

Nequddat ha-Reshimu – The Trace of Transcendence and
the Transcendence of the Trace
The Paradox of *Simsum* in the RaShaB's
Hemshekh Ayin Beit

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Perhaps this trace approaches the face,
approach always delayed, revealed.
What carries us to the infinite. ...
Thought in infinite regress, writing of the abyss. ...
The trace is tied to being, to essence,
as to the emptiness with which it perhaps resonates.

—Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Margins*

On 6 Sivan 5672 (May 12, 1912), the first day of Shavuot, the fifth master in the Ḥabad-Lubavitch dynasty, Shalom Dovber Schneerson, the Rebbe RaShaB (1892-1920), began a series of 144 continuous discourses (*ma'amarim*) that lasted until 15 Heshvan 5676 (October 23, 1915), the Sabbath of parashat Wayyera. It is widely believed, in no small measure due to the advocacy of the seventh rebbe, Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, the RaMaM (1902-1994),¹ that this composition is one of the deepest and most intricate expositions of Ḥabad religious philosophy. The published version, which includes the transcription of the discourses delivered orally as well as the written discourses that were never delivered, was published posthumously in 1977 as *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu 5672*. The title is based on the dictum transmitted in the name of R. Simai with which the opening discourse begins, 'When the Israelites gave precedence to "we will do" over "we will listen" (Exodus 24:7), six hundred thousand ministering angels came and set two crowns upon each man of Israel, one as a reward for "we will do," and the other as a reward for "we will listen."

¹ Even prior to assuming the leadership of the movement in 1951, Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson was known by both acronyms RaMaM (R. Menaḥem Mendel) and RaMaSh (R. Menaḥem Schneerson).

But as soon as Israel sinned, one million two hundred thousand destroying angels descended and removed them, as it is said, “And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from mount Horeb” (ibid., 33:6).² The treatise is also known as *Hemshekh Te'erav* or by the abbreviated title *Ayin Beit*, referring obviously to the year when the presentation of this material was initiated.

Simsum and the Concealment of Disclosure

In this essay, I will examine several crucial themes in this seminal work clustered about the expression *nequddat ha-reshimu*, the ‘point of the trace’. While this locution, both conceptually and philologically, is based on Lurianic material that describes the emergence of the point (*nequddah*) as the trace (*reshimu*) that remains in the void (*halal*) or empty space (*maqom pannuy*) as a consequence of the withdrawal (*simsum*) of the infinite light (*or ein sof*), it appears that the RaShaB was the first to coin the precise term in *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*.³ As is well known, the prominence of the doctrine of *simsum* in Lurianic kabbalah provoked a significant controversy in the seventeenth and

2 Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 88a.

3 I am here referring to the expression *nequddat ha-reshimu*, and not to the notion of *reshimu*, which is expounded at great length in previous Habad sources, due to the influence of the Sarugian version of the Lurianic teaching, especially as transmitted by Naftali Bachrach, *Emeq ha-Melekh*, Amsterdam 1648, pt. 1, ch. 1, 1a. Regarding this influence, see the brief remarks in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menahem Mendel Schneerson*, New York 2009, p. 60; Nochem Grunwald, ‘On the Kabbalah of R. Israel Sarug in Hasidic Teaching: Trace, Garment, and the Withdrawal Before the First Withdrawal in Habad Hasidism’, *Heikhal ha-Besht* 31 (2011), pp. 48-60, esp. 49-52 (Hebrew). Another crucial text that influenced the Habad masters is the marginal gloss of Moses Zacuto to Vital’s *Oserot Hayyim*, which adds the word *reshimu* to explain the initial phase of the withdrawal of light, a word that is overtly missing in the account offered by Vital. For the text of Zacuto, see Hayyim Vital, *Oserot Hayyim*, Beit Shemesh 2012, 1d, and see Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, Brooklyn 1996, Wayyiqra, 43b, 51b. These sources are mentioned by Grunwald, ‘On the Kabbalah of R. Israel Sarug’, pp. 50 n. 12 and 51 n. 15. See also Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5643-5645*, Brooklyn 1983, p. 79. On the Lurianic doctrine of the *reshimu*, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1956, p. 264; Isaiah Tishby, *The Doctrine of Evil and the ‘Kelippah’ in Lurianic Kabbalism*, Jerusalem 1942, pp. 24-25 (Hebrew); Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship*, Stanford 2003, pp. 130-131, 147-148.

eighteenth centuries centered on the question of whether it should be interpreted literally or figuratively. Does it signify an actual withdrawal of the light of Ein Sof from itself and into itself, resulting paradoxically in the formation of a vacuum within the plenum, or is it a metaphorical way of depicting the concealment of that light from human cognition?⁴ If the act of withdrawal literally happened, then there would appear to be justification for distinguishing the transcendence of Ein Sof and the immanence of the light in the various worlds. If, however, it is only a figure of speech to mark the apparent concealment of the light when considered from the human point of view, then it is merely a temporary barrier that separates individual consciousness from the infinite. The mental obstacle is eliminated when one realizes that all that exists is a manifestation of that hidden light, and there would seem to be a leaning in the direction of panentheism or acosmism.⁵ In the seventh chapter of *Sha'ar ha-Yihud we-ha-Emunah*, Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812) famously opposed the literal interpretation of *šimšum* on the part of 'some sages', a position associated with Elijah ben Solomon, the Gaon of Vilna, and his disciples, as part of their polemical opposition to the ḥasidic espousal of an ecstatic monism and the alleged assault on the ontic autonomy of the world vis-à-vis God.⁶ A careful reading of the text indicates that Shneur

- 4 For two helpful reviews of the problem with fairly exhaustive citation of previous scholarly discussions, see Yoni Garb, 'Rabbi Kook and His Sources: From Kabbalistic Historiosophy to National Mysticism', in *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths*, Leiden 2004, pp. 81-82, and Raphael B. Schuchat, *A World Hidden in the Dimensions of Time: The Theory of Redemption in the Writings of the Vilna Gaon, Its Sources and Influences on Later Generations*, Ramat-Gan 2008, pp. 117-122 (Hebrew).
- 5 This was the position articulated by Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 262. See also idem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, edited by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, translated by Allan Arkush, Princeton 1987, p. 276; David Biale, 'Gershom Scholem's Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah: Text and Commentary', *Modern Judaism* 5 (1985), pp. 79-80.
- 6 Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, Brooklyn 2010, pt. 2, ch. 7, 81b-85a. See Rachel Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism*, translated by Jeffrey M. Green, Albany 1993, pp. 79-91, esp. 85-89, and sources cited on p. 240 n. 3; and other references mentioned in Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 336 n. 112, to which I would add Amos Funkenstein, 'Imitatio Dei and the Concept of *Šimšum* in the Teaching of Ḥabad', in *Studies in Jewish Thought Presented to Professor Raphael Mahler on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, edited by Shmuel Yeivin, Merḥavia 1974, pp. 83-88 (Hebrew); Joseph P. Schultz, *Judaism and the Gentile Faiths: Comparative*

Zalman's nonliteral interpretation is based on a twofold assumption: on the one hand, from the perspective of infinity, there cannot be any withdrawal because everything is as nothing before the one true reality of Ein Sof, and thus it is impossible for the light to be diminished in actuality; on the other hand, from the perspective of the finite, there is nothing but withdrawal, since every materialization of that light in the guise of a separate entity (*yesh nifrad*) is perforce an occlusion.⁷ By interpreting *šimšum* literally, as the RaMaM explained Shneur Zalman's words, one may be prone to think that the world is the totality of existence (*a gantse metsius*).⁸ When appropriately understood, however, the doctrine of *šimšum* bespeaks the paradox that the immanent presence of divinity in the world is proportionate to its absence from the world,

Studies in Religion, Rutherford 1981, pp. 91-92; Jacob Gottlieb, *Rationalism in Hasidic Attire: Habad's Harmonistic Approach to Maimonides*, Ramat-Gan 2009, pp. 68-69 (Hebrew); Dov Schwartz, *Habad's Thought from Beginning to End*, Ramat-Gan 2010, pp. 86-114 (Hebrew). For a nuanced discussion of Shneur Zalman's position on *šimšum*, monism, and divine immanence in relation to the Vilna Gaon and his disciples, see Allan Nadler, *The Faith of Mithnagdim: Rabbinic Responses to Hasidic Rapture*, Baltimore 1997, pp. 12-20. On the Vilna Gaon's understanding of *šimšum*, see also Alan Brill, 'The Mystical Path of the Vilna Gaon', *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993), p. 134; Yosef Avivi, *The Kabbalah of the Vilna Gaon*, Jerusalem 1993, p. 27 (Hebrew); Elliot R. Wolfson, 'From Sealed Book to Open Text: Time, Memory, and Narrativity in Kabbalistic Hermeneutics', in *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*, edited by Steven Kepnes, New York 1996, pp. 158-160, 173-174 n. 59; Raphael Schuchat, 'The Vilna Gaon's Commentary to *Mishnat Ḥasidim*: The *Mashal* and the *Nimshal* in Lurianic Works', *Kabbalah* 3 (1998), pp. 265-302, esp. 272-274 (Hebrew); idem, *A World Hidden*, pp. 137-141; Garb, 'Rabbi Kook', p. 82; Tzvi Einfeld, *The Teaching of the Gra and Ḥasidic Doctrine: These and Those are the Words of the Living God*, Jerusalem 2010, pp. 198-218 (Hebrew). On the complicated and at times contentious relationship between Shneur Zalman and the Vilna Gaon in light of the latter's criticism of Ḥasidism, see Immanuel Etkes, *The Gaon of Vilna: The Man and His Image*, translated by Jeffrey M. Green, Berkeley 2002, pp. 100-111, 121-133, 135-136, 147-150; idem, *Ba'al ha-Tanya: Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady and the Origins of Ḥabad Ḥasidism*, Jerusalem 2011, pp. 225-229, 240-245, 248-252, 282-284, 304-305, 310-315 (Hebrew); Eliyahu Stern, *The Genius: Elijah of Vilna and the Making of Modern Judaism*, New Haven 2013, pp. 26, 86-89, 94, 96, 112.

7 Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, pt. 1, chs. 48-49, 67a-70a; pt. 4, ch. 25, 140b; idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, Wayyiqra, 52b-d; idem, *Seder Tefillot mikol ha-Shanah*, Brooklyn 1986, 271a.

8 Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva'aduyyot 5716*, vol. 3, Brooklyn 2000, p. 169.

for if not for this absence, the world would not appear to be the ostensible reality in which the divine could be both present as absent and absent as present.⁹

A full scale study of the different nuances of this topic in the vast and complex literature produced by the seven masters of the Ḥabad-Lubavitch lineage and their disciples is a scholarly desideratum,¹⁰ but for my purposes I will limit my remarks to the RaShaB, and even with respect to this figure my comments will not be exhaustive, as I am focusing primarily on the *Hemshekh Ayin Beit*. The position on *šimšum* that he assumes is not adequately categorized as either figurative or literal. More generally, as I have argued elsewhere, the modality of thinking at play in Ḥabad sources is one in which this polarity should be problematized, insofar as something can be deemed to be literally true to the extent that it is figuratively so, and figuratively true to the extent that it is literally so, whence it follows that what is most literal is the figurative, an idea often communicated rhetorically by the term *mammash*.¹¹ With respect to a ‘true parable’ (*mashal ha-amitti*), there is an isomorphic relation between the *mashal* and the *nimshal*.¹² Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me state emphatically that I am well aware of the fact that there are contexts in which the term *mashal* is invoked in order to

9 Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 84.

10 Compare the fourfold schematization offered in Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 1987, no. 11, pp. 19-21, reprinted in Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Liqqutei Siḥot*, vol. 15, Brooklyn 1999, pp. 470-471: the *šimšum* is literal (*ki-feshuto*) and it applies to the divine essence (*asmut*); (2) the *šimšum* is literal but applies to the light (*or*) and not to the essence; (3) the *šimšum* is not literal (*de-lo ki-feshuto*) and it applies to the luminescence (*ma'or*) that is above the light; (4) the *šimšum* is not literal and it applies only to the light. It is of interest to note that in this letter, written in Paris on 19 Shevaṭ 5699 (February 8, 1939), Schneerson suggested that Ḥayyim of Volozhyn's position on *šimšum* in *Nefesh ha-Ḥayyim* betrays the influence of Ḥabad sources, and especially *Tanya*. Even so, he argues that Ḥayyim of Volozhyn embraced the third perspective, whereas the true opinion of Ḥabad accords with the fourth position, since the act of withdrawal can be ascribed only to the lowest aspect of the light. For a recent discussion of the different views, largely following the schema delineated in Schneerson's letter, see Moshe Leib Miller, *Mishnat Ḥabad: Sefer Arakhim—Seder ha-Hishtalshelut*, Brooklyn 2012, pp. 110-120.

11 For a more extended discussion on this topic, see Elliot R. Wolfson, ‘Revealing and Re/veiling Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson's Messianic Secret’, *Kabbalah* 26 (2012), pp. 56-63.

12 Schneerson, *Liqqutei Siḥot*, vol. 15, pp. 475-476.

distinguish the figurative from the literal, or where it is stated explicitly that there is no homology between a particular figure of speech derived from the physical realm and the spiritual reality that is depicted figuratively (*ein ha-mashal domeh la-nimshal*),¹³ including the very topic of *šimšum*.¹⁴ Another case in point would be the ascription of somatic images to the divine: God is not literally a fleshy body subject to generation and decay; and yet, to say these images are applied to the divine figuratively (*al derekh mashal*) is not to deny their literalness but rather to recast the meaning of the literal, so that one apprehends that what is most literally true—hyperliterally so—is the symbolic. Anthropomorphism is not merely a device to enunciate the inherent metaphoricity of theological language; it is rather a mode of discourse that calls into question our naturalistic and commonsensical assumptions about human and cosmic corporeity. The true nature of the carnal is not the corruptible body but the imaginal body, whose tangibility is to be ascertained from the ‘spiritual metaphor’ (*mashal ruḥani*), encapsulated scripturally in the

13 See, for instance, Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, pt. 1, ch. 42, 60b; pt. 2, ch. 3, 78b; ch. 6, 81a; idem, *Torah Or*, Brooklyn 2001, 14c, 92b, 103c; idem, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5566*, vol. 1, revised edition, Brooklyn 2004, p. 44; idem, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen—Ethalekh le-Oznaya*, Brooklyn 2012, p. 245; Dov Baer Schneersohn, *Perush ha-Millot*, Brooklyn 1993, 110d; idem, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Emsa'i: Qunṭresim*, Brooklyn 1991, pp. 5, 264; idem, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Emsa'i: Hanaḥot*, Brooklyn 1994, p. 336; idem, *Torat Hayyim: Bere'shit*, Brooklyn 1993, 122b, 164b; idem, *Torat Hayyim: Shemot*, Brooklyn 2003, 365a; idem, *Imrei Binah*, revised edition, Brooklyn 2008, 54c; idem, *Sha'arei Or*, Brooklyn 1997, 80b; Menaḥem Mendel Schneersohn, *Derekh Mišwotekha*, Brooklyn 1993, 49b, 54b, 135b, 149a, 153a; idem, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 1995, p. 140; idem, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 3, Brooklyn 1998, p. 967; idem, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Šemaḥ Sedeq 5614-5615*, Brooklyn 1997, pp. 36, 94, 184, 249; Shmuel Schneersohn, *Torat Shmu'el 5627*, Brooklyn 2000, pp. 348, 474; idem, *Torat Shmu'el 5629*, Brooklyn 1992, p. 371; idem, *Torat Shmu'el 5631*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 2004, p. 223; *Torat Shmu'el 5640*, vol. 2, Brooklyn 2004, pp. 573, 661, 866, 871, 872, 945; Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu 5672*, Brooklyn 2011, p. 1364; Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 3, Brooklyn 1987, no. 543, p. 209; idem, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5712*, vol. 3, Brooklyn 1997, p. 74; idem, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5713*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 1997, p. 202; *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5713*, vol. 2, Brooklyn 1997, p. 163; idem, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5716*, vol. 2, Brooklyn 2000, p. 203; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 36, Brooklyn 1999, p. 46.

14 Schneersohn, *Derekh Mišwotekha*, 54b.

verse ‘from my flesh I will behold God’ (Job 19:26).¹⁵ I return to this matter below but at this juncture what needs to be underlined is that the historical debate regarding *šimšum* should be reframed in light of this philosophical discussion. Even a cursory look at the plethora of texts that discuss the variegated implications of this doctrine well attest that labeling the Ḥabad perspective ‘figurative’ as opposed to ‘literal’ is woefully inadequate.

The RaShaB states in the inaugural discourse of *Ayin Beit*, ‘in order for there to be the generation of the worlds [*hithawwut ha-olamot*], there had to be the *šimšum* initially, which is the removal of the light [*silluq ha-or*].’¹⁶ Note the exact language: *šimšum* is identified as the removal of the light and not simply its obfuscation; the pretense of worlds that appear to be ontically independent of the infinite light necessitates the withdrawal of that light through an act of constriction that creates the boundary (*hagbalah*) and partition (*hithallequt*) within the boundless and indivisible required for there to be any semblance of external reality. What is generally thought to be the acosmic orientation of Ḥabad must be qualified: the preliminary concealment of the infinite light (*or ein sof*) is not due to the epistemic inability to perceive that light; it is necessitated ontologically by the process of emanation; the worlds can come forth from the first light only after it has been condensed.¹⁷ Expressed in a different terminological register: in the light of infinity prior to the withdrawal, the aspect of the will is not yet manifest as the will, not even to itself, because there is no other in relation to it. To activate that will as a creative potency, it was necessary for the infinite light to withdraw so as to provide the conditions necessary for there to be the appearance of a relativized absolute—the absolute that can be described as ‘one’ (*eḥad*), since it is the ‘unity of particulars’ (*hitahadut ha-peraṭim*) in contrast to the absolutized absolute, the infinite essence (*ašmut ein sof*) about which it can be said only that it is unique (*yaḥid*), a oneness that has no differential and hence no relationality to the worlds

15 Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5573*, Brooklyn 2012, p. 9. On the contrast between a corporeal metaphor and a spiritual metaphor, see Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, Wayyiqra, 54c; Schneersohn, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Emsa'i: Quntresim*, p. 201; Schneersohn, *Derekh Mišwotekha*, 183a.

16 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu 5672*, p. 3. Compare *ibid.*, p. 456, where the first *šimšum* is described as the ‘aspect of the removal of the light and its privation’. And compare Shlomo Zalman Schneersohn, *Magen Avot al Sefer Wayyiqra*, Berditchev 1902, 33d.

17 Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah 5666*, revised edition, Brooklyn 2010, pp. 293, 467.

(*shayyakhut el ha-olamot*).¹⁸ The comportment of the infinite will is to shine—after all, such is the nature of light—but this can be effectuated only by not shining; in the zoharic parlance, *Keter* (or *Arikh Anpin*) displays the movement of *matei we-lo matei*,¹⁹ ‘touching and not touching’, flowing outward (*hitpashshetut*) and retreating inward (*histallequt*),²⁰ not successively but simultaneously: to spread without is to recede within.

The example used repeatedly to illustrate the point is that of the master and the disciple. In order to impart knowledge, it is necessary for the former to compact and to conceal the light of his intellect, so that it is commensurate to the ability of the latter to receive. We cannot expect comprehension on the part of the disciple unless the ‘essence of the intellect’ (*ašmiyyut ha-sekhet*) of the master is revealed through acts of constriction in the form of the ‘permutations of the letters of speech’ (*šerufei otiiyyot ha-dibbur*).²¹ Similarly, for the light to emanate from the essence of the emanator (*ašmut ha-ma’asıl*) to the emanated beings (*ha-ne’ešalim*), there had to be a multiplicity of withdrawals (*ribbuy šimšumim*) to complement the first withdrawal (*šimšum ha-ri’shon*).²² The RaShaB posits four constrictions corresponding to the four letters of the Tetragrammaton, which collectively symbolize the drawing forth of the light from infinity to the finite. More specifically, the correspondence is set forth in the following way: *yod* is the ‘beginning of the drawing forth of the line as it is above Adam Qadmon’; *he* is the ‘aspect of Adam Qadmon’; *waw* is the ‘aspect of the general formation’ (*yeširah di-kelalut*); and *he* is the ‘aspect of the plane of emanation’ (*ha-shetaḥ ha-ašilut*).²³ Alternatively, *yod* corresponds to the ‘aspect of the point of the trace’ (*beḥinat nequddat ha-reshimu*), the point that ‘contains everything that will be disclosed in the totality of the concatenation’

18 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 701, 1332. On the distinction between *yaḥid* and *eḥad*, see Wolfson *Open Secret*, pp. 79, 88-89, 325 n. 168, 334 n. 80.

19 *Zohar* 1:16b, 65a, 72a; 2:268b; 3:164b.

20 Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5652-5653*, Brooklyn 1987, p. 38; idem, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 340, 456, 910, 963, 966 (in that context, the touching yet not touching is linked to *sha’ashu’im*, the noetic jouissance of the light of the infinite), 977. Compare Schneersohn, *Imrei Binah*, 64d-66c.

21 Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 82b. Compare Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwawa’aduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, Brooklyn 1999, p. 71. It goes without saying that the metaphor of the master and the disciple to illustrate the mystery of *šimšum* appears in numerous texts.

22 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 160-161.

23 Ibid., p. 161. In the summation of this section (p. 162), the correspondence is as follows: the *yod* is the beginning of the line (*re’shit ha-qaw*), and the other three letters are correlated with creation, formation, and doing.

(*kolelet kol mah she-yitgalleh bi-khelahut ha-hishtalshelut*); *he* is the matter of the 231 gates of the world of the garment (*olam ha-malbish*);²⁴ *waw* is the 'disclosure of the line that is after the withdrawal that enclothes' (*hitgallut ha-qaw she-aḥar ha-šimšum ha-malbish*), the beginning of the line (*re'shit ha-qaw*) above Adam Qadmon; and *he* is the aspect of Adam Qadmon.²⁵ For the purposes of this study I will turn my attention to the image of the point of the trace.

The first occurrence of the expression appears in the discourse from the second night of Shavu'ot 5672 (May 22, 1912), and this shall be the touchstone for the ensuing analysis. Emanation (*ašilut*) is described as the intermediary (*memuša*) between infinity (*ein sof*) and the created worlds (*olamot hanivra'im*). The nature of an intermediary is such that it links two opposites but in order to do so, it must comprise both aspects dialectically without being reduced to either one of them.²⁶ In the RaShaB's own words: 'It is known that in every [instance of] two opposites, of necessity there must be an intermediary [*memuša*] between them to join them, and it is not possible for there to be greater opposites than the limit [*gevul*] and the limitless [*beli gevul*], and how is it possible for there to be the existence of a limit from the infinite light, which is entirely without limit? Of necessity there must be an intermediary between them'.²⁷ The phenomenon of the *memuša* in general is demonstrated from the particular example of the limitless and the limited. The mystery is such that even these two allegedly unbridgeable antinomies are bridged by the

24 The RaShaB renders the Sarugian idea of *olam ha-malbush* as *olam ha-malbish*. It occurs three times in *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 161, 162 and 876. See also Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5652-5653*, p. 97. In that context, the RaShaB refers explicitly to the first part of Bachrach's *Emeq ha-Melekh*, ch. 61, 12a, where mention is made of the ten *sefirot* of *olam ha-malbush*, which are the root of all the ten *sefirot* below. This confirms that the expression *olam ha-malbish* is the RaShaB's idiosyncratic way of vocalizing Sarug's *olam ha-malbush*. The text of *Emeq ha-Melekh* is cited in the same way in Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5651*, Brooklyn 1987, p. 24. See also idem, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5646-5650*, second edition, Brooklyn 2006, p. 278². I am not sure why the RaShaB modified the original phrase.

25 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 161.

26 This terminology is attested in older kabbalistic sources. For instance, Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi's commentary to *Sefer Yeširah* 1:6, printed erroneously as a work of Abraham ben David of Posquières in *Sefer Yeširah*, Jerusalem 1990, 27d-28a; Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, Jerusalem 2000, 9:6, 149a-b. Many more examples could have been cited. See below, n. 28.

27 Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5652-5653*, p. 37.

intermediary of *Keter*, the infinite will, which is differentiated from the emanator but not in a manner that allows it to be counted as one of the emanations.²⁸ Unlike ‘the light of the infinite, which is in the aspect of complete removal from the worlds [*havdalah legamrei min ha-olamot*], since it is not at all in the aspect of relatedness to the worlds [*shayyakhut kelal el ha-olamot*],’²⁹ and thus it is ‘in the aspect of utter concealment in its essence [*he’lem legamrei be-ašmuto*], for there is no aspect of disclosure at all in the essence [*gilluy kelal ba-ešem*],’ *Keter* is the aspect of volition marked by the sense of arousal (*hit’orerut*) for the other (*le-davar ha-zulat*), what we may call in present-day jargon the lure for alterity, and hence it bears the ‘aspect of relatedness to the thing that is aroused within it’ (*beḥinat shayyakhut el ha-davar she-nit’orer bo*).³⁰ In spite of the connectivity to the other and the potential for plurality within the one that this proclivity to overflow to the other (*lehaspi’a el ha-zulat*) entails,³¹ the infinitude of *Keter* still precludes it from being enumerated as one of the emanations.

In the same way, the *sefirot* as a whole are a *memuša*, as they bridge the infinite and the finite worlds, and consequently they must exhibit the two aspects, which are demarcated respectively as the light (*or*) and the vessel (*keli*). The vessel is described further as the aspect of boundary (*gevul*) and existence (*meši’ut*), and the light as the aspect without existence (*beli meši’ut*). The root of the light is located in the line (*qaw*) that extends from the ‘infinite light that is prior to the withdrawal’ (*or ein sof she-lifnei ha-šimšum*), and the root of the vessel in the ‘point of the trace, the aspect of the place’ (*nequddat ha-reshimu beḥinat ha-maqom*), the impending spatiality that emerges as an outcome of the withdrawal.³² The purpose of the *šimšum* is that there should be a disclosure of the interiority of the line (*penimiyyut ha-qaw*)³³—a terminus

28 On *Keter* as the *memuša* between the emanator (*ma’asil*) and the emanated (*ne’ešal*), see Hayyim Viṭal, *Eš Hayyim*, Jerusalem 1910, 42:1, 89b; Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, pt. 4, ch. 20, 130b; *Torah Or*, 24c, 109a-b; *Liqqutei Torah*, Wayyiqra, 46c.

29 See, however, Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 701, where the ‘infinite essence’ (*ašmut ein sof*) and the ‘infinite light’ (*or ein sof*) are distinguished by the fact that the former is not at all in the category of the worlds but the latter exhibits the quality of relatedness to the worlds. This distinction, which was articulated by the Alter Rebbe, is a fundamental tenet of Habad philosophy.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 344.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 457.

technicus that refers to the potential of the infinite to expand, which stems from the aspect called *tif'eret ha-ne'lam*,³⁴ identified by the zoharic expressions *qaw ha-middah* and *bošina de-qardinuta*,³⁵ also referred to as the interiority of *Keter* (*penimiyyut ha-keter*) or the interiority of *Atiq* (*penimiyyut atiq*), the manifestation of the aspect of the 'interiority and essentiality of the infinite' (*penimiyyut we-ašmiyyut ein sof*) that comprises the *coincidentia oppositorum* of the bounded and boundless (*hitkallelut di-shenei hafakhim di-gevul u-beli gevul*),³⁶ as opposed to the exteriority of the line (*hišoniyyut ha-qaw*), the potential of the infinite to form a measurable circumference, which stems from the aspect called *malkhut de-ein sof*³⁷—but for this to take place the light had to be externalized by being encompassed in garments.³⁸ From that vantage

- 34 Menaḥem Mendel Schneersohn, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 2, Brooklyn 1997, p. 722; *Sefer Tehillim: Ohel Yosef Yišḥaq im Perush Yahel Or*, third edition, Brooklyn 2002, p. 190; Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 116, 597. See additional references cited in nn. 33-35, and Shlomo Zalman Schneersohn, *Magen Avot al Sefer Bere'shit*, Berditchev 1902, 9a: 'As it is written according to the kabbalah of R. Israel Sarug, the line extends from the aspect of *tif'eret ha-ne'lam* (for the withdrawal was in *malkhut de-ein sof*)'. On the expression *tif'eret ha-ne'lam* as a synonym for *Keter* (also referred to as *da'at ha-ne'lam* or as *moaḥ ha-ne'lam*, the site of pure mercy), see Shabbetai Sheftel Horowitz, *Shefa Tal*, Jerusalem 2005, 2:3, p. 135; 2:4, p. 143; 6:1, pp. 290, 299; 6:11, p. 351; 6:14, p. 380. Compare Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 3:8, p. 36, where *Da'at* is characterized as '*Tif'eret* in its concealed existence, which is above *Binah*'. See also Isaiah Horowitz, *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit ha-Shalem*, edited and annotated by Meyer Katz, Haifa 2002, vol. 1, p. 374, vol. 2, p. 134; *Hemed Hadat we-Atiq*, Livorno 1849, 16b; Ya'aqov Ševi Yalles, *Qehillat Ya'aqov*, Lemberg 1870, s.v. ללל, 42d.
- 35 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 554, 556.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 555; see also pp. 597, 1170, 1435.
- 37 *Ibid.*, pp. 460, 1170. Compare Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5712*, vol. 3, p. 34; *idem*, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, p. 72; *idem*, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5715*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 1999, p. 63; *idem*, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5716*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 2000, pp. 43, 180; *idem*, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5717*, vol. 2, Brooklyn 2001, p. 252; *idem*, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5718*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 2002, p. 308.
- 38 Cast in the lingo of quantum physics, we could identify the light as the particle and the vessel as the antiparticle, which meet and collide in the zero gravitational energy of empty space, the nothingness that spawns the something that is the stuff of being. For a readable introduction to this convoluted discourse, see Henning Genz, *Nothingness: The Science of Empty Space*, translated by Karin Heusch, Cambridge, MA 1999. See also Lawrence M. Krauss, *A Universe From Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather than Nothing*, with an afterword by Richard

point, the root of the vessel may be judged to be higher than that of the light—in the infinitesimal measure coiled within the measureless infinity there is nothing more intensive than the impulse to extend compressed in the point of the trace—and, consequently, the nullification of the vessels (*bittul ha-kelim*) is superior to the nullification of the lights (*bittul ha-orot*) in the same manner that the conversion of one thing into its opposite (*ithapkha*) is superior to the subjugation of one thing by its opposite (*itkafya*).³⁹ The *bittul ha-keli* at the beginning of the emanative process, when the light of Ein Sof is garbed in the vessels—the annihilation that results in the radiation of the concealment of the concealment—anticipates the eschatological state, when the material vessels will be nullified by morphing into receptacles of light and the concealment will be disclosed in the disclosure of the concealment.⁴⁰ On the Sabbath, which is a

Dawkins, New York 2012, pp. 55-73, 141-170. The perspective of Krauss is decidedly anti-theological, but a more nuanced understanding of the apophatic approach to nothingness in mystical sources may have resulted in a more sympathetic attitude on his part. I accept the basic premise of the experimental method he adopts, and the consequent demand not to base arguments on theological or philosophical beliefs not subject to empirical verification or repudiation, but it appears that Krauss is unaware of the complexities surrounding speculation on the concept of the nothing in Western and Eastern texts. Even more pertinent is the fact that apophasis itself has at times led to a position that challenges the theistic postulate of a creator responsible for the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, or to put it another way, *ex nihilo* has assumed in some thinkers the meaning that the world emanates from the infinite nothing, a concept that has resonance with the quantum depiction of subatomic matter as empty space. A number of attempts (with varying degrees of success) have been made to discuss the affinities between quantum and kabbalistic cosmologies. See, for instance, Joel R. Primack and Nancy Ellen Abrams, “‘In A Beginning...’: Quantum Cosmology and Kabbalah”, *Tikkun* 10 (1995), pp. 66-73; Daniel C. Matt, *God & the Big Bang: Discovering Harmony Between Science and Spirituality*, Woodstock, VT 1996; Howard Smith, *Let There Be Light: Modern Cosmology and Kabbalah—A New Conversation*, Novato 2006. For comparisons of the Buddhist conception of emptiness and the empty space of quantum physics, see Richard H. Jones, *Science and Mysticism: A Comparative Study of Western Natural Science, Theravāda Buddhism, and Advaita Vedānta*, Lewisburg 1986, pp. 186-191; William L. Ames, ‘Emptiness and Quantum Theory’, in *Buddhism and Science: Breaking New Ground*, edited by B. Alan Wallace, New York 2003, pp. 285-302.

39 Schneerson, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 18.

40 Compare Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, p. 72: ‘Thus the final purpose is especially in the coming to be of the vessels, for this [is the meaning of the dictum that] the blessed holy One desires a habitation in the lower

prolepsis of the future, the worlds are elevated and the vessels attract the light, and ‘this is because in its root the vessels was primary, and the matter of the primacy [*ha-qedimah*] of the vessel is that the intent of the light is to illumine the vessel, and thus the vessel draws the light. And similarly, with respect to this matter [of the Sabbath], for the intent is that the sparks will be refined and purified, and there will be a nullification of existence [*biṭṭul ha-yesh*], and hence by means of the refinement the darkness will be transformed and will be made into a vessel for divinity [*keli le'lohut*] by means of which the disclosure of the light will radiate, and this is the disclosure of the aspect of the supernal delight [*ha-ta'anug ha-elyon*], and the drawing forth is the aspect of the supplement of light [*tosefet or*] on account of which the intention that came first in thought is completed’.⁴¹

beings (and from this perspective the root of the trace is above the root of the line), but in order to be revealed in the vessels ... by means of the nullification of the vessel [*biṭṭul ha-keli*] in relation to the light, it becomes a vessel for the light [*keli el ha-or*], until it is one substance with the light [*mahut ehad im ha-or*].

- 41 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1040. On the symbol of *ta'anug elyon* in Ḥabad literature, see Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 119, 300, 318 n. 43, 340 n. 160, and 375 n. 41. The term *ta'anug*, which renders the Yiddish *geshmak* (see below at n. 116), is also used to denote sensual pleasure. While I do not deny the erotic nature of the supernal delight, albeit a noetic as opposed to a somatic eroticism, I have rendered *ta'anug elyon* as ‘supernal delight’ rather than ‘supernal pleasure’ in an effort to distinguish contemplative ecstasy from physical forms of gratification. See the passage translated in Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 154. The transcendental nature of this expression is underscored by the fact that on occasion it is identified as the ‘aspect of Ein Sof’ (Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, Bemidbar, 19c; Dov Baer Schneersohn, *Derushei Hatunah*, vol. 2, Brooklyn 1991, p. 699) or as that which is drawn forth from the ‘light of Ein Sof’ (Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, Bemidbar, 62c; Devarim, 50d). This is not to deny that the supernal delight can be experienced sensually; on the contrary, such a possibility is a necessary corollary of the view that the supernal delight is garbed and hidden in the Torah, which includes, of course, the commandments, the expressions of the ‘interiority of the will’ (*penimit ha-raṣon*) that is fulfilled through the body. Nevertheless, the essential nature of the *ta'anug elyon* or *oneg ha-elyon* is a matter of gnosis (*da'at*), a term that carries the connotation of erotic union, but in a manner that obviously surpasses carnal yearning (*teshuqah*). By means of the proper noesis—a metacognitive state of mindfulness—the supernal delight is drawn into the Torah and, by extension, into the spatio-temporal world. See Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, Shemot, 1d-2a; Bemidbar, 47a, 50a, 62c, 71b; Devarim, 84d; Shir ha-Shirim, 1c, 26a, 48b; idem, *Torah Or*, 18c; Schneersohn, *Derushei Hatunah*, vol. 2, pp. 502-503, 516-517 (where a clear distinction is made between *ta'anug ruḥani* and *ta'anug gashmi*); Schneersohn,

What is available on the Sabbath—the primacy of the vessel or, as it also expressed, the superiority of the garment to that which is garbed⁴²—is a foretaste of the messianic redemption when the supernal delight, which is the aspect of *Atiq* or the interiority of *Keter*, will be revealed and the hierarchy between light and vessel overturned, the vessel becoming light and not simply a worthy container to hold it. Matter, we might say, is wholly transmogrified into energy. Translated into gender terms, the female recipient (*meqabbel*) assumes the position of the male donor (*mashpi'a*)—*Malkhut* rises above and overflows to *Ze'eir Anpin*—an idea formulated in sundry ways, including by the scriptural tropes of ‘the female encircling the male’, *neqevah tesovev gaver* (Jeremiah 31:21) and ‘a woman of valor is the diadem of her husband’, *eshet hayil aṭeret ba'lah* (Proverbs 12:4),⁴³ as well as by the aggadic motif of the

Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar, vol. 2, p. 641, and Hosafot, pp. 118-119; Schneersohn, *Derekh Mišwotekha*, 26a, 39a, 43b-44a (*ta'anug elyon* is linked to *Keter* and the *te'amim*, that is, the cantillation signs, which are associated with the word *ta'am*, which can also mean ‘taste’, as we find in Psalms 34:9, ‘Taste and see how God the Lord is’, *ta'amu u-re'u ki tov yhw*), 52a (the pleasures of this world, *ta'anugei olam ha-zeh*, are said to derive from the refuse of the supernal delight, *pesolet ta'anug ha-elyon*, which fell as a consequence of the breaking of the vessels), 135a; Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1264; Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqaṭ*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 2002, pp. 325-326. Needless to say, many other textual references could have been cited, and especially from the corpus of the *Šemaḥ Sedeq* where the notion of *ta'anug elyon* is discussed in numerous contexts. Finally, let me note that *ta'anug elyon* is also related to the notion of sport or laughter implied in the Hebrew *šəhoq*; see Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, Bemidbar, 50d. I was prompted to add this clarification as the result of a recent conversation with Eliyahu Stern. I express my gratitude to him for prodding me inadvertently to expand on this matter.

42 See the *hanaḥot* of the RaShaB in Shmuel Schneersohn, *Torat Shmu'el 5640*, vol.1, Brooklyn 2004, p. 358.

43 Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5657*, Brooklyn 1984, pp. 109-110; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5671*, Brooklyn 1989, p. 225; *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah 5666*, pp. 391, 533, 695, 703. The application of the images from Jeremiah 31:21 and Proverbs 12:4 to the eschaton appears numerous times in Ḥabad literature, far too many to enumerate in this note. For the citation and analysis of a modest sampling of sources, see Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 148, 176-177, 203-205, 207-208, 209-217, 219, 357 n. 88. Connected to these images as well in the RaShaB and the other Ḥabad masters is the view that the prophecy of the matriarchs was superior to that of the patriarchs, a motif that requires an independent study.

coterminous illumination of the sun and the moon based on the cliché ‘two kings making use of one crown’ (*shenei melakhim mishtammeshim be-kheter ehad*),⁴⁴ a transvaluation that summons the toppling of the phallogocentric dominance and the leveling out of the difference between the feminine and the masculine.⁴⁵ The utopian state reflects the ‘actual expansion’ (*hitpashshehut mammash*) of the essence⁴⁶ before the *simsum* in which there was no distinction between bestowing and receiving,⁴⁷ no distinction between the ‘aspect of boundlessness’ (*behinat bilti gevul*) and the ‘aspect of boundary’ (*behinat gevul*), since both are ‘equal’ (*shawwin*) in relation to the essential indifference that is infinity.⁴⁸

The Torah, analogously, is designated as the intermediary between the infinite and the various worlds that are links in the cosmological chain, and thus it, too, contains the two aspects of light and vessel, which correspond to the interiority of the Torah (*penimiyyut ha-torah*), the light of the infinite without measure and boundary, and the exteriority of the Torah (*hisoniyyut ha-torah*), the garment that conceals that light by endowing it with measure and boundary in the form of the ritual laws.⁴⁹ I do not think it hyperbolic to say that *Ayin Beit* can be viewed as an elucidation of the intermediary status of the Torah. Needless to say, the fact that the discourse was initiated on the holiday celebrating the Sinaitic revelation lends support to the surmise that this is its central concern. Musically, the leitmotif of the work as a whole, that which holds together the discrete patterns in their heterogeneity, is the emphasis on the task of Israel to fulfill the supernal will (*raṣon ha-elyon*) by drawing the immaterial light of Ein Sof into the material universe through observance of the commandments⁵⁰—a vocation facilitated by the fact that Jewish souls are uniquely enrooted in the aspect of the ‘essential concealment’ (*he'lem ašmi*) of

44 Babylonian Talmud, Hullin 60b.

45 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1208. See also Shneur Zalman, *Torah Or*, 93c; Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 9, Brooklyn 1999, pp. 8-15; Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 206.

46 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 102.

47 Ibid., p. 1209.

48 Ibid., p. 302.

49 Ibid., p. 14. Compare *ibid.*, p. 165; Schneersohn, *Imrei Binah*, 20b-d; Shmuel Schneersohn, *Torat Shmu'el 5640*, vol. 2, Brooklyn 2004, p. 814; Schneersohn, *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah 5666*, p. 688; Yosef Yiṣḥaq Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5692-5693*, Brooklyn 2004, p. 215.

50 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 165.

the infinite essence (*ašmut ein sof*)⁵¹—to transmute corporeal substances into vessels for divinity, or in the language used frequently to serve as a catalyst to produce the *dirah ba-tahtonim*.⁵² In its original midrashic context, the slogan is used to explain how the Mosaic construction of the Tabernacle as a place where the *Shekhinah* rested is related to God's desire for a habitation below parallel to the habitation above. In the Ḥabad lexicon, it is expanded to refer to the entirety of the cosmos, that is, the responsibility of the Jewish people by means of Torah observance is to bring about disclosure of the essence (*gilluy ha-ešem*) without the investiture of the garments (*hitlabbeshut ba-kelim*),⁵³ which is to say, a revelation of the infinite light through the façade of the finite that brings about the nullification (*biṭṭul*) of the latter.

It is critical to underscore that the *biṭṭul* does not signal the annihilation of the physical but its transfiguration through the realization of the nullity of its existence vis-à-vis the luminous essence of the absolute nothingness.⁵⁴ Through the 'nullification of the vessel' (*biṭṭul ha-keli*), the material becomes a 'vessel for the supernal light' (*keli le-or elyon*), but in so doing, there is an even more profound nullification, the 'nullification of the vessel in the aspect of the nullification of existence' (*biṭṭul ha-keli bi-vehinat biṭṭul bi-meši'ut*), an abolition of the illusory standing of all corporeal entities as autonomous, a nullification of the nullification, which, in the final analysis, fosters the affirmation of what is nullified in its nullification, the 'disclosure of the aspect of the infinite essence' (*gilluy behinat ašmut ein sof*). The RaShaB insists, therefore, that there still will be an aspect of the vessel: 'For in the future the souls will be in bodies, however, the body will be a vessel for divinity [*keli le'lohut*], for there will be a nullification of the materiality entirely [*biṭṭul ha-ḥomriyyut legamrei*]... even so there will be bodies and they will be vessels for divinity [*kelim le'lohut*]'.⁵⁵ The 'nullification of materiality entirely' does not herald the cessation of the differential embodiment that is the world but rather the metamorphosis of the body into a vessel for godliness, a transubstantiated body, a body that changes from coarse materiality into an apparatus for the light. 'The body of the reality of created beings will be godly [*guf meši'ut ha-*

51 Ibid., p. 1434.

52 Ibid., pp. 93, 121, 130, 247, 589-590, 601, 607, 663, 687, 772, 896, 900-904, 911, 918, 1215, 1247-1248, 1328, 1349.

53 Ibid., pp. 101-102. Compare Schneersohn, *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah 5666*, p. 292.

54 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 247.

55 Ibid., p. 607.

nivra'im yihyu elohut], for the essence of the future renewal [*ha-ḥiddush dile'atid*] is that the corporeal body will be godly in actuality [*she-ha-guf ha-gashmi yihyeh elohut mammash*].⁵⁶ We must be careful to distinguish bodiliness (*gufaniyyut*) and corporality (*gashmiyyut*) from materiality (*ḥomriyyut*). The conception of physicality implied by the first two terms is related, moreover, to the long-standing kabbalistic notion of the linguistic body, the body whose limbs are composed of the Hebrew letters.⁵⁷

To make sense of the assertions of the Ḥabad masters, particularly pronounced in the seventh Rebbe, regarding the messianic elevation of the body over the soul, or as it is often expressed the soul being sustained by the body,⁵⁸ which is an alternate way of articulating the aforementioned ideal of the ascent of the female over the male,⁵⁹ one must be cognizant of the fact that the corporeality valorized as positive is the body whose constituent elements are the Hebrew letters whence everything has come into being.⁶⁰ The enfleshment of the immaterial in the material—the infinity inhabiting the finite—is based on this sense of embodiment. The mandate to make a dwelling for divinity in nature means to change the material (*ḥomri*) into the corporal (*gashmi*), to transpose nature into divinity, to the point that we discern the paradox that, in the words of the RaMaM in the talk *Ba'ti le-Ganni* delivered on 10 Shevat 5711 (January 17, 1951), the first anniversary of the Friediker Rebbe's death, 'the existence of the world is divinity' (*meṣi'ut ha-olam hu elohut*)⁶¹ or 'the world and divinity are entirely one' (*olam we-elohut hu kolla had*).⁶² The notion of *dirah ba-taḥtonim* is a paradox par excellence that cannot be comprehended by discursive reason, and thus it should come as no surprise that the RaShaB asserts concerning this subject, 'there is no rationale or comprehension at all, but it is only because it was his will, blessed be he'.⁶³

56 Ibid., p. 1209. Compare *ibid.*, pp. 769-770, partially translated and analyzed in Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 256-257.

57 Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 130-160.

58 Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5712*, vol. 2, Brooklyn 1997, p. 135 and other sources cited in n. 42. See also Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 131, 147-149, 216, 290, 351 n. 7, 357 n. 83, 358 n. 100, 378 nn. 62-63.

59 Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Reshimot*, Brooklyn 2003, sec. 18, 2:105.

60 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1209.

61 Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5711*, vol. 1, p. 155.

62 Ibid., 1:202. The Yiddish equivalent is *elohus un olam in die zelbe zakh*. See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 82, and 'Revealing', p. 94 n. 264.

63 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 121.

Paradox of the Intermediary and the Coincidence of Opposites

Since I have introduced the word ‘paradox’, it will be beneficial to clarify what I mean by this concept. I have suggested that in Ḥabad thought the paradox should be understood principally as the logic apposite to the coincidence of opposites. Contesting my view,⁶⁴ it has been argued that the penchant on the part of Ḥabad masters for affirming statements that ascribe antinomical properties to a particular phenomenon should be rationally explained on the presumption that from one perspective the phenomenon appears as A and from another perspective as not-A. Such an approach, in my judgment, is not only erroneous but it obfuscates the essential spirit that animates Ḥabad teaching and practice, which is to cultivate a mystical piety that promotes the contemplation (*hitbonenut*) of the ‘supernal mystery’ (*pele elyon*)⁶⁵—also entitled the ‘mystery of divinity’ (*hafla’ah de-elohut*)⁶⁶ or the ‘mystery of the light of infinity’ (*hafla’at or ein sof*)⁶⁷—which is predicated on the supposition that A and not-A are the same in virtue of their difference, or in the indigenous language of the pertinent texts, *shenei hafakhim be-nose ehad*, ‘two opposites in one subject’.⁶⁸ To be sure, this knowing—what the RaShaB, as the other masters, calls *ha’amaqat ha-da’at*⁶⁹—is, more properly speaking, an unknowing,⁷⁰ the eradication of knowledge (*hessaḥ ha-da’at*),⁷¹ the *via*

64 The criticism is offered in Don Seeman’s lecture ‘The Concept of Bittul: Textual and Ethnographic Reflections on Contemporary Ḥabad’, presented in the Department of Jewish Thought at Ben Gurion University on June 2, 2011, which is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxJQLbEkOuY>. I learned of the video from a blog posted by Eli Rubin on December 7, 2011, in which my use of paradox to analyze Ḥabad thought in *Open Secret* is discussed. The post is available at <http://chabadrevisited.blogspot.com/2011/12/sventzich-vu-meredt-question-of-context.html>.

65 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 474.

66 Ibid., p. 369.

67 Ibid., pp. 195, 241.

68 Ibid., p. 672.

69 Ibid., pp. 368, 785, 814, 948, 1246.

70 The Ḥabad perspective on apophaticism is captured succinctly by Schneersohn, *Magen Avot al Sefer Wayyiqra*, 4d: ‘The goal of knowledge is not to know. If so, it is difficult [to ascertain] why we need to begin to know when the goal is not to know at all. Yet, if one does not begin to know, one does not know anything. However, when one deepens one’s mind to know [*ke-she-ma’amiq da’ato leida*], one comes to the boundary of knowledge, verily to the aspect of knowledge and comprehension. And with respect to what is above the boundary of knowledge, one knows and comprehends nonetheless what is impossible to know’.

negativa, referred to in a variety of different expressions, including *derekh shelilah*, *derekh ha-shelilah*, *hassagat ha-shelilah*, *yedi'at ha-shelilah*, or simply, *shelilah*.⁷² It is obligatory for the Jew to pursue Torah study—and this includes investigating the observable phenomena of nature as part of the overall nomian framework—through the exercise of the rational intellect, but all such efforts must finally guide one to the ‘primordially of the intellect’ (*qadmut ha-sekheh*) that is ‘above the intellect’ (*lema'lah min ha-sekheh*),⁷³ the level of the inestimable will that surpasses the ‘essential concealment of wisdom’ (*he'lem ha-ašmi de-ḥokhmah*), the Torah as it is ‘in the veritable aspect of his essence’ (*bi-veḥinat amittit ašmuto*) that cannot be deciphered by the human mind, the ontological secret that is the ‘veritable aspect of the light of the Torah’ (*beḥinat amittit or ha-torah*), the ‘aspect of the amusements of the king in his essence’ (*beḥinat sha'ashu'ei ha-melekh be-ašmuto*), the ‘aspect of the essential concealment of the infinite’ (*beḥinat he'lem ha-ašmi de-ein sof*).⁷⁴ Through this mystical agnosticism—culminating in the thought of no-thought, the thought that cannot be thought but as what cannot be thought—one fathoms the unfathomable juxtaposition of opposites in one subject, which is typified by that essential concealment, the concealment of the essence that is the essence of the concealment. This is precisely the function of the intermediary, the *memuša*, a notion mentioned without exaggeration thousands of times in the corpus of the seven exponents of Ḥabad lore. In the paradoxical logic endorsed by them, based on earlier kabbalistic sources,⁷⁵ the intermediary

71 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1026.

72 On the *via negativa* in Ḥabad, see Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 68-81. See below, n. 176.

73 See the *hanaḥot* of the RaShaB in Schneersohn, *Torat Shmu'el 5640*, vol.1, p. 337, and see *ibid.*, pp. 347 and 358. The RaShaB stresses that the letters are enrooted in the primordially of the intellect that is above intellect. See Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1235. The expression *qadmut ha-sekheh* was used by the Alter Rebbe to name the ‘supernal wisdom’ (*ḥokhmah ila'ah*) that is above what may be comprehended, also referred to as the ‘primordial thought’ (*maḥashavah qedumah*) or the ‘supernal will’ (*raṣon ha-elyon*). See Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, pt. 4, ch. 5, 107a; *Liqqutei Torah*, Bemidbar, 13a; *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5569*, revised edition, Brooklyn 2005, p. 14; *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5572*, Brooklyn 2006, p. 95. The locution appears repeatedly in Ḥabad sources. For example, see Dov Baer Schneersohn, *Ner Mišwah we-Torah Or*, Brooklyn 1995, 37a, 138a; *Imrei Binah*, 141a.

74 Schneersohn, *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah 5666*, p. 121.

75 See above, n. 26.

affirms the very middle excluded by the Aristotelian principle of the excluded middle, the principle that avows that with respect to two contradictory propositions, 'A is A' and 'A is not-A', one must be true and the other false, but both cannot be true. The concept of the *memuša* directly challenges this law insofar as it presumes that contradictory propositions are contemporaneously true rather than being mutually exclusive. Furthermore, the logic inherent to Ḥabad thought—a way of thinking that begets an annihilation of thinking, an aporetic state of learned ignorance—assaults the law of noncontradiction, for the *memuša* is the mediating space that makes it possible to contend with respect to A that it is both A and not-A at the same time and in the same relation.

I will cite one of numerous examples from *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu* that I think has a special poignancy. In one section,⁷⁶ the RaShaB describes Adam Qadmon as the 'aspect of the intermediary between the light of the infinite and the worlds' (*beḥinat memuša bein or ein sof le-ha-olamot*), and as he points out, a consequence of this mediating status is the paradoxical inference that Adam Qadmon is 'in the aspect of time and not in the aspect of time' (*bi-veḥinat zeman we-lo bi-veḥinat zeman*)—it is not in the aspect of time, inasmuch as it embodies the 'essence of the emanator', which is 'above the classification of time' (*lema'alah mi-geder zeman*), and hence 'everything is contained within it without the aspect of existence at all' (*ha-kol kalul bo she-lo bi-veḥinat meši'ut kelal*), and yet, it is in the aspect of time, inasmuch as it is the aspect of the 'one thought' (*maḥashavah aḥat*), that is, the primordial thought (*maḥashavah qedumah*), which is 'not in existence' (*she-eino bi-meši'ut*) but which nevertheless 'contains everything in specificity and in one glance' (*she-kolel ha-kol bi-feratyyut u-vi-seqirah aḥat*).⁷⁷ Adam Qadmon, accordingly, is 'the intermediary between the light of the infinite that is entirely above the classification of time and the generation of the worlds in the aspect of the temporal order and of time' (*beḥinat memuša bein ha-or ein sof she-lema'alah mi-geder zeman legamrei u-vein hithawwut ha-olamot bi-veḥinat seder zemanim u-zeman*)—the temporal order (*seder zemanim*) refers to the world of emanation (*ašilut*) and time (*zeman*) to the remaining three worlds of

76 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 343. Compare *ibid.*, pp. 338, 1405.

77 The expression *bi-seqirah aḥat*, which is derived from Babylonian Talmud, Rosh ha-Shanah 18a, appears numerous times in Ḥabad texts to describe the activity of the primordial wisdom or thought, far too many to delineate here. But compare Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 110 and 1340.

creation (*beri'ah*), formation (*yeširah*), and doing (*asiyyah*).⁷⁸ By virtue of this intermediary status, it is possible for the light of infinity beyond time to assume form in time.⁷⁹ As the coincidence of the temporal and the transtemporal, Adam Qadmon serves as the paradigm of the paradoxical structure of the intermediary to possess both a thing and its opposite in such a manner that it defies the reason of a logic based on the reciprocal exclusivity of contradictory propositions—A is either A or not-A, but not both A and not-A. The statement ‘A is both A and not-A’ might appear to be self-refuting, since it can only be true if it is false, but this is so only from an unenlightened vantagepoint, from the state of diminished consciousness (*moḥin de-qatnut*). The enlightened in the state of expanded consciousness (*moḥin de-gadlut*) knows that the truth of the intermediary dictates that A and not-A are equally characteristic of A.

Applying this logic to the topic at hand, the contention that *ašilut* is the intermediary between *ein sof* and the *olamot ha-nivra'im* entails that the *sefirot* are concomitantly limited and unlimited—in the language of *Sefer Yeširah*, *middatan ešer she-ein lahem sof*; indeed in their essence they are essentially inessential (*beli mah*) as they reveal the light of infinity without substance (*beli mahut*).⁸⁰ The Torah, too, is an intermediary that is infinite and finite in tandem, not infinite from one perspective and finite from another perspective, but both infinite and finite at one and the same time, according to the tenet of *shenei hafakhim be-nose eḥad*. And just as Adam Qadmon is said to be in time but not in time, so the Torah is in time insofar as it is garbed below in the form of the *mišwot* that are to be fulfilled in the temporal plane, but not in time insofar as it is the primordial wisdom (*ḥokhmah qedumah*) of Adam Qadmon that emanates from and bears the light of Ein Sof.⁸¹ Utilizing this motif, the RaShaB interprets the zoharic reiteration of the aggadic theme that God created the world by looking into the Torah.⁸²

It is known that that the matter of Adam Qadmon is the aspect of the universal light that contains all of the concatenation from the first of the gradations to the last of the gradations [*or kelali she-kolel kol ha-hishtalshelut me-ro'sh kol dargin ad sof kol dargin*], for everything in the most detailed specificity [*bi-feratei peratyyut*] is enclosed in the primordial thought of Adam Qadmon, and everything

78 Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5652-5653, pp. 38-39.

79 Schneerson, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 342.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 343. Compare the passage from the RaShaB cited and analyzed in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death*, Berkeley 2006, pp. 69-70.

82 *Zohar* 2:161a.

is previewed verily in one glance [*nisqarin bi-seqirah aḥat mammash*] ... and on account of this the aspect of Adam Qadmon is the aspect of the intermediary between the light of the infinite and the world [*bi-vehinat memuša bein or ein sof el ha-olamot*], for the worlds are in the aspect of time and the light of the infinite is above the aspect of time, and Adam Qadmon, which comprises everything, looks and sees until the end of all generations and all of them are previewed in one glance. This is the intermediary between being above time and time And this is also the matter of 'he looked into the Torah and created the worlds', for the Torah, too, is the aspect of the universal and the particular [*kelal u-feraṭ*], and the aspect of the universality of the Torah [*hikalelut de-torah*] is the aspect of the universal light of Adam Qadmon. 'The blessed holy One' is the aspect of the essentiality of the light of the infinite [*ašmiyyut or ein sof*], the aspect of the interiority of Adam Qadmon that is even above the aspect of the universal light of Adam Qadmon. 'He looked into the Torah', that is, in order for there to be the generation of the worlds from the aspect of the essence of the light of the infinite, there must first be an emanation in the universal aspect and afterward in the particular aspect.⁸³

There is much to be elicited from this passage but for our purposes I will concentrate on what is most germane to this investigation. The paradox of being in time but beyond time is applied to the interiority of Adam Qadmon, also identified as the aspect of the essentiality of the light of Ein Sof, and to the universal light of Adam Qadmon, the primordial thought or wisdom, which is the Torah. In both cases, the dual deportment of being in time and above time is explained by the sense of comprising all aspects of time—or, better, all events that will transpire temporally in the sequence of history—in one glance (*seqirah aḥat*), which I assume can be rendered as the blink of the eye (*keheret ayin*), in which there is a compresence of past, present, and future, the mystical connotation of the Tetragrammaton. Repeating the argument of his father, the Rebbe MaHaRaSh,⁸⁴ the RaShaB points out that eternity (*nišhiyyut*) is the quality of time that is without limit and that which endures ceaselessly, and therefore it cannot be apportioned to the essence that is entirely above the category of time.⁸⁵ The eternal moment, which occupies the unique position of being both temporal and atemporal—or to appropriate the language of the third rebbe, Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, the Ṣemaḥ Ṣedeq (1789-1866), the moment exemplifies the 'interminable duration of time' (*meshekh zeman bilti ba'al takhlit*), a concept that he readily admits is difficult

83 Schneerson, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1405.

84 Schneerson, *Torat Shmu'el* 5627, p. 85.

85 Schneerson, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1345. Compare Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyot* 5714, vol. 2, Brooklyn 1998, p. 151.

for the human intellect to comprehend⁸⁶—will be fully instantiated in the future when the ‘eternal light’ (*or olam*), the illumination of YHWH, the supernal unity (*yihuda ila’ah*) of the infinite light (*he’arat or ein sof*), will merge with Elohim, the aspect of the lower unity (*yihuda tata’ah*) of *Malkhut*.⁸⁷ The ensuing radiance will be so bright that darkness will be changed into light, according to the verse ‘night is as light as day; darkness and light are the same’ (Psalms 139:12).⁸⁸

No rational explanation can dispel the paradox of this mode of eternal temporality (*ha-zeman nišhi*)⁸⁹—the measure of time that is without measure—in which the very distinction between nocturnal and diurnal is transcended.⁹⁰ On the contrary, the inscrutability of the premise that time and that which is above time are not only compatible but indistinguishable⁹¹ is only enhanced

- 86 Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Haqirah*, Brooklyn 2003, 33b. The expression *meshekh ha-zeman* to mark the temporal duration that is distinguished from the measurable chronoscopic time appears regularly in Ḥabad sources. For some references, see Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 281 and 397 n. 72.
- 87 On the identification of *Malkhut* as the locus of the aspect of time in its tripartite division of past, present, and future, see Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 161. Concerning this theme in Ḥabad literature, see Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, pp. 109-112.
- 88 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1345.
- 89 Schneersohn, *Imrei Binah*, 66d. Time becomes eternal when the essence of the infinite light, which is above the aspect of time, is conjoined to or garbed within *Malkhut*, which is the aspect of time that is limited (*ha-zeman bi-gevul*). As a result of this conjunction, ‘time, too, becomes eternal in the eternity of his essence, which is entirely above time’. For a fuller citation and analysis of this passage, see Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, pp. 107-109. The motif of eternal temporality or temporal eternity arising from the union of that which is above time with that which is bound by time is reiterated often in the Ḥabad sources. See Schneersohn, *Imrei Binah*, 63b, 76d; *Ner Mišwah we-Torah Or*, 127a; *Sha’arei Orah*, 20b; *Torat Hayyim: Shemot*, 75d, 234a; *Ma’amerei Admor ha-Emša’i: Bere’shit*, Brooklyn 1988, p. 243; *Ma’amerei Admor ha-Emša’i: Devarim*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 1986, pp. 212-213.
- 90 Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, p. 112.
- 91 Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma’amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5572*, p. 151. In that context, the future overcoming of the distinction between time and timelessness is linked to the overcoming of the distinction between male and female as it pertains specifically to the halakhic categories of positive commandments dependent on time and those that are independent of time. In the present, according to the traditional rabbinic jurisprudence, women are exempt from the former but this will change in the future when men and women will be treated as equal (*she-az shawin*

with every attempt at ratiocination—how can the mind assimilate what it means to be past, present, and future all at once? As complicated as it is to comprehend this notion of temporal eternity, it pales in comparison to the mystery of infinity, the true unity in light of which ‘time itself is without limit [*she-ha-zeman ašmo hu beli gevul*], that is, time itself is without time [*she-ha-zeman ašmo hu beli zeman*]’.⁹² Each of us can pronounce these words but reason cannot decode the paradox of the timeless time, *zeman we-lo zeman*,⁹³ being in time but outside the triadic schism basic to the human experience of time. Again, we see that the paradox requires maintaining the congruence of opposites, an enigma that cannot be unraveled by appealing to two different perspectives.

One of the critical ways this paradox is articulated is in terms of the application of the scriptural idiom *meshal ha-qadmoni*, the primordial parable (1 Samuel 24:14), to the Torah. The probable source for this identification is Rashi’s explanation that *meshal ha-qadmoni* alludes to the Torah, since it is the ‘parable of the primordial one of the world’ (*meshal qadmono shel olam*).⁹⁴ In the Ḥabad sources, this idea conveys the belief that the infinite light is concretized in the cloak of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which are contained in the Tetragrammaton, the mystical essence of the

ha-nashim im ha-anashim). The theme is elaborated in Schneersohn, *Imrei Binah*, 76c-d.

92 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1346.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 343.

94 Commentary of Rashi to Exod. 21:13: ‘The primordial parable [*meshal ha-qadmoni*] is the Torah, which is the parable of the blessed holy One, who is the primordial one of the world [*qadmono shel olam*]’ (ed. Chavel, p. 250). And compare Rashi’s commentary to 1 Samuel 24:14: ‘The primordial parable [*meshal ha-qadmoni*]: the parable of the primordial one of the world [*meshal qadmono shel olam*], the Torah, which is the parable of the blessed holy One’. See also Rashi’s commentary to the Babylonian Talmud, Makkot 10b, s.v. *we-ha-elohim innah le-yado*. In *Open Secret*, p. 61, I referred to the second of these sources, but unfortunately I carelessly read *meshal qadmono shel olam* as *meshal qadmoni shel olam*, which led to a slight error in translation even though the interpretation was not effected. In his commentary to 1 Samuel 24:14, David Kimḥi writes: ‘The rabbis, blessed be their memory, explained the primordial parable [*meshal ha-qadmoni*] as the parable of the primordial one of the world [*meshal qadmono shel olam*], and this is the blessed holy One’. To date I have not found this explanation in a source that predates Rashi.

Torah.⁹⁵ To say that the Torah is the primordial parable implies, therefore, that it epitomizes the quintessential paradox by revealing in the spatio-temporal realm the concealed, primordial one, the hyper-transcendence above the concatenation of the worlds (*histalshelut ha-olamot*),⁹⁶ even beyond the dichotomy of transcendence (*sovev kol almin*) and immanence (*memalle kol almin*).⁹⁷ The Şemaḥ Şedeq said it succinctly, ‘The Torah is called the primordial parable, that is, it is the aspect of the parable and garment [*mashal u-levush*] vis-à-vis the aspect of the primordial one of the world [*li-vehinat ha-qadmoni shel olam*], for just as that which is rendered parabolic [*nimshal*] is comprehended by means of the parable [*mashal*], so by means of the Torah there is comprehension of the light of the infinite, blessed be he [*hassagah be-or ein sof barukh hu*], for he is the primordial one of the world [*qadmono shel olam*].’⁹⁸ In the more technical language used by the RaShaB, the attribute of *Hokhmah*, or as he specifies in some contexts, the attribute of *Hokhmah* of Adam Qadmon, illumines the ‘inner aspect’ (*behinat ha-penimit*) of the line (*qaw*), which contains the ‘aspect of the essence of the infinite’ (*behinat ha-aşmut de-ein sof*), and hence the Torah is identified as the *meshal ha-qadmoni* because it is like a *mashal* in relation to Ein Sof, the garment that reveals and thereby conceals the primordial one of the world.⁹⁹

The meaning of *mashal* can be gauged, moreover, from the RaShaB’s identifying it as the curtain (*parsa*), a technical term in Lurianic theosophy that denotes the divide that comes to be in the midsection of the body of Adam Qadmon as a consequence of the diminution of the light.¹⁰⁰ Elaborating specifically on a passage in the Alter Rebbe’s *Torah Or*,¹⁰¹ the RaShaB explains that in contrast to *şimşum*, which is the removal of the light, within the *parsa* ‘the substance of the light is garbed and hidden’ (*mahut ha-or mitlabbeh u-mit’allem*) in the same manner that ‘the substance of what is rendered parabolically is verily garbed in the parable’ (*mahut ha-nimshal mammash melubbash be-ha-mashal*). The Torah, therefore, is the primordial

95 See sources cited and analyzed in Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 58–65, to which many more could have been added.

96 Schneersohn, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 2, p. 581; Hosafot, p. 42.

97 Schneersohn, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 3, p. 760⁶.

98 Schneersohn, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 2, Hosafot, p. 32. See *ibid.*, p. 13.

99 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 266. See *ibid.*, pp. 328, 331, 343–344, 346. For discussion of this theme, see Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 60–63, and 325 n. 164.

100 See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 325 n. 162.

101 Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 14a-b.

parable because ‘the light extends in *Hokhmah* not by means of the withdrawal [*ha-šimšum*] but by way of the curtain [*derekh parsā*], and there is within it the aspect of the essence of the light’.¹⁰²

There is much more to ponder about this theme but suffice it to say that this esoteric doctrine provides the prism through which the rabbinic idea that God created the world by looking into the Torah is interpreted by the Ḥabad masters: the concatenation of the worlds is a manifestation of the light, which is above all the worlds, through the garment of the Torah, whose contours vary in accord with each of the four levels of reality. Most notably, on every plane the manifestation is concurrently a masking—a point accentuated by the repeated wordplay between *ha-olam* and *he'lem*; the very notion of worldhood denotes the concealment of the infinite revealed by being concealed.¹⁰³ The disclosure of the essence in the world safeguards the withdrawal of the essence from the world. Thus, in Heideggerian terms, we can speak of nature as a presencing of an absencing, a making-present in which the absence abides in what becomes present,¹⁰⁴ the spectral immanence of an invisible transcendence, which is not to be construed as a transcendent being exterior to the world but rather as the immanent absolute that clandestinely manifests itself in the endless panoply of phenomenal forms. The RaMaM put it pithily, *zaynen beli gevul un gevul eyn zakh*, the boundless and the bounded are identical.¹⁰⁵ Or, as he expressed it in his explanation of miracles that uphold the natural order (*hanhagat ha-teva*) versus miracles that circumvent that order (*shidud ha-teva*),¹⁰⁶ ‘With respect to the miracles that are garbed in nature, the disclosure of the boundless light of the infinite, which is above the worlds, is in the world itself. And since the world is itself limited—the limited and limitless are two opposites [*di-gevul u-veli gevul hem shenei hafakhim*]—for there to be a disclosure of the boundless light of the infinite in the confines of the world, the drawing forth of the limitless must be from the essence of the light of the infinite that is found in every place even in the confines (and nature) of the world’.¹⁰⁷ Inverting what one might expect, the miracle that conforms to the

102 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 266. Compare *ibid.*, pp. 963, 968, 977.

103 Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 26-27, 52, 93, 103-114, 128-129, 132, 215, 218.

104 For references and analysis, see Wolfson, ‘Revealing’, pp. 61-62 n. 127.

105 Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 39, Brooklyn 1999, p. 383. Compare Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqaṭ*, vol. 1, p. 297.

106 Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 63-64. On the two types of miracle, see Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 278-279, 700.

107 Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5712*, vol. 2, p. 130.

laws of nature is viewed as a greater nullification of nature (*bittul ha-teva*)—indeed the ‘true nullification’ (*bittul amitti*)¹⁰⁸—than the supernatural miracle that suspends those laws because the former involves the joining together of the two opposites, the limitless and the limited, the light of infinity in the finitude of the cosmos. The consummation of the truth that natural events are a more sublime form of miracle will come to pass in the future when ‘there will be an elevation of nature [*aliyyat ha-teva*], for nature, too, will become a vessel for the disclosure of the limitless light of the infinite that will be garbed in it [*keli le-gilluy or ein sof ha-beli gevul she-mitlabbesh bo*]’.¹⁰⁹

This paradox is not to be resolved by saying that nature is infinite from God’s standpoint but finite from the human standpoint. To maintain such a position is to continue to look at reality with exilic eyes. The aim of the path of *hasidut*, through which the wellsprings are opened and *penimiyyut ha-torah* is disseminated, is to achieve messianic consciousness, the ‘disclosure of the supernal knowledge [*da’at elyon*], which is the disclosure of the aspect of the essence of the light of the infinite’.¹¹⁰ The attainment of this gnosis occasions a clasping of the truth that the infinite essence is encloded in and envisioned through the dissimilitude of the finite. Language here proves to be deficient, for the binary of infinite and finite continues to be invoked in the endeavor to describe a unitive state in which they are impossible to take apart. At a lower level of discernment, we are inclined to think of the divine vis-à-vis the world in terms of the transcendent capacity to withdraw and the immanent capacity to be manifest, but at a higher level, we appreciate that infinity cannot be so circumscribed, for the twin movements of extending limitlessly above and extending limitlessly below undermine the spatial metaphors.¹¹¹ The essence of the infinite light is beyond concealment and disclosure, but because the two properties are transposable in the unity (*ahdut*) and integration (*hitkallelut*) of that essence, there can be disclosure from concealment and concealment from disclosure.¹¹² This insight is a key to understanding the messianic promise

108 Ibid., p. 134.

109 Ibid., p. 135.

110 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 199. See *ibid.*, p. 14.

111 Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwawa’aduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, pp. 70-71. The depiction of Ein Sof is based on *Tiqunei Zohar*, edited by Reuven Margaliot, Jerusalem 1978, §57, 92a.

112 Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *Ma’amar Heḥalsu 5659*, Brooklyn 1999, p. 27. Compare Shlomo Zalman Schneersohn, *Magen Avot al Sefer Shemot*, Berditchev 1902, 23c: the essence of the infinite light is above the Tetragrammaton, that is, the concatenation of worlds, which is characterized by the polarity of concealment

repeated often in the Ḥabad sources that in the future the essence of the infinite light will be revealed without any garment.¹¹³ Prima facie, these words are tautological: since the essence by nature is delineated as that which cannot be delineated and hence cannot be placed under the category of the garment (*geder hitlabbeshut*),¹¹⁴ it follows that if it is to be revealed, it must be revealed without a garment.

But what does this mean phenomenologically? What will be disclosed in such a disclosure if not the concealment of the essence that is concealed? The full disclosure, on this score, is a threefold concealment. One sees the essence of the light without a garment through the garment that is the light of the essence, a vision of the nonvisible—as opposed to the invisible—in the visible, the imperceptible and intangible energy that permeates the spacetime continuum, endowing everything that exists therein with the mass—in Ḥabad terminology, the corporality (*gashmiyyut*)—that determines the distinctive beingness of each entity, the inner vitality (*hiyyut penimit*), the force of life that, ipso facto, accounts for both the unity and diversity of everything in reality. If the very concept of world entails concealment, then the revelation thereof must amount to perceiving the concealment as such, seeing the garment through the garment rather than discarding it. By means of this vision one attains the level of the ‘essential nullification’ (*biṭṭul ha-ašmi*) in relation to the ‘infinite essence that has no existence in itself’ (*le-ašmut ein sof she-eino meši’ut le-ašmo*),¹¹⁵ a state of pneumatic bliss that mimics the noetic jouissance (*sha’ashu’a*) of Ein Sof, the ‘delight in something that is verily nothing’

and disclosure, for in that essence the concealment and disclosure are indistinguishable.

113 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 14, 1324. Compare Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, pt. 1, ch. 36, 46a; Dov Baer Schneersohn, *Sha’arei Teshuvah*, Brooklyn 1995, 142d; Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluqat*, vol. 3, Brooklyn 2002, pp. 114, 148, 152, 333. See, however, Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 461, where a distinction is drawn between the messianic era and the period of the resurrection of the dead: the former involves comprehension of the substance of the essence of the supernal wisdom (*hassagat be-mahut ašmut ḥokhmah setima’ah*) and the latter the substance of the infinite (*mahut ha-ein sof*), the ‘disclosure of the aspect of the concealment’ (*gilluy beḥinat ha-kissuy*), which is the fulfillment of the destiny of the Jewish people pledged to Abraham (Genesis 18:18) to be ‘a great and powerful nation’ (*goy gadol we-ašum*), that is, the ‘disclosure of the essential concealment’ (*gilluy he’lem ha-ašmi*).

114 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 102.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 353.

(*ta'anug be-eizeh davar she-eino davar mammash*, which is glossed in Yiddish as *a geshmak in epes vos*).¹¹⁶ The something, which is verily nothing, is the embryonic and inchoate light of the essence that assumes the shape of the myriad forms of emptiness that make up the multiverse. In perceiving this truth, one is attuned to the ultimate mystery of the infinite being laid bare in the finite.

As I noted above, this is the import of the repeated demand to convert nature into a habitation for divinity, to collapse the difference between world and godliness, not in the pantheistic sense (à la Spinoza) of *God or nature* but in the panentheistic sense of *God and nature*, the 'and' being appositive rather than conjunctive. This is the intent of the mystical directive to nullify the existence of the world as an entity purportedly separate from the essence, *biṭṭul bi-meṣi'ut*, the negation of negation, which supersedes *biṭṭul ha-yesh*. To cite the RaMaM again:

It is known that the nullification in the world, which is from the perspective of the disclosure of the light with respect to the world, is only the nullification of something [*biṭṭul ha-yesh*] . . . but the truth of the matter of nullification, the obliteration of existence [*biṭṭul bi-meṣi'ut*], is particularly from the perspective of the light that is above any relation to the worlds. And since the intention of the creation is that created beings will be nullified vis-à-vis divinity in the absolute nullification [*beṭelim le'lohut be-takhlit ha-biṭṭul*], the obliteration of existence, for by means of this, in particular, the habitation for him [*dirah lo*] is made, thus there

116 Ibid., p. 1406. On the *sha'ashu'a* of Ein Sof, see *ibid.*, p. 352. It is of interest to compare the Habad perspective to the following words of Menahem Mendel of Viṭebsk, *Peri ha-Areṣ*, Jerusalem 2007, p. 102: 'For now, prior to the coming of the Messiah, there cannot be the true unity without an intermediary, as the knowledge which is the unity, is called delight, and now prior to the coming of the Messiah it is impossible for a human being to endure the supernal delight like this and the true unity without any intermediary'. Prima facie, these words, if taken at face value, would seemingly challenge my interpretative stance, since it is stated explicitly that the messianic moment is distinguished from the present on the basis that there will be knowledge of the supernal delight, the *true unity without any intermediary*. It is possible, however, that even this passage calls for a more esoteric reading such that the future knowing without intermediary consists ultimately of knowing that there is no knowing but through an intermediary. For a fuller citation and analysis of the passage from *Peri ha-Areṣ*, see Elliot R. Wolfson, 'Immanuel Fromman's Commentary on Luke and the Christianizing of Kabbalah: Some Sabbatean and Hasidic Affinities', in *Holy Dissent: Jewish and Christian Mystics in Eastern Europe*, edited by Glenn Dynner, foreword by Moshe Rosman, Detroit 2011, pp. 198-199.

was initially the light that is above any relation to the worlds, and from it, in particular, there emanated the light with respect to the worlds.¹¹⁷

The obliteration of existence does not stipulate the nihilistic destruction of the world of particularity but rather the awareness that everything that exists is naught but a manifestation of Ein Sof, the illimitable emptiness that may be depicted metaphorically in quantum terms as the unifying electrical force configured constantly anew by the ever-evolving multiplicity of the symbiotic constellations that cohere in the intra-relational field of the material nature.¹¹⁸ To ascertain this truth is to lift the veil so that one may glimpse the truth unveiled, that is, to apprehend the truth that there is no way to perceive the truth but through the veil of truth. The eschatological assurance of ‘an actual disclosure of the essence’ (*gilluy ha-ašmut mammash*) in the spatio-temporal world is thus rendered as a drawing down of the light by means of a ‘garbing of an interior fashion’ (*be-hitlabbešut be-ofen penimi*) rather than the exposure of the light divested of any garbing.¹¹⁹ This lends support to my hypothesis that the predictions about seeing without a garment intend that the awakened will see that there is no seeing but through the garment. The

117 Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqaš*, vol. 3, p. 331.

118 I am of the opinion that the Ḥabad reflections on the nothingness of infinity, the immateriality of matter, and the nullification of existence can be read as a critique of substantialist metaphysics, ontological realism, and epistemological representationalism. In that respect, there are similarities between Ḥabad speculation on nature and the relational metaphysics of process theology as well as some current trends in quantum cosmology. Especially pertinent is the agential realism and the intra-active nature of materiality proffered by Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham 2007, pp. 132-185. The one crucial part of Barad's argument that would not fit the Ḥabad worldview is her rejection of the belief that language reflects the underlying structures of the world. There are ways to preserve the primacy accorded to language without lapsing into the representationalist ontology that Barad denounces but this is a topic that cannot be pursued here. I will say, finally, that Barad's posthumanism can be applied to the messianic teaching promoted by the Ḥabad masters according to which the root of the savior is in the aspect of the not-human, *lo adam* (1 Samuel 15:29), which, as I have argued, implies a venturing beyond both the anthropomorphic depiction of the divine self and the theomorphic depiction of the human self. See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 240-248; ‘Revealing’, pp. 77-83.

119 Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5717*, vol. 2, pp. 252-253.

messianically inspired vision is the agency that transforms the finite garment into a suitable vessel for the infinite light.¹²⁰

Trace of Infinity Before the Withdrawal: Nothing That is Not

This paradox, I submit, is the key to unlocking the manifold iterations of the secret in *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*. Let me illustrate the point by returning to the language of light and vessel, which are linked to the line and the point of the trace. The extension of the line (an expression of the attribute of *hesed*) is set in motion by the act of *šimšum* (an expression of the attribute of *din*¹²¹) but the main goal of the latter is to produce the vessels that will reveal the light by concealing it. The RaShaB thus emphasizes in several passages that after the first withdrawal there are other withdrawals,¹²² an observation that rests on the assumption that there can be no manifestation without occlusion. In the RaShaB's articulation, 'whatever is not bounded and formed is not disclosed' (*kol davar she-eino mugbal u-mešuyyar eino be-hitgallut*).¹²³ The RaShaB gestures toward this dialectic when he states that the vessels are also in the aspect of the 'disclosure of the concealment' (*gilluy ha-he'lem*)¹²⁴— just as it is axiomatic that the disclosure is contained in the concealment,¹²⁵ so the concealment is disclosed through the vessel only as the concealment persists in its concealment. If that were not the case, we could not speak of the concealment being disclosed. It follows that the disclosure of divinity in the world can come to fruition 'only from the aspect of the concealment that belongs to the disclosure [*ha-he'lem ha-shayyakh el ha-gilluy*], that is, from the aspect of the light that belongs to the worlds [*ha-or ha-shayyakh el ha-olamot*]'.¹²⁶ The Ḥabad perspective is based on the kabbalistic insight that to exist is to be a manifestation of the infinite light, which cannot be exposed unless it is shrouded.

With this we return to the image of the point of the trace and the question of the status of the light in Ein Sof prior to the *šimšum* — it should be clear that *lifnei ha-šimšum* is not to be understood temporally, since before this act there

120 Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 113, 122, 127, 212, 245; 'Revealing', pp. 40, 62-63, 80.

121 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 554.

122 *Ibid.*, p. 161.

123 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

124 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

125 *Ibid.*, p. 653.

126 *Ibid.*, p. 640.

is no basis to speak of a temporal priority. The RaShaB avails himself of various technical terms to depict the immeasurability of that light: ‘nondifferentiation’ (*hashwa’ah*), the ‘essential expansiveness’ (*merhav ha-ašmi*), the ‘essential expansiveness of the infinite essence’ (*merhav ha-ašmi de-ašmut ein sof*), and the ‘one egression’ (*hitpashsheṭut aḥat*).¹²⁷ All of these expressions imply that in the nondifferentiated luminosity—dubbed *ma’or* as opposed to *or*¹²⁸—the light is not yet discriminated from darkness. In this incomposite state, moreover, the light is without existence (*beli meši’ut*), whereas the vessel is in the aspect of boundary and existence (*gevul u-meši’ut*). In sync with the main drift of the Lurianic teaching, the process of *šimšum* explains the transition from indifferent oneness to differentiated unity.¹²⁹ As a consequence of the *šimšum*, there emerges the dyadic structure of light and vessel. The source of the vessel, as we have seen, is the point of the trace that remains in the vacated space within the infinite after the light has been withdrawn. The nomenclature ‘point’ implies some element of condensation, but the descriptions of that point uniformly indicate that this point displays no punctiform extensionality; like hyllic matter, the *yod*, which is the point of the trace, integrates everything within itself in an amorphous way. With respect to the point of infinity, to which existence cannot be attributed,¹³⁰ we can say that absolute contraction and absolute expansion are equivalent.¹³¹ The RaShaB is careful to point out, however, that the concealment of the light, which is triggered by the concealment of the withdrawal (*he’lem ha-šimšum*), does not relate to the light of the infinite in and of itself but only to that light in relation to us, that is, the light in its capacity to produce the worlds outside itself.¹³² Be

127 Ibid., p. 677. See *ibid.*, p. 241.

128 The distinction appears frequently. Especially relevant to the topic of this study is Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5646-5650*, Brooklyn 1986, pp. 38-45, and *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5651*, pp. 205-211.

129 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 382.

130 Ibid., p. 161; Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5680*, Brooklyn 1989, p. 41. On the characterization of the *reshimu* in terms of hyllic matter in Baruch of Kosov, see the appendix of Esther Liebes in Gershon Scholem, *The Latest Phase: Essays on Hasidism*, ed. D. Assaf and E. Liebes, Jerusalem 2008, pp. 277-279 (Hebrew). The motif of the trace is discussed further by Esther Liebes, “‘Set Me as a Seal Upon Thine Heart’—‘Reshimu’ in Hasidism”, in *And This Is for Yehuda: Studies Presented to Our Friend, Professor Yehuda Liebes, On the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, edited by Maren R. Niehoff, Ronit Meroz, and Jonathan Garb, Jerusalem 2012, pp. 381-400 (Hebrew).

131 Wolfson, ‘Revealing’, p. 53.

132 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 928.

that as it may, the residual trace prefigures the vessel that will receive the light of the line, for the trace in relation to the amplification of the light represents delimitation, absence, and withdrawal. 'In the trace the light is hidden, as is known, for the point of the trace is the aspect of concealment [*di-nequddat ha-reshimu hi beḥinat he'lem*], and surely by means of the concealment comes forth the aspect of existence [*beḥinat ha-meši'ut*], and the principle is known that the concealment of the light causes the matter of existence [*de-he'lem ha-or gorem inyan ha-meši'ut*]... and the concealment of the light is by means of the point of the trace and not the withdrawal'.¹³³ Through the point of the trace, which is the aspect of concealment, the limitless light becomes the limited force (*koah gevuli*) that is garbed in the aspect of the vessels.¹³⁴ The point is thus compared to the 'vessel that conceals the interiority of the light and reveals the exteriority of the light' (*ke-dugmat keli she-mit'allem penimiyyut ha-or u-megalleh hiṣoniyyut ha-or*).¹³⁵

Two things are worthy of our attention. First, even though the division of the indivisible luminescence produces the dyad of light and vessel, in its source the vessel itself is constituted by the light that lingers subsequent to the contraction. This is the intent of the RaShaB's insistence that the essence of the infinite light is hidden within the point of the trace.¹³⁶ The dualism of light and vessel thus gives way to a meontological monism wherein the vessel is subsumed in and by the light. The symmetry of the kabbalistic cosmology and eschatology is such that the beginning is a prolepsis of the end when the vessel will be changed into light. Here we note again the ethnocentrism of Ḥabad thought in its assigning to the Jewish people the unique mission of drawing the surplus of light into the world by observing the law, so that 'just as the infinite light filled the whole vacant space [*meqom ha-ḥalal*] before the withdrawal, thus it will be after the withdrawal'.¹³⁷ One ethnos, in contradistinction to all others, has the singular duty of inducing the appearance of the light in relation to which all ethnic divisions are eradicated.

Second, even though before the *šimšum* the distinction between exteriority and interiority was not discernible, the potential for this distinction must have been in the infinite essence based on the principle that the perfection of infinity

133 Ibid., p. 1269.

134 Ibid., p. 181.

135 Ibid., p. 677. On the depiction of the point of the trace as the image of the vessel, see *ibid.*, p. 1010.

136 Ibid., pp. 736, 1330.

137 Ibid., p. 867.

is such that it can lack nothing, not even the ability to lack.¹³⁸ Hence, the RaShaB refers to the source of the vessels as *koaḥ ha-gevul she-be-ein sof*,¹³⁹ the capacity for boundary in the infinite, which is identified further as the trace that remains after the withdrawal¹⁴⁰ or as the trace that exists before the act of withdrawal,¹⁴¹ an attribute that is associated theosophically with the aspect of *Malkhut* that is within Ein Sof through which the withdrawal is enacted,¹⁴² the

- 138 Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5643-5645*, p. 79; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5646-5650*, Brooklyn 1986, p. 50; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5657*, Brooklyn 1984, p. 48; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5659*, Brooklyn 1977, p. 34; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5663*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 1993, p. 177; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5663*, vol. 2, Brooklyn 2003, p. 261; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5664*, Brooklyn 1985, p. 12; *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah 5666*, p. 467; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5668*, Brooklyn 1989, p. 64; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5671*, p. 115; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5677*, Brooklyn 1990, p. 136; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5678*, Brooklyn 2003, p. 279; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5679*, Brooklyn 2006, pp. 21-22; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5670*, Brooklyn 1998, p. 30. The RaShaB cites Meir Ibn Gabbai's *Avodat ha-Qodesh* as the source for this idea (*Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 12, 19, 302, 321, 322, 1392, 1437), but what he has in mind is actually a citation in Meir Ibn Gabbai, *Avodat ha-Qodesh*, Jerusalem 2000, pt. 1, ch. 8, p. 10, from Azriel of Gerona's *Sha'ar ha-Sho'el*, also called *Perush Eser Sefirot* or *Be'ur Eser Sefirot*, which was published several times, and together with Ibn Gabbai's *Derekh Emunah* in Berlin 1850 and then again in Warsaw 1890. For the most recent edition, see Moshe Schatz, *Ma'yan Moshe*, Jerusalem 2011, pp. 83-84. The passage from Azriel is cited in the name of the *Avodat ha-Qodesh* in the supplementary notes of the *Ṣemaḥ Ṣedeq* printed in Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5567*, Brooklyn 1979, p. 427, and again in the note of the *Ṣemaḥ Ṣedeq* printed in Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5569*, p. 330. See also Schneersohn, *Derekh Mišwotekha*, 153a; Schneersohn, *Torat Shmu'el 5640*, vol.1, p. 129; Schneersohn, *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah 5666*, p. 615; Grunwald, 'On the Kabbalah of R. Israel Sarug', p. 52.
- 139 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 170, 172.
- 140 Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5646-5650*, p. 44; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5664*, p. 12; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5668*, pp. 164-165; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5669*, p. 164; *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah 5666*, pp. 467, 615, 689; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5670*, pp. 30, 35; *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 181. Compare Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, Wayyiqra, 54a (*Hosafot*). On the description of the *reshimu* as the *koaḥ gevuli* (or the *koaḥ ha-gevul*) that remains after the withdrawal to limit the limitless light of the infinite, see Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5567*, p. 25.
- 141 Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5664*, p. 12; *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 230, 944, 995, 1010; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5670*, p. 30.
- 142 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 768. Compare Hillel ben Meir of Paritch, *Pelaḥ ha-Rimmon al Shemot*, Brooklyn 1956, p. 165; *Pelaḥ ha-Rimmon*

‘root of the extension of the line’ (*shoresh hamshakhat ha-qaw*), the line that extends on account of the light that is withdrawn.¹⁴³ This capacity, the root of boundary (*shoresh ha-gevul*) that provides the conditions for there to be differentiated existence (*meši’ut ha-yesh*), is identified as the ‘letters of the trace’ (*otiyot ha-reshimu* or *otiyot di-reshimu*),¹⁴⁴ a coinage based on the Sarugian idea of the *malbush* transmitted by Naftali Bachrach in *Emeq ha-Melekh* as the garment woven from the 231 combinations (literally, gates) of letters in the front and in the back, identified as well as the *reshimu* left behind in the *halal* after the *šimšum*.¹⁴⁵ The primal form of inscription is linked exegetically to the zoharic description of the demiurgic activity of the *bošina de-qardinuta*, the hardened spark, the quality of judgment within the infinite, *galif gelufei bi-tehiru illa’ah*, ‘engraved engravings in the supernal luster’.¹⁴⁶ These proto-letters are in Ein Sof even before the *šimšum* — indeed the RaShaB, following his father’s view, calls attention to the fact that the *šimšum* has no impact on, literally does not ‘touch’ (*naga*), the letters, for as the trace

al Wayyiqra, Brooklyn, 2002, p. 85. Concerning this motif, see Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 106-107, 128, 218, 256, and other sources cited on p. 344 nn. 221, 224, and 225, 376 n. 45.

- 143 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1170. Compare the passage of Menahem Mendel Schneersohn printed in *Ma’amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5569*, p. 330.
- 144 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 20, 169, 302, 555, 1010, 1330, 1429. On the letters of the trace, see *ibid.*, pp. 17, 109, 131, 171, 305, 640, 1193; Schneersohn, *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah 5666*, pp. 8, 467; *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5664*, p. 11; *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5670*, p. 30; *Sefer ha-Siḥot: Torat Shalom*, p. 66. Compare Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, *Or ha-Torah: Bere’shit*, vol. 7, Brooklyn 1983, pp. 2386-2387; *Or ha-Torah: Devarim*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 1965, pp. 421-422; *Or ha-Torah al Ma’amerei RaZaL we-Inyanim*, Brooklyn 1983, p. 255; *idem*, *Or ha-Torah al Siddur ha-Tefillah*, Brooklyn 1984, p. 337; Schneersohn, *Torat Shmu’el 5640*, vol.1, p. 127; Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5692-5693*, pp. 97, 519; Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, p. 52; *idem*, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyyot 5716*, vol. 2, p. 276; *idem*, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyyot 5717*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 2001, p. 24. On the connection between the Sarugian *olam ha-malbush* and the *otiyot di-reshimu*, see also Schneersohn, *Magen Avot al Sefer Bere’shit*, 9a, 42c; *Magen Avot al Sefer Wayyiqra*, 31d; *Magen Avot al Sefer Devarim*, Berditchev 1902, 4d, 68b; *Magen Avot: Hosafot*, Berditchev, 1902, 66c.
- 145 Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqutei Torah*, Wayyiqra, 43b; Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, *Or ha-Torah: Wayyiqra*, Brooklyn 1991, p. 290. See above n. 24.
- 146 *Zohar* 1:15a. Compare Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5646-5650*, p. 44; *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5677*, p. 18; *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 131, 169, 304, and the text of Dov Baer Schneerson mentioned below in n. 174.

of the infinite light, they are the capacity for boundary within the boundless and thus they possess the light without any decrease,¹⁴⁷ and the attribute of existence cannot be applied to them until after the *šimšum*.¹⁴⁸ The implicit paradox is spelled out by the RaYYaTz: prior to the withdrawal the trace of the primal light, which is the capacity for boundary in the infinite (*koah ha-gevul she-be-ein sof*) that is also the aspect of the infinite in boundary (*beḥinat ein sof bi-gevul*), is completely incorporated in the boundless.¹⁴⁹

The letters of the trace are described as the ‘imprint from the infinite before the withdrawal’ (*roshem me-ha-ein sof she-lifnei ha-šimšum*)¹⁵⁰ and as ‘the aspect of the vessels’¹⁵¹ prior to there being any condensation of the light. Running the risk of saying the obvious, an imprint (*roshem*), as it is conventionally construed, is a mark of what is no longer ready at hand, a sign

- 147 Shmuel Schneersohn, *Torat Shmu'el* 5633, vol.1, Brooklyn 1994, p. 130; *Torat Shmu'el* 5640, vol.1, p. 128; Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5643-5645, pp. 79-80; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5664, pp. 11-12; *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah* 5666, p. 270; *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 1268-1269. See, by contrast, Schneersohn, *Magen Avot al Sefer Wayyiqra*, 94d: ‘Ein Sof is omnipotent and everything is found in him, blessed be he, and there is in him as well the potency and the root for limit [*koah we-shoresh ha-gevul*]. And this is the matter of the trace and the letters, which is the aspect of the potency for limit comprised in Ein Sof, blessed be he. Therefore it is called a trace from the light [*reshimu me-ha-or*] like the imprint of a matter [*roshem ha-davar*] that is not comparable to the essence of the matter. Similarly, the potency for limit that is comprised [in Ein Sof] is not comparable to the limitless essence of the light of Ein Sof’. On the official status of Sholmo Zalman of Kopys and the ruling on the appropriateness of studying his *Magen Avot*, see the exchange between Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson and Shemaryahu Gurary in *Ha-Melekh bi-Mesibo*, vol. 2, Brooklyn 1993, pp. 84-85, and on the doctrine of the *reshimu* and the innovation of the MaHaRaSh, see *ibid.*, pp. 267-293.
- 148 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 17, 1010; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5664, p. 11; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5677, p. 18; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5678, p. 338. Compare Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyot* 5717, vol. 1, p. 24.
- 149 Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5692-5693, p. 80.
- 150 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 17. Compare Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5692-5693, pp. 79-80: ‘The trace [*reshimu*] is the power of limit within infinity [*koah ha-gevul she-be-ein sof*], for prior to the withdrawal [*ha-šimšum*] it was concealed and hidden in the radiant limitless light, and these are the letters in which the light of the limitless infinity was illumined, and by means of the withdrawal the letters were revealed, and there remained a trace of the limitless light’.
- 151 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1010.

that evokes the absent presence of somebody or something that is presently absent. The trace consummately partakes of the structure of the imagination that makes a presence of an absence by fabricating the image that is a mixture of being and nonbeing.¹⁵² Likewise, with respect to the divine realm, the trace (*reshimu*) is an impression that remains in the void after the light of the essence has been withdrawn, an idea found in Lurianic sources and affirmed by the RaShaB and his predecessors. But the inscription (*reshimah*) by which the limitless is delimited is depicted as well as a portent that previews what is occluded from sight. To understand this fully, one must bear in mind that rabbinically the term *roshem* can connote an act of inscribing or drawing aligned with but distinguished from writing (*ketivah*).¹⁵³ Even more relevant is the use of *reshimah* in kabbalistic sources—in all probability based on the rabbinic texts—to name an amorphous form of writing, usually associated with *Hokhmah*, a pre-scripting that precedes the letters assuming a more determinate shape within *Binah*.¹⁵⁴ Drawing on Moses Cordovero's *Pardes Rimmonim*,¹⁵⁵

152 Eva Brann, *The Ways of Naysaying: No, Not, Nothing, and Nonbeing*, Lanham 2001, p.xii.

153 Mishnah Shabbat 12:3, 4; Makkot 3:6; Tosefta Shabbat 12:5. Compare Moses Maimonides, *Mishnah im Perush Mosheh ben Maimon: Seder Mo'ed*, translated and annotated by Joseph Kafih, Jerusalem 1964, p. 40. Commenting on the ruling in Mishnah Shabbat 12:3 that one is culpable for writing two letters on the Sabbath whether one writes with the left hand or with the right hand, Maimonides expounds the interpretation attributed to Abbaye in Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 103a: 'This [applies] only to one who uses his right hand and his left hand equally ... but with respect to all other people [the term] writing [*ketivah*] is only the writing of the right hand, whereas writing with the left hand is marking [*roshem*] and not writing [*kotev*]'. See *ibid.*, where in the gloss of Maimonides on R. Jose's teaching in the aforementioned mishnah there is a clear distinction between *kotev* and *roshem*. The inscribing of two letters on Sabbath, according to R. Jose, falls under the latter category.

154 See, for instance, Isaac the Blind, *Perush Sefer Yesirah*, in Gershom Scholem, *The Kabbalah in Provence*, edited by Rivka Schatz, Jerusalem 1970, Appendix, p. 8 (Hebrew). Commenting on the description of God having engraved (*haqaqan*) the twenty-two letters, Isaac, or more likely a student recording his master's teaching, wrote: "He engraved them," in *Teshuvah* [i.e., *Binah*] he made the amorphous matter [*ha-golem*], but [the author] did not want to speak of the inscription [*ha-reshimah*], even though we find [mentioned in the verse] "that which is inscribed in the book of truth" [*ha-rashum bi-khetav emet*] (Daniel 10:21), for the inscription does not have a form until it is first in writing [*bi-khetivah*]. See *ibid.*, pp. 5 and 9. The first of these passages is translated in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination*, New

the Ḥabad masters explain that the formation of the letters comprises four consecutive stages, *reshimah*, *ḥaqqiqah*, *ḥasivah*, and *asiyyah*.¹⁵⁶ Concentrating on the first of these, *reshimah* denotes the highest or most sublime verbal gesticulation, which is not simply the marking of a trace of what has been removed but a semiotic signpost (*ot we-siman*) that foreshadows what is to emerge akin to the blueprint of a building (*ṣiyyur ha-binyan*) that an architect etches on a tablet before commencing the actual construction.¹⁵⁷ Ḥabad speculation on *ṣimṣum* revolves about an amalgamation of the two connotations of *reshimah* as trace and omen. As the RaShaB expressed the point:

In the matter of the *reshimah*, there are two matters, for the *reshimah* in essence is the aspect of the power of boundary within the infinite, that is, that which was in the aspect of concealment and a transcendent power [*behinat he'lem we-khoah nivdal*]. And the second is that it comprises and delimits the entirety of the primordial light in the manner of the design of the building [*roshem ha-binyan*]

- York 2005, pp. 210-211. On the linguistic stratification of the sefirotic potencies in the text attributed to Isaac, see Mark B. Sendor, 'The Emergence of Provençal Kabbalah: Rabbi Isaac the Blind's *Commentary on Sefer Yeṣirah*: Translation and Annotation', 2 vols., Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University 1994, 1:176-184, esp. 178-181, and the corresponding passages translated in 2:57-58, 88-89, 95. See also Azriel of Gerona, *Commentary on the Talmudic Aggadot*, edited and indexes by Isaiah Tishby, Jerusalem 1982, p. 99 (Hebrew), translated in Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 208; Gershom Scholem, 'The Commentary of Isaac of Acre to the First Chapter of Sefer Yeṣirah', *Qiryat Sefer* 31 (1955-56), p. 384 (Hebrew); *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, Jerusalem 1963, ch. 14, 196b-197a.
- 155 Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 16:9, p. 208, affirms the correlation of *reshimah*, *ḥaqqiqah*, *ḥasivah*, and *asiyyah* respectfully with the four worlds, *ašlut*, *beri'ah*, *yeṣirah*, and *asiyyah*. See *ibid.*, 27:27, p. 447; Horowitz, *Shefa Tal*, 3:7, p. 201. For a different set of correspondences to these four levels, see Isaiah Horowitz, *Shenei Luḥot ha-Berit ha-Shalem*, edited and annotated by Meyer Katz, Haifa 2006, vol. 3, pp. 346-347. A reference to this passage is found in Schneersohn, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 3, p. 794.
- 156 Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, Wayyiqra, 54a (Hosafot); Schneersohn, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 3, p. 767; Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 228, 1216; Yosef Yiṣḥaq Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5689, Brooklyn 1990, p. 18; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5692-5693, pp. 80-81. In all of these sources, reference is made to Cordovero.
- 157 Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen* 5567, p. 25; Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5646-5650, Brooklyn 1986, p. 44; Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5651, p. 210; Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5670, p. 36; Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5692-5693, pp. 74, 80-81.

and a memento [*ot le-zikkaron*]. ... That which is called *reshimah* likewise has two matters, for it is the imprint of the essential light of the infinite [*roshem ha-or ha-ašmi de-ein sof*], that is, in the delimiting capacity that is within it in concealment, and in the aspect of the transcendent power in it there is markedly a greater essential potency [*koah ašmi yoter*], and this is the aspect of the separate gradation. And the second is that [the *reshimah*] is a trace of the totality of the light [*roshem mi-kelalut ha-or*] and the disclosure of the infinite light before the withdrawal [*we-ha-gilluy de-or ein sof she-lifnei ha-šimšum*], that is, it covertly comprises within itself the whole of the aspect of the primordial light whence there extends the aspect of the disclosure of the line.¹⁵⁸

The combination of the two connotations of *reshimah* leads to the bending of the arc of temporality and the affirmation of a linear circularity: the inscription presages the reality that must be its precursor; what is left behind, therefore, is the trace of what is yet to be. From the notion of the point of the trace before the withdrawal we may adduce the elemental constituency of time as the *retroactive not yet*, the achronic fecundity of the future that is perpetually emptying itself in the coming to be of what passes away interminably.

The highest expression of Ein Sof, even superior to the encompassing light (*or maqif*),¹⁵⁹ consists of the letters that issue from the trace of infinity that is, concomitantly, antecedent and consequent to the withdrawal.¹⁶⁰ The posteriority of the trace is its anteriority, that is, it comes before as what comes after. To quote the words of the RaShaB verbatim: ‘In the light of the infinite prior to the withdrawal [*be-or ein sof qodem ha-šimšum*], the boundless light of the infinite glowed openly [*me’ir be-gilluy*] by means of the letters of the trace, for this is the capacity for boundary in the infinite. But this aspect of the capacity for boundary was not at all discernible, for everything was verily in

158 Shalom Dovber Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5660-5662*, Brooklyn 1991, p. 205.

159 Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa’aduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, p. 52.

160 Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5643-5645*, p. 80. Compare Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Or ha-Torah: Bere’shit*, vol. 6, Brooklyn 1972, p. 2136: ‘The root of the matter of the breaking-through of the line [*beqi’at ha-qaw*] is in the light of the infinite that is above the withdrawal, for it breaks through so that the aspect of the withdrawal of the line [*beḥinat šimšum ha-qaw*] will be drawn forth. However, the trace is without any withdrawal at all [*ha-reshimu hi bilti šimšum kelal*] ... Thus, even though the trace is concealed, it nonetheless bears and sustains the totality of all the worlds that are [*kelaliyyut kol ha-olamot*] in the place of the empty space’.

the aspect of the infinite'.¹⁶¹ Clearly, the RaShaB wants to burn the proverbial candle at both ends: the potential for finitude is in infinity—it could not be otherwise because the inclusivity of the infinite is such that it must possess even the capacity to be exclusive, the capacity to be less than infinite. In virtue of its all-encompassing nature, infinity embraces its own other in a unity of opposition that is opposed to any opposition to itself. Comparable to the Hegelian infinite,¹⁶² within the indeterminate confines of Ein Sof, every other is reduced to the identity of the same in relation to which there is no beyond, but that potential is not perceptible, since otherness qua otherness is dissolved in the indifferent oneness that includes the excluded other. Insofar as the trace is the capacity for boundary within the boundless, a capacity that the boundless must contain as a facet of its perfection, it follows that we are led logically to the paradox of the 'trace of the trace' (*reshimu di-reshimu*),¹⁶³ that is, the trace of infinity in which there can be no trace, the 'concealment of the concealment' (*he'lem de-he'lem*)¹⁶⁴ that is prior to there being anything to conceal. In the RaShaB's language: 'The essence of the point of the trace is verily the aspect of concealment [*beḥinat he'lem mammash*], and it is from the aspect of the essence of the light that is even above the aspect of disclosure to itself [*gilluy le-ašmo*], and above this from the aspect of the essential concealment in actuality [*mi-beḥinat he'lem ha-ašmi mammash*]... and this is the aspect of its essential name [*shemo ha-ašmi*], which is YHWH, without the letters *yod he* [*waw he*']'.¹⁶⁵ The notion of the trace of the point of the trace brings one to the precipice of the most impenetrable of all paradoxes: the essential name, the name contained in the nameless essence,¹⁶⁶ turns out to be not only the name

161 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1429. Compare Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva'aduyyot 5713*, vol. 1, p. 9.

162 Rodolphe Gasché, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*, Cambridge, Mass. 1994, pp. 133-134; Dale M. Schlitt, *Hegel's Trinitarian Claim: A Critical Reflection*, Albany 2012, pp. 174-180.

163 The expression is found in Aaron Halevi Horowitz of Staroselye, *Sha'ar ha-Yihud we-ha-Emunah*, Shklov 1820, pt. 1, ch. 25, 50c, and Schneersohn, *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, 108a.

164 Schneersohn, *Perush ha-Millot*, 24a; *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Emša'i: Devarim*, vol. 1, Brooklyn 1986, p. 316; Aaron Halevi Horowitz of Staroselye, *Sha'arei ha-Yihud we-ha-Emunah*, pt. 1, ch. 25, 50c.

165 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1333.

166 The kabbalistic idea of the name assimilated in the nameless is commonly expressed as an interpretation of the statement in *Pirqei Rabbi Eli'ezer*, Warsaw 1852, ch. 3, 5b, that before the world was created God and his name alone existed. See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 217, 344 n. 227, and 378 n. 64. See also Shlomo

that cannot be vocalized but also the name that cannot even be written, since it has no letters. The path of this inceptual thinking has led us to the primeval language that has neither a phonetic nor an orthographic dimension.

Developing this idea, the RaMaM spoke of the *reshimu* as the ‘imprint from the totality of the light of the infinite that was prior to the withdrawal’ (*roshem mi-kelalut ha-or de-ein sof she-hayah qodem ha-šimšum*)¹⁶⁷ or of the ‘point of the trace that is prior to the withdrawal’ (*nequddat ha-reshimu she-lifnei ha-šimšum*), which he identified further as the ‘mere imprint’ (*roshem be-alma*) of the light of the infinite and as the ‘point that has no form’ (*nequddah she-ein bah šyyur*),¹⁶⁸ that is, a point without geometric dimensions, a turn of phrase that is found already in the RaShaB to refer to *Keter* as opposed to *Hokhmah*, which is the point with a form that is the ‘beginning of the disclosure of the line’ (*re’shit gilluy ha-qaw*),¹⁶⁹ as well as to *Malkhut*, the ‘privation of expansion’ (*he’der hitpashshetut*), the archetypal lack, the being whose being consists of not being.¹⁷⁰ The expression *roshem be-alma* appears in much older texts, including Rashi’s talmudic commentary, to render the term *roshem*, which, as we have discussed above, connotes (according to a teaching preserved in the name of R. Yose regarding what is forbidden on the Sabbath) the minimal kind of writing in contrast to the more robust form that is classified as *ketivah*.¹⁷¹ But the key text informing the meaning of *roshem be-alma* in Ḥabad thought, a text that on occasion is cited verbatim,¹⁷² is the following passage from Cordovero:

The matter of the *reshimah* is like that which is inscripted [*ke-davar ha-nirsham*], which has no substance [*she-ein bo tefisat davar mah*] other than being a mere

Zalman Schneersohn, *Magen Avot al Sefer Shemot*, 47d; *Magen Avot al Sefer Wayyiqra*, 31d.

167 Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, p. 71.

168 Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyyot 5713*, vol. 1, p. 109. Compare idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyyot 5715*, vol. 1, p. 104; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyyot 5716*, vol. 1, p. 130. In some contexts, the expression ‘point without a form’ is applied to *Malkhut*. See Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyyot 5713*, vol. 1, pp. 107, 108; and discussion in Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 214-216.

169 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 1331.

170 Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5680*, pp. 40-41.

171 Rashi’s commentary to Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 103a, s.v. *ha mani rabbi yose hu*.

172 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 228; Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim 5692-5693*, p. 81.

imprint [*reshimah be-alma*], for there is nothing in it except for the distinction between its nothing and its something [*she-ein bo ki im hevdel asher bein eino li-yeshno*], that is, like the distinction between the absolute nothing and the subtle something [*ke-hevdel she-bein ha-ayin ha-gamur le-yesh ha-daq*], the beginning of existence, for existence is then in the utmost subtlety and proximity to the nothing to the point that there is no distinction at all between the something and the nothing [*ad she-ein hevdel bein ha-yesh we-ha-ayin ketal*]. This subtlety is called the mere imprint [*reshimah be-alma*]. This aspect is the aspect of the emanation, the essence of the *sefirot* in their place, for they are not limited, nor [are they] an independent inscription [*reshimah ašmi*]. They are, however, between the something and the nothing, between the bounded and the boundless.¹⁷³

The character of the trace that one may elicit from this passage is that it is a marker of liminality, not quite something but also not quite nothing, hovering betwixt the limitless and the limited. Indeed, there is no real substance in the imprint other than the very distinction between being and nonbeing that collapses under the weight of the erasure of its signature written in the writing of its erasure.

In Ḥabad literature, beginning with the Mittlerer Rebbe,¹⁷⁴ the expression *roshem be-alma* describes the primordial act of engraving (*ḥaqqiqah*) and inscription (*gelifah*), which is connected to the first withdrawal, but the source that most probably influenced the RaMaM is the following statement of the RaYYaTz: ‘The marking [*reshimah*] is merely an imprint [*roshem be-alma*] ... for its being is not the essence [*she-ein ha-yeshno iqqar*] but rather the essence is what is not its nothing [*ella she-ha-iqqar hu mah she-ein zeh eino*], and it is understood that this is like the negative attribute, which is the true attribute, for the negation is what is negated when there is privation and its opposite, just as with respect to the potentiality of the essence, all that is the privation of potentiality is negated’.¹⁷⁵ Employing the *via negativa* expounded by

173 Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 16:9, p. 208.

174 Schneersohn, *Sha'arei Orah*, 46b. In that passage, the *roshem be-alma* is connected exegetically to the language in *Zohar* 1:15a, cited as *be-reish hurmana de-malka galif gelifu bi-tehiru illa'ah*. See above, n. 146. Compare Schneersohn, *Torat Ḥayyim: Bere'shit*, 244d, where reference is made to the ‘mere trace of an illumination of the line and the thread’ (*roshem he'arah be-alma de-qaw we-ḥut*) that remains in the vacated space after the light of the essence is concealed.

175 Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5692-5693, p. 94. On the discrepancy between engraved or written letters and the *roshem be-alma*, see Schneersohn, *Imrei Binah*, 166d-167a.

Maimonides,¹⁷⁶ the RaYYaTz maintains that the trace signifies the double negative that yields the positive, the not-nothing that is something, albeit a something that is never more than the nothing that it is not (*mah she-ein zeh eino*), the point of the trace before the withdrawal of there being anything to be traced, the point completely annulled in the absolute nothingness (*efes ha-muḥlat*), the utter emptiness of the void (*tohu*), which is before there is something in virtue of which nothingness can be reckoned to be nothing.¹⁷⁷

Let me conclude by noting once more the central role accorded the paradox and the insufficiency to explain it by petitioning a form of perspectivism. In no uncertain terms, a potential for boundary is posited within the boundless, and indeed not to do so would be to delimit the boundlessness of the infinite and thereby negate its infinitude. The paradox of *šimšum* is that it seeks to account for the emergence of difference within indifference and to subvert that very possibility by envisioning the other as a manifestation of the same—darkness is portrayed as an aspect of light, absence as a facet of presence. And yet, the RaShaB's meditations on the *nequddat ha-reshimu* should give us pause, as they suggest some interesting parallels to contemporary representations of the trace, especially the Levinasian idea of the trace of illeity¹⁷⁸ and the Derridean

176 On the adaptation of the Maimonidean formulation of negative theology in Ḥabad, see Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 80 and 247, and compare sources cited on pp. 334-335 n. 90; Gottlieb, *Rationalism in Hasidic Attire*, pp. 47-53.

177 The following words of Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, translated by Girard Etzkorn, The Hague 1973, p. 39, seem to capture well the paradox of Ein Sof: 'If Being is identical to Nothingness, it is only with regard to a being that this Nothingness is "nothing". Considered in itself Nothingness is a real Nothingness'. In Ḥabad thought, infinity is this *real Nothingness* in which there is no ground to distinguish being and nonbeing; it is only after the differentiation of the nondifferentiated unity that one can speak of this Nothingness as 'nothing' in contrast to 'something'. Compare the Hegelian formulation in Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 693: 'The internal division of Being is the condition for its promotion to the level of phenomenon. This division is the work of negativity. ... It is an ontological essence. Insofar as Being bears negativity within it as an essential structure, it seems handed over to dualism. Negativity is not Being; it is what is opposed to it. It is born at the same time as Being but face to face with it and hence it is "co-born" with it. Negativity is the condition of splitting and, consequently, it is that which constitutes the foundation of the possibility of a manifestation. ... In the act whereby it splits the identity of the absolute Being, negativity inaugurates the distance which permits this being to appear; it is its phenomenal letting-to-be'.

178 Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht 1987, pp. 106-107; idem, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond*

idea of the arche-trace.¹⁷⁹ Without collapsing the thought of these two thinkers and glossing over important disparities, they both reject identifying the originary trace as a trace of origin, opting instead to highlight that the trace interrupts the metaphysical assumption that we begin with an indivisible point, that absence is always related to presence, that substance is the prevailing notion that structures our language and the experience of the world. Building on Heidegger's notion of the 'early trace' related to the 'oblivion of Being' that ensues from the forgetting of the ontological difference between Being and beings,¹⁸⁰ the trace that Levinas and Derrida place at the beginning is not a phenomenal trace of a plenary presence, but a nonphenomenal trace of what can never be brought into presence, a trace of a trace, the erasure that is the inception of writing, not as a token of difference but as a stroke of *différance*, the other that cannot be reduced to the same.¹⁸¹ The nothing of infinitude

Essence, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht 1991, pp. 12, 94; and see the analysis in Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, New York 2000, pp. 158-164, 224.

- 179 Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, translated, with an introduction, by David B. Allison, preface by Newton Garver, Evanston 1973, p. 156; idem, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Spivak, corrected edition, Baltimore 1977, p. 61; idem, *Margins of Philosophy*, translated, with additional notes by Alan Bass, Chicago 1982, pp. 65-67. For a list of representative studies that deal with the Derridean trace, see Wolfson, 'Revealing', p. 31 n. 25. In previous studies, I have accentuated the contrast between the Derridean and kabbalistic notions of the trace. See Elliot R. Wolfson, 'Assaulting the Border: Kabbalistic Traces in the Margins of Derrida', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70 (2002), pp. 475-514, esp. 506-507, and idem, 'Structure, Innovation, and Diremptive Temporality: The Use of Models to Study Continuity and Discontinuity in Kabbalistic Tradition', *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 6 (2007), pp. 151-154, 162-163 n. 38. For a modification of my earlier view, see Elliot R. Wolfson, 'Nihilating Nonground and the Temporal Sway of Becoming: Kabbalistically Envisioning Nothing Beyond Nothing', *Angelaki* 17 (2012), pp. 38-39, and in much greater detail in the revised version of 'Assaulting the Border', which will appear as the fourth chapter of my monograph *Giving Beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania*, New York 2013.
- 180 Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, translated by David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi, New York 1975, pp. 50-52, and analysis in Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, pp. 23-25.
- 181 See the concise presentation of the contrast between the trace in traditional metaphysical thinking and the trace in Derrida and Levinas in Dan Zahavi, *Self-*

affirmed in Ḥabad teaching, the *asmut* of Ein Sof, can be conceived similarly as *being other than what is conceived as being*—beyond finitude and infinity, beyond the bounded and the boundless, indeed beyond all the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic representations of God that are basic to the beliefs and practices of Jewish monotheism,¹⁸² the ‘aspect of the essential nothing that is not in the aspect of the substance or existence of anything at all’ (*beḥinat ayin ba-ešem lo bi-veḥinat mahut u-meši’ut davar kelal*)¹⁸³— but in being so conceived, this being-not, which is to be distinguished from not-being, is the object of the self-negating contemplation that has the potential for an atheological surpassing of the traditional theism upheld in both theory and practice by the Ḥabad masters and their minions. What is ultimately contemplated is not a what at all, not this and not that, but the absolutely other vis-à-vis all existents, including the existence of the deity, the nihility that is prior to the distinction of being and nonbeing—in the motto of some kabbalists, *lo yesh we-lo ayin*—and therefore beyond affirmative and negative propositions.¹⁸⁴ If the essence is truly neither something nor nothing, then the trace of that essence, the point of the trace of the infinite light, is not a residue of a presence that is now absent but a nonpresence that is outside the either/or structure that informs the economy of presence and absence; it is, in short, the chiasm that resists both the reification of nothing as something and of something as nothing.

To my ear, this is implied in the RaMaM’s translation of the RaShaB’s idea, *nequddat ha-reshimu she-lifnei ha-šimšum*, the point of the trace that is before the withdrawal—a trace before anything can be left behind, a trace of what can leave no trace. To speak of this traceless trace as the absence of presence is as ill-advised as it is to speak of it as the presence of absence; it is technically beyond both affirmation and negation, neither something that is nothing nor nothing that is something. That the vessels, which constitute the spatial and temporal coordinates of the world, issue from the light of the line that is garbed in the point of the trace, the Tetragrammaton arrayed in the name Elohim,¹⁸⁵ intones the secret of the supreme paradox, the incarnation of the

Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation, Evanston 1999, p. 264 n. 68.

182 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, p. 8.

183 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

184 See Wolfson, ‘Revealing’, pp. 44-46.

185 Schneersohn, *Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu*, pp. 989-990. See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 117-118.

infinite essence in finite nature, the appearance of the inapparent through the veneer of the apparent. Messianic enlightenment entails laying bare this secret, the manifestation of the essence that is not being or nonbeing but the emptiness whence all beings come to be and pass away. To grasp this point is to understand the crucial role allocated by the RaShaB to the *nequddat ha-reshimu*, the trace of transcendence and the transcendence of the trace, the concealment of the disclosure of the concealment at the beginning that makes possible the disclosure of the concealment of the disclosure at the end.