

human faculty involved in contact with a supernal power resonates to the very nature of that power. Thus, somanodia, psychanodia and nousanodia are examples not only of ascent terminology but also of broader religious structures.

## 2. HEIKHALOT LITERATURE: PRECEDENTS AND OFFSHOOTS

The theme of the ascent to the divine realm is well represented in Jewish sources of late antiquity: in inter-testamental Jewish literature, in some rabbinic discussions and in so-called Heikhalot literature, written some time between the third and the eighth centuries.<sup>15</sup> As mentioned above, the material pertinent to this theme has been analyzed time and again by many scholars, including Culianu, and I shall not summarize here the vast literature on the topic. For our discussion it will suffice to mention that this ascent consists of the elevation of some form of body, perhaps similar to an astral body, to the supernal realm; hence, the term psychanodia would be a problematic description of such discussions. In any case, I am not aware of any linguistic terminology that will allow us to assume that those Jewish authors had in mind the ascension of the soul devoid of any form, despite the fact that in Midrashic literature, the soul of man was described as ascending on high every night in order to give an account of his daily deeds and sometimes to draw some form of strength.<sup>16</sup> This nightly ascent of the soul is in no way eschatological, nor does it point to a mystical experience of close contact with the divine essence.

According to Morton Smith, “We can fairly conclude that one or more techniques for ascent into heaven were being used in Palestine in Jesus’ day, and that Jesus himself may well have used one.”<sup>17</sup> As this scholar indicates, Paul attributed an ascent to Jesus, in which he was brought up to the third heaven, “whether in the body or out of the body.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the conception of an ascent of the soul to paradise—represented by the phrase “out of the body”—in order to have an ineffable experience even before death is considered by Smith to have been current among Jews of the first century.<sup>19</sup> This obviously represents a concept different from the more widespread belief in the possibility of bodily ascent to heaven, which seems to have been held much earlier. More recently, Margaret Barker pointed out that in the Odes of Solomon, a case of ascent on high that culminated in angelization was attributed to Christ. There, the spirit is described as elevating Jesus:

Brought me forth before the LORD's face  
And because I was the Son of Man,  
I was named the Light, the Son of God;  
Because I was the most glorious among the glorious ones,  
And the greatest among the great ones  
And he anointed me with his perfection  
And I became one of those who are near him.<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere in the same book, it is said:

I went up into the light of truth as into a chariot,  
And the truth led me and caused me to come  
And there was no danger for me because  
I constantly walked with him.<sup>21</sup>

In this context it may be pertinent to mention Rabbi Shimeon bar Yohai's statement, preserved in the Babylonian Talmud, concerning the *benei `aliyyah*, translated roughly as "those who attended the ascent," which implies that bar Yohai's vision of the few elect in the upper world was the result of a mystical journey.<sup>22</sup>

Apocalyptic literature represents a drastic shift from the dominant biblical point of view. It is the human who takes the initiative for an encounter with the divine, and the divine realm itself—not an elevated mountain—is the scene of the mystical revelation. Apocryphal in its literary genre, this literature propelled a series of figures into celestial zones—"out of this world," to use Culianu's phrase—in order to allow them to return with the credential of having had an interview with the divine monarch. Journeys and books about such journeys have been attributed to Moses, Abraham, Isaiah and Enoch.<sup>23</sup> In some cases, deep transformations of human personality, including some corporeal changes, are evidenced as a result of their visits to the supernal worlds.<sup>24</sup>

This motif—the mythical ascent of man—is preserved and even elaborated upon in Hebrew treatises written after the destruction of the second temple. In these mystical treatises, referred to under the general title of *Heikhalot* literature, the ascent on high is a major subject. Here, it is the initiative of the mystic that provides the starting point for the mystical journey. As to the goals of these ascents, there are divergences among scholarly interpretations. A more mystical reading of the target views the mystic as experiencing an encounter with God, who is a su-

pernal anthropomorphic entity of immense size.<sup>25</sup> According to other scholarly views, participation in the heavenly liturgy is the goal of the ascent.<sup>26</sup> More recently, some studies place emphasis upon the ascender's ability to magically attain access to the higher world.<sup>27</sup>

In all cases, the protagonists of these heavenly ascents are mainly post-biblical figures, some of which are the founders of the first phase of rabbinic literature, known as Tannaite: Rabbi Akiva ben Joseph, Rabbi Ishmael, Yohanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Eleazar ben Arakh, Rabbi Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah, Shimeon ben Zoma, Shimeon ben Azzai and Elisha ben Abbuiah. Biblical figures appear from time to time in Heikhalot literature, but they are not the main protagonists. Enoch and Moses are mentioned, but their names surface only rarely in more than one of the writings belonging to this literature.<sup>28</sup>

These Heikhalot writings were composed between the third and eighth centuries. In rabbinic literature of this period, the ascent to heaven plays a much less conspicuous role, though Moses is described both in the Talmud and in some Midrashic discussions as ascending through several heavens in order to receive the Torah.<sup>29</sup> This difference can be explained in at least two different and perhaps complementary ways. First, from the literary point of view, rabbinic literature is more concerned with legalistic and interpretive matters than with mysticism, myth and magic. These topics recur in many places in both the Talmud and Midrash, but they are not the focus of these literary genres. Second, there are proclivities in this literature to suppress centrifugal tendencies in order to cultivate a more worldly religiosity. However, all this said, I wonder if comparison between discussions in rabbinic literature that deal with the question of the ascent on high and such presentations in Heikhalot literature will disclose a vision of this issue that is drastically different. In the Talmud, Moses and four Tannaitic figures are described as ascending on high. It is in this type of literary corpus that a more magical turn is preserved in at least one version of the ascent. The religious capabilities of Rabbi Akiva allowed him to ascend to the divine world, and when the angels attempted to throw him down, God intervened and declared that he was worthy of the magical use of the divine glory—in Hebrew, *lehishtamesh bi-khevodi*.<sup>30</sup> However, in the version found in Heikhalot literature, the same rabbi is described as worthy only of looking at or contemplating the divine glory—*le-his-takel bi-khevodi*.<sup>31</sup> What is the implication of such a difference to the

goal of the ascent on high? In my opinion, the rabbinic version of the ascent is concerned with exercising a certain influence—which can be described as magical or theurgical—on the divine glory, while the gazing upon or the contemplation of the glory seems to be the main goal in Heikhalot literature. In this type of mystical literature, awareness of the size of the divine body is a crucial part of soteriological knowledge. I propose that the emphasis upon precise size had certain repercussions on broader religious attitudes in Heikhalot literature. This is why there is no hint of a change in the glory or its being put into the service of man, but rather its static state is contemplated.<sup>32</sup> While rabbinic literature is inclined toward a view that God cannot be seen by mortals, Heikhalot literature subscribes to a much more positive attitude toward the contemplation of the divine.<sup>33</sup>

A third ideal of the ascent, which will concern us much more thoroughly in the following discussion, is expressed in Heikhalot literature: Rabbi Akiva is described as receiving the revelation of a name while contemplating the vision of the divine chariot.<sup>34</sup> This name enables him and his students to accomplish magical operations, which is hinted at by the verb *mishtammesh*, which means “to use.” In this instance, bringing down an occult knowledge that confers extraordinary power is evident. The same is the case in the introduction to a magical treatise named *Shimmushei Torah*. Here, Moses is described as ascending on high and, after a contest with various angels, not only the Torah is revealed to him but also the way to read it as a magical document through the transformation of the common sequel of the canonic text into names that have various magical uses.<sup>35</sup> In other words, magic is revealed to Moses through the divine names that are found in a cryptic manner in the text of the canon. Moreover, Moses is given *segullot*—remedies—as a gift.<sup>36</sup>

Ascending on high and bringing down some form of esoteric knowledge, either in the form of magical names, of remedies or of a magical reading of the Torah, can be understood as a model that I propose calling mystical-magical. The first action—the ascent on high—represents the mystical phase of the model, as it allows the religious *perfectus* contact with the divine or celestial entities. His bringing down of the secret lore, which in many cases has magical qualities, represents the magical aspect of this model. In the ancient literature, this mystical journey takes place either *in corpore* or, as I propose interpreting some of the Heikhalot

discussions, in a sort of astral body.<sup>37</sup> In other words, in Heikhalot literature the concomitant presence of the same person in two places seems to be a crucial issue. So, for example, Rabbi Nehunyah ben ha-Qanah is described as sitting in the special posture of Elijah in the lower world, surrounded by his disciples, apparently in a lethargic state. At the same time, he is portrayed as sitting and gazing upon the divine chariot on high. I would like to emphasize the use of the verb sit—*Yoshev*: the Rabbi is represented as sitting in two different places at the same time. This observation of the double presence of the mystic in Heikhalot literature may be a clue to understanding the whole phenomenon of the ascent to the Merkavah.<sup>38</sup> It is neither an ascent of the soul nor a corporeal ascent; it combines both by the assumption that the spiritual body of the mystic is the entity that undertakes the celestial journey, while the corporeal body remains in a special posture in the terrestrial world. I cannot elaborate here upon the possible implications of such a proposal for the understanding of Heikhalot literature. For the time being, it is sufficient to remark that the assumption of a double presence in a Heikhalot text connected to the term *Golem*—which in many cases since the Middle Ages means “an artificial anthropoid”—may have something to do with the concept of a spiritual body.

Not only the ideal of the ascent—at least in principle—but also its techniques persisted as part of the reservoir of Jewish culture. In general, I would say that Scholem’s interpretation that the techniques of Heikhalot literature degenerated into “mere literature” is a curious view in light of reports of the ascents of souls throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> However, the more dominant method of attaining contact with divine or semi-divine entities in medieval literature is through *Himmelsreise der Seele*. Due to the impact of Greek and Hellenistic psychologies, Jewish authors adopted more spiritual explanations of the communion of the soul. In lieu of the ascent of the person, the union or the communion of the soul or the intellect with God or another spiritual supernal entity was conceived as the mystical component of the mystical-magical model.<sup>40</sup> This is simply a more “spiritualized” version of the archaic model found in the Heikhalot. In the ninth century, however, the descriptions of the Heikhalot masters were interpreted by some Babylonian Jewish thinkers belonging to an elite group called *Ge'onim* in an interiorized manner, as though indicating inner, rather than external, experiences. The main text to this effect is the report of Rav Hai Gaon. In one of his *responsa*, he indicates that:

Many scholars thought that one who is distinguished by many qualities described in the books, when he seeks to behold the Merkavah and the palaces of the angels on high, he must follow a certain procedure. He must fast a number of days and place his head between his knees and whisper many hymns and songs whose texts are known from tradition. Then he perceives within himself and in the chambers [of his heart] as if he saw the seven palaces with his own eyes, and it is as though he entered one palace after another and saw what is there. And there are two *mishmayot*, which the *tannaim* taught regarding this topic, called the *Greater Heykhalot* and the *Lesser Heykhalot*, and this matter is well known and widespread. Regarding these contemplations, the *tanna'* taught: "Four entered Pardes"—those palaces were alluded to by the term *Pardes*, and they were designated by this name.... For God...shows to the righteous, in their interior, the visions of His palaces and the position of His angels.<sup>41</sup>

The spiritual understanding of Rav Hai's view of the ancient mystics drew the attention of Adolph Jellinek, who affirms that Rav Hai was influenced by Sufi mysticism, a statement that indicates that his interpretation of earlier material is based on new spiritual approaches.<sup>42</sup> Scholem's view is that Rav Hai is describing a "mystical ascent." His rendering of "the interiors and the chambers" implies that this phrase was understood to refer to external entities, presumably parts of the supernal palaces.<sup>43</sup> However, this understanding is somewhat problematic; the form *ba-penimi u-va-hedri*, which translates as "within himself and in the chambers," suggests the subject of the verb, *maniah rosho*, thereby referring to the mystic himself. David J. Halperin accepts Scholem's understanding of this passage, although he disagrees with the assumption that it reflects a view occurring in the much earlier treatise, *Heikhalot Zutarti*. He denies the presence of a reference to a celestial journey in this treatise and argues that Rav Hai misunderstood the earlier source, translating the phrase "He thus peers into the inner rooms and chambers" without referring to the possessive form of these nouns. Thus, Halperin's opinion is that Rav Hai's passage indeed reflects a heavenly ascension.<sup>44</sup> Martin Cohen's translation is more adequate: "he gazes within himself." However, his general interpretation is erroneous: Rav Hai did not imply "a mystic communion with God," and his passage does not "have the ring of truth, as well as the support of the gaon's unimpeachable authority."<sup>45</sup>

It is my opinion that Rav Hai Gaon misinterpreted the late antiquity texts by transforming an ecstatic experience that takes place out of the body into an introversive one. The contemplation of the Merkavah is compared here to the entrance into Pardes; both activities are, according to Rav Hai, allegories for the inner experience attained by mystics. The mystical flight of the soul to the Merkavah is interpreted allegorically; the supernal palaces can be gazed upon and contemplated not by referring to an external event, but by concentrating upon one's own "chambers." Thus, the scene of revelation is no longer the supermundane hierarchy of palaces but the human consciousness.<sup>46</sup> Rav Hai Gaon asserts that the mystic may attain visions of palaces and angels, intentionally ignoring the vision of God. It should be mentioned that his father, Rabbi Sherira, refused to endorse the anthropomorphic conception of the Godhead found in the book *Shi'ur Qomah*.<sup>47</sup>

According to a younger contemporary of Rav Hai, Rabbi Nathan of Rome, the Gaon's intention was that the ancient mystics "do not ascend on high, but that they see and envision in the chambers of their heart, like a man who sees and envisions something clearly with his eyes, and they hear and tell and speak by means of a seeing eye, by the divine spirit."<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the earliest interpretation of Rav Hai's view emphasizes inner vision rather than mystical ascent. This type of mystical epistemology is congruent with Rav Hai's view concerning the revelation of the glory of God to the prophets through the "understanding of the heart"—*'ovanta de-libba'*. Far from expounding a mystical ascent of the soul, the Gaon offers instead a radical reinterpretation of ancient Jewish mysticism. In the vein of more rationalistic approaches, he effaces the ecstatic or shamanic aspects of Heikhalot experiences in favor of their psychological interpretation. Though I imagine that this recasting of an earlier religious mentality was motivated by Rav Hai's adherence to rationalist thinking,<sup>49</sup> we cannot ignore the possibility that his psychological perception may bear some affinities to much earlier views of the Merkavah.<sup>50</sup> However, even if such early understandings of Merkavah mysticism indeed existed, they were seemingly marginal in comparison to the bodily and spiritual ascent cultivated by the Heikhalot mystics. This kind of rationalization consistently reveals a reserved attitude toward the object of interpretation; therefore, Rav Hai Gaon seems to have been reacting against a relatively common practice, as we may infer from his remark: "this is a widespread and well-known matter." Even the opening statement of the quotation, although formulated

in the past tense, bears evidence of the recognition of the technique by “many scholars.”<sup>51</sup> We may conclude on the grounds of Rav Hai’s passage that the use of Elijah’s posture in order to attain paranormal states of consciousness perceived as visions of the Merkavah was still customary among Jewish mystics, notwithstanding Rav Hai’s attempt to attenuate some of its “uncanny” facets.<sup>52</sup> It is plausible that this interpretation, quite incongruent with Heikhalot material, is the result of the impact of the intellectualistic Greek orientation that penetrated the Babylonian regions by the mediation of Arabic thinkers, attenuating the external, more mythical aspects of the journey to the Merkavah. My scheme assumes that the shift from a literal understanding of the ascent and the act of enthronement to an allegorical one is basically medieval, starting with the tenth century, as exemplified by Rav Hai’s interpretation of the experience of the Heikhalot.<sup>53</sup> I assume that in some circles the literal understanding of the ascent remained active, while in others, like that of the Gaon, it was internalized.

The most important Jewish thinkers who continued, *mutatis mutandis*, the major tendencies of Heikhalot literature were the so-called Hasidei Ashkenaz. They were a late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century group active mainly in some cities in the Rhineland. These authors reproduced, glossed and perhaps even saved from oblivion some of the earlier Heikhalot texts and used some of their theologoumena in their own writings. However, more concrete instances in which psychanodian legends are related to historical figures were apparent in some regions in France, an area close to the Ashkenazi figures. Rabbi Ezra of Montcontour is described as a prophet who made an ascent on high.<sup>54</sup> Rabbi Moses Botarel, a late medieval Kabbalist, mentions a tradition received from his father, Rabbi Isaac, asserting that: “The soul of the prophet from the city of Montcontour ascended to heaven and heard the living creatures singing before God a certain song; and when he awoke he remembered this song and told his experience as it was, and they wrote down the song.”<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, the ascent heavenwards is a technique used to solve a problem. In the first instance, it is a method by which to bring down the song of the angels. In other cases, issues difficult to solve by means of regular speculation, including both halakhic and theological topics, are viewed as questions to be asked of heavenly instances.<sup>56</sup> Rabbi Ezra’s particular technique of composing verses by ascending on high and listening to the angelic chorus is not, however, unique. A promi-



nent early medieval *paytan*, Rabbi Eleazar ha-Qalir, is also described as having ascended to heaven and questioning the archangel Michael on the manner in which the angels sing and how their songs are composed. Afterwards, he descended and composed a poem according to the alphabetical order that he learned from the angelic songs.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly enough, Rabbi Eleazar was imagined to ascend to heaven by the use of the divine name, an ascent technique attributed by the famous eleventh-century commentator of the Bible known as Rashi—Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaqi—to the four sages who entered Pardes.<sup>58</sup> This description of the poet was no doubt an attempt to include Eleazar among the Merkabah mystics. This also seems to be the tendency of another report concerning Rabbi Eleazar: a mid-thirteenth century Italian author, Rabbi Tzedakiah ben Abraham, states in the name of his father, who in turn heard it from his masters, some unnamed Ashkenazic sages, that while Rabbi Eleazar was composing his well-known poem, “The Fourfold Living Creatures,” “fire surrounded him.”<sup>59</sup> This latter phrase has an obvious connection to the mystical study of sacred texts or discussions of topics particular to the Merkabah tradition.<sup>60</sup> In a third description of Rabbi Eleazar, also from a text of Ashkenazi origin, he is referred to as “the angel of God.”<sup>61</sup>

Thus, Rabbi Ezra of Montcontour’s study of the celestial academy through the ascent of his soul and transmission of a poem he heard there have close parallels to the practices of a much earlier person, portrayed with the help of motifs connected to Merkabah traditions. Also pertinent to our topic is the following report concerning Rabbi Michael the Angel, a mid-thirteenth-century French figure. He is described as follows:

[He] asked questions, and his soul ascended to heaven in order to seek [answers to] his doubts. He shut himself in a room for three days and ordered that it not be opened. But the men of his house peered between the gates [!], and they saw that his body was flung down like a stone. And so he laid for three days, shut in and motionless on his bed like a dead man. After three days he came to life and rose to his feet, and from thence on he was called Rabbi Michael the Angel.<sup>62</sup>

Though different from the reports stemming from Heikhalot literature, this description does not leave any doubt that, like the earlier claims of

Jewish mystics, the ascent on high is a matter undertaken by a living person who survives this experience. Unlike their contemporaries in Provence and Catalonia who attributed the experience of prophecy to biblical figures, these two individuals from the Ashkenazi and French regions provide examples of references to historical persons, presumably during their lifetimes, in terms of prophecy. I see no reason on the basis of this passage to surmise the possibility that an astral body made the ascent, despite the fact that a passage dealing with an astral body is known from a text believed to have been written in France in the same period.<sup>63</sup> The term *neshamah*, or “soul,” seems to indicate an early instance of psychanodia in the strict sense of the word. Thus, on the one hand, this text reflects a different mentality in comparison to Heikhalot literature because the soul is expressly mentioned. On the other hand, in comparison to the internalized vision in Rav Hai’s interpretation where no ascent is mentioned, here it is referred to explicitly. Though there can be no doubt that these two bodies of literature were known to the medieval figures, it seems that they were interested in another understanding of the ascent.

Unlike more mystically oriented descriptions (to be discussed below), however, the soul does not encounter or return to an entity that is its source, or experience some form of lost perfection, but rather is a mode for obtaining hidden information. Hence, this passage is more in line with some ancient apocalyptic materials and with Heikhalot literature than with medieval transformations of psychanodia.

### 3. NOUSANODIA:

#### THE NEOARISTOTELIAN SPIRITUALIZATION OF THE ASCENT

The processes of interiorization of mythical modes of thought resorting to new forms of spirituality are part and parcel of many developments in religion.<sup>64</sup> This is also the case with many descriptions of ascents on high and of visions of supernal realms. The adoption of and adaptation from some Greek forms of thought are evident in the elites of the three monotheistic religions. We already have seen above Rav Hai Gaon’s rejection of the external elements of the ascent in Heikhalot literature; more dramatic, however, are attempts to reinterpret the biblical descriptions of ascent and descent as references to inner states of consciousness or as metaphorical expressions. This is the general propensity of various Jewish philosophical schools, the major exception being the thought of Rabbi Yehudah ha-Levi. This mode of metaphorical exe-

genesis is applied repeatedly to the Bible and some rabbinic dicta in Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*. The great eagle explains the occurrences of the verb "ascend" in connection to God in the Bible as pointing to "sublimity and greatness."<sup>65</sup> Developing Maimonides's semantic approach, one of his followers, the Kabbalist Rabbi Abraham Abulafia, wrote in one of his commentaries on the secrets of the *Guide*:

The matter of the name of "ascent" is homonymous, as in their saying, "Moses ascended to God": this concerns the third matter, which is combined with their [allusion] also to the ascent to the tip of the mountain, upon which there descended the "created light." These two matters assist us [in understanding] all similar matters, and they are [the terms] "place" [*maqom*] and "ascent" [*'aliyah*] that, after they come to the matter of "man," the two of them are not impossible by any means; for Moses ascended to the mountain, and he also ascended to the Divine level. That ascent is combined with a revealed matter, and with a matter which is hidden; the revealed [matter] is the ascent of the mountain, and the hidden [aspect] is the level of prophecy.<sup>66</sup>

The hidden sense of the reference to ascent of the mountain is understood as a purely intellectual event that disregards any form of bodily ascent. Elsewhere, Rabbi Abulafia indicates that the human intellectual faculty gradually ascends to the agent intellect "and will unite with it after many hard, strong and mighty exercises, until the particular and personal prophetic [faculty] will turn universal, permanent and everlasting, similar to the essence of its cause, and he and He will become one entity."<sup>67</sup> No spatial adventure is mentioned here besides the opening of the human intellect to the cosmic intellectual presence, thus unifying the two. Ascents or descents found in Rabbi Abulafia's writings are metaphors for intellectual activities. Psychanodia is obliterated; there is no interpretation of Heikhalot discussions as undertaken by Rav Hai Gaon. In lieu of this, we may speak about a figurative nousanodia.

The transition from the sensuous to the intellectual is conceived by Rabbi Abulafia's school as a "natural change"—*sinnuy tiv'iy*. We learn this from a book entitled *Sefer ha-Tzeruf* by an anonymous author connected to Rabbi Abulafia's circle:

Now when the sphere of the intellect is moved by the Agent Intellect and the person begins to enter it and to ascend the sphere which returns, like the image of a ladder, and at the time of the ascent his thoughts shall be really transformed and all the visions shall be changed before him, and there will be nothing left to him of what he had earlier. Therefore, apart from changing his nature and his formation, he is as one who was uprooted from the power of feeling [and was translated to] the power of the intellect.<sup>68</sup>

Unlike Rabbi Abulafia, the anonymous Kabbalist underemphasizes the figurative nature of the term ascent. In this book the phrase “sphere of the intellect” uses a bodily term—sphere—that may indicate an ascent to an entity mediating between the corporeal and the intellectual. In any case, the act of ascension is strongly related to the concept of transformation, which affects the human being who is supposed to operate as an intellectual entity.

In a passage preserved in Rabbi Isaac of Acre’s *Me’irat `Einayyim*, there is an extremely interesting discussion cited in the name of Rabbi Nathan, presumably Rabbi Nathan ben Sa`adya:

I heard from the sage Rabbi Nathan an explanation of this name [intellect]: You must know that when the Divine Intellect descends, it reaches the Agent Intellect and is called Agent Intellect; and when the Agent Intellect descends to the Acquired Intellect it is called Acquired Intellect; and when the Acquired Intellect descends to the Passive Intellect, it is called Passive Intellect; and when Passive Intellect descends to the soul which is in man it is called the soul. We therefore find that the Divine Intellect, which is within the human soul, is called the soul. And this is from above to below. And when you examine this matter from below to above, you shall see that when man separates himself from the vanities of this world and cleaves by his thought and soul to the supernal [realms] with great constancy, his soul will be called according to the level among the higher degrees, which he has acquired and attached himself to. How so? If the soul of the isolated person deserves to apprehend and to cleave to the Passive Intellect, it is called Passive Intellect, as if it is Passive Intellect; and likewise when it ascends further and cleaves to the Acquired Intellect, it becomes the Acquired Intellect; and if it

is merited to cleave to the Agent Intellect, then it itself [becomes] Agent Intellect; and if you shall deserve and cleave to the Divine Intellect, happy are you, because you have returned to your source and root, which is called, literally, the Divine Intellect. And that person is called the Man of God, that is to say, a Divine man, creating worlds.<sup>69</sup>

Let us compare the last passage to one that will be adduced later from Rabbi Yehudah Albotini, a Kabbalist who was heavily influenced by Rabbi Nathan's book. Both resort to the cleaving of thought and soul, and both conceive the culmination of the ascent with the acquisition of magical capacities. Both combine Neoplatonic and Neoplatonic terminology. And, what is more pertinent to our discussion, both describe a rather easy transition from the lower human capacity to the highest spiritual level of the divine world. In other words, Rabbi Albotini's passage offers a synthesis of theories found in the writings of Rabbi Abulafia and two of his followers, who belong to what I call the Eastern group of his disciples. Similarly, we read in the mid-fourteenth-century Byzantine writings of Rabbi Elnathan ben Moses Qalqish, a prolific author influenced by ecstatic Kabbalah, that:

This is the distinguished level of the man of God, and this is the daily and light intellect, the light of which is above the heads of the creatures inscribed as in the vision, "and upon the image on the throne was an image like that of a man," to whom he cleaved and by whom he ascended. And the prophets who came after him prophesied by means of the Unclear mirror, and that is the imagination of night-time, [which is] dark, like the light of the sun upon the moon, to receive light from the sparks, and from the flame of his warmth to warm from its extreme cold, like the warmth of the heart which is extreme in its simplicity, to extinguish the extreme cold of the spleen.<sup>70</sup>

There can be no doubt that the human intellect, described as hovering over or surrounding the head of man and constituting his real "image," is described here as the vehicle for man's ascent on high. This is no doubt a metaphorical ascent, but nevertheless the concept of ascension is explicit.

These are just a few examples of cases of *ascensio mentis* in ecstatic

Kabbalah, which can easily be multiplied. As we shall see below in the work of some of the followers of Rabbi Abulafia, there are also examples of psychanodia that betray the impact of Neoplatonism.

#### 4. NEOPLATONIC CASES OF PSYCHANODIA

In Heikhalot literature it seems that the main protagonist of the ascent is not the soul, but rather some form of spiritual body. As seen above, it is only later in the Middle Ages that the term “soul” occurs in an ascensional context. In most cases, this is part of an ascensional approach that sees the soul as the main protagonist of the upward journey, demonstrating the impact of Neoplatonism.<sup>71</sup> Explicit mention of the soul, though not in a literal sense, is found in a highly influential text by Plotin. Following is a translation of this passage as mediated by the *Theology of Aristotle* by Rabbi Shem Tov ibn Falaquera, a Jewish philosopher active in the second half of the thirteenth century in Spain:

Aristotle has said: Sometimes I become as if self-centered and remove my body and I was as if I am a spiritual substance without a body. And I have seen the beauty and the splendor and I become amazed and astonished. [Then] I knew that I am part of the parts of the supernal world, the perfect and the sublime, and I am an active being [or animal]. When this has become certain to me, I ascended in my thought from this world to the Divine Cause [*ha-’Illah ha-’Elohit*] and I was there as if I were situated within it and united in it and united with it, and I was higher than the entire intellectual world and I was seeing myself as if I am standing within the world of the divine intellect I was as if I was united within it and united with it, as if I am standing in this supreme and divine state.<sup>72</sup>

The language of ascent is quite obvious, despite the fact that, conceptually speaking, nothing similar to psychanodia or nousanodia is surmised by the Neoplatonic author. This is the reason why the expression “as if” occurs six times. We may assume that here there is an interiorization of a psychanodian vision found in Hellenistic sources, understood now as an inner flight.<sup>73</sup> However, in some reverberations of Neoplatonism, an ascent of the soul to the supernal soul becomes nevertheless obvious. In a passage authored by the early thirteenth-century Kabbalist, Rabbi Ezra of Gerona, such a process is well illustrated:

[T]he righteous causes his unblemished and pure soul to ascend [until she—the human soul—reaches] the supernal holy soul [and] she unites with her [the supernal soul] and knows future things. And this is the manner [in which] the prophet acted, as the evil inclination did not have any dominion over him, to separate him from the Supernal Soul. Thus, the soul of the prophet is united with the Supernal Soul in a complete union.<sup>74</sup>

The righteous, acting in the present, and the prophets, who are ideals relevant to the glorious past, use the same comic–psychological structure: naturally, when the soul is unblemished and unstained by sin, it can ascend to the source, and by doing so, it can know the future. Ascent is therefore part of a more complex process that involves a more practical implication in both the righteous and the prophet.

A mixture of psychanodia and nousanodia is found in an influential anonymous Kabbalistic writing composed in the early fourteenth century in Catalonia. Again, the soul of the righteous is the main subject of the ascent: “The soul of the righteous one will ascend—while he is yet alive—higher and higher, to the place where the souls of the righteous [enjoy their] delight, [an event] that is [called] ‘the cleaving of the mind.’ The body will [then] remain motionless, as it is said: ‘But you that cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day.’”<sup>75</sup> Interestingly enough, the adherence or the union is the main purpose of the ascent in these cases, and the mystics are called by the name “righteous”—*Tzaddiqim*—a term that does not play a significant role in *Heikhalot* literature. It recurs elsewhere, however, in Rabbi Ezra’s writing; this Kabbalist uses the term to describe those who perform an operation in the divine world—namely those who first adhered to the supernal realm and then acted thereupon.<sup>76</sup>

The philosophical terminology of these two quotes is obvious. In the case of Rabbi Ezra, the Neoplatonic terminology of two souls is explicit. In the second quote, the cleaving to the place of supernal thought is mentioned. In any case, neither firmaments, palaces, rings or thrones nor angelic structures that played such a crucial role in *Heikhalot* and other late antiquity types of Jewish literature occur in these cases of *ascensio*. The role of the cosmic pillar, a topic that will be addressed later, is also absent here.

Now I turn to a passage found in an anonymous Kabbalistic treatise belonging to what is known as the circle of the *Yuun* book:

And this attribute [*Middah*] was transmitted to Enoch, son of Jared, and he kept it, and would attempt to know the Creator, blessed be He, with the same attribute. And when he adhered to it, his soul longed to attract the abundance of the upper [spheres] from the [sefirah of] wisdom, until his soul ascended to and was bound by the [sefirah of] discernment, and the two of them became as one thing. This is the meaning of what is written, “And Enoch walked with God.” And it is written in the *Alpha Beta of Rabbi Akiva* that he transformed his flesh into fiery torches and he became as if he were one of the spiritual beings.<sup>77</sup>

This is an important example for the attenuation of the mythical ascent from *Heikhalot* literature by a more unitive description that puts the soul at the center of the experience. The soul’s adherence to and union with the third sefirah, that of Binah, which is considered in many early Kabbalistic texts to be the source of the soul, is conceived to be the “real” meaning of Enoch’s ascent. Though bodily transformation is mentioned at the end of the excerpt, the reference to *Alpha Beta of Rabbi Akiva* serves as a proof text for expounding upon the medieval theory of mystical union.

Now let us examine the evidence found in the *Zohar* in a passage from *Midrash ha-Ne`elam* on the Song of Songs:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, He placed him in the Garden of Eden, in a garment of glory, out of the light of the Garden of Eden.... And those garments left him.... And the luminous soul ascended...and he remained bereft of all...and that luminosity of the supernal soul which left him ascended upwards, and it was stored in a certain treasury, that is the body, up to the time that he begat sons, and Enoch came into the world. Since Enoch came, the supernal light of the holy soul descended into him, and Enoch was enraptured in the supernal soul which had left Adam.<sup>78</sup>

Unlike the Neoplatonic use of the term “supernal soul” to indicate the cosmic or universal soul, as seen above and as shall be seen again below, the *Zoharic* passage deals with the superior part of the human soul. Adam’s soul is understood Neoplatonically—that is, as an entity that descended from a higher sphere of reality and returns thereto—but this is a soul preserved for the few, and as such, Enoch merits it. In a



way, the soul that deserted the sinful Adam is also a light that descends upon meritorious individuals.

The spiritual shift from the individual to the universal soul is exemplified in Rabbi Nathan ben Sa'adya's book *Sha'arei Tzedeq*. In one case, Moses is described as having "been transformed into a universal [being] after being a particular, central point. And this is the matter of the lower man that ascended and became 'the man who is on the throne,' by the virtue of the power of the Name."<sup>79</sup> This description is reminiscent of many Neoplatonically-oriented transformations of the particular soul into the universal soul, a phenomenon I propose calling universalization. This form of expression, which may or may not represent an experience that is different from others described as involving cleaving and union, already had a history in Jewish mysticism, and Rabbi Nathan's *Sha'arei Tzedeq* is one link in a longer chain of tradition. Indeed, some lines further, our author refers explicitly to the "soul of all."<sup>80</sup> Moses's transformation was accomplished by means of a name—in Hebrew, *ha-shem*, which stands for the Tetragrammaton and the consonants of which are identical to a permutation of those of Mosheh. Therefore, resorting to the Kabbalistic technique based on names used by the author, Moses was able to become a supernal man. The above transformation from the particular to the general is found elsewhere in the group of Rabbi Abulafia's followers related to *Sha'arei Tzedeq*. Rabbi Isaac of Acre mentions that "the Nought, that encompasses everything" and the "soul should cleave to Nought and become universal and comprehensive after being particular because of her palace when she was imprisoned in it, [she] will become universal, in the secret of the essence of the secret of her place from which she was hewn."<sup>81</sup>

This common language of universalization does not mean, to be sure, that the earlier text authored by Rabbi Nathan had an impact on Rabbi Isaac, who was acquainted with at least some concepts found in the book. Nevertheless, for an examination of unitive imagery, this neglected passage is of great importance since it includes a syntagm that is reminiscent of much later Hasidic discussions of union with the divine nought—*le-hidabbeq be-'ayin*.<sup>82</sup> Earlier in his treatise, Rabbi Nathan reports on a conversation between God and Moses, who is told by the divine voice that he cannot contemplate the divine glory, despite the fact that he "ascended to the rank of the supernal man, who is the Living."<sup>83</sup> These phrases unequivocally indicate an expansion of the lower

man, more precisely of his soul, its ascension to its supernal source and its transformation into that source. The Neoplatonic assumption that there is only one soul, particularized by matter into individual souls without fragmenting that of the universal, underpins the above discussions.<sup>84</sup> It should be emphasized that, though the vision in the biblical proof text is that of an *anthropos*, the interpretation offered by Rabbi Nathan speaks solely of the transformation of the soul. The ascent of the soul gained impetus from sixteenth-century Safedian Kabbalah onwards. Its main hero, the famous Ashkenazi Rabbi Isaac Luria (1538–1572), is reported in a hagiographic book as one:

...whose soul ascended nightly to the heavens, and whom the attending angels came to accompany to the celestial academy. They asked him: “To which academy do you wish to go?” Sometimes he said that he wished to visit the Academy of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, or the Academy of Rabbi Akiva or that of Rabbi Eliezer the Great or those of other Tannaim and Amoraim, or of the prophets. And to whichever of those academies he wished to go, the angels would take him. The next day, he would disclose to the sages what he received in that academy.<sup>85</sup>

This passage describes one of two ways in which the mystic may acquire the supernal secrets of the Kabbalah: he may either ascend to study the Torah together with ancient figures, as above, or be taught by Elijah and others who descend to reveal Kabbalistic secrets, as we read in other texts that describe the manner in which Rabbi Luria obtained his knowledge.<sup>86</sup> The frequency of heavenly ascent is indeed remarkable: each and every night, Rabbi Luria visited one of the celestial academies, and thereafter transmitted the teachings to his students. This perception of Rabbi Luria is no doubt closely connected to the huge amount of Kabbalistic material that emerged from him and that produced the extensive Lurianic literature. It should be emphasized that the description of Rabbi Luria, unlike any of the other masters to which ascension of the soul has been attributed, mentions nighttime explicitly as the only occasion on which such ascents take place.

Let me address now a passage preserved by the main disciple of Rabbi Luria. In the fourth part of his *Sha'arei Qedushah*, Rabbi Hayyim Vital quotes passages dealing with *hitbodedut*—mental concentration or

solitude—that are not present in any other Kabbalistic source. So, for example, in a manner reminiscent of Rabbi Abulafia's recommendations for solitude, Rabbi Vital's source recommends that one:

Meditate in a secluded house as above, and wrap yourself in a *tallit*, and sit and close your eyes and remove yourself from the material world, as if your soul had left your body, and ascended into the heavens. And after this divestment, read one *mishnah*, whichever one you wish, many times, time after time, and intend that your soul commune with the soul of the *Tanna*' mentioned in that *mishnah*.<sup>87</sup>

From some points of view, this text combines ecstatic Kabbalah with practices of reciting the Mishnah found among sixteenth-century Safedian Kabbalists.<sup>88</sup> In his mystical diary, Rabbi Vital reported the dream of one of his acquaintances, Rabbi Isaac Alatif, concerning himself, which he described as follows:

Once I fainted deeply for an hour, and a huge number of old men and many women came to watch me, and the house was completely full of them, and they all were worried for me. Afterwards the swoon passed and I opened my eyes and said: "Know that just now my soul ascended to the Seat of Glory and they sent my soul back to this world, in order to preach before you and lead you in the way of repentance and charity."<sup>89</sup>

It may be assumed that the ascent of the soul to the seat of glory has a certain mystical implication, perhaps an attempt to contemplate God, such as Rabbi Vital attempted according to one of his dreams.<sup>90</sup>

The concept of ascension is important in eighteenth-century Hasidism, as we shall see in greater detail in chapter four, where some of the discussion will address the Neoplatonic concept. Here I would like to draw attention to just one case, which reverberates with many followers of the master who formulated it, the Great Maggid of Medzirech. In a manner reminiscent of Rabbi Nathan ben Sa'adya Harar's discussion of the two halves in a passage found in his *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, Rabbi Dov Baer of Medzirech interprets the biblical verse "Make thee two trumpets" as follows:

[T]wo halves of forms, as it is written “on the throne, a likeness in the appearance of a man above upon it,” as man [that is, *’ADaM*] is but *D* and *M*, and the speech dwells upon him. And when he unites with God, who is the Alpha of the world, he becomes *’ADaM*.... And man must separate himself from any corporeal thing, to such an extent that he will ascend through all the worlds and be in union with God, until [his] existence will be annihilated, and then he will be called *’ADaM*.<sup>91</sup>

The Maggid bases his homily on the verse: “Make thee two trumpets of silver, of a whole piece shall thou make them.”<sup>92</sup> The Hebrew word for trumpets—*Hatzotzerot*—is interpreted as *Hatzi-Tzurah*—namely “half of the form,” which together, since they are two halves, create a perfect form. Here, we may see this process as the completion of a perfect structure by the ascent of one of its halves. No hierarchy is implied here, but rather direct contact between man and God in a manner reminiscent of Rabbi Nathan’s point of view.

## 5. THE ASCENT THROUGH THE TEN SEFIROT

Ascents on high are more meaningful when detailed hierarchies are involved. This is obvious in the theosophical–theurgical Kabbalah, where the system of ten sefirot constitutes a median structure between infinity—*’Ein Sof*—and the created world. To be sure, the understanding of these powers varies from Kabbalist to Kabbalist, and I use here a simplistic description, which is much more salient for the later, sixteenth-century understanding of Kabbalah.<sup>93</sup> As instruments of the divine power, which is also immanent within them, the sefirot were and still are involved in sustaining and governing the created world. In a way, they play a role reminiscent of the celestial bodies in medieval astronomy and astrology. However, while celestial bodies often assumed negative valences, as Culianu points out, sefirotic powers were conceived of in a much more positive light.<sup>94</sup> There are many forms of upward processes, however, that involve the ascension of both the lower sefirot, who draw on and suck influx from the higher sefirot, and the human intention or soul.<sup>95</sup> This type of ascent is exemplified in an influential passage by Rabbi Moses Cordovero describing the nature of Kabbalistic prayer:

The man whom his Creator has bestowed with the grace of entering the innerness of occult lore and knows and understands that by reciting *Barekh `Aleinu* and *Refa'enu* the intention is to draw down the blessing and the influx by each and every blessing to a certain *sefirah*, and the blessing of *Refa'enu* to a certain *sefirah*, as it is known to us. Behold, this man is worshipping the Holy One, blessed be He and his *Shekhinah*, as a son and as a servant standing before his master, by means of a perfect worship, out of love, without deriving any benefit or reward because of that worship...because the wise man by the quality of his [mystical] intention when he intends during his prayer, his soul will be elevated by his [spiritual] arousal from one degree to another, from one entity to another until she arrives and is welcome and comes in the presence of the Creator, and cleaves to her source, to the source of life; and then a great influx will be emanated upon her from there, and he will become a vessel [*keli*] and a place and foundation for [that] influx, and from him it [the influx] will be distributed to all the world as it is written in the *Zohar*, pericope Terumah, until the *Shekhinah* will cleave to him... and you will be a seat to Her and [then] the influx will descend onto you...because you are in lieu of the great pipe instead of the *Tzaddiq*, the foundation of the world.<sup>96</sup>

The Kabbalist is supposed to ascend daily through the sefirotic realm in order to adhere to the supernal source, from which he demands that the influx be drawn down. Ascent in this case is not only a matter of individual attainment but also part of a wider and more complex model—the mystical–magical, which has already been addressed above. However, what is much less clear is what exactly ascends on high: the intention—some form of noetic process focusing upon the content of the divine map while praying—or some form of energy that is acquired through concentration during prayer. What is important in this passage is the fact that the ascent is no longer a rare experience attributed only to a small elite group but rather is a matter of daily experience that is accessible to every Kabbalist. The ascendant Kabbalist is not only capable of triggering the descent of the influx but also becomes a pipeline for its transmission to the mundane world.

The ascent from one degree to another, which is found before Rabbi Cordovero, became a standard expression for ascent in the supernal

world, and it recurs in many texts, especially in Hasidism. It also occurs in an explicit discussion of the ascent through the sefirot attributed to an influential messianic figure, Sabbatai Tzevi, by a Yemenite apocalypse, which stems from a rather early period of the Sabbatean movement. In a passage printed and previously analyzed by Gershom Scholem, the Messiah is described as ascending from “one degree to another, [all] the degrees of the seven sefirot from Gedullah to Malkhut...after two years he ascends to the degree that his mother is there.”<sup>97</sup> The sequence of the sefirot is not clear at all: Gedullah in classical descriptions stands for the fifth sefirot, the sefirah of Hesed, while Malkhut is a much lower one. Thus it is hard to understand how movement from the former to the latter can be considered an ascent. It is even harder to characterize the nature of this ascent: which human faculty is utilized, what is meant by the length of time needed to reach the highest attainment, and who the “mother” is. Scholem has correctly interpreted this text as referring to the third sefirah, which is commonly symbolized as the mother. He even proposes, on the basis of this passage, that a mystical event occurred in the spiritual life of Tzevi in 1650, and again, he correctly intuited that the meaning of this attainment would be the understanding of the “secret of the Divinity.”<sup>98</sup> What Scholem does not specify is the nature of this secret. On the basis of the above quotes as well as others to be adduced below, I suggest that this secret should be understood not just as reaching the third sefirah; rather, this sefirah itself may be the very secret of the divinity, the most intimate secret of Sabbatean theology, as proposed by Tzevi himself.<sup>99</sup> In any case, elsewhere in the same epistle, the nest of the bird, the mystical place of the Messiah, is none other than the third sefirah.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the axis of the sefirot also constitutes the vertical ladder that is climbed by the mystic when he progresses in both understanding and in discovering experientially the higher levels of the divine structure. I have great doubt, however, that the above text reflects an experience or a statement stemming from Tzevi himself. It seems that the ascensional language related to the sefirot more aptly reflects the views of the anonymous Sabbatean author of the so-called Yemenite apocalypse rather than that of the Messiah, whose views were closer to Rabbi Abulafia’s stance. In any case, it should be pointed out that the issue of ascent is related not only to founders of religions, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, but also to Messianic figures like Jesus. As we shall see,

the ascent occurs in connection to the Messiah in the book of the Zohar and in relation to the activity of the Besht in his encounter with the Messiah.<sup>101</sup>

Eighteenth-century Hasidism is even more concerned with ascension. In a passage written by an important Ukrainian author, Rabbi Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, we find a stance that may reflect a view of the founder of Hasidism, the Besht:<sup>102</sup>

By means of the Torah, the union between the bridegroom and the bride, the Assembly of Israel and the Holy One, blessed be He, takes place... And just as the bridegroom and the bride will delight in joy, so the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Assembly of Israel are [enjoying] “like the joy of the bridegroom for/on his bride”... He compared us to a bridegroom and a bride, since the permanent delight is not a delight, only the union of the bridegroom and the bride, which is a new union, because they did not previously have an intercourse. So has someone to unify the Holy One, blessed be He, a new union every day, as if this day it has been given, as the sages, blessed be their memory, said: “Let the words of the Torah be new, et cetera.” And the reason is that the Holy One, blessed be He, is renewing every day the creation of the world and the Torah is called “creation of the world” because by means of it [the Torah] all the worlds have been created, as it is well known. And God is continuously innovating and there is no one [single] day that is similar to the other one, and every day there is a new adherence and coming closer to the Torah, since the day has been created by it in a manner different from “yesterday that passed.” This is the reason why Israel is called a virgin...because every day its youth is renewed and the union of that day never existed [beforehand] since the creation of the world, and from this point of view it is called a virgin. Whoever is worshipping in such a manner is called the walker from one degree to another always and from one aspect to another aspect, and he unifies every day a new union... And the Torah is called an aspect of the fiancée that is an aspect of the bride, so that always a new union will be achieved as at the time of the wedding. This is the meaning of [the story about] Moses that he was studying and forgetting, namely that he is forgetting the delight, because “a permanent delight is not delight,” until the Torah has been given to him as a bride to a bridegroom. This means that he received the power to go every

day from one degree to another, and every new degree and ascent was for him an aspect of a bride, a new union, and this is the great delight like that of the bridegroom and the bride.<sup>103</sup>

Unlike the daily ascent on the sefirotic axis, as we saw in Rabbi Cordovero's passage, here the ascent is not connected explicitly to an articulated hierarchy, but such progress is assumed. Moreover, again unlike the Safedian Kabbalist, the Hasidic master does not mention the expert—the Kabbalist—in matters of esotericism, but Jews in general. It seems that the importance of the process is so great that attainment is underemphasized; rather, the event of gradual ascent from one degree to another is the purpose of the exercise. The Hasidic master recommends an ascent for the sake of the pleasure of doing so.

## 6. "AS IF" AND IMAGINARY ASCENTS

The language "as if" is obvious in the passage by Plotin adduced above and in its numerous reverberations in medieval material. It may be concluded, therefore, that ascent language is figurative, but it does not indicate an imaginary process that resorts to a specific spiritual faculty like the imagination. Following are some examples in which Kabbalists used "as if" to describe their ascents on high.<sup>104</sup> Found as early as the classic book of Neoplatonism, its occurrence is part of Hellenistic thought attenuated by the earlier somanodia phenomena. In a book by Rabbi Yehudah Albotini, an early sixteenth-century author belonging to ecstatic Kabbalah and active in Jerusalem, the "as if" language is quite obvious. Departing from Rabbi Abraham Abulafia's discourse, which does not resort to the word *ke-'Illu*—translated as "as if"—to describe a figurative ascent, he suggests to the Kabbalist that:

...he should prepare his true thought [*mahshavto*] to visualize in his heart and mind as if he sits on high, in the heavens of heavens, in front of the Holy One, blessed be He, within the splendor and the radiance of His Shekhinah. And it is as if he sees the Holy One, blessed be He, sitting as a king.... And he should ascend and link and cleave his soul and thought [*mahshavto*] then from one rank to another insofar as spiritual issues are concerned [and] as far as his power affords, to cause her to cleave and to cause her to ascend on high, higher than the world of the spheres, and the world of the sep-



arate intellects and to the supernal and hidden world of emanation, so as to be then as if it is an intellect *in actu* and it has no sense for the *sensibilia* because it [already] exited from the human dominion and entered then into the divine dominion, and he said [commanded] and his will is done.<sup>105</sup>

We witness again a combination of nousanodia and psychanodia in the same passage. Not only are the soul and the intellect mentioned, but I also assume that the two organs—the heart and the mind—indicate a dual understanding of the ascension. However, the language of ascent is much more concrete here, as an entire hierarchy of worlds is explicitly mentioned. Steeped as he was in the language of Neoaristotelianism, as mediated by Maimonides and Rabbi Abulafia, Rabbi Albotini describes the result of ascent as the actualization of the intellect. The theosophical structure of the ten sefirot, therefore, is conceived not only as the place from which the soul descended and to which it should return, but also as the locus of the actualization of the intellect.

The introvertive experience that calls for the “as if” language recurs in a text by Rabbi Hayyim Vital that describes the technical preparations necessary for the imaginary ascent:

Behold, when someone prepares himself to cleave to the supernal root, he will be able to cleave to it. However, despite the fact that he is worthy to achieve this [achievement] he should divest his soul in a complete manner, and separate it from all matters of matter, and then you should be able to cleave to her spiritual root. And, behold, the issue of divestment that is found written in all the books dealing with issues of prophecy and divine spirit, a real divestment that the soul exits from his body really, as it happens in sleep, because if it is so this is not a prophecy but a dream like all the dreams. However, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit upon man takes place while his soul is within him, in a state of awakenedness, and she will not exit from him. But the matter of divestment is that he should remove all his thoughts whatsoever, and the imaginative power...will cease to imagine and think and ruminate about any matters of this world as if his soul exited from it. Then the imaginative power transforms his thought so as to imagine and conceptualize, as if he ascends to the supernal worlds, to the roots of his soul that are there, from one [root] to another, until the concept of his imagination [*Tziyyur dimy-*

ono] arrives to his supernal source... All this is the divestment of the power of imagination from all the thoughts of matter in a complete manner.<sup>106</sup>

Elsewhere in the same book we read that one should:

...remove his thoughts from all matters of this world, as if his soul had departed from him, like a person from whom the soul departed and who feels nothing.... And he should imagine that his soul has departed and ascended, and he should envision the upper worlds, as though he stands in them. And if he performed some unification—he should think about it, to bring down by this light and abundance into all the worlds, and he should intend to receive also his portion at the end. And he should concentrate in his thought, as though the spirit had rested upon him, until he awakens somewhat...and after a few days he should return to meditate in the same manner, until he merits that the spirit rest upon him.<sup>107</sup>

Dealing with Rabbi Vital's mystical thought, R. J. Z. Werblowsky duly points out that the imaginary nature of the references to the ascent diminish its ecstatic nature. He attributes this attenuation to Maimonides's theory of imagination that detracts from the importance of the ascent in favor of the language "as if."<sup>108</sup> There can be no doubt that Rabbi Vital was indeed acquainted with Maimonides, and there is no historical problem in assuming such an influence. On the one hand, as seen above, the language "as if" in the specific context of ascents on high is found in some texts before Rabbi Vital, and on the other, those mystics drawing more directly from Maimonides, like Rabbi Abulafia, did not use this language in order to describe their ascents. Thus, it would be much more pertinent to attribute the occurrence of this language to the Neoplatonic influence.

Rabbi Vital combines this language with a certain theory of imagination that is not, however, entirely Aristotelian. His approach to this faculty is much more positive than that of Maimonides, possibly due to the impact of a theory found in the Middle Ages in Sufi and Kabbalistic texts regarding the world of imagination. Due to the influence of some forms of Sufism, the role of the imaginary faculty is highlighted. Events are described as taking place in the imagination and in a place described as the "world of images," *alam al-mithal*—in Hebrew, *'olam ha-*

*demut*, and translated by Henry Corbin in Latin as *mundus imaginalis*.<sup>109</sup> One of the few Kabbalists to adopt this vision of imagination was Rabbi Nathan of Sa'adyah Harar, who has been mentioned above.<sup>110</sup> Rabbi Vital, however, was acquainted with theories concerning the visualization of letters of divine names in different colors—letters that were imagined to ascend to the sefirotic realm. In a text presumably written some time in the fourteenth century in Spain, we read that:

...when you shall think upon something which points to the [sefirah of] *Keter* and pronounce it with your mouth, you shall direct [your thought] to and visualize the name YHWH between your eyes with this vocalization, which is the *Qammaz* [vowel pronounced as a long a] under all the consonants, its visualization being white as snow. And he [!] will direct [your thought] so that the letters will move and fly in the air, and the whole secret is hinted at in the verse, "I have set the Divine Name always before me."<sup>111</sup>

According to this passage, the colored letters visualized are meant to ascend. Thus, human imagination is ontologically creative, its products being able to ascend to the supernal realm of the Merkavah. Following this trend in theosophical–theurgical Kabbalah, Rabbi Hayyim Vital adduces elsewhere in his *Sha'arei Qedushah* a text ending with the ascent of thought to the highest firmament, the *'Aravot*, where "he shall visualize that above the firmament of *'Aravot* there is a very great white curtain, upon which the Tetragrammaton is inscribed in [color] white as snow, in Assyrian writing in a certain color."<sup>112</sup> The issue is quite obvious here: the Kabbalist does not see what is inscribed objectively on the firmament but imagines what is written there. The ascent is therefore some form of induced imaginary vision of ascent and contemplation.

## 7. ASCENSION AND ANGELIZATION

In some cases of late antiquity Christianity the ascension is connected to forms of transformation that culminate in the phenomena of angelization, apotheosis or theosis.<sup>113</sup> In a hierarchical society, the very act of ascending means acquiring a higher status and coming closer to entities that are more sublime, powerful, knowledgeable or even divine. Processes of angelization are reported in the Odes of Solomon adduced above, particularly in Enoch's case, according to the different versions

of books dealing with this figure. However, as previously noted, examples of an ascent of some form of bodily entity are few in the Middle Ages. The emphasis is on phenomena that may be described as psychanodia and nousanodia. However, in some cases it is assumed that not only the soul or the intellect but also some other aspect of the human psyche might ascend. Nevertheless, even instances in which the ascent of the soul is expressly mentioned, as is the case for Rabbi Michael from France, one nevertheless may acquire the attribute “angel.”

The human intention—known in Hebrew as *kavvanah*—is sometimes understood as ascending on high as part of the theurgical effort to impact processes taking place within the divine sphere. So, for example, we read about “those who abandon the affairs of this world and pay no regard to this world at all, as though they were not corporeal beings, but all their intent and purpose is fixed on their creator alone, as in the case of Elijah and Enoch, who lived on forever in body and soul, after having attained union of their souls with the Great Name.”<sup>114</sup>

In addition to the process of angelization attributed to Enoch, it is the figure of Elijah who assumes the role of an angel-like entity, who ascends on high and continues to reveal himself at various occasions by descending to this world. So, for example, in a late fifteenth-century Kabbalistic book written in Spain, we read:

When he [Elijah] has ascended on high, he has acquired the power of spirituality as an angel indeed, to ascend and to become [afterwards] corporeal and descend to this lower world where you are existing. This in order to perform miracles or to disclose My power and My dynamis in the world. And he [Elijah] is causing the descent of My power in the world, forcefully and compelling, from My great name, that is an integral part of him. And because of this great secret he did not have the taste of death, so that he will be able to cause the descent of My power and disclose My secret by the power of My precious names. And he is called “The bird of heaven will bring the voice” and no one should have any doubt of it. He was revealing himself to the ancient pious one, factually in a spiritual body, which was enclosed and embodied in matter, and they were speaking with him, by the virtue of their piety, and he was revealing himself *in corpore et in spiritu*. This is the reason why those dreaming a dream are causing the descent of My power, by his mediation, within you, without speech and voice, and this is the secret of [the

verse] “for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations.” And My power is bound to him and he is bound to your souls and discloses to you the secrets of My Torah, without speech. And a time will come, very soon, that he will reveal himself to you *in corpore et in spiritu* and this will be a sign for the coming of the Messiah. And by his descending to earth together with him then will he reveal *in corpore et in spiritu*, and many other will see him.<sup>115</sup>

Thus, though Elijah’s ascent is an apotheosis, his descent is not a return of the deified person to a human existence, but in fact a case of theophany, since the divine power descends with him. It is in this literary body of Kabbalistic writing, which fiercely opposes both Greek and Jewish philosophy, that a more concrete vision of the ascent and descent may be found.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, what is conspicuous in this passage is the continuum among the divine, the angelic and the human. The ascent is a motion taking place between planes of existence that are not separated by ontic gaps but that are different forms of manifestations of a Protean and more comprehensive being.<sup>117</sup>

## 8. ASTRAL PSYCHANODIA IN JEWISH SOURCES

As pointed out by Culianu, the rather widespread ascent of the soul through the seven planets found in Hellenistic and early Christian sources was alien to late antiquity Jewish sources, which provide a separate and independent model of psychanodia.<sup>118</sup> I believe that this phenomenological remark is an important insight and holds not only for the ancient Jewish texts but also for vast majority of medieval and premodern Jewish texts. Despite the impact of astrology and of hermetic sources on various Jewish literatures, discussions of the ascent through the planetary system are few and explicitly literary; in fact, I am aware of only two examples. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, the influential twelfth-century thinker, produced a literary composition entitled *Hay ben Meqitz* under the influence of Avicenna.<sup>119</sup> Another composition was authored by Rabbi Abraham Yagel, a Kabbalist in the second half of the sixteenth century, that is entitled *Gei Hizzeyon*, which follows Italian models.<sup>120</sup> It should be mentioned, however, that unlike late antiquity cases of psychanodia in which some negative aspects are attributed to the planets, in these two Jewish sources, as well as in Avicenna, this is not so.

## 9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It may be said that the heavenly journey depicted as an act of leaving the body in order to explore the higher realms and then returning to it, as found in Heikhalot literature, is missing in the vast Kabbalistic literature written on the Iberian Peninsula. In lieu of this, as we shall see in chapter three, we have the elaboration of a tradition of the ascent of dead souls—post-mortem—on a cosmic pillar, from the lower to the higher paradise.

Whether the astral body is involved or not, ascents of the soul as part of an initiated endeavor do not occur in Spanish Jewish literature known as Kabbalah; Heikhalot literature had no impact. Here, we may find many instances of ascent and adhesion of the human soul, thought or intellect to higher spiritual entities, be they God, the agent intellect or the cosmic soul. Such forms of ascent are influenced by Neoplatonism and Neoplatonic sources as mediated by Arabic, Jewish and—more rarely—Christian philosophical writings that address the ideal of cleaving to the source of the human's spiritual faculties. At least within the topic of the spiritual ascent, a major shift in the phenomenology of Jewish mysticism can be discerned. While the bodily forms of ascent of mortals are dominant in late antiquity Jewish mysticism, such phenomena remain on the margin of its medieval forms and lingered only in instances in which Greek-Hellenistic theories were not influential. In all other cases—the vast majority of Jewish mysticism—Greek-Hellenistic theories prevailed and obliterated earlier forms of Jewish ascent. These forms remained active in one way or another *in corpora* that were much less interested in noetic processes, like the posthumous ascents in the book of the Zohar that will be analyzed in chapter three and in some Hasidic cases that will be discussed in chapter four. Though the theme of ascent on high remained in medieval European literature, as is evident from Dante's *Divina Commedia* and other cases mentioned in section eight, they are literary, not experiential, treatments. In the mystical literature of Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages, the ascent lost most of the centrality it had in late antiquity due to the accumulative impact of the noetic valences of both Neoplatonism and Neoplatonism. It is only in the posthumous journey of the soul that the ascent remained important in the three monotheistic religions in the Middle Ages.<sup>121</sup>

To return to Culianu's distinction between ancient Jewish ascents

through the heavens and Greek ascents involving a system of planets or spheres, both forms were marginalized in most medieval forms of Kabbalah. Other Greek and Hellenistic theories of psychanodia and nousanodia were adopted and transformed the late antiquity Jewish form of ascent via the heavens. Helpful as Culianu's distinction is for the period he investigated—namely late antiquity—it becomes less relevant for other periods in Jewish mysticism. Nevertheless—and this should be emphasized—there was a reticence in Jewish sources to adopt celestial spheres and planets as ladders for the ascent of the soul.

## NOTES

1. See Pierre Benoit, "L'ascension," *Revue Biblique* LVI (1940): pp. 161–203; Morton Smith, "Ascents to Heavens and the Beginning of Christianity," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 50 (1981): pp. 403–29; and James D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (New York: University Press of America, 1986). For Patristic discussions, see Felix Asiedu, "The Song of Songs and the ascent of the soul: Ambrose, Augustine, and the language of mysticism," *Vigiliae Christianae* 55:3 (2001): pp. 299–317.
2. See Geo Widengren, *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension* (Wiesbaden: Lundequistska bokhandeln Uppsala, 1955), pp. 96–114 and 220–26; Shmuel Tamari, *Iconotextual Studies in the Muslim Vision of Paradise* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University; and Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), pp. 72–75; David J. Halperin, "Hekhalot and Mi'raj: Observations on the Heavenly Journey in Judaism and Islam," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, eds., J. J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 269–88; B. Schrieke, "Die Himmelsreise Muhammeds," *Der Islam* VI (1916): pp. 1–30; Joseph Horowitz, "Muhammeds Himmelfahrt," *Der Islam* IX (1919): pp. 159–83; and R. Hartmann, "Die Himmelsreise Muhammeds und ihre Bedeutung in der Religion des Islam," *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg, 1928–1929* (Leipzig-Berlin: 1930), pp. 42–65. For mystical interpretations of the ascension in Islam see, for example, R. A. Nicholson, "An Early Arabic Version of the Mi'raj of Abdi Yazid al-Bistami," *Islamica* (1926): pp. 402–16; James Winston Morris, "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabi and the Mi'raj," *JAOS* 107:4 (1987): pp. 629–52; idem, 108:1 (1988): pp. 63–77. For philosophical interpretations of the ascent of the soul in Islam, see chapter 5.
3. For a short survey of the importance of theophany and apotheosis in the history of Jewish mysticism, see, for example, Moshe Idel, "Metatron: Some Remarks on Myth in Jewish Mysticism" (in Hebrew), in *Myth in Judaism*, ed. H. Pedaya (Beer Sheva: University of Ben Gurion Press, 1996), pp. 29–44; and idem, *BEN: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (forthcoming).

4. See Moshe Idel, "On Some Forms of Order in Kabbalah," *Daat* 50–52 (2003): pp. xxxi–lviii.
5. See Mircea Eliade, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 311–41.
6. Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), pp. 99–122.
7. Chapter II in Ioan P. Couliano, *Psychanodia I: A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden: Brill, 1983); and idem, *Experiences de l'extase: Extase, ascension et récit visionnaire de l'Hellenisme au Moyen Age* (Paris: Payot, 1984), pp. 79–92. See also idem, "Ascension," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (1987), vol. I, pp. 435–440; and the description of Culianu's views by Eduard Iricinschi in *Ioan Petru Culianu, Cult, magie, erezii*, ed. Sorin Antohi (Iasi: Polirom, 2003), pp. 244–48. For a substantial contribution to Culianu's thesis, see the study of Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Seven Heavens in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses," in her *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 21–54.
8. See Ioan P. Couliano, *The Tree of Gnosis*, trans. Hillary Wiener and Ioan P. Couliano (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), pp. 42–43. See also Michel Tardieu and J. D. Dubois, *Introduction a la litterature gnostique* (Paris: Cerf/CNRS, 1986), p. 33.
9. Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), pp. 9–22.
10. Ioan P. Couliano, *Out of this World: Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1991), pp. 181–87.
11. For the source of combinatory proclivities in the late Culianu, see Moshe Idel's preface to Nicu Gavriluta, *Culianu: Joculire mintii si lumile multidimensionale* (Iasi: Polirom, 2000), pp. 16–17.
12. Couliano, *Out of this World*, p. 38.
13. See, for example, Annelies Kuyt, *The "Descent" to the Chariot* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995). For Elliot R. Wolfson's treatment, see *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 74–124, especially pp. 108–19; and idem, "Yeridah la-Merkavah: Typology of Ecstasy and as Enthronement in Ancient Jewish Mysticism," in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typologies*, ed. R. A. Herrera (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 13–44. For Israel Knohl's work on this topic, see *The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, trans. David Maisel (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).
14. See Alexander Altmann, "The Ladder of Ascension," *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967), pp. 1–32; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 88–96; and Elliot R. Wolfson, "Weeping, Death and Spiritual Ascent in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism," in Collins and Fishbane, *Death, Ecstasy*, pp. 207–43.
15. See, especially, Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Peter



- Schaefer, *Hekhalot Studien* (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), pp. 234–49 and 285–89; David J. Halperin, “Ascension or invasion: Implications of the heavenly journey in ancient Judaism,” *Religion* 18:1 (1988): pp. 47–67; idem, “Heavenly ascension in ancient Judaism: The nature of the experience,” *SBLSP* 26 (1987): pp. 218–32; and idem, *Faces of the Chariot* (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987).
16. *Genesis Rabba*’ 14:9 in *Midrash bereshit Rabba*, eds. J. Theodor and C. Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965), vol. I, pp. 133–34.
  17. Morton Smith, “Ascents to Heavens and the Beginning of Christianity,” *Eranos Jahrbuch* 50 (1981): p. 415. See also idem, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 237–49; and idem, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: 1981), pp. 124–25.
  18. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*, pp. 426–28. The quote is II Corinthians 12:3. On this text, see Peter Schaefer’s article, “New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and in Merkavah Mysticism,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35 (1984): pp. 19–35. Schaefer did not consider the possibility that Smith’s, or his predecessors’, reading of Paul’s statements related to Jesus himself.
  19. See Tabor, *Things Unutterable*; Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1960), p. 18; Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*, pp. 238–43; and Ithamar Gruenwald, “Knowledge and Vision,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 (1973): p. 106.
  20. *Ode* 36.3, 4 and 6, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J.H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), vol. II, pp. 765–66; Margaret Barker, “The Secret Tradition,” *The Journal of Higher Criticism* 2:1 (1995): pp. 31–67. I assume that this text is the source of, or at least a parallel to the views found in, the Gnostic *Apocalypse of Zostrianos* VIII.1, where an ascent on high is described that culminates with becoming one of the glories. This view is found also in the Slavonic Book of Enoch. See Madeleine Scopello, “The Apocalypse of Zostrianos (Nag Hamadi VIII.I) and the Book of the Secrets of Enoch,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 34 (1980): pp. 376–78. See also Frederik H. Borsch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History* (London: SCM Press, 1967), pp. 195–96.
  21. *Ode* 38.1 and 5, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. II, p. 766. “Truth” is to be interpreted here as the name of a hypostasis or an angel. In ancient Jewish literature, truth points in some cases to God. See Moshe Idel, “Golems and God: Mimesis and Confrontation,” in *Mythen der Kreativitaet*, eds. Refika Sarionder and Annette Deschner (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck, 2003), p. 242; and idem, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 306–08. *Nota Bene*: The chariot here is a means for ascent, not an object of contemplation, as is the case in Heikhalot literature.
  22. *Sukkah*, fol. 45a. On this statement and the parallels adduced by the author, see Aharon Kaminka, “Die Mystischen Ideen des R. Simon b. Johai,” *HUCA* X (1935): p. 165.

23. See Martha Himmelfarb, "Heavenly Ascent and the Relationship of the Apocalypses and Hekhalot Literature," *HUCA* LIV (1988): pp. 73–100.
24. See Moshe Idel, "Enoch is Metatron," *Immanuel* 24/25 (1990): pp. 220–40; C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkavah Tradition," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43 (1992): p. 17.
25. On the gigantic dimension of divinity designated as *Shi'ur Qomah*, see Martin S. Cohen, *The Shiur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham: Scholars Press, 1983).
26. Schaefer, *Hekhalot Studien*, p. 286. On transformation of the person in this literature, see Daphna V. Arbel, "'Understanding of the Heart,' Spiritual Transformation and Divine Revelations in the Heikhalot and Merkavah Literature," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6 (1999): pp. 320–44.
27. Schaefer, *Hekhalot Studien*, pp. 277–95.
28. See the lengthy discussions on Moses's role in Heikhalot texts in Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 289–322, 335–36 and 420–26. See also the texts of Heikhalot literature and the short discussion in Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 115–18, 166, 171 and 212.
29. See especially *BT, Sabbath*, fol. 88b. See also Moshe Idel, "The Concept of the Torah in Heikhalot Literature and Its Metamorphoses in Kabbalah" (in Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): pp. 25–32.
30. See *BT, Hagigah*, fol. 15b. In several early and late Midrashic cases, expressions similar to this one are found; they deserve separate treatment.
31. Rachel Elijor, ed., *Heikhalot Zutarti* (Jerusalem: Institute for Jewish Studies, Hebrew University, 1982), p. 23.
32. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 157–58.
33. See Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 135–50.
34. Elijor, *Heikhalot Zutarti*, p. 22; Peter Schaefer, ed., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1981), pp. 143–44.
35. Idel, "Concept of the Torah," pp. 27–29.
36. See J. D. Eisenstein, ed., *Otzar ha-Midrashim*, 2 vols. (New York: Reznik and Co., 1915), p. 307. Compare to Idel, "Concept of the Torah," pp. 27–29; and Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 289–319. For more on this issue, see discussion of the revelation received by the Besht in chapter 4.
37. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 285–86.
38. See the texts printed in Schafer, *Synopse*, pp. 59–60, par. 119–21; and Gottfried Reeg, *Die Geschichte von den Zehn Martyrern* (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985), p. 90, par. 40. This passage also is translated into German on pp. 82–83. In most of the manuscripts of this text, the passage on the miraculous exchange between the Rabbi and a Caesar are missing. On the interchanges between the images of two persons in the ancient period, see Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), p. 157, n. 28; and Peter Schaefer, *Uebersetzung der Heikhalot-Literatur* (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 43–51.
39. See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 51.

40. See Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), pp. 45–145; and section 5 below.
41. Benjamin Levin, ed., *’Otzar ha-Geonim* (Jerusalem, 1932), on *Hagigah*, part of Teshuvot, pp. 14–15. I have partially followed the translation of the first half of the quotation given in Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 49. See also Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 144–50. “Qualities” here is the translation of *Middot*, a recurring term in Heikhalot literature, the meaning of which changes from context to context. For more on the technique described in this passage, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 91; and Paul Fenton, “La ‘tête entre les genoux’: Contribution à l’étude d’une posture méditative dans la mystique juive et islamique,” *Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 72:4 (1992): pp. 413–26.
42. See Adolph Jellinek, *Beitraege zur Geschichte der Kabbala* (Leipzig: C. L. Fritzsche, 1852), part 2, pp. 15–16, n. 22.
43. Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 49–50.
44. See David J. Halperin, “A New Edition of the Heikhalot Literature,” *Journal of American Oriental Society* 104:3(1984): pp. 544, 547 and 550–51. See also idem, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980), pp. 3, 89 and 177.
45. See Cohen, *Shi’ur Qomah*, pp. 5–6.
46. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 90–91; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 110–11, 146–48; Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, pp. 109 and 148, n. 53; and Ron P. Margolin, *The Interiorization of Religious Life and Thought at the Beginning of Hasidism: Its Sources and Epistemological Basis* (in Hebrew) (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 176ff, 196–201.
47. See Levin, *’Otzar ha-Geonim*, *Hagigah*, pp. 11–12.
48. A. Kohut, ed., *’Arukh ha-Shalem* (Vienna: Grab, 1878), vol. I, p. 14, under the word *’avnei shayish tahor*; and Assi Farber-Ginat, “Inquiries in *Shi’ur Qomah*” (in Hebrew), *Massu’ot: Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb*, eds. Michal Oron and Amos Goldreich (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1994), p. 374, n. 70.
49. See E. E. Urbach, ed., *R. Abraham ben Azriel, ’Arugat ha-Bosem* (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1947), vol. 1, p. 198, n. 2 and pp. 199–200. See also p. 202 for the phrase *ba-sekhel libam*, “the intellect of their heart”; and David Halperin, “Origen, Ezekiel’s Merkavah, and the Ascension of Moses,” *Church History* 50 (1981): pp. 263 and 273–74. The occurrence of the phrases *cordis oculis* in Origen or *binat levavkhem* in Hebrew texts may evidence a psychological interpretation of the vision of the Merkavah in ancient Jewish sources; see also Halperin, *Merkabah*, pp. 174–75; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 147–48; and Adena Tanenbaum, *The Contemplative Soul: Hebrew Poetry and Philosophical Theory in Medieval Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 77–79 and 190.
50. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 29, where he refers to Macarius the Egyptian, who in the fourth century interpreted the vision of Ezekiel as a vision of “the secret of the soul.”

51. See also Rav Hai's reservations concerning mystical and magical practices connected with the divine names: Levin, *'Otzar ha-Geonim*, Hagigah, pp. 16–24; and Colette Sirat, *Les theories des visions surnaturelles dans la pensee juive du Moyen Age* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), pp. 33–35.
52. See especially Rav Hai's view in Levin, *'Otzar ha-Geonim*, on *Hagigah*, p. 15, that inner visions are miraculous events granted by God to the righteous. This attitude is an obvious attempt to discredit the efficacy of mystical techniques.
53. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 90–91. For another stance that emphasizes the importance of a docetic reading of many rabbinic sources, see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 33–51.
54. See Gershom Scholem, "On the Prophecy of Rabbi Ezra of Moncontour" (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): p. 244.
55. This poem, consisting of three verses, was printed in Hebrew by Naftali Fried, *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): p. 514. Unfortunately, Botarel is an unreliable witness, and his testimonies in general are suspect of fabrication. Here, however, the testimony is corroborated by other material.
56. See Israel Ta-Shma, "*She'elot ve-Teshuvot me-ha-Shamayim*: The Collection and the Additions" (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 87 (1988): pp. 51–66. See also the passage above by Rabbi Ezra of Montcontour.
57. See Rabbi Naftali Zevi Hirsch Treves, *Commentary on the Siddur* (Thiengen, 1560), fol. 40, Ib.
58. On *Hagigah*, fol. 15b.
59. Samuel K. Mirsky, ed., *Shibbolei ha-Leqet* (New York: Sura, 1966), vol. I, no. 28, p. 46; and R. Simhah of Vitry, *Mahzor Vitri*, ed. S. Horowitz (Nuremberg: Bulka, 1923), p. 364. Compare also to Mirsky, *Shibbolei ha-Leqet*, p. 176. The Rabbi Eleazar's poem is printed in Daniel Goldschmidt, *Mahzor to Rosh ha-Shanah* (Jerusalem: Koren, 1970), p. 216. Its content is, significantly enough, closely related to Ezekiel's vision.
60. See E. E. Urbach, "The Traditions of Merkabah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period" (in Hebrew), in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967), pp. 4–10.
61. Rabbi Moshe of Taku, *Ketav Tammim*, printed in *'Otzar Nehmad*, IV (1863), p. 85.
62. See Rabbi Abraham of Tortrutiel's supplements to *Sefer ha-Kabbalah of R. Abraham ben David*, reprinted in *Two Chronicles from the Generation of the Spanish Exile*, intro. by A. David (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1979), p. 28. Compare to the description of the *incantatores* discussed in chapter 4, section 3 below. For a somewhat earlier description of ascent, see Rabbi Nehemiah ben Shlomo the Prophet's *Commentary on Seventy Names of Metatron*, stemming from late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century Ashkenazi circles. Enoch is described as someone who ascended to the firmament; the terminology used implies that he did so by himself: *'alah la-raqi'a*. He also is described as becoming an angel and at the same time as "the brother of God"—a clear case of apotheosis. See *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, ed. Y. M. Epstein (Lemberg: Kugel, Levin & Co., 1865), fol. 4b.

63. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 86–91.
64. For an important survey of these processes in Judaism, see Margolin, *Interiorization of Religious Life*.
65. See Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1963), I:10, pp. 35–37.
66. *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Ms. Munchen 408, fols. 7b–8a. The first quote is Exodus 19:3. For the mountain as a metaphor for the human intellect in Rabbi Abulafia, see Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 102–03 and 156–57, n. 128. On the term “place,” see Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I:8, pp. 33–34. On the interiorization of the term “place” in Jewish mysticism, see Margolin, *Interiorization of Religious Life*, pp. 129–31.
67. Ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 155a. On the concept of universalization, see Moshe Idel, “Universalization and Integration: Two Conceptions of Mystical Union in Jewish Mysticism,” in *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, eds. M. Idel and B. McGinn (New York: MacMillan, 1989), pp. 27–58. On immortality as deification, see W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (London, 1925), pp. 357–58. Rabbi Abulafia’s stance would confirm Inge’s category of deification through transformation. See *ibid.*, p. 365; and *idem*, *Mysticism in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 46.
68. Ms. New York JTS 1887, fol. 105b. “Sphere of the intellect” is translated from *galgal ha-sekheh*. This phrase corresponds to the view of the Empireum in the Middle Ages. On this issue, see Adena Tenenbaum, “Nine Spheres or Ten?” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47 (1996): pp. 294–310.
69. Rabbi Isaac of Acre, *Me’irat Einayyim*, ed. Amos Goldreich (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1984), p. 222; this passage was reprinted from Ms. Munchen 17 in Appendix II of J. Hercz, *Drei Abhandlungen u’ber die Conjunction des separaten Intellects mit dem Menschen* (Berlin: Hermann, 1869), p. 22. In Hercz’s view, this text reflects the impact of Averroes’s theory of the intellect. The passage was translated into French by Vajda, who contends that it was influenced by the psychological doctrine of Ibn Bajja; see Vajda, *Recherches*, p. 379, n. 3; and Micheline Chaze, “Quelques aspects du thème de l’ascension de l’âme dans la Kabbale du XIIIe siècle,” *Revue des études juives*, vol. 156, 1–2 (1997), pp. 107–111.

The term “Divine Intellect” also appears in the early works of Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla and Rabbi Abraham Abulafia as well as in Rabbi Nathan ben Sa’adya’s *Sha’arei Tzedeq*. For more on this issue, see Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 151, n. 62.

Rabbi Jacob ben Sheshet, a Geronese Kabbalist of the mid-thirteenth century, formulated the view that an entity that cleaves to another entity is called by the name of the latter. See chapter II in Georges Vajda, ed., *Recherches sur la philosophie et la Kabbale dans la pense juive du Moyen Age* (Paris: Mouton, 1962), p. 76. On the impact of this stand on a contemporary Kabbalist, see Efrayyim Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah in the Writings of Rabbi*

*Bahya ben Asher* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass, 1970), pp. 115–16; and Rabbi Joseph Angelet, *Sefer Quppat ha-Rokhlim*, Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1618, fol. 70ab.

On the source and root of the soul, see also Natan ben Sa'adyah Har'ar, *Le Porte della Giustizia*, ed. Moshe Idel, trans. Maurizio Mottolese (Milan: Adelphi, 2001), p. 453. On the magical implications of the mystical attainment, see Idel, *Golem*, pp. 106–07.

70. *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, Ms. Paris BN 727, fol. 28b. The quote in this passage is Ezekiel 1:26. The Kabbalist also mentions in this context a translucent mirror as an allegory for either the human-actualized intellect or the cosmic agent intellect; the unclear mirror in the passage is the human imagination. See the Talmudic sources adduced and discussed in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 147–48. In “the prophets who came after him,” “him” refers to Moses.
71. On this issue in medieval Judaism, see Alexander Altmann and Samuel M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 189–95; and Tanenbaum, *Contemplative Soul*, pp. 40–42.
72. Ludwig Venetianer, ed., *Sefer ha-Ma'alot* (Berlin: Verlag von S. Calvary & Co., 1894), p. 22. “Aristotle” at the beginning of this passage is, in fact, Plotin. For the appropriation of the “as if” language for ascent in Kabbalistic texts, see section 6 in this chapter. See also Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: The Schocken Books, 1991), pp. 257–58; idem, *Major Trends*, p. 203; and Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 52. On the impact of this work on thirteenth-century Jewish thought, see Alexander Altmann, “The Delphic Maxim in Medieval Islam and Judaism,” in *Von der Mittelalterlichen zur Modernen Aufklärung: Studien zur Juedischen Geistgeschichte* (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), pp. 26–28; Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, pp. 191–92; Moshe Idel, “Types of Redemptive Activity in the Middle Ages,” *Messianism and Eschatology: A Collection of Essays* (in Hebrew), ed. Zvi Baras (Jerusalem: The Shazar Center, 1983), pp. 256–57, n. 20; Paul B. Fenton (Ynnon), “Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera and the *Theology of Aristotle*” (in Hebrew), *Daat 29* (1992): pp. 27–40; idem, “The Arabic and Hebrew Versions of the *Theology of Aristotle*,” in *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages*, Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts, ed. J. Kraye (London: Warburg Institute, 1996), vol. 11, pp. 241–64.
73. For more on Plotin, see chapter 5. See also Margolin, *Interiorization of Religious Life*, pp. 113–15.
74. See Scholem, *Elements*, p. 194. Though this text is anonymous in all manuscripts in which it is extant, Scholem seems to be correct in his attribution of the text to Rabbi Ezra.

For more on the union of the righteous and the supernal, see Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra's *Commentary on Psalms* 139:18. In a passage by an influential nineteenth-century master, Rabbi Qalonimus Qalman Epstein of Cracow, we find a similar stance attributed to the righteous: “It is known and I have indeed seen some great *tzaddiqim* who had attached themselves

to the supernal worlds, and they divested themselves of the garment of their corporeality, so that the *Shekhinah* dwelled upon them and spoke from within their throats, and their mouths spoke prophecy and future things. And these *tzadikim* themselves did not know afterwards what they spoke, for they were attached to the supernal worlds while the *Shekhinah* spoke from within their throats.” Compare to *Ma’or va-Shemesh* (Jerusalem: Even Israel, 1992), I, p. 127; Rivka Schatz Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism: Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth-Century Hasidic Thought*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Princeton: Princeton University Press; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1993), pp. 200–01 and adduced in the English translation of Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), pp. 217–18.

The use of the past tense in this passage indicates the difference between the righteous acting today and the prophets who acted in the past. On this issue, see Moshe Idel, “The Interpretations of the Secret of Incest in Early Kabbalah” (in Hebrew), *Kabbalah* 12 (2004): 106 n. 92.

75. *Sefer Ma’arekhet ha-’Elohut*, fol. 98b. The term “cleaving of the mind”—*Devequt ha-Da’at*—is a clear example of nousanodia, despite the fact that at the beginning of the passage the soul is mentioned explicitly. The quote within this passage is Deuteronomy 4:4.
76. See Rabbi Ezra’s passage translated in Moshe Idel, “Some Remarks on Ritual and Mysticism in Geronese Kabbalah,” *Jewish Thought and Philosophy* III (1993): p. 124.
77. MS. Jerusalem 1959 80, fol. 200a. It seems that the term *Middah* implies a certain way of action, or a technique, to attain the spiritual experience. The quote in this passage is Genesis 5:22. For commentary on the phrase “as if,” see n. 104.
78. *Zohar Hadash*, fol. 69ab. In Manichaeism, the soul is given a garment of light after death. See Manfred Heuser, “The Manichaean Myth according to Coptic Sources,” in *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art*, eds. Manfred Heuser and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 42–43. On luminous garments in early Kabbalah, see Gershom Scholem, “*Levush ha-Neshamot ve-Haluqa’ de-Rabbanan*” (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 24 (1955): pp. 290–306; Elliot Wolfson, “The Secret of the Garment in Nahmanides,” *Da’at* (English version) 24 (1990): pp. 29 and 47. For more on Manichaeism and the Zohar, see chapter 3, and Idel, “Some Remarks on Ritual,” pp. 119–21.

The matter of “brilliance” is undoubtedly connected here to the concept of the *haluqa’ de-Rabbanan*, as emphasized in Lurianic Kabbalah; this matter requires detailed study. See also Hugo Odeberg’s introduction to *The Book of Enoch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), pp. 122–23. For the use of the expression “Metatron” in order to indicate the most exalted part of the human soul, see a citation entitled “Midrash” in *Yalqut Reuveni* (Jerusalem, 1962), fol. 23a: “And God created man in His image’—in the image and the image of Metatron. If man merits, he merits the image...the first God is the living God, [which is] an allusion to Metatron.” See also chapter 3, n. 15.

79. Natan ben Sa'adyah Har'ar, *Le porte della Giustizia*, p. 385. The quote is Ezekiel 1:26. It should be noted that this verse is the proof text for the Midrashic dictum about the prophets that compares the form to the entity that forms them, adduced by Rabbi Nathan in the passage quoted from a book of Rabbi Isaac of Acre, in Rabbi Moses of Kiev. On the concept of "the point," which in Rabbi Abulafia's writings refers either to the agent intellect or to the human soul, see Moshe Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. M. Kallus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 40–41.
80. Natan ben Sa'adyah Har'ar, *Le porte della Giustizia*, p. 385.
81. 'Otzar Hayyim, Ms. Moscow-Ginsburg 775, fol. 233b. I translated the rather exceptional formulation found in this version, which uses "Nought" in lieu of 'Ein Sof, as is also the case in the version of this passage extant in Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1911, fol. 154b. "Nought" is *va-tidbbaq nefesh zo be-'ayin*; "palace" is *Heikhalah*. The latter is a recurrent image in Rabbi Isaac's writings on the body. See also the quote from an unnamed Kabbalist, adduced in Rabbi Nathan Ben Sa'adya's *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, in *Le porte della Giustizia*, p. 373, and in the anonymous *Peraqim be-Hatzalah*, attributed to Maimonides, ed. D. Baneth (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1939), p. 17.
82. See Rabbi Levi Isaac of Berditchev, *Qedushat ha-Levi*, (Jerusalem: Makhon Qedushat Levi, 1993), p. 5.
83. Natan ben Sa'adyah Har'ar, *Le porte della Giustizia*, p. 467. I assume that this refers to the angelic powers.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 475.
85. Meir Benayahu, ed., *Sefer Toldot ha-Ari* (Jerusalem: Makhon ben-Tzvi, 1960), p. 155. This hagiographic description left an indelible impression on the way in which the Besht has been portrayed. For more on this issue, see chapter 4. For an important passage by Rabbi Hayyim Vital dealing with the ascent of Moses in body and soul, which becomes an example for the Messiah, see Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, trans. R. J. Z. Werblowsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 53.
86. Benayahu, *Sefer Toldot ha-Ari*, pp. 154–55.
87. *Sha'arei Qedushah*, Ms. British Library 749, fol. 16a, printed also in Rabbi Hayyim Vital, *Ketavim Hadashim*, ed. Nathanel Safrin (Jerusalem: Ahavat Shalom, 1988), p. 6. "As above" refers to a prescription copied earlier on the same page. For comments on the phrase "as if," see n. 104 below.
88. See Lawrence Fine, "Recitation of Mishnah as a Vehicle for Mystical Inspiration: A Contemplative Technique Taught by Hayyim Vital," *REJ* 141 (1982): pp. 190 and 198; and *idem*, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Palo Alto, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 290–91.
89. *Sefer ha-Heziyonot*, p. 112; Morris M. Faierstein, ed., *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), p. 136.
90. *Sefer ha-Heziyonot*, pp. 42 and 47–49.
91. See Dov Baer of Medzeritch, *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov*, pp. 38–39. The quote is Ezekiel 1:26. It is important to emphasize that a distinguished disciple of the Great Maggid understood this verse as symbolizing the deep



affinity between the human and the divine. According to Rabbi Abraham Jehoshua Heschel of Apt, the man on the chariot is identical to the plene spelling of the Tetragrammaton and, at the same time, stems from the lower man, who generates or makes God by his performance of the commandments. This interpretation ostensibly reduces, or even obliterates, the distance between God and man.

Shortly before this excerpt, the Maggid refers to the descending contractions that permitted a union of God to man. Here, man returns to his origin, ascending the *scala contemplationis*, which implies gradual obliterations of the contractions, culminating in annihilation of the human existence.

The term translated as “speech” is *Dibbur*; I prefer the version found in a variant of this passage found in another collection of the teachings of the Great Maggid, *’Or ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1968), p. 73: *dibbur Malkhut*, or “speech” and “*Malkhut*,” the initials of which—*D* and *M*—form parts of the word *’ADaM*. Thence, it seems that “speech” may represent here the sefirah of Tiferet; compare, however, Schatz-Uffenheimer’s remark in her edition of Dov Baer of Medzeritch, *Maggid Devarav le-Ya’aqov* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1976). My interpretation turns *’ADaM* into a symbol for three aspects in the Godhead: the *’A*—master of the universe, that is, the transcendent aspect; and two immanent aspects—*Malkhut* and *Tiferet*. *DaM*, which is translated here as “Alpha,” in Hebrew is blood. The Maggid uses a pun: the Hebrew term *’Aluf* is both master and champion but is also close to *’Alef*, the principle of the world. Compare also to Rabbi Levi Isaac of Berditchev’s discussion in *Qedushat Levi*, fol. 64bc, where the reference to *’Alef* is explicit. The source is apparently *BT, Hagigah*, fol. 16a.

For parallels to this text in Hasidic literature, see Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 213, n. 29. See also Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), pp. 226–27; Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, trans. D. Goldstein (London: Littman Library, 1991), vol. 2, pp. 1010–11, n. 354.

92. Num. 10:2.

93. See Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. I, pp. 229–370; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 136–53.

94. Ioan P. Couliano, *Experiences de l’extase*, (Paris: Payot, 1984), pp. 119–144.

95. For more on this issue, see the concluding remarks in Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros* (forthcoming). For a description of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists by Rabbi Abulafia, who declares that they ascend from one light to another, see the passage translated and analyzed in Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 83–84.

96. Reprinted in Azulai, *Massekhet ’Avot* (Jerusalem, 1986), fol. 3a. The Hebrew term translated here as “entity” is *sibbah*. Cordovero also mentions the ascent from one *’Illah* to another. On “the source,” see also Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 42–46; and idem, “Universalization and Integration,” pp. 28–33. On the pericope *Terumah*, see *Zohar II*, fol. 169a. The pertinent text is quoted by Rabbi Cordovero, but I do not deal with it here because, in my opinion, it is not the actual source of this view. See, however,

Zohar, I, fol. 43a; and Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 53. "The great pipe" in Hebrew is *bi-meqom ha-tzinor ha-gadol*. For more on this text in general, see Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 100–01.

97. Gershom Scholem, *Researches in Sabbateanism* (in Hebrew), ed. Yehuda Liebes (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1991), pp. 214–15; and Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 193–94. The ninth sefirah, Yesod, is widely described as Tzaddiq, as we shall see in chapter 2.
- For a Freudian interpretation of this passage, which emphasizes the importance of the mention of "his mother," see Avner Falk, "The Messiah and the Qeliphoth: On the Mental Illness of Sabbatai Sevi," *Journal of Psychology and Judaism* 7:1 (1982): pp. 25–26. For another psychoanalytical interpretation of Sabbateanism, see Siegmund Hurwitz, "Sabbatai Zwi, Zur Psychologie der haeretischen Kabbala," *Studien zur analytischen Psychologie C. G. Jungs, Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von C. G. Jung* (Zurich: Rascher Verlag, 1956), vol. II, pp. 239–63.
98. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, pp. 119–23, 146–47 and 149; and Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 107–13.
99. This suggestion invites a more detailed investigation, which may find that the Sabbatean secret of the divinity changed as part of a development alongside the vector of time and of the ontic hierarchy of the sefirot. This means that the closer the messianic drama comes to the final stage, the higher the divine power that is appointed upon Sabbatai and constitutes the "secret of divinity."
100. Scholem, *Researches in Sabbateanism*, p. 222.
101. See Charles H. Talbot, "The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity," *New Testament Studies* 22 (1976): pp. 418–39.
102. See the citation adduced in the name of his grandfather by Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Efrayyim of Sudylkov, *Degel Mahaneh 'Efrayyim* (Jerusalem, 1995), p. 214.
103. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, *Me'or 'Einayyim* (Jerusalem, 1975) p. 123. See also Elliot R. Wolfson, *Circle in the Square* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 25. For more on the views of this master regarding the righteous and his task, see chapter 4.

The "Assembly of Israel" is translated from *Knesset Yisrael*. This is a cognomen for the last sefirah, which is commonly understood as the bride of God, and the union between them is conceived of as the main task of the theosophical–theurgical Kabbalah. The first quote in this passage is Isaiah 62:5. "Delight of all delights" is a recurring dictum in Hasidism since its very beginning, which was influenced by the anti-Maimonidean stance of the early fifteenth-century Catalan thinker, Rabbi Hasdai Crescas. Rabbi Menahem Nahum and his son Mordekhai were very fond of this formula. Interestingly enough, to the best of my knowledge, only Rabbi Menahem Nahum describes God by the term "the delight of all delights." See Menahem Nahum, *Me'or 'Einayyim*, p. 27. The Besht has been attributed a passage in which this dictum appears by Rabbi Aharon ha-Kohen of Apta, an early collector of the Besht's dicta; see his book,

*Ner Mitzvah* (Pietrkov, 1881), fol. 24b, written at the end of the eighteenth century.

On the history of the interpretations of the dictum, “let the words of the Torah be new,” see Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 370–89. “The creation of the world” is translated from *Ma’aseh bereshit*. “Yesterday that passed” is Psalm 90:4. “Israel is called a virgin” is translated from *Betullat Yisrael*.

104. On the language “as if,” see R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 69–70; Wolfson, “Weeping, Death,” p. 232; Haviva Pedaya, “‘Ahuzim be-Dibbur,” *Tarbiz* 65 (1996): pp. 576–77, n. 21; Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 126–31, 137–42, 144–46 and 148–50; and idem, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), p. 45.
105. Y. E. E. Porush, ed., *Sullam ha-’Aliyah* (Jerusalem: Sha’arei Ziv, 1989), p. 73. On the expression “as if,” which occurs three times in this passage, see section 4. Compare “the splendor and the radiance” to the passage extant above from the *Theology of Aristotle*. The sentence, “And it is...,” reflects the impact of Rabbi Abulafia’s *Hayyei ha-’Olam ha-Ba’*. “From one rank to another” is translated from *Mi-madregah le-madregah*. On this phrase, see section 5 and chapter 4, n. 7. The “supernal and hidden world of emanation” is the realm of the ten sefirot. The terms “human dominion” and “divine dominion” stem from Rabbi Nathan ben Sa’adya’s *Sha’arei Tzedeq*. See Moshe Idel’s introduction to Rabbi Nathan ben Sa’adya Harar, *Le porte della Giustizia*, pp. 276–87.
106. *Sha’arei Qedushah*, pp. 102–03. For an analysis of this passage, see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, pp. 69–70; and Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 320–23. I read “as if the soul exited it” as referring to the world, though it is also possible that the soul exited from the body of man. “From one root to another” is but another version of the ascent from one degree to another, as discussed above.
107. *Sha’arei Qedushah*, pp. 114–15.
108. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, p. 70.
109. See, for example, Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); and William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).
110. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 73–89.
111. Moshe Idel, “Kavvanah and Colors: A Neglected Kabbalistic *Responsum*,” in *Tribute to Sara Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah Presented to Professor Sara O. Heller Wilensky* (in Hebrew), eds. M. Idel, D. Dimant, and S. Rosenberg (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1994), p. 5. On this issue, see also Moshe Idel, “Kabbalistic Prayer and Colors,” in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. D. R. Blumenthal (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), vol. III, pp. 17–27. The quote at the end of the passage is Psalms 16:8.

112. Ms. British Library, Margoliouth 749, fol. 16a, printed in Rabbi Hayyim Vital, *Ketavim Hadashim*, p. 6.
113. See *The Book of Mystical Chapters: Meditations on the Soul's Ascent from the Desert Fathers and Other Early Christian Contemplatives*, trans. and intro. John Anthony McGuckin (Boston: Shambhala, 2002).
114. Nahmanides, on Leviticus 18:4.
115. Ms. Jerusalem, NUL 80 147, fols. 96b–97a; this passage was copied in the mid-sixteenth century in Safed by Rabbi `Ovadia Hamon, Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1597, fols. 58b–59a. The Hebrew original is printed in Idel, “Inquiries,” pp. 212–13; and more recently, in Claude Sultan, *Levouch ha-Malkhout, Le vetement royal* (Ph.D. diss., University of Strasbourg, 1990), pp. 181–82.

The “power of spirituality” is *Koah ruhaniyyut*. “An integral part” of Elijah is his angelic nature. It is in Elijah’s name that letters of the Tetragrammaton are found. This is a theory found in several Kabbalistic sources. The divine names referred to in this passage play a central role in the theories of this book. The first quote is Ecclesiastes 10:20; the second, Deuteronomy 4:6. “My soul is bound to him” also refers to Elijah or to his name. “By his descending to earth together with him” refers to Elijah, who descends with the Messiah according to many traditions. Though the mythical return of the prophet with the Messiah is part and parcel of Jewish apocalypics, here a more theosophical understanding of the event is found.
116. See Idel, “Inquiries,” pp. 232–43; and idem, “Magic and Kabbalah in the Book of the Responding Entity,” *The Solomon Goldman Lectures*, ed. M. Gruber (Chicago: Spertus College, 1993), vol. VI, pp. 125–38.
117. See Idel, *Enchanted Chains*.
118. Couliano, *Psychanodia*; and idem, *Experiences de l’extase*, pp. 153–72.
119. See Israel Levin, ed., *Igeret Hay ben Meqitz le-Abraham ibn Ezra* (Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv, 1983); and Aaron Hughes, “The Three Worlds of ibn Ezra’s *Hay ben Meqitz*,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 11:1 (2002): pp. 1–25. A translation of Avicenna’s book in Hebrew, together with a commentary by ibn Zayla, is available under the title *Hay ben Meqitz: The Living, the Son of the Awaker*, printed by David Kaufmann, *Qovetz alYad* (Berlin: Mekize Nirdamim, 1886), vol. II, pp. 1–29.
120. See *A Valley of Vision: The Heavenly Journey of Abraham ben Hananiah Yagel*, trans. David B. Ruderman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990). On Yagel’s sources, see Ruderman’s introduction, pp. 28–50.
121. For Arabic and Jewish sources dealing with this issue, see chapters 3 and 5.