

THE HERMENEUTICS OF VISIONARY EXPERIENCE: REVELATION AND INTERPRETATION IN THE *ZOHAR*

Elliot R. Wolfson

This paper analyses the processes of revelation and interpretation as they function in the classic work of medieval Jewish mysticism, the *Zohar*. The author points out that visionary experience of the divine is not only central to Zoharic theosophy, but that the act of textual study itself must be understood in the light of this phenomenon insofar as the text is nothing but the configuration of divine light. The author demonstrates that the phenomenological structure of these two modes is identical according to the *Zohar*. Hence, the kabbalist who interprets Scripture attains the level of Moses who received the Torah at Sinai.

INTRODUCTION

The legitimization of new insights within the history of Judaism, as other religious cultures based on sacred scriptures, has basically taken one of two forms: exegesis of the foundational documents or appeal to direct revelation. That is, a newly expressed truth is either attributed to a divinely inspired revelation or is found to be implicit in the ancient text and derived therefrom exegetically. To be sure, in both of these possibilities the link with past tradition is secured. The one who claims that he has had a new vision will not only express that disclosure in traditional language but will attribute the experience to a traditional authority. Thus, taking an example from the history of Jewish mysticism, in the chain of transmission of mystical lore associated with the first known kabbalists in Provence, Abraham ben Isaac, Abraham ben David, Jacob ha-Nazir and Isaac the Blind, esoteric knowledge was said to be imparted through the revelation of the prophet Elijah.¹ The name of the latter alone at least partially guaranteed the legitimacy of the revelation in traditional circles. Whatever the content of the mystical revelation, its being attributed to Elijah, the guardian of rabbinic tradition *par excellence*, secured its place within normative Judaism. In the case of a novel interpretation, this process of legitimization is all the more certain as new ideas are presented as part of the original revelation. The potential gap separating the scriptural revelation and ongoing human interpretation is

effectively closed by the hermeneutical assumption, – which some might call a “noble fiction”,² – that all truth is contained in the sacred text. Again turning to Judaism for an example, scholars have long noted the fundamental paradox characterizing scriptural interpretation, *midrash*, in the rabbinic tradition: whatever is new must be old for all interpretations are presumed to have been hidden in the Torah.³

It is sometimes assumed by scholars of Jewish thought that the modalities of revelation and interpretation are mutually exclusive. An appeal to exegesis thus arises specifically in a situation wherein access to divine revelation has ceased, for were such a revelation forthcoming there would be no need to derive truths out of a fixed canon. *Midrash*, in a word, presupposes a distance from God due to the cessation of prophetic or revelatory states.⁴ Yet, it can be shown that within the Judaic tradition, particularly in the apocalyptic and mystical literature,⁵ there is an intrinsic connection between the study of a text and visionary experience. Far from being mutually exclusive, the visionary experience itself may be interpretative in nature, drawing upon prior visions recorded in a written document, while the exegetical task may originate and eventuate in a revelatory state of consciousness.

The purpose of this study is to examine the question of the relation between revelation and interpretation in the *Zohar*, the classic text of medieval Jewish mysticism which surfaced in Castile towards the end of the 13th century. As Gershom Scholem has argued, historical documents attest to the fact that in the 12th century two distinct modes of legitimization of mystical doctrine were operative in kabbalistic circles: one, which I have already mentioned, consisted of the mystical revelations of Elijah, and the other mystical *midrash*, particularly as is evidenced in the case of the *Sefer ha-Bahir*.⁶ Elsewhere Scholem has written that in the history of Kabbalah, innovations were made ‘on the basis of new interpretations of ancient lore’ as well as ‘a result of fresh inspiration or revelation, or even of a dream’.⁷ Kabbalistic literature, according to Scholem, is thus coloured by a duality between supernatural illumination, on the one hand, and traditional exegesis, on the other. The thesis of this paper, simply stated, is that in the *Zohar* the two modes, revelation and interpretation, are identified and blended together. That this convergence occurs is due to the fact that the underlying theosophic structure provides a phenomenological basis common to both. In the hermeneutic relation which the mystic exegete has to the text he is once again seeing God as God was seen in the historic event of revelation. In short, from the vantage point of the *Zohar*, visionary experience is a vehicle for hermeneutics as hermeneutics is a vehicle for visionary experience. The combining of these modalities was a potent force that had a profound influence upon subsequent generations of Jewish exegetes. The nexus between textual study and visionary experience having been established, interpretation

of Scripture was no longer viewed as simply fulfilling God's ultimate command, to study Torah (*talmud Torah*), but was rather understood as an act of participating in the very drama of divine life. *Interpretatio* itself became a moment of *revelatio*, which, in the language of the *Zohar*, further involves the process of *devequt*, i.e. the cleaving of the individual to God.⁸

REVELATION

To grasp the correlation of interpretative and revelatory modes in the *Zohar*, it is necessary to analyse each component of the equation separately. The first question then concerns the Zoharic understanding of revelation. Scattered throughout the voluminous corpus of the *Zohar* are many valuable, at times contradictory⁹ insights concerning the nature of revelation. For the purposes of this paper, however, the focus will be specifically on the Zoharic treatment of the nature of the visionary experience of the Sinaitic theophany.

In one of the key texts,¹⁰ an interpretation of Ex. 20:15, 'And all the people saw the voices,' *we-khol ha-'am ro'im 'et ha-qolot*, the *Zohar* raises an obvious problem which troubled classical and medieval exegetes¹¹ alike: why does Scripture employ the predicate 'saw' in conjunction with the object 'voices' thereby mixing an optical and auditory metaphor? In response to this query, the *Zohar* offers three possible interpretations. The first, attributed to R. Abba, is based on a more or less literal, close reading of Scripture and suggests that the incorporeal voices of divine speech were embodied in the physical media of darkness, cloud, and thick fog,¹² which allowed them to be seen by the human eye. From such a vision the Israelites were illuminated by the supernal light of God. The second view, attributed to R. Jose, maintains that these voices, the content of the vision, were nothing other than the *sefirot* themselves, the potencies of God, which shone forth.¹³ It thus makes perfect sense to speak of an 'actual seeing' of these voices for the latter are in essence of a luminous nature. A third view, attributed to R. Eleazar, offers yet another, though not unrelated, interpretation. According to him, the voices likewise refer to the *sefirot* but the vision of these voices was mediated through the last of them, the *Shekhinah*.¹⁴ This is alluded to in the verse by the accusative particle, 'et, which functions in the *Zohar* as a mystical symbol for the last gradation, the completion of divine speech, inasmuch as this word comprises the first and last consonants of the Hebrew alphabet.¹⁵

R. Eleazar's interpretation that at Sinai Israel had a vision of *Shekhinah* has its antecedents in a host of midrashic and aggadic statements which emphasise the unique theophanous quality of the Sinaitic revelation.¹⁶ In terms of kabbalistic precedents, the notion that *Shekhinah* is the locus of the revelatory experience at Sinai is first expressed in the *Sefer ha-Bahir*.

One verse says, 'And all the people saw the voices' (Exod. 20:15), and another verse says, 'The voice of the words which you heard' (Deut. 4:12). How is this possible? At first they saw the voices. And what did they see? The seven voices . . . and in the end they heard the speech that went out from them all. We have learned that there were ten [words] and the rabbis said that all of them were said in one word.¹⁷ So all of these [seven voices] were said in one word.¹⁸

Just as the rabbis had claimed that the ten words of revelation were uttered in one, so too the seven voices, which correspond to the seven lower of the ten *sefirot*, are all contained in one speech, i.e. the *Shekhinah*. That the one word which contains all the upper voices refers to *Shekhinah* may be gathered from the following section of the *Bahir* which states: 'Ten words [correspond] to the ten kings . . . the word "I" ('*anokhi*) is written amongst them [cf. Exod. 20:2] and it contains all ten.'¹⁹ *Shekhinah* is symbolised by the first person pronoun, '*anokhi*, for the feminine Presence is the subjective pole of the divine pleroma, the aspect which addresses man as the 'I' of the voice of revelation.

That which was implied in the enigmatic passage from the *Bahir* is developed further by 13th century Spanish Kabbalists, such as R. Ezra of Gerona and his younger colleague, Nahmanides (1194–1270). Thus, for example, in one place R. Ezra comments that although there are two aspects of Torah, written and oral, which correspond respectively to the sixth (masculine) and tenth (feminine) divine emanations,²⁰ the medium of revelation of the former is the latter. 'The oral Torah [*Shekhinah*] emanates from the written Torah [*Tiferet*] which maintains Her . . . The two *torot* were given by means of the *Shekhinah* . . . for the inner voice [of revelation] was not discernible or heard until the end which is the tenth *sefirah*.'²¹ Nahmanides, for his part, writes in his commentary to Exodus 19:20:

[The Torah] was given to Moses in seven voices²² [i.e. the seven *sefirot*], which he heard and comprehended. But with respect to Israel, they heard it in one voice [i.e. *Shekhinah*], as it says, 'a loud voice and no more' (Deut. 5:19). And it says, 'You heard the sound of words but perceived no shape—nothing but a [single] voice' (ibid. 4:12). And here too [Scripture] alludes [to this]: 'And all the people saw the voices' (Exod. 20:15), the word *qolot* is [written] without a *waw* [signifying the plural form], for they [Israel] saw all the voices as one [viz., *Shekhinah*].²³

The opinion attributed in the *Zohar* to R. Eleazar follows this line of interpretation by maintaining that the vision of the upper lights at Sinai was mediated through the *Shekhinah*. In another context, the *Zohar* puts it as follows:

When the Torah was given to Israel they saw and gazed directly upon the other mirror [*Shekhinah*] and the upper gradations, and they desired to gaze upon and

to see the Glory of their Master. Thus they saw the supernal Glory of the Holy One, blessed be He.²⁴

In yet another passage we read:

It has been taught: when God revealed himself on Mount Sinai all of Israel saw as one who sees from a light in a crystal. And from that light each one saw that which Ezekiel the prophet did not see. Why? For those upper voices were revealed [or, according to a variant reading, inscribed] in one, as it is written, 'And all the people saw the voices.' But by Ezekiel the *Shekhinah* was revealed in her chariot but not more. Ezekiel saw as one who sees from behind many walls.²⁵

Here, it is essential to note that, according to the *Zohar* as well as other 13th century kabbalists, the vision of God accorded to all prophets, with the exception of Moses,²⁶ was said to be mediated through the last of the divine grades, the feminine *Shekhinah*,²⁷ indeed, *Shekhinah* is called the 'gradation in which all the forms (*deyoqnin*) are seen'²⁸, or the 'mirror (*heizu*) of the upper colors.'²⁹ One might even go so far as to say that, for the kabbalists, *Shekhinah* is not only the locus of prophetic experience but is the 'objective correlate' or 'sensory pole' of prophetic vision. In contrast to the standard medieval philosophic explanation of prophecy, espoused especially by Maimonides in the Jewish tradition,³⁰ for the mystics the object of prophetic vision is not simply a sensory image or idea in the mind of the prophet; it is rather an existent reality, indeed the divine reality as it is reflected in the last of the gradations.³¹ On several occasions Naḥmanides criticised Maimonides on precisely this score: the latter contrasted too sharply prophetic vision with actual seeing, implying thereby that the contents of a prophetic vision have no basis in concrete external (or spatial) reality.³² The author of the *Zohar*, in full consort with Naḥmanides, would claim that the object of prophetic vision does not exist only in the mind of the prophet, but is an objective reality.³³

It follows, therefore, that the interpretation of R. Eleazar places the Sinaitic theophany in the spectrum of normal, i.e. other than Mosaic, prophetic experience wherein the locus of visionary experience is the last gradation. It is noteworthy, moreover, that the Sinaitic vision is contrasted with that of Ezekiel's Chariot-vision in Babylonia³⁴: whereas Israel saw all the upper gradation as reflected in *Shekhinah*—as if in a crystal—Ezekiel only merited to see *Shekhinah* as reflected in her chariots, i.e. the angelic beings beneath the divine realm. It would appear from the view of R. Jose, however, that at Sinai Israel achieved a higher level of prophetic consciousness. Indeed, in another passage,³⁵ attributed again to R. Jose, the *Zohar* presents an alternative explanation according to which those at Sinai were

said to be on a par with Moses, thereby exceeding the experiential level of other prophets. In this case as well, the *Zohar* contrasts Israel's vision at Sinai with that of Ezekiel. In the latter's vision Scripture constantly employs words like 'image', 'likeness', and 'appearance' for Ezekiel saw what he saw 'as if from behind a wall,'³⁶ whereas Israel saw God 'face to face'. 'Ezekiel saw the *image* of the supernal chariots for he saw from a place that was not so bright.' Israel saw a vision of the five upper voices³⁷ through which the Torah, according to one rabbinic view,³⁸ was given, whereas Ezekiel saw five corresponding gradations below the divine realm, viz., the stormy wind, a huge cloud, the flashing fire, a radiance, and the electrum (cf. Ezek. 1:4). At Sinai Israel achieved something of the status of Moses. The *Zohar* notes, accordingly, that Scripture says with respect to Moses, 'And the Lord descended on Mount Sinai and called to Moses' (Exod. 19:20), whereas it says, analogously, with respect to the nation, 'the Lord descended in front of all the people on Mount Sinai' (ibid. 19:11). Hence, at Sinai the king's 'head' and 'body' were revealed, whereas Ezekiel saw only the 'lower hand' or 'feet' of God. Ezekiel, as Isaiah, had a vision of the *Shekhinah*, but even that was a lower level of visualisation.³⁹

As to the specific content of the visionary experience at Sinai we learn, moreover, that the vision had a decidedly gnostic element, i.e. through the vision the people were able to gain esoteric knowledge of the divine attributes. 'It has been taught: R. Jose b. R. Judah said: Israel saw here [at Sinai] that which Ezekiel the son of Buzi did not see; and they all comprehended the supernal, glorious Wisdom.'⁴⁰ A clear link between the visionary and epistemological is thus formed: through the vision theosophical knowledge was gained. Already in midrashic sources, as well as in Philo, the seeing of the voices described in Exod. 20:15 was taken in the sense of a conceptual vision expressed through interpretation.⁴¹ When Israel saw—i.e. comprehended—the words of the divine revelation, they immediately interpreted them. Drawing upon this ancient motif in Jewish thought, the *Zohar* thus elaborates on the hermeneutical quality of the visionary experience at Sinai:

The ten words of the Torah [i.e. the Decalogue] contain all the [613] commandments,⁴² comprehending what is above and below, the principle of the ten words of creation⁴³ . . . These [ten words] were carved on the tablets of stone, and all that was hidden in them was visible to their [the Israelites'] eyes, for they all knew and considered the secret of the 613 commandments of the Torah contained in them. All was visible to them, all was understood in the minds of Israel and all was revealed to their eyes. In that time all the secrets of Torah, above and below, were not removed from them, for they saw with their eyes the splendor of the Glory of their Master. Since the day when God created the world there was nothing like His revealing His Glory on Sinai.⁴⁴

Through a vision of the divine Glory, the last of the emanations in the sefirotic pleroma, the people of Israel were able to penetrate the depths of Torah, to gain the hidden (i.e. kabbalistic) secrets of the 613 commandments which were contained in the Decalogue. The ten words of revelation correspond to the ten words of creation, which in turn correspond to the ten divine gradations. According to the *Zohar*, then, at Sinai the people of Israel gained knowledge of the esoteric as well as the exoteric dimension of Torah through a vision of the Glory. The esoteric dimension is fundamentally an understanding of the sefirotic pleroma expressed here specifically as the comprehension of secrets contained in the Decalogue. Thus, by seeing the Glory the people were capable of acquiring mystical knowledge embodied in the Torah.

INTERPRETATION

It is clear from the above section that the *Zohar* upholds a special kind of visionary experience at Sinai. In such a case the people were said to have seen either the upper five gradations directly, thereby achieving the level of Moses, or the last gradation as reflecting the upper five. In the text cited at the close of the last section, the people likewise were said to have seen the divine Glory, but at the same time all the secrets of the Torah. Indeed, according to that passage, these secrets were available to Israel precisely because they beheld the splendor of the Glory. Visual experience, therefore, grounds theosophical comprehension; gnosis flows out of a mystical seeing.

It can be further argued that, in the mind of the author of the *Zohar*, the process of kabbalistic exegesis is, in some sense, an imitation of the historical event of revelation.⁴⁵ Here too the Zoharic view is rooted in a long-standing rabbinic tradition according to which exegetical activity, or study of Torah, was linked to the Sinaitic theophany. Several rabbinic passages even stress that through interpretation of the Torah the supernatural phenomena of the Sinai event are recreated.⁴⁶ In the *Zohar* the correlation of exegesis and revelation is focused specifically on the fact that in the former, as in the latter, comprehension of the text is brought into relation with a vision of the Glory. Yet, whereas those present at Sinai comprehended esoteric truths of the Torah through a vision of the Glory, the mystics gain a vision of the Glory through intense study of the Torah.⁴⁷

The close connection between those engaged in mystical exegesis and the *Shekhinah* is emphasised in any number of passages in the *Zohar*. Thus, for example, in one place we read that they mystical fellowship of R. Shim'on, the *havrayya*, are called the 'face of the *Shekhinah*' because '*Shekhinah* is hidden within them. She is concealed and they are revealed.'⁴⁸ In another place we read that R. Shim'on specifically gave the name 'Peniel' to two of his comrades, R. Eleazar and R. Abba, for 'they saw the face of the

Shekhinah'.⁴⁹ Drawing, moreover, upon earlier rabbinic sources wherein a clear link was established between the study of Torah and the immanent dwelling of the divine Presence,⁵⁰ the *Zohar* emphasises time and again that through study one cleaves to, or is united with, the *Shekhinah*.⁵¹ To cite a few salient examples: 'It has been taught: whoever is engaged (*de-'ishtaddel*) in words of Torah and his lips whisper Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, covers him and the *Shekhinah* spreads her wings over him.'⁵² 'The wise shall obtain honor' (Prov. 3:35): Whoever is engaged (*de-'ishtaddel*) in the [study of] Torah merits to inherit the supernal portion in the Glory of the holy, supernal King . . . And who is that? That which is called the Glory of the Lord [i.e. *Shekhinah*] who does not ever depart from them.'⁵³ 'Whoever is engaged (*de-'ishtaddel*) in Torah it is as if he is engaged in the palace of the Holy One, blessed be He [i.e. the *Shekhinah*],⁵⁴ for the supernal palace of the Holy One, blessed be He, is the Torah.'⁵⁵ 'Come and see: When a person draws close to the Torah, which is called good, as it is written, 'the teaching of your mouth (*torat pikha*) is good to me' (Ps. 119:72), he draws close to the Holy One, blessed be He, who is called good, as it is written, 'The Lord is good to all' (ibid. 145-9), and he then comes close to being righteous, as it says, 'Happy is the just man for he is good' (Isa. 3:9). When he is righteous the *Shekhinah* rests upon him and teaches him the highest secrets of Torah, for the *Shekhinah* is joined only to one who is good, for the righteous [*Ṣaddiq*, i.e. the ninth masculine gradation, *Yesod*] and righteousness (*Ṣeddeq*, i.e. the tenth feminine gradation, *Shekhinah*) go together as one.'⁵⁶ Elsewhere, those who are engaged in the study of Torah are called 'comrades of the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Community of Israel', i.e. *Tiferet* and *Shekhinah*, for when they utter words of interpretation they 'cleave to the wings' of *Shekhinah* and their words are 'brought forth and dwell in the bosom of the King.'⁵⁷ To cite one final example, the *Zohar* explains the Talmudic dictum⁵⁸ that Sabbath eve is the most appropriate time for the scholar's marital duty, for during the week the scholar, i.e. the mystic exegete, is in union with the *Shekhinah* and therefore must be separated from his earthly consort.⁵⁹

Going beyond all previous midrashic or aggadic sources, however, at times the *Zohar* notes that hermeneutical activity is not merely a divinely-inspired state, but the very means to behold the divine.⁶⁰ That is, through the mystical study of Scripture the kabbalist can see the divine light hidden in the text, for the letters themselves are nothing but the configurations of that light.⁶¹ 'There is no word in the Torah that does not have several lights shining to every side . . . The supernal Wisdom shines in it for the one who needs it.'⁶² The words of Torah are likened to garments⁶³ that cover this divine light, and only the mystic, who contemplates the esoteric sense hidden in the words of the text, can again apprehend this light. As

Moses de León succinctly expressed it in one of his Hebrew works. *Mishkan ha-Edut* (1293):

Our holy Torah is a perfect Torah (*Torah temimah*), 'all the glory of the royal princess is inward' (Ps. 45:14). But because of our great and evil sins today 'her dress is embroidered with golden mountings (ibid.) . . . Thus God, blessed be He, laid a 'covering of dolphin skin over it' (Num. 4:6) with the visible things [of this world]. And who can see (*lir'ot*) and contemplate (*le-histakkel*) the great and awesome light hidden in the Torah except for the supernal and holy ancient ones (*qaddishei 'elyon ha-gadmonim*). They entered her sanctuary and the great light was revealed to them . . . They removed the mask from her.⁶⁴

Of the various levels of interpretation of the Torah,⁶⁵ the deepest or most profound is that which envisions the text as a *corpus symbolicum* of the divine world. Each word of Scripture is potentially a symbol of the divine life and as such participates in this life. Kabbalistic exegesis, therefore, is a form of revelatory experience, for the study of Torah not only generates a visionary experience but itself constitutes such a vision. To appreciate fully this last claim one must bear in mind several of the kabbalistic principles accepted by the author of the *Zohar*. The Torah in its mystical essence is nothing other than the divine Name, the Tetragrammaton, which itself comprises the theosophic structure of the ten gradations.⁶⁶ Hence, the Torah (mystically conceived) is identical with God. Although this tacit assumption is clearly the foundational principle that lies behind almost every word of the *Zohar*, it is stated quite explicitly in one place that 'the Holy One, blessed be He, is called the Torah.'⁶⁷ And, again, a bit further on in the same context, one reads that 'the Torah is nothing but the Holy One, blessed be He.'⁶⁸ It follows, insofar as the Torah is nothing other than the divine edifice, the study of the Torah itself necessarily entails some sort of visionary experience of God. De León would have surely subscribed to the following view espoused by a contemporary of his, Joseph Hamadan: by studying the letters of the Torah, or even by simply gazing upon the open Torah scroll, one apprehends the form of the divine.⁶⁹ Seeing the text for the kabbalist is therefore tantamount to seeing the shape of God.

It is through interpretation of the Torah, in accord with kabbalistic principles, that the mystic participates again in the act of revelation, now understood in a decidedly visual sense. This experience exceeds the normal range of prophetic visionary experience, however, for the kabbalist attains that which the Israelite attained at Sinai. Thus, in one passage the *Zohar* explains the Talmudic dictum that 'the sage is better than the prophet'⁷⁰ by noting that 'those who are engaged in Torah' (*de-mishtaddelei be-'oraita'*) stand on a higher level in the sefirotic world than do the prophets. 'Those who are engaged in Torah stand above in the place which is called Torah

[i.e. *Tif'eret*], the pillar of all Faith (*qiyyuma' de-khol meheimanuta'*),⁷¹ and the prophets stand below in a place which is called *Neṣaḥ* and *Hod*.⁷² Below the prophets are those who 'utter words by the Holy Spirit,' for they are linked particularly to the last *sefirah*.⁷³ Those engaged in Torah are on the highest level, that which corresponds symbolically to the written Torah in the divine realm, i.e. *Tif'eret*, the sixth gradation, the *sefirah* of Moses. It is clear that by the expression 'those engaged in Torah,' *de-mishtaddelei be-'oraita'*, the *Zohar* means specifically the mystics who study and interpret Torah according to the kabbalistic system.⁷⁴ The theosophic exegete, therefore, is the enlightened one, the *maskil*, who attains the level of Moses.⁷⁵

That the kabbalist, according to the *Zohar*, is on a par with Moses is stated openly in another passage wherein Mosaic prophecy is contrasted with that accorded to the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Whereas the latter had visions of the 'lower colours' as reflected through the prism of the *Shekhinah*, Moses alone beheld the 'upper colours' that are 'concealed and invisible.' After having established the different modes of prophetic vision, the *Zohar* interprets Dan. 12:3, 'And the enlightened (*maskilim*) will shine like the splendour (*zohar*) of the sky.'

Who are the enlightened ones? This refers to the wise one who comprehends by himself those things [or words: *millin*] which no man can speak with his mouth. These are called enlightened. 'They will shine like the splendour of the sky.' Which sky? The sky of Moses [i.e. *Tif'eret*] which stands in the middle [of the divine edifice]. The splendour of this [sky] is hidden, and its colour is not revealed.⁷⁶

It is quite evident that the enlightened, the *maskilim*, are the mystics, or more accurately, the kabbalists.⁷⁷ It is thus that the author of the *Zohar* attributes to the enlightened the quality of understanding on their own, a character trait already singled out by the *Mishnah* as appropriate for one desiring to engage in *ma'aseh merkavah*, speculation on the divine Chariot.⁷⁸ Moreover, we are told that the enlightened 'shine like the splendor of the sky' which is identified further as the 'sky of Moses.'⁷⁹ The latter term refers symbolically to the *sefirah* of *Tif'eret*, the divine gradation which, as was mentioned above, corresponds to Moses. That is to say, therefore, that the mystic is capable of reaching the level of Moses.⁸⁰ Quite remarkably, the continuum of experience for prophet and mystic appears to be one and the same.⁸¹ That implies two things: first, classical prophecy is reinterpreted as a mode of mystical experience involving visualisation of the *sefirot*, and, second, revelatory experience of God is still a distinct possibility for the kabbalist.⁸² As I have suggested, the vehicle to achieve this revelatory experience is exegesis, interpretation of the Torah which is the corporeal form of God.

That the mystic visionary *par excellence* is the theosophic exegete is substantiated further by the following interpretations of Dan. 12:3:

(1) 'And the enlightened will shine' (Daniel 12:3). Who are the enlightened? Those who know how to contemplate (*le-ʾistakkalaʾ*) the Glory of their Master and know the secret of Wisdom, to enter without shame into the world-to-come.⁸³ These shine like the upper splendor. And it says 'the enlightened' (*ha-maskilim*) rather than 'the knowers' (*ha-yod'im*) for these verily are they who contemplate (*de-mistakla'an*) the inner, hidden secrets which are not disclosed or transmitted to every person.⁸⁴

(2) 'And the enlightened will shine,' the 'enlightened' refers to those who contemplate (*de-mistakkelei*) the mystery of Wisdom in the secret mysteries of the Torah . . . All who are engaged (*de-mishtaddelei*) in the [study of] Torah are called *maskilim*, [for] with wisdom they contemplate (*mistakkelan*) the secret of the upper Wisdom.⁸⁵

From both of these passages it is clear that mystic contemplation, interpretative in nature, is a visual sort of comprehension.⁸⁶ The enlightened is one who gazes upon the Glory of God and thereby contemplates 'the mystery of Wisdom,' which is embodied in 'the secret mysteries of the Torah.' The one 'engaged' in the study of Torah, moreover, is 'enlightened' for only such a person contemplates the upper Wisdom inherent in Torah. Clearly, then, it would seem that the revelatory and midrashic modes here converge, for visualisation of the divine is engendered by the hermeneutic relation that one has to the received text. Indeed, for the author of the *Zohar*, the perception of the colours or lights, the *sefrot*, is best attained through a mystically intuitive grasp and exposition of Scripture. Although the technique of *midrash* was part of the kabbalistic mind-set from the beginnings of theosophic speculation in Europe,⁸⁷ it is in the *Zohar* that the task of exegesis becomes the *sine qua non* of mystical praxis. The goal of kabbalistic exposition, however, is not hearing the word of God as related in the text but rather seeing the hidden mysteries—i.e. the divine light⁸⁸—concealed in the letters and words of that text. So central is the visionary element to mystical exegesis that the *Zohar* emphasizes that the kabbalist, the one who contemplates the mysteries of the Torah, is called by Scripture the 'enlightened one' and not simply 'one who knows' for the word *maskil* derives from the root *skhl* which, like the Greek *theoria* and the Latin *contemplatio*, connotes comprehension through seeing.

The meeting of the visionary and hermeneutical modes in the *Zohar* is brought out in the following discourse of the 'Old Man' (*sabba'*) concerning the nature of interpretation and the inner layers of the Torah:

The Holy One, blessed be He, enters all the hidden things [or words: *millin*] that He has made into the holy Torah, and everything is found in the Torah.

And the Torah reveals that hidden thing [or word] and then it is immediately clothed in another garment where it is hidden and not revealed. And even though that thing [or word] is hidden in its garment the sages, who are full of eyes, see it from within its garment. When that thing [or word] is revealed, before it enters into a garment, the one of open eyes [i.e. the mystic sage] casts [his eyes] upon it. And even though [the thing or word] is immediately concealed, it does not depart from their eyes.⁸⁹

In this text the *Zohar* repeatedly employs metaphors derived from the phenomenon of sight. God is said to hide secret matters within the Torah and clothe them in a garment,⁹⁰ the removal of which allows them to be seen by the sage. Hence, the mystic is called the 'wise one full of eyes.'⁹¹ Furthermore, perhaps borrowing from Maimonides' description of truth in the introduction to the *Guide of the Perplexed*,⁹² de León here describes the concealed truth of Torah as that which momentarily flashes out from behind its hiding place, only to quickly return to another one.

In the continuation of this passage, the *Zohar* presents the famous parable of the beautiful princess (literally, beloved, *reḥimata*') secluded in her palace, hinting to her lover (*reḥima*') to approach, and ultimately uniting with him in matrimony. On the allegorical level the princess in her castle symbolises the Torah which is hidden behind several layers of meaning.⁹³ The lover is the mystic who must be gradually led to the deepest level of hermeneutic experience, knowledge of the esoteric layer of the text.⁹⁴ Though in this case the *Zohar* does employ acoustic language to describe the process of disclosure, it is clear that the main mode of the revelation is again visual. Hence, the word of Torah, as the princess, appears and then quickly vanishes. The mystic interpreter, as the lover, alone can *see* his beloved.

It may be suggested, moreover, that in terms of kabbalistic theosophy the princess functions as a symbol for the *Shekhinah*, the feminine potency of God, which is also the divine gradation that corresponds to the oral Torah. Indeed, the four stages of the relationship between the princess and lover represent four levels of meaning: *peshaṭ* (literal or contextual), *derashah* (homiletical), *haggadah* (allegorical),⁹⁵ and *sod* (mystical or esoteric). (Only the former three are explicitly named; the fourth is implied.)⁹⁶ These four levels—including the literal or contextual sense—from the perspective of the kabbalist, comprise four distinct hermeneutical postures which collectively make up the oral Torah. On the symbolic plane, therefore, the parable is alluding to the mystic's relationship to the written Torah as mediated through four aspects of oral Torah.

Textual interpretation, for the author of the *Zohar*, thus involves an intimate relation between the mystic and *Shekhinah*; indeed, the kabbalist, as I have already discussed, who is engaged or occupied with study of Torah is said to be united with the *Shekhinah*. That the model in this case

was the Sinaitic revelation as well can be adduced by an analysis of the passage which directly precedes the parable wherein the 'Old Man' sets out to interpret Exodus 24:18, 'Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain.'

What was that cloud? It is as it is written, 'And my bow I placed in the cloud' (Gen. 9:13). It has been taught that the rainbow removed its garments and gave them to Moses and with that garment Moses ascended to the mountain. And from it [the garment] he saw what he saw and he delighted in all.

The prototype of the mystics, Moses, must receive the garment of the rainbow before he ascends to the mountain to receive the Torah. It would appear that the rainbow here is a symbol for *Yesod*,⁹⁷ and the cloud a symbol of *Shekhinah*. Moses must put on the garment of *Yesod* before entering into the cloud, *Shekhinah*, and ascending further to receive the Torah.⁹⁸ By adorning himself with the cloak of the rainbow in order to enter into the cloud, Moses emulates the theosophic process by means of which the masculine *Yesod* (= phallus) enters into the feminine *Shekhinah*.⁹⁹ In another sense, by this act Moses symbolically enacts the unification of the oral Torah and the written Torah which, kabbalistically, correspond to *Shekhinah* and *Tif'eret*. That is, by entry into the one, the feminine oral Torah, Moses can gain access to the other, the masculine written Torah.¹⁰⁰

The hermeneutic process follows the same pattern, for by means of interpretation, a bridge is established between masculine and feminine, written and oral, and the mystical exegete, as Moses, stands in the position of *Yesod*¹⁰¹ the conduit or channel connecting the two. Although this view is implied in any number of Zoharic contexts, it is stated with particular clarity in the following passage:

Come and see the secret of the matter. The Community of Israel [*Shekhinah*] does not stand before the King [*Tif'eret*] except by means of the Torah. Whenever earthly Israel are engaged in [the study of] Torah the Community of Israel dwells with them . . . Thus, when the Community of Israel is aroused before the King by means of Torah, her forces are strengthened and the Holy King is glad to receive her. However, when the Community of Israel comes before the King and Torah is not found with her, her strength, as it were, is weakened.¹⁰²

Those who study Torah strengthen the *Shekhinah* in order to enable her to unite with her masculine consort, the Holy King. It is clear, therefore, that the mystics engaged in Torah fulfill the function of *Yesod*, the gradation that unifies the feminine and masculine potencies of God.¹⁰³

It is surely not insignificant that in the context of unfolding the nature of mystical hermeneutics the *Zohar* interprets a biblical verse connected to the Sinaitic event. Underlying this strategy is the assumed identification between

the modalities of revelation and interpretation. The mystic, like Moses, is capable of achieving union with *Shekhinah*, a union which is the relationship that bears the fruit of theosophic speculation and exegesis.¹⁰⁴ It is, moreover, the medium of visionary experience, for through the light of the *Shekhinah* the kabbalist can penetrate into the hidden depths of the text and thereby contemplate the upper secrets of the divine realm. Hence, at the end of the parable the *Zohar* calls the lover (the mystic), who finally sees the princess (the Torah) face to face and learns of her secret ways, 'husband of Torah, master of the house.' The same appellation 'master of the house', *ma'rei de-veita*, is applied elsewhere in the *Zohar* to Moses¹⁰⁵ and to the *saddiq*, the righteous one who is the mundane correlate to *Yesod* above.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the phrase 'husband of Torah' is reminiscent of another phrase used in connection with Moses in the *Zohar*, 'husband of 'Elohim.'¹⁰⁷ Both of these expressions point to the fact that Moses had achieved union with the *Shekhinah* (referred to symbolically as 'house' and as 'Elohim').¹⁰⁸ Here, the two expressions are applied to the mystic who masters the secrets of Torah. Again we see the intricate and essential correlation which the author of the *Zohar* establishes between the mystic exegete and Moses and, by implication, between the processes of interpretation and revelation.

In sum, then, gnosis for the *Zohar* is primarily visual and not auditory. The mystic, as the prophet, indeed the greatest of prophets, Moses, can have a visual experience of God. Yet, this seeing is decidedly text-oriented, for it is through midrashic activity that the mystic can attain a revelation of the divine. This conviction was certainly upheld by the author of the *Zohar* himself who construed his task as imparting a new-old revelation through the means of textual interpretation. Just as he reached the level of Moses by studying the Mosaic text, so too others studying his document could in turn share in the dynamic and shine with the splendour of Moses' gradation. This implicit assumption which colours the entire literary effort of the *Zohar* was stated succinctly by the anonymous author of *Tiqqunei Zohar*.

In that time 'the enlightened will shine like the splendor of the sky' (Dan. 12:3). What is the 'splendour?' The gradation of Moses, our rabbi, the 'Central Pillar' [*Tif'eret*], because of whom this work is called the 'Book of Splendour' (*Sefer ha-Zohar*).¹⁰⁹

How well this kabbalist has captured the true secret of the *Zohar*! The classic of Jewish mysticism conveys in so many different ways the presumption that its author had reached the symbolic level of Moses in the divine world and had thus identified with the historical Moses. By interpreting the Torah which the ancient Moses had revealed, this new Moses was in effect revealing a new Torah. His interpretation was concomitantly a revelation. The extraordinary power which the *Zohar* had in subsequent generations

of Jewish history must be seen against this background. The identification of *midrash* and visionary experience opened the door for others to similarly have visions of God by studying the letters of the sacred text. In its turn the *Zohar* itself became an exegetical basis for revelatory experience.

NOTES

- 1 See G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). pp. 35–39, 238–43.
- 2 Shlomo Pines uses this Platonic term to describe Maimonides' conviction that 'the prophets were philosophers.' See 'Translator's Introduction' in *Guide of the Perplexed* (translated by S. Pines, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). p. cxx. For a criticism of Pines' view, see L. Berman, 'Review of Pines' Translation of the *Guide*', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85 (1974): 411–412; *idem*, 'Maimonides, Disciple of Alfarabi,' *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974): 167; and I. Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 366. n. 25.
- 3 Cf. S. Rawidowicz, 'On Interpretation', in *Studies in Jewish Thought* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974), pp. 47–48, 52–53; G. Scholem, 'Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories', in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 287–289.
- 4 See the remarks of D. Halivni-Weiss, *Midrash, Mishna, Gemara* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 16. Cf. also the description of the relation of revelation to *midrash* given by R. Bloch, 'Midrash', in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, ed. by W. S. Green (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978), p. 31; and G. Porton, 'Midrash: Palestinian Jews and the Hebrew Bible in the Greco-Roman Period,' in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.19.2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), pp. 111–112.
- 5 On the connection between the process of textual interpretation (*midrash*) and prophetic states of consciousness in Jewish apocalyptic literature, see the relevant remarks of I. Gruenwald, 'Knowledge and Vision: Towards a Clarification of Two "Gnostic" Concepts in Light of Their Alleged Origins', *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 (1973): 68 and 104. Cf. also D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 117, 119–120, 183 ff; J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 16; Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 74–78; Susan Niditch, 'The Visionary', in *Septuagint and Cognate Studies*, ed. by J. J. Collins and G. W. E. Nickelsburg (Scholars Press, 1979), 12: 153–179. J. Kugel, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), pp. 58–59. On the process of 'inspired biblical exegesis' as a 'divinely guided *midrash*' in the Qumran sect, see L. H. Schiffman, *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls Courts, Testimony and the Penal Code* (Brown Judaic Studies 33, Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 15–16. On the connection between vision of God and study in Philo see *De Mutatione Nominum* 259–260, and the interpretation of that passage in P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (NovTSupp 10; Leiden: Brill, 1965), pp. 99ff., esp. 115–118. And on the connection between study of a text and visionary experience in early Jewish mysticism, see M. Idel, 'The Concept of Torah in the Hekhalot and its Transformation in the Kabbalah'

- (in Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981), pp. 35–36, and p. 36, nn. 38–39. See also M. Idel, ‘Infinities of Torah in Kabbalah’, in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. by G. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 141–144. On pneumatic interpretation in later kabbalistic sources, see now M. Idel, *Kabbalah New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 234–243. A related question is the relationship between the visionary experience and the description or report of that vision in a commonly accepted literary tradition. Cf. Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 161–173; M. Cohen, *The Shi’ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 2–10.
- 6 Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 39–44, 49–53. Concerning the midrashic character of the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, see also J. Dan, ‘Midrash and the Dawn of Kabbalah,’ in *Midrash and Literature*, pp. 127–139.
 - 7 See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961), p. 120.
 - 8 Of the many examples that could be cited I will mention but a few: (1) *Zohar* II, 213b: ‘Praiseworthy is the portion of one who enters and departs [a oft-repeated technical expression in *Zohar* for mystical exegesis based on the famous rabbinic legend of the four who entered Paradise; according to one version R. Akiva alone entered and exited in peace; see T. Hagigah 2:4; B. Hagigah 14b; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 1:28], who knows how to contemplate the secrets of his master and to comprehend (*le-’itdabbeqa*) them. Through these mysteries one can cleave (*le-’itdabbeqa*) to his master’. (2) *Zohar* II, 217a: ‘Those who consider his name’ (Mal. 3:16) [refers to] all those who contemplate words of Torah to cleave (*le-’itdabbeqa*) to their master, to know the secret of the holy name and to establish the wisdom of his name in their hearts.’ (3) *Zohar* III, 36a: ‘All those engaged in Torah cleave (*mitdabbeqin*) to the Holy One, blessed be, He and are crowned in the crowns of the Torah [on the image of the crown as a symbol for mystical union, see below, n. 47];’ (4) *Zohar Hadash*, 27d: ‘Praiseworthy are Israel for the Holy One, blessed be He, gave them the Torah to reveal to them the highest secrets. Concerning them it is written, ‘You who cleave (*ha-deveqim*) to the Lord your God are all alive today’ (Deut. 4:4); (5) *ibid.*, 29a: ‘The one who draws close to the Torah . . . draws close to the Holy One, blessed be He.’ Underlying all of these passages, and the examples could be greatly multiplied, is the assumed identification of the Torah and God; see below, n. 66. The Zoharic usage of *dvq* in the double sense of comprehension and cleaving reflects the medieval philosophical usage of the word *devequt* to describe the state of conjunction between human and divine (or Active) intellect; see J. Klatzkin, *Thesaurus Philosophicus: Linguae Hebraicae et Veteris et Recentioris* (Berlin, 1928), 1:128–129.
 - 9 Indeed in several contexts the author of the *Zohar*, following earlier midrashic precedents (see *Sifra Leviticus*, De-Vore’ de-Nedavah, 1:12; *Sifre Numbers*, pisqa 103; *Numbers Rabbah* 14:22), seems to reject the possibility that one who is still in a bodily existence can see God at all; see, e.g., *Zohar* II, 66b; III, 147a. Such a posture is unequivocally adopted by Moses de León in *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, ed. by A. W. Greenup (London, 1911), p. 19. After discussing the various grades of prophetic experience he cautions the reader: ‘In any event God, may He be blessed, is removed from every idea and thought, for no one can comprehend [Him] and He, may He be blessed, has no image or form. Thus to Torah speaks in the language of man in order to settle their minds.’ De León goes on to say that at

times even in the sensible world people see images that have no basis in reality, as, for example, one who sees mirages while wandering through the desert. The images seen by prophets likewise have no reality-base but are merely the means by which the prophet visualises and comprehends that which lies beyond visualisation and comprehension, just as the anthropomorphic expressions in Scripture are only means by which finite minds comprehend the truth. The influence of the Maimonidean perspective here is clear; see below, n. 31. It must be pointed out, however, that in this passage de León was clearly adopting an apologetical stance, possibly in response to critics who may have challenged kabbalah on the grounds of introducing multiplicity into the divine. In order to defend kabbalah, therefore, de León felt it necessary to emphasise that God is one being and the various divine *sefirot* or emanations (here called *'ispaqlari'ot*, i.e. lights) named by the kabbalists are in truth one light that is only perceived under multiple aspects. See below, n. 32.

10 *Zohar* II, 81a–b.

11 Cf. the views of R. Akiva and R. Judah the Prince in *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael, Masekhta de-Bahodesh*, 9, ed. by J. Lauterbach (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933), 2:266–267: ‘R. Akiva says: They saw and heard that which was visible. They saw the fiery word coming out of the mouth of the Almighty as it was struck upon the tablets . . . Rabbi says: This is to proclaim the excellence of the Israelites, for when they all stood before Mount Sinai to receive the Torah they interpreted the divine word as soon as they heard it.’ According to Akiva, then, seeing the voices involved a mystical perception of the divine word akin to fire, whereas, according to Rabbi, the seeing of the voice (i.e. the word of God) is an intellectual perception involving interpretation (cf. *Sifre Deuteronomy*, pisqa 313, ed. by Finkelstein [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969], p. 355). Cf. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978), pp. 266–267. A parallel to Akiva’s interpretation is found in *Hekhalot Rabbati* 24:3 cited in Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965), p. 62. On the mystical conception implicit in Akiva’s view, see I. Gruenwald, ‘Some Critical Notes on the First Part of *Sefer Yesira*,’ *Revue des Études Juives* 132 (1973): 501–504; I. Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), p. 3. It is also instructive to compare R. Akiva’s view with Philo, *De Decalogo*, 32–33, where the voice heard at Sinai is said to be ‘an invisible soul’, ‘a rational sound . . . which giving shape and tension to the air and changing to flaming fire, sounded forth . . . an articulate voice.’ See *ibid.* 46–47: ‘Then from the midst of the fire that streamed from heaven there sounded forth . . . a voice, for the flame became articulate speech . . . and so clearly and distinctly were the words formed by it that they seemed to see rather than hear them. What I say is vouched for by the law in which it is written, “All the people saw the voice” . . . for it is the case that the voice of men is audible, but the voice of God truly visible.’ See also *De Vita Mosis* II. 213, where Philo says that the ten commandments were ‘promulgated by God not through His prophet but by a voice which, strange paradox, was visible (διὰ φωνῆς—τὸ παραδόξοισατον—ὄρατῆς) and aroused the eyes rather than the ears of the bystanders.’ Yet, in *De Migratione Abrahami*, 47–49, Philo’s view seems to approximate that of R. Judah the Prince: ‘. . . whereas the voice of mortal beings is judged by hearing . . . the words of God are seen as light is seen; for we are told that “all the people saw the voice,” not that they heard it; for what

was happening was not an impact on air made by organs of mouth and tongue, but virtue shining with intense brilliance, wholly resembling a fountain of reason . . . This shews that words spoken by God are interpreted (κρύτερον) by the power of sight residing in the soul.' Cf. H. Wolfson, *Philo Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), 2:37–38. From other places in the Philonic corpus it is clear that Philo maintained the supremacy of eyesight over hearing as the higher level of the soul's perfection; see, e.g. *De Ebrietate* 82, and see below, n. 91. This 'spiritualized' reading of Exod. 20:15 (20:18 according to the LXX) appears in Patristic literature as well; see Origen, *Contra Celsum*, translated by H. Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 377, and n. 6 for other references. See also H. Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 2:104–106 where parallels between Philo's treatment of the Sinaitic theophany and that of Judah ha-Levi are drawn. For other examples of the medieval treatment, cf. Abraham ibn Ezra's commentary on Exod. 20:15 (ed. by Weiser [Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1977], 2:140) who explains that it was appropriate to use the verb 'seeing' in conjunction with the object 'voices' because 'all the senses are united in one place [in the forehead]' and therefore can be used interchangeably. See also ibn Ezra on Deut. 4:12 (ed. by Weiser, 3:224). According to Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I. 46 (ed. by Pines, pp. 99–100) the 'seeing' spoken of in Exod. 20:15 refers either to intellectual apprehension or to prophetic vision. See, however, *ibid.* II. 33 where Maimonides interprets the 'seeing' of the voices as a reference to the hearing of the voice of the trumpet. And cf. the commentary of Rashi to Exod. 20:15: 'They saw that which should be heard—something which is impossible to see on any other occasion.' Rashi's view is based on R. Akiva's interpretation cited above. See also Rashi's commentary to B. Berakhot 6b, s.v. 'the very voices which were present at the giving of the Torah': 'It is said that [the voices] were seen and even though a voice is not seen this one was seen.'

- 12 Cf. Deut. 4:11, 'The mountain was ablaze with flames to the very skies, darkness, clouds, and a thick fog.' And *ibid.* 5:19–20, 'The Lord spoke those words to your whole congregation at the mountain from within the fire, the cloud, and the dense fog . . . When you heard the voice out of darkness.' And see *Zohar* I, 11b: 'Darkness is fire, as it is written, "When you heard the voice out of the darkness" and "The mountain was ablaze with flames to the very skies, darkness etc."' The source for the equation between darkness and elemental fire appears to be Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II. 30 (ed. by Pines, p. 351). A similar explanation for the revelatory experience is offered by R. Saadia Gaon (882–940) in his commentary on *Sefer Yesirah*; see the text published by M. Lambert, *Commentaire sur le Séfer Yesira* (Paris, 1891), pp. 11–12 (Arabic section) and pp. 26–27 (French translation). For a Hebrew paraphrase see R. Judah ben Barzilai, *Perush 'al Sefer Yesirah*, ed. by S. J. Halberstam (Berlin, 1885), p. 273. According to Saadia, the verse says that they 'saw' the voices, even though hearing would have been a more appropriate metaphor, because in the dark cloud on Mount Sinai the letters of the divine voices took shape and were visible from within the darkness. At Sinai the Israelites saw images of the letters of the divine words in the fire just as on a cold day when one speaks vapors emerge from one's mouth. Saadia's explanation is also cited by Pseudo-Bahya, *Sefer Torot ha-Nefesh*, translated by Isaac Broydé (Paris, 1896), p. 18, and Menahem Recanati (Italian kabbalist, early

14th century) in his *Commentary on the Torah* (Jerusalem, 1961) 26a. See also Bahya ben Asher, *Commentary on the Torah*, ed. by C. D. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1981), 2:206, to Exod. 20:18, 'all the people saw the voices.' Bahya reflects the views of Maimonides (see preceding note) and Saadia: 'This seeing is a matter of comprehension . . . Or perhaps it says "they saw" because the voice emerged from the fire . . . and they saw the fire; therefore it says "they saw the voices."' Cf. Jacob ben Sheshet, *Meshiv Devarim Nekhohim*, ed. by G. Vajda (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1968), p. 191: 'A subtle essence (*hawayah daqqah*) spreads forth in the air until they (!) become dense and are an actual substance (*hawayah mamashit*). From there they emerge and one is seen by the eyes and the other heard by the ear. Similar to this is the revelation of the Torah, for it is written, "From the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; on earth He let you see His great fire; and from amidst that fire you heard His words" (Deut. 4:36) . . . It says that the voice went out from heaven, and they [the Israelites] heard it but they did not understand it until that voice reached the fire, and the voice went out from the fire and they understood the speech.'

- 13 Cf. *Zohar* II, 194a: 'All [of Israel] saw the upper lights illuminated in the speculum that shines [i.e. the sixth emanation, *Tif'eret*], as it is written, "And all the people saw the voices" (Exod. 20:15).' The source for this kabbalistic interpretation of the verse from Exod. is to be found in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, ed. by R. Margalio (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978), §§ 45, 48. An alternative interpretation of Exod. 20:15, which likewise emphasises the visionary characteristic of the Sinai event, is to be found in *Zohar* II, 146a: 'When the Holy One, blessed be He, was revealed on Mount Sinai, He gave the Torah in ten words (or commandments). Each and every word produced a voice and that voice divided into seventy voices [cf. B. Shabbat 88b; *Tanpuma*, Shemot, 25; *Exodus Rabbah* 28:4]. All of [the voices] shone and sparkled before the eyes of Israel, and with their very eyes they saw the splendour of His glory, as it is written, "And all the people saw the voices."' See also the graphic description in *Zohar Hadash*, 41b–c of Israel's seeing the letters of the first word of the Decalogue, 'anokhi, being engraved on the tablets. For a fuller discussion of visionary experience in 13th century kabbalah, see my forthcoming book, 'Through a Speculum that Shines: A Study of Visionary Experience in Medieval Jewish Mysticism.'

- 14 A reference to this Zoharic view is given in Moses de León's *Mishkan ha-'Edu*, MS Berlin Quat. Or. 833, f. 35a: 'And I have seen in the secrets of Torah a deep matter concerning the verse "And all the people saw the Voices," the secret of the speculum that does not shine [i.e. *Shekhinah*] They (!) said that this speculum is hidden and takes form. She stands and is momentarily seen, then returns and is hidden as at first; she takes form and afterwards is hidden and removed. This is the hidden secret of the verse, "all the people are seeing, "we-khol ha-'am ro'im. It is written ro'im [i.e. in the present tense] and not ra'u [i.e. in the past tense].' The use of the present tense implies that the activity of seeing described here is not completed for indeed the object of vision, the *Shekhinah*, is characterised by a ceaseless dialectic of appearing and hiding. See below, n. 93. Cf. Nahmanides' *Commentary on the Torah*, ed. by C. D. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1976), Gen. 15:1, 1:89, and Deut. 5:19, 2:369. See below, n. 23.

- 15 See *Zohar* I, 15b, 30b, 53b, 60a, 208a, 247a; II, 90b, 126a, 147b, and elsewhere. Cf. especially *Tiqqunei Zohar*, § 30 (74b): “‘And all the people saw the Voices’ (*’et ha-golot*). [The word] *’et* refers to the lower *Shekhinah* which ascends in each voice of the seven voices.’ In interpreting this seemingly insignificant word, the *Zohar* follows an ancient midrashic practice attributed particularly to the school of Akiva; see B. Pesahim 22b. Cf. F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (Leipzig, 1922), p. 125, n. 2.
- 16 Cf. S. Lieberman’s appendix to Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, pp. 118–126; Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Tradition*, pp. 1–32; A. Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung von der Shekhinah in den Früher Rabbinischen Literatur* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969), pp. 205–209. See in particular the statement of R. Shim’on bar Yoḥai in *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael*, Yitro Baḥodesh, 2: ‘They said: Our wish is to see our king; one who hears is not comparable to one who sees. God said to him: Give them what they have requested, “For on the third day the Lord will descend in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai” (Exod. 19:11).’ See also *Midrash Tehillim*, ed. by S. Buber (New York: Om Publishing, 1947), 69:2, 161a; 149:1, 270a.
- 17 Cf. *Tanḥuma*, Yitro, 11, where it is stressed that ‘the ten words [of revelation] all emerged from the mouth of God in one voice.’ See also *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael*, Yitro Baḥodesh, 4: ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, said all the ten commandments in one word, and afterwards specified each commandment by itself.’
- 18 *Sefer ha-Bahir*, § 48. The Bahiric passage is discussed in the context of other rabbinic statements concerning the voices of revelation by R. Ezra of Gerona in his commentary to the Talmudic aggadot; see MS Vatican 441, ff. 49a–b. See below, n. 23.
- 19 *Ibid.*, § 49. First person pronouns, such as *’anokhi* and *’ani* subsequently became standard kabbalistic symbols for *Shekhinah*. Cf. *Zohar* I, 6b, 65b, 89a, 204b, 228a; II, 85a–b, 236b; 3:178b (*Piqqudin*). See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 216, 401, n. 38.
- 20 Cf. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 49.
- 21 R. Ezra, *Commentary on Shir ha-Shirim, Kitvei Ramban*, ed. by C. D. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978), 2:487. And cf. the passage translated and discussed by Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 49–50: ‘The form of the written Torah is that of the colours of white fire, and the form of the oral Torah has coloured forms as of black fire . . . And so the written Torah can taken on corporeal form only through the power of the oral Torah.’ Scholem attributed the text to R. Isaac the Blind of Provence, who wrote in the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th century. See, however, M. Idel, ‘Kabbalistic Materials from the School of R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid’ [in Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2 (1982–1983): 170, n. 9, who suggests that the text was written by a certain kabbalist, R. Isaac, who wrote at the end of the 13th or beginning of the 14th century. See *idem*, ‘Infinities of Torah in Kabbalah,’ in *Midrash and Literature*, p. 145.
- 22 This is based on the view of R. Yoḥanan who stated that the Torah was given in seven voices which then divided into seventy corresponding to the 70 nations of the world. See B. Shabbat 88a; *Tanḥuma*, Shemot, 25; *Exodus Rabbah* 28:4. On the connection between the seven voices and the 70 names of God, see the

interesting comment in *Hekhalot Zutarti*, in P. Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1981), § 396: 'And this youth [i.e. Metatron] who is written in seven voices, in seven letters, in the seventy names.' See also *ibid.*, § 390, where it is stated that Metatron prevents the celestial beasts from hearing the voice of the divine speech and the sacred name which he mentions by means of the seven voices.

- 23 Nahmanides' *Commentary on the Torah*, 1:388. See also Nahmanides' commentary on Gen. 15:1, p. 89, Exod. 3:13, p. 291, Deut. 5:19, 2:369, and 34:10, p. 504. In contrast to Nahmanides, R. Ezra of Gerona maintained that at Sinai Moses beheld but five *sefirot*. See R. Ezra's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:488; R. Azriel, *Commentary on the Talmudic Aggadot*, ed. by I. Tishby (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), p. 7. R. Ezra's view is based on the opinion of R. Ḥelbo, cited in B. Berakhot, 6b, that the Torah was given in five voices. See, however, Ezra's commentary on the aggadot extant in MS Vatican 441, f. 49a, where, after mentioning the passage from Berakhot, he summarises the various positions as follows: 'The ten [voices], and the seven, and the five, everything was one [or perhaps: all these views are identical].' And see the comment of Menaḥem Recanati in his *Commentary to the Torah*, Exod. 20:15, 46d: 'Israel comprehended [at Sinai] only one voice, and Moses comprehended five or seven according to the opinion of the sage, R. Ezra.' It appears that Recanati has confused the view of R. Ezra with that of Nahmanides. Cf. Ṭodros Abulafia's interpretation of R. Ḥelbo's view in *'Oṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem, 1970), 4a: 'In the event of revelation only five voices were revealed, corresponding to the last five *sefirot* which were united in the word *'anokhi* in the [event of the] revelation of the Torah . . . All the voices were unified in the last voice.' It is of interest to note, finally, that in a sermon, evidently delivered in the early part of his career, Nahmanides writes that Israel saw the glory of God at Sinai from behind seven barriers of fire; see *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:135.
- 24 *Zohar* I, 91a. Cf. II, 146a: 'Whatever Israel saw at that time [i.e. at Sinai] they saw from one light [i.e. *Shekhinah*] which received all the other lights [i.e. the upper *sefirot*], and they desired to see it.'
- 25 *Zohar* II, 82b. The expression 'as if from behind a wall' is used on several occasions in the *Zohar* to characterize an inferior mode of visualisation. See *Zohar* II, 69b, 130b, 213a; III, 174b; *Zohar Ḥadash* 38a. The very same expression is used by Moses de León in several of his Hebrew theosophic writings. See, e.g., *Sha'ar Yesod ha-Merkavah*, MS Vatican 283, f. 169b: '... concerning the upper [celestial creatures] there is no seeing except by a slight contemplation as if from behind a wall.'
- 26 Employing the terminology of the Talmud (cf. B. Yevamot 49b) the kabbalists maintained that all prophets, with the exception of Moses, beheld the *Shekhinah*, the 'speculum that does not shine;' Moses, by contrast, beheld the divine through the *sefirah* of *Tif'eret*, i.e. the speculum that shines.' Cf. R. Azriel, *Commentary on the Talmudic Aggadot*, ed. by I. Tishby, pp. 33–34; *Zohar* I, 131a, 170b–171a; II, 23b, 82b, 245a; III, 174a, 198a, 268b; *Zohar Ḥadash* 38b, 42c, 77a; *Tiqqunei Zohar* 18 (32a); *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, p. 16; Isaac of Acre, *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayim*, ed. by A. Goldreich (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 41–43. Cf. *Zohar* II, 82b: 'all prophets vis-à-vis Moses are like a female vis-à-vis a male.' In *Zohar* III, 152b the relationship between Moses and the other prophets is compared to that of the sun to the moon (cf. B. Baba Batra 75a; *Zohar*

- Hadash, Tiqqunim*, 96c); and see *ibid.* 268b where the relationship is compared to a human and an ape. See, however, Todros Abulafia, *Sha'ar ha-Razim*, MS JTS Mic. 1887, ff. 56a–b where it is stated that even Moses only comprehended the speculum that shines, i.e. *Tif'eret*, indirectly through the medium of the two cherubim which, according to this kabbalist, symbolise the ninth and tenth *sefirot*, *Yesod* and *Shekhinah*.
- 27 Cf. *Zohar* I, 85a, 88b, 91a–b, 183a, 203a, 240b; II, 245a, 247b, 257b; *Tiqqunei Zohar*, §§ 18 (31b), 19 (39b); *Zohar Hadash, Tiqqunim*, 111b. It should be noted, however, that on occasion the author of the *Zohar*, in concurrence with the accepted kabbalistic symbolism of his time, refers to the two gradations above *Shekhinah*, *Neṣaḥ* and *Hod* as the source of prophetic inspiration. Cf. *Zohar* I, 1b, 183a; II, 104b, 171a, 251b, 257b; III, 35a, 90b. Yet, even in these contexts, it is abundantly clear that the medium of prophetic vision is the *Shekhinah*. See also *Zohar* III, 68a (*Ra'aya Meheimna*); *Tiqqunei Zohar*, Introduction (2a–b, 11b, 13a), §§ 21 (49a), 55 (88b), 70 (123b). This is also the basis for the theosophic reinterpretation in the *Zohar* of the rabbinic idea that prophecy is restricted to the land of Israel, the latter being understood symbolically as a reference to *Shekhinah*; see *Zohar* I, 85a, 240b; *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, p. 87. See *Zohar Hadash, Tiqqunim*, 119c where there is an effort to harmonise the older aggadic tradition concerning the speculum that shines and the speculum that does not shine and the kabbalistic notion that *Neṣaḥ* and *Hod* are the sources of prophetic inspiration: 'The central pillar [*Tif'eret*] is called the "speculum that shines" from the side of *Neṣaḥ* . . . *Shekhinah* . . . is called the "speculum that does not shine" from the side of *Hod*.'
- 28 *Zohar* I, 88b, 91a.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 183a. See also *Zohar* II, 186b where *Shekhinah* (the 'lower tabernacle') is described as the 'crystal that reflects all the lights.'
- 30 Cf. F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), esp. pp. 30–91; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II. 41–46. See also C. Sirat, *Les Théories des Visions Supernaturelles dans la Pensée Juive du Moyen-Âge* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), pp. 141–143. A notable exception to the rule is Judah ha-Levi who maintains that the prophets had an 'inner' or spiritual vision, to be distinguished from both rational speculation and sensory imagination, by means of which they were able to see actual spiritual entities such as the angelic hosts, the divine throne, and the glory; see *Cuzari* IV. 3. Cf., however, H. Davidson, 'The Active Intellect in the Cuzari and Hallevi's Theory of Causality,' *Revue des Études Juives* 131 (1972): 389, who writes that the 'spiritual vision' in prophecy 'for Hallevi, unlike Alfarabi [see below], has no objective existence.' On p. 367, n. 4, Davidson remarks that the 'the inner eye was a Sufi commonplace.' It is unclear, however, if he intended to say that ha-Levi was actually influenced by Sufic ideas. Rahman, *op. cit.*, p. 38, draws a distinction between al-Farabi's presentation of prophecy as the imaginative symbolisation of intellectual phenomena and that of ibn Sina on the basis that, while the latter considered these forms to be purely mental with no external correlate, the former maintained that prophetic perceptions do have counterparts in the sensible world. Rahman admits, however, that even for al-Farabi this does not amount to an 'objective' pole inasmuch as the perceptions are not public but rather the private possession of the prophet. Moreover, if one considers the citation from al-Farabi that Rahman himself brings (p. 37), it can be seen that these so-called external counterparts to prophetic imaginative forms are generated from the internal

sensus communis, then transmitted to the external world from which they are again perceived by the prophet and sent back to the imagination by the *sensus communis*.

- 31 This crucial difference between kabbalistic and rationalistic prophethood is glossed over by Scholem in his remarks in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 9–10.
- 32 See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 27 (ed. by Pines, p. 58) where Maimonides gives the following reason why Onkelos, the Aramaic translator, could render Gen. 46:2–3 literally: in this context there is no fear of anthropomorphism for ‘this passage contains a relation of what was said and not a relation of a story.’ By contrast, Exod. 19:20 cannot be rendered literally because that is ‘a relation of what took place within matters having existence.’ See Nahmanides’ lengthy critique in his commentary to Gen. 46:1 (ed. by Chavel, 1:246–51). In a similar vein in his commentary to Gen. 18:1 Nahmanides criticised Maimonides’ interpretation in the *Guide* II. 42 of angelic revelations as referring allegorically to prophetic vision rather than actual seeing. See Sirat, *Les Théories des Visions Surnaturelles*, pp. 147–149. [It is of interest to note that in his *Sefer ha-Rimmon* Moses de León refers to and upholds Nahmanides’ critique of Maimonides; see E. Wolfson, ed., *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León’s Sefer ha-Rimmon* (Brown Judaic Studies 144; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), p. 38 of Introduction and p. 316 of the Hebrew text.] See also *Guide* II. 46 (p. 404), where Maimonides writes that actions which take place in a prophetic vision ‘are not real actions, actions that exist for the external senses.’ An extreme form of this de-objectification of prophetic states of consciousness can be seen in the following remark of Abraham ibn Ezra in his commentary to Dan. 10:21: ‘In prophecy the one who hears is a human being and the one who speaks is a human being.’ For the development of this ‘subjective’ view of prophecy as a mode of self-confrontation in Abraham Abulafia’s mystical circle, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 142. It should be noted finally that in some cases Maimonides does allow for an ‘objective’ correlate to prophetic visionary experience, viz., the ‘created light’ or the *Shekhinah* which God has made especially for this purpose. Cf. *Guide* I. 11 (p. 37), 25 (p. 55), 46 (p. 103), 64 (p. 156). This reflects the Saadianic conception of the ‘created glory,’ *kavod nivra*; see A. Altmann, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 152–155.
- 33 One notable exception to this claim, although it does not deal directly with the problem of prophecy or visionary experience, is the statement in *Zohar* I, 103b that God ‘is known and comprehended according to what one imagines in one’s mind, each one according to one’s capability of comprehending with the spirit of wisdom.’ This statement would seem to somewhat compromise, at least from the epistemological perspective, the purely ‘objective’ character of our knowledge of the divine, for it is only through imagination that one has access to or gnosis of God. See the citation from de León’s *Sheqel ha-Qodesh* given above, n. 9. The rationalistic interpretation of prophecy as a visual experience of the divine glory in the prophet’s imagination is made explicitly by several medieval rabbinic figures, including Hai Gaon (10th century) and Hananel ben Hushiel (11th century). See *Ozar ha-Ge’onim*, ed. by B. Lewin (Jerusalem, 1932) IV, Hagigah, Teshuvot, pp. 14–15; Nathan of Rome, *Arukh ha-Shalem*, ed. by A. Kohut, 1:14, s.v. *’avnei shayish tahor*; E. Urbach, ed.,

- '*Arugat ha-Bosem* (Jerusalem: Mequize Nirdamim, 1938), 1: 198–202, and sources cited on 198, n. 1.
- 34 The link between these two events was made already in tannaitic and amoraic *midrashim*. Indeed several rabbis considered the Sinaitic theophany to be a revelation of God on his throne surrounded by his celestial retinue. However, the precise relation between these midrashic traditions and the esoteric doctrines of *merkavah* mysticism is not clear. Cf. references to Lieberman and Chernus in n. 16. It should be noted as well that in the classical *midrash* the supremacy of vision of the people at the splitting of the sea, even the lowly maid-servant, over Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the other prophets is emphasised; cf. *Mekhilta De-R. Ishamel, Shirata*, 3; B. Sotah 30b.
- 35 *Zohar* II, 82b. See also *ibid.* 194a (cited above, n. 13).
- 36 See n. 24.
- 37 This accords with the view of R. Ezra of Gerona; see above n. 23. Cf. *Zohar* II, 84b, 90a, 206a. De León affirms the same view in several of his Hebrew theosophic writings; see E. Wolfson, *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon*, p. 162 (Hebrew section); and the untitled fragment that is extant in MS Munich 47, f. 336a. Concerning this latter work, see G. Scholem, 'Eine unbekannte mystische Schrift des Mose de Leon,' *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 71 (1927): 109–123.
- 38 See the view of R. Helbo cited in B. Berakhot 6b.
- 39 The author of the *Zohar*, together with several other 13th century kabbalists, relegated Ezekiel's Chariot-vision to a lower ontological realm below the divine pleroma. To be sure, as is evident from the various kabbalistic commentaries on chapter one of Ezekiel, the particular details of the prophet's vision all have a symbolic correspondence to the upper realm, but, in essence, the throne-world of that vision was concerned with the 'lower chariot,' i.e. the angelic world below the sphere of divine potencies. Cf. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 206–207; Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1971), 1:415–421; A. Farber, 'R. Jacob ha-Kohen's Commentary on Ezekiel's Chariot' (in Hebrew; M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, 1978), pp. 94, n. 3 and 170, n. 1.
- 40 *Zohar* II, 82a.
- 41 See above, n. 11.
- 42 This notion can be traced to Geonic and late medieval midrashic sources. See Saadia, *Commentaire sur le Séfer Yesira*, ed. by M. Lambert (Paris, 1891), p. 22; *idem* 'Azaharot le-'Aseret ha-Dibberot, in A. Jellinek, *Quntres Taryag* (Vienna, 1878), p. 5, n. 14; R. Judah Barzilai, *Commentary on Sefer Yeşirah*, ed. by S. J. Halberstam (Berlin, 1885), p. 278; *Numbers Rabbah* 13:16, 18:21; *Sefer ha-Bahir*, § 124; R. Ezra, *Commentary on Song of Songs, Kitvei Ramban*, 2:521; *Zohar* II, 90a–b, 93b. For other references, see E. Wolfson, *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 58, n. 245 (Introduction).
- 43 That is, the ten words by which the world was created; cf. M. 'Avot 5:1. For references to the correspondence between the logoi and the commandments, see L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), 3:104–106, 6:43, n. 237 and 45, n. 243; M. Kasher, *Torah Shelema* (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1973), 9: 43, n. 72; *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 219, n. 20 (Hebrew section).
- 44 *Zohar* II, 93b–94a. Cf. I, 91a, II, 82b, and 156b: 'All the secrets of the world, all the commandments and all the upper and lower wisdom are dependent on them [the ten sayings of the Sinaitic revelation], and everything is contained in them. Everything is in the Torah.'

- 45 On the relation between theosophic exegesis and the Sinaitic revelation, see the telling remark in *Zohar Hadash*, 93c (*Tiqqunim*): 'The Holy One, blessed be He, inclines the heavens and the heavens of the heavens towards the [mystical] fellowship [of R. Shim'on] in the manner of [the event at] Sinai.'
- 46 See E. Urbach, 'The Traditions about Merkabah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period,' in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion presented to Gershom Scholem on his Seventieth-Fifth Birthday* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), pp. 7–10 (Hebrew section).
- 47 On gaining a vision of the divine Glory through study of a text, see the legend in *Zohar* I, 56b concerning Abraham and Enoch looking at the book of the generations of mankind given originally by God to Adam. It may be argued, moreover, that, according to the *Zohar*, the mystic must experience some prior spiritual illumination before he can contemplate the *Shekhinah* and see the light of Torah. This point is brought out explicitly in the following interpretation of Dan. 12:3 in *Zohar* I, 15b–16a: "And the enlightened will shine like the splendor of the firmament" refers to the pillars and supports of that palanquin [a symbolic reference to *Shekhinah* based on Song of Songs 3:9; see, e.g. *Zohar* I, 29a]. "The enlightened" (*ha-maskilim*) are the upper pillars and supports [i.e. the kabbalists] who contemplate (*mistakkelei*) with their understanding the palanquin [*Shekhinah*] to the extent that it is necessary . . . "They will shine," for if they did not shine and were not illuminated, they would not be able to gaze upon and contemplate that palanquin to the extent that is necessary . . . "The splendor" (*zohar*)—that which illuminates the Torah. "The splendor" which shines upon the "heads" of that beast [i.e. *Shekhinah*] and these heads are the enlightened who shine perpetually and who contemplate that firmament and the light that emerges from there which is the light of Torah that shines constantly without pause.' See below, nn. 75–76. Cf. also *Zohar* II, 127a–128a. This section begins with R. Shim'on and three of his comrades sitting under the shade of a tree, and R. Shim'on says: 'We must crown this place with words of Torah.' After a lengthy kabbalistic exposition, R. Shim'on realises that they are sitting 'in the shade of the Holy One, blessed be He, within the palanquin [i.e. the *Shekhinah*],' which they must crown with the 'upper crowns' (i.e. the upper divine grades). In truth, of course, the shade of the tree symbolises the *Shekhinah*, which is the shade of God, and the mystical interpretation of Scripture was only made possible because the comrades found themselves in this place covered by God's light. On the crown, as a symbol for mystical union in the *Zohar* and de León's Hebrew theosophic texts, see E. Wolfson, 'Mystical-Theurgical Dimensions of Prayer in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*,' in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. by D. Blumenthal (Brown Judaic Studies 134; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 3:53–55. An elaboration of this theme in its literary and historical context can be found in my forthcoming study, 'Images of the Crown in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Mysticism.'
- 48 *Zohar* II, 163b. In the continuation of the text the *Zohar* establishes the principle that a person's face reflects the spiritual level to which he is attached. The latter idea is, no doubt, based on earlier physiognomic traditions that have found their way into the *Zohar*, see esp. *Zohar* II, 73a. Hence, the face of the righteous is like the face of the *Shekhinah*. On the history of physiognomic texts in Jewish mysticism and their influence upon the *Zohar*, see G. Scholem, 'Ein Fragment zur Physiognomik und Chiromantik aus der Tradition der spätantiken jüdischen Esoterik,' *Liber amicorum: Studies in Honor of Professor*

- Dr. C. J. Bleeker (Leiden: Brill, 1969): 175–193; I. Gruenwald, ‘New Fragments from the Physiognomic and Chiromantic Literature’ (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 40 (1971): 301–319; *idem*, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1980): pp. 218–224. For a later kabbalistic development of this motif, see L. Fine, ‘The Art of Metoposcopy: A Study in Isaac Luria’s Charismatic Knowledge,’ *AJS Review* 11 (1986): 85–86. That study of Torah illuminates the face of one so involved is stated in ancient Jewish mystical speculation as well. See Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur*, §§ 288, 678.
- 49 Zohar I, 9a. These three figures in the Zohar, R. Shim‘on, R. Eleazar, and R. Abba, represent the three pillars which sustain the mystical fellowship (*havrayya*) whose total number is ten. These ten symbolically correspond to the ten divine emanations and the three rabbis just mentioned correspond to the three central emanations, *Hesed* (Lovingkindness) on the right, *Gevurah* (Strength) or *Din* (Judgment) on the left, and *Rahamim* (Mercy) or *Tif‘eret* (Splendor) in the center. See Liebes, ‘The Messiah of the Zohar’ (in Hebrew), in *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982), pp. 98–99, 130–132.
- 50 See M. ‘Avot 3:2, 3:6, B. Berakhot 6a; Sanhedrin 39b; Targum to Ps. 82:1; *Midrash Tehillim* on Ps. 105:1, ed. by S. Buber, 224b; *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 7:2 Cf. E. Urbach, *The Sages Their Concepts and Beliefs*, p. 33.
- 51 Zohar I, 135b, 164a, 245a; II, 94b, 134b (*Ra‘aya Meheimna*), 149a, 155b, 188b; III, 22a, 35a, 60b, 61a, 213a, 268a–b, 298a; Zohar *Hadash*, 28b, 95a (*Midrash ha-Ne‘elam*). See also II, 149a: ‘R. Isaac said, One day I went with [R. Shim‘on] on the road and he opened his mouth in [explication of the] Torah. I saw a pillar of cloud fixed from above to below and one splendour shone within that pillar.’ And II, 209a where R. Abba says: ‘I have seen one light that divided into three lights . . . I have surely seen the *Shekhinah* . . . and the three lights that I saw are you’ [i.e. three members of the mystical fellowship engaged in kabbalistic exegesis]. For other references, see I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2:770, n. 43.
- 52 Zohar III, 35a.
- 53 Zohar III, 268b. Cf. *ibid.*, 61a, where it says not only that the *Shekhinah* is never removed from the scholars occupied in Torah study, but also that the very image of these scholars is inscribed before God and every day God gazes upon these images and derives pleasure.
- 54 See the comment of the kabbalist R. Ḥayyim Joseph David Azulai (1724–1806) *ad loc.*: ‘It is possible that the [intent here is that the] oral Torah corresponds to *Malkhut* [i.e. *Shekhinah*] which is called *hekhal* (palace) whose numerical value is equal to that of *‘Adonai* [one of the standard names for *Shekhinah*]. And this is [the meaning of] what is said, “Whoever is engaged in Torah,” for the word “engaged” (*‘ishtaddel*) for the most part connotes that one is occupied in detailed study (*she-‘oseq be-‘yyun*) of the oral Torah, and by means of this study one causes the unity of the Holy One, blessed be He, and the *Shekhinah*. Therefore one is “engaged in the palace of the Holy One, blessed be He, “to unify her with her beloved.’ See below, nn. 71, 96.
- 55 Zohar II, 200a. On the identification of *Shekhinah* and Torah, cf. Naḥmanides’ commentary to Gen. 1:1 (ed. by Chavel, 1:11) and Deut. 33:1 (2:491).
- 56 Zohar *Hadash*, 29a.
- 57 Zohar III, 22a.
- 58 B. Ketuvot 62b.

- 59 See *Zohar* I, 50a; II, 63b, 89a; III, 49b, 78a, 143a ('*Idra Rabba*'). Cf. E. Ginsburg, 'The Sabbath in Classical Kabbalah' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1984), pp. 147–149. The model here again is the aggadic view of Moses who separated permanently from his wife after receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai. See Y. Liebes, 'The Messiah of the Zohar,' p. 122.
- 60 Cf. *Zohar* I, 72a, 92b, 115b; II, 200a; *Zohar Hadash*, 28a.
- 61 This is substantiated in parts of the *Zohar* by means of the numerical equivalence between *raz*, i.e. mystery, and 'or, i.e. light. Insofar as both words equal 207, it may be said that one who knows the mystery of the text can see the light hidden therein. Cf. *Zohar* I, 140a (*Midrash ha-Ne'elam*); III, 28b (*Ra'aya Meheimna*); *Zohar Hadash*, 8d (*Midrash ha-Ne'elam*), 94b (*Tiqqunim*); *Tiqqunei Zohar* 19 (39b). And see *Zohar* II, 193b where R. Shim'on is said to have revealed the lights of Torah hitherto hidden in the darkness. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, p. 63. On the kabbalistic notion of the letters as configurations of divine light, see Scholem, 'The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbalah', *Diogenes* 80 (1972): 161–72. See also the citation from the *Zohar* given below, n. 80. In subsequent Hasidic literature a technical meditative technique was developed centred on the cleaving of one's thought to the infinite divine light contained in the letters of the Torah and those of prayer. See J. Weiss, 'Torah Study in Early Hasidism,' *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism*, ed. by D. Goldstein (Oxford, 1985), pp. 56–68. The numerical equivalence (*gematria*) of light, 'or, and mystery, *raz*, is also employed by a contemporary of the author of *Zohar*, Abraham Abulafia (1240–1291), the noted ecstatic-prophetic kabbalist. See, e.g. 'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz, MS Oxford Bodleian 1580, f. 8b. On the connection between the luminous essence of the letters and the mysteries of the Torah, see *idem*, *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, MS JTS Mic. 1801, ff. 29a–b. On the vision of letters in Abulafia's writings, see M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 100–105. In the final analysis, the kabbalistic notion that words of Scripture are the concretisation of divine light represents a version of the Neoplatonic conception of God's accommodating self-revelation, i.e. the divine light is concealed in a variety of veils so that human beings can perceive it. See the classical formulation of this by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names* 1, 592B.21f., and *The Celestial Hierarchy* 1, 120B.7–121A.1: 121BC. 16–27. The latter source is cited and discussed by P. Rorem, 'The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius,' in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. by B. McGinn, J. Meyendorff, and J. Leclercq (New York: Crossroad, 1987), p. 134. The influence of Pseudo-Dionysius' symbolic reading of the literal text on twelfth-century Christian exegetes, particularly the Victorines, has been noted by B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), p. 370. For an example of a possible Jewish Neoplatonic source that may have influenced the Spanish kabbalists on this score, see the statement of Abraham bar Ḥiyya cited in Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, p. 63. The identification of Torah (or Wisdom) and light is also prevalent in the writings of the Gerona school; see, e.g., R. Azriel, *Commentary on the Talmudic Aggadot*, pp. 83, 100, 110–111. For the Neoplatonic influence in the case of Azriel, see A. Altmann, 'Isaac Israeli's "Chapter on the Elements"' (MS. Mantua). *Journal of Jewish Studies* 7 (1956): 31–57; *Isaac Israeli A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century*, translated and ed. by A. Altmann and S. M. Stern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 130–132.

- On the image of the literal sense as a cloak that hides the divine light, see below, nn. 63, 90.
- 62 *Zohar* III, 202a. In that context the different lights that shine in each word of Torah correspond to the various types of meaning, to wit, the literal or contextual, the homiletical, the allegorical, the mystical, and the legalistic. See n. 65.
- 63 Cf. *Zohar* III, 152a. On the theme of the garments of Torah, see Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2:369; and, most recently, Dorit Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 45–49.
- 64 *Mishkan ha-'Edut*, MS Berlin Or. Quat. 833, f. 1b. See Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar*, p.47.
- 65 By the latter part of the 13th century, kabbalists generally distinguished between four levels of interpretation: the literal, homiletical, allegorical, and mystical. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, pp. 53–61; A Van Der Heide, 'Pardes: Methodological Reflections on the Theory of the Four Senses', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 34 (1983): 147–59.
- 66 Cf. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, p. 39, and references given therein, n. 3. The thematic has also been discussed by I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2:365–366, and more extensively by M. Idel, 'The Concept of Torah in the Hekhalot and its Transformation in the Kabbalah,' pp. 49–58.
- 67 *Zohar* II, 60a. Cf. also the explicit statements of Joseph Hamadan and Menahem Recanati cited in Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. p. 44. See also the statement of Judah Ḥayyat in his commentary to the anonymous *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* (Jerusalem, 1963), 93a: 'The Torah is the image (*demuto*) of the Holy One, blessed be He, and from its perspective man can compare the form, which is the soul, to its creator.' The expression 'compare the form to its creator,' with a different meaning, is found in earlier rabbinic sources; see, e.g., *Genesis Rabbah* 24:1 (ed. by Theodor-Albeck, p. 230), 27:1 (p. 256).
- 68 *Ibid.*, 60b.
- 69 Cf. *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Miṣwot*, ed. by M. Meier (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1974), p. 58: 'Therefore the Torah is called by this name for it instructs [us] about the pattern of the Holy One, blessed be He . . . the Torah, as it were, is the shadow of the Holy One, blessed be He . . . and inasmuch as the Torah is the form of God He commanded us to study it so that we may know the pattern of the upper form [i.e. the *sefirot*]. As some kabbalists [cf. Naḥmanides *ad loc.*] said concerning the verse, "Cursed be he who does not raise up the words of this Torah" (Deut. 27:26), is there a Torah that falls? This is rather a warning to the cantor to show the writing of the Torah scroll to the community so that they will see the pattern of the upper form. How much more so [is it incumbent] to study the Torah so that one may see the supernal mysteries and see the actual Glory of the Holy One, blessed be He. All the time that one studies the Torah one is actually sitting in the shadow of the Holy One, blessed be He.' See parallels in Joseph Hamdan, *Sefer Tashak*, ed. by J. Zwelling (Ph.D., Brandeis University, 1975), pp. 72, 88, and esp. 93. The text from Hamadan has been discussed by Idel, 'The Concept of Torah in the Hekhalot and its Transformation in the Kabbalah,' pp. 64–65. See also the citation from a late 13th century kabbalistic text, *Sefer ha-Yihud*, translated and discussed by Idel, 'Infinities of Torah in Kabbalah,' p. 145.
- 70 B. Baba Batra 12s.
- 71 Concerning this expression, see Liebes, *Sections of a Zohar Lexicon* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1982), pp. 379–380, n. 94.

- 72 *Zohar* III, 35a. See above, n. 27.
- 73 Ibid. There is another nuance to this text, viz., the correspondence of the three parts of the biblical canon to three gradations in the divine world: Torah corresponds to *Tif'eret*, Prophets to *Neṣaḥ* and *Hod*, and the Writings to *Shekhinah*. Cf. the parallel in E. Wolfson, *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 20 (Hebrew section). This symbolic correspondence predates the Zoharic theosophy. See, e.g., Azriel's *Commentary on the Talmudic Aggadot*, ed. by Tishby, pp. 48–49; Ṭodros Abulafia, *Sha'ar ha-Razim*, MS JTS Mic. 1887, f. 58b.
- 74 Cf., e.g., *Zohar* I, 189b–190a; II, 61b, 95a; III, 22a, 36a, 73a, 112a, 153a (*Piqqudin*); II, 202a; *Zohar Ḥadash*, 70d, and the passage cited at n. 85. In *Zohar Ḥadash*, *Tiqqunim*, 97c, to be 'engaged in Torah study' is given the particular theurgic meaning of uniting the feminine and masculine potencies of God (see above, n. 54). To be sure, the expression, *le-ishtaddel be-'oraita*, can also have a less technical meaning of simply being occupied with Torah study. See, e.g. *Zohar Ḥadash*, *Ruth*, 80d–81a (*Midrash ha-Ne'elam*); *Zohar* I, 132b, 168a, 184b, 242b; II, 27a, 46a, 83b, 161a–b; III, 98b.
- 75 Cf. *Zohar* III, 132b (*'Idra' Rabba'*) where R. Shim'on says: 'I have seen now what no man has seen since Moses ascended the second time to Mount Sinai, for I have seen the Faces [the *sefrot*] illuminated as the light of the bright sun . . . Moreover, I have known that my face is illuminated, but Moses did not know and did not consider.' And cf. *ibid.*, 144a (*'Idra' Rabba'*) where R. Shim'on thus comments on the premature death of three of the comrades in the Great Assembly: 'Perhaps, God forbend, a decree of punishment has been given to us for by our hands that which was not revealed since Moses stood on Mount Sinai has been revealed.' It is clear that the author conceived of the contents of the *'Idra' Rabba'* as another Sinaitic revelation. See Liebes, 'The Messiah of the Zohar' pp. 90, n. 12, 134, 208–215. On the parallel theurgical powers of R. Shim'on and Moses to perform miracles, see esp. *Zohar* II, 149a. On the Zohar's image of R. Shim'on as the figure of Moses *redivivus* and its influence in subsequent kabbalistic literature, see A. Green, 'The *Zaddiq* as *Axis Mundi* in Later Judaism,' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45 (1977): 335–337; Liebes, 'The Messiah of the Zohar,' pp. 90, n. 12, 105–107, 112.
- 76 *Zohar* II, 23a. See below, n. 86.
- 77 Cf. *Zohar* II, 2a where the enlightened, *maskilim*, are identified specifically as 'those who are occupied with the mystery of wisdom.' Cf. also *Zohar Ḥadash* 105a (*Matnitim*), 105c, 106b. And see *Tiqqunei Zohar*. Introduction (17a) [parallel in *Zohar Ḥadash*, *Tiqqunim*, 93d] where the *maskilim* of Dan. 12:3 are interpreted explicitly as a reference to R. Shim'on and his circle. See the passage discussed above at n. 47. It should be noted that the term *maskilim* was used in medieval Hebrew literature both by the rationalists and the mystics, the former in order to designate those who adhered to a philosophical ideology and the latter in order to name esotericists and initiates of kabbalah. The usage thus clearly predates the generation of the *Zohar*. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 224.
- 78 M. Hagigah 2:1. For a discussion of this mishnaic statement, and other rabbinic parallels, see D. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980), pp. 30ff.
- 79 Cf. *Zohar Ḥadash*, *Tiqqunim*, 94b. See, however, *Zohar* I, 100a (*Sitrei Torah*) [parallel in *Zohar Ḥadash*, 104b], and II, 2a, where the word *zohar* in Dan. 12:3 is interpreted as a reference to *Yesod*. See following note.

- 80 See above n. 75. Is there an allusion here to the authorship of the *Zohar*? See the suggestive remark of Daniel Matt, *Zohar, the Book of Enlightenment* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 243. Cf. the citation from *Zohar Ḥadash, Tiqqunim*, 94b, below at n. 109. And cf. *Zohar* III, 79b, where Numbers 12:8, the scriptural account of Mosaic prophecy, is applied to R. Shim'on bar Yoḥai. Concerning the latter reference, see Liebes, 'The Messiah in the *Zohar*,' p. 144. Perhaps one should read the passage in the following way: the *maskilim* shine like the sky of Moses, which is to say that they reflect the light of *Tif'eret*, and therefore are on the level of *Shekhinah*. Indeed, in several places in the *Zohar* it is emphasised that the mystic sage shines with the splendour of the *Shekhinah*; cf. *Zohar* I, 9a, 135b; III, 268b. See also *Mishkan ha-'Eduṭ*, f. 36a, and de León's *Shushan 'Eduṭ*, ed. by G. Scholem, *Qovez 'al Yad*, n.s. 8 (1976): 341, where it seems that the splendour (*zohar*) in Dan. 12:3 is interpreted as a reference to *Shekhinah*. See also *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 159, 401 (Hebrew section).
- 81 Cf. Abraham Abulafia's description of kabbalists as 'prophets for themselves' discussed by M. Idel, 'The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and his Teaching' [in Hebrew] (Ph.D. dissertation: Hebrew University, 1976), 2:274–275. It would seem that Scholem's hard and fast distinction between prophetic revelation and mystical experience is a product of his own systematic categorisation of the three stages in the historical development of religion wherein the mythical precedes the prophetic which in turn precedes the mystical, rather than an accurate account of the sources themselves. Cf. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 7–9; *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 9–11.
- 82 The radicalness of these claims vis-à-vis classical rabbinic dogma has been noted by D. Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Ktav, 1978), 1:135–136.
- 83 Cf. *Midrash Mishle*, ed. by Buber (Vilna, 1893), 10, 33b. Part of the passage has been translated by Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 71, who duly noted the connection of this text to merkavah mysticism.
- 84 *Zohar Ḥadash*, 105a (*Matmitin*).
- 85 *Ibid.*, 106b.
- 86 See Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1:146, interpreting the Zoharic passage cited above at n. 76. Cf. *Zohar* II, 179b: 'The combination of the letters of the holy names [of God] as the letters themselves cause the *upper secrets* to be *seen*, just as the letters themselves of the holy Name [the Tetragrammaton] cause the upper, holy secrets to be seen through them' (my emphasis). See also the lengthy discussion on letter-combination in *Zohar* III, 2a–3b. On the connection between letter-combination and visionary experience in the school of Abulafia, see Idel, 'The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and his Teaching,' 2: 294–298; and *idem*, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 80–81. An interesting epistemological clash is generated by the emphasis on the visionary component of mystical experience, on the one hand, and the adherence to the oral nature of kabbalah, on the other, the latter being transmitted primarily through hearing and not sight. See, in particular, the following comment of R. Isaac of Acre in *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayim*, ed. by A. Goldreich, p. 11 (of critical text): 'The secrets of Torah are pleasant and sweeter than honey and they illuminate the intellective soul (*ha-me'irim nefesh ha-sekhel*). And for whom are they pleasant? To those who hear them (*le-shom'im*), that is to say, to the kabbalists (*la-mequbbalim*), as we always say, "they said it from the

tradition" (*mi-pi ha-shemu'ah*), which is from the kabbalah.' See, however, *ibid.*, p. 101, where R. Isaac distinguishes between three cognitive levels: hearing (*shemi'ah*) which is correlated with the tenth emanation, *Shekhinah*, knowledge (*yedi'ah*) correlated with the sixth emanation, *Tif'eret*, and vision (*re'iyah*) correlated with the third emanation, *Binah*. From this correlation of epistemological states with ontological grades it is clear that vision is accorded the highest status. Other kabbalists, however, emphasised the epistemological supremacy of the auditory mode over the visual. Cf. the following comment of R. Azriel of Gerona cited in Scholem, 'Qabbalat R. Ya'aqov, we-R. Yiṣṣḥaq,' *Madda'ei ha-yahadut* 2 (1927): 233: 'And from the power of That which is hidden (*Koah ha-nistar*) He goes out in That which is heard (*ba-nishma'*) and from That which is heard to That which is seen (*ba-nir'eh*).' See Scholem's n. 2, *ad loc.* See Jacob ben Sheshet, *Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, p. 189: 'The faculty of hearing is more subtle than that of sight;' Bahya ben Asher, *Commentary on the Torah*, Exod. 4:11, p. 37: 'The light [of vision] expands the understanding, but the sense of hearing is much greater . . . for a greater advantage comes to a person from the ear than the eye . . . The ear is a more honourable limb than the eye . . . This matter can only be explained by the kabbalah, for vision (*ha-re'iyah*) is from the power of the *heh* [i.e. the feminine *Shekhinah*] and hearing (*ha-shemi'ah*) is from the power of the *waw* [i.e. the masculine *Tif'eret*].' See also *Zohar* II, 23b where on the basis of Exod. 6:3, 'I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make myself known to them by the explicit name [the Tetragrammaton],' the author of *Zohar* distinguishes between two levels of experience: knowledge (*yedi'ah*) and vision (*re'iyah*). The former, mystical gnosis, was attained only by Moses and corresponds to the *sefirah* of *Tif'eret*, whereas the latter was attained by the patriarchs and corresponds to the *Shekhinah*. Nevertheless, it is clear from the whole context that even the former is visual in nature for Moses was said to have had a vision of the upper hidden colours, whereas the patriarchs had a vision of the lower revealed colours as reflected in the *Shekhinah*; see text cited above, n. 76. Moreover, the *Zohar* sets out a specific technique for achieving the visionary experience that he calls knowledge, viz. the rotation of the closed eye which creates an array of colours said to symbolise the upper hidden colours; see also *Zohar* I, 18b, 97a (*Sitrei Torah*); II, 43b. Cf. de León's comment in *Sha'ar Yesod ha-Merkavah*, MS Vatican 283, f. 170a, on the verse. 'As I gazed on the creatures' (Ezek. 1:15): "As I gazed," a limited vision (*re'iyah mu'etet*), for permission has not been granted to the eye to see [the upper creatures, i.e. the three central *sefirot*]. Thus the vision was deficient.' From this passage we see again that mystical gnosis of the upper gradations—here called the creatures—is visual in nature, even though de León attempts to limit that vision in significant ways. The issues that I am raising here touch upon the larger question of the respective value assigned to visual and auditory thinking in medieval Jewish thought (philosophical and mystical), a comprehensive treatment of which I hope to give in my forthcoming monograph referred to above in n. 13. For a similar phenomenological conflict between the visual and auditory modes in the 4th century Christian controversy over the nature of the Trinity, see D. Chidester, 'Word against Light: Perception and Conflict of Symbols,' *The Journal of Religion* 65 (1985): 46–62.

87 See above, n. 7.

88 See above, n. 61.

- 89 *Zohar* II, 98b.
- 90 In *Zohar* III, 152a, four levels are distinguished: the body which corresponds to the legal portions of Scripture, the garment which corresponds to the narrative portions, the soul which corresponds to the esoteric truths concealed in the text, and the soul of souls which corresponds to an even more esoteric dimension. The latter is revealed only in the Messianic age. See *Zohar* I, 103b; III, 164b: *Zohar Hadash, Tiqqunim*, 96c; and cf. the detailed study of Y. Liebes, 'The Messiah in the *Zohar*' (see n. 49). The idea that God must clothe the word of Torah is related to another Zoharic idea, based on earlier kabbalistic sources including Nahmanides, that the angels must put on an earthly garment upon their descent to this world. On this theme and citation of all the relevant sources, see Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar*, pp. 26–44. For the possible Neoplatonic source for this image, see above, n. 61. On the common image of the literal sense of the text as a cloak of concealment which must be penetrated, see the remark of Claudius of Turin cited and analysed in B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, pp. 1–2.
- 91 This image may have been derived from Ezek. 10:12 where the wheels of the chariot are described as being 'covered all over with eyes.' I am unaware of any previous rabbinic source which applies this image to describe the sage. See, however, Philo, *Questiones et Solutiones in Exodum*, III, 43 (in Loeb ed., p. 236) where it is said that it is necessary for the soul 'to be all eyes' so that it may 'receive lightning-flashes (of illumination), having God as its teacher and leader in obtaining knowledge of things and attaining to their causes.' This text is related to a theme that Philo develops in a number of contexts concerning God's implanting (*enommatoō*) eyes in an individual so that he will be able to see God. See the sources cited and discussed in G. Dellling, 'The "One Who Sees God" in Philo', in *Nourished With Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel*, ed. by F. Greenspahn, E. Hilgert, and B. Mack (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), pp. 33–34.
- 92 This possible dependence was noted already by Tishby. See *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2: 370, n. 50; D. Matt, *Zohar, The Book of Enlightenment*, pp. 30–31.
- 93 The imagery is based, no doubt, on *Tanḥuma*, Peqqudei, 4, where the Torah is likened to a king's daughter hidden behind seven chambers in a palace. Cf. F. Talmage, 'Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism,' *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), pp. 316–318. On this image of the Torah, see reference given below, n. 100. See also *Sefer ha-Bahir* § 196 (cf. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 170–171) as well as the suggestive characterization of the Torah in *Zohar* III, 35b–36a: 'When a person comes to be united with the Torah she is open to receive him and to join him. But when a person closes his eyes from her and goes another way, she is closed from another side.' And cf. the citation from de León's *Mishkan ha-'Edut* given above, n. 14.
- 94 Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2:370–371.
- 95 For the possible etymological derivation of this term, see F. Talmage, 'The Term "Haggadah" in the Parable of the Beloved in the Palace in the *Zohar*' (in Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 4 (1985/86): 271–273. Talmage traces the use of the term *haggadah* for allegorical meaning to the old Spanish word, *razonamiento*, which means both 'discourse' or 'speech' and 'reasoning' or 'rationication.' The same expression is used by Nahmanides in his report of the famous disputation in Barcelona in 1263 with the Friar Pablo

- (or Paul) Christiani. See the version of this report in *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. by Chavel, 1:308. The bibliography on this disputation is extensive; see the references given in J. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 110–111, n. 16. The crucial passage is translated and discussed by Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 118–119.
- 96 See references above, n. 65, and see below, n. 104.
- 97 The derivation of this symbolism consists in the fact that *Yesod* corresponds to the male sex organ and the rainbow is a phallic symbol. Already in rabbinic literature, the word *qeshet* (which is the word for rainbow as well) euphemistically signifies the phallus; see e.g. B. Soṭah 36b; Sanhedrin 92a. On the kabbalistic symbolism, see G. Scholem, 'Colours and Their Symbolism in Jewish Tradition and Mysticism,' *Diogenes* 108 (1979): 89–90; 109 (1980): 69–71. See, however, Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1:64, who explains that the rainbow in this context is a symbol for *Shekhinah*, and the cloud the garment in which she is clothed. See also Matt, *Zohar, the Book of Enlightenment*, p. 251, and Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar*, p. 77, who follow this line of interpretation. The rainbow as a symbol for the divine Presence is also rabbinic in origin; see B. Ḥagigah 16a (based on Ezekiel 1:28).
- 98 Cf. *Zohar* II, 229a, and see Nahmanides' commentary on Ex. 24:1, p. 448. In several places in the *Zohar* the garment represents the means through which the soul cleaves to and comprehends God. See *Zohar* 1:38b, 75b–76a; 2:55a; 3:69a, 214a; Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar*, pp. 68–74. Another related idea in the *Zohar* is that the righteous one below who performs certain divine commandments is clothed in the garment of the *Shekhinah*; see Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2:429–44.
- 99 Cf. M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 227–228. In *Mishkan ha-'Edut*, f. 36a, de León notes just the opposite, i.e. as the righteous one approaches the *Shekhinah* she is the one that puts on a garment. See Cohen-Alloro, *op. cit.*, p. 16, n. 1.
- 100 Cf. *Zohar Ḥadash*, 42a: 'Moses needed forty days to learn the Oral Torah, for that gradation is called "Forty." Thus it says, "And [Moses] was there forty days and forty nights" (Ex. 34:28). The written Torah [i.e. *Tif'eret*] and the oral Torah [i.e. *Shekhinah*] were united. Therefore he had to specify and mention "forty days" [corresponding to *Tif'eret*] and "forty nights" [corresponding to *Shekhinah*].' See references above, n. 21. See also *Zohar Ḥadash*, 72d–73a, where Moses' relationship to *Shekhinah* (i.e. the oral Torah symbolised by the name *'Elohim*) is said to be consummated only when he receives the Ineffable Name (i.e. *YHWH*, or the written Torah). The image of Moses as the husband of Torah is made in an earlier aggadic source, *Midrash 'Alpha' Beitot*, where it is, interestingly enough, connected with his exegetical prowess. See S. Wertheimer, ed., *Battei Midrashot* (Jerusalem, 1980), 2:424: 'Afterward [God] brought out the soul of Moses from underneath his throne who would in the future explain the Torah in seventy languages. God showed him to the Torah and said, "My daughter [see above, n. 93], take joy and be gladden by this Moses, my servant, for he will be your groom and your master. He will be the one to receive you and to explain your words to the sixty myriad of Israel.'
- 101 On this theme, see Liebes, 'The Messiah of the Zohar,' pp. 135–145; and my study 'Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol,' *History of Religions* 27 (1987): 189–215. See also the citation given above at n. 56. Cf. *Tiqqunei Zohar* § 19 (38a) where the 'upper waters' are identified as the written Torah, the 'lower waters' as the

- oral Torah, and the 'thread' that is between them (cf. B. Ḥagigah 15a) with *Yesod* which is 'the secret of the Torah' and 'the foundation and root' of both. And see the explanation of R. Elijah ben Solomon, the Gaon of Vilna, *ad loc.* 'Kabbalah is the union of the two *torot*, for it brings the oral secrets [as they are] in Scripture.' See also the comment of R. Ḥayyim Joseph David Azulai cited above, n. 54.
- 102 *Zohar* III, 22a.
- 103 See also *Zohar* I, 4a, where those who study Torah the night before Pentecost are said to prepare the *Shekhinah* for her wedding to *Tif'eret*, i.e. the oral Torah and the written Torah. In this respect, too, the one who studies Torah is in the posture of *Yesod* in that he acts as a conduit connecting the masculine and feminine potencies. On this passage, see Liebes, 'The Messiah of the Zohar,' pp. 92–93. The understanding of kabbalistic study as a means to unite the masculine and feminine aspects of God is a common motif in any number of kabbalistic sources. I will cite one striking example from Naphtali Bacharach, *'Emeq ha-Melekh* (Amsterdam, 1653), 144c: 'R. Shim'on ben Yoḥai was the righteous one, foundation of the world, and by means of his studying this wisdom [i.e. kabbalah] with which he was occupied as is appropriate, he united *Ze'eir 'Anpin* [i.e. the masculine aspect of God] and his female [i.e. *Shekhinah*] . . . And this is the secret of all those who write mystical books: they repair the world of action by the secret of writing these esoteric truths. And the esoteric truth itself unites *Ze'eir 'Anpin* with his feminine counterpart in the most inward unity.'
- 104 Sée Liebes, 'The Messiah of the Zohar', pp. 198–203. That *Shekhinah* is the locus of exegetical activity is emphasised in *Tiqqunei Zohar* (*Zohar Ḥadash*, 102d) by the claim that *Shekhinah* is called *pardes de-'oraita*, the 'paradise (or orchard) of Torah,' for this gradation comprises four levels of interpretation: *peshat*, *re'iyah*, *derashah*, and *sod*. Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2:376; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, p. 58. See above, n. 96.
- 105 Cf. *Zohar* I, 236b; II, 22b, 238b. In *Zohar* I, 138b, the term is applied to Jacob who symbolically corresponds to the same gradation as Moses, viz. *Tif'eret*, the consort of *Shekhinah*. On the difference between the level of Moses and that of Jacob, see *Zohar* I, 21b, and the Hebrew parallel in de León's untitled fragment extant in MS Munich 47, ff. 336a–b (see above, n. 37).
- 106 Cf. *Zohar* II, 134b
- 107 Cf. *Zohar* II, 238b. This is based, of course, on the biblical appellation, *'ish 'Elohim*, which is applied to Moses; see, e.g. Deut. 33:1. For the other biblical personalities so named, cf. *Sifre Deuteronomy*, piska 342, ed. by Finlestein, p. 393; *'Avot De-R. Natan*, ed. by S. Schechter (Vienna, 1887), version B. ch. 37 (pp. 95–96); Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 6: 167, n. 965. The kabbalistic interpretation of the expression is alluded to in Nahmanides' commentary to Deut. 33:1, ed. by Chavel, 2:491. Cf. M. Idel, 'Métaphores et Pratiques Sexuelles dans la Cabale,' in *Lettre sur la Sainte, étude préliminaire traduction de l'herbréu et commentaires* par Charles Mopsik (Paris, 1986), p. 345.
- 108 On the Zoharic conception of Moses' mythical unification with *Shekhinah*, see the sources cited and discussed by Liebes, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon*, pp. 182–84.
- 109 *Zohar Ḥadash*, *Tiqqunim* 94b. See *ibid.*, 96b, and above, n. 80. See also *Tiqqunei Zohar* 69, 111b where it is said that Moses will come at the end of days to reveal the meaning of the *Zohar*. As A. Green, 'Zaddiq as Axis Mundi' p. 343,

n. 10, correctly observes, this already assumes an identification of the Zoharic R. Shim'on and Moses (see above, n. 75).

ELLIOT WOLFSON is currently Assistant Professor of Medieval Hebrew Literature and Thought in the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University. His major area of research is Jewish mysticism. He has recently published *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon*.

Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University, 51 Washington Square South, New York, NY 10012, U.S.A.