesh et la rédaction du Zohar: Une réponse à Yehuda Liebes," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 3 (1998):117–218; Daniel Abrams, "Critical and Post-Critical Textual Scholarship of Jewish Mystical Literature: Notes on the History and Development of Modern Editing Techniques," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 1 (1996):17–71, esp. 61–64; Daniel Abrams, "The Zohar as a Book: On the Assumptions and Expectations of the Kabbalists and Modern Scholarship," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 12 (2004):201–232 (Hebrew); Ronit Meroz, "Zoharic Narratives and Their Adaptations," *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 3 (2000):3–63; Pinchas Giller, *Reading the Zohar: The Sacred Text of Kabbalah* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 3–33.

researcher the historicist presumption that a cultural phenomenon is best apprehended by understanding historical context synchronically.[31]

The priority accorded the mythopoeic and the refusal to favor the historical over the symbolic does not entail, in my judgment, the conclusion that the "inner world" of the human imagination takes precedence over the external world. It is surely valid to say that for kabbalists in general, and for the zoharic authors in particular, the corporeal world is constructed by a "literary imagination" that is expressed especially in the "homiletical talents" applied to Scripture, which is identified as the mystical body of God, but this does not amount to the creation of a "genuine reality" indicative of "a great triumph of spirit over matter."[32] The imaginal perspective I have ascribed to medieval kabbalists embraces the twofold mirroring that overcomes the distinction between internal and external, spirit and matter, image and reality.

The present essay builds upon and further elaborates some points that I have discussed in my previous work. In particular, I have focused on the role of sacred space and sacred time in the imaginative visualization of the enthroned glory connected to the mystical ideal of intention in prayer.[33] Moreover, as I have argued, the visionary praxis is predicated on the older tradition concerning the imaginal symbol of the transcendental reality (the celestial Temple) experienced concretely in the heart of the worshipper. Prayer (in the theisitic form inherited by kabbalists) is impossible without an image of God, but God has no image. To pass from the theological presumption of an imageless God to the phenomenological configuration of an imagined God, it is necessary to posit the symbol of the *imago templi.* That is, within the imaginary edifice of the celestial Temple, a symbolic form configured in the imagination, the incorporeal God assumes the shape of the imaginal body, the image of the glory sitting upon the throne in the heavenly abode.[34]

There is thus an indisputable link that binds the act of contemplation and the image of the Temple. Here it is in order to recall that the Latin *contemplari* is etymologically derived from the word *templum,* the space in heaven marked off for augural observation. Attunement to the philological resonance of the term suggests that the Temple not only is the precinct consecrated to a divine being, but also is the place of vision that is connected especially in Corbin's thinking to theophanic prayer.[35] In Jewish sources as well there is an inextricable nexus among visual contemplation, the Temple, and liturgical worship.[36] With the gradual decline of the earthly Temple and the ascendancy of the celestial Temple, the focus of that contemplative vision changes accordingly. To contemplate is to set one's sight on the Temple in heaven, the place that determines the field of one's spiritual vision. The heavenly Temple, however, is visible only through the mirror of the imagination. Hence, one may speak of the human imagination as the sacred interval of vision, as the consecrated space of contemplation where that which has no figure is configured in the figuration of what cannot be configured.[37] God and human are united and mutually transformed through the symbol of the *imago templi,* for the divine is rendered accessible to human imagination in anthropomorphic form and the human imagination is sacralized as the prism through which the divine is manifest. In the *imago templi,* therefore, the divine becomes human and the human divine.

As one might well expect, the archaic symbol of the *imago templi* figures prominently in the mythopoeic typography that informs many of the literary strata that make up the zoharic anthology. There are even two

31. I have here repeated the argument in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. xii–xiii.

32. Liebes (see note 30), p. 56. I am grateful to Kalman Bland who reminded me of these comments of Liebes in a recent conversation. While I am in agreement with Liebes that in the mind of the zoharic kabbalist what we call the "external" world is constructed through language that is mediated through the imaginative faculty, I do not accept the binary opposition between the imagined and real that emerges from his approach. My criticism of Liebes on this score parallels the critique I leveled against his distinction between the "mythic" and "symbolic" in *Language, Eros, Being* (see note 5), pp. 36–39.

33. Elliot R. Wolfson, "Sacred Space and Mental Iconography: *Imago Templi* and Contemplation in Rhineland Jewish Pietism," in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine,* ed. Robert Chazan, Willaim Hallo, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), pp. 593–634.

34. On the role of the throne in Corbin's writings, see Maria E. Subtelny, "Le Motif du trône et les rapports entre mystique islamique et mystique juive," in *Henry Corbin: Philosophies et sagesses des religions du livre* (note 19), pp. 195–212.

35. Corbin (see note 8), p. 386; Corbin (see note 2), pp. 246–257.

36. Jon D. Levenson, "The Jerusalem Temple in Devotional and Visionary Experience," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages,* ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1987), pp. 32–61; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum* (see note 5), pp. 198–203, 290–293; and *Language, Eros, Being* (note 5), p. 391 n. 5; Wolfson (notes 23, 33).

37. Jambet (see note 28), p. 135.

distinct microforms dedicated to a detailed charting of the chambers of the heavenly Temple, which are further delineated in the second and more expansive account as the seven holy palaces that correspond structurally to seven palaces of impurity.[38] There is a major shift in the zoharic context, however, for the supernal Jerusalem or, more specifically, the image of the Temple above serves as a symbolic denotation of *Malkhut,* the last of the ten sefirotic emanations.[39] As a consequence of this identification, it is not possible to separate the cosmological and theosophical implications of the Temple imagery. Let me cite one of numerous texts that illustrate the point, which I have chosen because it poignantly embraces both the spatial and temporal nuances of the experience of the imaginal.

> Come and see: the beauty of the world and the form of the world were not seen in the world until the Tabernacle was built and established, and the Ark entered the [place that is] holy. From that moment the form of everything was seen in the world and the world was aligned, and [the Israelites] journeyed by means of that Tabernacle and Ark until they reached that Point, which is the "beautiful vista" (Ps. 48:3), the joy of everything. When they reached there the Ark opened up and said "This is my resting-place for all time, here I will dwell for I desire it" (ibid., 132:14). Rabbi Yeisa said: This verse was spoken by the Community of Israel when the Temple was built and the Ark entered into its place. Rabbi Ḥezeqiah said: The holy One, blessed he, uttered it with regard to the Community of Israel when Israel execute his will, for then holy One, blessed be he, sits on his throne of glory and has pity over the world, and the blessing, peace, and love of everything are found. Consequently, he said "This is my resting-place for all time."[40]

The fuller literary context whence this citation has been extracted is a homiletical reflection on the psalmist's praise of the mountain of the Lord in the city of God, that is, the temple-mount in Jerusalem, which is described as the "beautiful vista, joy of all the earth, Mt Zion, summit of Zaphon, city of the great king" (48:3). The zoharic homilist builds on an earlier rabbinic tradition regarding the foundation stone (*even shetiyyah*) beneath the throne of the glory whence all entities in the world are sustained, the center-point (*nequddah emṣa'ita*) of all being. Corresponding to the *axis mundi* (an idiom that is translated in an exact linguistic equivalent in the zoharic Aramaic *yesoda de-alma*) above is the sacred precinct of the Jerusalem Temple below, which is compared structurally to an eye and hence it is characterized as the source of the visionary form of all that exists.

My citation began at the point of the text where the transfer from Tabernacle to Temple is enunciated. Prior to the construction of the Temple, the world was not yet properly centered, though the itinerant edifice of the Tabernacle did serve as the temporary foundation, since the glory did dwell therein. The sojourn of the Israelites brought them eventually to Jerusalem and especially to the temple-mount, which is designated by the scriptural idiom *yefeh nof,* the "beautiful vista." When the Israelites reached this site the Ark itself is portrayed as saying "This is my resting place for all time, here I will dwell for I desire it." The text then offers two theosophic interpretations that ascribe the verse to different aspects of the divine. According to Rabbi Yeisa, the verse is uttered by *Malkhut* or the "Community of Israel," the tenth of the *sefirot,* when the Temple was built by the Jewish people, for at that moment the feminine Presence is sequestered and hence occluded in her appropriate habitation in the image of a chaste woman who does not leave her abode.[41] By contrast, according to Rabbi Ḥezeqiah, the verse is uttered by *Tif'eret* or the "holy One, blessed be he," the sixth of the *sefirot,* for when the Temple was constructed the masculine potency sits upon the throne, a mythopoeic formulation that is to be understood symbolically as referring to the *hieros gamos* within the Godhead.[42]

The central role accorded to space and time in the zoharic description of the image of the supernal Temple is especially noteworthy.[43] Both elements are suggested

38. The first version occurs in *Zohar* 1:38a–45b, and the second in *Zohar* 2:244b–262b. See Scholem (note 30), p. 160; Tishby (note 30), p. 4.

39. For representative studies of the symbol of Jerusalem in early kabbalistic sources, see Moshe Idel, "Jerusalem in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Thought," in *The History of Jerusalem: Crusades and Ayyubids, 1099–1250* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1991), pp. 264–286 (Hebrew), and Haviva Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind: A Comparative Study in the Writings of the Earliest Kabbalists* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), pp. 148–177 (Hebrew).

40. *Zohar* 2:222b.

41. Tishby (note 30), p. 381; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Occultation of the Feminine and the Body of Secrecy in Medieval Kabbalah," in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions,* ed. Elliot R. Wolfson (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 1999), pp. 113–154, esp. pp. 135–147.

42. The erotic connotation of enthronement as a moment of sacred union is attested in older sources that undoubtedly influenced the formation of medieval kabbalistic symbolism. See Wolfson, *Through a Speculum* (note 5), pp. 98–105.

43. An alternative exploration of the spatial and temporal aspects of the image of the Temple is found in Haviva Pedaya, "The Divinity as Place and Time and the Holy Place in Jewish Mysticism," in *Sacred*

by the key biblical verse that is the textual spoke around which the homily hermeneutically turns: "This is my resting place for all time, here I will dwell for I desire it." The issue of space is evident enough and hardly needs elaboration: The Temple is the resting place of the divine, a theme that is implied in the traditional Hebrew phrase *beit ha-miqdash,* the sanctuary or the sacred building. The obvious point is emphasized in the interpretive stance transmitted in the name of Rabbi Yeisa according to which the verse from Psalms is spoken by the Community of Israel, the feminine Presence, when Israel below constructed the Temple. According to the interpretation attributed to Rabbi Ḥezeqiah, the verse is uttered by the masculine potency in relation to the feminine, that is, the erection of the Temple in the mundane occasions the enthronement in the divine realm. The issue of dwelling, consequently, assumes symbolic significance, and the notion of space is to be understood euphemistically as a reference to the female vessel that receives the seminal discharge of the male.

Alongside the spatial metaphors, the verse from Psalms yields the temporal dimension of the experience of the imaginal as well in emphasizing that the resting place is "for all time," *adei ad.* From the standpoint of the external meaning, the scriptural nomenclature simply intones the hope, or better the promise, that the Temple will stand forever and that the Presence will have a permanent dwelling among the Jewish people. But the internal meaning, the kabbalistic secret, rests on a deeper consideration of the contours of temporality. What does it mean to speak of something "for all time"? Is the notion of "for all time" actually a time at all? Or is it rather a termporal marking of that which exceeds time?

Prima facie, it would seem that this formulation obviates the difference between all particular times and it is thus effectively equivalent to no time. I would suggest, however, that the notion of "for all time" is a mode of time, but one that is at all times experienced in the erupting of the instant of rupture, the moment that persists enduringly as that which passes provisionally.[44] Under the stamp of *adei ad,* each interval of time is the same in virtue of being different, different in virtue of being the same. The comportment of temporality is enhanced by the language of eros in the second part of the verse *poh eshev ki iwwitiha,* "here I will dwell for I desire it." The juxtaposition of the erotic and temporal—their dwelling together in one neighborhood of thought, to use a Heideggerian turn of phrase—is a motif well attested in various literary genres, including kabbalistic compositions: Chronological succession—with its continuous ebb and flow—structurally resembles carnal passion, which likewise is characterized by the permanent impermanence of the impermanent permanence.[45] The fulfillment of this desire—which is always in and of the moment—is never anything but momentary, and hence time-bound. But the moment of longing can be overcome by the longing of the moment that is marked *adei ad,* "for all time," a moment in which the ephemerality of the interim is redeemed by the fullness of the present, the compresence of all three temporal tenses that mimics the eternality of the divine ipseity,[46] the midpoint that is concurrently the recovered anticipation of the beginning and the anticipated recovery of the end.

The way to attain the temporal nullification of time, to void time of its temporality, is through the ascetic transmutation of erotic desire, an act that is linked exegetically in some kabbalistic texts including passages in the *Zohar* to the verse *la-kol zeman we-et le-khol ḥefeṣ taḥat ha-shamayim,* which I would render as "for every time and a moment for every yearning under heaven" (Eccles. 3:1). Thus, for example, we read in one zoharic homily:

> What is "a moment for every yearning"? A time and occasion for everything, for every desire (*re'uta*)[47] that is found below. Another matter: "a moment for every yearning," what is the "moment"? As it is written, "It is the moment (*et*) to do for the Lord, for they have broken your Torah" (Ps. 119:126). And it is written, "do not come at any moment (*et*) to the shrine" (Lev. 16:2), and this is the appointed gradation, as it has been established. Hence, the moment (*et*) is appointed "for every yearning under heaven."[48]

Space: Shrine, City, Land—Proceedings of the International Conference in Memory of Joshua Prawer, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1998), pp. 84–111.

44. For a more detailed discussion, see Wolfson (note 31), pp. 71–72.

45. For elaboration of this cluster of themes, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "The Cut That Binds: Time, Memory, and the Ascetic Impulse," in *God's Voice From the Void: Old and New Studies in Bratslav Hasidism,* ed. Shaul Magid (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 119–120.

46. Wolfson (note 31), pp. 76–78.

47. On this technical term in the zoharic lexicon, see Tishby (note 30), p. 953.

48. *Zohar* 1:194a.

Exoterically, the juxtaposition of the words "moment" (*et*) and "yearning" (*hefeṣ*) communicates the idea that there is a specific instantiation of every intent that occurs in the cosmos. Esoterically, the correlation can be understood only if we take hold of the nexus between the temporal interval and the feminine potency within the divine pleroma, a point that is elucidated further by the two other verses that are invoked by the zoharic author: Psalm 119:126, which links abrogation of the Torah and the moment to act on God's behalf, and Leviticus 16:2, which associates the sanctity of the moment and entry into sacred space. A more attentive reading of the second verse, however, indicates that entering the holy place may be an expression of breaking the law. By this hypernomian act of transgressing, limitlessly venturing beyond the limit,[49] trespassing the sign, one may access the *tempus discretum,* the interruptive present in which the past is yet to come and the future is what has already been, the extenuating circle extending linearly in the encircling of the reversible irreversibility.

To elucidate the point further, I will focus on another zoharic homily that deals with the mysterious demise of the two sons of Aaron "when they drew near before the Lord" (Lev. 16:1).[50] Following a long exegetical trajectory, the zoharic authors seek to comprehend why Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, suffered such a fate. To uncover the notion of time expressed in the homily, one must attend more carefully to the biblical verse interpreted by the anonymous kabbalist, "And the Lord said to Moses, Speak to Aaron your brother and do not come at any moment to the shrine," *we-al yavo be-khol et el ha-qodesh* (Lev. 16:2). From this prohibition one may assume, though it is not stated explicitly, that the entry of Nadab and Abihu into the sanctuary was ill-timed. At an earlier point in the narrative the reader is told that Aaron's sons offered a "strange fire" (*esh zarah*) before the Lord (Lev. 10:1; see also Num. 3:4, 26:61), but we still do not know how this relates to the question of what constitutes the "wrong" or "right" moment.[51] Through the voice of R. Abba, a member of the fraternity clustered about Simeon ben Yoḥai, the zoharic homilist begins the discourse by eliciting the following moral from the biblical narrative: It is suitable to ask one's requests during propitious times when divine beneficence is found in the world and not at other times when severe judgment reigns.[52] To pray effectively, one must be attuned to the different time zones, as it were, which are reflective of disparate states within the divine mirrored in the providential forces that govern the world—primarily the alternating periods of judgment and mercy, which correspond respectively to the altering templates of night and day. The author of the zoharic passage, through the mouthpiece of Simeon ben Yoḥai, draws the obvious conclusion:

> We have established the matter in interpreting "[to give them food] in his moment" (*latet okhlam be-itto*) (Ps. 104:27), and this is certainly so. Thus the holy One, blessed be he, came to warn Aaron not to err in the transgression with respect to which his sons erred, for this moment (*hai et*) is known. Therefore, they should not err by joining the other moment (*et aḥra*) to the king, as it is written, "do not come at any moment (*be-khol et*) to the shrine," that is, even though he sees that it is the time that the other hand has been given power to rule in the world and it has been given to him to unite with it and to draw it close to the holy, for "I and my name are one" (*ana u-shemi ḥad hu*). Therefore "do not come at any moment to the shrine." If you want to know by means of what he should enter—"through this" (*be-zo't*). "Through this Aaron shall enter into the shrine" (*be-zo't yavo aharon el ha-qodesh*) (Lev. 16:3), this *zo't* is the moment (*et*) that is attached to my name, through this *yod,* which is inscribed in my name, you will enter the shrine. It has been taught: R. Yose said, it is written, "He has made everything beautiful in its moment" (*et ha-kol asah yafeh ve-itto*) (Eccles. 3:11). This word was established by the holy flame [Simeon ben Yoḥai], and thus it is, as it has been taught, "He has made everything beautiful in his moment" (*et ha-kol asah yafeh ve-itto*), and thus it is verily (*wadda'y*). "Everything" (*et ha-kol*)—verily (*wadda'y*). "He made it

49. Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 186–285. See ibid., pp. 214 and 239, where the interpretation of Psalm 119:126 in a critical talmudic passage and its reverberation in the beginning of the Idra Rabba section from the zoharic anthology is discussed. See also Liebes (note 30), pp. 46–47, and the analysis of Daphne Freedman, *Man and the Theogony in the Lurianic Cabala* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006), pp. 103–106. What I have called the hypernomian extending beyond the limits of the law is affirmed in different terminology by Corbin (see note 2), p. 55, as the secret of the "mystic truth" (*ḥaqīqa*) that transcends piety based on ritual law (*sharī'a*). See also my brief comments and other references to this theme in Islamic mysticism mentioned in *Venturing Beyond,* p. 211 n. 90.

50. I am here reworking material in *Alef, Mem, Tau* (see note 31), pp. 98–104.

51. It is worth mentioning the injunction to the priests (Exod. 28: 42–43) to wear linen breeches to cover their genitals, literally, the "flesh of nakedness" (*besar erwah*), lest they enter the tabernacle in an immodest posture and bring upon themselves a death decree. Perhaps, it would be fruitful to consider these verses and the account of the death of Nadab and Abihu.

52. *Zohar* 3:58a–b.

beautiful in his moment" (*asah yafeh ve-itto*), one in the other, so that the others will not be mixed in with them. "In his time" (*ve-itto*), precisely (*mammash*), and not in another. Therefore there was a warning to Aaron "do not come at any time to the shrine." Through what should he enter? "Through this" (*be-zo't*), as it has been established, "Through this Aaron shall enter into the shrine."[53]

The secret of the correlation of time and prayer—a correlation, I note in passing, suggested by the evocative scriptural expression *wa-ani tefillati lekha yhwh et raṣon,* "As for me, may my prayer come to you, O Lord, at a favorable moment" (Ps. 69:14)[54]—the "propitious time," *et raṣon,* the necessity of which is deduced from the injunction given to Aaron, *be-zo't yavo aharon el ha-qodesh,* "Through this Aaron shall enter into the shrine," offered as a corrective to the lethal misdeed of Nadab and Abihu, a violation that brought about the interdiction "do not come at any time to the shrine," *we-al yavo be-khol et el ha-qodesh.*

But what did the sons of Aaron do wrong? The author of this homily assumes that their transgression consisted of trying "to join the other moment to the king." To comprehend the import of the expression "other moment," *et aḥra,* it is necessary to mull over the meaning of the word *et.*[55] The connotation of the latter may be discerned from the remark that Simeon ben Yoḥai had established the intent of this term when interpreting the expression *be-itto* in the verse *latet okhlam be-itto,* "to give them food in his time" (Ps. 104:27): "This is the Matrona who is called the 'time of the righteous one' (*itto de-ṣaddiq*), and thus all await this moment."[56] We may deduce, therefore, that the word *et* is one of the indexical markers of Matrona, a commonly used designation of *Shekhinah* or *Malkhut* in zoharic homilies, the tenth of the sefirotic emanations. This is the intent as well of the expression "moment of the righteous one," *itto de-ṣaddiq,* that is, the moment, engendered as feminine, belongs to the *ṣaddiq,* the righteous one, a standard reference in kabbalistic lore to the ninth emanation, *Yesod,* the phallic potency of the divine.[57] The "moment of the righteous one" symbolizes the union of *Shekhinah* and *Yesod,* an incorporation that portends the messianic redemption, which seems to me to be the underlying intent of the comment at the conclusion of Simeon ben Yoḥai's words, "all await this moment," *kullehu meḥakka'an le-hai itto.*

With this symbolism in hand we can decode the rest of the homily. If the word *et* denotes *Shekhinah,* then *et aḥra,* the "other moment," will refer to the corresponding force on the "other side," *siṭra aḥra,* the technical name of the demonic realm coined by Castilian kabbalists of the zoharic circle.[58] The sin of Nadab and Abihu consisted of their attempt to unite the demonic feminine, elsewhere identified as Lilith, with the king on the side of holiness, which in this case refers to *Tif'eret.* Although not stated explicitly, it is likely that the zoharic interpretation was inspired by the expression *esh zarah,* "strange fire," used in conjunction with Nadab and Abihu in several verses, as I noted above. The "strange fire" they offered before the Lord, rendered symbolically, denotes their desire to mix the unholy and holy—a reading that is attested in other zoharic passages.

As may be culled from still other zoharic comments, the symbolic ascription of the strange fire to the feminine aspect of the demonic is enhanced by the exegetical link made to the expression the "estranged woman," *ishshah zarah.* In the symbolic imaginary of the zoharic kabbalists, this expression from Proverbs alludes more specifically to the Christian woman, for Christianity, the prototypical idolatrous religion (the faith and piety of *siṭra aḥra*), is associated with sensual lust, the power of eros from the left, which parallels the power of eros from the right, manifest most ideally in the yearning to cleave to the divine through contemplative prayer and study. Indeed, as I have

53. Ibid., 58b.

54. Also relevant is the verse *koh amar yhwh be-et raṣon anitikha u-ve-yom yeshu'ah azartikha,* "Thus said the Lord: In a moment of favor I will answer you, and on the day of salvation I will help you" (Isa. 49:8).

55. Needless to say, the word *et* has a long history in Hebrew texts, beginning in scripture where it is used to designate events of time perceived not chronologically but as distinct manifestations of divine volition. See Gershon Brin, *The Concept of Time in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), pp. 39–48, 294.

56. *Zohar* 3:58a.

57. See, by contrast, *Tiqqunei Zohar,* sec. 21, 43a, where the expression *itto de-ṣaddiq* refers to *Yesod* and not to *Shekhinah.* In *Tiqqunei Zohar,* sec. 69, 101b–102a, there is a lengthy discourse built around the symbolic identification of *Shekhinah* and time, related especially to the word *et;* the monthly lunar cycle is divided into twenty-eight *ittot,* fourteen from the side of mercy and fourteen from the side of judgment, which are linked exegetically to the twenty-eight occurrences of the word *et* in Ecclesiastes 3:2–8. On the association of the term *et* and *Shekhinah* and a decoding of the expression *itto* as referring to the union of *Shekhinah* and *Yesod* in the thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalist, Joseph Gikatilla, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Fore/giveness on the Way: Nesting in the Womb of Response," *Graven Images: A Journal of Culture, Law, and the Sacred* 4 (1998):165–166 n. 11.

58. 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. 56–87; Tishby, (note 30), pp. 447–474.

analyzed at length in a previously published study, there is a homology between the lure of Christianity as idolatry in the theological plane and as the crux of sexual seduction in the social sphere.[59] Moreover, as Yitzhak Baer observed long ago, zoharic homilies well attest that for kabbalists in northern Spain in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, one of the greatest challenges for the male Jew was not to succumb to the attraction of Christianity in either domain.[60] Nadab and Abihu are exemplary of biblical figures—with a pedigree no less impressive than being in the lineage of the high priest—who were unable to overcome the sexual temptation of the other side. It is likely, then, that the intent of their offering a "strange fire" was that they cohabited with gentile women.[61] The point is drawn explicitly in the following passage:

> R. Judah began to expound, and he said: "It is the moment to do for the Lord, for they have broken your Torah" (Ps. 119:126). "It is the moment to do for the Lord" (*et la'asot la-yhwh*). What is [the gist of] this? It has been established that *et* refers to the Community of Israel, which is called *et,* as it says, "do not come at any moment to the shrine" (Lev. 16:2). What is the meaning of "do not come at any moment" (*we-al yavo be-khol et*)? It is, as it is said, "to guard you from the estranged woman" (Prov. 7:5), and this is [alluded to in the words] "they offered a strange fire before the Lord" (Lev. 10:1). What is the reason for *et*? For there is a moment (*et*) and time (*zeman*) for everything, to come close, to be illumined, to be united, as is appropriate, as it is said, "But as for me, my prayer is to thee, O Lord, at a propitious moment" (*wa-ani tefillati lekha yhwh et raṣon*) (Ps. 69:14).[62]

As one might expect from a medieval Jewish mystical text, the mixing of unholy and holy has dire consequences. In line with the scriptural maxim of justice, measure-for-measure, the sons of Aaron were consumed by the holy fire, *Shekhinah,* the medium that executes divine judgment, for, symbolically, having intercourse with the estranged woman is on a par to offering strange fire on the altar. Yet, in spite of the blatant demand to separate the two realms, one may also discern between the lines of the zoharic text recognition of the spiritual proximity and kinship between idolatry and worship, sexual temptation and erotic piety. The one who is captivated by the ecstatic fervor of the epiphanic moment will recognize the duplicitous nature of that moment, holding forth the possibility that one will succumb to the temptation of *et aḥra* to combine what should be kept separate as well as the possibility that one will seize the moment of *et raṣon* to worship the divine with no admixture of evil. One might say, accordingly, that the moment of ecstasy, *et la'asot la-yhwh,* is the two-edged sword, *ḥerev pifiyyot* (Ps. 149:6), not only in the sense that the instant breaks into time in such a manner that it is severed from "before" and "after," as I discussed above, but also in the sense that it has the potential to sever one's connection to the path.

In kabbalistic gnosis, the moment, which is the feminine, is the temporal interval that opens and closes, binds and unbinds.[63] The duplicity is captured in the zoharic comment on the scriptural expression *ḥerev ha-mithappekhet,* "ever-turning sword" (Gen. 3:24), which is applied to *Shekhinah:* "It changes from this side to that side, from good to evil, from mercy to judgment, from peace to war, it changes in everything, good and evil, as it is written, 'the tree of knowledge of good and evil'" (ibid., 2:17).[64] The alternation between good and evil attributed to the divine presence portends the

59. Elliot R. Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant: Memory, Forgetfulness, and History in the *Zohar,*" in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi,* ed. Elisheva Carlebach, David S. Myers, and John Efron (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1998), pp. 214–246.

60. Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain,* trans. Louis Schoffman, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), vol. 1, pp. 256–260. See also Yom Tov Assis, "Sexual Behavior in Medieval Hispano-Jewish Society," in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky,* ed. Ada Rapoport Albert and Steven Zipperstein (London: P. Halban, 1988), pp. 25–59, esp. 27.

61. *Zohar* 3:57b. See *Zohar* 3:33b–34a (*Ra'aya Meheimna*) where the "strange fire" is interpreted as cohabiting with a menstruating Jewish woman; insofar as Christian women are always in the status of menstruating women, the interpretations are thematically congruous; in *Zohar* 3:37b, the different explanations of the sin of Nadab and Abihu are cited.

62. *Zohar* 1:116b. See also 194a.

63. In some zoharic passages, the sword functions as an androgynous symbol, and thus it is associated with *Yesod,* the phallic gradation, which comprises male and female. In other contexts, the image of the sword is associated more specifically with *Shekhinah* in the feminine facade of divine judgment, though even in this case the female is portrayed in decidedly masculine, even phallic, terms, the "sword that shall execute the vengeance of the covenant," *ḥerev noqemet neqam berit* (Lev. 26:25); expressed otherwise, the symbolic figuration of judgment is the feminine dimension of the male. See Tishby (note 30), p. 1365; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 87 and 204, nn. 36–37.

64. *Zohar* 1:221b. In a section from the Tosefta stratum printed in *Zohar* 2:27b–28a, the scriptural image of *lahaṭ ḥerev ha-mithappekhet,* "fiery ever-turning sword" (Gen. 3:24) is applied to both *Binah* and *Malkhut,* the former insofar as "it changes from judgment to mercy to bestow upon the righteous their reward in the world-to-come," and the latter insofar as "it changes from mercy to judgment to judge the wicked in this world."

incisive quality of time, the fullness of the moment realized in the cut that binds, the fork in the road that splits into a path to the right and a path to the left. The sojourner on the way knows, however, that the two paths are not to be construed dichotomously as they spring forth from one and the same font.

I suggest that this insight underlies the statement from the zoharic homily mentioned previously, "even though he sees that it is the time that the other hand has been given power to rule in the world and it has been given to him to unite with it and to draw it close to the holy." The remark is offered as the rationale for the restriction imposed on the priests not to enter "at any moment into the shrine," for when contemplating entry into the shrine, the priest apprehends that even the demonic is not absolutely other in relation to the divine. The experience of God's oneness discounts the possibility of ontological dualism—an idea expressed by kabbalists (as mystics in other traditions) by the image of the coincidence and, in some cases, identity of opposites—hence the high priest is tempted to draw the strange fire into the shrine, to traverse the boundary and thereby unite demonic and divine, to affirm, in the zoharic language, God's declaration, *ana we-shem ḥad hu,* "I and the name are one." Although the monistic claim is metaphysically true, in the unredeemed world, the mandate for the pious Jew is to keep pure and impure separate. When confronting the sacred in the form of the erotic energy of the feminine, the priest must resist the enticement to render the disjuncture of the moment—the slashing of the instant—conjunctive by blurring the boundaries separating holy and unholy.

There is one more layer of meaning to expose from the zoharic homily, the layer that will help us uncover the most recondite dimension of the ontology of time and the kabbalistic phenomenology of prayer as they illumine the feminine imaginary of the *imago templi.* We have established that the moment, *et,* corresponds to *Shekhinah,* the feminine potency of the divine. The matter of gender construction, however, is more complex than meets the eye. Let us recall the following comment:

> If you want to know by means of what he should enter—"through this" (*be-zo't*). "Through this Aaron shall enter into the shrine" (*be-zo't yavo aharon el ha-qodesh*) (Lev. 16:3), this *zo't* is the moment (*et*) that is attached to my name; through this *yod,* which is inscribed in my name, you will enter the shrine.

The intent of this passage is to relate that the ascription of the temporal category *et* to the feminine is dependent on her receiving the seminal efflux of divine energy from the supernal *sefirot,* which are fashioned imaginally as male.[65] The point is enunciated in the following comment of David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, a likely member of the fraternity responsible for the earliest strata of the zoharic text:[66] "This is [the import of] 'Your garments should be white in every moment' (Eccles. 9:8), verily 'in every moment' (*be-khol et*), and this is the secret of 'do not come at any moment to the shrine' (Lev. 16:2), for all the lights of the supernal crown (*keter elyon*) illumine this moment (*me'irim le-hai et*), as it says, 'It is the moment to do for the Lord' (*et la'asot la-yhwh*) (Ps. 119:126), a moment 'for every time and a moment for every yearning' (*la-kol zeman we-et le-khol ḥefeṣ*) (Eccles. 3:1)."[67]

To comprehend the full implications of this remark, it is necessary to bear in mind that the context in which it occurs is an exposition of the words "he does not remit all punishment," *we-naqqeh lo yenaqqeh* (Exod. 34:7), which appear in the biblical verses whence rabbinic interpreters eisegetically derived the thirteen attributes of divine mercy. Building on previous rabbinic texts, the medieval kabbalist accords theurgic power to these verses; their recitation by Israel induces the bestowal of a "free gift" (*matnat ḥinnam*)[68] on God's part in the form of his forgiving all transgressions through the conduit of "the attribute of whiteness (*middat ha-lavan*), which is

65. The point is made in slightly different terminology in the commentary of Naḥmanides to the scriptural expression "this is the blessing," *we-zo't ha-berakhah* (Deut. 33:1), *Perushei ha-Torah,* vol. 2, p. 491: "By way of truth, 'this' [*we-zo't*] is the 'blessing' [*ha-berakhah*], 'for from the Lord this [*zo't*] was' (Ps. 118:23), and, similarly, with respect to Jacob it is said 'and this [*we-zo't*] is what their father said to them' (Gen. 49:28). 'This is the blessing'—this is what was spoken by David, 'This [*zo't*] has been my lot, for I have observed your precepts' (Ps. 119:56). This alludes to Zion, the city of David, 'there the Lord ordained blessing, everlasting life' (ibid., 133:3), and the enlightened will comprehend [*we-ha-maskil yavin*]." Naḥmanides reads the expression *we-zo't ha-berakhah* as an appositive rather than constructive: That is, *zo't* is the *berakhah,* thereby forging an essential link between *Shekhinah* and blessing, a link that is dependent, moreover, on the fact that *Shekhinah* is like a vessel that holds the overflow of the blessing received from the emanations above her. At the conclusion of the relevant passage, Naḥmanides draws the obvious conclusion, "for the word 'this' [*zo't*] alludes to the blessing [*berakhah*], which is the Torah, and this is the covenant [*berit*], as it is written 'this is my covenant' [*zo't beriti*] (Isa. 59:21)."

66. Liebes (see note 30), pp. 126–134.

67. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, *Sefer ha-Gevul,* Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, MS Mic. 2197, fol. 25b.

68. The expression used as a poetic representation of the divine attribute of grace in various rabbinic and liturgical contexts. See below, note 76.

the whiteness of the skull (*loven shel ha-gulgolet*)."[69] The essence of time whence the mystery of prayer may be discerned is connected to the image of the gratuitous gift[70] that ensues from the "attribute of whiteness" or the "whiteness of the skull," images that signify that *Keter,* the first of the emanations, consists of pure compassion.[71] From this unmitigated mercy, the "free gift," one may discern the nature of time as the primordial flux, the wellspring of light renewed in each moment as that which has formerly been, the absolute potential of all that may actually exist, the nothing that is everything in the everything that nothing is.[72] The impulse of time, the *élan vital* of divine energy that permeates the whole of reality, is this free gift, the gifting that embraces the reciprocity of give and take, such that bestowing is a form of receiving and receiving a form of bestowing, the gift that ensues from the boundless grace that exceeds the binary of guilt and innocence, merit and blame, the world of unqualified purity without any admixture of impurity—indeed, the purity beyond the duality of pure and impure.[73] The nature of time instantiated in the moment, the *et* that is assigned to *Malkhut,* reflects this impulse that she receives from *Keter.*[74]

The symbolic implication of the nexus between *Keter* and *Malkhut,* and particularly the liturgical transformation of the temporal interim, which is linked to the feminine, is brought into sharper relief in the following passage from another treatise authored by David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid. The exegetical focus is the verse that encapsulates the entreaty of Moses before God, the prelude to his prayer that may be called the prayer before prayer, that is, the prayer that opens the possibility of prayer, "I pleaded with the Lord at that time," *wa-eṯḥannan el yhwh ba-et ha-hi* (Deut. 3:23):

> Now I have come to enter in the secret of the portion as it says "I pleaded with the Lord." The [expression] *wa-eṯḥannan* is naught but the language of grace (*ḥinnam*), as it is written "and the grace that I grant" (*we-ḥannoti et asher aḥon*) (Exod. 33:19). For Moses was supplicating and praying to *Keter Elyon,* which is the attribute of grace (*middat (ḥinnam*) . . . for he pardons the wicked as the righteous, and this is attribute of indifference (*middat ha-hashwa'ah*). Therefore, it is written "I pleaded with the Lord at that time," that is, he entered and ascended from attribute to attribute, and he began to enter from the tenth attribute, which is the attribute of the moment (*middat et*), as it says "do not come at any moment to the shrine" (Lev. 16:2). Thus he ascended from attribute to attribute until the attribute of *Keter Elyon,* which bestows a free gift (*matnat ḥinnam*) to the righteous and to the wicked.[75]

The secret imparted by the scriptural depiction of the supplication of Moses is that prayer rises to the supernal aspect, the attribute of grace, whence divine beneficience issues impartially for the wicked and righteous, the attribute of indifference wherein opposites coincide in the identity of their difference. The petition of Moses, as prayer more generally, is linked to a particular moment, *ba-et ha-hi,* which corresponds symbolically to the tenth of the emanations to the degree that it incorporates the benevolence of the first of the emanations. The worshipper enters through *Malkhut,* which is the moment, and ascends to *Keter,* the boundless source of the free gift, the divine efflux that proceeds infinitely in an act of pure love that is identified as the true essence of prayer, an idea that the medieval kabbalist expresses (following older sources) by linking the word *ḥinnam* to the biblical *wa-eṯḥanan.*[76] With this in mind, we can better comprehend the interpretation of the verse "Your garments should be white in every moment" (Eccles. 9:8) in the first passage from David ben Yehudah

69. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, *Sefer ha-Gevul,* Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, MS Mic. 2197, fol. 25b.

70. I borrow this expression from Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1983), p. 26. Corbin describes the Hermetic figure of the "good daemon" (*Agathos Daimōn*), also identified as the celestial partner (*daimōn paredros*), as "the helping, tutelary angel—a gratuitous gift obtained by prayer." Perhaps in a separate study, I will explore the relevance of this complex of symbols for understanding medieval kabbalah.

71. Wolfson (see note 49), pp. 213–214.

72. Wolfson (see note 31), pp. 87–98.

73. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, *Or Zaru'a,* Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, MS Mic. 2203, fols. 9a, 38a.

74. The relationship between *Keter* and *Malkhut,* which is an extremely important dimension of the thought of this kabbalist, demands a separate analysis. For a preliminary discussion, see the introduction to David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, *The Book of Mirros: Sefer Mar'ot ha-Ẓove'ot,* ed. Daniel Chanan Matt (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), pp. 26–27.

75. Ibid., p. 235 (Hebrew section).

76. *Sifre on Deuteronomy,* ed. Louis Finkelstein (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969), sec. 26, pp. 38–39 (Hebrew); *Midrash Tanḥuma* (Jerusalem: Eshkol., 1972), Wa-eṯḥannan, sec. 3, p. 853. The formulation that seems to have influenced David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid the most is the paraphrase of the midrashic text in the biblical commentary of Solomon ben Isaac, *Perushei Rashi al ha-Torah,* ed. Ḥayyim D. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1983), p. 524 (ad Deut. 3:23): "*Wa-eṯḥanan,* in every place *ḥinnan* connotes a free gift (*matnat ḥinnam*). Even though the righteous could rely on their good deeds, they do make a request from God except as a free gift."

he-Ḥasid cited above: The nature of the moment can be fathomed from *Keter,* the ancient one, coterminous with the infinite and yet renewed, albeit unremittingly, as that which has eternally been what is yet-to-become. Inasmuch as the supernal emanation is depicted as the "attribute of whiteness" or as the "whiteness of the skull," it is incumbent that an individual's garment be white *in every moment.*

In the aforecited zoharic passage, the gender transformation of this process is brought into sharper relief. *Shekhinah* assumes the posture of the moment (*et*) when she receives from and is thereby incorporated into the male. The transposition is alluded to in the claim that the word *zo't,* the feminine demonstrative pronoun, is the *yod* that is inscribed in the divine name. The reference obviously is to the first letter of the Tetragrammaton, which is *yod,* but in this context, the more specific allusion is to the *yod* that is the letter/sign of circumcision; through that letter *Shekhinah* is attached to the name. To appreciate the full import of this claim, it is necessary to recall that zoharic homilists, as other kabbalists of their time, linked *Shekhinah,* which is called *aṭarah,* with the corona of the phallus, *aṭeret berit.*

As I have discussed this symbolism in several studies, I will not belabor the point here, but what I want to emphasize is the particular relevance of this transposition to understanding the nexus of time and prayer. The *et,* which initially was identified as the female aspect, the Matrona, in the end is assimilated into part of the male organ, the *yod* that is inscribed in the name. By what means does the priest enter the shrine? Through *zo't,* which is the *yod,* the sign of circumcision. And with this we reach the point of perfect symmetry in the homiletical rhetoric exhibited by the zoharic author: Nadab and Abihu cohabited with gentile women and thereby placed the sign of the covenant in an unworthy place. From this transgression the high priest is to learn that he can only go into the shrine through the potency of *zo't,* the letter of the name inscripted on the flesh, the *yod,* the feminine dimension of the phallic potency, identified as *aṭeret berit.*[77]

Exposure of the corona facilitates access to the sacred space in the sacred moment at hand, *be-zo't yavo aharon el ha-qodesh,* for the site of the covenantal incision is the ontic root of time in its alternating phases of night and day. In this manner, the erotic ecstasy of the instant, whose incisive cut tears the fabric of time, is properly restrained by means of the restoration of the female to the male in the form of the sign of circumcision, *zo't* reincorporated into *zeh.* The containment of the female in the male ensures that boundaries will not be traversed and that the distinction between holy and unholy will be preserved. When the potentially threatening force of the unruly, transgressive feminine is properly reined in, then crossing the threshold at the propitious moment—indeed, the moment is the threshold that one crosses, entering and departing, not as sequential acts but as one contemporaneous gesture—facilitates the meeting point of time and space, a concurrence that bespeaks the mystery of prayer, which serves as the paradigm for human worship more generally.

Let me conclude by reiterating that the world of the Castilian kabbalists responsible for the zoharic compilation was infinitely complex and hence the scholar is well served to avoid generalizations that level the textual variation. This warning notwithstanding, the themes I have discussed in this essay provide a window onto a central aspect of what legitimately may be called the zoharic notion of the *imago templi.* The image of the heavenly Temple is transposed in the zoharic kabbalah into a symbol of *Shekhinah,* the divine feminine. In numerous passages from the *Zohar,* the last of the luminous emanations is identified as the objective and subjective pole of the visual experience. A paradigmatic illustration of this idea is found in the following homiletical exegesis on the verse "The valley of vision pronouncement, what can have happened to you that you have gone, all of you, up on the roofs" (Isa. 22:1):

> Come and see: "The valley of vision" refers to *Shekhinah,* who was in the Temple, and all of the people of the world would draw the sustenance of prophecy (*yeniqu di-nevu'ah*) from her. Even though all of the prophets prophesied from another place, they drew their prophecies from her, and hence she is called "the valley of vision." "Vision" (*ḥizzayon*)—it has already been explained that it is the prism (*ḥeizu*) of all of the supernal colors.[78]

77. In *Zohar* 2:51a, the verse *be-zo't yavo aharon el ha-qodesh* (Lev. 16:3) is cited to anchor the idea that the way to approach the king is through the angelic mediator, *sheliḥa de-malka be-khola,* "the angel of the king in all things." This angelic being, also designated by the technical terms "angel of God," *mal'akh ha-elohim* (Gen. 31:11; Exod. 14:19, Judg. 6:20, 13:9; 2 Sam. 14:20), and "guardian of Israel," *shomer yisra'el* (Ps. 121:4), refers to *Shekhinah,* the symbolic referent of the pronoun *zo't* (see above, note 5). While there is nothing explicit or implicit in this passage to justify positioning the divine presence in the corona of the phallus, it seems to me nevertheless reasonable to presume that the gender of the angelic glory, which is the glorious angel, is masculine.

78. *Zohar* 1:203a.

The terminological association of the words "vision" (*ḥizzayon*) and "prism" (*ḥeizu*) undergirds a theme repeated on numerous occasions in zoharic and other kabbalistic literature regarding the visionary status of *Shekhinah*. In particular, that rank is linked to the fact that this emanation—like the moon in medieval astronomy—has no luminosity of its own and thus is compared to the mirror that reflects the supernal colors or forms.[79] Even more germane to the topic of this analysis is the fact that the visionary role is ascribed to *Shekhinah* especially as she is located within the confines of the Temple, the place whence prophetic inspiration disseminated to the world. As we can elicit from other relevant discussions incorporated in the textual landscape of the *Zohar, Shekhinah* is assigned the title "prism" for she corresponds to both the archetypal image in the sefirotic world, which is cast more specifically as the image of the anthropos Israel, and to the human faculty of the imagination that affords one access to that image.[80] In the terms enunciated by Corbin, *Shekhinah* occupies the position of the intermediate world, the place where the two seas, the sea of the spiritual emanations and the sea of the corporeal forms, meet, for within the confines of the imagination the divine presence is garbed in the form of the imaginal body through which the incorporeal is configured. The ritual space-time related to the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem Temple is transformed in zoharic kabbalah into the imaginary time-space of the heart of the visionary in the perennial mystic quest to envision the invisible and to name the unnameable.

79. Ibid., 88b, 91a. For further discussion, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol," *History of Religions* 27 (1987):199–201, and Wolfson, *Through a Speculum* (see note 5), pp. 310–311.

80. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum* (see note 5), pp. 306–317.