

# Time and Eternity in Jewish Mysticism

*That Which is Before and That Which is After*

*Edited by*

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**PART 1**

*Setting the Theoretical Stage*





# Retroactive Not Yet: Linear Circularity and Kabbalistic Temporality

*Elliot R. Wolfson*

## Abstract

The essay examines the relationship of time and image through an analysis of select kabbalistic texts. The method employed in this analysis is to be differentiated from the more historiographical orientation that puts its focus on the relationship of medieval kabbalists to the philosophical literature of their day. As important as this line of research is, my concern here is with the more constructive use we can make of kabbalistic sources to elicit the notion of time predicated on the belief that every moment is radically new only to the extent that it is utterly ancient. Time extends as a line that revolves as a circle. The ability of the imagination to surmount spatial and temporal boundaries is related to the fact that when we imagine something of the present we not only summon an image of what is indirectly given through sense perception but an image that is lodged between retention and expectation, the no-more of the past and the not-yet of the future. The intentionality of the imagination is to be distinguished from that of perception insofar as the givenness of the perceived object has the character of actuality, whereas the reproductive givenness of the imagined object is characterized as fictive, and in this sense, it can only be given as nongiven and is thus more proximate to the retentional consciousness of memory in which the absent is continuously made present by the present being perpetually absent. Time, on this measure, is the distension or duration of the movement of the soul from one state to another. Temporal facticity, therefore, is inherently noetic in nature; there is no objectivity to time outside the mind.

A word of the faith that never balks,  
Here or henceforward it is all the same to me, I accept Time absolutely.

It alone is without flaw, it alone rounds and completes all,  
That mystic baffling wonder alone completes all.

I accept Reality and dare not question it,  
Materialism first and last imbuing.

WALT WHITMAN, *Song of Myself*

Gershom Scholem famously described kabbalah as a “time-bound thought.”<sup>1</sup> In support of his contention, Scholem referred to a passage in the treatise *Rav Pe’alim* composed in the thirteenth century by Isaac Ibn Laṭīf: “Whatever is found in the heart of the sage without duration [*shehut*] and without time [*zeman*] is called wisdom, and every image of a true matter that does not exist in itself without time [*we-khol šīyyur davar amitti she-eino mašuy be-ašmo be-lo zeman*] is not wisdom at all. The one who relies upon it is not a sage but a Kabbalist.”<sup>2</sup>

- 1 Gershom Scholem, “Franz Rosenzweig and His Book *The Star of Redemption*,” in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988), 35. See Sara O. Heller-Wilensky, “The Relations Between Mysticism and Philosophy in the Teachings of Rabbi Isaac Ibn Laṭīf,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, 3–4 (1987): 368–369 (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, *Old Worlds, New Mirrors: On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 288 n. 24.
- 2 Isaac Ibn Laṭīf, *Rav Pe’alim*, edited by Samuel Schoenblum (Lemberg: Anna Wajdowicz, 1885), sec. 39, 14a; Hannah Kasher, “Isaac Ibn Laṭīf’s Book ‘Rav Pe’alim,’” MA thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 1974, 27. Heller-Wilensky, “The Relations between Mysticism and Philosophy,” 370, suggests that the temporal nature of kabbalistic thought relates to the fact that this wisdom is transmitted orally from the master to the disciple, a dialogical process that unfurls in time. Ibn Laṭīf’s theory of temporality has been discussed by several other scholars: Deborah Schechterman, “Studies in the Short Version of Sha’ar ha-Shamayim of Isaac Ibn Laṭīf,” M.A. thesis, University of Haifa, 1980, 107–113 (Hebrew); Yossi Esudri, “Studies on the Philosophy of R. Isaac Ibn Laṭīf: Profile, Knowledge and Prophecy, and a Critical Edition of *Zurat ‘Olam*,” Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 2008, 208–214 (Hebrew); and compare my own reflections in Elliot R. Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted Within a Dream: Oneiropoiesis and the Prism of Imagination* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 360–362 n. 37. See the more recent exploration of this theme by my student Guadalupe González Diéguez, “Isaac ibn Laṭīf (1210–1280) Between Philosophy and Kabbalah: Timeless and Timebound Wisdom,” Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 2014, 239–325. The chapter begins with the aforementioned passage from *Rav Pe’alim*. Additionally, she cites this text on 221, in support of her claim that Ibn Laṭīf integrates the messianic age “in a temporal scheme of cosmic cycles which he derives from esoteric exegesis of the Bible” (220). This theme is discussed in greater detail, *op. cit.*, 262–318. I have offered a different explanation of this passage. The temporal implications of Ibn Laṭīf’s theory of cosmic cycles have also been explored by Sara O. Heller Wilensky, “Messianism, Eschatology, and Utopia in the Philosophic-Mystical Current of Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century,” in *Messianism and Eschatology: A Collection of Essays*, edited by Zvi Baras (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Centre, 1983), 221–237 (Hebrew); Ḥaviva Pedaya, *Naḥmanides: Cyclical Times and Holy Text* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2003), 22–23, 216–217 (Hebrew). Both Wilensky and Pedaya suggest that, with regard to this matter, Ibn Laṭīf may have been influenced by Ismā’īlī theology. For fuller treatment of this topic, see Sara O. Heller Wilensky, “The ‘First Created Being’ in Early Kabbalah and Its Philosophical Sources,”

Let me preface the ensuing analysis with a brief methodological clarification. As I am wont to do in my scholarship, in this study, too, I will use the text of Ibn Laṭīf as a springboard to reflect on the larger philosophical issue concerning the relationship of time and image. This is not to say that I think kabbalistic texts present the reader with a coherent epistemology or a systematic ontology. I am, nevertheless, committed to the supposition that one may engage these sources philosophically and thereby elicit from them insights that will contribute to the ongoing interrogation of speculative questions that have perplexed thinkers through the centuries. This method is to be differentiated from the more historiographical orientation that puts its focus on the relationship of medieval kabbalists to the philosophical literature of their day.<sup>3</sup> As important as this line of research is, my concern here is not with the chronological alignment of the ducks, as it were, but with the more constructive use we can make of kabbalistic sources.

## 1 Alef and the Immeasurability of Eternal Time

What, then, may we glean from the pairing of the role of the image (*šīyyur*) and temporality (*zeman*) in the aforementioned remark from *Rav Pe'alim*? Ibn Laṭīf's deliberately laconic aphorism is far from clear. Minimally, we can deduce that, corresponding to a distinction he makes in *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* between the "masters of rational analysis" (*ba'alei shiqqul ha-da'at*)<sup>4</sup> and the prophets

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in *Studies in Jewish Thought*, edited by Sara O. Heller Wilensky and Moshe Idel (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989), 272–276 (Hebrew); English translation in *Jewish Intellectual History in the Middle Ages* [*Binah: Studies in Jewish History, Thought, and Culture*, vol. 3], edited by Joseph Dan (Westport: Praeger, 1994), 72–74.

- 3 The attempt to clarify this question has roused the interest of various scholars through the generations. It has been a pivotal part of my own work. See, for example, Elliot R. Wolfson, "Hebraic and Hellenistic Conceptions of Wisdom in *Sefer ha-Bahir*," *Poetics Today* 19 (1998): 147–176, esp. 148–156; and compare the insightful discussion of the "philosophical ethos" cultivated by the early Provençal and Spanish kabbalists in Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
- 4 The expression *shiqqul ha-da'at*, which literally means the "weighing of knowledge," is a rabbinic idiom (see, for example, Palestinian Talmud, Ketuvot 9:2, 33a; Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 6a, 33a), which was appropriated in medieval Hebrew parlance to refer to the ratiocination characteristic of the philosophers. It is used frequently by Abraham Ibn Ezra. See Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible: Abraham ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 83; Tzvi Langermann, "Abraham Ibn Ezra," *The Stanford*



(*nevi'im*), who are described as “those who receive from the true sages” (*mequbbalim me-hakhmei ha-emet*),<sup>5</sup> he distinguishes sharply between philosopher (*hakham*) and Kabbalist (*mequbbal*).<sup>6</sup> However, in contrast to the earlier work, wherein the spiritual vision (*mar'eh ruhanit*) is characterized as seeing the “secret of the supernal beings [*sod ha-elyonim*] in one timeless moment [*berega ehad be-lo zeman*],”<sup>7</sup> in the latter work, it is the wisdom (*hokhmah*) of the philosopher that is represented as a form of atemporal cognition,<sup>8</sup> whereas the object of the Kabbalist—presumably a secret (*sod*) that can be neither comprehended by discursive reason nor explicated fully in writing<sup>9</sup>—is the image of the true matter (*šiyur davar amitti*) that is dependent on time.

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*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/ibn-ezra/>. It is reasonable to assume that Ibn Ezra was the source for Ibn Laṭīf's own utilization of the expression *ba'alei shiqqul ha-da'at* as a synonym for the philosophers (see, for example, Isaac Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 22b). Regarding the link between Ibn Ezra and Ibn Laṭīf, see Sara O. Heller-Wilensky, “On the Question of the Authorship of *Sefer Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* Attributed to Abraham Ibn Ezra,” *Tarbiz* 32 (1963): 277–295 (Hebrew).

- 5 Isaac Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 12a. See *ibid.*, fol. 21b, where a distinction is made between the “level of speculation” (*ma'alat ha-yyun*) and the “level of the true tradition” (*ma'alat ha-qabbalah ha-amittit*). Compare Isaac Ibn Laṭīf, *Surat Olam*, edited by Zalman Stern (Vienna: Adalbert della Torre, 1860), ch. 27, 41 (*Zurat 'Olam*, edited by Esudri, 72), where the “masters of rational analysis” (*ba'alei shiqqul ha-da'at*) are contrasted with “the prophets, who speak through the holy spirit” (*ha-nevi'im ha-medabberim be-ruah ha-qodesh*). I have accepted the emendation of the printed text *ha-nivra'im*, “the created beings,” to *ha-nevi'im*, “the prophets,” first suggested by Hannah Kasher, “On the Meaning of the Terms ‘Kabbalah’ and ‘Kabbalist’ in the Writings of Laṭīf,” *Da'at* 42 (1999): 8 (Hebrew).
- 6 For a different explanation of the term “Kabbalist” in this context, see Kasher, “On the Meaning,” 8–9. On the contrast between prophet and philosopher in Ibn Laṭīf, see Wolfson, *A Dream*, 118–119.
- 7 Isaac Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 12a.
- 8 Kasher, “Isaac Ibn Laṭīf's Book ‘Rav Pe'alim,’” 27 n. 1, cites a parallel to this passage in Isaac Ibn Laṭīf, *Perush Megillat Qohelet* (Jerusalem: Makor, 1969), 48. She also traces this idea of atemporal wisdom to Ibn Sina and notes that it is mentioned by Judah Halevi (*Kuzari*, 5:12) and accepted by Maimonides (*Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:38).
- 9 See, for instance, Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 5b; *idem*, *Ginzei ha-Melekh*, edited by Adolf Jellinek, in *Kokhvei Yišhaq* (1866): ch. 27, 10. Ibn Laṭīf's hermeneutic of esotericism, influenced by the rhetoric of Maimonides, is stated succinctly in Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 6b: “The essence of my intention is a hidden explication [*be'ur mekhuseh*], to conceal that which is alluded to in the allusion [*ha-nismhal ba-mashal*], the object in the subject [*ha-nasuy ba-noseh*].” The exact language is repeated in Isaac Ibn Laṭīf, *Ginzei ha-Melekh*, edited by Adolf Jellinek, in *Kokhvei Yišhaq* (1862): 7. On the use of the parable (*mashal*) to elucidate hidden matters, see Ibn Laṭīf, *Surat Olam*, ch. 26, p. 39 (*Zurat 'Olam*, edited by Esudri, 69). See also Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 11a: “My intention in the matter of

the secrets and the mysteries will be to transmit of them chapter headings through profound allusions like one who reveals a handbreadth and conceals two handbreadths. What is disclosed will be for one who understands from his own mind, but if one does not understand, one will not succeed because it is sealed." In the continuation, Ibn Laṭīf states that the comprehension (*havanah*) of the "wondrous and hidden matters" requires a "pure and impeccable contemplation" (*īyyun zakh we-naqī*). This locution is used on a number of occasions by Ibn Laṭīf; see, for instance, op. cit., fol. 20a. The secrets, which are related to the "words of the prophets and those who speak through the holy spirit," exceed demonstrative reason, but they cannot be apprehended except by one who has mastered the various philosophical disciplines. As he puts it, op. cit., fol. 33a, "Every prophet is a philosophical sage but no philosopher is a prophet until all these honorable gradations are united with him." The prophetic soul (*nefesh ha-nev'it*) is superior to the philosophical soul (*nefesh ha-filosofit*), which is a form for the rational faculty (*šurah la-medabberet*). On five "supernal mysteries of the Torah"—the unity of the divine comprehended through the name of ten letters (the Tetragrammaton written out in full), the connection of the eternal and the creation of the world, the form of prophecy and revelatory visions, the form of the earth and the seas, and the ostensible conflict between the literal meaning of Scripture and truths ascertained on the basis of demonstrative reason—that cannot be ascertained by the philosophers or masters of speculation, see Ibn Laṭīf, *Rav Pe'alim*, secs. 80–86, 25b–27a (Kasher, "Isaac Ibn Laṭīf's Book 'Rav Pe'alim,'" sec. 81–87, pp. 55–61); Esudri, "Studies," 227–232; Wolfson, *A Dream*, 361 n. 37. On the superiority of the prophet over the philosopher in Ibn Laṭīf's teaching, see Sara O. Heller-Wilensky, "The Dialectical Influence of Maimonides on Isaac Ibn Latif and Early Spanish Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 7 (1988): 298–299 (Hebrew); English version: "The Guide and the Gate: The Dialectical Influence of Maimonides on Isaac Ibn Latif and Early Spanish Kabbalah," in *A Straight Path—Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, edited by Ruth Link Salinger (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 273–274. On the use of the rabbinic criterion for the disclosure of secrets, understanding on one's own, *mevin mi-da'ato* (Mishnah, Ḥagigah 2:1), see Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 42b. In that context—and many more examples could have been adduced—it does not appear that the expression "hidden secret" (*sod nistar*) refers to anything but an accepted philosophical conception; that is, to be more specific, the phrase "a still, subtle voice," *qol demamah daqqah* (1 Kings 19:12) denotes the divine word that is without any vocal articulation (*davar beli qol*). On fol. 44b, Ibn Laṭīf uses the locution "simple spiritual word" (*dibbur ha-ruḥani ha-pashuṭ*), and on fol. 55a, he writes that "the first will [*hefeš ha-ri'shon*] precedes the simple word [*dibbur ha-pashuṭ*], which is described as a 'subtle voice' [*demamah daqqah*], a primordially of a unique existence that is boundless [*qadimat meši'ut meyuḥedet beli nigbelet*]. . . . And to this Elijah, blessed be he, intimates in his saying 'a still, subtle voice' [*qol demamah daqqah*], that is, the voice that issues from the subtlety [*demamah*], which is described as the spiritual word [*dibbur ha-ruḥani*]." Ibn Laṭīf hints at the secret of the word (*dibbur*) and the voice (*qol*) from between the two cherubim in *Šurat Olam*, ch. 7, p. 13 (*Zurat 'Olam*, edited by Esudri, 21). For a more comprehensive discussion of the hermeneutical strategies of Ibn Laṭīf, see González Diéguez, "Isaac ibn Laṭīf," 97–148. Finally, let me note that Ibn Laṭīf also accepted the negative theology endorsed by Maimonides and thus he emphasized that there is no way to comprehend the

It lies beyond the scope of this study to examine the complex blend of philosophical and kabbalistic elements in Ibn Laṭīf's thought,<sup>10</sup> a subject that has been addressed by a number of scholars,<sup>11</sup> but there is one point that is worth pondering as it has important ramifications for understanding the nature of time. I have in mind the discussion in *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* of the doctrine of the temporal creation of the world (*ḥiddush ha-olam*) from absolute nothing (*afisah muḥleṭet*),<sup>12</sup> versus belief in the eternity of the world (*qadmut ha-olam*), whether understood in the Platonic version (the world was shaped from

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- "ultimate truth" of the "substance of God" (*mahut ha-el*), also identified as the "first cause" (*ha-sibbah ha-ri'shonah*), the "cause of all causes" (*sibbat kol ha-sibbot*), the "incomprehensible primordial existence" (*meš'i'ut qadmon beli mussag*), and the "one true unity" (*eḥad aḥdut amittit*). By the logic of the *via negativa*, to say that God is eternal means that he is not created; to say that God is one means that he is not composite; and so on. See Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fols. 17b–18a, 45b; *Ginzei ha-Melekh*, ch. 3, p. 10.
- 10 Interestingly, in the introduction to his *Minḥat Yehudah*, a commentary on *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* (Mantua, 1558), 3b, Judah Ḥayyat instructed the reader to study the works of Ibn Laṭīf with caution, since with respect to the wisdom of kabbalah, "one of his feet was inside and one of his feet was outside." See Moshe Idel, "On Kabbalah in R. Judah Moscato's Qol Yehudah," in *Rabbi Judah Moscato and the Jewish Intellectual World of Mantua in the 16th–17th Centuries*, edited by Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 62–63.
- 11 Sara O. Heller-Wilensky, "Isaac Ibn Latif's 'The Gate of Heaven': A Mystical Guide of the Perplexed," in *Perspectives in Jewish Learning*, vol. 2, edited by Moses A. Shulvass (Chicago: Spertus College of Judaica, 1966), 17–25; idem, "Isaac Ibn Latif—Philosopher or Kabbalist?" in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, edited by Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 185–223; idem, "The Relations between Mysticism and Philosophy;" idem, "The Dialectical Influence," 289–306 ("The Guide and the Gate," 266–278); idem, "The 'First Created Being' in Early Kabbalah," 261–276 (English translation, 65–77); Shoey Raz, "Isaac Ibn Laṭīf and the Guide of the Perplexed," M.A. thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 2004 (Hebrew); idem, "Metaphysics and the Account of the Chariot: Maimonides and Iṣḥaq Ibn Laṭīf," in *Maimonides and Mysticism: Presented to Moshe Hallamish On the Occasion of his Retirement*, edited by Avraham Elqayam and Dov Schwartz (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009), 133–164 (Hebrew); idem, "Latif, Isaac b. Abraham Ibn," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, second edition (2008), 12:506–507, available at [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0012\\_o\\_11920.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/judaica/ejud_0002_0012_o_11920.html).
- 12 Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 6b. See *ibid.*, fol. 19a, where the author uses the expression *afisah gemurah muḥleṭet*. As González Diéguez, "Isaac ibn Laṭīf," 246 n. 18, points out, Ibn Laṭīf's presentation of the traditional dogma of *ex nihilo* (*yesh me-ayin*) corresponds to the idea of creation from absolute nonexistence (*lā min shay*) as opposed to creation from no-thing (*min lā shay*), since the latter could be interpreted as creation out of something that is no-thing, the existence of primordial matter, which is inchoate and indeterminate.

pre-existent matter) or in the Aristotelian version (the world as it is always existed).<sup>13</sup> His explicit declarations notwithstanding, the view on creation that he espouses does not accord perfectly with what became, in medieval rabbinic culture, the traditional reading of the scriptural narrative. Precisely the point of disparity provides a window through which we can better fathom his perspective on time and the imagination.

Ostensibly following Maimonides,<sup>14</sup> Ibn Laṭīf maintains that everything celestial and terrestrial was created concurrently by means of one word (*dibbur*), which he identifies further as the “simple will” (*hefeṣ pashuṭ*).<sup>15</sup> The cosmological notion is cast mythopoeically in the rabbinic idiom, “everything was created in one moment immediately when it arose in thought,”<sup>16</sup> or in the mystically-oriented formulation, all entities were created by means of the Tetragrammaton.<sup>17</sup> In support of the latter idea, Ibn Laṭīf invokes the dictum from *Pirquei Rabbi Eliezer*, “Before the world was created, the holy One, blessed

13 Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fols. 18a–20a. See Wilensky, “Isaac Ibn Laṭīf,” 191–192. For an extended discussion on the topic of time and creation, see González Diéguez, “Isaac ibn Laṭīf,” 242–252.

14 Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated with an introduction and notes by Shlomo Pines, with an introductory essay by Leo Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 2:17, p. 296; 2:30, p. 350.

15 Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 21b. See *ibid.*, fol. 45b. The role of the will in Ibn Laṭīf's thought can be traced to what is most likely an Ismā'īlī interpolation of the word (*kalima*) in the Plotinian scheme of emanated hypostases between the One and the Nous. See Shlomo Pines, “La longue recension de la Théologie d'Aristote dans ses rapports avec la doctrine ismaélienne,” *Revue des Études Islamiques* 22 (1954): 7–20; *idem*, “The Book *Arugat ha-Bosem*: Fragments from the Book *Fons Vitae*,” *Tarbiz* 27 (1958): 218–233 (Hebrew); Samuel M. Stern, “Ibn Ḥasday's Neoplatonist: A Neoplatonic Treatise and Its Influence on Isaac Israeli and the Longer Version of the Theology of Aristotle,” *Oriens* 13–14 (1960–1961): 58–120; F. W. Zimmerman, “The Origins of the So-Called *Theology of Aristotle*,” in *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages: The Theology and Other Texts*, edited by Jill Kraye, W. F. Ryan, and C.B. Schmitt (London: Warburg Institute, 1986), 110–240, esp. 196–208; Heller-Wilensky, “The ‘First Created Being’ in Early Kabbalah,” 262–266 (English translation, 66–69).

16 Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 20b.

17 *Ibid.*, fol. 55b. In that context, Ibn Laṭīf paraphrases the dictum in *Sefer Yeṣirah* 2:6 that God “makes all creation and all the things one name, and a sign for the matter is the twenty-two objects in one body.” For textual variants of this passage and analysis, see A. Peter Hayman, *Sefer Yeṣirah: Edition, Translation and Text-Critical Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), § 22, 109. The passage is paraphrased in the same language by Ibn Laṭīf, *Ṣurat Olam*, ch. 21, p. 31 (*Zurat 'Olam*, edited by Esudri, 55). The name through which all things are created is identified as both the will (*hefeṣ*) and as the first word (*dibbur ha-rishon*), which comprises the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

be he, and his name alone existed,”<sup>18</sup> to convey the coequality of the first cause and the will.<sup>19</sup> This secret seems to be implied in the aphorism in *Rav Pe’alim* wherein Ibn Laṭīf writes about the mystery of the connection between the creation of the world and its primordially (*qadmuto*), a secret predicated on the seemingly impossible confluence of two opposites in one subject and in one moment (*qibbuṣ shenei hafakhim be-nose eḥad u-ve-rega eḥad*).<sup>20</sup> Defying the law of noncontradiction, we are compelled to say that the world is both created and eternal, insofar as all that was generated temporally was contained timelessly in the infinite will. The paradox can be explained as well in light of the doctrine of the cosmic cycles (*shemittot*), according to which the present world is a renewal of the world that preceded it and was then destroyed, and so on *ad infinitum*.<sup>21</sup> From that vantagepoint, there cannot be an absolutely novel act of creation as is implied by the doctrine of *ex nihilo*—even the presumed first act of creation, technically speaking, is not out of nothing, since what is brought forth existed already in the divine volition. Extrapolating more generally about the nature of time, we can say that every moment is radically new only to the extent that it is utterly ancient. Time, on this score, extends as a line that revolves as a circle.

In any given point of the temporal rotation within the cycle, creation mimics this linear circularity. Hence, what comes to be is what has always been, the same difference that perpetually recurs as differently the same. In the twelfth chapter of *Ṣurat Olam*, Ibn Laṭīf elicits this mystery from the two sacred names, *Ehyeh* and *YHWH*, which are compared, *inter alia*, to form and matter, to the point (*nequddah*) and the encircling line (*huṭ ha-sovev*), to the letters *alef* and *waw*. Moreover, the pairing of these names is alluded to in the verses “What was is what will be” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) and “Remote and inscrutable is what has happened; who can discover it?” (ibid., 7:24). The cadence of time is discerned

18 *Pirquei Rabbi Eliezer* (Warsaw, 1852), ch. 3, 5b.

19 Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha’ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 20b. See also Ibn Laṭīf, *Ṣurat Olam*, ch. 6, pp. 10–11 (*Zurat ‘Olam*, edited by Esudri, 14–16). In that context, the name alludes to the “primordial supernal intellect” (*ha-sekkel ha-elyon ha-qadmoni*), which is depicted as well as the form (*ṣurah*) in relation to the “resplendent light” (*or bahir*), the “simple splendor” (*zohar pashuṭ*), or the “spiritual light” (*ha-or ha-ruhani*), which is the “simple matter” (*homer pashuṭ*). Ibn Laṭīf suggests that the name may also allude to the divine will (*hefeṣel*), which is positioned as an intermediary between the first being (*yeshut ha-ri’shonah*) and the dyad of matter and form.

20 Ibn Laṭīf, *Rav Pe’alim*, sec. 82, 26a (Kasher, “Isaac Ibn Laṭīf’s Book ‘Rav Pe’alim,’” sec. 83, p. 57). On the convergence of the necessary, impossible, and possible in one subject and in one time, see Ibn Laṭīf, *Rav Pe’alim*, sec. 29, 10b (Kasher, “Isaac Ibn Laṭīf’s Book ‘Rav Pe’alim,’” sec. 29, p. 21).

21 Kasher, “Isaac Ibn Laṭīf’s Book ‘Rav Pe’alim,’” 58.

as the encircling line of the future that continuously unpacks all that was contained in the impenetrable point of the past.<sup>22</sup> This, I submit, is the deeper significance of Ibn Latîf's acceptance of the Maimonidean claim that all things were created in one act by the divine will. When read through this lens, the first verse of the Torah—"In the beginning God created heaven and earth," *bereshit bara elohim et ha-shamayim we-et ha-areṣ* (Genesis 1:1)—alludes to the tripartite structure of the universe: the intelligible or angelic world (*elohim*), the celestial world (*shamayim*), and the terrestrial world (*areṣ*).<sup>23</sup> The subsequent events, delineated in the account of the six days, do not bespeak distinct acts of production, but rather the differentiation of all that was contained in an undifferentiated way in the root of all being, the secret of *alef* that is before *beit*, the infinite will that is the origin that prefigures—conceptually and not temporally—the beginning and thus bears the form of the world in its entirety.<sup>24</sup> This is the import of the claim that all things were created in the immediacy of one moment [*rega eḥad*], the blink of the eye, the omnitemporal interval that can occupy no space, the nonlocal locality of the instant that bridges the chasm separating time and eternity.

The logical principle at work here seems to be that the timelessness of God's essence precludes attributing any succession to divine action, and hence, with respect to creation, there can only be a single and instantaneous act—an act without duration—that issues from the first cause.<sup>25</sup> Just as divine

22 Ibn Latîf, *Ṣurat Olam*, ch. 7, p. 12 (*Zurat 'Olam*, edited by Esudri, 18–19).

23 Ibn Latîf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fols. 45a–b.

24 Ibn Latîf, *Ṣurat Olam*, ch. 6, p. 11 and ch. 25, p. 38 (*Zurat 'Olam*, edited by Esudri, 17 and 67). In the second of these passages, Ibn Latîf distinguishes between the *alef* and the first created being (*nivra ha-rishon*), which is the archon (*sar*) of the *alef*.

25 Zimmerman, "The Origins," 204. In kabbalistic literature, the principle is articulated clearly by Yiṣḥaq Isaac Ḥaver, *Pitḥei She'arim* (Tel-Aviv, 1964), Netiv Olam ha-Tiqqun, ch. 10, 69a: "If all the lights were illumined in one moment, then time would be abrogated and there would be the aspect of eternity [*niṣḥiyut*] in relation to which past, future, and present are not appropriate." Based on this principle, and the corollary assumption that each moment of time must be distinctive, Ḥaver concludes that the process of *tiqqun* in this world occurs successively (*be-hadragah*) rather than simultaneously (*be-vat aḥat*), although he entertains the possibility that in the world to come time will be nullified and hence all the lights will shine in tandem. The question of the attribution of timelessness, eternity, sempiternity, or omnitemporality to God is a complex matter that has been discussed by various philosophers. See, for instance, William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001); the essays by Paul Helm, Alan G. Padgett, William Lane Craig, and Nicholas Wolterstorff included in *God & Time: Four Views*, edited by Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001); and the collection of studies in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, edited by Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

omniscience implies that God knows every particular being in an eternal moment, so God creates the totality of the cosmic order in a momentary but never-ending flash. Seemingly deviating from Maimonides, Ibn Laṭīf infers from this notion of simultaneity that divine creativity is expressive of perpetual volition<sup>26</sup>—a stance that approximates the theory of occasionalism—insofar as the “first mover produces constantly without cessation [*oseh tamid beli hefseq*], for if the mover stops moving even for one small second, the reality of the natural world—in its generalities and in its particularities—would be obliterated.”<sup>27</sup> The time of creation, accordingly, is an eternal now, the *nunc stans*, which is both the fullness of time and outside the flow of time. Read as philosophical allegory, the story of creation instructs us that time in its most rudimentary comportment is to be calibrated from the vantagepoint of the Tetragrammaton,<sup>28</sup> which comprises the compresence of the three temporal modes in the ever-changing but immutable flux of the present that is always the same because always different.

In the thirty-third chapter of *Ginzei ha-Melekh*, Ibn Laṭīf links this secret to the “inner and hidden intent” of *Ehyeh*, the name that denotes (1) the primordality (*qadmūt*) and unity (*aḥdut*) of the first existent (*maṣuy ri’shon*); (2) the existence (*meṣi’ut*) of the first created being (*nivra ha-ri’shon*), which contains all created beings in its existence for a thousand generations, a cipher that stands for a cosmic cycle or aeon; and (3) the thirty-two paths of wisdom that illumine the heart from the thirty-two divine intelligible forms (*ṣurot sikhlīyyot*

26 I am not certain that the emphasis on the will as the agent of creation in Ibn Laṭīf signifies a renunciation of emanationism for the sake of affirming a voluntarism that is in more accord with the traditional creationism. I think the argument offered about Solomon Ibn Gabirol by Sarah Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire: Matter and Method in Jewish Medieval Neoplatonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 53–65, can also be applied to Ibn Laṭīf; that is, the latter’s conception of the will as the principle agent of the divine efflux enhances the emanationist scheme, since all things that come to be through the will are expressive of the divine essence. Creation is a narrative recounting of the originary act of genesis. The question that still needs to be investigated is if the philological distinction made by Pessin between will and desire—the latter is the word she uses to render the Arabic *al-irāda*, which corresponds to the Hebrew *raṣon* and the Latin *voluntas*—can also be transferred to Ibn Laṭīf’s *hefeṣ*.

27 Ibn Laṭīf, *Ginzei ha-Melekh*, ch. 3, pp. 10–11. For a similar articulation, see Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha’ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 55b. In the passage from *Ginzei ha-Melekh*, Ibn Laṭīf draws an analogy between the traditional view that the Creator is the first mover through the agency of the simple will and the Aristotelian view that the means for the divine causality are the separate intellects.

28 Ibn Laṭīf, *Ṣurat Olam*, ch. 16, p. 25 (*Zurat ‘Olam*, edited by Esudri, 44).

*elohiyyot*), encoded both in the thirty-two occurrences of the word *elohim* in the first chapter of Genesis and in the word *kavod*, “glory,” whose numerical value is thirty-two (*kaf* = 20 + *bet* = 2 + *waw* = 6 + *dalet* = 4).<sup>29</sup> That all things originate from and are contained within these thirty-two forms is a mystery that no one can comprehend, *u-me-hem u-va-hem nimša ha-kol we-ein mevin*. The secret of *Ehyeh*, moreover, alerts us to the inaccessibility of the substance (*mahut*) of God, on the one hand, and to the attachment of the influx of the divine potency and providence in the world, on the other hand—in more conventional terms, this name signifies both transcendence and immanence. *Ehyeh* is ascribed, most properly, to the first existent or to the first cause, since it denotes the “eternal and everlasting existence that has no end, limit, or termination” (*qiyyum la’ad u-le-nešaḥ nešaḥim ad le-ein qeš we-takhlit we-sof*),<sup>30</sup> and hence it embodies the essential feature of time realized in the futurity of the past taking shape in the eternity of the present. The enlightened (*maskilim*) contemplate this name and, as a consequence, conjure a mental image of time that mirrors the convergence of past, present, and future that is symptomatic of the demiurgic potency.<sup>31</sup>

I note, in passing, that in several of his treatises, spanning the trajectory of his literary career, Ibn Laṭif affirmed the view that time exists only within the

29 Compare Ibn Laṭif, *Şurat Olam*, ch. 21, p. 30 (*Zurat ‘Olam*, edited by Esudri, 52–53).

30 Isaac Ibn Laṭif, *Ginzei ha-Melekh*, edited by Adolf Jellinek, in *Kokhvei Yişḥaq* (1867): ch. 33, p. 7. On the name *Ehyeh* and its relationship to the Tetragrammaton, see Laṭif, *Şurat Olam*, ch. 7, p. 12 (*Zurat ‘Olam*, edited by Esudri, 18–19).

31 On the possible repercussions of the kabbalistic insight about time associated with the name *Ehyeh*, see Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, edited by Michael S. Berger (New York: Toras HoRav Foundation, 2005), 171–172: “The name *Ehyeh* (‘I will be’) which God reveals to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14) conveys an identical idea: I am and remain present; not merely sometime and somewhere but in every now and in every here (Buber, *Moses*, 52). Why? Because I am entangled in the historical occurrence; I co-participate in the historical drama on account of my covenant with their fathers, whom Israel embodies now. The *Ehyeh* of God is *eo ipso* the assurance for the *Ehyeh* of the charismatic personality. . . . Covenant existence is historical existence in its full uniqueness; existence in a present in which future and past converge. . . . The uniqueness of such a historical existence consists in projecting a present onto a mystical future, and vice-versa in tying it in with a dim past.” For discussion of the passage from Buber to which Soloveitchik alludes, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 27–28, 296 n. 102. I am currently preparing an essay that analyzes the kabbalistic influence—especially as mediated through Ḥabad—on Soloveitchik’s approach to the simultaneity of time as the coalescence of past, present, and future.



intellect.<sup>32</sup> This conception is referred to by Hannah Kasher as “subjectivist”<sup>33</sup> and she suggested as a possible source the statement of Abraham Bar Ḥiyya in *Hegyon ha-Nefesh ha-Ašuvah* that “time is not a substantial entity” (*ein ha-zeman davar she-yesh bo mamash*).<sup>34</sup> I would take issue with this characterization, for the locating of time within the mind, an idea that is well attested in the Neoplatonic tradition, is not meant to suggest that time is merely subjective, but rather that temporal facticity is inherently noetic in nature and hence there is no objectivity outside the mind. Time, on this measure, is the distension or duration of the movement of the soul from one state to another.<sup>35</sup> The reference to Bar Ḥiyya as a likely source for Ibn Laṭīf enhances the labelling of this idea as Neoplatonic rather than subjectivist.<sup>36</sup>

Here it is germane to recall another comment in the forty-first chapter of the same treatise. Ibn Laṭīf distinguishes three forms of comprehension (*has-sagah*): speculative (*īyyunit*), prophetic (*nevu'it*), and esoteric (*ne'lemet*). The first category entails demonstrative proofs of the existence of the first cause derived from knowledge of created existents. The second category involves apprehension of the first cause acting through the simple will (*hefeṣ pashuṭ*) or the spiritual word (*dibbur ruḥani*). This path is inaccessible to the philosophers (*ba'alei ha-meḥqar ha-īyyuni*), since it is enabled exclusively by the luminal overflow that emanates upon the prophets through gnosis of God's names. The third category is limited to the knowledge of *Ehyeh*, the most concealed name (*shem ha-ne'lam be-takhlit ha-ha'alamah*), which is depicted figuratively as the face that will be revealed in the future in accord with the prophetic pledge, “In that day the Lord will be one and his name will be one” (Zechariah 14:9). Significantly, a hint to the eschatological promise is discernible in the concluding words of the creation narrative, “which God created to be done,” *asher bara elohim la'asot* (Genesis 2:3). The “inner intent” (*kawwanah penimit*) of these words “alludes to the emergence of the comprehension of the hidden secret from potentiality to actuality.”<sup>37</sup> The termination of the creation myth is not simply a comment about the past; it portends the event that will transpire at

32 Ibn Laṭīf, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, MS Vatican 335, fol. 21a; *Perush Megillat Qohelet*, 19; *Rav Pe'alim*, sec. 18, 8a (Kasher, “Isaac Ibn Laṭīf's Book 'Rav Pe'alim,’” sec. 18, p. 14).

33 Kasher, “Isaac Ibn Laṭīf's Book 'Rav Pe'alim,’” 15.

34 Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Hegyon ha-Nefesh ha-Ašuvah*, edited, with introduction and notes by Geoffrey Wigoder (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1971), 41.

35 Elliot R. Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 8–9, 13–16.

36 González Diéguez, “Isaac ibn Laṭīf,” 241–242.

37 Ibn Laṭīf, *Ginzei ha-Melekh*, ch. 41, p. 16.

the end of time. The sealing of creation is thus indicative of the hermeneutical bending of the temporal arc, the crisscrossing of past and future in the present that perpetually renews itself as the reiteration of what has always been what is yet to be.

## 2 Imagining Time and the Givenness of the Nongiven

It goes without saying that it is not an easy matter to generalize about a phenomenon as multifaceted as the imagination. But one of its salient characteristics, attested in a variety of disciplinary approaches, including philosophy, psychology, and neurobiology, is the ability to traverse spatial and temporal distances. This is an ability that is facilitated by the transporting quality of reminiscence, which has been long associated with the imaginative faculty. As Eva Brann expressed it, “To the imagination diverse regions of present space represent different slices of time, insofar as they are invested by different memories. . . . The imagination overcomes the physical necessities of space and time equally.”<sup>38</sup> Probing the matter further, we surmise that the ability of imagination to surmount spatial and temporal boundaries is related to the fact that when we imagine something of the present, we not only summon an image of what is indirectly given through sense perception, but an image that is lodged between retention and expectation, the no-more of the past and the not-yet of the future. As it happens, in another treatise, *Şeror ha-Mor*, Ibn Latîf offers a description of time related to this very conception: “The temporal present of necessity exists but it is impossible to understand it. Rather it is in the image of the intermediary between past and future; the intermediate image, which is between two nothingnesses, is very difficult for the intellect . . . to imagine . . . for there is no intermediary outside the intellect, even for something that exists in actuality, and how much more so for the absolute privation.”<sup>39</sup>

38 Eva T. H. Brann, *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991), 615–616.

39 Isaac Ibn Latîf, *Şeror ha-Mor*, edited by Adolph Jellinek, *Kerem Hemed* 9 (1856): 155. I have also consulted ms Paris 982, fol. 80b. For a parallel description of time, see Ibn Latîf, *Perush Megillat Qohelet*, 19–20. In that context, Ibn Latîf cites the comment of Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 1:73, pp. 196–197, that “the cleverest philosophers were confused by the question of time and that some of them did not understand its notion—so that Galen could say that it is a divine thing, the true reality of which cannot be perceived—this applies all the more to those who pay no attention to the nature of anything.”

Ibn Latif is here drawing on an idea that is traceable to Plato: the image is a combination of being and nonbeing; the object we imagine is mentally present but somatically absent, and thus it is, at once, real and unreal.<sup>40</sup> Rendered in the technical language of Husserlian phenomenology, the presentification of the image, whether in the act of recollecting the past or in anticipating the future, is to be contrasted with the appresentationally given object that is characteristic of the appearance of the present in the impressional consciousness of perception. The intentionality of the imagination is to be distinguished from that of perception insofar as the givenness of the perceived object has the character of actuality, whereas the reproductive givenness of the imagined object is characterized as fictive, and in this sense, it can only be given as non-given and is thus more proximate to the retentive consciousness of memory, in which the absent is continuously made present by the present being perpetually absent.<sup>41</sup> The insight concerning the formal affinity between time and imagination is expressed poetically and lucidly by Brann: “An image, as a likeness, is composed of Nonbeing and Being *at once*, meaning that it *is not* the original, which in a way it also *is*; an image is the presence of an absence. In time, as the pure structure of Becoming, that ‘at once’ comes apart as absence turns into presence and presence into absence, as the future that *is not* yet ceaselessly propels the present that *is* now into a past that *is not* anymore; time is thus a present winged by two absences.”<sup>42</sup>

Alternatively, we can speak of the image as a *coincidentia oppositorum* of the hidden and the manifest; it both is and is not what it represents.<sup>43</sup> The flux of

40 Plato, *Sophist* 240b–c, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, with introduction and prefatory notes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 983. See analysis in Brann, *The World of the Imagination*, 389–396.

41 Dorion Cairns, *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*, edited by Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 72–74.

42 Eva Brann, *What, Then, is Time?* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), xii (emphasis in original).

43 In a related, albeit somewhat different terminological index, Henry Corbin deduced from the Sūfi understanding of the Active Imagination (*ḥaḍrat al-khayāl*), especially in the mystical theosophy of Ibn ‘Arabī, the depiction of the image as the intermediate plane, which is marked by the coincidence of opposites of the infinite and the finite, the intelligible and the sensible. See Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ‘Arabī*, translated by Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 218–219, 272–273, and the discussion in Elliot R. Wolfson, “*Imago Templi* and the Meeting of the Two Seas: Liturgical Time-Space and the Feminine Imaginary in Zoharic Kabbalah,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 51 (2007): 123–124.

time, similarly, exhibits the heterogeneity of the homogeneous. To paraphrase Hegel, the constituent element of becoming is the movement that consists of the reciprocal passing of being into nothing and nothing into being.<sup>44</sup> What is available at any moment is the presence of the actual present, the now that appears to us, but this present lacks any presence apart from the presence of the recollected past and/or the presence of the anticipated future, that is, a presence that cannot be accorded the reality of being present outside the absence conjured by the affirmation of negation that is central to the imaginative faculty. It follows that the duration of time is not primarily the property of thinghood or the measure of actual bodies in motion, as Aristotle famously argued, but rather the measure of alteration determined by the extension or stretching (*distentio*) of the mind backward and forward. This is a crucial aspect of Plotinus's reflections on time that had a major impact on Augustine's *Confessions* and later on Husserl's lectures on the phenomenology of internal time consciousness.<sup>45</sup>

To the extent that becoming marks the being of time, we can conjecture that the facticity of the latter is such that nonbeing and being coalesce, not as the dialectical resolution of antinomies but as the paradoxical juxtaposition of contraries that belong together in virtue of their intractable disjuncture. As Merleau-Ponty put it, "Past and future exist all too well in the world, they exist in the present, and what being itself lacks in order to be temporal is the non-being of the elsewhere, of the bygone, and of tomorrow. . . . Past and future voluntarily withdraw from being and pass over to the side of subjectivity, to seek there not some real support, but rather a possibility of non-being that harmonizes with their nature."<sup>46</sup> The common sense conception of time as a string of now-points is meaningful only insofar as it presupposes the synchronization of being and nonbeing in a field of presence that is circumscribed by the absence of the double horizon of past and future. Time and imagination both assume that being is implicated with nonbeing in becoming. Again, to quote Brann: "Imagination and time are related to the brink of identity through memory, which is the presence of what has gone absent through passage. . . . Therefore, if we want to understand something of imagination, memory, and time, we

44 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Logic: Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of The Philosophical Sciences (1830)*, translated by William Wallace, with foreword by J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), § 88, pp. 130–131, and see analysis in Brann, *What, Then, is Time?* 23.

45 Wolfson, *Alef Mem, Tau*, 8–30.

46 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 434–435.

must mount an inquiry into what it means to say that something is not what it claims to be or is not there or is nonexistent or is affected by Nonbeing.”<sup>47</sup> In the remainder of this essay, I will attempt to think about time kabbalistically from the vantagepoint of an apophasis that emerges from pondering the existence of nonexistence, the event of presence that is always in excess of being present.

### 3 Return of the Altogether Otherwise

The imaginary fusion of presence and absence, visible and invisible, imparts to us the key to understanding the paradox of linear circularity, the locution that I have deployed to name a conception of temporality that calls into question the linear model of aligning events chronometrically in a noetic sequence of now-points stretched invariably between the retention of the before that is no more and the protention of the after that is not yet. The notion of the timeswerve that I have championed calls for the reversal of the standard order, and hence, instead of speaking of every actually present becoming a repetition of a past that induces the expectation of a future, we should readily speak of every actually present becoming an expectation of a past that induces the repetition of a future.<sup>48</sup> In the contours of imagination, we affirm the coming to be of what is always yet to come. This inversion is at the heart of the hermeneutical process that has informed the variegated nature of textual reasoning at play in rabbinic and kabbalistic sources, and, I would add, in scholarly analyses of these sources as well. Indeed, with respect to the intricate relationship between temporality, imagination, and hermeneutics, I contend that there is no substantial difference between scholar and adept.

To avoid potential misunderstanding, let me elaborate on this last point. I am ever mindful of Nietzsche’s observation, “He who wants to mediate between two resolute thinkers shows that he is mediocre: he has no eye for what is unique; seeing things as similar and making things the same is the sign of weak eyes.”<sup>49</sup> In this spirit, I have sought to extract and to assess—at times

47 Eva Brann, *The Ways of Naysaying: No, Not, Nothing, and Nonbeing* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), xii.

48 For the fullest discussion, see the prologue “Timeswerve/Hermeneutic Reversibility” in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), xv–xxxii.

49 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, edited by Bernard Williams, translated by Josefine Nauckhoff, poems translated by Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), sec. 228, p. 145.

quite critically—kabbalistic doctrines from immersion in textual details rather than by providing systematic and/or totalizing generalizations based on the purported existence of metaphysical absolutes or ontological essences. Neither in theory nor in practice do I advocate for a simplistic leveling out of difference implied by the charge of essentialism that has been leveled against me. Appeal to the Derridean *différance* has been mobilized in the effort to criticize the alleged essentialist nature of my work, but a proper understanding of the paradox of iteration and innovation implied in this concept—and particularly as it relates to the notion of singularity—would expose the inadequacy of these attacks.<sup>50</sup> Consider as exemplary the following comment of Derrida about his own writing praxis: “Every time I write something, I have the impression of making a beginning—but in fact that which is the same in texture is ceaselessly exposed to a singularity which is that of the other . . . Everything appears anew: which means newness and repetition together. . . . In the actual writing, of course, I’m well aware of the fact that at bottom it all unfolds according to the same law that commands these always different things.”<sup>51</sup> The comment leaves little room for ambiguity: everything must appear as new but newness is unintelligible without the presumption of repetition.

The perspective of Derrida, to which I subscribe, is in basic accord with the observation of Deleuze that the principle of repetition “is no longer that of the Same, but involves the Other—involves difference, from one wave and one gesture to another, and carries that difference through the repetitive space

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50 Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 100–101, and my rejoinder in “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): 143–167, esp. 149–154. See also Moshe Idel, “Ascensions, Gender and Pillars in Safedian Kabbalah,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 25 (2011): 55–108, esp. 104–105 and 107–108. Idel’s comment that my stance is “still an open question” is surely true but ultimately trivial to the extent that it applies to every scholar, including Idel, and even his assertion that what I have written is an open question is itself an open question. If Idel were genuinely committed to *différance*, one wonders what would motivate him to invest so much time and energy to pass judgment repeatedly on the views that I have adopted. The obsessive need to criticize my scholarship coupled with the fervent tone of condemnation hardly suggests a portrait of someone genuinely devoted to the aporetic indeterminacy fostered by deconstruction or postmodernism. In the absence of an interpreter, texts are mute; a text speaks only through the voice of a reader, and, on this principle, the texts cited by Idel could be interpreted differently, just as he claims about my own interpretation of texts.

51 Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, edited by Giacomo Donis and David Webb, translated by Giacomo Donis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 47.

thereby constituted.”<sup>52</sup> Deleuze distinguishes the repetition of the same, which presumes the identity of the concept or representation, and the repetition of difference, which presumes the alterity of the idea or the heterogeneity of the a-presentation. The former involves equality, commensurability, and symmetry; the latter, inequality, incommensurability, and dissymmetry.<sup>53</sup> Even in the latter case, however, heterogeneity entails that we find the singularity within that which repeats, the return of the same in which the same is nothing but the recurrence of difference,<sup>54</sup> the ungiven that is the prerequisite of all that is given, the principle of nonphenomenality that accounts for the phenomenality of every phenomenon.<sup>55</sup> The masking of the dissimilar in the pretense of the similar constitutes the elemental paradox of temporal becoming: “Repetition is truly that which disguises itself in constituting itself, that which constitutes itself only by disguising itself.”<sup>56</sup> Hence, the “repetition of dissymmetry is hidden within symmetrical ensembles or effects; a repetition of distinctive points underneath that of ordinary points; and everywhere the Other in the repetition of the Same. This is the secret, the most profound repetition: it alone provides the principle of the other one, the reason for the blockage of concepts.”<sup>57</sup>

The following Deleuzian depiction of Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence could well serve as a succinct summary of what I will here present as the kabbalistic conception of time:

Eternal return cannot mean the return of the Identical because it presupposes a world . . . in which all previous identities have been abolished and dissolved. Returning is being, but only the being of becoming. The eternal return does not bring back “the same,” but returning constitutes the only Same of that which becomes. Returning is the becoming identical of becoming itself. Returning is thus the only identity . . . the identity of difference . . . Repetition in the eternal return, therefore, consists in conceiving the same on the basis of the different.<sup>58</sup>

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52 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 23. I have taken the liberty to repeat my analysis in Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift*, 12.

53 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 23–24.

54 *Ibid.*, 90–91, 242–243.

55 Miguel de Beistegui, *Immanence: Deleuze and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 52–53.

56 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 17.

57 *Ibid.*, 24.

58 *Ibid.*, 41.

There is no self-same and stable being that persists in the becoming; the being of that which becomes is nothing other than the process of return. The only thing that does not change is the inevitability of change necessitated by the continuous passage of time. It follows, moreover, that in each moment there is a merging of the three temporalities:

The present must coexist with itself as past and yet to come. . . . We misinterpret the expression “eternal return” if we understand it as “return of the same.” It is not being that returns but rather the returning itself that constitutes being insofar as it is affirmed of becoming and of that which passes. It is not some one thing which returns but rather returning itself is the one thing which is affirmed of diversity or multiplicity. . . . Returning is thus the only identity, but identity as a secondary power; the identity of difference, the identical which belongs to the different, or turns around the different. . . . Repetition in the eternal return, therefore, consists in conceiving the same on the basis of the different.<sup>59</sup>

A similar approach to time can be elicited from the “future thinking” (*künftige Denken*) and the grounding of the place of the moment (*Augenblicksstätte*) that Heidegger enunciated after the so-called *Kehre* in the 1930s. For example, in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, composed between 1936–38 but not published until 1989, Heidegger writes explicitly that with respect to the question of being (*Seinsfrage*) and the wish to traverse its course in the hope of retrieving the lineage of antiquity, the matter of repetition (*Wiederholung*) means “to let the same, the uniqueness of being, become a plight *again* and thereby out of a more original truth. ‘Again’ means here precisely ‘altogether otherwise’ [*Wieder’ besagt hier gerade: ganz anders*].”<sup>60</sup> Prima facie, one would not expect the concept of “the same” (*das Selbe*) to be glossed as the “uniqueness of being” (*Einzigkeit des Seyns*), since sameness, by definition, is diametrically opposed to uniqueness. However, in Heideggerian terms, there is no opposition, for to be attuned to the same, which is contrasted with the

59 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson (London: Athlone Press, 1983), 48.

60 Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), § 33, p. 58 (emphasis in original); *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* [GA 65] (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989), 73. I am here expanding on the discussion of this aphorism in Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift*, 243–244.



identical (*das Gleiche*),<sup>61</sup> one must retrieve the opening that is repeatedly different,<sup>62</sup> the event (*Ereignis*) of the other beginning (*der andere Anfang*) that is disclosive of the originary truth (*ursprünglicheren Wahrheit*), anterior to and concealed within the first beginning (*der erste Anfang*), the dawning of Greek thought that initiated the history of Western metaphysics.<sup>63</sup> Insofar as “every beginning is unsurpassable, it must constantly be repeated and must be placed through confrontation into the uniqueness of its incipience [*die Einzigkeit seiner Anfänglichkeit*] and thus of its ineluctable reaching ahead.”<sup>64</sup> Bracketing the implicit political and ideological importance of Heidegger’s emphasis on the confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) between the two beginnings, what is vital to this analysis is his avowal of the paradox that only what occurs once is repeatable, *Nur das Einmalige ist wieder-holbar*, whence it follows that repetition “does not mean the stupid superficiality and impossibility of the mere occurrence of the *same* for a second and third time. Indeed the beginning can never be apprehended as the *same*, since it reaches ahead and thus encroaches differently each time on that which it itself initiates.”<sup>65</sup> The temporal line is here inverted, for the beginning, which is typically located in the past, is comported as that which reaches ahead, the futural initiation of what returns always as something different, the inaugural event that is neither timeless nor timebound.

This event is characterized, more specifically, as the “self-eliciting and self-mediating center in which all essential occurrence of the truth of being must be thought back in advance [*voraus zurückgedacht*]. This thinking back in

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- 61 Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, translated and with an introduction by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 45; German text: 111. On the distinction between selfsameness (*Selbigkeit*) and identicalness (*Gleichheit*), see Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, translated by Bret W. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 25; *Feldweg-Gespräche* [GA 77] (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995), 39.
- 62 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, new translation by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 41; *Einführung in die Metaphysik* [GA 40] (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983) 42. See Elliot R. Wolfson, “Revealing and Re/veiling Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson’s Messianic Secret,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 26 (2012): 33–34, and the sources that treat the paradox of the repetition of the origin in Heidegger cited op. cit., 34 n. 35. See also Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift*, 442–443 n. 116.
- 63 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 92, pp. 146–147; *Beiträge*, 186–187. See Joseph P. Fell, “Heidegger’s Notion of Two Beginnings,” *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1971): 213–237; Joan Stambaugh, *The Finitude of Being* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 112–114.
- 64 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 20, p. 44; *Beiträge*, 55.
- 65 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 20, p. 45 (emphasis in original); *Beiträge*, 55.

advance [*voraus dahin Zurück-denken*] to that center is the inventive thinking of beyng [*Er-denken des Seyns*].<sup>66</sup> The path of thought, also labeled as the “inceptual thinking” (*anfängliche Denken*) that engenders the “fathoming of the ground” (*Ergründung des Grundes*),<sup>67</sup> is a thinking back that is, at the same time, a thinking ahead to the giving (*es gibt*) that tacitly offers itself—Heidegger explicitly draws a connection between the Greek words for substance (*ousia*) and presence (*parousia*), an interpretive move that has obvious theological overtones,<sup>68</sup> which are expressed most poignantly by the figurative use of the image of the advent of the last god (*der letzte Gott*)<sup>69</sup> that belongs to the “future ones” (*die Zukünftigen*)<sup>70</sup>—in “historical recollection” (*geschichtlicher Erinnerung*) as the “primordial temporality” (*Temporalität*). The nature of that temporality is portrayed paradoxically as “the occurrence of the having-been/preserving [*Gewesend-bewahrenden*] and futural/anticipating transporting [*Künftigend-vorausnehmenden Entrückung*], i.e., the occurrence of the opening and grounding of the ‘there’ and thus of the essence of truth.”<sup>71</sup> Heidegger insists that this temporality should not be understood as a form of “lived time” (à la Dilthey or Bergson) that is thought to be superior to the concept of “calculable time.” The time implied in the transporting of the inventive thinking is a continuation of the view of time proffered in *Sein und*

66 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 34, pp. 58–59; *Beiträge*, 73.

67 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 22, p. 46; *Beiträge*, 56.

68 Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift*, 101–102, 232–233, and consider the other pertinent studies cited on 364 n. 89 and 437–438 nn. 34–35, to which I would add the following: Joachim L. Oberst, *Heidegger on Language and Death: The Intrinsic Connection in Human Existence* (London: Continuum, 2009), 17–47, esp. 28–36; Aubrey L. Glazer, *A New Physiognomy of Jewish Thinking: Critical Theory After Adorno as Applied to Jewish Thought* (London: Continuum, 2011), 34–35; Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 61–65.

69 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 23, p. 46 (*Beiträge*, 57): “The greatest event, however, is always the beginning, even if it is the beginning of the last god.” See also *Contributions*, § 32, p. 56 (*Beiträge*, 70): “The approach and absconding, the advent or retreat, or the simple remaining absent of the gods; for us in the sovereignty, i.e., the beginning and dominion over this occurrence, the initial and final sovereignty which will show itself as the last god. In the intimations of the last god, being itself, the event as such, first becomes visible, and this shining requires both the grounding of the essence of truth as clearing-concealing and its *final sheltering* in the changed forms of beings” (emphasis in original). And compare *Contributions*, §§ 253–256, pp. 321–330; *Beiträge*, 405–417. The adjective “last” does not signify cessation but the beginning that is always on the way to begin, “the beginning which reaches out the furthest and catches up to itself with the greatest difficulty” (*Contributions*, § 253, p. 321; *Beiträge*, 405).

70 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 252, pp. 316–318; *Beiträge*, 399–401.

71 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 34, p. 59; *Beiträge*, 74.

*Zeit* as a “directive toward, and a resonating with, that which takes place in the uniqueness of the ap-propiation [*Einzigkeit der Er-eignung*] as the truth of the essential occurrence of beyng.”<sup>72</sup> The principle of ineceptual thinking is such that “all essence is essential occurrence” (*alles Wesen ist Wesung*), but every essential occurrence “is determined out of what is essential in the sense of the original-unique [*Ursprünglich-Einzigen*].”<sup>73</sup> The uniqueness of the event, in turn, is ascertained only through a “more original repetition [*ursprüngliche Wiederholung*] of the first beginning,” for the beginning (*Anfang*) “is the concealed, the origin [*Ursprung*] that has not yet been misused and driven on, the one which reaches furthest ahead in constantly withdrawing and thus preserves within itself the highest sovereignty.”<sup>74</sup>

The mystery of time is thus suggestive of the truth of the *original repetition*—apperceived at all times through the semblance of untruth<sup>75</sup>—the axial truth that is grounded in the discernment that the impermanence of becoming alone is the permanence of being, that what is given in the beginning from the origin is steadfastly the same because interminably different. From this perspective, the “*original seeking*”—the seeking for origin—is a “*grasping of what has already been found, namely, the grasping of what is self-concealing* [*Sichverbergenden*] as *such*.”<sup>76</sup> The temporalization apposite to this appropriative event of an origin that remains concealed in the veil of the beginning<sup>77</sup>—marked by the anomaly of the “again” that is “altogether otherwise”—is a “remembering expectation” (*erinnernde Erharren*), the abandonment (*Verlassenheit*) to the moment wherein “remembering a hidden belonging to beyng” is “expecting a call of beyng,” the “dispensation of the (hesitant) self-withholding,” which “a-byssally grounds the domain of decision” and “also makes possible a bestowal as an essential possibility, grants bestowal a space.”<sup>78</sup> The mandate of the ineceptual thinking is “to think the

72 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 34, p. 59; *Beiträge*, 74.

73 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 29, p. 53; *Beiträge*, 66.

74 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 23, p. 46; *Beiträge*, 57.

75 On this Heideggerian theme, see Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift*, 48–52, and reference to other scholars cited on 314–315 n. 106, to which many more studies could have been added.

76 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 38, p. 64 (emphasis in original); *Beiträge*, 80.

77 Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* Translation by Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray, with an introduction by J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 152; *Was heisst Denken?* [GA 8] (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002), 156.

78 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 242, p. 303; *Beiträge*, 384. On “the remembering expectation of the event” (*die erinnernde Erwartung des Ereignisses*), see also Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 31, p. 55; *Beiträge*, 69.

essence of time so originarily (in the temporal ‘ecstases’) that time becomes graspable as possible truth for being as such. Yet this thinking of time already brings it, through relatedness to the ‘there’ of Da-sein, into essential relation with the spatiality of Da-sein and thereby with space. . . . Compared to their usual representations, however, time and space are in this case more originarily and are entirely time-space [*Zeit-Raum*], which is not an interconnection but something more originarily in the belonging together [*Zusammengehörigkeit*] of time and space. This something points to the essence of truth as the clearing-concealing [*lichtende Verbergung*].<sup>79</sup>

The clearing-concealing of the abyssal ground (*Ab-grund*)—“the originarily essential occurrence of the ground” (*die ursprüngliche Wesung des Grundes*)—is identified as “the essence of truth” (*das Wesen der Wahrheit*) that is grasped as the time-space, “the originarily unity of space and time” (*die ursprüngliche Einheit von Raum und Zeit*), the “unifying unity [*einigende Einheit*] which first allows them to diverge into their separateness.”<sup>80</sup> The abyss thus gives in such a way that the intensiveness of time is exteriorized as the extensionality of space. Although adamant that space and time are not of the same essence, Heidegger avers that there is an essential juxtaposition such that the presence (*Anwesenheit*) of the present (*Gegenwart*) provides the space wherein beings are put into presence. “Time as transporting and opening up [*entrückenderöffnende*] is in itself equally a *granting of place* [*einräumend*]; it creates ‘space.’ Space and time are not of the same essence, but each belongs intrinsically to the other. . . . The unity of temporalizing [*Zeitigung*] and the granting of place [*Einräumung*], and indeed in the mode of presencing [*Anwesung*], constitutes the essence of beingness: the overcrossing [*Überkreuzung*].”<sup>81</sup> The inimitable destiny of humanity as the custodian of the appropriating event—the spatialization of time in the temporalization of space—is attested in the fact that Dasein alone is assigned the role of serving as the “site of the moment [*Augenblicksstätte*] for the grounding of the truth of being. The *site of the moment* arises out of the solitude of the great stillness in which the appropriation becomes truth.”<sup>82</sup>

79 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 95, p. 148; *Beiträge*, 189.

80 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 242, p. 299 (emphasis in original); *Beiträge*, 379.

81 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 98, pp. 150–151; *Beiträge*, 192.

82 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 200, p. 255; *Beiträge*, 323. Heidegger’s views of time have commanded an enormous amount of scholarly interest. For one representative study that treats his notion of *Augenblick* as the moment of vision and the redemption of being, see Koral Ward, *Augenblick: The Concept of the “Decisive Moment” in 19th- and 20th-Century Western Philosophy* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 97–124.

4 **Šimšum and the Replication of Difference**

Heidegger's terminology bears a remarkable affinity to the kabbalistic conception of *šimšum*, the primordial act of withdrawal of the light of infinity.<sup>83</sup> I will forego the discussion of possible sources that might explain this affinity other than to mention that the most probable channel is Schelling.<sup>84</sup> As far as the resemblance to kabbalistic theosophy, what is exceptionally noteworthy is Heidegger's depiction of the ground as "that which veils itself [*Sichverhüllende*] and also takes up [*Aufnehmen*], because it bears and does so as the protruding of what is to be grounded. Ground: self-concealing in a protruding that bears [*das Sichverbergen im tragenden Durchragen*]."<sup>85</sup> Astonishingly, the path of Heidegger's thinking leads to the very paradox that may be elicited from kabbalistic sources in their effort to explain the inexplicable mystery of *šimšum*, the withdrawal of Ein Sof from itself in order to create a plenitudinous vacuum within the vacuous plenum, to make space for the other in the all-encompassing oneness of the infinite. In an astounding similarity, Heidegger writes about the abyssal ground as "a self-concealing in the mode of the withholding of the ground" (*ein Sichverbergen in der Weise der Versagung des Grundes*); that is, through the act of withdrawal the concealment is concealed and the ground is emptied of the fullness of its emptiness. To cite Heidegger's own kabbalistically-inflected language: "The *lack* of the ground is the lack of the *ground* [*Der Ab-grund ist Ab-grund*]. In withholding itself, the ground preeminently brings into the open, namely into the first opening of *that* emptiness which is thereby a determinate one. . . . The abyssal ground is the hesitant self-withholding of

83 On the comparison of Heidegger's conception of nothingness and the domain of being's withdrawal to the kabbalistic speculation on the infinite and the idea of *šimšum*, see Marlène Zarader, *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 130–138. See also Elliot R. Wolfson, "Nihilating Nonground and the Temporal Sway of Becoming," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 17 (2012): 31–45, esp. 40–41; idem, *Giving Beyond the Gift*, 346 n. 333. For an early comment on the use of Heidegger to illumine kabbalistic sources philosophically, see Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 420–421 n. 241.

84 On Schelling and the kabbalah, see Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 100–104, and reference to other scholars cited on 392–393 n. 2, especially the study by Christoph Schulte, "Zimzum in the Works of Schelling," *Iyyun* 41 (1992): 21–40, German version "Zimzum bei Schelling," in *Kabbala und Romantik*, edited by Eveline Goodman-Thau, Gert Mattenklott, and Christoph Schulte (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer, 1994), 97–118. See also Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 475 n. 49; idem, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, 34–42, 119, 121–122, 193–194 n. 225, 194–195 n. 233.

85 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 242, p. 300; *Beiträge*, 379.

the ground [*Ab-grund ist die zögernde Versagung des Grundes*]. In this withholding, the originary emptiness [*ursprüngliche Leere*] opens up and the originary clearing [*ursprüngliche Lichtung*] occurs, but this clearing is such that, at the same time, hesitation is manifest in it.”<sup>86</sup> Utilizing the Heideggerian trope of ontological difference, we can describe Ein Sof—the infinite essence whose essence, paradoxically, is to lack any essence—as the withdrawal of being that occasions the manifestation of the myriad of beings that come to light in the concatenation of the multiple worlds.

Needless to say, many scholars have written about the theme of *šimšum*, but little attention has been paid to its temporal implications. If translated into this register, we can say that *šimšum* instantiates the secret of time as the *retroactive not yet*, the coming to be of what has already been, not as duplication of sameness but as replication of difference, the original repetition, one might say, the reappearance of nonappearance. I will illumine this point by citing a passage from *Sod ha-Yihud*, which is part of the treatise *Sod ha-Merkavah*, also referred to as *Perush ha-Merkavah*, composed, in all probability, by the eighteenth-century Kabbalist and man of letters, Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, known honorifically by the acronym Ramḥal.<sup>87</sup>

Ein Sof was already perfect as he<sup>88</sup> is now and as he will be forever without any modification, but initially the perfection was not revealed in actuality and afterwards it was revealed in actuality. Because he wished to realize this disclosure, three matters came to be: beginning [*ro’sh*], end [*sof*], and middle [*emša*]. That is, “the beginning”—the perfection initially was

86 Heidegger, *Contributions*, § 242, p. 300 (emphasis in original); *Beiträge*, 379–380.

87 Here I am following the conclusion reached by Jonathan Garb, “The Authentic Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 25 (2011): 183 (Hebrew). In his painstaking analysis, Garb divides the corpus of material attributed to or associated with Luzzatto into four groups: texts that were authentically written by Ramḥal; texts that were probably written by Ramḥal; texts attributed spuriously to Ramḥal; texts written by members of Ramḥal’s circle. *Sod ha-Merkavah* is placed in the second category.

88 The third person masculine pronoun can be rendered in English by the third person impersonal pronoun “it.” While there is justification for translating the references to Ein Sof in this neutral manner, the volitional characteristics attributed by Ramḥal to Ein Sof seem to me to justify using a more personal pronoun. In this respect, Ramḥal’s thinking is consistent with other kabbalists for whom the Ein Sof, contrary to what one might expect, is depicted in personal and gendered terms, more often than not, as masculine without a full-blown feminine counterpart. The feminine quality of infinity is commonly referred to as the aspect of *Malkhut* that is within Ein Sof.

in potentiality; “the end”—the perfection afterwards was revealed in actuality; and “the middle”—before it was revealed. Thus, whether in the beginning or in the end, there is no reality of evil, for everything is good, but in the middle, there is that which appears to be evil, even though in truth it is good, and this is what is called the “name” and the “epithet.”<sup>89</sup>

All that is contained atemporally in the infinite will of Ein Sof, the “root of all roots” (*shoresh kol ha-shorashim*),<sup>90</sup> is brought forth in the temporal division of beginning, middle, and end. The eternity (*nišḥiyut*) of this will, also identified as the incomprehensible capacity for perfect goodness (*koah ha-haṭavah ha-sheleimah*), is revealed through an unremitting sequence of novel creations in time until the “secret of the supernal unity” (*sod ha-yiḥud ha-elyon*) is achieved at the end when evil is transformed into good and everything is restored to Ein Sof as it was in the beginning.<sup>91</sup> The semblance of duality—signified by the distinction between the name (*shem*) and the epithet (*kinnuy*), *YHWH* and *Elohim*, which respectively symbolize masculine mercy and feminine judgment<sup>92</sup>—pertains only to the middle. The rectification (*tiqqun*) constitutes the perfection of creation (*sheleimut ha-berī’ah*) and the true manifestation of the supernal oneness, themes that are well known from Luzzatto’s teaching.<sup>93</sup> To cite again from *Sod ha-Yiḥud*:

89 Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Ginzei Ramḥal*, edited by Ḥayyim Friedlander, second edition (Benei Beraq, 1984), 264. For a more recent edition with extensive annotation, see *Sod ha-Yiḥud*, edited by Mordecai Chriqui (Jerusalem: Makhon Ramḥal, 2013), 55–58. Chriqui (47) surmises that Ramḥal’s *Sod ha-Yiḥud* is based on his exegesis of a passage from *Zohar* 1:65a, which appears in the second part of *Adir ba-Marom*, his commentary on *Idra Rabba*. See Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom*, pt. 2, edited by Joseph Spinner (Jerusalem, 1988), 61–92.

90 Luzzatto, *Ginzei Ramḥal*, 265.

91 *Ibid.*, 265, 267.

92 Usually the epithet (*kinnuy*) refers to *Adonai*, the appellation by which *YHWH*, the ineffable name (*shem*), is pronounced, but for Luzzatto the epithet is *Elohim*. See Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom*, pt. 2, 39: “Let me now explain the matter of the name [*shem*] and the epithet [*kinnuy*] that I mentioned. The [word] *kinnuy* is equal to *Elohim*, and this is [the import of the expression] *YHWH Elohim*.” Based on a passage from *Tiqqunei Zohar*, which is printed in *Zohar* 1:22b, Luzzatto observes that the numerical value of the term *kinnuy* is the same as the name *Elohim*, i.e., both equal 86. The juxtaposition of the name and the epithet, *YHWH* and *Elohim*, marks the conjunction of the masculine and the feminine.

93 See, for instance, Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Da’at Tevunot*, edited by Joseph Spinner (Jerusalem: Hamesorah, 2012), sec. 158, pp. 246–247; *Qelaḥ Pitḥei Ḥokhmah*, edited by Ḥayyim Friedlander (Benei Beraq, 1992), ch. 49, p. 179. I accept the conclusion of Garb, “Authentic Kabbalistic Writings,” 188–199, that *Qelaḥ Pitḥei Ḥokhmah* was probably not written by Luzzatto, but many of the ideas expressed in it are consistent with his views.

Accordingly, there are two types of conjunctions [*ziwwugim*]: the conjunctions of the middle and the conjunctions of the beginning and the end. That is, the unity needs to be disclosed, and it is disclosed incrementally by means of the conjunctions, for the left is subjugated by the right and the good dominates, and the evil is restored to the good. When it is completely revealed in the middle itself, the beginning and the end are perforce united, for then everything is one—beginning, end, and middle, everything is good without any evil at all. As long as there is a middle . . . there is a distinction between beginning and end, for the beginning is in potentiality and not [in actuality] and in the end it is in actuality. When the middle reverts to being good, the beginning and end are inexorably joined together, and this is the secret [of the verse] “I am first and I am last” (Isaiah 44:6). . . . The principle of the rectification [*kelal ha-tiqqun*] is that the lower beings are conjoined to the supernal beings to the point that everything is conjoined to the Ein Sof, blessed be he, and then everything is called one. This is the completion of the middle and the union of the beginning and the end, and this is the essence of the true worship. . . . Initially, the supernal union of perfection is united with the beginning, the perfection is aroused below, and everything is perfected in perfect unity. The beginning joins the end in accord with the aspect that is rectified in the middle through this conjunction. For you have already heard that the unity is revealed intermittently in the rectification of the middle, and through this aspect the beginning and the end are joined, and everything is perfected in one secret in perfection.<sup>94</sup>

Prima facie, it might seem that there is an inescapable circularity to Luzzatto's thinking, since the end is envisioned as a return to the beginning in which there is no duality, no distinction between the name and its epithet, between love and judgment, between masculine and feminine. A more attentive reading, however, reveals that the differentiated unity at the end is not merely a replica of the nondifferentiated unity at the beginning. To be sure, at the end there is a retrieval of the unity of the beginning, but, paraphrasing the words of Heidegger, what is achieved *again* is *altogether otherwise*; that is, the return of all things to the one is not the reverberation of the same but the reclamation of divergence. In *Adir ba-Marom*, Luzzatto refers to this process tellingly as the orientation of the infinite will toward the power of particularity (*koah ha-perati*).<sup>95</sup> The oneness of the universal is calibrated from the perspective of the absolute inimitability of the particular.

94 Luzzatto, *Ginzei Ramhal*, 264, 268.

95 Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom*, pt. 2, 76.



Time is the measure of this incommensurability, the beckoning of the eternal will that materializes in the temporal enfolding of the middle. In another passage from *Adir ba-Marom*, Luzzatto elaborates on the identification of the “secret of time” (*sod ha-zeman*) as the “rectification of the middle” (*tiqqun ha-emša*):

This is the secret of time concerning which [it is written] “For every time [*zeman*] and moment [*et*], and for every desire [*hefeš*] under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). This secret is the forty-five [letter name] and the fifty-two [letter name], and they are verily the rectification of the middle. . . . This secret is: forty-five [ה"מ] and fifty-two [כ"ב] equal *zeman* [מ"ז], for all of time is only in them, and the divisions of time are the divisions of the forty-five [letter name] and the fifty-two [letter name] joined together as one with the other. Therefore, the unity ascends until the secret of the beginning and the end.<sup>96</sup>

It lies beyond my immediate concerns to explicate all of the minutiae of this passage, but let me underline the principal point. Time is understood as the unification of the masculine and the feminine,<sup>97</sup> signified respectively by the two permutations of the Tetragrammaton, the one that numerically equals forty-five and the other that equals fifty-two.<sup>98</sup> The theoretical assumption is buttressed by the fact that the Hebrew word for time, *zeman*, has the numerical value of ninety-seven, which is the sum of forty-five plus fifty-two, a numerology that is well attested in post-Lurianic kabbalistic literature.<sup>99</sup>

96 Ibid., 91.

97 On time and the conjunction of male and female potencies, see Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, 79, 91, 98.

98 Ibid., 89–90.

99 Natan Shapira, *Maḥberet ha-Qodesh* (Jerusalem, 2005), Sha'ar ha-Sukkot, 318. See also Moses Zacuto, *Em la-Binah*, included in *Remez ha-Romez* (Jerusalem, 2008), s.v. *zeman*, 33: “It is already known that time is consequent to the movement of the sun and the moon, that is, the [name of] forty-five and [the name of] fifty-two, and this is the numerical value of *zeman* [7 + 40 + 50 = 97].” See *ibid.*, 41, and Immanuel Ḥay Ricchi, *Mishnat Ḥasidim in Perush Maggid Sheni*, pt. 3 (Szilágyosomlyó, 1909), Massekhet Leil Yom Ṭov, ch. 2, 122b, where the word *zeman* is said to symbolize the unity of the name of forty-five and the name of fifty-two, associated respectively with *Ze'eir Anpin* and *Nuqba*. Compare Yišḥaq Isaac Ḥaver, *Beit Olamim* (Warsaw, 1889), 55a. Commenting on the verse “For every time [*zeman*] and moment [*et*], and for every desire [*hefeš*] under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1), Ḥaver writes: “For the difference between time [*zeman*] and the moment [*et*] is that the [word] *et* is applied to the present time, in the moment that he acts in the world,

The fuller implications of the gender properties of time may be culled from a third passage in *Adir ba-Marom*. Luzzatto remarks that in the “secret of the beginning” and in the “secret of the end” the masculine and the feminine are both designated as *adam*, which signifies that they are in a state of unification (*be-ḥibbur*), but in the “secret of the middle” they are called *ish* and *ishshah*, “man” and “woman,” because they appear as two separate beings (*kol eḥad le-ašmo*). Even so, in the intermediary domain, which is the period of history, the goal is for the lost part (*ha-avedah*), that is, the female, to be restored to the male (*al ken šerikhah laḥazor le-ba’aleha*), a hyperliteral reading of the end of the account of the creation of man and woman in the second chapter of Genesis: “Then the man said, ‘This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called woman, for from man was she taken.’ Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:23–24). When the female is constructed from the male, she is transformed from the aspect of the back (*aḥor*)—consciousness (*moḥin*) is said to be aroused in her in the secret of the face (*sod panim*)—and

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and [the word] *zeman* is applied to what will come afterward, and it is from the language ‘to be summoned’ [*mezuman*] and the future that is coming. . . . And this can be expressed by way of the secret, for it is known that *et* is the aspect of the feminine, the name of fifty-two, and *zeman* is the numerology of forty-five and fifty-two together.” In the same passage, Ḥaver links the aspect of *et* with the governance of *Ze’eir Anpin* and that of *zeman* with *Attiqa Qaddisha*; the former is the present, which is marked by the polarity of good and evil, whereas the latter is the messianic future, which is beyond all duality. See also Ḥaver, *Pitḥei She’arim*, Netiv Olam ha-Tiqqun, ch. 10, 69a; Netiv Paršuf Arikh Anpin, ch. 11, 92a. In Ševi Hirsch Eichenstein of Zidichov, *Aṭeret Ševi*, vol. 1 (Benei Beraq, 2009), 246, time is linked to the secret of *Nešah* and *Hod*, the seventh and eighth of the ten *sefirot*, to which are attached respectively the forty-five and fifty-two letter name. The passage is referenced in Ya’aqov Ševi Yalles, *Qehillat Ya’aqov* (Jerusalem, 1971), s.v. *zeman*, 20b. The numerology appears frequently in the writings of Menaḥem Mendel of Shklov. One particularly interesting text is found in his *Derushim al Seder ha-Hishtalshelut* included in *Kitvei ha-Gaon Rav Menaḥem Mendel*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 2001), 306: “Every rectification [*tiqqun*] without the fiftieth gate [the letter *nun*], which is *Keter*, is *teiqu* [the word that talmudically signifies the irresolution of a question], and it remains in concealment [*bi-setimu*], the secret of doubt [*sod ha-sefequt*], and the essence of doubt depends on the purification [*berur*] of the crowns that are within it, the inner light [*or penimi*] and the encompassing light [*or maqif*], the interiority [*penimiyut*] and the exteriority [*hišoniyyut*], in the secret of forty-five and fifty-two. The purification is in the secret of [the names of] forty-five and fifty-two, which is the numerology of *zeman*, ‘for every time [*zeman*] and moment [*et*] and for every desire’ (Ecclesiastes 3:1).” I hope to dedicate an independent study surveying the esoteric intent of the notion of *sefequt* in Menaḥem Mendel of Shklov.

as a consequence, she is conjoined to the male and the unity is revealed in the mystery of the complete human (*adam shalem*). The body is then rectified and evil restored to the good.<sup>100</sup> The reconstituted unity of the feminine end (*sof*) returning to the masculine beginning (*ro'sh*)<sup>101</sup> is symbolized by the letter *zayin*, which is composed of the *yod* that sits atop the *waw*, the female diadem (*aṭarah*) that is positioned on the head of the male consort.<sup>102</sup>

The quality of time can be elucidated further by delving more deeply into the motif of *šimšum* and the trace of infinity. I will not investigate Luzzatto's sources nor will I refer to those whom he influenced; I will keep the focus only on his writings, and even this will be highly selective. Let me initiate the analysis by citing a passage from *Adir ba-Marom*:

Know that the essence of everything is the secret of the soul and the body, for their roots in the [divine] lights are the interiority [*ha-penimiyut*] and the exteriority [*ha-ḥisoniyut*]. . . . Know that in this order the reality of the *sefirot* was ordered from the beginning of their existence, which is at the time of the contraction [*zeman ha-šimšum*]. Greatly understand this matter, for there remained a trace [*reshimu*] within the space [*ha-ḥalal*], and from it the vessels [*ha-kelim*] were made. Afterward the line [*ha-qaw*] came into it and from it was made the essence [*ha-ašmut*].

100 Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom*, pt. 2, 48–49.

101 Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom*, pt. 1, edited by Joseph Spinner (Jerusalem, 1990), 94: “I will explain to you the matter of the beginning and the end [*sheiruta we-siyuma*]. In truth, this is a great and deep secret, for it is the principle of governance [*kelalut hanhagah*] in truth in general and in particular as it pertains to each one . . . And the secret of everything is the secret of male and female, for the male is the secret of the head and the female is the secret of the end . . . And this is the secret of the governance that goes from the beginning, which is the male, to the end, which is the female . . . The matter is that the beginning of thought [*tehillat ha-maḥashavah*] is the end of action [*sof ha-ma'aseh*], and the beginning of thought is the male and his focus is toward the female, which is the end of action. Thus, the whole time that the male rules is the time of action [*zeman ha-pe'ulah*] and when things reach the female, then everything is in the secret of repose [*sod menuḥah*] . . . In accord with this way, the world is governed, for the six thousand years are in the secret of the male, and they are the time of action and preparation, and afterward in the end is the restful Sabbath, which is the purpose of the world.” From this vantagepoint, there is a gender transvaluation—the female rises to a level higher than the male in the same way that the six millennia, which correspond to the six weekdays, culminate in the Sabbath and the cessation of activity.

102 See the text from *Qin'at ha-Shem Ševa'ot* cited and analyzed in Elliot R. Wolfson, “*Tiqqun ha-Shekhinah*: Redemption and the Overcoming of Gender Dimorphism in the Messianic Kabbalah of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto,” *History of Religions* 36 (1997): 331.

This is the difference between the essence and the vessels, for the vessels are from the aspect of the contraction [*mi-behinat ha-šimšum*], and the essence is the secret of the Ein Sof, blessed be he, which enters into the vacated space [*halal ha-mešumšam*].<sup>103</sup>

The time of the contraction does not refer to an actual time, since prior to the *šimšum* there is no time of which to speak; it denotes rather the demarcating point whence we can commence to ruminate about temporality, a point that is marked by the triadic structure of beginning, middle, and end. In the pure light of infinity, there is no time, for the oscillation of the latter is dependent on the distinction between the one that bestows and the one that receives, a distinction that does not pertain to the innate nature of light but only to its functional character when the agent of illumination is set in relation to the other that is illumined. In and of itself, light is beyond the contrast between light and dark, beyond the binary of masculine donor and feminine recipient. The wheel of history, which is impelled forward by the tension between these two poles, turns in such a way that the present proceeds according to a sequential order of one rectification after another, a process that leads to the gradual evisceration of evil and its reintegration into the good. In the future, by contrast, everything will be eternal (*ha-kol nišhi*) and thus all the lights will flow in an infinitesimal moment (*rega qaṭan*) that surpasses the customary partition of time, the time before time began as a result of the contraction of the light.<sup>104</sup>

In the fifth principle of *Da'at Tevunot*, which is an explication of the notion of the *reshimu*, Luzzatto writes: "The first time [*ha-zeman ha-ri'shon*] that we now have to explain is the time that his unity, blessed be he, was concealed as this day [*zeman hit'allem yiḥudo yitbarakh ka-yom ha-zeh*]; this is the principle of the time of the worship of man [*kelal zeman avodat ha-adam*]."<sup>105</sup> Luzzatto is alluding to the new order (*sefer ḥadash*) of governance (*hanhagah*)<sup>106</sup> that comes about as a consequence of the primordial act of withdrawal, the concealment of divine unity (*he'lem ha-yiḥud*).<sup>107</sup> The algorithm of historical time is based on the binary of good and evil (*hanhagat ha-ṭov ve-ra*) and hence it demands a system of reward and punishment that is apposite to human worship. The ultimate purpose of that worship is to convert evil into good and

103 Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom*, pt. 1, 88–89.

104 *Ibid.*, 107.

105 Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Da'at Tevunot*, edited by Joseph Spinner (Jerusalem: Hamesorah, 2012), 63.

106 *Ibid.*, 63.

107 *Ibid.*, 80.

thereby facilitate the disclosure of unity (*gilluy ha-yihud*) and the comprehensive rectification (*tiqqun ha-kelali*).<sup>108</sup> Time is commensurate to the trace of light that the supernal will innovates in proportion to the concealment of God's dominion and unity (*zeh kelal ha-derekh asher hiddesh ha-raṣon ha-elyon lefi inyan hit'alleṃ shelitato we-yihudo*), a hiding of the face of divine goodness (*hester penei tuvo*), for had the truth been revealed without obstruction, all evil would have been transformed into good, and the *durée* of time would be dispelled in the limitlessness of eternity.<sup>109</sup> The temporal efflux that issues from Ein Sof after the *šimšum* is like the shadow in relation to the person or the small trace (*roshem qaṭan*) that remains from the writing on paper after the letters have been removed.<sup>110</sup>

Following previous Lurianic sources, Luzzatto contrasts the essence (*ašmut*) and the vessel (*keli*), connected respectively to the images of the line (*qaw*) and the trace (*reshimu*). The extension of the line, which is an expression of *hesed*, is set in motion by the act of *šimšum*, which is an expression of *din*, but the main goal of the withdrawal is to produce the vessels that will reveal the light by concealing it, since the nonmanifest cannot be manifest without being occluded. In accord with the main drift of the Lurianic teaching, for Luzzatto, the process of *šimšum* provokes the emergence of the dyadic structure of light and vessel that marks the transition from indifferent oneness to differentiated unity. The source of the vessel is the trace that remains in the vacated space within the infinite after the light has been withdrawn. The residual trace, therefore, prefigures the vessel that will receive the light, and thus, in relation to the amplification and expansion of the light, it signifies delimitation and condensation.

Two things are worthy of our consideration. First, even though the division of the indivisible luminescence produces the dyad of light and vessel, in its source the vessel is constituted by the light that lingers subsequent to the contraction. The dualism of light and vessel thus gives way to a monism wherein the vessel is subsumed in and by the light. 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 is such that it can lack nothing, not even the ability to lack. Paradoxically, we must posit the capacity for boundary that is completely incorporated within the boundless. However, we are still faced with a philosophical quandary with respect to the matter of time.

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108 Ibid., 67.

109 Ibid., 65.

110 Ibid., 66.

The dilemma is captured succinctly in the following passage from the *Ma'amar Yiḥud ha-Yir'ah*, a text that circulated amongst the students of Luzzatto. Even if it is not certain that he is the author, it is valid to assume the contents are in accord with his teaching:

All of the worlds are naught but the disclosure of what was already arrayed in the perfection of the infinite, blessed be he . . . for the reality of all the worlds is naught but as one who dreams a dream and sees the matter in the imagination, and similarly the entire potency of the infinite, blessed be he, which has no temporality [*ein bo zeman*], is seen according to the way of time [*derekh zeman*]. . . . Thus, the infinite, blessed be he, acts in the way of his perfection, and there is placed before him the curtain of withdrawal [*masakh ha-šimšum*] in which are dependent all these colors, and they are all the laws of nature from beginning to end. All of these things vis-à-vis the infinite, blessed be he, are in a verily different manner, which we cannot comprehend . . . Similarly, the matter of time is nothing at all but how we imagine nature as it appears to us in accord with the withdrawal [*lefi ha-šimšum*]. As we see in the dream itself that days and years pass in one dream, and it seems to the dreamer that this is how it actually is. Analogously, when we are awake, we imagine the matters of nature in accord with what we see, and we call this imagining time, as if there could be one hour or one moment like the years of a dream, which are in truth a single moment [*rega ehad*].<sup>111</sup>

Luzzatto utilizes an archaic trope in order to elucidate the relationship of the infinite to the finite.<sup>112</sup> This teaching, which probably originated in Chinese Confucianism and Daoism, and was then transported into the various schools of Hinduism and Buddhism, and eventually found its way into both Islamic and Jewish mystical sources, is predicated on the insight that the spatio-temporal world is but a dream. Luzzatto appropriates this wisdom to explain one of the deepest mysteries of the kabbalah. If we assume, as we must, that everything was contained in the incomposite oneness of Ein Sof prior to the *šimšum*, then what appears to us as the progression of time itself is simply the manner in which the one single instant of eternity—a moment marked by the absolute simultaneity of infinite velocity that is infinite rest—is manifest on the phenomenal plane. On the one hand, we cannot speak of anything absolutely new occurring as a consequence of the withdrawal, since all was encompassed

111 Luzzatto, *Adir ba-Marom*, pt. 2, 150–151.

112 Wolfson, *A Dream*, 255–274.

in the infinite, and hence time would appear to be illusory like a dream; on the other hand, the trace that remains in the space after the withdrawal is the emanated light (*or ne'eshal*) that provides the “place for all that exists” (*maqom le-khol nimša*), and thus it is viewed as a “new light” (*or hadash*).<sup>113</sup> Time is accorded the significance of the trace that is the genuine novelty of repetition.

To grasp this paradox, which is the secret of time, we must distinguish two connotations implied in the word *reshimu*.<sup>114</sup> An imprint (*roshem*), as it is ordinarily construed, is a mark of what is no longer ready at hand, a sign that evokes the absent presence of something that is presently absent. In Luzzatto's image, the trace is what remains from the writing after the letters have been removed. Likewise, with respect to the divine, the trace is an impression that endures in the place of the void after the light of the infinite has been withdrawn. However, the word *reshimu* is also related to the notion of inscription (*reshimah*), which is a portent that previews what is hidden from sight. One must bear in mind that rabbinically the term *roshem* connotes an act of inscribing or drawing aligned with but distinguished from writing (*ketivah*).<sup>115</sup> Even more relevant is the use of *reshimah* in kabbalistic sources—based on the rabbinic texts—to name an amorphous form of writing, a pre-scripting that precedes the letters that assume a more determinate shape. For example, in a passage from Moses Cordovero's *Pardes Rimmonim*, the formation of the letters involves four consecutive stages, *reshimah*, *ḥaḳiqah*, *ḥaṣivah*, and *asiyyah*.<sup>116</sup> Concentrating on the first of these, *reshimah* denotes the highest or most sublime verbal gesticulation, which is not only the marking of a trace of what has been removed but a semiotic signpost that foreshadows what is to emerge, akin to the blueprint of a building that an architect etches on a tablet before commencing the actual construction. To plumb the depths of the myth of *šimšum*, one must attend to the amalgamation of the two connotations of *reshimah* as trace and omen.

The intermingling of these two connotations illumines the circular linearity that is emblematic of the curvature of time: the inscription presages the reality

113 *Qelaḥ Pitḥei Ḥokhmah*, ch. 26, p. 66.

114 I am here reworking the discussion in Elliot R. Wolfson, “*Nequddat ha-Reshimu*—The Trace of Transcendence and the Transcendence of the Trace: The Paradox of *Šimšum* in the RaShab's *Hemshekh Ayin Beit*,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 30 (2013): 111–113. What I argued there with respect to Ḥabad speculation can be applied to Luzzatto.

115 Mishnah Shabbat 12:3, 4; Makkot 3:6; Tosefta Shabbat 12:5.

116 Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim* (Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim, 2000), 16:9, 208, affirms the correlation of *reshimah*, *ḥaḳiqah*, *ḥaṣivah*, and *asiyyah* respectfully with the four worlds, *ašilut*, *ber'ah*, *yeširah*, and *asiyyah*. See *ibid.*, 27:27, 447.

that must be its precursor; what is left behind, therefore, is the trace of what is yet to be. From the notion of the trace, we may adduce the elementary constituency of time as the *retroactive not yet*, the achronic fecundity of the future that is the origin continually emptying itself in the coming to be of the beginning that passes away incessantly. The *first beginning* is, as Heidegger mused, an *original repetition*. Sounding a similar note, Derrida wrote of the beginning that comes forth from the withdrawal, “from the first it will have come second. *Two times at the same time*, originary iterability, irreducible virtuality of this space and this time.”<sup>117</sup> It may be useful as well to translate the kabbalistic symbolism into the evolutionary logic articulated by Peirce: the infinitely remote initial state is identified as the *pure zero*, which is to be distinguished from the *nothing of negation*. The former is the “germinal nothing,” the “womb of indeterminacy,” the “absolutely undefined and unlimited possibility,” the origin that is prior to every first; the latter, by contrast, is the leap, the springing forth of something new, the principle of firstness by which being is differentiated from nonbeing. The nullity of the monad yields the correlativity of the beginning, and the first mathematically assumes the status of the second; indeed, the potentiality of the first is determined from the actuality of the second, which entails the “nothing of not having been born” as opposed to the “nothing of death.”<sup>118</sup>

We can apply the same trinitarian logic to the kabbalistic cosmogony. The trace of infinity is, concomitantly, antecedent and consequent to the withdrawal. The posteriority of the trace is its anteriority, that is, it comes before as what comes after. The potential for finitude is thus coiled within the folds of 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 must embrace its own other in a unity of opposition that is opposed to any opposition to itself. Within the indeterminate confines of Ein Sof, every other is reduced to the identity of the same in relation to which there is no other, but that potential is not perceptible, since otherness qua otherness is dissipated in the indifferent oneness that includes the excluded other. Insofar as the trace

117 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York: Routledge, 1994), 163 (emphasis in original).

118 *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vols. 1–6, edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931–1935), 6:217, cited in John K. Sheriff, *Charles Peirce's Guess at the Riddle: Grounds for Human Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 4.



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 an infinite regress, the paradox of the point of the trace, which cannot be disentangled from the trace of the point, that is, the trace of infinity in which there can be no trace that is not itself the trace of a trace, a nonphenomenal trace of what cannot be incorporated within the either/or economy of absence or presence, the erasure that is the inception of writing, the concealment of the concealment that is prior to there being anything to conceal, the timeless point that propagates the encircling line that is time.