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**RABBINISM VERSUS KABBALISM:
ON G. SCHOLEM'S PHENOMENOLOGY
OF JUDAISM***

Behind speculation, and beneath gnosis and anti-gnostic constructions, we find *myths*.

Paul Ricoeur.

I

Prof. Gershom Scholem was universally recognized as the greatest contemporary scholar of Jewish mysticism. On the one hand, his tremendous achievements in this field enabled him to transcend limitations characteristic of even major scholars who master a specific and limited field of Judaism; on the other, his vast knowledge permitted him to offer large-scale analyses of the whole range of Jewish religious phenomena. By his virtuoso mastery of the neglected areas of Jewish mysticism, Scholem was able to suggest more complex descriptions of Judaism than previously existed. Through his studies (especially those written since 1949) the phenomenology of this religion made its first substantial steps. Scholem's revalorization of Jewish mysticism, not only added another area of Jewish creativity to the scrutiny of scholarship; it changed, in a dramatic way, the relationship between the various fields of this religion. The questions of the status of Jewish philosophy versus Halakhah, of Kabbalah versus philosophy, of Halakhah versus Kabbalah etc., were addressed in an authoritative way, and answers were provided for the last two generations of scholars in Judaica.

Like a powerful magnet which penetrated a static field, immediately changing its entire infrastructure, the bold introduction of Jewish mysticism in the field of Judaica dramatically restructured this academic domain. Since this meteoric invasion of mysticism in the late twenties and early thirties, the field of Judaica has again become "stabilized", with its structures remaining basically static despite the tremendous number of studies produced in the last two generations. Remarkably, the abrupt ascent of the status of Jewish mysticism, had raised very few questions as to the appropriateness of the new and

decisive role now assigned to Jewish mysticism in comparison to other major forms of Judaism: Halakhah, Midrash or philosophy. By and large, the problems related to the history of Jewish mysticism became the “real” history of Judaism. Even the research of Jewish history adopted itself comfortably to the new set of questions raised by Jewish mysticism. As a result a new harmony in Judaica was achieved as a result of the consensus of scholars that not only the right questions, but also the right answers are on the agenda of modern scholarship. Just like a magnet which restructures a magnetic field it enters charging, at the same time, the constituting entities with its own valency, so did Scholem bestow modern Judaica scholars with valences of his own. However, with the discovery of new Kabbalistic material and the disappearance of the magnetic power of Scholem’s personality, it now seems that the field of Judaica in general and that of Jewish mysticism in particular is more prepared for a complex restructuring.

In my opinion, the real legacy of Scholem is to be best conceived in terms of an essential need to rethink the existing theories on the basis of new material and approaches. A personality inclined to dialectics, Scholem could barely endure the expanded repetitions of his thoughts. Paradoxically, the Scholemian revolution in the modern understanding of Judaism was so successful that it became, in the lifetime of its initiator, a conservative movement. Scholem, who in his youth indulged in anarchic and nihilistic reveries, became in his older years the very revered symbol of an authoritative academic establishment. The source of the problems posited by Scholem was a question which remained marginal in scholarship. It was assumed obvious, mostly in the circle of his followers, that the “material”, namely the Jewish mystical texts, generated both the questions dealt with by the master, and the answers as well. Despite some late protests, Scholem’s disciples continued to follow the “right” path conveniently opened for them by their master.

The present discussions will be focused upon the question of Scholem’s understanding of the radical divergences between two major versions of Jewish religiosity: Rabbinism and Kabbalism. The centrality of the juxtaposition between these different forms of Jewish religion in Scholem’s phenomenology of Judaism is obvious, and invites a critical examination which, I believe, will elucidate important aspects of Scholem’s religious thought. Two major studies of this scholar will be scrutinized: “Kabbalah and Myth” and “Tradition and New Creation in the Ritual of the Kabbalists”.¹

In general, I am sceptical with regard to attempts to present Scholem’s view as a whole—given the long period of his scholarly creativity and its vast corpus. However, in this case, both articles were written in the same period, 1949–1950, and presented before the same au-

dience, the Eranos meeting at Ascona.² Moreover, Scholem himself has pointed out the affinities between the topics dealt with in these two essays.³ Scholem's other references to myth and ritual, will be mentioned in passing, but will remain peripheral for our present discussion. Aware as I am that there are also other discussions by Scholem on issues dealt here, both before and after the writing of these two studies, where Scholem has expressed also different opinions than those discussed here, they represent only tangential treatments of subjects whose ample analysis was offered in these two articles. My choice of these studies as the basis of the following treatment is conditioned by my understanding that these analyses are truly representative of Scholem's ideas. Moreover, as it is my view that a totally coherent theory on the relationship between Rabbinism and Kabbalism cannot be extracted from Scholem's writings I resort to the most complete discussions on this issue.

II

The cornerstone of Scholem's understanding of the emergence of Kabbalah is his postulate that this lore represents an irruption in classical Judaism of several *mythologoumena* conceived of as being of Gnostic extraction. Judaism was conceived of as previously capable to eliminate myth as a living factor. So, for example, Scholem ends his discussion of Biblical Judaism thus: "the tendency of the classical Jewish tradition to liquidate myth as a central spiritual power is not diminished by such quasi-mythical vestiges transformed into metaphors."⁴

This understanding of classical Judaism is, in my opinion, the result of Scholem's acceptance of the late 19th and early 20th century views of Judaism as formulated by Hermann Cohen for example, and which reverberates in the monumental study of biblical Judaism of Yehezqel Kaufmann.⁵ However, this is by no means the only possible understanding of the nature of biblical thought. Let me quote, for example, the opening sentence of a recent study, one of the many contemporary contributions to the analysis of Biblical myth, written by a scholar of Biblical thought, who is well-acquainted with the intellectual entourage of Scholem's oeuvre:

It is the central contention of this study—writes the author⁶—that the essential factor molding the spiritual world of the Bible, the Apocrypha, Rabbinic literature, and emergent Christianity, was mythical thought and expression.

There can be, and indeed there are, profound disagreements as to the meaning of myth; In our case, one can ask whether the biblical monotheistic myth—is mythical in the sense the pagan polytheistic myths are. Nevertheless, it seems that modern scholarship is nowadays more inclined to accept the mythical essence of some aspects of biblical theology than it was two or three generations ago.⁷ In any case, the working definition of myth I adopt for the following discussion is that proposed by Paul Ricoeur:

Myth will here be taken to mean what the history of religion now finds in it: not a false explanation by means of images and fables, but a traditional narration which relates to events that happened at the beginning of time and which has the purpose of providing grounds for the ritual actions of men of today and, in a general manner, establishing all the forms of action and thought by which man understands himself in the world.⁸

It is the last part of the passage that constitutes, in my opinion, a most contingent starting point for a fruitful discussion of myth in general. When Scholem assumes that the biblical thought is amythical, not to say anti-mythical, he probably understood it in comparison to the pagan mythology of the Near East. However, one of the issues when comparing the “amythical” Bible to the mythical Kabbalism is whether the latter consists in myths that are not found in earlier strata of Judaism, including the Biblical one. From this perspective, the crucial question is whether or not Kabbalah presents myths that have roots in the earlier Jewish thought. In other words, has the Kabbalistic *mythologoumena* nothing to do with the concerns and practices of previous forms of Judaism?⁹

A similar incompatibility with myth is postulated by Scholem also in regard to another major stratum of “classical” Judaism. In Rabbinism, he writes,

the performance of sacred actions, of ritual, is largely divorced from the substrate that has always been the mother of the ritual, that is, from the myths that are represented in the mime or drama of ritual.¹⁰

Postulating an amythical nature as regards the two major stages of Judaism which preceded the historical manifestations of Kabbalism, Scholem created a profound gap between these two earlier phases of this religion, with which Kabbalah was well acquainted, and even conceived of itself as their legitimate continuator, and Kabbalah. Indeed this “essential” gap between the different layers of Jewish religiosity opened the way to a new dynamics which will explain the transformation of the anti-mythical Judaism into a profoundly mythical one. Scholem set as the major efforts of his scholarly enterprise,

the task of explaining the tremendous metamorphosis of the earlier strata of Judaism. In the following, my discussion will be focused on the relationship between Rabbinism, as Scholem puts it, and Kabbalism,¹¹ the relations between Biblical Judaism and Kabbalah, interesting and crucial as they may be shall not be considered here.

III

In his article on the Kabbalistic ritual, Gershom Scholem remarked that the Rabbinic system was

a hypertrophy of ritual, which became all-pervading . . . accompanied by no magical action. The rites of remembrance produce no effect . . . and what they conjure up without the slightest gesture of conjuration is the memory, the community of generations, and the identification of the pious with the experience of the founding generation which received the Revelation. The ritual of Rabbinical Judaism makes nothing happen and transforms nothing . . . there is something strangely sober and dry about the rites of remembrance with which the Jew calls to mind his unique historical identity.¹²

According to this passage, the ritual of Rabbinic Judaism is totally divorced from a mythical substrate, notwithstanding its early connection to the soil, at least in the first halakhic formulations in the Mishnah and Talmud. The development of Rabbinism is portrayed by Scholem as a "hypertrophy of ritual" probably because of the gradual loss of contact with nature which caused, *inter alia*, the replacement of the natural year by the historical year; Rabbinism is, according to this scholar, the very embodiment of legalism. Let me analyze the single example adduced by Scholem which demonstrates the hypertrophy of ritual. It is a discussion found in *BT*, 'Eruvin, fol. 21b: there,

Kneset Israel says to God: 'Lord of the World, far more ordinances than Thou hast imposed on me have I imposed on myself, and I have kept them'.

However, it is possible to emphasize very different aspects of this passage, which would drastically change the impression Scholem would like us to have about it. He was interested to illustrate the Rabbinic tendency to multiply ordinances. The context of Scholem's analysis seems to point out that he was convinced that the only emotional roots of the Rabbinic ritual are in history, but not in the life and death of nature. This dichotomy of history versus nature is indeed an interesting one, but it does not exhaust the possibilities confronted by the Rabbinic masters. For example, the fuller context of the passage

in 'Erwin may supply such an emotional root that has nothing to do with either history or nature. It is possible to read the passage in another way, or ways. For example, the mythical figure of *Kneset Israel*, a feminine entity which represents the people of Israel, can be envisioned as standing in an erotic relationship to God. Important segments of the Jewish ancient ritual were rooted neither in nature nor in history but in God. It is this ostensible attempt to relate ritual to the divine world which shaped the inner structure of Jewish Rabbinic thought. Just before the above mentioned text, a verse from the *Song of Songs* [7, 14] is quoted: "The mandrakes give a fragrance, and at our gates are all manner of choice fruit, old and new, which I have laid up for thee, O my Beloved."

Obviously, the Rabbinic sages envisioned the old and new fruits as the ordinances, intended to attract God to *Kneset Israel*. The old ordinances stand, according to the context in the Talmud, for the halakhic interdictions related to menstrual periods as imposed by the Bible namely God. The new ordinances are the strictures related to the menstrual interdictions, imposed by the Rabbinic authority. The obedience to the former ordinances reflects the passive attitude of conforming to the formal requirements. The later strictures point, however, to a more active approach: a careful observance of the sexual interdictions. However, as the understanding of the biblical verse implies, the strictures are intended to express a special devotion to the beloved: the strictures were laid up for him. The bride purifies herself by observing the strictures for the sake of the beloved. It is an act of devotion which ensures a perfect sexual relationship. Thus, the ordinances do not stand in a vacuum; they structure an experience. The fact that the verse from the *Song of Songs* serves as a proof-text is, in my opinion, not a matter of accident; this book was understood by the Rabbinical authorities as expressing, allegorically, the relationship between God and the people of Israel. I believe that the Rabbinic ritual as expressed in the above discussion fits the understanding of worship proposed by Evelyn Underhill:

Man, incited by God, dimly and sharply conscious of the obscure pressure of God, responds to him best not by a simple movement of the mind; but by a rich and complex action, in which his whole nature is concerned.¹³

The rich and complex action which is understood as the characteristic of worship is quite difficult to define. In the case of Rabbinism it is indeed a very elaborate system of deeds. However, what seems to be crucial is not so much the very multiplication of the actions or their complexity, but the mental attitude which generates them. At least in the way I understand the Talmudic text, it is a response

of love which motivates the Halakhah. The passage from the Talmud can be envisioned, as Scholem did, as legalism per se, which multiplies ordinances to the extent of hypertrophy. However, it may reflect an erotic type of spirituality. Let me compare the above-mentioned Talmudic text to another Rabbinic discussion. In a Midrashic passage, the function of the commandments is described as follows:

Israel is beloved! The Bible surrounds them with *mitzvot*: *Tefillin* on the head and arm, a *mezuzah* on the door, *zizit* on their clothes . . . This may be compared to a king of flesh-and-blood who said to his wife "Adorn yourself with all your jewelry so that you will be desirable to me". So the Blessed Holy One said to Israel: "My children, distinguish yourself with *mitzvot* so that you will be desirable to Me."¹⁴

In both passages, the significance of the commandments is grounded in the intimate marital relationship which is the basic factor for their multiplication. Indeed someone may argue that what we face here is no more than a rhetoric of love, mere metaphors of marital relationship devoid of any emotional roots. However, such an argument is doubtful as it anticipates the conclusion by positing a preconception as to the dry and sober ritual which cannot express a more deep relationship. On the basis of these Rabbinic texts, it is quite possible that some ancient Rabbis envisioned the wealth of commandments as a treasure, to be performed with a highly emotional intention, whereas other Rabbis would adopt a more legalistic stand. In any case, the above text is open to a much more mythical understanding than that proposed by Scholem.

Moreover, I am not so sure whether it would be more congruent to assume that *Kneset Israel* is merely a metaphor for the whole people of Israel, or rather a supernal hypostasis whose erotic relationship to God represents, according to the Rabbinic reading of the *Song of Songs*, the real message of this book. I cannot fully explain here why I propose an hypostatic reading of this passage.¹⁵ In any case, it is rather strange that this Talmudic passage would be used to prove the unqualified hypertrophic nature of the Rabbinic ritual. My reading of the ordinances as expressions related to pure marital relationship seems to be as good as the more sober one offered by Scholem. I wonder why it was necessary to dispense with the biblical proof-text from the *Song of Songs* in order to leave the impression that the hypertrophy of the ordinances stands in itself, without any specific motivation. In my opinion, *Kneset Israel* in the above text indeed betrays a rather mythical entity, more than a metaphor for the community of Israel here below. In lieu of the divine consort of the archaic mythology, the God of Israel has chosen as his feminine counterpart

a whole people, the people of Israel. This is already alluded to in several prophetic descriptions of the relationship between the people of Israel and God. The feminine genre of the phrase *Kneset Israel* seems to accentuate the role of the hypostasis which represents the people of Israel. It indicates that Rabbinic thought was more open to the feminine entities than Biblical thought, as the parallel emergence of the term *Shekhinah* demonstrates.¹⁶ Thus, an ethnic monotheistic myth has substituted the classical cosmic myths characteristic of the ancient Near East. The addition of the feminine entity as a mediator between the actual people of Israel and the remote Deity rather-bridged the gap between the two extremes. In any case, the early occurrence of the concepts of an hypostatical *Kneset Israel* and the *Shekhinah*, renders Hegel's view of Judaism, as the classical example of a religion of transcendence (which was apparently applied by Scholem to Rabbinism) as an inadequate conception. If the "symbolic function" of myth can be described, in Ricoeur's words, as "its power of discovering and revealing the bond between man and what he considers sacred" then I believe that the above Rabbinic texts reflect a mythical understanding of Jewish ritual.¹⁷

However, it will be a misunderstanding to conceive the Rabbinic ethnic and ethic myths as totally devoided of any cosmic dimension. The Torah, which regulates the relationship between God and His people was conceived to have conspicuous cosmic characteristics, which are obvious in a long series of Aggadic discussions. Although it may be possible to adduce better examples than those offered by Scholem in order to make his point regarding hypertrophy, I remain sceptical as to the viability of the "myth of the sobriety" created by Scholem. Instead, I would prefer the description of the spirituality of legalism proposed by R. Goldenberg:

To live a life of Torah was not only to submit joyfully and lovingly to the "yoke" of a sacred covenant—this too may be said of anyone, or at least of all Israel—it was also to continue the shaping of that covenant, its application to unforeseen circumstances and its extension to new areas of human existence. There is a kind of grateful humility here, but a remarkable assertiveness as well. The innermost heart of the rabbinic religion is the place where these two emotions finally merge into one.¹⁸

Against this "background" of the "dry" and "sober" Rabbinic ritual, Scholem emphasizes the attempts of the first Kabbalists to "anchor the ritual of Rabbinic Judaism in myth by means of a mystical practice."¹⁹ "Mystical" presumably stands in Scholem for either the theurgical interpretation of the Talmudic requirement to perform the commandments with *Kavvanah*,²⁰ or intention, or for the communitive

significance of the commandments, namely the transformation of the *mitzvoth* into a means for attaining mystical experience. A basic question which Scholem did not address in his abovementioned essay is how the mystical and mythical understandings of the ritual emerge out of a "dry and sober" Rabbinic mentality. Scholem did not entirely ignore the problem. As we shall see below, he has given a detailed answer for it. Nevertheless, when dealing phenomenologically with generic descriptions of Kabbalism versus Rabbinism in the two articles under scrutiny here, he seems to evade this problem.

IV

The sharp antagonism between a Kabbalistic mode of thought motivated by a mythical universe, and the "history-saturated" consciousness of the Rabbinic mind, as Scholem called this type of mentality, is an oversimplification that does not do justice either to the Rabbinic or to the Kabbalistic concepts of myth, ritual, time or history. The dichotomy Scholem proposed is particularly unlikely insofar as it refers to voluminous bodies of literature written over very lengthy periods of time which are described generically. According to this phenomenology, the emergence of Kabbalah constitutes an instant and profound restructuring of Judaism. Theoretically, such a transformation is not impossible; but it is strange that no massive opposition to the allegedly novel form of Judaism is known among Rabbinic authorities. Exactly at the same time, the innovations of Maimonides were bitterly attacked whereas the emergence of the Kabbalah encountered only marginal opposition. In lieu of assuming such a profound contrast between two types of religiosity, (which were often cultivated by one and the same person) it would be better to make use of a more moderate description. Rabbinism was not an homogeneous religiosity; it incorporates diverging views on many issues, including the preference, or the rejection of mythical types of expression. It is therefore quite strange that Scholem implicitly identified Rabbinism exclusively with Halakhah, whereas the 'Aggadah was not included as part of the discussion of the dichotomy Rabbinism-Kabbalism. As he himself has several times remarked, the continuity between the Kabbalistic and the 'Aggadic literature seems to be obvious; indeed, according to Scholem himself, the 'Aggadic literature consists of some mythological elements.²¹ However, as far as I can determine, Scholem never quoted the scholarship which explicitly related 'Aggadah to specific mythological material.²² It may be mentioned, that there are but few scholars, indeed only very few, who would envision an organic link between 'Aggadah and Halakhah on

one side, and a natural link between them and the later medieval mystical-mythical interpretations on the other.²³ Hence Scholem's reduction of Rabbinism to Halakhah in those studies we are concerned with here is not only a simplification of Rabbinism, but also an one-sided view of Halakhah as devoid of any mystical and mythical implications.

On the other hand it should be noted that alongside the mythical types of Kabbalah there were also anti-mythical, or at least non-mythical forms as well—viz. the ecstatic and the philosophical modes. It seems that the generic, or perhaps, hypostatic attitude to the terms used in the academic inquiry, like Rabbinism, Kabbalism, Gnosticism, myth, Messianism are one of the major stumbling blocks to a more nuanced understanding of the processes which generated the emergence of the various Kabbalistic phenomena.

However, what apparently spoils Scholem's typology is not only simplistic descriptions of two basic layers of Judaism as totally different phenomenological types, but also the fact that the same figures that played an important role in the history of Kabbalah, e.g., R. Abraham ben David, [Rabad], Nahmanides, R. Shelomo ben Abraham ibn Adret, among others, were at the same time also among the greatest representatives of the "historically saturated" Rabbinism. The assumption that Kabbalism and Rabbinism differ so deeply in their understanding of such a crucial issue as the meaning of the ritual is not substantiated by the existence of inner tensions in the writings of the abovementioned authors. Thus, I would opt for a more nuanced description of both Rabbinism and Kabbalism. This would hold both for the continuity of the basic concepts of ritual, myth, time and history in these two basic forms of Judaism, and for the religious and intellectual integrity of some of its major representatives. In my opinion, such a task is one of the most important *desiderata* for the study of Kabbalah. Such an organic explanation would more easily explain why Kabbalah emerged on the historical scene exactly in the most important center of Rabbinic learning and not in a marginal area of Jewish culture.

Basically, the above analysis of Scholem's phenomenology of Judaism can be summarized as follows: The deep reticence regarding the spiritual potentialities of Rabbinism, shared by generations of Christians and some modern Jewish scholars, induced Scholem to see Gnosticism *as the means* which has restored the lost Jewish religious creativity. Devoid of an intimate relation to those Jewish classical sources that informed most of the Jewish mystics, Scholem found the solution for his quandary as to the causes which contributed to the survival of Judaism in religious material *en vogue* during his early readings on Kabbalah, viz. Molitor, and in his intellectual milieu.²⁴

The more this material was different from, and even antagonistic to Rabbinism, the easier it was to explain how it could fertilize the allegedly sterile Rabbinism. Or, to use the formulation of Scholem himself

Foreign mythical worlds are at work in the great archetypal images of the Kabbalists . . . Without this mythical contribution, the impulses of the Kabbalists would not have taken form. Gnosis, one of the last great manifestations of myth in religious thinking . . . gave the Jewish mystics their language.²⁵

"Foreign mythical worlds are at work in the great archetypal images of" Scholem. It is still an unproven assertion that this was the case also with the Kabbalists themselves. I believe that this crucial resort to alien sources as a key to Jewish spirituality, even to the most anti-Jewish type of thought, betrays Scholem's basic uncertainty, not to say scepticism, as to the spiritual forces inherent in the classical forms of Judaism, beginning with the Bible.

Theoretically, such a resort to Gnosticism can prove a correct approach; when comparing Kabbalah to the medieval Jewish philosophy, someone can easily extrapolate from the deep influence of the foreign philosophical elements, the possible influence of alien religious elements, stemming in this case not from Greek philosophy but from Gnostic religion. However, whereas it is relatively easy to find out the precise sources for the speculations of the medieval Jewish thinkers in the Greek and Islamic material, Kabbalah only very rarely allows such a simple detection of its sources. However, it would be methodologically more reasonable to check first the claims of the Kabbalists themselves. Their affirmations as to the normative nature of Kabbalah and its sources in ancient Judaism must be seriously scrutinized before concluding that they are unfounded and only when such a dead end will become obvious, the resort to Gnosticism, or any other alternative, may be used in order to open a more fruitful approach. For the time being, the massive reliance on "the Gnostic thesis" has inflicted a major injury to the historical research of Jewish mysticism, for it has implicitly divorced the medieval Kabbalah from its organic sources in ancient Jewish traditions. It is by systematically ignoring the recurrent indications of the Kabbalists and by adopting a pseudo-critical attitude to classical Judaism that the modern scholarship of Kabbalah has been brought to a dead end regarding the origins of the Kabbalah is concerned.

The hidden history of Kabbalah is, according to Scholem's historiography, a prolonged contest between mythical elements repressed by ancient Judaism and possessing a tendency to destroy the law (as Scholem put it) and the Rabbinic crystalization of this religion. The

return of the repressed, the understanding that they are the main factors on the Jewish scene and finally the assumption regarding their triumph or vengeance in Sabbatianism constitute the real evolution of Jewish mysticism since the early Middle Ages. Whereas Rabbinism remained static, hypertrophically elaborating upon the same old topics, Jewish mysticism was able to infuse new blood in this ritualistic version of Judaism. This infusion consisted, however, of spiritual ingredients which subsequently created a variegated series of tensions. Gnostic, antinomian, mythical, or Messianic are the elements conceived as dominant and active in the Kabbalistic versions of Judaism based, according to Scholem, on paradoxes.

Let me, in conclusion, address the peculiar process of the mythization of the Kabbalah. If the assumption of Scholem was that the Rabbinic ritual could not itself produce its mythical component, then the assumption is that some myths, or "narrative philosophies" as Scholem defined them following Schelling, were introduced into the ritual. I would rather like to contend that the theosophical element, related to the narrative philosophy, was the major technique for anchoring ritual in myth. I would say that it was a deepening of the significance of the ritual, through the attempt to determine the rationales of the commandments that generated the ritual myths. In other words, it can be assumed that the elaboration on some myths was, primarily, not the result of a mythopoeic drive to build up a certain mythical philosophy, but the result of the elaboration on the *mythologoumena* already in existence in Judaism, which were organized, or re-organized in order to account for the meaning of the commandments. In other words, I contend that a theosophy was not introduced to Judaism from outside, nor was it subsequently, and artificially connected with the commandments, but that an inner process was responsible for the emergence of stronger ritual myths. The effort to elucidate the metaphysical basis for the influence of the performance of the commandments on the divine level was, in my opinion, the main move of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. To put it differently, Scholem maintains that it was basically Gnostic material that informed Jewish mystics in regard to the Kabbalistic myth which is the quintessence of Kabbalistic theosophy. I would rather propose that a specific type of Jewish theurgy, that sought a supernal domain or a superstructure, is essential to explain the daily ritual here. Whereas Scholem minimized the mythical elements in Rabbinism and overemphasized the mythical nature of Kabbalism, I would suggest the possibility that Rabbinism was more mythical than Scholem and his followers would conceive²⁶, and that some parts of the Kabbalah, the ecstatic and the philosophical types, were much less mythical than Scholem's generalization implies. The restriction of Rabbinism

to dry ritual and the restriction of the Kabbalah to its theosophical-theurgical form, permitted the construction of an antagonism which enabled the acceptance of the Hegelian conception of Judaism transposed by Scholem to Rabbinism, while trying to show that the genuine religion, (a la Mircea Eliade) exists in Judaism in the form of Kabbalism.

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NOTES

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1. The two articles will be quoted simply by referring to the pages in Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1969)

2. See "Kabbalah und Mythos," *Eranos Jahrbuch*, Vol. 17 (1949), pp. 287–334; "Tradition und Neuschöpfung im Ritus der Kabbalisten" *Eranos Jahrbuch*, Vol. 19 (1950), pp. 121–180.

3. See *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 109, 119.

4. *On the Kabbalah*, p. 88. Scholem's view is regnant in modern scholarship of Kabbalah: see Morris M. Faierstein, "'God's Need for the Commandments' in Medieval Kabbalah," *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 36 (1982), pp. 45–46; Daniel Matt, "The Mystic and the Mizwot," in Arthur Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages*, (New York, 1986), Vol. I, p. 395.

On Scholem's view of myth in general see David Biale, *Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 51–70.

5. On Kaufmann's view and a criticism of it see David Sperling, "Israel's Religion in the Ancient Near East," in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality*, Vol. I, pp. 16–21.

6. Benjamin Uffenheimer, "Myth and Reality in Ancient Israel," in *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilization* (ed.) S. N. Eisenstadt, (Albany, 1986), p. 135; idem, "Biblical Theology and Monotheistic Myth," *Immanuel*, Vol. 14 (1982), pp. 7–26. On Rabbinic myth see Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), pp. 156–174; and the important study of Yehudah Liebes, "De Natura Dei: On the Jewish Myth and its Metamorphosis," forthcoming in *Ephraim Gottlieb Memory Volume*, (edited by) A. Goldreich and M. Oron (Tel Aviv, 1991).

7. See Uffenheimer, "Myth and Reality," *ibid*, pp. 505–510 for the pertinent bibliography, and Michael Fishbane, "Israel and the Mothers" in Peter L. Berger (ed.), *The Other Side of God* (New York, 1981), pp. 28–47.

8. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, (Boston, 1969), p. 5.

9. In my opinion, the myth of the Torah is crucial for most of the mystical forms of Judaism as well as for the non-mystical aspects of Jewish literature; however, this issue cannot be elaborated here and it must wait for a detailed treatment elsewhere.

10. *On the Kabbalah*, p. 120.

11. I shall use the terms Rabbinism and Kabbalism, which evoke generic modalities of Jewish religiosity, because they faithfully reflect Scholem's essentialistic approach.

12. *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 120–121. On the paradoxical character of this passage in its context see Harold Bloom, "Scholem: Unhistorical or Jewish Gnosticism," in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Gershom Scholem*, (New York, 1987), pp. 212–213, Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, p. 64 and Yoseph Hayyim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor, Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (New York, 1989), pp. 117–118, note 26. Indeed, I accept the paradoxical nature of Scholem's discussion but it seems that this paradox is the result of the biased presentation of Rabbinism which created, as Yerushalmi has perceptively described it, a "stark contrast".

Cf. also the tensions between the more mythical impulses in what is designated as "the Rabbinic popular faith", and its monotheistic concept as described by Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, (Jerusalem, 1961), Vol. I pp. 102–103. (Hebrew) It seems that this scholar conceived of the mythical elements, sometimes associated by him with Gnostic remnants, as part of the popular Jewish thought, despite the fact that he mentions the Rabbinic faith.

Compare to Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 105, where he asserts that the crystalization of the feminine element in God, the *Shekhinah*, by the Kabbalists, shows that they "had uncovered one of the primordial religious impulses still latent in Judaism." In this context, he refers to the immense popularity the feminine conception of the *Shekhinah* had among the masses of the Jewish people. However, it is a fact that Kabbalah appeared not as a popular movement, but as an esoteric lore of the elite, which was disseminated only very lately, starting with the second half of the 16th century.

13. *Worship* (London, 1937) p. 23. See also Joachim Wach, *Types of Religious Experience Christian and Non-Christian* (Chicago, 1957), p. 40.

14. *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, no. 36; cf. Daniel Matt, "The Mystic and the Mizwot," in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality*, Vol. I, p. 369. See also Byron L. Sherwin, "Law and Love in Jewish Theology," *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. LXIV, No. 4 (1982), pp. 467–480.

15. I shall take the matter up elsewhere; for the time being, *BT. Berakhot*, fol. 35b: Compare, however, Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem, 1979), Vol. I pp. 646–647, vol. II, pp. 988–989. It is obvious that the later Scholem became aware of the hypostatical content of the concept of *Kneset Israel*, as his remark in *Kabbalah*, p. 22 explicitly demonstrates: "the Jewish concept of *Kneset Yisrael* . . . as a heavenly entity that represents the historical community of Israel," and see also *ibid*, p. 43. However, despite this very interesting observation, he ignores the mythical and mystical potentialities of this key-concept when he has adduced the 'Erwin passage. It seems that in the period when he wrote the two essays we are analyzing here, Scholem did not accept the hypostatical status of *Kneset Israel*; see *On the Kabbalah*, p. 106; there, the Kabbalistic identification of the *Ecclesia* and the *Shekhinah* as symbols of the last *Sefirah*, he described as a "specifically Jewish metamorphosis in which so much of the gnostic substance entered into Jewish tradition." However, if we accept Scholem's own view in *Kabbalah*, that *Kneset Israel* was conceived as an hypostatic entity already in the Rabbinic

literature, then the Gnostic contribution becomes superfluous. For more on the 'Erubin passage see Urbach, *ibid.* p. 334.

As we know already in ancient Jewish sources, Israel was not only the name of a people on the mundane level, but also the name of an angel, thus representing an hypostasis; see e.g., Yizhak F. Baer, *Studies in the History of the Jewish People* (Jerusalem, 1985), Vol. I pp. 150–151. [Hebrew]

On the special status of the people of Israel as the wife of God see D. Buzy, "L'allegorie matrimoniale de Jahve et d'Israel et la Cantique des Cantiques," *Viver et Penser*, Vol. III (1945), pp. 79ff.

16. On the nature of the people of the *Shekhinah* in Rabbinic literature as identical to God, and as devoid of any feminine trait see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 104–105 and several times elsewhere. See the summary of Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History* (New York, 1987), pp. 137–138, who emphasizes the Gnostic character of the *Shekhinah* concept in Kabbalah. The Kabbalistic view of the *Shekhinah* is presented as an innovation, or radical departure, apparently related to Gnostic views. (See the previous footnote). However, I am not convinced by this dichotomy between the Rabbinic and the Kabbalistic concepts of the *Shekhinah* presented so neatly and I shall discuss this issue in detail elsewhere. See also Liebes, "De Natura Dei."

17. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 5.

18. See Robert Goldenberg, "Law and Spirit in Talmudic Religion," in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality*, Vol. I, p. 250. See also David Weiss Halivni, "Halakhah: The Jewish Way to God," *Cornerstone*, Vol. I, 1 (1988), pp. 44–47.

19. *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 132–133; *Major Trends*, pp. 29–30.

20. On this issue see Goldenberg, "Law and Spirit in Talmudic Religion," in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality*, Vol. I, pp. 235–237. On *Kavvanah* in Kabbalah see e.g., Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 126.

21. See *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1967), pp. 30–32. On page 31 Scholem even explicitly acknowledges that "the whole of Aggadah can in a way be regarded as a popular mythology of the Jewish universe. Now, this mythical element which is deeply rooted in the creative forms of Aggadic production, operates on different planes in the old Aggadah and in Kabbalism." See also above note 12.

22. See e.g., M. M. Gruenbaum, "Beitraege zur vergleichenden Mythologie aus der Hagada," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlaendischen Gesellschaft*, Vol. 31 (1877) pp. 183–359.

23. See Isaac F. Baer, *Israel among the Nations*, (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 82–83, 102–103, 112; [Hebrew], Yehudah Liebes, "The Kabbalistic Myth of Orpheus," in M. Idel, W. Z. Harvey & E. Schweid (eds.), *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 429–430, [Hebrew]; and idem, "De Natura Dei: On the Jewish Myth and its Metamorphosis."

24. See the recurring description of Kabbalah as an alien type of thought in Eliezer Schweid, *Judaism and Mysticism according to Gershom Scholem*, tr. D. A. Weiner (Atlanta, 1985). Schweid did accept Scholem's concept of the alien origins of Kabbalah but he only rarely addresses Scholem's constant emphasis on the Jewishness of this religious thought.

25. *On the Kabbalah*, p. 98. The same view was already formulated in *Major*

Trends, p. 35. It should be emphasized that Scholem's attitude to Gnosticism differs when he discusses this phenomenon in relationship to the early Jewish type of Mysticism, the Heikhalot literature. In his book on *Jewish Gnosticism, Mekabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1956) he uses the term in a way that does not imply the anarchic, revolutionary stand that informs his discussion of the relationship between Gnosticism and medieval Kabbalah. Early Jewish Gnosticism is presented as a type of thought that is part of the Rabbinic establishment, whereas the influence of Gnosticism, basically the historical non-Jewish type of thought on the medieval Jewish mystics in conceived in terms of infusing repressed ideas. These different attitudes to Gnosticism, which seem to have escaped the recent discussions of Scholem's thought, require a more detailed analysis. Here we shall mention that the anonymous authors of the Talmudic period who authored the Heikhalot literature were portrayed by Scholem in rather conservative terms, though he could not specify their precise milieu, while the historical figures of the early Kabbalah, leading Halakhists, were described as having opinions which were informed by radical, non-Jewish, types of thought.

26. See the description of the theurgical and cosmogonical statements in the Rabbinic literature which informed the Kabbalistic discussions, as "dubious" or "exceptional" in Gershom G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbala*, (ed.) R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, tr. A. Arkush (Princeton, 1987), p. 80, Isaiah Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy*, (Ramat Gan, 1964), p. 25 [Hebrew]; idem, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. II p. 110. [Hebrew]; see also Ephraim Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbala Literature*, (ed.) Joseph Hacker (Tel Aviv, 1976) p. 29 [Hebrew]. Compare, however, Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 161, 357.

The assumption of Scholem, Tishby and Gottlieb is that the Kabbalists imposed their views on the existing material, without however, elaborating upon the sources of those Kabbalistic views. None of them attempted to examine the Rabbinic sources which served as the prooftexts for the Kabbalistic discussion in order to disclose their possible contribution to Kabbalistic thought.