

EXCHANGE OPEN SECRET IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

by

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Ships cannot remain
where the water is too shallow

—Ekai, *The Gateless Gate*

Much scholarly and popular attention has been centered on whether or not Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh rebbe of the Ḥabad-Lubavitch dynasty, identified himself as the Messiah.¹ While this interest is surely understandable, both doctrinally and anthropologically, in my judgment, it obscures the central question concerning the nature of the messianism he propagated. This line of inquiry might seem gratuitous for two reasons. First, his writings, discourses, and actions are replete with references to a personal Messiah, and since there is no evidence that he ever deviated from the strictures of rabbinic orthodoxy, there should be no reason to cast doubt on his explicit assertions. Second, a distinguishing feature of Ḥabad ideology, in consonance with the general drift of Ḥasidism, is the ostensible commitment to divulging mystical secrets, *penimiyyut ha-torah*, the spreading of the wellsprings outward (*hafaṣat ma'yanot ḥuṣah*) to broadcast the mysteries that impart knowledge of divinity mandatory for proper worship.² Prima facie, it would appear that Ḥabad

1. For a representative list of previous studies on the rebbe's messianism, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 303 nn. 8–10. Since the publication of my book, a number of studies on Schneerson have appeared. Here I will mention a few: Naftali Loewenthal, "The Baal Shem Tov's Iggeret ha-Kodesh and Contemporary Ḥabad 'Outreach,'" in *Let the Old Make Way for the New: Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Eastern European Jewry Presented to Immanuel Etkes*, ed. David Assaf and Ada Rapoport-Albert, vol. 1: *Hasidism and the Musar Movement* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2009), 69–101 (English section); Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman, *The Rebbe: The Life and Afterlife of Menachem Mendel Schneerson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Maya Balakirsky Katz, *The Visual Culture of Chabad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Dov Schwartz, *Maḥashevet Ḥabad me-Re'shit we-ad Aharit* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2010); Simon Dein, *Lubavitcher Messianism: What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails?* (London: Continuum, 2011).

2. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Quntres Inyanah shel Torat ha-Ḥasidut* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1994), 22–23, and other sources cited and analyzed in Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 34–37, 40–41,

breaks the code of esotericism upheld (in theory if not unfailingly in practice) by kabbalists through the centuries. This is surely the self-understanding sanctioned by the seventh rebbe, and it can be justifiably argued that he went to greater lengths than his predecessor and father-in-law, Yosef Yiṣḥaq Schneerson—availing himself of the socioeconomic opportunities of the postwar American environment and making use of the instruments of technology—to accomplish the diffusion of the inwardness of the Torah.

The historical picture is more convoluted. One should never forget that Schneerson was heir to a long-standing esoteric tradition, according to which things are not always as they seem to be, nor do they always seem to be what they are. The role of secrecy in his teaching endures both in content and in form. Even though he was overtly dedicated to the distribution of esoteric matters in the service of inculcating the concrete life of true piety, Schneerson remains beholden to the hermeneutic of dissimulation attested in much earlier sources: The mystery is a phenomenon that conceals itself in the very act of revealing, for if that were not so, it would not be a mystery that was revealed.³ We can speak, therefore, of an inherent duplicity: The secret can be disseminated only if it is withheld. For Schneerson, as for many masters of Jewish esoteric wisdom, the ploy of secrecy is especially operative in the realm of messianic speculation.

This is the spot where my approach diverges most conspicuously from the work of others: Schneerson's employing the standard ways of referring to the personal Messiah—a point that I not only do not repudiate, but which I document painstakingly by referring to many of his overt pronouncements to this effect⁴—does not mean that strict allegiance to a literal interpretation without heeding its symbolic correlate is the most felicitous path to understand the intent of his words. Rather than repeating his dicta verbatim, I have sought to gaze beneath the curtain of the explicit to determine the latent meaning underlying the copious references to an actual Messiah by contextualizing them in his speculations on cosmology and temporality.

A crucial element of that contextualization is the attempt to frame the question of messianic belief philosophically by establishing the contours of reality according to the Ḥabad masters. I believe with good reason that for Schneerson the decoding of the meaning of events that transpire in the temporal-spatial arena is to be envisaged through the speculum of theosophic symbolism. Borrowing the language of Joseph Mali, I would argue that the method best suited to study Schneerson is *mythistory*, that is, a historiography that recognizes the essential role that myth plays in the historical construction of personal and communal identities.⁵ To ascertain this phenomenon, one must eschew the standard opposition of myth and history, the imaginal

319 n. 54, to which we may now add Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma'amaramim 5727* (Brooklyn, NY: Lahak Hanochos, 2011), 137 and 234.

3. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 64.

4. *Ibid.*, 3–4, 9–10, 12, 35–37, 225–26, 285.

5. Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

and the tangible. Mali's hybrid term, "ideareal history,"⁶ is an entirely apt depiction of Schneerson's orientation, that is, what is real in history is what is perceived ideationally to be real—not in an idealist sense that would reduce the material to the ideal, but in a postidealism wherein the transfigured materiality is construed mythopoetically as the true nature of reality. This is the significance of Schneerson's teaching that in the messianic state we will detect that the soul is sustained by the body,⁷ as well as his prediction that "it will be discerned openly that nature is divinity,"⁸ a cosmological perspective that I have dubbed *acosmic naturalism* or *apophatic panentheism*, that is, the perception of the nothingness incarnate in the multiple forms of existence that constitute the world.⁹

Viewing terrestrial events as symbolic of the dynamic potencies in the divine pleroma is a basic tenet of the kabbalistic mindset from the Middle Ages. Indeed, as Henry Corbin suggested, the "conviction that to everything that is apparent, literal, external, exoteric (*zāhir*) there corresponds something hidden, spiritual, internal, esoteric (*bāṭin*) is . . . the central postulate of esoterism and of esoteric hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*)." ¹⁰ It is preposterous to think that the seventh rebbe did not subscribe to this way of construing the concrete facts of history. Why should we entertain the possibility that he would have affirmed a notion of facticity stripped of the sheath of metaphoricization?¹¹ The coincidence of the symbolic and the factual is the conceptual basis for my argument that the rhetoric of the personal Messiah serves as a signpost to lead one to a state of unification in which all individuation—including the individuated sense of the redeemer—is overcome.

The coincidence of which I speak is indicated idiomatically by the term *mammash* in the Ḥabad lexicon. Following an exegetical strategy attested in older kabbalistic sources, including zoharic homilies, this term signifies the hyper-literal confluence of the literal (*peshat*) and the symbolic (*sod*).¹² This is not to discount that there are passages in Ḥabad literature where the terms *mashal* and *mammash* are ostensibly distinguished, the former connoting the figurative and the latter the actual, but a more profound reading of the sources intimates that it

6. Ibid., 284–93.

7. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Liqqutei Siḥot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1999), 20:44. See idem, *Liqqutei Siḥot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1999), 21:88. The eschatological inversion of the soul-body hierarchy—the soul is sustained by the body rather than the body by the soul—is repeated frequently by Schneerson. See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 147, 149, and the references cited on 357 n. 83.

8. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqaṭ* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2002), 2:100. See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 150. As I note there, "the discernment that nature is divinity is based on preserving the identity of their nonidentity in the nonidentity of their identity." This contrasts the Ḥabad view with Spinoza's celebrated *Deus sive Natura*, according to which divinity and nature are so completely identified that any sense of difference between them is obliterated.

9. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 87–103.

10. Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 78.

11. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 29.

12. Elliot R. Wolfson, *Luminal Darkness: Imaginal Gleanings from Zoharic Literature* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 80–83, 107 n. 40.

is precisely this locution that signifies the convergence of the two, an exegetical point that mirrors the ontological homology between the upper and lower worlds. One very important example from the first part of *Tanya* is worth citing: “Thus verily by way of parable [*mammash derekh mashal*] is the obliteration of the existence of the world and its fullness [*biṭṭul ha-olam u-melo’o bi-meshi’ut*] vis-à-vis its source, which is the light of the infinite, blessed be he.”¹³

This text in which the phrase is embedded exhibits the larger point that is vital to comprehending the Ḥabad perspective and my interpretation thereof: There is no *mammash* that is not a *mashal*, and hence something is thought to be actually real when it is understood that the factual is figurative and the figurative factual. Commenting on Yosef Yiṣḥaq’s explication of the statement in *Tanya* that the soul “is verily a portion of the divine from above” (*heleq eloha mi-ma’al mammash*),¹⁴ Menaḥem Mendel noted that the word *mammash* has two connotations, that which is literally so without exaggeration and that which is concretely real.¹⁵ On closer examination, it becomes clear that these are two sides of one coin: The semantic literalness conveyed by the word *mammash* is connected to the sense of ontic tangibility, but the latter is determined by the symbolic domain to which actual events are correlated. The soul, therefore, is literally divine, since it is of the same substance as God; this suggests, however, that the symbolic is, in fact, more concrete than the literal, or that the literal is actual to the extent that it instantiates the symbolic. Even the language *heleq eloha mi-ma’al*, which is drawn from Job 31:2, needs to be deconstructed according to the Ḥabad interpretation: If the soul is consubstantial with the infinite, it cannot be designated literally a “part of God,” because the infinite is incomposite. The force of *mammash*, which is added to the verse, rhetorically performs the reversal that allows one to see that the literal is the figurative and the figurative literal, that substantiality is composed of what is deemed insubstantial from the empirical standpoint. I would apply this same criterion to the use of the term *mammash* in conjunction with the Messiah. Thus, explicating in a talk from the second day of Shavu’ot, 7 Sivan 5751 (20 May 1991), the desire that the Messiah should come “without delay in actuality

13. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1984), part 1, chap. 33, 42a. What is expressed here is the key cosmological doctrine of Ḥabad: The material universe is nullified in relation to the light of infinity (Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 66–129). Most significantly, this insight is marked by the paradoxical expression *mammash derekh mashal*, “verily by way of parable,” which conveys that mystical gnosis implicates one in discerning that the dematerialization of the world is literally true to the extent that it is figuratively so, since, obviously, the world continues to exist and is not actually abolished by the contemplative gesture of nullification. See also Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2001), 68c, 86a; Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Derekh Miṣwotekha* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1993), 124b, cited and discussed in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 230–31 n. 285. Although the locution *mammash derekh mashal* encapsulates my orientation in *Open Secret*, I did not refer overtly to it in that work. I was reminded of it during a reading course on the *Tanya* with my student Joshua Schwartz in the spring semester of 2011.

14. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, part 1, chap. 2, 6a.

15. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva’aduyot 5742* (Brooklyn, NY: Lahak Hanochos, 1990), 4:1785.

[*tekhef u-mi-yad mammash*],” Schneerson noted that the word *mammash* implies that it should occur “in the manner of actuality [*be-ofen shel mammashut*], in the corporeality and materiality of the world,” and as a result the corporeal will become a “vessel” for the “most supreme spirituality,” the divine essence.¹⁶ So even here we see that the sense conveyed by actuality is a transfiguration of the physical.

In Ḥabad philosophy, there is no objectivity that is not subject to symbolic confabulation. One can, and indeed must, distinguish between the *meshal* and the *nimshal*, the sign and the signified, but just as in a dream truth is inescapably entwined with deception—the dream is the deceit that dissimulates as truth, as opposed to the deceit that covers truth¹⁷—so it is not possible for there to be a signified that is not enmeshed in a web of signification.¹⁸ The innate metaphoricity of existence is anchored in the depiction of the Torah as the primordial parable (*meshal ha-qadmoni*), a mythopoeic trope that conveys the belief that the infinite light is materialized in the cloak of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which are contained in the name YHWH, the mystical essence of the Torah.¹⁹ All that exists in the concatenation of the worlds is a manifestation of the light that is above all the worlds, a manifestation that is simultaneously a masking—a point emphasized by the wordplay between *ha-olam* and *he'lem*, that is, the world is the concealment of the infinite because the infinite is revealed therein by being concealed.²⁰ Insofar as the Torah, the primordial parable or the parable of the primordial, is the image of that which has no image, the scriptural text exemplifies the convergence of the literal and the figurative: What is literally true is the figuration of that which has no figure, and thus human beings do not have the ability to grasp the actual divested of the metaphorical veneer. Even the messianic promise—linked exegetically to Isaiah 30:20 and 40:5—of the “disclosure of the essence of the infinite light without garment” (*gilluy asmut or ein sof beli levush*)²¹ amounts to seeing that there is no seeing but through a garment, perceiving the metaphysical as it is manifest in the pretense of the physical, the paradox of the boundless and the bounded being identified as one and the same (*zaynen beli gevul un gevul eyn*

16. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Siḥot 5751* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2003), 2:562.

17. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 123–24. See Elliot R. Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted within a Dream: Oneiropoiesis and the Prism of Imagination* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 210.

18. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1997), no. 959, 4:173–74. On the admixture of truth and deception in the dream according to Ḥabad, see Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted within a Dream*, 203–217.

19. For fuller discussion and citation of some of the relevant sources, see Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 58–65.

20. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 26–27, 52, 93, 103–114, 128–29, 132, 215, 218.

21. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqaṭ* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2002), 3:333. See *ibid.*, 114; Schneerson, *Quntres Inyanah shel Torat ha-Ḥasidut*, 23. The *locus classicus* for the depiction of the messianic future as a disclosure of the divine light without any garment, linked exegetically to Isaiah 30:20, 52:8, and 60:19–20, is Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, part 1, chap. 36, 46a. Concerning this theme and the citation of other relevant sources, see Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 25–26, 115, 116–18, 122, 129, 175, 176, 178, 196, 274.

zakh),²² the mystery referred to by the rabbinic depiction of the world as the place for the divine habitation, *dirah ba-tahtonim*,²³ the spectral immanence of the invisible transcendence.²⁴ Instead of viewing the world as illusionary, it should be seen as allusive: The corporeal points to the spiritual in a way analogous to the hermeneutical claim that the esoteric meaning of the Torah is accessible only through the guise of the exoteric meaning, the light of infinity deflected through the façade of the letters, which constitute the true nature of materiality.²⁵ To be illumined messianically, therefore, entails seeing the veil unveiled as the veil, apprehending that the veil and the face behind the veil are the same in virtue of their difference.²⁶

Predictably, this interpretation of the rebbe's thought has met with resistance and the charge that it is not the sense that the texts literally transmit.²⁷ I do not, however, subscribe to the view that one can access the "plain meaning" without any interpretative layer, as if there were a naked truth that can be uncovered through textual exegesis. This is not to say that I think an interpreter can say whatever he or she wishes to say, or that I consider all readings equally valid. Philological proficiency is, I insist, a legitimate tool to decipher the literal sense of a text. The latter, however, is not ascertained by recovering an originary meaning, a fixed reference point, but rather through the continuous discovery engendered by the ongoing dispersal of meaning; the text, on this accord, varies with each new reading. The position I have taken is the middle ground between pure philology and constructive philosophical hermeneutics: The text is not simply what the reader says, nor is the reader merely reflecting what the text says. Interpretation arises from the confrontation of text and reader, which results in the concomitant bestowal and elicitation of meaning.²⁸

Here the notion of the "unthought" (*Ungedachte*) expounded by Heidegger is useful. In *Was heisst Denken?* (1954), he contends that we are prevented from "hearing" the language of thinkers as long as the "self-deception about history" prevails, and we construe tradition as something that "lies behind us" rather

22. Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1999), 39:383.

23. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 75, 213, 319 n. 53. On the link between creating a habitation (*dirah*) for the divine in the physical world and the notion of the essential expansiveness (*merhav ha-asmi*) of the infinite (see below note 44), see Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1999), 2:452.

24. Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva'aduyot 5717* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2001), 1:113.

25. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 130–60.

26. *Ibid.*, 113, 122, 127, 212.

27. Lawrence Grossman, "The End of Days? What the Rebbe Had in Mind," *Jewish Daily Forward*, January 15, 2010, www.forward.com/articles/122763/; Adam Kirsch, "American Messiah," *Tablet: A New Read on Jewish Life*, July 20, 2010, www.tabletmag.com/arts-and-culture/books/39279/american-messiah/; Abraham Socher, "The Chabad Paradox," *Jewish Review of Books*, Fall 2010, www.jewishreviewofbooks.com/publications/detail/the-chabad-paradox/; Alon Dahan, "Review of Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menahem Mendel Schneerson*," *H-Judaic*, February 2011, www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=29591.

28. I have repeated some of my argument in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and the Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 115.

than as something that “comes toward us because we are its captives and destined to it.” The reversal of time—the fate of the future unfurled as the cause of the destiny of the past—is related to the hermeneutic of attunement to a thinker’s language, which, in turn, requires that we acknowledge and respect that language, but this can come about only if one is attentive to what is unique and inexhaustible in each thinker through “being shaken to the depths by what is unthought in his thought. . . . The unthought is the greatest gift that thinking can bestow.”²⁹ The unthought is not something that can be thought once and for all, but the potential of the text to yield new meaning unremittingly in the curvature of time.³⁰ The more original the thinking—the deeper it wells forth from the origin that stays hidden with every disclosure—the more fecund will be the attempts to articulate what remains unthought.

Schneerson’s own approach can be adduced from his elucidation of the novel interpretations of the Torah originating in the supernal Torah, the infinite thought or wisdom, which emanates from the “essential hiddenness” that transcends the triadic division of time. I will cite one passage where the matter is couched messianically. The text is based on the transcription of the discourse Schneerson offered on the second day of Shavu’ot, 7 Sivan 5728 (June 3, 1968):

By means of scrutinizing [*iyyun*] and toiling [*yegi’ah*] in the particulars of the Oral Torah, we reach above the general. And this is what they said:³¹ “All that a distinguished student in the future will innovate [was said to Moses at Sinai],” (specifically to innovate), for by means of toiling in the Torah we draw down from the aspect of the Torah as it is rooted in the essential concealment of the infinite, which is above the aspect of the Torah as it comes in the aspect of drawing down and disclosure. And this is [the import of the expression] “I have labored and found” [*yaga’ti u-mašā’ti*],³² for the matter of a discovery [*meši’ah*] is that one finds a new thing that initially was not possible to imagine, like the found object that comes when one is unaware. And this is [the import of] “I have labored and found,” for by means of

29. Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. Fred W. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray, introduction J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 76. Many scholars have discussed Heidegger’s notion of the unthought, but here I will cite a succinct summary given by Kenneth Maly, “Man and Disclosure,” in *Heraclitean Fragments: A Companion Volume to the Heidegger/Fink Seminar on Heraclitus*, ed. John Sallis and Kenneth Maly (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 48: “Thinking’s task is to gather thought, to bring it together, in such a way that the unthought emerges as issue. But the disclosure of the unthought to thinking does not unfold for thinking in order to be transcended or abolished, to be taken up into thought. Rather, when heeded, the unthought as issue manifests its own refusal to yield itself up to thought; and thus it shows its essential character as insistent on continual astonishment. It is the interplay between this withholding and manifesting of the unthought that is the issue for thinking. It is the issue of disclosure and hiddenness: ἀ-λήθεια.”

30. This is the intent of the tautological statement made by Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 76: “What is *un*-thought is there in each case only as the *un*-thought.”

31. A conflation of several different rabbinic sources, including Palestinian Talmud, Pe’ah 2:4, Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 19b, *Leviticus Rabbah* 22:1, and *Exodus Rabbah* 47:1. The citation appears frequently in the seventh rebbe’s corpus.

32. Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 6b.

toiling in the Torah we discover and reveal new things, and by means of this toiling in the Torah now [and, in particular, the interiority of the Torah, which is like the Torah of the Messiah], we should merit the disclosure of the Torah of the Messiah, which comes when one is unaware.³³ “I have found David, my servant [anointed him with my sacred oil]” (Psalms 89:21) . . . for then there will be a disclosure of the essence of the infinite light without garment [*gilluy ašmut or ein sof beli levush*] . . . through the coming of our righteous Messiah, verily soon [*be-qarov mammash*].³⁴

The innovations of the Oral Torah that evolve unexpectedly from the exerted effort to explicate the text result in the uncovering of meanings that are both archaic (already given to Moses at Sinai) and novel (they could not be imagined beforehand). Repetition is not the mechanical return of the same, but the creative reclamation of difference, the constant verbalization of a truth spoken as what is yet to be spoken. For Schneerson, Torah study is a form of disciplined spontaneity that ideally instigates an innovative replication, the saying again of what has never been said, a reiteration that always occurs “in the moment” (*be-sha’ata ħada*).³⁵ This is the vehicle through which one merits to see³⁶ the new Torah that is to emerge,³⁷ for, according to a

33. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 97a.

34. Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluḡat*, 3:332–33. On the relation of *yegi’ah* and *meši’ah*, see *ibid.*, 247. This theme is repeated many times in the rebbe’s letters and homilies. For example, compare Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Liqqutei Siḡot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1999), 37:128. And see especially Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluḡat*, 1:371. Consequent to making the point that through real effort (*yegi’ah*) one can come to spontaneous discovery (*meši’ah*)—an idea supported by the language attributed to R. Isaac that one should only believe a person who says “I have labored and found,” *yaga’ti u-maša’ti* (Babylonia Talmud, Megillah 6b)—culminating in the “essential discovery” alluded to in the verse “I have found David, my servant, anointed him with my sacred oil” (Psalms 89:21), which relates to the Messiah who comes unawares, Schneerson reports in the name of his father-in-law that the need to compel the coming of the Messiah and to communicate vigorously about it orally and in writing do not contradict this tradition; on the contrary, the true *hessaḡ ha-da’at* consists of these efforts to bring the Messiah, for the Messiah cannot be brought except when one attains a metacognitive state of consciousness that is connected to *yehidah*. On the coming of the Messiah as a consequence of the innovations of Beshtian Ḥasidism, especially as refracted through Ḥabad, and the disclosure of the mysteries of the Torah, which are linked pneumatically to the aspect of *yehidah*, see Schneerson, *Quntres Inyanah shel Torat ha-Ḥasidut*, 6–7. See *ibid.*, 11, where hasidic teaching is identified as the *yehidah* of the Torah, the dimension of the soul that “is unified perpetually in his essence, blessed be he.” And *ibid.*, 17, where Schneerson writes that the “discernment of the essence of the light of infinity is possible only from the perspective of this aspect of the soul, which is unified in his essence, blessed be he.”

35. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5714* (Brooklyn, NY: Lahak Hanochos, 1998), 1:171.

36. Based on previous Ḥabad sources (see *Open Secret*, 119–21, 140, 293, 330 n. 36), Schneerson emphasizes that the study of the inwardness of the Torah is ocular in nature as opposed to auditory; the seeing of the secrets of the Torah facilitates the seeing of divinity, based on the long-standing kabbalistic axiom that the Torah and God are one. See Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Liqqutei Siḡot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1999), 26:389.

37. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 64, 171–72, 190–93, 247–48, 275, 316 n. 21, 326 n. 177, 364 n. 48, 370–71 n. 144.

talmudic tradition, the Messiah is one of three things (together with a scorpion and a lost object) that comes serendipitously, when a person is unaware, literally, when one's mind is distracted (*be-hessaḥ ha-da'at*).³⁸

What, then, is the understanding of redemption that I proffered in *Open Secret*? The core of my reconstruction is based on Schneerson's persistent emphasis on the spiritual task of the Messiah to reveal the "depth of the inwardness of the Torah," the disclosure of the "essential will" (*raṣon ašmi*)³⁹ that occasions an act of self-sacrifice, the nullification of the inner self (*bitṭul penimi*).⁴⁰ From early on, Schneerson adopted the view, which can be traced back to an oft-cited and highly influential passage from the fourth section in the *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* of Shneur Zalman of Liadi, that messianism involves a spiritual transformation that results from the contemplation of the divine through an opening of the "interiority of the heart" (*penimit ha-lev*), which is described further as the "inner point of the heart" (*nequddat penimiyyut ha-lev*) or as the "depth of the heart" (*umqa de-libba*), the "illumination of the supernal wisdom [*he'arat ḥokhmah elyonah*] that is above understanding [*binah*] and knowledge [*da'at*]," the "aspect of the spark of divinity [*nišoṣ elohut*] in each Jewish soul." The coming of the Messiah is linked, therefore, to the verse "Then the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your offspring to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, in order that you may live" (Deuteronomy 30:6), for true prayer, the "worship of the heart from the depth of the heart in its interiority," demands removing the foreskin from the heart, so that one knows that God alone is the vitality of one's life. This is the import of the aforementioned rabbinic idea that the Messiah comes when one is unaware, that is, the Messiah corresponds to "this love that is from the depth of the heart, verily from the inner point," the facet of the soul that is above knowledge. The coming of the Messiah thus signifies the "disclosure of the aspect of the universal inner point [*gilluy behinat nequddah penimit ha-kelalit*] and the exit of the collective *Shekhinah* from exile and captivity."⁴¹

In a nutshell, this is the seventh rebbe's messianic message, to liberate the point of the interiority of the heart from the lowest depth (*omeq taḥat*) to the supreme height (*omeq rom*),⁴² from the state of constriction (*meṣar*) to the state of expansiveness (*merḥav*),⁴³ or, as it is often referred to, the "essential

38. See note 33.

39. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Reshimot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2003), sec. 9, 1:257. The passage is copied from a letter of the sixth rebbe written on 20 Av 5685 (August 10, 1925). See Yosef Yiṣḥaq Schneersohn, *Iggeret Qodesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2001), no. 274, 1:485. On the nature of the Messiah and self-sacrifice, particularly related to the name *ben david* (based on an interpretation of a dictum in Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a), see Schneerson, *Reshimot*, sec. 11, 1:321–22.

40. *Ibid.*, sec. 7, 1:190; *idem*, *Reshimot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2003), sec. 154, 4:454.

41. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, part 4, sec. 4, 105a–b. See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 51.

42. *Sefer Yeširah* (Jerusalem: Yeshivat Kol Yehuda, 1990), 1:5.

43. The language is obviously based on Psalms 118:5. Compare Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5718* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2002), 1:3; *idem*, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5719* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2003), 3:208–210.

expansiveness” (*merhav ašmi*),⁴⁴ a transition that occurs, like the act of repentance, “in one moment and in one second” (*be-sha’ta ḥada u-ve-rig’a ḥada*),⁴⁵ a temporal delineation that is “not dependent on time” (*eino taluy bi-zeman*), a movement as swift “as a blink of the eye” (*ke-heref ayin*)⁴⁶ and therefore “above time and place” (*lema’lah mi-zeman u-maqom*).⁴⁷ The future redemption is thus demarcated

From the standpoint of mystical enlightenment, the binary opposition is undermined, insofar as the infinite expanse is consolidated in an infinitesimal point that is above length, width, height, and depth, and thus the “essential expansiveness” is identified as the “supreme constriction,” or the letter *yod*, which stands metonymically for the name YHWH. See Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5718* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2002), 3:272; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5719*, 3:152, 155. On the nexus between the point (*nequddah*) and the essential expansiveness (*merhav ašmi*), see Yosef Yiṣḥaq Schneersohn, *Iggeret Qodesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1987), no. 3289, 9:485; Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5719* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2002), 1:111, and the extended discussion in idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5719*, 3:207–209.

44. To the best of my knowledge, this phrase (sometimes transcribed as *ha-merhav ha-ašmi*) is based on expressions that first appear in the fifth rebbe, Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *merhav ha-ašmi de-ein sof* (*Be-Sha’ah she-Hiqdimu 5672* [Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1991], 231 and 450) and *merhav ha-ašmi de-ašmut ein sof* (ibid., 1306). See also Yosef Yiṣḥaq Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Siḥot 5706–5710* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2001), 381; idem, *Iggeret Qodesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2005), no. 513, 2:302; idem, *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2005), no. 959, 4:175. See above, note 23. And compare Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5717*, 1:204, 208; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluqaṭ* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2002), 1:327; idem, *Iggeret Qodesh*, no. 1175, 4:453; idem, *Liquṭei Siḥot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1999), 4:1035.

45. The theme occurs frequently in Schneerson’s teachings and writings. Here I mention a modest sampling of the relevant sources: *Liquṭei Siḥot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1999), 18:122; *Iggeret Qodesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1997), no. 4111, 12:290, no. 4127, 12:307; *Iggeret Qodesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1997), no. 6451, 17:303; *Iggeret Qodesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1997), no. 8816, 23:175–76; *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5712* (Brooklyn, NY: Lahak Hanochos, 1995), 1:271; *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5714* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 1998), 2:210; *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5719*, 1:15, 256; *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluqaṭ*, 1:212, 368. The locution *be-sha’ta ḥada u-ve-rig’a ḥada* is derived from *Zohar* 1:129a. I have rendered the term *sha’ta* (Hebrew *sha’ah*) as “moment” instead of the more conventional translation “hour,” because the context suggests that the temporal interim designated by this term is a short while, which seems to be the meaning of *sha’ah ḥadah* in *Daniel* 4:16. In the *Ḥabad* lexicon, the expression *be-sha’ta ḥada u-ve-rig’a ḥada* is applied especially to repentance (*teshuvah*), which is a turning from one opposite to another that occurs instantaneously. See, for example, Shmuel Schneersohn, *Liquṭei Torah: Torat Shmu’el 5639* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2004), 1:33; Yosef Yiṣḥaq Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Siḥot 5680–5687* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2004), 74; Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5711* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 1994), 1:183; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5711* (Brooklyn, NY: Lahak Hanochos, 1995), 2:310, 321; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5712* (Brooklyn, NY: Lahak Hanochos, 1997), 3:180; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5714*, 2:247; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5716* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2000), 1:17.

46. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5719*, 1:256.

47. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5712*, 3:178. And compare Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluqaṭ* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2002), 4:55: “The worship through repentance is in one moment and in one second, above

as the “rupture of the railing of time” (*perišat geder ha-zeman*) and as the “inheritance without bounds” (*naḥalah beli mešarim*).⁴⁸ Exhorting the imminent coming of a personal Messiah figures prominently in the seventh rebbe’s teaching as the channel to assist in the psychic conversion from the extreme of abjection to the extreme of elation. The mode of worship appropriate to this conversion is referred to as “skipping” (*dillug*),⁴⁹ the leap of consciousness that terminates in the “disclosure of the essence” (*gilhuy ha-ašmut*)—perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of *nonessence*, insofar as essence, the light of infinity (*or ein sof*), denotes the event of presence that is always in excess of being present—and the consequent emancipation of self through the expiration of self.⁵⁰ The heart is opened through the leap to the limitlessness of the (non)essence by delimiting itself and contracting to a point, or in the liturgical language that Schneerson was fond of quoting,⁵¹ by becoming like dust.⁵² Through self-extinction the individual Messiah (*mashiaḥ ha-peraṭi*) in each Jew, the “individual spark of the *Shekhinah* that is in the interiority of the heart,” is revealed, and this begets the coming of the collective Messiah (*mashiaḥ ha-kelali*), who will disclose the essential expansiveness of the Torah that is presently manifest through the study of ḥasidic doctrines (especially as expressed by Ḥabad).⁵³

the measurement of time, which is not the case for the ordinary worship, which is measurable by the duration and surface of time.” See *ibid.*, 280. It is also of interest to consider the explanation in Schneerson, *Liqqutei Siḥot*, 39:347, of the expression *mi-yad* in the statement of Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Teshuvah 7:5, “In the end Israel will repent in the termination of their exile, and immediately they will be redeemed [*mi-yad hen nig’alin*],” as an acrostic for Moses, Israel (that is, Israel ben Eliezer, the Beshṭ), and David, three figures related to the messianic drama. The temporal connotation of the word *mi-yad* is symbolic of the culmination of the redemptive process that begins with Moses and ends with David, who is identified as the king Messiah, but it also signifies that salvation will come in the “one and single moment” (*eyn un eyntsiker rege*), the “one and single point” (*eyn un eyntsike nekude*). For a similar decoding of the word *mi-yad* as a reference to Moses, Israel ben Eliezer, and David, see Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Siḥot* 5751, 2:562, and additional reference cited in Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 312 n. 108.

48. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Liqqutei Siḥot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1999), 32:190. On the expression *naḥalah beli mešarim*, see Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 51a, Shabbat 118a. The talmudic idiom appears frequently in Ḥabad literature.

49. There are too many references to skipping in the Ḥabad sources to list here and perhaps I will dedicate a separate study to this fascinating motif, which I think can be profitably compared to the Heideggerian notion of the leap. What is important to bear in mind in this context is that the skipping denotes the mode of worship of repentance, which involves jumping rapidly from one thing to its opposite, from darkness to light, bitterness to sweetness, wickedness to righteousness, a gesture of overcoming binary opposition that is associated with Passover and the future redemption. For example, see Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1997), no. 6794, 18:301; *idem*, *Liqqutei Siḥot*, 39:86; *idem*, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva’aduyyot* 5711, 2:12; *idem*, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva’aduyyot* 5712, 3:33; *idem*, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluqat*, 1:84, 220.

50. Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva’aduyyot* 5712, 3:35–36.

51. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 17a.

52. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva’aduyyot* 5716 (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2000), 2:75–76.

53. *Ibid.*, 81.

The critical dimension that links the individual and the collective Messiah stems from a state of consciousness that is above knowledge,⁵⁴ even above the interiority of the heart,⁵⁵ and hence the worship, which brings about both types of redemption, is illustrative of a postrational or metacognitive gnosis.⁵⁶ A clear enunciation of the point is found in the talk given by Schneerson on Simḥat Torah, 23 Tishrei 5737 (October 17, 1976): “And the worship, which is from the aspect of *yehidah*, is above division, and this is the preparation that is proximate to the true and complete redemption by means of our righteous Messiah, for the matter of the Messiah is *yehidah*, and thus there is in each Jew a spark of Messiah, for the individual *yehidah* that is in each Jew is a spark from the collective *yehidah* of the Messiah . . . he should come to redeem us and to lead us erectly to our land in the true and complete redemption, verily soon.”⁵⁷ This worship is identified as repentance, insofar as the latter actualizes the “bursting of all limitations and boundaries,” a quality attributed exclusively to the redeemer, whose ancestry can be traced to Pares, a name derived etymologically from the breaching of boundary (Genesis 38:29),⁵⁸ a gesture that does not entail the antinomian breaking of the law but its hypernomian fulfillment.⁵⁹ The Messiah represents the contemplative attainment of a mental state that exceeds all limits and supersedes all differentiation.

The changes in the historical plane are not supernatural events; they are external enactments of an internal transformation. Unlike Scholem, I do not think the spiritual or interior redemption is a form of neutralization; pneumatic enlightenment is itself an acute form of messianic activism and not a deferment. This applies to Schneerson, as can be seen from the following comment in the discourse from 19 Kislev 5719 (December 1, 1958), an extensive and intensive meditation on the verse “He redeems my soul in peace,” *padah ve-shalom nafshi* (Psalms 55:19):

This is what is written in the *Iggeret ha-Qodesh*⁶⁰ that by means of the liturgical worship from the interiority of the heart in the aspect of the removal of knowledge, there ensues the matter of the redemption and the deliverance of each divine spark in every Jewish soul from the imprisonment of the external forces, and by means of this as well there ensues the collective redemption, for this is [the meaning of] the Messiah will come unawares to the totality of

54. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Liqqutei Siḥot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1999), 38:89, 101. Compare Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *Yom Tov shel Roʻsh ha-Shanah 5666* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2010), 26, where the revelation of the “aspect of the essence” (*beḥinat ha-ašmut*) in the messianic future—linked exegetically to Isaiah 52:13—is depicted as a form of comprehension (*hassagah*).

55. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5713* (Brooklyn, NY: Lahak Hanochos, 1998), 3:109.

56. Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5714*, 1:74.

57. Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluḡat*, 1:209.

58. Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva’aduyyot 5719*, 3:188; idem, *Liqqutei Siḥot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1999), 30:189. See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 134.

59. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 161–99.

60. See above, note 41.

Israel. The complete liturgical worship is the worship of self-sacrifice, which is the worship from the perspective of the essence of the soul, the aspect of *yehidah* in the soul. Thus when a Jew worships through the inwardness of his soul, the aspect of *yehidah* in his soul, he actualizes the disclosure of the collective *yehidah*, which is the matter of the Messiah. . . . Therefore, when the worship below is in the manner of self-sacrifice from the perspective of the disclosure of *yehidah* in the soul, this actualizes the disclosure of the collective *yehidah* of the Messiah, for through him is the collective redemption.⁶¹

We see that from a relatively early date Schneerson understands the actual coming of the personal Messiah in history symbolically as the showing of the inwardness of the heart, the aspect of the soul of each Jew—*dos pintele yid*⁶²—to which the redeemer corresponds, and the act of nullification of the self that proceeds therefrom. I do not allege that the symbolic cancels the factual, but I do maintain that the import of the latter is determined by the former. By means of each Jew realizing the potential to be an individual Messiah, the collective redemption (*ge'ullah ha-kelalit*) through the arrival of the Messiah in actuality (*be-vi'at mashiah be-fo'al mammash*) will be implemented.⁶³

The messianic urgency in Schneerson's voice became exaggerated in the course of time, reaching a crescendo in the last decade of his life, but the fundamental aspect of his teaching did not change. The salient feature of the redemption, whether the individual or the collective, is a spiritual alteration in consciousness that is related to the revelation of the inwardness of the point of the heart. He repeatedly taught (following the view found in sources purportedly transmitting the view of Isaac Luria and affirmed by his six predecessors in the Ḥabad-Lubavitch lineage)⁶⁴ that the Messiah corresponds to

61. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva'aduyyot 5719*, 1:246. Compare idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, 38:101. After citing the passage about the Messiah from section four of *Iggeret ha-Qodesh*, Schneerson comments that the “perfection of the disclosure of the dominion of the messianic king in all of the world (the collective redemption)” comes about through the “worship of a person (the individual redemption), for there is a spark of the Messiah in each and every one (the inner point of the heart).”

62. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 48, 321 n. 90, 337 n. 122. On the depiction of the coming of the individual Messiah as the “enlightenment of the brain illuminating the inwardness of the heart [*haskalat ha-moah me'ir bi-fenimiyut ba-lev*],” see Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Reshimot* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2003), sec. 57, 3:120.

63. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva'aduyyot 5712*, 1:111–12. The text is cited in *Open Secret*, 51, but my translation has been slightly modified.

64. On the association of the soul of the Messiah and *yehidah*, which is correlated with *Arikkh Anpin*, see Hayyim Viṭal, *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* (Przemysl, 1875), chap. 60, 82b; *Liqqutei Torah* (Jerusalem: Yeshivat Qol Yehudah, 1995), 33 (ad Genesis 5:24); *Liqqutei ha-Shas me-ha-Ari z"l*, ed. (with preface and notes) Betsalel Senior (Jerusalem, 2010), 66; Shmuel Schneersohn, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu'el 5642* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2011), 15, and other references cited there in n. 66. An important source for the Ḥabad formulation seems to have been the commentary of Moses Zacuto to *Zohar* 3:260b, cited in Shalom Buzaglo, *Miqdash Melekh* (Benei-Beraq: Beit ha-Sofer, 1974), part 3, 190b. For a more recent edition of this text, see Moses Zacuto, *Perush ha-ReMeZ la-Zohar ha-Qadosh: Sefer Devarim* (Jerusalem, 2005), 9–10.

yehidah,⁶⁵ the aspect of the soul that is the pneumatic corollary to the incompatible will (*raṣon pashuṭ*), the highest gradation of the supernal realm, the “concealed Eden” that is the “aspect of the essential concealment of the infinite” (*beḥinat he’lem ha-ašmi de-ein sof*),⁶⁶ also branded by the technical Lurianic term *penimiyyut attiq*,⁶⁷ the “essence of the point of the heart” (*ašmut nequddat ha-lev*) in virtue of which the Jew can be unified with the *yahid*, the nondifferentiated one, through the effacement of the self (*biṭṭul ašmi*)—that is, the eradication of the illusion that the self is ontically separate from the divine.⁶⁸ In this state of incorporation (*hitkallelut*) in the (non)essence, there is a “nullification of opposition” (*biṭṭul di-le’ummat zeh*),⁶⁹ for opposites coincide in the indifferent oneness (*hashwva’ah* or *hishtawwut*) of infinity. Redemption of the soul (linked exegetically to Psalms 55:19) is thus explained as implying that “the adversary is abolished entirely [*ha-menagged mitbaṭṭel legamrei*] . . . and this by way of the disclosure of *yehidah*. . . . Since the aspect of *yehidah* has no opposite [*ein kenegdah le’ummat zeh*] . . . through the disclosure of *yehidah* the opposition is of itself nullified.”⁷⁰ In the absence of any opposition, evil is transformed into good according to the principle of *ithapkha*, which is distinguished from *itkafya*, the subjugation of evil to good⁷¹—and all differences are transcended, including, at least theoretically, what is perhaps the most troubling difference in Judaism as a religious-ethnic culture, the disparity between Jew and non-Jew, represented prototypically by the boundary separating Israel and Amaleq. While not all the Ḥabad masters are consistent on this point, there are many passages that stipulate that even this boundary will be effaced, and hence the ultimate soteriological significance attributed to the holiday of Purim according to which, by the talmudic injunction,⁷² one must become so inebriated that one can no longer distinguish between “blessed is Mordecai” and “cursed is Haman” (both expressions numerically equal 502).⁷³ The messianic Torah, the Torah of the Tree of Life as opposed to the Torah of the Tree of

65. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Siḥot*, 39:347. In that context, the Messiah is not only identified with the *yehidah ha-kelalit*, but is said to be one with the infinite essence (*dos iz eyn zakh mit atsmus ein sof*). Compare Schneersohn, *Derekh Mišwotekha*, 111a, where it is said with respect to the Messiah, “you endowed him with the infinite in itself [*ha-ein sof be-ašmo*], and from that perspective he will be the king over Israel.”

66. Schneersohn, *Yom Tov shel Rošh ha-Shanah* 5666, 506.

67. For references, see Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 332–33 n. 61.

68. *Ibid.*, 8, 49–50, 70, 73–74, 129, 162, 183–84, 232, 275, 307 n. 44, 367 n. 96.

69. *Ibid.*, 162. For a slightly different formulation, see *ibid.*, 184 and 186. The expression *le’ummat zeh* is an abbreviation of the phrase *zeh le’ummat zeh* (Ecclesiastes 7:14), which marks the state of duality and binary opposition.

70. Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluqaṭ*, 2:64; cited in Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 184. Compare Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluqaṭ*, 2:2, 41, 189; *idem*, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluqaṭ*, 4:212.

71. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 55–56, 75, 94, 96, 103, 117, 162, 183, 219. See Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva’aduyot* 5725 (Brooklyn, NY: Lahak Hanochos, 2009), 2:179.

72. Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 7b.

73. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 40, 56–58, 147–48, 167–68, 249, 289–90.

Knowledge of Good and Evil, is expressive of this transvaluation, the law above the law of the commandments, the new Torah that exceeds the distinction between innocence and guilt.⁷⁴

The mystical significance of the symbol of the Messiah that I have proposed can be traced seamlessly from Shneur Zalman of Liadi to Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson. The fact that one can find detailed descriptions of the personal Messiah in Schneerson's teaching is not something that I have denied or ignored. The premise of *Open Secret* is that there are these references, but the question that I pondered is what they signify in the overall scheme that informed Schneerson's worldview. The very point of the Messiah in Ḥabad Ḥasidism is to cultivate the nonegocentric consciousness, wherein all things personal are annihilated through the assimilation of the self in the "void that is a greater abnegation than the nothing" (*efes hu biṭṭul yoter me-ayin*).⁷⁵ Messianic consciousness, in short, is about overcoming the individuated sense of self (*kelot ha-nefesh*) as an entity separate from the divine.

The mystical meaning of the Ḥabad messianic doctrine is contained in the words from the Sabbath morning liturgy, *efes biltekha go'alenu limot ha-mashiah*, "There is naught but you, our redeemer in the days of the Messiah." Exoterically, the expression *efes biltekha* affirms the monotheistic belief that there is no divinity other than God, but, esoterically, it alludes to the meontological truth that even God is annihilated in the absolute naught (*efes muḥlat*),⁷⁶ the essence (*ašmut*) that is more than nothing (*ayin*), as nothing is still too much of a something to be the complete and utter extinction of all particularity vis-à-vis the light of infinity. The unconcealment of this truth—the disclosure of the infinite light in the finite world of discrete multiplicity—is what signals the days of the Messiah.⁷⁷ As Shneur Zalman of Liadi reportedly taught, the liturgical refrain *efes biltekha go'alenu limot ha-mashiah* points to the fact that "in the days of the Messiah there will be an illumination from the aspect of the naught [*beḥinat efes*] that is above the aspect of nothing [*beḥinat ayin*]."⁷⁸ Until the end of his life Menaḥem Mendel thought of his father-in-law in messianic terms because he believed that the sixth rebbe publicized this teaching in a quintessential way. He was, therefore, the redeemer to the extent that he proliferated the idea of the obliteration of existence (*biṭṭul bi-meši'ut*), which does not entail the nihilistic destruction of being but rather the awareness that there is nothing that is real but the infinite emptiness that is the womb of all potential becoming.⁷⁹ The seventh

74. Ibid., 189–99, 275, 370–71 n. 144.

75. Ibid., 122.

76. Yosef Yiṣḥaq Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5692–5693* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 2004), 457. In the Ḥabad sources, the expression *efes muḥlat* (or *efes ha-muḥlat*) is paired with the word *ayin* in explicating the traditional notion of *creatio ex nihilo*. When interpreted mystically, this doctrine indicates that all things emanate from the essence of the infinite, which is the absolute naught. See Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, part 4, sec. 20, 130b. The passage is cited frequently by the other Ḥabad-Lubavitch masters, especially by the sixth and the seventh.

77. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 23 and 126.

78. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 114c.

79. The positivity that is enfolded in the utter negativity—the self-negating negativity—is well captured by Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqaṭ*, 3:331: "It is known that the

rebbe viewed himself as the medium to fulfill the messianic mission of his predecessor by augmenting the circulation of this very message, to assist others in perceiving the oneness embodied in the plurality of beings, a one that is constantly being configured by the manifold of creation.

From Schneerson's perspective, for the Messiah to be on the way meant that the Messiah was already present, albeit as what is still absent. He often mentioned the sixth rebbe's insistence on the impending proximity of the Messiah—expressed in the image of “standing behind the wall” (*er iz ahintern vant*), based on the midrashic interpretation⁸⁰ of the description of the beloved in Song of Songs 2:9 (*hinneh zeh omed aḥar kotlenu*)⁸¹—to express that what is necessary to bring the Messiah is to dismantle the wall, to remove the mental obstacles that hinder one from discerning that “the reality of the world is divinity” (*meṣi'ut ha-olam hu elohut*),⁸² that “the world and divinity are entirely one” (*she-olam we-elohut hu kolla ḥad*).⁸³ As Schneerson put it in the talk from Shushan Purim 5714 (March 20, 1954):

His honorable holiness, my teacher and father-in-law, Admor said a number of times that this period is the final time of the exile, and “There he is”—the Messiah—“standing behind our wall.” And the matter is: “Our wall”—this

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 [*betelim 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 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.” See also Schneerson, *Quntres Inyanah shel Torat ha-Ḥasidut*, 14–15, 17–18.

80. *Midrash Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah*, ed. Shimshon Dunaski (Jerusalem: Dvir, 1980), 2:22, 68.

81. Yosef Yiṣḥaq Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Siḥot 5696-Horef 5700* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1989), 316; idem, *Arba'ah Qol ha-Qore me-ha-Admor Shelitā mi-Lubavitch* (Jerusalem: Salomon, 1942–1943), 6 (Hebrew text, 31), also printed in idem, *Iggerot Qodesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1987), no. 1447, 5:367. See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 124–25, 287, 315 n. 11.

82. Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5711*, 1:155. This passage and the one referred to in the following note are cited in Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 92, and see *ibid.*, 222.

83. Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5711*, 1:202. According to the Yiddish recording of the discourse (www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/550378/jewish/10-Shev-5711-Maamar.htm), the critical comment is *elohus un olam in die zelbe zakh*, “divinity and the world are one and the same thing.” I would like to take this opportunity to correct my rendering of part of this passage in *Open Secret*, 92, which was based on the Hebrew transcription. The sentence “It is not *el ha-olam*, that is, the divinity as an entity unto itself and the world as an entity unto itself, but rather the divinity rules over and governs the world, for the world and divinity are entirely one” should be amended to “It is not *el ha-olam*, that is, the divinity as an entity unto itself and the world as an entity unto itself, such that the divinity would rule over and govern the world, but rather the world and divinity are one and the same thing.” While the meaning of the text was not affected dramatically by my error in translation, the version offered here is more accurate. I thank Eliyahu Mishulovin for drawing this matter to my attention.

applies to the wall that separates Israel and their heavenly Father, which comes about through our transgressions, as it says “But your iniquities have been a barrier etc.” (Isaiah 59:2). And this is “There he is standing behind our wall”—for the Messiah is already present [*kevar nimša*], but he is “standing behind our wall,” behind the wall that we set up (through our transgressions), and all we must do is the break the barricade [*ha-kotel ha-mafsiq*], and the Messiah will be amongst us.⁸⁴

Despite the passage of time and the failure of its realization, Schneerson did not forsake this belief; on the contrary, it only deepened. On 6 Ḥeshvan 5752 (October 14, 1991), he expressed the matter as follows in a dialogue with Mordecai Eliyahu, the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel from 1983 to 1993:

There is nothing more for which to wait, since all the matters of worship have been completed, and they have already repented. . . . [The talmudic teaching that] “the matter is dependent only on repentance” was before some time, but now . . . the matter is dependent solely on the coming of the Messiah himself. All that is necessary is that the Messiah should actually come in reality [*be-fo'al mammash*], “one should point with one’s finger and say *this*,”⁸⁵ this is our righteous Messiah. . . . The essence is that this should be literally in actuality . . . immediately and without delay in actuality [*tekhef u-mi-yad mammash*], as I have said and repeated many times, it is not only that the terminus of the redemption is to come, but that the redemption is already standing at the entrance of the door, and it is waiting for each and every Jew to open the door and to usher the redemption into the room!⁸⁶

Messianic hope hinges on the paradox of preparing for the onset of what has transpired, the *purely present future*, the future that is already present as the present that is always future, the *tomorrow that is now precisely because it is now tomorrow*. The futurity of waiting for the Messiah to appear is not a matter of chronoscopic time at all, but a mental state whereby and wherein one realizes that what is to come intermittently is already present perpetually.⁸⁷ All one needs to

84. Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva'aduyyot 5714*, 2:160.

85. Based on the eschatological teaching attributed to R. Eleazar in the Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 31a: “In the future the blessed holy One will arrange a chorus for the righteous and he will sit in their midst in the Garden of Eden, and every one will point with his finger, as it is said ‘In that day they shall say: This is our God, we trusted in him, and he delivered us. This is the Lord, in whom we trusted; let us rejoice and exult in his deliverance’ (Isaiah 25:9).”

86. Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem: Hitwva'aduyyot 5752* (Brooklyn, NY: Vaad Hanochos BLahak, 2003), 1:241–42. I have slightly corrected my earlier rendering of this passage in *Open Secret*, 285–86.

87. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 286. It is of interest to consider the following exchange between Jesus and his disciples according to the *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 51, “His disciples said to him, ‘When will the dead rest, and when will the new world come?’ He said to them, ‘What you look for has come, but you have not perceived it’” (April D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation with a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel* [London: T & T Clark, 2006], 182). See *ibid.*, logion 113: “His disciples said to him, ‘When will the

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do is to open the door, provided that one has heard the knock, or perhaps even more profoundly, one will hear the knock only when one realizes that there is no door but the one we have built in our minds.

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Kingdom come?’ ‘It will not come by waiting. It will not be said, “Look! Here it is!” or “Look! There it is!” Rather, the Kingdom of the Father is spread out over the earth, but people do not see it” (295). I am grateful to Samuel Zinner for reminding me of these passages.