

THE STATUS OF THE (NON)JEWISH OTHER
IN THE APOCALYPTIC MESSIANISM OF MENAHEM
MENDEL SCHNEERSON

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By God, you gotta have a swine to show you where
the truffles are.

Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?*

1. IN GOD WE TRUST: AMERICA AS THE SPIRITUAL SUPERPOWER

There is no question that the environment of America had a profound impact on the Habad-Lubavitch hasidism under the leadership of the seventh, and presumably last, Rebbe, Menahem Mendel Schneerson. One of the areas where this effect is most conspicuous is with regard to the attitude toward the Gentile nations. The sixth Rebbe had already expressed gratitude for the freedom to practice Judaism in this country in contrast to the persecutions and hardships suffered in Russia,¹ but he has also expressed doubt regarding the viability of America as a place where traditional Judaism could thrive. Thus, in the beginning of the pamphlet *Qol Qore*, which appeared for the first time on 26 May 1941, Yosef Yitzhaq remarked that in the 'old country' the fires were burning to consume the body of the Jewish people, whereas in the 'new country,' the Jewish soul was threatened with extinction.² A similar sentiment was expressed in a talk he gave on the second day of Pentecost, 10 June 1943: the situation in America was deemed to be worse than under Tsar Nicholas in Russia, for, in the latter, the wish was to murder Jews physically, and in the former to uproot them entirely from the faith.³ The matter is also depicted in terms of a well-known rabbinic recasting of a biblical typology: the destiny of Jacob is linked to the world to come, the fate of Esau to this world. Inasmuch as the people of Israel are involved in mundane matters solely for the

¹ Y.Y. Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Sihot* 5702, 110.

² Y.Y. Schneerson, *Arba'a Qol ha-Qore*, 3 (Hebrew text on p. 28).

³ Y.Y. Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Sihot* 5703, 132.

sake of Torah, their material needs are fulfilled on the basis of unwarranted divine grace (*hesed hinnam*); American Jews, however, are not at ease with this sense of munificence, and thus they are in “partnership” with non-Jews in pursuit of physical desires and pleasures.⁴ In the following month, on 12 Tammuz (15 July), the festival of redemption (*hag ha-ge’ullah*) celebrating the discharge of the sixth Rebbe from Soviet prison on that date in 1927, the spiritual depravity was repeated in a brief but poignant way: ‘Here in America, it is not only that new melodies are not created, but the old ones, too, are forgotten’.⁵ One would readily agree that these are rather dismal assessments about American Jewry. Although there are occasional asides in which Yosef Yitzhaq extols the Jews of America,⁶ on the whole he is rather grim regarding their religious fortitude. The seventh Rebbe emphasized that his predecessor was far more optimistic about America, noting, for instance, that he rejected the more conventional view of European rabbis that this was not a place where orthodox Jewry could flourish;⁷ his comportment, however, is fundamentally different. From the beginning of his leadership until the last years of his life, he maintained his father-in-law’s deep conviction regarding the imminent coming of the Messiah, which logically implies a continued sense of physical dislocation and temporary belonging, but he also felt great possibilities in the American landscape to promote the cause of Judaism and to spread the teachings of Hasidism worldwide. When the Messiah comes, he declared already on 6 December 1951, we will be able to say with ‘justified pride’ that the Jewish youth of America were the soldiers in the army responsible for carrying out the mission of bringing the redemption.⁸ Moreover, the freedom of worship secured by the American constitution would eventually serve as a lynchpin in his overall post-Holocaust messianic battle.

In the course of time, we find pronouncements that indicate that he applauded actions and words on the part of the US government and even the president that were in accord with his spiritual vision, for example, the ruling to allow the lighting of the Hanukah menorah

⁴ Ibid., 134.

⁵ Ibid., 142.

⁶ Ibid., 140, where the quality of innocence (*temimut*) is associated with the American experience.

⁷ M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 22 # 8593, 410.

⁸ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyot 5712*, vol. 1, 155.

in public places.⁹ The mystical import of this activity is to maximize the diffusion of the divine light to Jews but especially to non-Jews, an idea that is linked to the rabbinic injunction to light the candles of Hanukah ‘in the entry to one’s house from the outside’ (*al petah beito mi-ba-hutz*),¹⁰ that is, the essence of this gesture is to illumine spiritually those who are positioned on the exterior.¹¹ Moreover, the Rebbe appealed to and upheld the rabbinic maxim, *dina de-malkhuta dina*,¹² which accords legitimacy and authority to the rule of the land where one lives in matters that do not conflict with the regulations of the Torah, but beyond this principle of pragmatic expediency, he viewed America in a special way, and thus believed that there was an inherent affinity between American and Jewish law. In the talk given on 12 Tammuz 5743 (23 June 1983), Schneerson took the opportunity to express gratitude to the current American president, Ronald Reagan, and he noted that the superpower status of America is related directly to the fact that it is distinguished amongst all modern nations in placing ‘exceptional emphasis’ on faith (*emunah*) and conviction (*bittahon*) in God, a propensity exemplified in the slogan ‘in God we trust’, which is linked especially to the nation’s currency. The content of these words relates to ‘faith in the Creator of the world, and not faith [*emunah*] alone, but “trust”—faith of conviction [*emunah shel bittahon*], that is, they place absolute trust [*immun muhlat*] in the Creator of the world, and they have faith in him’.¹³

Schneerson shows here, as he was wont to do, a finely attuned sensitivity to mundane matters. He astutely discerns the underlying importance of religious conviction in the American landscape—one must still wonder if a person who did not explicitly avow belief in God by

⁹ From a discourse on 19 Kislev 5747 (21 December 1986), in M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5747*, vol. 2, 54–55.

¹⁰ Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 21b.

¹¹ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5750*, vol. 2, 66–67.

¹² Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 10b.

¹³ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5744*, vol. 2, 895. On the spiritual import of the slogan ‘In God we trust’, see also idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5744*, vol. 3, 1435; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5746*, vol. 2, 203; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5750*, vol. 2, 67; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5751*, vol. 4, 49. It is of interest to note that the website www.otzar770.com, which includes a picture of the Rebbe with the messianic slogan *yehi adonenu morenu we-rabbenu melekh ha-moshiah le’olam wa’ed* (‘May our lord, our teacher, our master, the king Messiah, live forever’) features a replication of an American coin with the words ‘Liberty In God We Trust’ and the date 1986.

invoking the divine in political jargon, let alone someone who openly denied or expressed doubt regarding the existence of God, could stand a chance of running for the presidency. The view of America proffered by Schneerson, and the presidential comments to which he refers, bolstered his messianic vision. All of Israel will be united, but beyond Israel, the ‘matter of peace’ will spread through the civilized world. The agency that shall bring this about is observance of the seven Noahide laws, the rabbinic category to denote the universal laws that are binding on any human society.¹⁴ From Schneerson’s perspective, adherence to these laws on the part of non-Jews purifies their somatic and mental state of being. Salvation (*hatzalah*), therefore, is not exclusively for the Jews but for the world in its entirety.¹⁵ Here, too, Schneerson cites Maimonides as his authority: ‘He who fulfills one commandment tips himself and the whole world to the scale of merit, and he brings about for himself and for them redemption and salvation’.¹⁶ As he made clear in a talk he delivered on 19 Kislev 5747 (21 December 1986), ‘In God we trust’ bespeaks the utopian ideal of all nations worshipping together so that the attribute of kingship will be properly ascribed to God.¹⁷

2. SEVEN NOAHIDE LAWS: INCLUDING THE EXCLUDED

Perhaps nothing expresses more clearly the zeal, and to some extent, audacity of Schneerson’s messianic aspiration than the drive on the part of the Lubavitch movement under his supervision to spread the knowledge of and gain commitment to the seven Noahide laws amongst Gentiles. This undertaking should not be construed as missionary activity, as there is no interest in conversion. The target audience for the missionizing tendencies on the part of Habad is secular Jews. Still, the aspiration to spread the seven Noahide laws comes closest to a proselytizing program, insofar as it reflects an aspect of their religious vision that entails shaping the beliefs and practices of non-Jews for the sake of redeeming the world.

¹⁴ Ravitzky, *Messianism*, 188–193; Ehrlich, *Messiah of Brooklyn*, 107–108; Kraus, ‘Living with the Times’, 280–290; idem, *The Seventh*, 80–83, 224–249.

¹⁵ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5744*, vol. 1, 893; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5745*, vol. 3, 1839–1840; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 35, 97–98.

¹⁶ Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim 8:10.

¹⁷ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5747*, vol. 2, 57.

As is the case with so many crucial ideas, this, too, was seen as an integral part of the sixth Rebbe's messianic calling. Specifically, the release of Yosef Yitzhaq from Soviet prison on 12 Tammuz 5687 (12 July 1927) was interpreted as a reaffirmation of his mission "to unify all of the people of Israel by means of the dissemination of the Torah and Judaism, which includes the spreading of the fulfillment of the commandments of the sons of Noah in all of the world in its entirety."¹⁸ The universalist objective is part of the vocational particularity. The significance of the seven Noahide laws in Schneerson's teachings has been noted by a number of scholars, but the topic has been treated in isolation from the larger and more complex issue concerning his philosophical stance on the question of alterity and the status of the non-Jew. Many have claimed, apologetically in my view, that the campaign of the seven Noahide Laws illustrates not only a more conciliatory attitude toward the Gentiles but a weakening of the traditional ethnocentrism. While I do not deny that there is an interesting shift in Schneerson's rhetoric, I submit that a careful scrutiny of the various articulations of this idea leads to the conclusion that the boundary separating Jew and non-Jew is not completely obliterated or even substantially blurred; on the contrary, the narrowing of the abyss only widens it further.

One passage, in particular, is worthy of citing, as the matter of the Jew's responsibility to proliferate the knowledge and observance of the seven Noahide laws on the part of non-Jews is framed in gender terms. The relevant comment is from a discourse delivered on 21 Kislev 5745 (15 December 1984):

It is known and it has been explained in a number of places that the blessed holy One created the world in a manner that every created being is both a donor [*mashpi'a*] and a recipient [*meqabbel*], for it is not possible for a discriminate entity to be exclusively in the aspect of donor or in the aspect of recipient. As it pertains to our matter, since the task of the Jew is to influence and to cause the non-Jew to receive the commandments given to the sons of Noah, it follows that the Jew is the donor and the non-Jew the recipient. But since it is not possible for a discriminate entity to be exclusively in the aspect of recipient—the blessed holy One caused the non-Jew to bestow on the Jew in matters of a livelihood.¹⁹

¹⁸ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot* 5743, vol. 2, 1733.

¹⁹ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot* 5745, vol. 2, 900.

Utilizing the standard binary of the donor and the recipient, which is engendered as male and female, the hierarchical supremacy of Israel is expressed by the fact that even the more active role assigned to the non-Jew is tied to benefiting Jews in material matters. Another text, in which the incongruity is made even more sharply, is taken from a talk given on 26 Av 5745 (13 August 1985). In a conventional manner, Schneerson insists that the Jews must not be swayed by the nations in which they are embedded. The reason for the diasporic existence is to accentuate the chosenness of the Jewish people and the fact that they serve as a living example for the nations of the world, especially to endorse the seven Noahide laws. Schneerson makes a point of singling out America as a place where Gentiles respect the Jews and help them establish their own social and educational institutions.²⁰

An honest assessment of this passage, as well as others that could have been cited, leads inevitably to the conclusion that the other nations are treated as a means to benefit the Jews,²¹ an idea supported exegetically by the verse 'Kings shall tend your children, their queens shall serve you as nurses' (Isa. 49:23).²² Even the demand that they fulfill the seven commandments of Noah is merely an aspect of this instrumentality. This is not to deny the fact that Schneerson, following Maimonides,²³ whom he cites quite frequently, did impart soteriological significance to the observance of the non-Jews. More specifically, the goal of transposing the world into a habitation for the divine is realized when the Jews fulfill the Torah and the Gentiles the seven Noahide commandments.²⁴ Nevertheless, the hierarchy is not effaced, a crucial point that has not always been appreciated by scholars who have written about this subject. Those who wish to speak of a partnership between Jews and Gentiles in the business of redemption must acknowledge the terms of that collaboration without defensiveness or dishonesty. The seventh Rebbe's effort to promote the observance of the seven commandments on the part of the non-Jews was certainly laudable, but a careful analysis of his remarks on this topic indicates that they only reinforced the prejudicial alterity implied in his portrayal of the non-Jew as the other to the other who is the Jew.

²⁰ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5745*, vol. 5, 2797.

²¹ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5743*, vol. 1, 924.

²² *Ibid.*, 933.

²³ Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim 8:10.

²⁴ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5751*, vol. 3, 269.

By including the excluded in the claim to exclusivity, the exclusivity is rendered even more inclusive.

3. ISRAEL'S HUMANITY: JEWISH PARTICULARITY AS IDIOMATIC OF SELF-NULLIFICATION

Foundational to Habad's philosophic orientation is the presumed ontological difference in the constitution of the Jew and the non-Jew, both psychically and somatically. While hardly unique to this body of literature, each of the seven masters in the Lubavitch dynasty has accepted such a view, apologetic denials on the part of some scholars and practitioners notwithstanding. The textual evidence to support this assertion is overwhelming and it would be impractical to offer even a small percentage of the sources that validate the point. A striking way that this dogma has been expressed is the claim that non-Jews possess an animal soul that derives from the demonic, whereas Jews possess a divine soul that endows them with the capacity to uplift their animal soul and to transform it into a vessel for holiness. Jews alone are said to be endowed with the aspect of soul known as *yehidah*, in virtue of which the individual can be reincorporated into the incomposite unity of the nondifferentiated One (*yahid*).²⁵ A distinctive position is accorded the Jews, as it is presumed that only they have the facet of the divine that is enrooted in the essence of the Infinite (*atzmut ein sof*), the 'inner point of the heart' (*nequddat ha-lev penimit*)—they are not just of a similar substance, they are of the same substance (a doctrinal principle attested in the dicta *yisra'el we-qudsha berikh hu had* and *yisra'el we-qudsha berikh hu kolla had*)²⁶—and therefore they are the

²⁵ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5711*, vol., 125, 266.

²⁶ M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 2, p. 604; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 23, 181; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 30, 153; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 31, 51; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 35, 51; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 36, 122, 186; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 37, 105; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 39, 332, 359, 361, 363, 370, 371, 426; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 6, # 1635, 115; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5712*, vol. 1, 305; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5715*, vol. 1, 278; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5716*, vol. 2, 44, 147; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5717*, vol. 2, 57; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5719*, vol. 3, 68; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat al Seder Hodshei ha-Shanah*, vol. 1, 120; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat al Seder Hodshei ha-Shanah*, vol. 2, 150, 415; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat al Seder Hodshei ha-Shanah*, vol. 3, 20, 95, 125, 253, 276. The more typical formulation, based on Zohar 3:73a, affirms the unity of God, Torah, and Israel, though the precise language, *yisra'el*

only ones capable of being bound to and absorbed in the transcendent light beyond the delimitation of the concatenation of worlds.²⁷ Even the pious Gentiles, who acknowledge that God creates the world *ex nihilo*, can comprehend only the existence (*metzi'ut*) of the divine and nothing of its substance (*mahut*), and since the light of the Infinite is completely concealed from them, they do not have the capacity to cultivate the ultimate experience of ecstasy through the 'realization of the nullification of their existence' (*hitpa'alut ha-bittul mi-metzi'utam*).²⁸ The Jews singularly have the capacity to suffer such an experience, to be affixed to the supernal knowledge (*da'at elyon*) that is above reason,²⁹ to attain the metanoetic state labeled as the 'conjunction' (*devequt*), 'bonding' (*hitqashsherut*), or the 'unification' (*yihud*) of the 'essence with the essence' (*etzem ba-etzem*),³⁰ and it is thus through them that 'the

oraita we-qudsha berikh hu kola had, is closer to the expression *qudsha berikh hu oraita we-yisra'el kolla had*. Regarding this saying, see Tishby, *Messianic Mysticism*, 454–485. This is repeated on numerous occasions in the Rebbe's discourses and letters. See, for instance, M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 4, # 799, p. 39, # 1009, p. 282, # 1095, pp. 376, 378, # 1215, p. 500; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 5, # 1319, p. 111; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 7, # 2157, p. 302, # 2211, p. 351; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 12, # 4173, p. 358; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 14, # 5151, p. 387; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 19, # 7384, p. 386; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 22, # 8331, p. 127; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 28, # 10,655, p. 95; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5711*, vol. 1, 55; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5711*, vol. 2, 330; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5712*, vol. 1, 200; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5712*, vol. 3, 182; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5713*, vol. 1, 259; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5714*, vol. 1, 19, 210; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, 147; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5716*, vol. 2, 307, 316, 318; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5717*, vol. 1, 121; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5717*, vol. 2, 167; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5718*, vol. 1, 145; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5718*, vol. 3, 33, 260; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5719*, vol. 3, 196; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 1, 201; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 2, 221, 414; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 3, 60, 64, 99, 137, 289; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 39, 365.

²⁷ Sh. Schneersohn, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu'el 5626*, 242; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5716*, vol. 2, 216.

²⁸ Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Seder Tefillot*, 287b–c.

²⁹ M.M. Schneersohn, *Derekh Mitzwotekha*, 27b.

³⁰ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5713*, vol. 3, 9; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5714*, vol. 2, 15; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, 222, 228; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5717*, vol. 1, 77, 118, 119; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5718*, vol. 3, 200, 260; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5719*, vol. 2, 95. The experience is also referred to as the 'discernment of the essence by the essence' (*hakkarat etzem ba-etzem*); see idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5719*, vol. 2, 96, 97, 172.

darkness is also transformed into light, and it is revealed to them as it will verily be in the world to come'.³¹

On this score, it is relevant to recall that the term to designate the Jew, *yehudi*, is related by Shneur Zalman of Liadi to the utterance of Rachel *ha-pa'am odeh et yhwah*, 'The time I will praise the Lord' (Gen. 29:25), the scriptural explanation of the name of Judah (*yehudah*). The essence of what it is to be a Jew is connected to the gesture of expressing gratitude to God (*hoda'ah*), which, conceived mystically, is the 'aspect of nullification in the light of the Infinite' (*behinat ha-bittul le-or ein sof*).³² That the unique power of the Jew is linked to the liturgical utterance is an idea affirmed in classical rabbinic sources, but its deeper meaning, according to Habad philosophy, concerns the annihilation of self. This, too, is the meaning elicited from the scriptural term for 'Hebrew', *ivri*, which is linked to the verse 'In ancient times, your forefathers lived beyond the river', *be-ever ha-nahar yashvu avoteikhem me-olam* (Josh. 24:2): the root of the Jewish soul is from beyond the river, that is, from the essence, the concealed thought and the infinite will that transcend the order of the concatenation of the worlds (*sefer hishtalshelut ha-olamot*).³³ The biblical depictions of the people of Israel as the children of God (Deut 14:1) or as the first-born (Ex. 4:22) are related similarly to the 'essential connection to the divine' (*hitqashsherut atzmit le-elohut*) alleged on the part of the Jews, an indigenous bond that facilitates their incorporation within the essence.³⁴ Summarizing the point, Schneerson remarked that the soul of each and every Jew is a

portion of the divine from above in actuality [*heleq elohah mi-ma'al mammash*], a portion of the essence by means of which they grasp the essence, and when the worship is from the side of the essence of the soul,

³¹ D.B. Schneerson, *Torat Hayyim: Bere'shit*, 161d.

³² Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 99a. See M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwawa'aduyyot 5747*, vol. 3, 258.

³³ Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 25a (in that context, the source beyond the river is identified as *Keter*), 75d, 76c; idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 1, Behuqotai, 46d-47a, Mas'ei, 93d; idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Shir ha-Shirim, 37c; idem, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5565*, vol. 1, 290; D.B. Schneerson, *Torat Hayyim: Shemot*, 279a, 281b; M.M. Schneerson, *Derekh Mitzwotekha*, 82b; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwawa'aduyyot 5720*, vol. 2, 3-4, 8-9; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 1, p. 253.

³⁴ Y.Y. Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5689*, 112.

which is the matter of nullification and acceptance of the yolk, then all the matters of worship are equaniminous.³⁵

In an important letter to David Ben Gurion, written on 8 Adar I 5719 (9 February 1959), the seventh Rebbe categorically rejected the idea of a 'secular Jew', since Jewish identity is intricately linked to the pneumatic connection of the Jew, regardless of his or her allegiance, to the divine essence. He acknowledges that there are righteous individuals amongst the nations of the world, but, as the nomenclature indicates, they are from the nations of the world and hence they cannot be on the same footing as Jews.³⁶

One should be struck straight away by a blatant contradiction: on the one hand, the intrinsic nature of the Jew, in contrast to the non-Jew, is tagged as the ability to be integrated in the essence, but, on the other hand, in that essence, opposites are no longer distinguishable, whence it should follow that the division between Jew and non-Jew should itself be subject to subversion. I shall return to this matter below, but suffice it here to note that even if it is acknowledged that the overcoming of difference is the purpose of the path, the path to get beyond the path is tendered as the unique responsibility of the people of Israel, since only they are thought to be conterminous with the divine, and hence only they are fully entrusted with the task of transmuting the animal craving for the pleasures of this world into the all-consuming hankering for and delight in God. The ideal of self-abnegation is customarily presented, therefore, as the mystical exegesis of the verse *ner yhw nishmat adam*, 'the human soul is the lamp of the Lord' (Prov. 20:27), which is applied specifically to Israel based on the older rabbinic idea that the word *adam*, in its most exacting sense, refers to the Jews and not to the nations of the world.³⁷ Just as it is the nature of the flame to illumine and to rise upward, so the desire of the soul of every Jew (even if a particular individual is unaware) is to ascend and to be conjoined to its source but also to augment the light in the world. Moreover, the term *adam* is related linguistically to the expression *eddammeh le-elyon* (Isa. 14:14), which denotes the correspondence between the human below and divine anthropos above.

³⁵ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 1, 298. See *idem*, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 22, 163.

³⁶ M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 18, # 6714, p. 211.

³⁷ Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 42–57, 73–124.

That this is restricted to the Jews is well attested in Habad sources.³⁸ To approach the seventh Rebbe's worldview unapologetically, this is the place where one must begin: of all ethnicities, the Jews alone are isomorphic with the essence, and thus they alone are capable of apprehending the imaginal body of God from their own embodied mindfulness.³⁹

Early on, Schneerson offered a strident expression of this belief: 'The Jewish man [*ish ha-yisra'eli*] is constituted by two lines [...] the natural qualities, too, are composed of good and evil, which is not the case with respect to the nations of the world, for they have no good at all'.⁴⁰ One might propose that such a rash formulation was reflective of youthful intemperance, but it must be remembered that the view expressed by the young man was not uniquely his own. Indeed, in the opening chapter of the first part of *Tanya*, we find the infamous distinction between the animal soul of the Jews and the animal soul of the idolatrous nations: the former derives from the shell of the radiance (*nogah*), which is from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, whereas the latter derives from the remaining three impure shells 'in which there is no good at all'.⁴¹ It is not only that the Jews alone possess a divine soul, but even their animal soul is unique and superior to other ethnic identities. To some extent, this view is modified by the Habad-Lubavitch masters in accord with the Hasidic teaching, which is, in some measure, anticipated in medieval kabbalistic lore, that there is no evil without an admixture of good, and hence the redemptive task is to ignite the spark of light encased in the shell of darkness in order to restore the darkness to the light. This task is portrayed by Schneerson with special reference to Esau or Edom, which, following a longstanding exegetical tradition, is a figurative trope for Christianity:

This is also the content of the work of Israel in this last exile, the exile of Edom, to purify also this evil of Esau (the father of Edom) until the time

³⁸ Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 69b, 76b; idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 1, Wayyiqra, 2c, 8b; Bemidbar, 81c; idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Devarim, 4b; idem, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen—5566*, vol. 1, 201; D.B. Schneerson, *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, 61d, 62b, 68b, 68d, 111d; M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 20, # 7450, p. 6; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 24, # 9170, p. 171; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwawa'aduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, 174.

³⁹ M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 4, #876, p. 134; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 22, # 8626, p. 448.

⁴⁰ M.M. Schneerson, *Reshimot*, vol. 4, sec. 132, p. 193.

⁴¹ Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, pt. 1, ch. 1, 6a.

of the end when the good hidden in him will be revealed [...] And by means of this Edom, too, is transformed into good—as the sages, blessed be their memory, said, ‘In the future, the pig will become pure’⁴² (which alludes to Edom, ‘the pig is Edom’),⁴³ to fulfill the promise ‘For the liberators shall march up on Mount Zion to wreak judgment on Mount Esau, and dominion shall belong to the Lord’ (Obad 1:21), quickly in our days in actuality.⁴⁴

I shall return below to the image of the kosher pig, as it were, and the apocalyptic theme of the othering of the non-Jew, the Jewish other, that it implies, but the crucial point to underscore here is that Schneerson, following the teaching of his predecessors, which can be traced to much older sources, accorded ontic singularity to the Jewish people. The rich tradition that informed his thinking notwithstanding, the specific exigencies of his moment cannot be denied. In the wake of the mass destruction of European Jews, and the relocation of many refugees to the liberal, democratic society of America, where the powerful forces of secularism and assimilation obviously posed a challenge to those who sought to protect and promulgate orthodoxy, the necessity to emphasize even more stridently the irreducible character of the Jew is surely understandable.⁴⁵ Claims to the superiority of the Jew in a post-Holocaust world might seem counter-historical, but their power derives precisely from this fact.

Schneerson never wavered from the conviction that the ‘soul of each and every one from Israel is a portion of the Creator and it is bound to him, and by means of this it possesses superior spiritual powers’.⁴⁶ The pietistic ideal of self-annihilation (*bittul atzmi*) rests on the consubstantiality of the Jewish soul and the essence.⁴⁷ The Jew, as it were, has what it takes to be nothing. The Torah, which in its full incarnation is given uniquely to Israel, is the intermediary bond through which the opposites, God and human, nature and what is beyond nature,

⁴² For analysis and reference to some of the relevant sources, see Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 239–240, 265. See also M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 12, 175–176; Kimelman, *Mystical Meaning*, 100, 123, 176.

⁴³ *Midrash Wayyiqra Rabbah* 13:5, p. 293. On the depiction of Esau as the pig, see Sh. Schneersohn, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu’el* 5639, vol. 1, 338; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyot* 5716, vol. 2, 243, 250.

⁴⁴ M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 35, 118.

⁴⁵ M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 9, # 2871, p. 247.

⁴⁶ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwva’aduyot* 5720, vol. 1, 397.

⁴⁷ M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 4, 1147.

coalesce in the sameness of their difference.⁴⁸ In Habad, accordingly, we have a mystical discipline predicated on a non-egocentricist philosophy that is at the same time culturally ethnocentric. One might have expected the two to have been coupled, such that the breeding of egocentricity on the psychological plane is the efficient cause that engenders the propagation of ethnocentricity on the anthropological. But it is also possible, as the example of Habad illustrates, to decouple the two.

The belief that every Jew bears this distinction is precisely what fueled Schneerson's ambition to spread orthodoxy to secular and estranged Jews. I see no evidence that the seventh Rebbe challenged the view of his predecessors, which restricted mystical gnosis to the Jews. It is true that Schneerson accepted the Maimonidean view that the future redemption entails the diffusion of the knowledge of God for Jews and non-Jews. But this does not efface the disparity. Indeed, an unbiased examination of the material indicates that precisely in contexts where Schneerson affirmed the eschatology of Maimonides, he was careful to emphasize as well the kabbalistic theme of Israel's meontological identity with God.⁴⁹ Even when Schneerson accepts Maimonides's view that the scriptural notion that Adam was created in God's image refers to the faculty of reason, which presumably should not be ethnically exclusive, he qualifies this (in a manner reminiscent of Judah Loewe of Prague, the Maharal)⁵⁰ by demarcating a difference between the rational soul of the Jews and the rational soul of the non-Jews: the former possess a divine soul and therefore their intellect is imbued with the possibility of becoming assimilated or incorporated into the divine through self-annihilation.⁵¹ What Jew and non-Jew share in common highlights the gap that separates them. Apologetic presentations of Schneerson's ideas notwithstanding, a critical assessment must begin from acknowledging the basic precept of Habad

⁴⁸ M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 4, # 1039, p. 316; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwawa'aduyyot 5711*, vol. 1, 290–291; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 3, 59–60.

⁴⁹ M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 23, 178–181.

⁵⁰ For discussion of the Maharal's view regarding the divine image, see Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 116–120, and reference to other scholars cited on p. 117 note 423. For a sustained discussion of the influence of this figure on East-European pietism, see Safran, 'Maharal and Early Hasidism', and reference to other scholars cited on p. 91 notes 1–4.

⁵¹ M.M. Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5737*, 273–274, and the Yiddish version in idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 15, 60–61.

religious philosophy regarding the unassimilable singularity of the Jews vis-à-vis other ethnicities.

4. MESSIANIC ANTHROPOS: BEYOND THEOPOETIC METAPHORICIZATION

One might contend that the seeds to undermine this perspective are found in Habad teaching as well, since the supernal consciousness is knowledge of the essence, which is characterized as the nondifferentiated light of the Infinite, the supernal light in which there is no longer any basis to distinguish light and darkness, Jacob and Esau, Jew and non-Jew. This state of indifference, however, is itself caught in the snare of ethnocentricity, and hence we would be more precise in rendering the Habad approach as thinking of the non-Jew, the other to the Jew, as still a Jewish other, the other that is other to the other, which is precisely what makes any semblance of identity possible. I make no effort to defend or rationalize this conception of alterity, but I would suggest that there is a principle at work here that may have a wider resonance and relevance.

Shneur Zalman ascribed this characteristic of the *coincidentia oppositorum* to the adamic nature that is linked distinctively to the Jews. Speaking about the forms of the chariot envisioned by Ezekiel, he noted that the face of the lion was to the right and the face of the ox to the left (Ezek. 1:10),

but in the aspect of the human there is no right or left, for it is their inner aspect that comprises them together, and therefore it is called *adam*, 'I will be likened to the most high' [*eddammeh le-elyon*], that is, to the aspect of the supernal Adam that is upon the throne, which is called the 'human of emanation' [*adam de-atzilut*].⁵²

The divine anthropos is identified specifically as the supernal prototype of the Jew, but the face of the human is said to be beyond duality—positioned neither to the right nor to the left because it comprises both left and right—and therefore the distinction between Jew and non-Jew must be surpassed in the discernment that the (non)Jew is the same to the other that is the same other.

⁵² Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen* 5566, vol. 2, 464.

As Shneur Zalman put it in another context,

It is written ‘upon the semblance of the throne, there was the semblance of the appearance of a human’ (Ezek. 1:26), ‘the appearance of a human’ [*ke-mar’eh adam*], through the register of the imagination [*be-kaf ha-dimyon*], for the way and order of the concatenation from world to world [...] is in the aspect of a human in three lines, the right and left hands, and the middle is the body [...] And by bearing the throne, the beasts bear the appearance of a human that is ‘upon it from above’ (Ezek. 1:26), to the aspect of ‘for he is not human’ [*ki lo adam hu*] (1 Sam. 15:29), above the aspect and category of the concatenation, to drawn down from there a new light to the aspect of the human that is upon the throne.⁵³

The enthroned anthropos envisioned by the prophet figuratively symbolizes the manifestation of the infinite light of the structure of the worlds, but the light itself is beyond that form, indeed, it is the meta/figure, the figure without figure, the ‘supernal anthropos’ (*adam ha-elyon*), the not-human (*lo adam*), which is ‘above the aspect of the anthropos’ (*lema’alah mi-behinat adam*).⁵⁴ The boundless light is connected as well with the zoharic depiction of *Attika Qaddisha*, the highest dimension of the Godhead, as lacking any left side,⁵⁵ that is, ‘there is no division of gradations at all and therefore there are no changes there at all. And this is what Samuel said to Saul, “The eternity of Israel does not deceive or have remorse” (1 Sam. 15:29)’.⁵⁶ It is important to heed the scriptural context: Samuel informs Saul that he cannot reclaim the monarchy from David, since the kingship of David, the promise of the messianic reign, derives from the aspect of the divine that is the ‘eternity of Israel’ (*netzah yisra’el*). With this

⁵³ Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 71b.

⁵⁴ Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma’amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5569*, 173. See also M.M. Schneersohn, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 1, 49; idem, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 2, 954.

⁵⁵ Shneur Zohar 3:129a (*Idra Rabba*). On occasion, the zoharic image of the one eye (ibid., 129b), is also used to convey the same idea of transcending binaries. See, for example, Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Re’eh, 24c; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluqat*, vol. 2, 407. For discussion of these themes, see Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 218–224.

⁵⁶ Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 72c. Compare idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 1, Bemidbar, 9c; idem, *Ma’amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5569*, 173. A critical passage that informed the Habad speculation on the supernal anthropos that is above anthropomorphic representation is Zohar 3:136b (*Idra Rabba*). In that context, 1 Sam. 9:29 is interpreted in the following way: the highest aspect of the Godhead, the ‘eternity of Israel’, is portrayed as a forehead without a full face, and hence the term *adam* is not ascribed to it. See Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Shir ha-Shirim, 23c.

we come to what might certainly appear to be a grave inconsistency in Habad thought. On the one hand, the light of the Infinite, which is called the 'not-human' (*lo adam*), is above the bifurcation of right and left⁵⁷—a point exemplified as well by the claim that there is no distinction between the masculine donor and the feminine recipient (*she-ein sham behinat hithallequt mashpi'a u-meqabbel kelal*), a concurrence that is acclaimed to exceed rational comprehension⁵⁸—but, on the other hand, it is only through the revelation of the Torah that there can be a disclosure of this light in the shape of the anthropos (*tziyyur adam*) that is unique to Israel, and, consequently, the attainment of the higher level in which the anthropomorphic depiction of the divine is surmounted is spearheaded solely by the Jewish people.⁵⁹

That this is the implication of the messianic awakening is proffered in a remarkable way in a comment of Dov Baer:

It is known that [the nature of] human [*adam*] [is linked to] 'I will be likened to the most high' [*eddammeh le-elyon*] (Isa. 14:14), and the very opposite of this will be in the Messiah, concerning whom it is written 'My servant will be enlightened' [*yaskil avdi*] (Isa. 52:13), and his root is in the essence of the light of the Infinite, the essential attributes above the aspect of the human, as its says 'very' [*me'od*] (Gen. 1:31). Nonetheless, it will be precisely in the aspect of the human, for presently the aspect of the human comes in the aspect of the delimited consciousness [*hagbalah de-mohin*] of *Abba* and *Imma* in *Ze'ir Anpin*, in a diminished state [*be-qatnut*], and *Arieh Anpin* is also in the aspect of constriction [*tzimtzum*] vis-à-vis the essence, but in the future-to-come, all the lights of the ten *sefirot*, which are verily in the essence, will appear in the aspect of the human that is without boundary at all, as it is written about him, '[You are] My son, I have fathered you this day' (Ps. 2:7), just as he is in the substance and the essence in actuality [*kemo she-hu be-mahut we-atzmut mammash*].⁶⁰

In the pre-messianic epoch, the divine light assumes the shape of an anthropos, buttressed by the alleged etymological derivation of *adam* from *eddammeh le-elyon*, a double-edge sword that cuts two ways—anthropomorphically, the quality of being human is to be assimilated within the essence beyond, though theomorphically, what is beyond

⁵⁷ Cf. M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 3, # 449.

⁵⁸ Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 71d.

⁵⁹ Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 71d, 72c, 77a; idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 1, Tazri'a, 21b, Bemidbar, 9c, Megillat Esther, 122a; D.B. Schneersohn, *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, 92b; idem, *Imrei Binah*, pt. 1, 83a; idem, *Sha'arei Or*, 95b.

⁶⁰ D.B. Schneersohn, *Ner Mitzvah we-Torah Or*, 106b.

essence is imagined in human terms. The imaginal bodies, in and through which the light is incarnate, are the configurations (*partzufim*) specified in some passages of the zoharic corpus and developed further in Lurianic kabbalah, the states of consciousness delineated as *Arikh Anpin*, *Abba*, *Imma*, *Ze'eir Anpin*, to which we should add *Nuqba*, the feminine counterpart, which for some reason is not specified here independently. In the diminished state—figuratively rendered as the exile of God, the exile of world, and the exile of human—the sefirotic light is fashioned in the imagination as an anthropos, in mythopoeic language that conjures the portrait of a divine family; in the messianic future, however, the light will appear in the ‘aspect of the human that is without boundary at all’ (*behinat adam she-hu beli gevul kelal*).

How are we to confabulate the form of a human without boundary? As expansive as one’s imagination might be, this can be imagined only as unimaginable, the figure of the metafigure, the infinite essence that is the non-human (*lo adam*).⁶¹ The excess of this lack is encoded in the word *me’od*, in the refrain at the conclusion of the sixth day of creation, ‘and it was very good,’ *we-hinneh tov me’od* (Gen. 1:31). From the fact that the word *me’od* has the same consonants as *adam*, we can deduce the principle of the double bind of the imagination: the possibility of expanding beyond the image of the human is communicated by the word that denotes the human image. Furthermore, we are told that the anthropos without dimensions, and, consequently, the representation that is incapable of representation, is linked to the Messiah, whose root is in the ‘essence of the light of the Infinite’, which comprises the ‘essential attributes above the aspect of the human’ (*middot ha-atzmiyyim she-lema’alah mi-behinat adam*).⁶² Schneerson extended this insight by noting that the rabbinic insistence that the Jews alone are called *adam* implies that they ‘are like one human that is above division [*lema’alah mi-hithallequt*] [...] Therefore, their amalgamation [*hitkallelut*] is in a manner such that you do not find in them a beginning and an end’.⁶³ There is a complete homology,

⁶¹ D.B. Schneersohn, *Sha’arei Teshuvah*, 42a; idem, *Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or*, 122b.

⁶² D.B. Schneersohn, *Sha’arei Teshuvah*, 104d.

⁶³ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Meluqat*, vol. 2, 212–213. For an alternative transcription, see idem *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 30, 218–219. See also idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 4, 1140–1143. The description of the unity of the body politic of Israel as having no head or end, and this comparable to a circle, is found in earlier Habad sources. For example, see Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Netzavim, 44a.

then, between the essence, the Messiah, and the Jewish polity: just as the essence is devoid of essence, so the messianic constellation of Israel is above visual and verbal anthropomorphization. In the distended consciousness, we journey beyond the desire to imagine the divine as human, since the human is thought to be divine, at the margin of what it is to be human, the figure of the savior, and hence the need to specularize that human through the culturally-specific prism of Israel is called into question, even though we must candidly admit that the masters of Habad-Lubavitch have consistently maintained that only the soul-root of the Jew is in this facet of the divine that is the not-human.⁶⁴ As Schneerson put it, commenting on the eighteenth chapter of Yosef Yitzhaq's *Ba'ti le-Ganni* in a talk delivered on 11 Shevat 5748 (30 January 1988),⁶⁵ the aspect that is called *Attiq* is separate from the image of an anthropos—indeed the term itself denotes removal—but it is still linked to the aspect of the anthropos.⁶⁶ On the ladder of the contemplative ascent, it is necessary to ascend from *Malkhut* to *Ze'eir Anpin*, and from *Ze'eir Anpin* to *Keter*, and from *Keter* to *Attiq*, and from *Attiq* to the facet of the Godhead that completely transcends the emanation, 'since in the aspect of "for he is not human" as well there is the matter of form' (*ki gam bi-vehinat ki lo adam hi yeshno inyan shel tziyyur*).⁶⁷ The eschaton is marked by the disclosure of the concealment that is beyond figurative symbolization, the essence of the Infinite, the utter transcendence that is so entirely removed that it is removed from the very notion of removal, insofar as removal itself implies something from which to be removed, but the way to this anthropomorphic and theomorphic disfiguration—the human that is not-human and therefore the God that is not-God—is through the configuration of the divine anthropos that is limited to Israel. It is in this sense that the Torah is considered the intermediary that connects the emanation and that which is above the emanation (*memutz'a bein lema'alah me-atzilut we-atzilut*).⁶⁸

⁶⁴ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 2, 317–318, 410. The Rebbe's remarks are part of his commentary on the eighteenth chapter of the Friederker Rebbe's *Ba'ti le-Ganni* discourse (see following note) delivered in 1968 and 1988. See also M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5715*, vol. 2, 98, 148, 172.

⁶⁵ Y.Y. Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5710–5711*, pt. 1, pp. 153–154.

⁶⁶ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 2, 407.

⁶⁷ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5713*, vol. 2, 203.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* See *idem*, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5715*, vol. 2, 173–174.

According to Shalom Dovber, the future vision is a 'seeing of the substance itself', which is distinguished from ordinary prophetic vision, insofar as the latter is mediated through the anthropomorphic image.⁶⁹ Emulating Moses, the enlightened mind beholds the substance as it is in its insubstantiality; in this beholding, one attains the aim of knowledge, which is to know that one does not know. In the end, as many mystic visionaries have ascertained, to see the light is to see the darkness, to comprehend that in the supernal light (*or elyon*) the two are indistinguishable,⁷⁰ a vision that cannot be seen but in the seeing of its (un)seeing. As Shneur Zalman put it,

That which is revealed is called 'light' and that which is above disclosure is called 'darkness'. Accordingly, whatever is in the higher level is referred to in relation to us as darkness, but from above to below, it is the opposite, for regarding what is more revealed, the comprehension is more in the category of darkness vis-à-vis the light of the Infinite, blessed be he, in his essence and his glory, as it is written in the *Zohar* with regard to the supernal crown (*keter elyon*),⁷¹ 'Even though it is the resplendent light and the radiant light, it is black vis-à-vis the Cause of Causes', and everything is darkened before him.⁷²

Referring to same zoharic passage, the seventh Rebbe commented, 'So it is with respect to the higher gradations, the closer that one approaches the aspect of the infinite essence [*atzmut ein sof*], the more it is itself in the aspect of the nullification of existence [*behinat*

⁶⁹ Sh. D. Schneersohn, *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah* 5666, 98–99. It is also of interest here to note the contrast made between the revelation at Sinai and that of Purim in Sh. Schneersohn, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu'el* 5639, vol. 1, 338: in the case of the former, the epiphany was (in language derived from Ezek 1:26) from the perspective of the 'human appearance' (*ke-mar'eh adam*), whereas in the case of the latter, the increase in the degree of self-denial occasioned an emanation above the anthropomorphic mold, which is the metaphorical depiction of the divine in the image of the gazelle (based on Song of Songs 2:9). The intent of this observation can be elicited from the concluding statement in which the talmudic dictum 'Be swift as the gazelle, and be courageous as a lion, to fulfill the will of your father in heaven' (Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim 112a) is cited, that is, the imaginary representation of the divine as a gazelle is proportionate to the one who acts like a gazelle in being swift to carry out God's will.

⁷⁰ M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 4, 1143; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot* 5714, vol. 1, 152; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot* 5711, vol. 1, 24.

⁷¹ *Tiqqunei Zohar*, ed. Margaliot, sec. 70, 135b. I have translated the text as it appears in the work of Shneur Zalman (see following note), even though some words from the original were left out.

⁷² Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Shir ha-Shirim, 4c–d.

bittul ha-metzi'ut] and in the aspect of darkness [*behinat hoshekh*].⁷³ To attain this apophysis, the mind must venture past all that is implied in the motto repeatedly invoked by the seven Habad masters, *adam eddammeh le-elyon*, that is, one must traverse the threshold of theism itself. The biblical phrase, accordingly, assumes a different meaning: for the archetypal 'human' (*adam*) to become like the 'supernal one' (*elyon*), it is necessary that one become not-human (*lo adam*) through the eradication of one's will.⁷⁴ The quietistic divestiture of self by which the human becomes divine corresponds to ridding the imagination of images that configure the divine as human. This is the intent of the ideal vision of the essence without any garment: to see with no veil is to see that there is no seeing without a veil, but in this seeing, the mind lets go of the fanciful urge to posit a face beyond the veil.

Redemption is characterized, accordingly, as the collapse of antinomies, conveyed in the Habad lexicon as *zeh le'umat zeh*, 'this corresponding to this'. Needless to say, the collapse of binaries would include the blurring of the discord between Israel and the nations. When thought of geopolitically, the ramifications of the coming of the Messiah would have to extend to all nations, a point that is regularly supported by reference to the verse 'Strangers shall stand and pasture your flocks, aliens shall be your plowmen and vine-trimmers' (Isa. 61:5). Since this boundary will be blurred, the Jews will be able to discourse openly about the wisdom of Torah, fulfilling the prophecy 'For the land shall be filled with devotion to the Lord, as the water covers the sea' (Isa. 11:9).⁷⁵ Schneerson's view, as he explicitly notes, is based on the opinion of Maimonides that the sages and prophets have not desired the days of Messiah for any material or political power, but only so that 'they would be free [to study] Torah and its wisdom', and on account of which 'they would merit the life of the world to come'.⁷⁶ Schneerson also follows the surmise of Maimonides that at that time there will be peace amongst the nations and 'the occupation of the whole world will be solely to know the Lord, and, therefore, Israel

⁷³ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5718*, vol. 1, 163. See idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 1, 191.

⁷⁴ Sh. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu'el 5632*, vol. 2, 395, 402; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5715*, vol. 2, 176–177.

⁷⁵ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5720*, vol. 1, 195.

⁷⁶ Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim 12:4.

[will consist of] great sages, who know the concealed matters and who comprehend the knowledge of their Creator in accordance with human potential'.⁷⁷ Moreover, in line with the apophatic approach of Maimonides, the Habad interpretation of this wisdom, as we have seen, implies that the objective of Jewish monotheism is to divest the mind of the theo-poetic temptation to portray God anthropomorphically and anthropopathically.⁷⁸ However, at play as well is the kabbalistic depiction of the Infinite as the coincidence of opposites, an idea that goes considerably beyond the perspective of the medieval sage, especially in the challenge it presents to the axiological dualism, which justifies and sustains the socio-political reality of the Jews as an autonomous community. Indeed, Maimonides is on record as affirming that in the messianic age nothing of the natural order will be obliterated.⁷⁹ It is reasonable to presume that this applies to the law of non-contradiction, for the very concept of nature accepted by Maimonides would not be intelligible unless we presume this principle. I see no reason to suppose that Maimonides thought this law would be abrogated in the future.

In Habad eschatology, this law is surpassed in the identification of opposites, to the point that we can no longer differentiate between good and evil. The ideal is encapsulated in the rabbinic designation of the future as a 'world that is entirely good' (*olam she-kullo tov*)⁸⁰—'goodness' is no longer a correlative term, as it has incorporated evil within itself. The view of the previous Habad masters regarding the dissemination of the secrets of Torah in messianic times is thus paired by Schneerson with the Maimonidean opinion that knowledge of God

⁷⁷ Ibid., 12:5. See M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 23, 174–175. The language of Maimonides was cited on a number of occasions in Schneerson's writings and discourses. See, for instance, M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 17, # 6211, p. 66; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwawa'aduyot 5711*, vol. 1, 341.

⁷⁸ Wolfson, 'Via Negativa in Maimonides', 371–373.

⁷⁹ Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim, 12:1. See also idem, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II.28, p. 335, 29, p. 345. Note as well I.32, p. 70, where Maimonides (citing Isa. 5:20) considers the confusion of opposites to be a 'deficiency and defective' in the Law. Such a confusion is precisely what the Habad masters envision as indicative of the final redemption. See also *ibid.*, I.52, p. 114, where Maimonides writes of the imagination's faulty desire to establish a means to connect contraries, which should remain separate. On the delineation of the nature of governance as the division of light and darkness, see *ibid.*, II.6, p. 261.

⁸⁰ Palestinian Talmud, Hagigah 2:1, 77b; Babylonian Talmud, Qiddushin 39b, Hullin 142a.

will fill the land, yielding the claim that Jews will be able to discuss the mysteries publicly, presumably even before non-Jews. Not only is the broadcasting of the esoteric seen as a propadeutic to accelerate the redemption, but the latter is depicted as the wholesale dispersion of the mysteries of the Torah, a breaking of the seal of esotericism. But, it is precisely with respect to the explicit claims regarding the disclosure of secrets that the scholar must be wary of being swayed by a literalist approach that would take the Rebbe at his word. There is no suggestion of willful deceit on the part of Schneerson, of an intention to falsify, but there is an appeal to the wisdom of the tradition regarding the duplicity of secrecy: the secret will no longer be secret if and when the secret will be exposed to have been nothing more than the secret that there is a secret. To discover the secret that there is no secret is the ultimate secret that one can neither divulge nor withhold.

5. BLESSED MORDECAI AND CURSED HAMAN: MYSTICAL TRANSVALUATION OF TRADITION

As it happens, that possibility looms most conspicuously at the precipice to which the pietistic path leads, the ideal of equanimity wherein the dissonance between good and evil is defused. The collusion of opposites patently presents a theoretical challenge, since the overcoming of binaries in the Infinite would belie the rigid dualism separating Jew and non-Jew that is presupposed by the halakhic worldview. An interesting passage that indicates the sensitivity to this issue is found in Dov Baer's *Sha'arei Orah*:

The joy of Purim is above the concatenation and this is the matter of 'until one does not know'⁸¹ [...] the intention is not that there is equanimity [*hishtawwut*], God forbid, for Haman is forever cursed and Mordecai the Jew blessed, but the principle of the matter in the gradation that is above the concatenation is in the pattern of the gradation that is above wherein the darkness is like the light.⁸²

The festival of Purim is distinguished from other holidays, insofar as the joy commensurate to it relates symbolically to that which is beyond all differentiation and particularity, a level of attainment that is

⁸¹ Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 7b.

⁸² D.B. Schneerson, *Sha'arei Orah*, 144b.

captured in the talmudic dictum that one must drink enough wine on Purim to the point that it is no longer possible to distinguish between ‘cursed Haman’ and ‘blessed Mordecai’, expressions that are numerically equivalent. Dov Baer recoils, however, at the categorical effacing of boundaries implied by this tradition and thus he emphasizes that equanimity, the indifference that is the defeat of all difference, is not the intention of the ritual practice ordained by the rabbinic authorities. As he emphasizes elsewhere,⁸³ the root of the Jew is ‘from the perspective of the essence of the Infinite in actuality’, but the root of the idolatrous nations is ‘from the first contraction [*ha-tzimtzum ha-ri’shon*], which is after the withdrawal of the light, and it is comprised in the luminosity that is called the vacant place [*maqom panuy*], as this is the source for the root of the aspect of separation and division’. The possibility of messianic rectification for the non-Jews in the end is secured by the fact that a trace (*reshimu*) of the light remained concealed in that space in the beginning. In the future, souls of the non-Jews will be restored to the vacant place, which is the void (*tohu*) and the emptiness (*efes*). This is the esoteric meaning of the verse ‘All of the nations are as naught [*ke-ayin*] in relation to him, he considers them as if they were from the void and the nothing [*me-efes wa-tohu*’ (Isa. 40:17). Here philological attunement is critical: the very same words used to designate the essence that is prior to the withdrawal are used to designate the vacuum that arises as a consequence of the withdrawal. Dov Baer, however, is careful to distinguish the two: the former is the ‘true divine nothing’ (*ayin ha-elohi ha-amitti*), which is the ‘source of everything’ (*meqora de-khola*), the ‘true being’ (*yesh ha-amitti*), whereas the latter is the ‘actual nothing’ (*ayin mammash*), which appears ‘as if it were not in existence at all’ (*ke-illu eino bi-metzi’ut kelal*). While this distinction may seem pedantic, it is the basis for upholding the rabbinic claim that the term *adam* applies exceptionally to Israel, a philological point that, as we have seen, exerted a profound influence on kabbalistic anthropology. The non-Jew, even when purified, can only reach the level of incorporation into the externality of the human form (*hitkallelut de-adam be-hitsoniyyut*), which is associated with Elohim, the attribute of judgment, but not the interior aspect (*behinah penimit*), signified by YHWH, the attribute of mercy, since they were separated

⁸³ D.B. Schneerson, *Torat Hayyim: Bere’shit*, 76b–c.

from the 'essential unity' at the time of the first contraction and they derive from the void that is 'considered as if it were not in actuality' (*she-ke-lo mammash hashiv*), the negative that dissimulates as the negative, which is to be distinguished from the prerogative of the Jew to affirm the negative in its fecund positivity. This is the kabbalistic intent of the rabbinic teaching that the term *adam* applies most properly to the Jews and not to the idolatrous nations.

Something of the initial break—the inaugural division within the indivisible, which engenders the beginning that conceals the origin—cannot be rectified. And hence, even though the future is described as a time when all of the holy sparks will be liberated from the demonic shells and evil will be annihilated from the world, an element of contrariness will endure: Haman, who is from the seed of Amaleq, will always be cursed and Mordecai the Jew will always be blessed. What, then, does the numerical equivalence of the two expressions convey? In the essence above the concatenation of worlds, and this includes the first act of contraction, opposites are truly identical—darkness is indistinguishable from the light that is luminous to the extent that it is dark, which is to say, the light that is neither luminous nor dark. However, in the mind of the Mittlerer Rebbe, and this should not be viewed as idiosyncratic, the possibility of attaining this gradation is assigned uniquely to the Jewish people. As conceptually difficult and spiritually limiting as this may sound, we must accept that the mystical logic advanced by Habad allows us to speak of a *universal singularity* only if we are willing to admit that the universal, which entails the effacing of boundaries, is the specific dispensation of one ethnic faction.

The messianic task of the Jew, then, would be to sponsor the truth that Jew and non-Jew are identical in virtue of being different. In a manner that is resonant with Levinas, ethnocentrism is the condition that secures the viability of a genuine alterity, since the notion of an 'absolutely universal', the principle that grounds the sense of respect for and responsibility toward the irreducible other, 'can be served only through the particularity of each people'.⁸⁴ Simply put, otherness is what makes the other the same; what I share with the other is that we are different. An obvious point of divergence between the approach of Habad and that of Levinas would turn on the question of ontology. Although Levinas was conversant with at least some kabbalistic

⁸⁴ Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 136.

sources that demonstrate affinity with the hasidic orientation, including, ironically enough, the *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* of the Lithuanian opponent to East-European Hasidism, Hayyim of Volozhyn,⁸⁵ he squarely rejected the ontologizing of Israel's election, which renders the distinctiveness of the Jews a matter of inborn nature.⁸⁶ On Levinasian grounds, chosenness is a function of acting, not a condition of being; for the Habad masters, by contrast, Israel's election is a feature of the inherent disposition of what is, and thus ethics cannot be severed from ontology. We can propose a coincidence of opposites in the absence of opposites to coincide, but this only reinforces the othering of the other. When there is no other, the other persists as not (an)other, and therefore it is not sufficient to envision a unity in which there is neither one nor the other.

The point is illustrated convincingly from another passage from Dov Baer. In discussing the nature of the future, he observes that many of the critical verses that speak of the eschatological vision (Isa. 2:2, 11:9, 40:5; Zeph. 3:9) imply that the nations of the world are included. The seventy nations, or more specifically, the seventy archons attached to them, correspond to the seventy powers on the side of holiness, which are connected as well to the number of persons that were Jacob's issue (Ex. 1:5). As a consequence of the obliteration of evil, the seventy forces will be elevated to their source, the seven supernal attributes from *Hesed* to *Malkhut*, and the corresponding seven kings of the world of chaos (or the seven primordial kings of Edom) that fell in the breaking of the vessels will be rectified, an idea that is linked

⁸⁵ From a conceptual standpoint, there are many affinities between the Habad teaching initiated by Shneur Zalman of Liadi and the speculative kabbalah that can be traced to Elijah ben Solomon, the Gaon of Vilna. Obviously, I cannot engage this topic here, but consider, for example, the discussion of the passage in Hayyim of Volozhyn's *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* in Wolfson, 'Secrecy, Modesty, and the Feminine', 213–216. A careful glance at that discussion leads us to conclude that the characteristic doctrine of Habad, which I have termed apophatic embodiment, is affirmed by Hayyim of Volozhyn. I hope to dedicate a separate study of this phenomenon in the kabbalistic ruminations attributed to the Vilna Gaon and his school. An interesting later repercussion of this intellectual crisscrossing is the reference to Shneur Zalman's notion of infinity and the contraction of the divine in the essay *Halakhic Man* by Joseph B. Soloveitchik, a descendant of Hayyim of Volozhyn. See Schwartz, *Religion or Halakha*, 168, 178–183. It should also be noted that Soloveitchik studied as a child with the Habad teacher Baruch Rizberg. See *ibid.*, 182 note 89. On the controversial question of Soloveitchik's relationship to Schneerson in Berlin and later in New York, see Deutsch, *Larger Than Life*, 71–73, 113–119, 279, 282, 289.

⁸⁶ Wolfson, 'Secrecy, Modesty, and the Feminine', 198–200.

orthographically to the suspended *ayin* in the last word of the expression *yekharsemennah hazir mi-ya'ar*, 'the pig of the wild will gnaw at it' (Ps. 80:14),⁸⁷ the letter, incidentally, that marks the middle of this biblical book.⁸⁸ In some contexts, Dov Baer seems to posit a view similar to his father, the Alter Rebbe, and thus he characterizes the future as the unconditional destruction of every source of unholiness and the uncompromising purification of evil. The total transformation of darkness into light is the condition that fosters the indiscriminate manifestation of the divine presence to all flesh, Jews and non-Jews alike.⁸⁹ Occasionally, however, he insists otherwise. In one passage, for instance, he declares that

there will still be a great variance between Israel and the nations of the world, for with regard to Israel it is said 'you, O Lord, will be seen in plain sight' (Num. 14:14) [...] for the Jews will see with their eyes [*ayin be-ayin*] the essence of the light of the Infinite, blessed be he, in actuality, without any garment of concealment at all, but rather as it is above in actuality, it will come to them in the disclosure below. Therefore, the worship of Israel then will be in the aspect of the enlarged consciousness [*mohin de-gadlut*], insofar as they will be sustained from the splendor of the essence of the light of the Infinite in actuality, as their contemplation will be of the essence in actuality, which is above the concatenation of transcendence and immanence.⁹⁰

What is given with one hand is taken away with the other, or, to be even more precise, the hand that gives is the hand that takes away: the Jew alone is capable of contemplating the essence within which the dissimilarity between Jew and non-Jew is transcended. The identity of difference is apperceived through the speculum of the difference of identity. Incongruous as it may seem, the ultimate vision casts a spotlight on the blindspot in the system. By the dint of its own paradoxical logic, the attempts to avoid saying that the disproportion between the

⁸⁷ Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Devarim, 30b–31a; D.B. Schneerson, *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, 74a; idem, *Imrei Binah*, pt. 1, 17c; idem, *Torat Hayyim: Bere'shit*, 196a; idem, *Perush ha-Millot*, 95b; M.M. Schneerson, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 1, 20; idem, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 2, p. 393; Sh. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu'el* 5632, vol. 1, 263; idem, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu'el* 5632, vol. 2, 545; idem, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu'el* 5639, vol. 1, 259, 307, 310; Sh. D. Schneerson, *Be-Sha'ah she-Hiqdimu* 5672, 1:376; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot* 5716, vol. 2, 243, 250.

⁸⁸ Babylonian Talmud, Qiddushin 30a.

⁸⁹ D.B. Schneerson, *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, 74a.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 142d.

other nations and Israel is completely redressed are not viable. It is true that the messianic politics are such that the ideal anthropos, the messianic figure, is a third term between the Jew and the non-Jew, both and thus neither Jew nor non-Jew, but with regard to the relationship of Jew and non-Jew, we must continue to say that the one, as the other, is not other in virtue of being other.

6. BEYOND THE RIVER: TRANSCENDENCE AND THE SINGULAR UNIVERSAL

Much evidence can be adduced from the writings and discourses of the seventh Rebbe that indicates his commitment to this conception of alterity. Like his predecessors, he ascribed to the Jews a unique role in the messianic mission to redeem the world, often expressed in the traditional liturgical idiom, ‘to rectify the world in the kingdom of the Almighty’ (*letaqqen olam be-malkhut shaddai*),⁹¹ and thus he, too, imagined an endtime in which the chasm separating Jew and non-Jew would be appreciably narrowed.⁹² It is particularly the proliferation of the study of the interiority of the Torah on the part of the Jews—to the point that there will not remain even one Jew who is not conversant with the teaching of Hasidism—that facilitates the eschatological change in the status of the non-Jew.⁹³ The cosmological underpinning of the apocalyptic sensibility is clear enough: the world is a ‘unified reality’, since it was created by a ‘singular and united’ God, and therefore ‘all human beings and all the things in the world are bound to each other’.⁹⁴ Schneerson was, no doubt, influenced by (and on occasion even directly cites)⁹⁵ the words of Maimonides from the uncensored version in the section on the laws of kingship toward the end of his halakhic code. According to this text, Jesus and Muhammad are described as being entrusted with the task of ‘paving the way for the messianic king, to prepare the world in its entirety to worship the Lord

⁹¹ The line appears in the second stanza of the traditional *Aleinu* prayer; see *Seder Avodat Yisra'el*, 132.

⁹² M.M. Schneerson, *Iggeret Qodesh*, vol. 14, # 5093, p. 323; idem, *Iggeret Qodesh*, vol. 23, 175; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5717*, vol. 1, 51, 251–252.

⁹³ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5715*, vol. 1, 136; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5716*, vol. 3, 105.

⁹⁴ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5712*, vol. 1, 163.

⁹⁵ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5711*, vol. 1, 155.

together, as it says, “For then I will make the nations pure of speech” (Zeph. 3:9).⁹⁶ This biblical verse is invoked by Schneerson to mark the disruption of the partition that separates the Jew and non-Jew; in the future, all the nations, even the sparks that are presently submerged in the depths of darkness, shall be restored to the light of holiness. I do not think that Schneerson’s perspective accords with the more radical interpretation of Zeph. 3:9, attributed to R. Joseph (explicating the position of R. Eliezer) in the Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 24a, to the effect that all the nations will become proselytes in the future to come. On balance, the position of Schneerson, following Maimonides, accords with the view of Abbaye that the verse only implies that the nations will turn away from idolatry.⁹⁷ Departing from Maimonides, however, the Habad approach privileges Judaism as the agent to purify the other two Abrahamic faiths, the attribute of judgment associated with Edom (Christianity) and the attribute of mercy associated with Ishmael (Islam).⁹⁸ Be that as it may, if we take seriously Schneerson’s insistence that the one that is truly pious (*hasid amitti*) has no concern for boundaries,⁹⁹ it follows that the spiritual ideal would necessarily entail venturing beyond the discordant demarcations of the law. As he put it in a talk from 12 Tammuz 5713 (25 June 1953),

Since the root of the disclosure of the Messiah is from the aspect that is above boundary, it follows that the emanation below in the world will also be in the manner of unity and the lack of division—and thus the action of the Messiah will be in the manner of rectifying the world completely to worship the Lord together, as it says ‘For then I will make the nations pure of speech, so that they all invoke the Lord by name and serve him with one accord’ (Zeph. 3:9), and as it says ‘And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord with one name’ (Zech. 14:9).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ The text of Maimonides is from the uncensored version of the *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim, 11:4.

⁹⁷ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5712*, vol. 1, 170, 208; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5714*, vol. 1, 148. See, however, the reference to R. Nissim of Gerona’s interpretation added to Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 23, 179 n. 76, and the explication in Ginsburgh, *Kabbalah and Meditation*, pp. 86–87, 95–96 note 80. I thank Jody Myers for reminding me of the reference in Ginsburgh.

⁹⁸ D.B. Schneersohn, *Derushei Hatunah*, vol. 2, 547.

⁹⁹ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5751*, vol. 3, 405.

¹⁰⁰ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot 5713*, vol. 3, 56. The Rebbe’s comments are an explication of a distinction made by the RaShaB (*Sefer ha-Ma’amarim* 5669, 39) between Moses and the Messiah: in the case of the former, the encompassing light (*or maqqif*) shines within the internal light (*or penimi*) by constricting its

I spoke a moment ago of disruption of the partition and not its dismantling, for, as I have already made clear, Schneerson did not abandon entirely the ethnocentrism of his predecessors. It would be intellectually misleading to say that his teachings are exempt from the prejudicial ontology of the kabbalistic tradition or that he was unaware of the potentially subversive repercussions of the messianic characterization of the infinite essence. I noted above that the special connection of the Jew to that essence is linked etymologically to the title *ivri*, which denotes the one who dwells on the other shore, the shore beyond the river. But if that shore is a metaphor for the division beyond divisions—the shore, that is, that is without a shoreline—then it must be the source of both Jewish and non-Jewish souls. The point was made by Schneerson, commenting on Josh. 24:2 (or, more accurately, on the section of the traditional Passover Haggadah in which this verse is cited) from a talk delivered the second night of Passover, 16 Nisan 5720 (12 April 1960):

The matter of the river is what is written ‘And the river goes forth from Eden to water the garden’ (Gen. 2:10), for Eden is the aspect of *Hokhmah*, and the river is the aspect of *Binah*, and this is the matter of *Mahashavah*, for just as the waters of the river never cease, so thought does not stop and it flows perpetually. However, the root of the souls are above the aspect of *Mahashavah*, and this is what is written ‘your forefathers lived beyond the river’, that is, above the aspect of the river. And this is also the explanation of the saying that ‘Israel arose in thought’,¹⁰¹ ‘arose’ precisely, for they are in the highest aspect of thought. This is also what is written in the *Zohar* on the verse ‘On the day of the first fruits’ (Num. 28:26), for of all the nations of the world, Israel were the most ancient and the first fruits of the blessed holy One,¹⁰² and the meaning of ‘ancient’ [*qadmonim*] is that their source is in the primeval thought of the Primordial Anthropos [*mahashavah ha-qedumah de-adam qadmon*]. Indeed, the dictum of the Maggid¹⁰³ that the primeval thought of the

essence, whereas in the case of the latter, there is a conjunction (*hithabberut*) of the two lights to the point that they are completely identical, and thus the encompassing light is revealed in the internal light in its essence without any constriction (*tzimtzum*) or attire (*hitlabbeshut*).

¹⁰¹ *Midrash Bere'shit Rabba*, 1:4, p. 6. Compare Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, pt. 1, ch. 2, 6a: “The souls of Israel arose in thought, as it is written “My firstborn son is Israel” (Ex. 4:22), “You are children unto the Lord your God” (Deut. 14:1), that is, just as the child derives from the brain of the father, so, as it were, does the soul of each and every Jew derive from his thought and his wisdom, may he be blessed’.

¹⁰² *Zohar* 3:253a (*Ra'aya Meheimna*).

¹⁰³ See M.M. Schneerson, *Derekh Mitzwotekha*, 58b; idem, *Or ha-Torah: Ma'amerei Razal we-Inyanim*, 84.

Primordial Anthropos is the aspect of the universal light (the universal crown) that comprises all of the concatenation equanimously [*or kelali (keter kelali) ha-kolelet kol ha-hishtalshelut be-hashwwa'ah ahat*] is well known. It follows that there is also the place for the nations of the world,¹⁰⁴ and hence it says that [the Jews] were in the aspect of first fruits, for in the Primordial Anthropos, they were in the highest aspect, in the aspect of the interiority of the Primordial Anthropos. And even higher, the source of the souls is in the aspect of the letters that are in the essence of the light of the Infinite before the withdrawal, according to the saying¹⁰⁵ 'he engraved engravings in the supernal luster'.¹⁰⁶

Contextually, the biblical description of the forefathers of Israel having resided 'beyond the river' refers to the Euphrates, but it is interpreted mystically as an allusion to the innermost essence, the alterity of alterity, one might say, the other par excellence, the other above any and every specification and therefore other vis-à-vis its own otherness. Since this essence is, according to the locution transmitted in the name of the Maggid of Mezeritch, the 'universal light' that contains the multiplicity of differentiated beings in a nondifferentiated manner, it must be the source of both Jew and non-Jew. The paradoxical truth may be elicited from the fact that, on the one hand, it is Terah, Abraham's non-Hebrew father, who occupied the position beyond the river, and yet, on the other hand, being so positioned is proffered as the distinctive quality of the Hebrew. The non-Jew inhabits the place reserved for the Jew.¹⁰⁷ Dialogically, the other to the other secures the irreducibility of the other. The essence, therefore, is demarcated as the 'impossibility of impossibilities' (*nimna ha-nimna'ot*), since it bears opposites (*nose hafakhim*) in a manner that defies the logic of non-contradiction.¹⁰⁸ Schneerson stays faithful to the teaching of the prior masters, however, going back to the Alter Rebbe, by insisting that even in this indis-

¹⁰⁴ See, however, M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5711*, vol. 1, 231–233, where the aspect of transcendence, the shore beyond the river, is described as the source of the types of the Jewish souls, the souls of the world of emanation and the souls of the worlds of creation, formation, and doing. On the basis of Jer 31:26, the former are called the 'seed of the human' (*zera adam*) and the latter, the 'seed of the beast' (*zera behemah*). Moses, who is in the aspect of the supernal knowledge (*da'at elyon*), is entrusted with the task of imparting knowledge to the latter so that they may be transformed into the former. Compare idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5714*, vol. 2, 82.

¹⁰⁵ Zohar 1:15a.

¹⁰⁶ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5720*, vol. 2, 3–4.

¹⁰⁷ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 1, 253.

¹⁰⁸ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5720*, vol. 2, 9.

criminate essence a discrimination can and must be made between Jew and non-Jew: the ontological root for the soul of Israel is located in the highest aspect of the essence, which is designated as the 'primeval thought of the Primordial Anthropos' and as the 'letters that are in the essence of the light of the Infinite'.

As contradictory and inscrutable as this may seem, the path of Habad leads us notionally to posit that in the place of indifference, where opposites collide, a difference can still be made, a difference within the indifference, the paradox conveyed by the arresting image of letters in the infinite essence.¹⁰⁹ Israel is distinguished to the extent that it is rooted in the primeval thought, indeed, identical with the primordial Torah, which is the light of the Infinite. The Jew, in other words, is the sign of difference within indifference, the consummate mark of the other, the other to the other, the singular universal. The 'spiritual vocation' of the Jew is not in principle open to all, as it has been recently argued, and even the phenomenon of conversion, which ostensibly challenges this assumption, or at the very least mitigates against a simplistic biological explanation for the inequity of Jew and non-Jew,¹¹⁰ is possible because of the ontological difference. Conversion is an important trope to articulate a critical aspect of the ecstatic experience. I do not think, however, that it alleviates the inequity between the somatic and pneumatic conditions of the Jew and non-Jew. Such a claim would fail to take into account either the mechanics

¹⁰⁹ Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 1, Hosafot, 53d.

¹¹⁰ Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 263 note 31. The author asserts that the claim of Dov Baer, and other 'mystics within the Jewish tradition', that the 'divine soul is specific to Israel [...] cannot be rooted in a biological or vitalistic orientation since one can convert to Judaism [...] Rather, it concerns a spiritual vocation (which in principle must be open to all), one in which the Jewish person takes on the given, awe-filled responsibility, expressed by the covenant, for the return of all God's people to him and establishing God's exiled presence in human history'. The claim that the spiritual vocation assigned to Israel is open to all is an apologetic statement that is contradicted by countless texts, and the appeal to conversion to substantiate the point reflects a failure to understand the dynamics of this phenomenon according to the kabbalistic interpretation adopted by the Mitteler Rebbe and other Lubavitch masters. I will cite one passage from *Quntres ha-Hitpa'alut*, in *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Emtza'i: Quntresim*, 139–140, which demonstrates that the inaccuracy of Steinbock's surmise: 'However, there is something akin to an actual nature in everyone from Israel also in his [task to fulfill] "Shun evil and do good" (Ps. 34:15) in actuality, precisely from the perspective of the root of his divine soul, which is the natural and essential aspect, and not from the perspective of his choice or his worship at all'. From this we may conclude that the distinctiveness of the Jew's calling is determined primarily on the basis of ontology and not on behavior or functionality.

of conversion or the understanding of embodiment as they are understood generally in kabbalistic sources and particularly in the thought of the Mittlerer Rebbe and the other Habad masters. As I have discussed at great length elsewhere,¹¹¹ the conception of body affirmed in Lubavitch thought is semiotic and not anatomic. If we understand embodiment in this hyperlinguistic sense, then it is accurate to inscribe the distinction between Jew and non-Jew physiologically. Concerning the former, it can be said briefly that conversion does not involve undergoing a transubstantiation to become part of the other in relation to which it is the same, but rather a process of return, the restoration of the other to the same in relation to which it is the other.

In the talk delivered on 11 Shevat 5718 (1 February 1958), Schneerson refers to Hayyim Joseph David Azulai's observation that the talmudic expression¹¹² is the 'convert who converts' (*ger she-nitgayyer*) rather than the 'non-Jew who converts' (*goy she-nitgayyer*) to indicate that the soul of the convert was present at Mount Sinai, even though it may be many years before the actual conversion takes place.¹¹³ Going considerably beyond this explanation, which builds on the rabbinic idea that the souls of all converts to be were present together with all future generations of native-born Israelites at the revelation on Mount Sinai,¹¹⁴ Schneerson insists that, technically speaking,

it is never the non-Jew who converts, for the one who converts does so because there is a holy spark within him, but for some reason it fell into a place to which it does not belong, and when he converts—after several reasons and attempts—then the holy spark is liberated and it joins the 'torch' and the 'light,' that is, the Torah, the commandments, and the blessed holy One.¹¹⁵

The ostensible redundancy communicates that conversion is akin to a gnostic drama of emancipation of the spirit: the convert to Judaism is already a Jew—one is to become what one already is—and thus conversion is a reversion, a release of the spark of holiness from its imprisonment in a foreign body.¹¹⁶ To convert, therefore, is not to

¹¹¹ See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, ch. 3.

¹¹² Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 48b, 62a, 97b; Bekhorot 47a.

¹¹³ Azulai, *Midbar Qedemot*, 3:3, 10b.

¹¹⁴ Tosefta, Sotah 7:5; Babylonian Talmud, Shevu'ot 39a; see Porton, *Stranger Within Your Gates*, 32, 42, 120, 177, 217, 242 note 71, 311 note 250, 354 note 22.

¹¹⁵ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwawa'aduyot 5718*, vol. 2, 61–62.

¹¹⁶ On the status of the convert's soul and the body, see M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 9, # 2666, p. 53.

affirm a genuine sense of difference, to cross a boundary, but rather to reclaim part of the self that has been lost, to go back to one's origin.

Elaborating on this theme in the talk from 15 Shevat 5743 (29 January 1983), Schneerson noted that the adage 'the convert who converts is compared to a newborn infant' (*ger she-nitgayyer ke-qatan she-nolad damei*) indicates that the convert is not an 'entirely new reality' (*metzi'ut hadashah legamrei*) but rather s/he is like a baby that existed prenatally before entering the world.¹¹⁷ To state the matter in more technical terms, the souls of converts to Judaism are identified as the holy sparks that were scattered as a consequence of the breaking of the vessels in the seventy nations and displaced to the shell of *nogah*, the innermost of the four shells, the one in closest proximity to the core, the shell that consists of the duality of good and evil.¹¹⁸ Using this criterion, converts are treated as lower than those who are thought to be Jewish indigenously—the root of the Jews is 'in the aspect of truth', the central pillar or the attribute of compassion (*rahamim*), and thus the destiny of Israel is to 'receive the aspect of the truth of the light of the Infinite', whereas the root of the converts is 'beneath the wings of the *Shekhinah*',¹¹⁹ the proselytes from Ishmael (Islam) derive from the right wing of mercy (*hesed*) and the ones from Edom (Christianity) from the left wing of judgment (*din*), and thus they receive the light

¹¹⁷ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5743*, vol. 2, 925. Also relevant to this understanding of temporality implied by the phenomenon of conversion is the rabbinic belief that the souls of converts were present at Sinai (see above, note 114). This presence suggests that when the conversion takes place, it is a reversion to an original condition. See M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5714*, vol. 1, 248.

¹¹⁸ D.B. Schneersohn, *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, 142d; idem, *Imrei Binah*, pt. 1, 86d–87a; idem, *Torat Hayyim: Bere'shit*, 121b–c, 124c, 125a–b. The source for the souls of the righteous Gentiles is similarly identified as the shell of *nogah*, which is also the source of the natural soul in the Jew, whereas the soul of all other Gentiles is from the three shells of impurity. See Hillel ben Meir of Paritch, *Liqqutei Be'urim* on Dov Baer Schneersohn, *Quntres ha-Hitpa'alut*, p. 144; M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 9, # 2666, 53. These passages are mentioned by Loewenthal, *Communicating*, 297 note 128. While the positive remark concerning the righteous of the Gentiles is emphasized, no mention is made about the corresponding negative remark regarding the rest of the Gentiles. It is said of them that whatever good they do is motivated by egocentric desires, and not for the sake of fulfilling the will of God or out of a sense of compassion for fellow human beings.

¹¹⁹ The expression is rabbinic in origin, but the key text that influenced the Habad material is Zohar 1:13a–b.

only by way of the lateral lines.¹²⁰ In spite of this discrepancy, they are nevertheless implanted in the same divine substance.¹²¹

The phenomenon of conversion only reinforces the paradoxical attribution of difference within the indifference. As the seventh Rebbe put it in a talk on the second day of Pentecost, 7 Sivan 5720 (2 June 1960), the Jews have the ability to ascend ‘to the root and source of the soul in the aspect that is above the chaos and the rectification, and hence, even though “Esau was a brother to Jacob” (Mal. 1:2), to the point that he does not know which of them he desires, “he loved Jacob” in particular’.¹²² In a treatise prepared for 18 Elul 5727 (23 September 1967), the day that commemorates the return of the sixth Rebbe to America, Schneerson elaborated the point:

The matter of ‘for [the Lord your God] loves you’ (Deut. 23:6) is the essential love of the blessed holy One, for Israel, for even though in the gradation above the concatenation, it says ‘and Esau was a brother to Jacob’, nevertheless ‘he loved Jacob’ particularly. And this is ‘the Lord your God’, even though in YHWH, which is above (the light of the Infinite that is above the concatenation), everything is identical, still by means of a disclosure of the essential love of the blessed holy One, for Israel, YHWH, which is above, is ‘your God’ precisely.¹²³

The Jewish soul, which is rooted in the essence, has the capacity through ritual observance to transform curse into blessing and the power through repentance to turn iniquities into virtues. Previously, I cited a passage in which this exploit is portrayed with special reference to Esau or Edom, depicted metaphorically as the pig, the animal that symbolizes the force of impurity paradigmatically.¹²⁴ The salvific work of Israel in the ‘last exile’, which is the ‘exile of Edom’, is to purify the evil of Esau, so that the good hidden in him will be revealed, the ‘lights of chaos’ (*orot de-tohu*), which is the source of his soul,¹²⁵ and, consequently, the pig will be restored to holiness. And yet, in the light of the Infinite, which is above binary opposition, God nevertheless harbors a special love for Israel, which distinguishes them from all other nations.

¹²⁰ D.B. Schneerson, *Ma’amerei Admor ha-Emtza’i: Hanahot*, 10. See Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma’amerei Admor ha-Zaqen* 5565, vol. 1, 372–373.

¹²¹ D.B. Schneerson, *Ner Mitzvah we-Torah Or*, 141a.

¹²² M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot* 5720, vol. 2, 107–108.

¹²³ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot* 5750, vol. 4, 242.

¹²⁴ See above, note 44.

¹²⁵ M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa’aduyot* 5717, vol. 3, 242.

The possibility of messianic rectification is predicated on the paradoxical positioning of the non-Jew in the light of the essence, but in such a way as to safeguard the inequality with the Jew. In the final analysis, this tension in Schneerson was never fully resolved. In a letter from 14 Av 5719 (18 August 1959),¹²⁶ he discussed the uniqueness of the Sinaitic revelation for the Jewish people, contrasting it explicitly with Christianity and Islam. Addressing the more general question of the difference between Jews and non-Jews, he begins by referring to the ruling of Maimonides that the righteous of the nations have a portion in the world to come,¹²⁷ but he then goes on to acknowledge that Jews have more possibilities than the other nations. In response to the question why this is so, he confesses that it is not rationally comprehensible. Having conceded this basic point, he does go on to compare the different nations to the various parts of a body, and just as the latter have discrete functions, so the former. The special role accorded Israel is justified by the comparison of Israel to the heart,¹²⁸ a position famously articulated by Judah Halevi in the twelfth century and one that greatly informed the kabbalistic sensibility through the ages.¹²⁹ The attempt to synchronize Maimonidean universalism and mystical individualism may be considered typical of the hybridity that shaped the seventh Rebbe's orientation. The coalescence of these disparate intellectual currents produced a curious, and not altogether coherent, apocalyptic disbanding of the dyadic clash between Jew and non-Jew, but in such a way that the one remains other to the other, and thereby indifferently the same.

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¹²⁶ M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 6, 317–318.

¹²⁷ Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim 8:11.

¹²⁸ Zohar 3:221b.

¹²⁹ Judah Halevi, *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, 2:36, 44.

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