

# The Symbolism of Ritual Circumambulation in Judaism and Islam – A Comparative Study

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In the course of our research on the relationship between Jewish and Muslim mysticism, we have concentrated in recent studies on the comparison between certain practices shared by both traditions.<sup>1</sup> By the mutual light they shed, particular analogies have proven extremely instructive, often helping to penetrate the symbolic dimensions of not a few doctrinal and ritual prescriptions. We would like to discuss presently what is probably the central ritual held in common by these two religions – the ritual of circumambulation, known in Hebrew as *baqqâfâh*, and in Arabic as *ṭawâf*, from the respective roots *nâqaf* et *ṭâfa*, both signifying ‘to encircle’.

Circumambulation is not exclusive to Judaism nor Islam; indeed it is one of the few rituals universally attested amongst faiths and creeds from the four corners of the globe.<sup>2</sup> Invariably performed

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<sup>1</sup> We have given an overview of the influences of Sufism upon Judaism in the introduction to our *Deux Traités de mystique juive*, Lagrasse, Editions Verdier, 1987. The Muslim background to the *baqqâsôt* ceremony is discussed in our article “Les *baqqâsôt* d’orient et d’occident”, *REJ* CXXXIV (1975), pp. 101–121. Other comparative studies of particular practices are presented in our articles: “La tête entre les genoux”, *Revue d’histoire des religions* LXXII (1992), pp. 413–426; “*Hašpa ’ôt šufiyôt ‘al ha-qabbalâh ba-Safat*”, *Mahanayim* VI (1993), pp. 170–179; “Solitary meditation in Jewish and Islamic Mysticism”, *Medieval Encounters* 1 (1995) pp. 271–296 and “Influences soufies sur le développement de la Qabbale à Safed: le cas de la visitation des tombes”, in R. Goetschel (Ed.), *Actes du colloque sur la mystique juive*, Paris, 1994 (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the collective work by S. Bhardwaj and G. Rinschede, *Pilgrimage in World Religions*, Berlin, 1988.

around a central pole – a terrestrial representation of the supernal abode or a symbol of the *axis mundi* – circumambulation can also be an imitation of the rotation of the sun or the heavenly spheres. It thus reenacts the flux and movement of the physical realm in contrast to the stability and immutability of the ‘House of God’. By exposing the individual to all angles of the deity, such ceremonies, akin to the describing of ‘magic circles’, usually have a protective or destructive aim either through warding off or conjuring up evil.<sup>3</sup>

### Circumambulation in Judaism

The circumambulation rite is extremely ancient in the Semitic tradition, and already appears in the Bible. The sevenfold circuit performed by Joshua and the Israelites, which brought about the fall of Jericho constitutes, as it were, the paradigmatic model. Since the latter is often referred to in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is worthwhile quoting a few lines from the narrative in the Book of Joshua VI, 13–16:

“And the seven priests bearing the seven rams’ horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually, and blew with the horns; <...> and they compassed the city once, and returned into the camp; so they did six days. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early at the dawning of the day, and compassed (*wayâsôbbû*) the city after the same manner seven times, only on that day they compassed the city seven times.”<sup>4</sup>

The classical example of the circumambulation ritual is that which took place in Temple times during the pilgrim ‘festival of booths’ (*Sukkôt*), which begins at the full-moon of the first month of the year, *Tisbrî*. Now *ḥag*, the term which specifically designates the

<sup>3</sup> See M. Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions*, Paris, 1975, p. 313 and A. J. Wensinck, ‘Some Semitic Rites of Mourning and Religion’, *Verhandelungen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam XVIII* (1917), pp. 42–49: Circumambulation.

<sup>4</sup> See P. Saintyves, *Essais de Folklore biblique*, Paris, 1923, “les rites maléfiques et la prise de Jéricho”, pp. 200–204.

festival of *Sukkôt*, derives from the root *hög*, signifying 'to describe a circle' and underscores the important role originally played by circumambulation in the pilgrimage rites attached to this festival. In a ritual analagous to that of the encirclement of Jericho, the Temple altar was encompassed by priests bearing willow-branches once every day of the festival.<sup>5</sup> The rite was performed seven times on the seventh and last day in an anti-clockwise direction.<sup>6</sup>

This is how the ceremony is described in the second century by the *Mišnâh Sukkâh* IV, 4:

"What was the rite of the willow-branch? There was a place below Jerusalem called Moša'. They went down thither and collected thence young willow-branches, and they came and set them upright along the sides of the Altar with their tops bent over the top of the Altar. They then sounded a prolonged blast, a quivering note and a prolonged blast. Each day (of the six days of the festival) they walked in procession once around the Altar and recited "We beseech thee O Eternal, save we pray; we beseech Thee, O Eternal, send prosperity, we pray" (Ps. 118, 25). <...> On the (seventh) day they walked in procession round the Altar seven times."<sup>7</sup>

Space does not allow us to dwell on the details of the historical development of this ritual. As has been pointed out by the historians of religion it seems that circumambulation was originally a rain ritual.<sup>8</sup> This fits in with the general theme of the rites of sympathetic magic which characterize the feast of *Sukkôt*, such as the building of booths, the shaking of palm branches, and the

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<sup>5</sup> The analogy is actually pointed out in *TJ Sukkâh* ch. IV, 3, ed. Venice, fol. 54c. Interestingly, Elazar of Worms, *Sefer ha-rôqeah, hilkôt sukkâh*, Warsaw, 1880, no. 221, draws a parallel between Jericho and the need for rain: "in general when dew and rain are requested, it is necessary to carry out circumambulations as in Jericho." See *infra* n. 31 where *haqqafôt* are indeed employed as a rain ritual.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Mišnâh, Middôt* II, 2: 'Whoever enters the Temple court does so rightwards, circumambulates and exits leftwards'.

<sup>7</sup> See also the discussion thereon in *TB Sukkâh*, 43b-42a.

<sup>8</sup> See for example, N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Language and the Book - Belief and Doctrines*, Jerusalem, 1955, pp. 78-86 (in Hebrew). Cf. Zachariah XIV, 16-17: "the remainder will go up to Jerusalem each year ... to celebrate the feast of booths. And the families of the earth that go not up ... will no longer be granted rain."

libations,<sup>9</sup> whose finality is not to celebrate the harvest, as has been often claimed, but to inaugurate the rain season. This association is moreover borne out by the liturgical texts which still accompany the ritual even today and whose main theme is the invocation of rain. In post-Temple times, circumambulation (*baqqâfôt*) continued to be practiced during the *Sukkôt* festival in the synagogue – traditionally considered to be a *miqdaš mō'at*, a 'micro-temple' – in order to perpetuate remembrance of temple custom (*zeker la-miqdaš*). An imitation of the temple ceremonial was enacted around the almemor.

However, a careful perusal of liturgical sources indicates that this custom was integrated into the synagogue service at a relatively late date sometime in the Ge'onic period (Xth century), i.e. subsequent to the rise of Islam. Indeed, R. 'Amram Gâ'ôn's (ob. circa 875) *Order of Prayers* makes no reference to this procession,<sup>10</sup> which, as far as we know, only first appears in the *Siddûr* of Sa'adya (ob. 942), who states:

(During the recital of the *bôs 'anôt*) the worshippers compass (*yatûfûn*) the almemor each day with one circuit (*tûfa*) and seven circuits on the seventh day. Nowadays it is the custom to compass the almemor three times each day and seven times on the seventh day.<sup>11</sup>

A slightly later Ge'onic authority, R. Šerirâ' Gâ'ôn (ob. 1006) still refers in a *responsum* to the *baqqâfôt* as an innovation: *baqqâfôt* we perform nowadays are not those which were performed around the (Temple) altar, but an innovation (*hiddûš*).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> On this particular point, see D. Feuchtwang, *Das Wasseropfer und die damit verbundenen Zeremonien*, Vienna, 1911.

<sup>10</sup> *Seder Rab 'Amram Gâ'ôn*, ed. D. Goldschmidt, Jerusalem, 1971, p. 176, §140. For a full discussion of the topic, see L. Ginzberg, *Ginzey Schechter*, vol. II, New York, 1929, pp. 252–265.

<sup>11</sup> *Siddûr Rab Sa'adya Gâ'ôn*, ed. S. Assaf, I. Davidson and I. Joel, Jerusalem, 1979<sup>4</sup>, p. 238. Note that the Arabic term employed by Sa'adya to designate a circumambulation, *tûfa*, derives from the same root as the Islamic *tawâf*. The custom is well established in R. Hai Gâ'ôn's (ob. 1038) time. Cf. *Hilġôt R. Yisbaq Giyat*, *hilġôt lulab*, no. 244, and B. Lewin, 'Ošar ba-ga' onim, Jerusalem, 1934, *sukkâb* 60, no. 151.

<sup>12</sup> Isaac Ibn Giyat, *Sa'arey Simbâb*, Fürth, 1861–62, no. 114. Ginzberg, *Ginzey Schechter*, vol. II, New York, 1929, p. 253 concludes from here that the

It is apparent from a Genizah fragment published by L. Ginzberg that in Babylonia only the Sages and pious individual (*yahidim*) would perform the *haqqâfôt*. With the exception of the Sabbath, these took place twice daily on festival days (*yôm tôb*), once on each of the intermediate days of the festival of *Sukkôt* (*hól ba-mô'ed*), and once in the morning and once in the evening of the seventh day (*Hoš'a'na Rabba*).<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, in Ge'onic Palestine, a single *haqqâfâh* was performed during the festival, only on the seventh day. It took the form of a public procession around the Mount of Olives with the participation of numerous pilgrims from all parts of the Diaspora.<sup>14</sup>

### Circumambulation in Islam

The Arabic *ḥağğ*, which designates the ceremonial carried out during the Muslim pilgrimage to Mekka, is of course etymologically related to the term *ḥag*, by which the Hebrews called the pilgrim festivals, and particularly that of *Sukkôt*.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as we shall see later, one can still perceive in the Muslim rites certain vestiges of ancient Semitic practice which are analogous to Jewish rituals associated with the festival of *Sukkôt*. Circumambulation around the Ka'ba, or Black Stone, predates Islam and was already practiced as a religious ceremonial by the pagan Arabs.<sup>16</sup> According to Qu'rân II,

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passages in the Jerusalem Talmud and *Midraš tēbillim* XVII referring to the seven *haqqâfôt* are late interpolations.

<sup>13</sup> Details concerning the performance of this ritual are provided by L. Ginzberg, *loc. cit.*, pp. 252–256. See also *Siddur Sa'adya*, *ed. cit.*, p. 253 and *Halakôt gâdôlôt*, ed. I. Hildesheimer, Berlin, 1890, p. 173.

<sup>14</sup> J. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and Palestine under the Fâtimid Caliphs*, vol. II, Oxford, 1922, p. 190 and *Sefer ha-hasidim*, ed. J. Wistinetzki, Berlin, 1924<sup>2</sup>, § 630, where it is interestingly said that R. Hay Gâ'ôn would travel from Babylonia to Palestine in order to attend this procession in the course of which the Prophet Elijah would be revealed to him.

<sup>15</sup> For an account of the *Ḥağğ* ritual, see Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Le Pèlerinage à la Mekke*, Paris, 1923 and the article 'Ḥadjdj', *EI*<sup>2</sup>, III col. 33–39 (A. J. Wensinck- < J. Jomier >).

<sup>16</sup> See article 'Ka'ba', *EI*<sup>2</sup>, IV col. 331–337 (A. J. Wensinck- < J. Jomier >) and J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidenthums*, Berlin, 1897<sup>2</sup>, pp. 68–79.

124, the Ka'ba and its sacred rites were founded by Abraham and Ismael,<sup>17</sup> though the present form of ritual circumambulation is based on that instituted by Muḥammad. The pilgrimage can be performed individually at any time of the year in the framework of the *'umra*, i.e. the 'minor' or 'mandatory pilgrimage', although the nights of Ramadan are particularly favoured. However, it is collectively performed during the 'obligatory pilgrimage' (*ḥaǧǧ*) on the tenth of the month of *Dû l-Ḥiǧǧa*, the final month of the lunar year.

According to historians, in pre-Islamic times these two pilgrimages represented two distinct seasonal festivals. The *ḥaǧǧ al-aṣḡar*, the 'minor pilgrimage', took place in the spring in the month of *muharram*, at the same time as the Jewish Passover, whereas the *ḥaǧǧ al-akbar*, the 'major pilgrimage' (the *'umra*?), took place in the autumn in the month of *raǧab* at the time of the Jewish festival of *Sukkôt*, and consisted mainly of a *ṭawâf*. This situation endured for approximately two centuries after the rise of Islam, as long as the Muslims practiced the *nâsî'* (intercalation) after the manner of the Jewish calendar. It was only later, when the series of months underwent an inversion following the transferral of importance from the autumn festival to the spring one, that Islam incorporated into the *ḥaǧǧ* certain elements that originally belonged to the *'umra*, such as the *ṭawâf*.<sup>18</sup>

Since the month of *ḥaǧǧ*, like that of *tišrî'*, originally coincided with the beginning of the rain season, it is not fortuitous that the ritual of the Muslim pilgrimage offers analogies with the rain rituals practiced on the occasion of the autumn festival of *Sukkôt*. As Wensinck has already remarked, a trace of this association still subsists in the name given to the eighth day of *Dû l-Ḥiǧǧa*, known as *yawm at-tarwiya* 'the Day of watering', explained today rather simplistically as the day upon which the pilgrims make provision

<sup>17</sup> See A. Eisenberg, *Abraham in der arabischen Legende*, Berlin, 1912.

<sup>18</sup> See Wellhausen, *Op. cit.*, p. 84, K. Wagtendonck, *Fasting in the Koran*, Leiden, 1968, p. 123, G. E. Von Grunebaum, *Muhammadan Festivals*, London, 1976, p. 29, and H. Amîr Ali, 'The First Decade in Islam – a fresh Approach to the calendrical Study of Early Islam', *Muslim World* XLIV (1954), pp. 126–138. See also the article 'nâsî', *El<sup>2</sup>*, VII col. 9077–8 (A. Moburg).

for water for the duration of the festival. This name rather suggests a rain ceremonial<sup>19</sup> of which a residual vestige is perhaps detectable in the libations of Zamzam water which are carried out at the conclusion of the pilgrimage.<sup>20</sup> It is worthwhile pointing out that according to tradition, even the *sa'y*, the run between Safwa and Marwâ, recalls the frantic search by Hagar to find water for her son Isma'îl, dying of thirst. Even the second *ṭawâf al-ifâda* (litt. 'the circuit of overflowing') recalls this association with water, which likewise pervades the festival of *Sukkôt*.<sup>21</sup>

The circumambulation proper, called *ṭawâf*, meaning 'circuit', takes place three times during the *ḥaġġ* pilgrimage in conformity with the *ṭawâf* enacted by the Prophet himself on the occasion of his 'farewell pilgrimage'. After having carried out a major ablution, — the first of the seven major ablutions performed according to *Ṣâfi'ite* rite during the pilgrimage ritual from the moment of commencing the *ḥaġġ* until the conclusion of the final *ṭawâf* —, the pilgrim signals his entering into the state of sacredness (*iḥrâm*) by donning a special, white robe, composed of two pieces, respectively called the *riḍâ'* and the *izâr*. The great theologian and mystic al-Gazali (ob. 1111) specifies in his *Iḥyâ' 'ulûm ad-dîn* that white

<sup>19</sup> See A. J. Wensinck, "Arabic New Year and the Feast of Tabernacles", *Verhandelingen der koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen* XXV (1926), p. 28 and *idem*, *VKAW* XVII (1916), p. 34. See also Von Grunebaum, *Op. cit.*, p. 35. Wensinck, *Op. cit.*, p. 20, draws a parallel between the booths of the festival of *Sukkôt* and the leather huts erected by certain Arab tribes in virtue of the taboo of dwelling beneath a roof during the period of the 'umra. Wensinck's comparison gains in credibility when it is borne in mind that the ideal *sukkâh* will be made in the End of days from the hide of the Leviathan. Cf. *Pesiqta*, ed. S. Buber, Lyck, 1860, p. 188b. On the other hand, Tur-Sinai, *Op. cit.*, pp. 73–78 connects them with the 'utfa, the possible ancestor of the *maḥmal*, a sort of symbolic canopy which was transported by a camel as part of the pilgrimage. See concerning this the article 'maḥmal', *EI*<sup>2</sup>, VI, col. 43–44 (Fr. Buhl < J. Jomier >).

<sup>20</sup> It is recommended after the *ṭawâf* as on all other opportunities, to drink often and abundantly of the Zamzam water, and to bring some of it home for relatives and family members.

<sup>21</sup> R. Dozy, *Die Israeliten zu Mekka*, Leipzig, 1864, p. 114, was one of the first to point out the symmetry between the rites of the *ḥaġġ* and those of the feast of *Sukkôt*. However, he proposes another interpretation of the terms to which we have referred.

is God's preferential colour for garments and that this robe solemnly recalls the pilgrim's final garment – the shroud.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, like the latter, the *ridâ'* consists of a seamless, white cotton cloth and is in fact preciously preserved as a life-long keepsake by the pious Muslim pilgrim for whom it serves as a mortuary covering in the grave.

Clad in this apparel and in a state of ritual purity, the pilgrim proceeds to carry out a *ṭawâf at-taḥiyya* 'greeting circuit', the initial ritual performed upon arrival in Mekka. Entering the Grand Mosque through the northern portal (*bab as-salâm*) from the North-East side, he proceeds to the Black Stone embedded in the wall of the Ka'ba, where he successively performs the seven, anti-clockwise circuits (*aṣwâṭ*)<sup>23</sup> without interruption. At the conclusion of each circuit, it is recommended to touch the Black Stone, or, if the crowd is too thick, to at least salute it at a distance. The first three circuits are performed at a rapid pace (*ramal*) whereas the last four are carried out at an ordinary gait, during which special litanies are chanted. At the conclusion, the pilgrim presses himself against the part of the Ka'ba wall situated between the Black Stone and the door of the Ka'ba. Finally, he prays two *rak'a-s* behind the *maqâm Ibrâhîm* and drinks a draught of the holy Zamzam water, which is said to spring from beneath the sanctuary. The pilgrim then takes leave by touching once again the Black Stone in a farewell gesture.

The fact that the *ṭawâf* ritual is followed by a sevenfold course between the two rocks *Ṣafâ* and *Marwâ*, emphasizes the recurring symbolism of the number seven – and also, to a lesser degree, three – both in the Jewish and Muslim forms of circumambulation. As is known the number seven symbolizes a complete cycle of perfection and thus a moment of renewal.

The second series of circumambulations, known as the (*ṭawâf al-ifâda*) 'overflowing circuit' takes place on the tenth of the month

<sup>22</sup> Al-Ġazalî, *Iḥyâ' 'ulûm ad-dîn*, vol. I, Book VII, ch. 2, Beirut, n.d., p. 248 and ch. 3, p. 268: "Similarly, he will encounter God after death in an attire different from that which he wore in this world. Indeed that attire resembles the garments (of *iḥrâm*) for the latter have no stitches like a shroud."

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Jewish custom quoted above n. 6.

after the return to Mekka from Mount 'Arafa. This series is compulsory and constitutes one of the main rituals of the pilgrimage as a whole.

The third series, known as (*ṭawâf al-wadâ'*), the 'farewell circuit' is, as the name indicates, the final ritual to be performed at the conclusion of the pilgrimage before the return journey home.

### Circumambulation in Jewish Mysticism

Apart from the ceremonial attached to the enlargement of the Temple courtyard and the walls of Jerusalem described in *Mišnâb Šabû'ôt* II, 2,<sup>24</sup> the *Sukkôt* pilgrimage was the only known rite involving circumambulation ritually practiced in classical Judaism. However, it subsequently proved to be quite a rich motive in Jewish ceremonial. In particular, from the sixteenth century onwards, this practice, like so many others, assumed new significance under the influence of the Luryanic Qabbalah, and came to be performed as a passage rite in the critical circumstances of life. Though numerous examples can be cited, space will allow the naming of but a few, in order to convey the interest of this motive for future study.

At the marriage ceremony the bride would encircle the bridegroom beneath the nuptial canopy. This custom is already attested in the XIIIth century by Samson b. Šadoq, who mentions three circuits<sup>25</sup> while later sources describe seven.<sup>26</sup> It is noteworthy

<sup>24</sup> The ceremony is more fully described in TB *Šabû'ôt* 15a-16a.

<sup>25</sup> Samson b. Šadoq, *Tašbes qatan*, Warsaw 1901 (Jerusalem, 1974), p. 59, no. 465. According to Moses b. Abraham Mat (c. 1551-1606) of Przemysl, *Ma'eb Mâšeb* (Customs), London, 1958, p. 345 n. 4, this number corresponds to the threefold occurrence in Scripture of the expression "when a man taketh spouse" (Deut. 22-24). This explanation is also given by Y. Š. Leibowitz, *Šulhan ba-ezer*, vol. II, Brooklyn, 1969, fol. 32b, who adds that the three circuits correspond to (a) the three camps surrounding the altar in the desert (b) the three substances veiling the Divine presence (darkness, cloud and mist) (c) the threefold expression of betrothal in Hos. 2, 21-22.

<sup>26</sup> Y. H. Friedman, *Liqqutey Maharîb*, vol. III, Marriage laws, New York, 1965, says, on the authority of the interpretation of Jeremiah 31, 22 in *Tiqquney Zohar* XIII (Brody, 1883, fol. 49a) that seven circuits correspond to the seven

that according to Qabbalistic and Ḥasidic custom, not only the bride but also the bridegroom are decked in a white garment, reminiscent of the shroud.<sup>27</sup> A sevenfold circumambulation is also performed around the bier of a deceased person prior to burial.<sup>28</sup> Seven circuits are likewise carried out with Torah scrolls at the dedication of a new synagogue or cemetery.<sup>29</sup> The tomb of a saint whose intercession is requested, is also the object of a sevenfold circumambulation.<sup>30</sup> At a time of drought,<sup>31</sup> or a threat to the

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days of *Sukkôt*, whereas Y. ha-Kohen Tarb, *Š'erit Ya'aqôb*, Jerusalem, 1930, no. 18, says that the circuits correspond to the seven heavens.

<sup>27</sup> See Abraham Sperling, *Ṭ'amey ha-minhâgim*, Jerusalem, 1957, no. 957, p. 407.

<sup>28</sup> Aaron b. Moses of Modena, *Ma'abôr Yabbôq*, Vilnius, 1927, ch. 43 and 45. See also Abraham Khalfon, *Hayey Abraham*, Livorno, 1861, fol. 55a, no. 379.

<sup>29</sup> Maharam Schick (1807–1879), *Responsa Yöreb dê 'âb*, New York, 1961, p. 120, no. 357. Some interesting details are therein supplied in the name of the Ba'al Sem Ṭôb concerning the prescriptions to be observed after each of the seven circuits, which begin in the South-East and move towards the East. They are said to correspond to the seven forms of charity.

<sup>30</sup> The first literary evidence of this custom, mentioned by all later sources, is Alexander Süsslin ha-Kôhen, *Ha-'aggûdâb*, Krakow, 1571, *masseket samâbôt*, fol. 472. See also the *responsa* of Yôsef Hayyim, *Tôrâb li-šmah*, Jerusalem, 1975, p. 375, no. 520, who relates these seven circuits to the seven lower *sefirôt*. Y. A. Margaliyôt, *Hillula da-Raš bî*, Meron, 1981, pp. 47–54 and Z. Moscovitch, *'Osrôt yörüsälâyim*, Jerusalem, ch. X, discuss this practice at the tomb of R. Šim'ôn bar Yôhay in Meron. See also A. Sperling, *op. cit.*, pp. 258–260. A stop was apparently put some time ago to the circumambulation of the tomb by the sealing of a door. A Muslim parallel is afforded by Ḥasan al-Bašri's request in a dream to have his tomb rebuilt against a wall so as to prevent circumambulation of his sepulchre. See F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, vol. II, Oxford, 1929, p. 627. For further examples of circumambulation of saints' tombs in Islam, see *infra* n. 44.

<sup>31</sup> See Yôsef Caro, *Maggîd mēšārîm*, pericope 'emôr, Vilnius, 1875, fol. 35d: "Whenever the world is in need of plentiful rain, go and circumambulate (the tombs) of the said saints and fast for the misfortune that has befallen the community and encircle them seven times and ye shall be answered." There even exists a special order of prayers for this purpose known as *'Asrey ha-tiqwâb*, the most celebrated of which is that composed in 1940 by the Qabbalist Yehudah Fataya. Cf. Aaron Mu'allam, *Toladôt Aharon û-Môšeh*, Jerusalem, 1983, pp. 262–295. The seven circuits, which are interspersed with the sounding of seven ram's horns, are related to the seven patriarchs. Rain-prayers in cemeteries, known as *istisqâ'*, are also a known feature in Islam. See I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. II, London, 1971, pp. 285–286.

community<sup>32</sup> this ritual is extended to the whole cemetery. On Friday nights in some Qabbalistic congregations a circumambulation of the almemor in the synagogue is performed at the time of *qabbalat šabbât* 'the ushering in of the Sabbath'.<sup>33</sup> Moreover Luryanic sources prescribe two circumambulations of the table prior to each of the three ritual Sabbath meals, thus giving a total of seven circuits.<sup>34</sup>

Notwithstanding the interest of these phenomena, we must return to the ceremony as accomplished during the festival of *Sukkôt*, which will be our main concern.

Already in the classical Spanish Qabbâlâh, the *baqqâfôt* ceremonial of the *Sukkôt* festival was conferred with a mystical interpretation keyed to the sefirotic categories. The recurrent symbolism suggested by the seven days of the festival, its seven particular precepts, the seven circuits, the seven species composing the palm branch, the seven wavings, the seven patriarchal visitors to the *sukkâh*, could not have failed to strike the Qabbalists' imagination. This number is almost always evocative of the seven lower *safirôt*, as exemplified by the following interpretation extracted from the work by the XIIIth century mystic Isaac of Acco:

On circumambulation. Know that it is a symbol of the rotation of the seven *safirôt* around the known altar (*mal'kût*). From this rotation proceeds seven types of emanation which constitute the mystery of the seven days of creation. Each

<sup>32</sup> An interesting account of an occurrence of this ritual at the time of Rabbi Hayyim Duway ha-Kôhen (1858–1933) is given by Margâliyôt, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–54, who relates that Bar Yohay's tomb was circumambulated while holding the previous year's seven species in order to avert an unfavourable decree. See also Sperling, *T'aamay ha-miswôt* p. 260, note 26.

<sup>33</sup> This ritual is mostly performed later at the household table. The discrepancy arose from a variant reading in the Luryanic text "house" or "house of prayer". See *Ša'ar ha-kawwânôt*, vol. II, Jerusalem, 1988, p. 76 note 30. The circuit within the synagogue around the almemor, signifying the "encompassing light", whose performance we have personally witnessed in a Qabbalistic community, is a sequel "to the welcoming of the Sabbath in the field", which symbolizes the "internal light".

<sup>34</sup> See *Ša'ar ha-kawwânôt*, *loc. cit.* and *Porî 'es hayyim*, vol. II, Jerusalem, 1988, ch. 6, pp. 392, 418. The twofold circuit corresponds respectively to the upper and lower "encompassing light". See also *infra* p. 13. Note that both the almemor and household table are symbolic of the Temple altar.

Divine utterance created an entity called 'day' and the days are seven according to the number of emanations.

For "thine O Lord is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty for all that is in the Heaven and Earth is thine" (I Ch. 29, 11). Each of < these attributes > produces an entity through the rotation of the Will which permeates them. They too rotate in order to generate from themselves the flux and emanation towards the ocean of wisdom. Therefore we encompass and circumambulate once daily until the expiry of six days and seventimes on the seventh day for the latter comprises all seven < *safirôt* >, as I have informed you regarding the mystery of "The righteous is the foundation of the world" (Prov. 10, 25) for this seventh *safirâh* (*yôsôd*) is the completion of all seven and the seven are included in it.

Hence, it is because the seven *safirôt* encompass and envelop each other like an ornamental girdle, and Will extends endlessly, that this festival is called *hag*, derived from the expression: "He walketh in the circuit of the heaven" (Job 22, 14), as it is said "Ye shall celebrate it as a pilgrimage (*hag*) to the Lord" (Ex. 12, 14).<sup>35</sup>

With the intensification of theosophical speculation consecutive to the development of the Safed school of Rabbi Isaac Lurya (1534–1572), the *haqqâfôt* ritual, closely bound up with the waving of the palm-branch ceremony, assumed an even deeper significance. Like many other religious practices, it was interpreted in Luryanic doctrine as a virtual act of unification within the sefirotic pleroma of the masculine element, symbolized by the devotee himself, and the feminine element, symbolized by the encircled almemor. The unitive goal was itself an anticipation of the restoration of ultimate harmony in the divine realm, which is to usher in the messianic age. This ties in with the eschatological dimension which is particularly present in the general significance of the *Sukkôt* festival.

The unitive process can be summarized as consisting of three phases which correspond to the three types of spiritual light respectively inherent in the *safirôt* and in the soul: the 'inner light', representing the 'quest', the 'outer light', representing the 'descent of grace', and the 'all-encompassing light', representing 'union' or 'communion' of the foregoing two. Each of these is consecutively

<sup>35</sup> Isaac of Akko, *Mâ'irat ha-'aynayim*, pericope 'emôr, Jerusalem, 1976, pp. 219–220. Further on p. 223 he refers to the model of Jericho and "A woman shall turn about a man" (Jer. 31, 22).

generated firstly by the devotees' person, secondly by the act of bearing the palm-branch, and finally by the liturgical prayers uttered during the circuits. The unification is a gradual process which takes place day by day and *saḥarâb* by *saḥarâb* for each of the seven lower *saḥarôt*. It culminates in the sevenfold procession on the final day, which symbolizes the all-encompassing light reintegrating the totality of the lower *saḥarôt*. The eighth day of 'Solemn assembly' was known in Qabbalistic literature as the day of the great unification (*ha-yihûd ha-gadôl*) and was considered to be the consummate point of the whole cycle of festivals which traverse the month of *Tisrî*.

As is known, the Qabbalists of the Luryanic school introduced liturgical innovations to enhance the devotional content of the ancient rituals. A conspicuous addition to the latter is to be found in the Qabbalistic meditations relating to the daily circuits and, in particular, those recited during the circuits on the seventh day, which were popularized by R. Ḥayyim Yôsef David Azulay (1724–1806). Immersion in a ritual bath is recommended before their performance and it is noteworthy, that in several congregations the prayer-leader and in some cases the worshippers themselves are clad in the white garment known as the *kitel*, which is reminiscent of the shroud. Indeed, pious Jews are buried in this garment, worn on solemn occasions during their lifetime. In some congregations a ram's horn (*šôfar*) is sounded at the conclusion of each circuit.

Now, according to Qabbalistic doctrine, each of the latter is associated with a particular form of the Tetragrammaton, the Divine Name. Furthermore, each *haqqâfâh* is placed beneath the patronage of a Patriarch: Abraham on the first day, and Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and David, on subsequent days. At the same time these selfsame patriarchs, known as *uṣpîzîm*, or 'guests' who are said to visit in turn the devotee in his *Sukkâh* on the successive days of the festival, are respectively associated with the *saḥarôt* *hesed*, *gabûrâh*, *neṣah*, *hôd*, *yasôd* and *malḳût*. One would not be far wrong in submitting that these 'guests' personify the *saḥarôt* which are to be integrated into the devotee's spiritual experience during the ritual.

Furthermore, probably at first because of their rogatory character, the *haqqâfôt* were carried over from *Hoša'nâ rabbâ* to the

following day, known as the 'Day of Solemn Assembly' (*Šemīnī 'ašeret*). Besides, the liturgy of these two days has preserved the original significance of a rain ritual insofar as the accompanying texts are in fact rogations. Indeed, the circuits of *Šemīnī 'ašeret* are followed by one of the most solemn moments of the annual liturgy, *tašillat gešem*, or the 'prayer for rain'. In the *Aškanazī* ritual the latter is augustly chanted in the musical mode of the High Holidays by the precentor clad in a *kitel*.<sup>36</sup> It is noteworthy that in Ḥasidic circles, this request for rain underwent a remarkable process of spiritualization. For R. Šadôq ha-Kôhen of Lublin (1823–1900), for instance, the descent of rain corresponds to the impregnation of the soul by the *safīrôt*:

Rain is < the symbol > of the effusion of life upon creatures. Upon this day of Solemn Assembly, following on from the Day of Atonement and the Festival of Booths, a new vitality is implanted in the hearts of the soul of Israel in order to assimilate the seven attributes of holiness (the seven lower *safīrôt*) through the renewal of the acceptance of the words of the Torah in the heart.<sup>37</sup> This is the significance of the descent of rain on this day, that is the effusion of the life-giving drop in the heart.

Our Masters alluded to this day when they said: "Greater is the day of rain than that of the resurrection of the dead" (*TB Ta'anit 7a*). It is meet to add that it was to this < revitalization of the *safīrôt* > that our Sages referred in their sevenfold affirmation of the (grandeur of the) day of rain < in the following passage of the Talmudic text >. This coincides with the seven attributes of holiness which are instilled with a new vitality in the hearts of the souls of Israel.<sup>38</sup>

From the last third of the sixteenth century, additional series of seven processions were performed in the Holy Land on the eve of that day as well as at the following morning and afternoon prayers, but without the four species. R. Isaac Lurya was also wont to perform a further series, later known as the *baqqâfôt šmiyyôt*, after the conclusion of the eighth day of the festival. In the Diaspora

<sup>36</sup> In certain ḥasidic communities, the *šaddīq*, who is the symbol of the terrestrial pole (Jerusalem), also dons this garment.

<sup>37</sup> According to Ḥasidic doctrine the festival of *Šabû'ôt* (Pentecost) commemorates the giving of the external Torah whereas the festival of *Šemīnī 'ašeret* commemorates that of the internal Torah.

<sup>38</sup> Šadôq ha-Kohen, *Porī Šaddīq*, vol. V, Lublin, 1934, § 34, pp. 260–261. In the remainder of this passage the author relates each of the Talmudic sayings with one of the *safīrôt*.

where there is an additional ninth day, either three or seven circumambulations were performed in Qabbalistic and Ḥasidic circles on the eve of *Šaminī 'ašeret* as well as seven circumambulations on the following night, known as *Simḥat tôrâh*, the 'Rejoicing of the Law' and on the ninth day following the morning prayers.<sup>39</sup>

From the eighteenth century onwards along with numerous other Qabbalistic rituals, the sevenfold procession on the 'Day of the Rejoicing of the Law' gained universal acceptance in almost all Jewish communities. This reception was facilitated, on the one hand, by the diffusion of Qabbalistic manuals such as Jacob Semah's *Naggīd ū-mešaurweb* (Constantinople, 1726) and the *Ḥemdat ha-yamīm* (Izmir, 1731), and on the other hand, through the influence of Palestinian emissaries such as the afore-mentioned R. Ḥayyim Yôsef David Azulay.<sup>40</sup> Even in far-off Baghdad, the influence of the celebrated Qabbalist R. Yosef Ḥayyim (1833–1909) encouraged the performance of all seven series of circumambulations on the concluding days of the festival.<sup>41</sup> Here again the mystical tradition elaborated meditative texts relating each circuit to one of the Patriarchs (*ušpīzīm*) and thus to one of the *saḥīrôt*, which it behooved the mystic to interiorize.

Finally, it should be added that particularly in Ḥasidic circles the ritual dancing known as *simḥat bêt ha-šô 'êḥâh* which takes place during the nights of *Sukkôt*, is often performed in the form of circumambulations. Significantly, these joyous manifestations are supposed to recall the show of rejoicing accompanying the drawing of water from the Spring of Siloah, said to originate from beneath the Temple, which was used in libations in Temple times.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. A. Yaari, *Toladôt haq Simḥat tôrâh* (History of the Festival of the Rejoicing of the Law), Jerusalem, 1964, pp. 259–317. The ritual was even adopted by the Qaraites who called the "circuits" *sibbūbīm* (p. 269). Yaari specifies (pp. 291–292) that in some localities it was customary either to perform just one circuit or three. He also mentions (p. 344) the custom in some communities of performing the *haqqafôt* on *šabbat bərəšīt*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

## Circumambulation in Islamic Mysticism

On the Islamic side, besides the *ḥaġġ*, other instances where the *ṭawâf* is performed are recorded. In practically all Muslim countries sacred places are to be found, generally the tombs of saints, which have become imperfect substitutes for the far-off and almost mythical Mekka. The *ḥaġġ*, often impossible to accomplish, is replaced by a *ziyâra* (pilgrimage) to a local shrine, which entails the rites performed at Mekka, i.e. the *ṭawâf* and the imbibing of sacred water from a fountain believed to be attached to the well Zamzam.<sup>42</sup> Amongst such shrines are counted certain venerated mosques, such as the ancient mosque at Fustât, which was the object of a sevenfold *ṭawâf*, described in detail by al-Maqrizî.<sup>43</sup> The shrine of a Muslim saint may be the object of a pilgrimage on joyous or omenous occasions, such as circumcisions or weddings, or requests for healing or intercession, especially during a drought. Interestingly, these visits invariably entailed certain rites reminiscent of the Mekkan pilgrimage, such as seven-fold processions around the tomb and the drinking of water from a nearby 'sacred' source.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See H. Chambert-Loir and C. Guillot (Eds.), *Le Culte des saints dans le monde musulman*, Paris, 1995, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. I. Goldziher, 'Veneration of Saints in Islam', *Muslim Studies*, vol. II, London, 1971, p. 287.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. T. Canaan, *Muhammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, London, 1927, p. 218, where the procession around the saint's shrine (*maqâm*) is given the same name as the circumambulation around the Ka'ba, i.e. *ṭawâf*, and pp. 219–234 where a detailed description of rain processions is given entailing the circumambulation of the *maqâm*. An interesting instance is provided by E. Dermenghen, *Le Culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrébin*, Paris, 1954, pp. 125–126 who describes a synagogue in Algiers which was formerly the tomb of a Muslim marabout. Muslim women seeking relief continued to frequent the Jewish chapel, uninhibitedly circumambulating seven times around the almemor even during the synagogue services. For further examples of the sevenfold circumambulation of saints' tombs in Islam, see Goldziher, *op. cit.*, pp. 287–288, Hasluck, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 266, E. Doutté, *Magique et religion en Afrique du Nord*, Paris, 1984<sup>2</sup>, pp. 576–580, and Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitâb az-ziyâra*, Beirut, 1980, p. 28, who mentions the practice, which he energetically reproves, at the tomb of 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Gilânî, according to which "he who salutes the saint seven times, advancing by a pace with each salutation towards his tomb, shall be answered."

On the other hand, Muslim history records examples of out-right attempts to supplant the Mekkan shrine. One remarkable instance truly brings home the profound connection between the rituals as practiced in Judaism and Islam. It took place during the rule of the anti-caliph 'Abdallah b. az-Zubayr when the pilgrimage to the *Ḥiğâz* was virtually stopped. The Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (*reg.* 685–705) proclaimed that a substitute *ṭawâf* could be performed within the Dome of the Rock Mosque in Jerusalem, elevated for the purpose to the same rank as the Ka'ba.<sup>45</sup> Thus provision was made in the building's circular conception for an ambulatory, *maṭâf*, in order to enable pilgrims to compass the famous rock which, according to legend, was the scene of the Abrahamic sacrifice. Although disclaimed by theologians opposed to *bid'a* (religious innovation), the circumambulation is still practised by pious pilgrims, albeit in the opposite direction to that of the Ka'aba in order to distinguish it from the latter. Be that as it may, the fact remains that Muslims perform *ḥaqqâfôt* at the site of the former Jewish Temple!<sup>46</sup>

Interestingly, a similar occurrence took place in certain *ṣūfi* circles. Indeed, some devotees had expressed opposition to the veneration of which the Ka'ba was the object "preferring instead the procession around God Himself." In particular the *ṣūfi* martyr Maṣṣûr al-Hallâğ (ob. 922) built a miniature replica of the Ka'ba in his courtyard in Baghdad, around which he and his disciples would perform a substitute *ṭawâf*.<sup>47</sup> However these practices were admonished by the orthodox theologians.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–45. The author suggests that this political expediency was also responsible for the legend that the Zamzam pays an annual visit to the spring of Siloah.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Idem.*, pp. 287–288. It is interesting to speculate as to what degree this and the following examples of Muslim practice may have influenced the development and institutionalisation of the *ḥaqqâfôt* ritual in Jewish worship.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. L. Massignon, *La Passion de Hallâğ*, vol. I, Paris, 1975<sup>2</sup>, p. 67. Massignon also cites other examples of vicarious Ka'bas; that built by the Caliph al-Mu'tašim (*reg.* 833–842) in Samarra for his Turkish officers, where all the ceremonies of the *ḥağğ* were performed, and that built by Abû Bakr Mađâra'yî, a pro-Hallağian, in Cairo *circa* 925 (cf. *ibid.*, I, p. 462).

'Alīb. 'Uṭmān al-Haḡwīrī (ob. circa 1072) is the author of one of the most famous Persian mystical manuals, the *Kaṣf al-mahḡūb* ('The Revelation of the Veil') which presents the theosophical doctrine of Sufism as a process of gradual unveiling. The rending of the eighth veil is dedicated to the theme of pilgrimage of which the culminating point is the station of Abraham:

Now Abraham had two stations: the station of his body, namely Mekka, and the station of his soul, namely friendship (*kbullat*). Whoever seeks his bodily station must renounce all lusts and pleasures and put on the pilgrim's garb and clothe himself with a shroud (*kafan*) and refrain from hunting lawful game, and keep all his senses under strict control, and be present at 'Arafāt and go thence to Muzdalifa and Maš'ar al-Ḥaram, and pick up stones and circumambulate the Ka'ba and visit Minā and stay there three days and throw stones in the prescribed manner and cut his hair and perform the sacrifice and put on his (ordinary) clothes. But whoever seeks his spiritual station must renounce familiar associations and bid farewell to pleasures and take no thought of other than God (for his looking towards the phenomenal world is interdicted); then he must stand on the 'Arafāt of gnosis (*ma'rifat*) and from there set out for the Muzdalifa of amity (*ulfat*) and from there send his heart to circumambulate the temple of Divine purification (*tanzīh*), and throw away the stones of passion and corrupt thoughts in the Minā of faith, and sacrifice his lower soul at the altar of mortification and arrive at the station of friendship (*kbullat*).<sup>48</sup>

Thus for al-Huḡwīrī the Meccan pilgrimage is an initiatory journey whose finality is the contemplation of God, as indicated on the same page by these two sayings quoted respectively in the name of Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl and al-Gunayd:

If they are bound to visit a stone, which is looked at only once a year, surely they are more bound to visit the temple of the heart, where He may be seen three hundred and sixty times in a day and night.

When you circumambulated the Temple if you did not behold the immaterial beauty of God in the abode of purification, then you have not circumambulated the Temple.<sup>49</sup>

In his vast *Iḫyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn*, al-Ġazālī, devotes a whole book to the 'secrets of the pilgrimage', to which he lent a deep spiritual meaning. Among the themes evoked, it is noteworthy that he

<sup>48</sup> Al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf al-Mahjub*, transl. R. A. Nicholson, London, 1911, p. 326.

<sup>49</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 327–328.

specifies that during the *ṭawâf* the pilgrim resembles an angel encircling the Divine throne. The bodily *ṭawâf* is an external symbol of the heart's circumambulation around the Divine presence of celestial royalty (*malakût*) of which the Ka'ba is a representation in the phenomenal realm (*mulk*).

In the same way as the Qabbalistic system of Isaac Lurya revitalized the *baqqâfôt* ceremony, so it can be said that the great Andalusian Muslim mystic Muḥyī d-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (1165–1240) breathed new life into the *ṭawâf* ritual. Indeed he provides the most detailed treatment of its spiritual symbolism. In the year 1201, Ibn 'Arabī journeyed from Spain to Mekka. There, as he was accomplishing the ritual circuits around the antique temple whose initiatory character he underlines he experienced an event which was to transform his life. In the preface to his monumental work written as a result of that experience and significantly entitled *al-Futūḥât al-makkiyya* ('the Mekkan revelations'), the author discloses the circumstances of the vision that was revealed to him at that crucial instant.<sup>50</sup> While circumambulating, he witnessed a theophany which took on the appearance of a youth. The latter, paradoxically styled the 'encompassed-encompasser' (cf. 'inner-outer light' of the Qabbâlâh), was himself encircling the Ka'ba when he revealed to Ibn 'Arabī the theosophical system that he later set down in his book. The seventy-second chapter of his work, entitled 'the mysteries of the pilgrimage', is devoted to an exposition of the basic rites of circumambulation.<sup>51</sup>

Like al-Ġazâlī, Ibn 'Arabī explains that during the performance of the *ṭawâf* around the Ka'ba, the pilgrim should see himself as an angel encircling the Divine Throne.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the seven-fold circuits of the *ṭawâf* are an imitation of those performed by the planets orbiting in the seven heavens.<sup>53</sup> The latter symbolize the modes of human experience belonging to the domain of subtle

<sup>50</sup> *Al-Futūḥât al-makkiyya* I, Cairo, 1329H, pp. 47–51. See also H. Corbin, *L'Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī*, Paris, 1958, ch. 13 'Autour de la Ka'ba mystique', pp. 213–216 and notes thereto pp. 301–306.

<sup>51</sup> *Futūḥât* I, pp. 665–763.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 699, 1. 30.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 704, 1. 34.

manifestation, which in turn correspond to different levels of divine inspiration. The 'youth zealous in devotion' whom he encounters is none other than his own true self, liberated from temporal consciousness.<sup>54</sup>

Interestingly, the seeds of some of these themes are to be found in *Kitāb al-ḥağğ* by the earlier mystic al-Ḥakīm at-Tirmidī (ob. 908), whose teachings were resurrected by Ibn 'Arabī:

The *tawāf* consists of seven circuits involving the use of the seven members.<sup>55</sup> Some perceive in the seven circuits (an allusion to) the seven climes, the seven heavens, the seven portals of Paradise, of which the eighth is an addition reserved for the people of Muḥammad. It is also related of the Prophet (in a *ḥadīth*) that he declared: "The Qur'ān was revealed according to seven versions."

(As for) the seven portals of Paradise, that he may behold them with his heart and circumambulate that Realm, having no sovereign but Allah, the unique and omnipotent, so that his innermost self passes from the consciousness of possession to that of the Possessor (...) the spirit (*rūḥ*) circumambulates the Throne, for it was created from the light thereof. As for him who elevates himself above the soul, the heart and the spirit, he will no longer perceive the duality of existence, but will be conscious of the Realm that is not of a creational nature, that is Divine Names and Attributes. He will contemplate them in his innermost consciousness and circumambulate in this Realm and will not perceive a Partner to Him in His Attributes and Names.<sup>56</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī considered the seven circuits as having the same value as canonical prayer and he relates them to the seven sacred formulae which announce the seven physical positions adopted during worship (vertical position, inclination, second vertical position, prostration, sitting position, second prostration, second sitting position).<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Cf. F. Meier, 'The Mystery of the Ka'aba: Symbol and Reality in Islamic Mysticism', in J. Campbell (Ed.), *Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, vol. II *The Mysteries*, London, 1995, pp. 149–168, in part. p. 156.

<sup>55</sup> I.e. the seven physical members involved in the Muslim ablutionary rites.

<sup>56</sup> *Kitāb al-ḥağğ wa-asrārūhu*, ed. H. N. Zaydān, Cairo, 1969, pp. 111–112. While discussing the final *tawāf* (pp. 136–138), Tirmidī explains that the pilgrim should obtain from each circuit certain provisions for the Path: (1) refuge in God (2) refuge in His Book (3) grace (4) compassion (5) desire for God (6) fear of God (7) submissive awe.

<sup>57</sup> *Al-Futūḥāt* I, p. 704. See also Ch. Gilis, *La Doctrine initiatique du pèlerinage à la Maison d'Allah*, Paris, 1982, pp. 169–172.

Most significantly for our comparison, Ibn 'Arabī explains that the seven circuits also represent the seven Divine attributes with which the pilgrim is successively invested. There is some discrepancy amongst mystics generally and even within Ibn 'Arabī's own writings, as to the identity of these attributes. They are generally enumerated as: life, speech, power, will, knowledge, hearing, sight.<sup>58</sup> Though these cannot be related to specific *saḥrāt* of the Qabbalistic system, the similarity in the principle of their relation to the circuits is most striking especially as elsewhere in the great *ṣayk's* writings, these attributes are associated respectively with the following prophets: Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jesus and Muḥammad. This correspondence provides an interesting parallel to Jewish doctrine, which also relates each circuit to a patriarch or prophet.

Furthermore, Ibn 'Arabī specifies the mystical experience he had during the appropriation of the seven attributes in a separate composition called *Tāḡar-rasâ'il*. This treatise, which is a celebration of the Ka'ba written during his stay in Mekka in the year 600 H, contains seven epistles in rhymed prose corresponding to the seven circuits, addressed to each of the attributes which were revealed to him in the course of each circumambulation.<sup>59</sup> These include the subservient epistle (*'abdallah*), corresponding to the Divine name *Allah*, the sacred epistle (*qudsiyya*), corresponding to the Divine name *ḥayy* ('living'), the unificatory epistle (*ittiḥâdiyya*), corresponding to the name *'alim* ('knowing'), the primordial epistle (*suriyâniyya*), corresponding to the name *ṣakûr* ('the thanked one'), the visionary epistle (*maṣḥadiyya*), corresponding to the name *baṣîr* ('seeing'), the paradisiacal epistle (*firdawsîyya*), corresponding to the name *samî'* ('hearing'), the virginal epistle (*udrâwiyya*), corresponding the name *wadûd* ('beloved'), the existential epistle (*wuḡudiyya*), corresponding to the name *qâdir* ('powerful').

<sup>58</sup> Cf. H. S. Nyberg, *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabî*, Leiden, 1919, p. 73 n. 1; Arabic text p. 15, l. 14, pp. 28-29.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn 'Arabî, *Tāḡ al-wa-minḥâḡ al-wasâ'il* in: *Maḡmû'at ar-rasâ'il*, ed. Muḥyî d-Dîn Ṣabrî al-Kurdî al-Kaniškânî, Cairo, 1328H, pp. 553-633. Cf. *al-Futûḥât* I, p. 700. See also O. Yahya, *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabî*, vol. II, Damascus, 1964, pp. 485-487.

It is interesting to note that there are in fact eight epistles, the last perhaps being the all-inclusive attribute since it corresponds to the entering of the Ka'ba itself. We have here a noteworthy numerical symmetry with the eighth day of 'Solemn Assembly', considered by the Qabbalistic doctrine to be the moment of 'ultimate unification'.

As pointed out by H. Corbin one is reminded of a later development in the Ibn 'Arabī school of Sufism professed by the XIVth century, Persian mystic 'Alā' ad-Dawla as-Simnānī (1261–1336), who taught a doctrine of the seven prophets of one's being, i.e., the seven subtle centres of the total human being.<sup>60</sup> The sevenfold procession typifies the appropriation of the seven Divine attributes during the ascent of consciousness through the successive spheres of one's being to the sphere of the self, symbolized by the Ka'ba. Indeed, upon completion of the *tawāf*, Ibn 'Arabī entered the Sacred Temple in the company of his youthful guide whereupon, the latter declared to him:

I am the seventh at the stage where spiritual growth and the secrets of existence of the individual, and of the Wherefore are encompassed <...> the Ka'ba is the entrance of those possessed of insight, and in it is the repose of those who encircle it.<sup>61</sup>

One of the foremost spiritual disciples of Ibn 'Arabī was 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ġilī (ob. 1428), author of the *al-Insān al-kāmil*, the 'Perfect Man'.<sup>62</sup> In the final chapter of the second part of this book, he states explicitly that the Ka'ba is symbolic of the Divine Essence whereas the Black Stone stands for the human spiritual essence. Through circumambulation the mystic attains to his very

<sup>60</sup> H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. III, Paris, 1972, pp. 275–355. We hope to deal elsewhere with the remarkable Qabbalistic parallels to Simnānī's theory of the seven subtle substances, typified by the seven prophets. In the meantime see on this author: J. Elias, "Sufi Thought and Practice in the Teachings of 'Ala' ad-Dawla as-Simnani", Ph.D. dissertation, Yale, 1991, in part. pp. 170–198 (now published in book-form: *The Throne Carrier of God*, SUNY, New York, 1995).

<sup>61</sup> H. Corbin, *L'Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 302.

<sup>62</sup> See on this author R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge, 1927, pp. 77–142.

selfhood, his origin and principle, his pre-eternal root, whereby his Divine *alter ego*, his entire individuality, becomes visible to him in all its fullness. He confirms that the sevenfold circuit corresponds to the seven Divine attributes, life, knowledge, will, power, hearing, sight and speech, which bring his essence to perfection.<sup>63</sup>

According to al-Ġilī the performance of the seven circuits constitutes an initiatory realization through which the mystic acquires the Divine attributes, his life becomes that of God, his knowledge that of God, his will that of God, etc. as it is written in the *Ḥadīth* "I shall be his hearing by which he hears, the sight by which he sees" (Buk̄ārī, Riq̄âq no 38).

The concluding prayer symbolizes integration into unity and the standing in the *Maqâm Ibrâhîm*, the manifestation of this state in his body, insofar as Abraham is the guardian of the seventh heaven.<sup>64</sup> Thus the entering into the Ka'ba is a symbol of the attribute of union, the point at which the human self and psychic principle commune with the cosmic Self and universal principle.

It is interesting to point out that Qabbalistic sources and particularly their Hasidic interpreters relate the festival of *Sukkôt*, though not specifically to the circumambulatory ritual, to the source of Divine inspiration *ruah ba-qôdeš*. The Rabbi of Gur, Judah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847–1905), in terms astonishingly close to those of al-Ġilī, calls it the 'return to one's root',<sup>65</sup> whereas the Rabbi of Sochaczew, Samuel Bornstain (1855–1926) gives this formula as the very definition of *rûah ba-qôdeš*:

The source of soul is a Divine supernal portion which transcends the body but radiates illumination to the latter < ... > *ruah ba-qôdeš* stems from the soul's faculties communion with the soul's root from which they draw Divine inspiration. Thus *sukkâh*, which has the numerical value of the combination of

<sup>63</sup> 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ġilī, *al-Insân al-kâmil* II, Cairo, 1970, pp. 136–137.

<sup>64</sup> This is one of the prescriptions of the *tawâf*. It is interesting to point out that the Judaeo-Arabic mystic Abraham he-Ḥasīd (ob. 1223) uses this expression to designate the spiritual experience of the Israelites at the Sinaitic Revelation. See our article 'Some Judaeo-Arabic fragments from Rabbi Abraham he-Ḥasīd, the Jewish Sufi', *JSS XXVI* (1981), p. 59, n. 40.

<sup>65</sup> Judah Aryeh Leib Alter, *Sefat emet* V, Jerusalem, 1971<sup>2</sup>, fol. 97c–d.

the two Divine names, brings about in man the communion of the soul's faculties with the latter's root and through *sukkâh* one attains to Divine inspiration.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, we should like to draw some conclusions from this comparison of the Jewish and Muslim mystical interpretations of this particular ritual. While bearing in mind that we are dealing with two distinct modes of mystical thought, one cannot help being struck by the analogy of the particular traits these two traditions hold in common. Both the Jerusalem temple and subsequently its synagogue substitute in Judaism, and the Ka'ba with its substitutes in Islam, are construed as *axii mundis*. Both faiths share the same number of circumambulations performed at these shrines, whose origins no doubt go back to a distant Semitic past.

These sevenfold circuits are said to correspond to the seven heavens. Now, since the nether Jerusalem is situated, according to Jewish tradition, opposite the supernal Jerusalem,<sup>67</sup> any rite there performed necessarily exerts an influence of cosmic bearing. This idea is also clearly expressed in the Islamic sources in connection with Mekka. Indeed, as the city is situated on the cosmic axis of the seven heavens, all worship performed there has its correspondants in each of the heavens.<sup>68</sup> When the sanctuary is inaccessible, its axial position can be assumed by secondary centres (synagogues—tombs), representing the supreme centre.

On the exoteric plane several external phenomena are also shared: a founding myth (Jericho-Abraham), ritual purity, the

<sup>66</sup> Samuel Bornstein, *Šem mi-Šemû'el* IV, Jerusalem, 1989, p. 148. It is extremely fascinating to observe that another Ḥasidic thinker, R. Zvi Elimelek Schapira of Dinow (1783–1841) in his *Beney Yissakaḥ* (vol. II, ch. 124, New York, 1975, fol. 37b–38a), directly relates the mystical significance of the circumambulation ritual of *Hoša'na rabba* to Islam as though he had perceived some profound connection between the two.

<sup>67</sup> TB *Ta'anit*, 5a. In connection with the tradition which situates Jerusalem or Mekka at the centre of the Earth, see A. J. Wensinck, 'The Ideas of the Western Semites concerning the Navel of the Earth', *VKAWA* XVII (1916), pp. 1–65. See also the poetic *sillûq* for the pericope of *pârâh* in the *Aškanazî* ritual (*'eyn la-sôheah*), based in turn upon *Exodus Rabbâh* 33, 4: 'For the upper throne corresponds to the lower throne; indeed, all that exists above, exists below, throne opposite throne, sanctuary opposite sanctuary, temple opposite temple, sons opposite sons, servants opposite servants'.

<sup>68</sup> See Von Grunebaum, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

wearing of a white garment, anti-clockwise circuit, accompanying prayers. However the most striking parallels are to be found on the esoteric level. Both mystical traditions identify the successive circuits with seven Divine attributes, which are in turn associated with patriarchal or prophetic figures. The ultimate purpose of circumambulation in both instances seems to be unification with the supernal world through attainment to the soul's root.

The coincidence of these themes may spring from the archetypes of the human psyche. For the time being, we leave open the question of influence of one tradition upon another. At first glance, it would seem most likely that the Jewish development of the *haqqâfôt* ritual, having emerged in Islamdom – though not without ancient Israelite precedent – was influenced by Muslim practice. This could also prove true even in the esoteric domain bearing in mind that the Luryanic qabbâlâh in its Safed cradle evolved in an Islamic environment greatly suffused with Sufi influence.