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JOSEPH KARO AND ISRAEL BA'AL SHEM TOV

Mystical Metamorphosis – Kabbalistic Inspiration Spiritual Internalization¹

SUMMARY — The autobiographical-mystical notes of R. Joseph Karo (1488-1575), a leading Halakhic authority in the Jewish world of the 16th century and an inspired mystic who had experienced profound spiritual revival in a form of direct angelic revelation, printed in the book *Maggid Meisharim* (1646) were a major source of inspiration to the founder of Hasidism, R. Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (the Besht 1700-1760). Karo's private extraordinary mystical experience, written by him between 1535-1575 and printed posthumously in 1646, was internalized by the Besht and relived in his mind. The spiritual world that was consolidated in *Maggid Meisharim* in the wake of Karo's mystical experience was adopted by the Besht and re-shaped as binding directives/instructions of the followers of the Hasidic movements. The major Hasidic themes of *deveikut* (communion with God), *hishtavut* (indifference), *mashavah* (ongoing contemplative thought on the divine being), and *avodah begashmiut* (worship through corporeality or through physicality) were inspired by Karo's mystical records, that were perceived by the Besht as resuming of divine revelation. The present article studies the complex nature of the mystical transformation: the extraordinary individual angelic experience of Karo in the 16th century – committed into the printing press in the 17th century – became the foundation of the communal Hasidic mysticism through Israel Ba'al Shem Tov renewed experience in the 18th century.

¹ This article is based on a chapter in my forthcoming book, *Rabbi yisra'el ba'al shem tov ve-reishit ha-hasidut – diyuqan ruhani ve-hashpa'ot tarbutiyot ba-olam ha-yehudi be-mizrah eiropah ba-mahazit ha-rishonah shel ha-me'ah ha-18* [Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov and the beginnings of Hasidism: a spiritual image and cultural influences in the eastern European Jewish world of the first half of the eighteenth century]. The book was written as part of a research project of the National Science Fund of the Israel National Academy of Science. First volume of this study has been published in English as R. Elior, *The mystical origins of Hasidism*, Oxford 2006. I thank my friends and colleagues who read a first draft of the article, helped me hone issues that are subject to dispute, and called my attention to matters needing clarification – Prof. Ada Rappoport-Albert, Prof. Immanuel Erkes, Prof. Judah Leibes, Prof. Abraham Shapira, Prof. Bracha Zak, Dr. David Assaf, Dr. Raayah Haran, and Dr. Mor Altshuler. The article, including quotations from primary sources, was translated from the Hebrew by Joel A. Linsider.

INTRODUCTION

Only rarely in the history of mysticism do we witness the emergence of some entirely new phenomenon, of some concept created *ex nihilo*. More often, great creative thinkers undergo complex internal transformations in the wake of profound identification with earlier thinkers or writers, real or imagined, who are close to them in spirit; alternatively, they internalize inspiring works that transcend boundaries of time and space. In the course of such a metamorphosis, these creative individuals spiritually incorporate the image or the work of the earlier figure, which makes itself felt consciously or unconsciously, as reality or as reverie. The impressions made by the earlier writers or writings can later evolve into revelatory visions of a hidden world or as contact with hidden voices that bridge the concealed and the revealed. This sort of identification and internalization appear to go on within the psyches of innovative mystical figures, to whom supernal worlds are revealed and whose vistas of consciousness expand beyond the boundaries of time and space. These creative figures believe that divine revelation did not come to an end with the completion of the Bible; in their view, it continues in various forms that are uncovered through contact between religious virtuosi and inspirational texts. This sense of continuous divine revelation draws on the written mystical tradition and on the ever-renewed mystical experience, which sustain, illuminate, and interpret each other. The traces of this complex process, in which written accounts are revitalized deep in the psyches of religious innovators and traditional readings are re-dramatized in changing circumstances, are evident in the mystical oeuvre throughout the generations. In this article, I want to examine this sort of mystical conversation, which traverses all boundaries of time and space; my central argument is that the spiritual world of Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, was decisively influenced by *Maggid Meisharim*, Rabbi Joseph Karo's mystical composition.

JOSEPH KARO AND SOLOMON MOLKHO

Maggid Meisharim, the journal kept by Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488-1575), was written in the middle third of the sixteenth century. The first of its two parts was printed in Lublin in 1646; the second, complementing the Lublin edition, was printed in Venice in 1649. A consolidated edition, including both parts, was printed in Amsterdam in 1708². The composition is a unique mysti-

² On the book and its author, see the classic study by R.J.Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and mystic*, Philadelphia 1980². On the bibliographical questions associated with the manuscripts and printed editions of *Maggid Meisharim*, see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 24-37, 301-308. For important biographical and bibliographical developments since Werblowsky's book

cal autobiography, attesting to the hidden world of a towering halakhic figure undergoing intense internal struggles and giving free expression to the way in which the mystical experience breaches established boundaries.³ Two factors contribute to the work's distinctiveness: (1) the unconstrained frankness of its author, a man driven by powerful internal impulse and mystical inspiration and writing only for himself, never imagining his book would be published; and (2) its author's freedom from established literary forms and external conventions, for at the time *Maggid Meisharim* was written, there was as yet no extant Jewish mystical autobiographical literature, the *Zohar* had not yet been printed, and the Kabbalah had not acquired the standing it attained following the printing of the *Zohar*.⁴

Karo's mystical revelations appear to have begun in 1533,⁵ in the wake of Solomon Molkho's immolation at the stake in November 1532 (Marḥeshvan/Kislev 5293) at the hands of the Inquisition in Mantua.⁶ His journal attests to

was published, see M. Benayahu's comprehensive work *Yosef behiri: maran rabbi yosef qaro* [Joseph my chosen: Our master Rabbi Joseph Karo], Jerusalem 1991, 155-171, 393-412.

³ On Karo's complexities and various aspects of his *Maggid Meisharim*, see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 9-23, 148-168, 257-286; id., 'Li-demuto shel ha-maggid shel r. yosef qaro' [On the figure of R. Joseph Karo's *Maggid*], in: *Tarbiz* 27 (1958), 310-321; Z. Shazar, 'Zofayikh zefat' [Your observers, O Safed], in: *Kokhvei boqer*, Tel-Aviv 1972, 293-332 [English: *Morning stars*, (trans. Shulamith Schwartz Nardi) Philadelphia 1967]; M. Pachter, 'Sefer *Maggid Meisharim* le-r. yosef qaro ke-sefer musar' [Joseph Karo's *Maggid Meisharim* as an ethical work], in: *Da'at* 21 (1988), 57-83; J. Dan, 'Joseph Karo – Lawyer and Mystic by R.J.Z. Werblowsky' [review], in: *Tarbiz* 33 (1963), 89-96; D. Tamar, *Mehqarim be-toledot ha-yehudim be-erez yisra'el u-ve-italyah* [Studies in the history of the Jews of the Land of Israel and of Italy], Jerusalem 1973, 101-106, 194-200; M. Idel, 'Iyyunim be-shitat ba'al sefer ha-meishiv' [Studies in the method of the author of *ha-meishiv*], in: *Sefunot* 7 (New Series, 1983), 220-226.

⁴ On the paucity of autobiographical writings in Jewish mystical literature, see G. Scholem, *Major trends in Jewish mysticism*, New York 1961³, 15-16, 147. See M.M. Faierstein, *Jewish mystical autobiographies: Book of Visions and Book of Secrets*, New York 1999, introduction. In a forthcoming study of mystical autobiography, I consider the broader spiritual and historical significance of that phenomenon. On the change in the Kabbalah's standing around the middle of the sixteenth century, see Y. Tishby, 'Ha-pulmus al sefer ha-zohar ba-me'ah ha-16 be-italyah' [On the polemic over the *Zohar* in sixteenth-century Italy], in: *Peraqim* 1 (1967-1968), 131-182; R. Elior, 'Ha-ma'avaq al ma'amadah shel ha-qabbalah ba-me'ah ha-16' [The struggle over the standing of the Kabbalah during the sixteenth century], in: *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981), 177-190; D. Abrams, 'Eimatai huberah ha-haqdamah le-sefer ha-zohar?' [When was the introduction to the *Zohar* written?], in: *Asufot* 8 (1994), 211-226. The *Zohar* was first printed in Mantua in 1558.

⁵ See further on this below, n. 8.

⁶ On Solomon Molkho, see A.Z. Aescoly, *Ha-tenu'ot ha-meshihiyot be-yisra'el* [Jewish Messianic Movements], Jerusalem 1988², 296, 417-420, 426-427; S. Idelberg, 'Ha-im nitlavveh david ha-re'uveini li-shelomoh molkho be-masa'o le-regensburg?' [Did David ha-Reuveini accompany Solomon Molkho on his journey to Regensburg?], in: *Tarbiz* 42 (1973), 148-153;

his yearning to be immolated on God's altar, burnt for the sanctification of God's Name.⁷ Molkho's *auto-da-fé* was tied to his refusal to forsake his messianic aspirations and his desire to atone for his past, to publicly sanctify the name of heaven, and to be 'an unblemished sacrifice, a pleasing savor before God'. In the late 1520s and early 1530s, Molkho was involved in efforts, both terrestrial and mystical, to hasten the redemption. His death put an end to real-world realization of the hope for redemption and stirred up the kabbalists of the generation of the Spanish expulsion and their successors throughout the sixteenth century. These kabbalists, with ties to the circles of R. Joseph Taitazak and his student, R. Solomon Alkabez in the Ottoman Empire, reinterpreted the link between the kabbalistic tradition and eschatological expectations, formulated a mystical symbiosis between Exile and Redemption, and established a complex process of internalizing the hopes for the messianic age.⁸

M. Idel, 'Shelomoh molkho ke-magiqon' [Solomon Molkho as magician], in: *Sefunot* (new series) 3 (1985) no.18, 193-219. On the connection between Karo and Molkho, see Shazar, 'Zofayikh zefat, 300-301; Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 97-99. The date of Molkho's death is a matter of controversy, some placing it in 5292 and others in 5293, but the earlier year appears to be based on an error in calculation and he most likely went to the stake in early 5293. Reliable information in a letter by Rabbi Azriel Diena of Mantua (d. 1536) places Molkho still in Italy in Elul 5292 (the last month of that year) (Eshkoli, *Ha-tenu'ot ha-meshihiyot be-yisra'el*, 296, 423); the writer, one of Molkho's supporters, notes that on 28 Elul 5292, Molkho was mentioned in the blessing for the living. Eyewitness testimony by Joseph of Rosheim relates to a meeting between Molkho and Emperor Charles V at the end of 1532, but does not refer to the date of Molkho's death. Molkho therefore must have gone to the stake in 5293, for he would have had to reach Regensburg in Bavaria in order to meet with the Emperor and then return to Mantua, where he met his death. Azariah di Rossi (1511-1578), a native of Mantua, noted in his *Me'or einayim* (Vilna 1866, 193) that Solomon Molkho was burned in Mantua in 5293; according to Sh. Simonson (*Toledot ha-yehudim be-dukhasut mantova* [History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua]. Vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1963, 18), who compares accounts by Mantuan chroniclers to the known Jewish sources, Molkho was executed during the second half of November 1532, corresponding to Marḥeshvan or Kislev of 5293.

⁷ See Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 97-99, 151-154.

⁸ On Joseph Taitazak's circle in Salonika, see G. Scholem, 'Ha-Maggid shel yosef taitazek ve-ha-gilyim ha-meyuhasim lo' [Joseph Taitazak's *Maggid* and the revelations attributed to him], in: *Sefunot* 11 (1971), 67-112; Bracha Zak, 'Al peirushav ha-darshaniyim shel yosef taitazek' [On Joseph Taitazak's homiletical exegesis], in: *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 7 [1988]), 341-355 and bibliographical notes id. On Solomon Alkabez, see Solomon Schechter, 'Safed in the sixteenth century: A city of legists and mystics', in: *Studies in Judaism. Second series*, Philadelphia 1908, 202-306; M. Pachter, *Sifrut ha-derush ve-ha-musar shel hakhmei zorfat ba-me'ah ha-16 u-ma'arekhet ra'ayonoteha ha-iqqariyim* [Homiletical and ethical literature of the French sages during the sixteenth century and its principal ideas], doctoral dissertation, Hebrew Univ. of Jerusalem 1976, 138-193; id., *Mi-zefunot zefat* [From Safed's hidden treasures], Jerusalem 1994, 17-38; Bracha Zak, 'Galut u-ge'ulah bi-verit ha-levi le-rabbi shelomoh alqabez' [Exile and redemption in Rabbi Solomon Alkabez's Berit ha-levi], in: *Eshel Be'er Sheva* 2 (1980), 265-286.

Karo was close to these circles, and his mystical yearnings were tied to the profound change in his consciousness regarding the hidden meaning of Exile and Redemption. His first mystical revelation mentioned in *Maggid Meisharim* took place on the night of the Sabbath, 22 Adar I 5293 (1533), a few months following Molkho's *auto-da-fé*.⁹ The revelation included a mystical way of life dictated from the heavens; a communication related to the future of his family; a vision of his immolation at the stake, intertwined with his entry into Paradise as a groom entering his wedding canopy; and his being offered up as a sacrifice in the supernal realms. There is little doubt that Molkho's writings and letters, which were studied in Taitazak's and Alkabez's circles along with the *Zohar* manuscript, helped shape Karo's mystical thinking.¹⁰

The critical transformation with respect to the hidden significance of Exile and Redemption was focused in Karo's vision on the image of a multi-vocal heavenly entity, revealed to him in his mind's eye and embodying the exiled *Shekhinah* awaiting redemption. This variegated figure, variously referred to in his journal as the *Mishnah* (the compendium of rabbinic law constituting the earlier stratum of the Talmud), the *Shekhinah* ('divine presence'), the *Maggid* ('mystery-revealing angelic mentor') the *qol ha-medabber* ('speaking voice') or the *malakh ha-go'el* ('redeeming angel') assigned him direct responsibility for its elevation and its redemption. The heavenly figure speaks to him simultaneously as the voice of the exiled daughter of Zion, keening in the words of the Book of Lamentations over the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple; and in the voice of the *Mishnah* (identified in his consciousness with the

⁹ On Karo's first revelation, see Joseph Karo, *Maggid Meisharim* (ed. Y.A. Bar-Lev), Petah-Tiqvah 1990, 5-7 (hereafter: *MM*). Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Maggid Meisharim* are cited to and translated from that edition. The heading to this revelation states 'Sabbath night, 22 Adar I', without specifying a year. The years 5293 and 5296 (1532/3 and 1535/6) were leap years (in which Adar I would be so designated), and it is almost certain that the reference is to 5293 (1533). By 1536, Karo was already in the Land of Israel; but the revelation pertains to the time of his first marriage, before the death of his children in an epidemic in 1534, while he was in Turkey. The events associated with Karo's early revelations cannot be dated precisely, for the work was arranged by section at the time it was printed, without regard to the order in which it was written. The dates that appear in the journal generally omit the year, and the few references to years are not necessarily accurate. See Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 294-300; Benayahu, *Yosef behiri*, 321-327.

¹⁰ Molkho's kabbalistic-messianic booklets were printed in *Sefer ha-Mefo'ar* (Salonika 1529), and the accounts of his visions that circulated in manuscript during the sixteenth century were published in the *Hayyat ha-Qaneh* (Amsterdam c.1658; Paris 1938). Molkho's writings were known in the late 1520s and early 1530s to kabbalistic circles in the Ottoman Empire to which Karo was close. See Eshkoli, *Ha-tenu'ot ha-meshibiyot be-yisra'el*; and cf. his introduction to *Hayyat ha-Qaneh*. I consider the influence of Molkho's writings on Karo in my work on mystical autobiography, referred to in n. 4 above.

exiled *Shekhinah*), speaking to him in the words of the *Zohar* and assuring him that he will have the favor of publicly sanctifying God's Name and being sacrificed on God's altar in the Land of Israel. The assurances are issued by the voice that speaks within him on condition that he fast, purify himself, study, be joined to God, and devote himself ceaselessly to the redemption of the *Shekhinah*.¹¹

The comments of the *Mishnah/Shekhinah* clearly show the link between Molkho's death – which Karo interpreted as a higher purification, an atonement, a sanctification of God's Name, the sacrifice of an individual who, by his suffering, atones for the sins of the multitude – and Karo's yearning to give up his life, to purify himself, and publicly sanctify the name of heaven:

I will grant you the favor of being publicly burned in the Land of Israel to publicly sanctify my name and you will be raised as a pleasing sacrifice on my altar (...) just as Solomon my chosen one was favored to be called 'Molkho' [from the root for 'king'], for he was anointed many times from on high and went up pleasingly on my altar (...) and it is I, the *Mishnah*, speaking in your mouth (*MM* 362).¹²

JOSEPH KARO – DECISOR AND KABBALIST

Joseph Karo immigrated to Safed, in the Land of Israel, in 5296 (1535/6), in the wake of a mystical revelation on the eve of the festival of Shavuot in 5233

¹¹ On this mystical entity and its various names, see below, text at nn. 20-21. The first appearance of the term *Maggid* to denote a heavenly force that reveals the mysteries of the Torah seems to be in *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, an Ashkenazi commentary on the seventy names of Metatron: 'one who knows the seventy names of Metatron can accomplish whatever he may want; but it requires sanctity and purification in hot and cold water and fasting and sexual abstinence, and it requires prayer and Torah study. And if you do this, he will then reveal to you all the mysteries of the Torah and you will be able to invoke a *Maggid* at your will, as you wish, and he can work other wonders'. (*Sefer ha-Hesheq*, end of the section beginning *Beit din le-rabbi avraham hamui* [Livorno, 1853], 3b.) S. Pines has shown that by the early Middle Ages, the term *Maggid* had already come to mean an angel or spiritual force that reveals mysteries. S. Pines, *Le Sefer ha-Tamar et les Maggidim des Kabbalistes: Hommage à Georges Vaijda*, Louvain 1980, 348-363. An illuminating explanation of the term's essential meaning during the sixteenth century appears in Moses Cordovero, *Derashot be-inyanei ha-mal'akhim* [Discourses on angels], printed at the end of R. Margalio, *Mal'akhi elyon* (Jerusalem 1945, 64-65), reprinted in *Sefer ha-zohar, zohar hadash al megillot shir ha-shirim, eikhah ve-rut, im peirush or yaqar mei-ramaq* [The *Zohar*, *Zohar hadash*, on Song of Songs, Lamentations and Ruth, with the commentary *Or Yaqar* of Rabbi Moses Cordovero]. Vol.13, Jerusalem 1991, 20. See also Hayyim Vital, *Sha'ar Ruah ha-Qodesh*, Jerusalem 1912, 1a-b. On the phenomenon of the *Maggid* in the kabbalistic tradition, see Idel, 'Iyyunim be-shitat ba'al sefer ha-meishiv', 183-226.

¹² For additional references to the promise of immolation at the stake, cf. *MM* 6, 52.

(1533) or 5234 (1534).¹³ In the course of that revelation, he heard the voice of the exiled *Shekhinah* calling on him to go up to the Land of Israel and participate in its redemption.¹⁴ An additional motivation was his longing to be immolated at the stake as Solomon Molkho had been and to sanctify God's Name in the Holy Land. In the years following his immigration, he headed a major yeshiva in Safed; experienced numerous mystical revelations, recounted in writing in *Maggid Meisharim*; completed his *Beit Yosef*, a large halakhic work published during the 1550s; wrote his *Shulhan Arukh*, printed in the 1560s; composed an extended series of commentaries, novellae, and halakhic books;¹⁵ and fought to secure his primacy among the sages of the Land of Israel.¹⁶

Historians of *halakhah* have shown *Beit Yosef* to be doubly innovative: it employed a method that bundled 'all the laws that are practiced' and the opinions of all previous decisors, reaching conclusions in the principal halakhic areas in accordance with a novel rule of decision;¹⁷ and it offered a unique melding

¹³ According to Werblowsky (*Joseph Karo*, 121, 294), Karo immigrated to the Land of Israel in 5297 (1536/7). But it is clear from the studies of H.Z. Dimitrovsky ('Vikuah she-avar bein maran rabbi yosef qaro ve-ha-mabbit' [A dispute between our master Rabbi Joseph Karo and Rabbi Moses ben Joseph of Trani], in: *Sefunot* 6 (1962), 90-94) and Tamar (*Mehqarim be-toledot ha-yehudim be-erez yisra'el u-ve-italyah*) that he immigrated in 5296 (1535/6). Cf. Benayahu, *Yosef behiri*, 155-161.

¹⁴ On the Shavuot-night revelation, see Solomon Alkabez's epistle in *Maggid Meisharim* (Lublin 1646), 'Introduction'; Isaiah Horowitz, *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit*. Part 2, Amsterdam 1649, *Masekhet Shevu'ot*, *Amud ha-Torah* 180a. The epistle is included at the beginning of the Jerusalem, 1960 edition of *Maggid Meisharim*, based on the Amsterdam edition of 1708. Werblowsky (*Joseph Karo*, 108-111) thought the revelation had taken place on Shavuot of 1530 or 1534; Pachter (*Mizefonot zefat*, 21-22) argued – relying on the date of Solomon Alkabez's immigration to the Land of Israel and passage from Salonika to Nikopol en route – that the correct date was 1534; see also Benayahu, *Yosef behiri*, 157. It appears that these dates are incorrect, for it is not at all impossible that the *tiqqun leil shavu'ot* (the Shavuot-night ceremony) took place in Salonika in 1533, a few months after the first revelation to Karo (the night of the Sabbath, 22 Adar I 5293 [1533]), following Molkho's going to the stake. Pachter showed that Alkabez was in Salonika in the month of Iyyar 5294 (spring of 1534) and immigrated to the Land of Israel that summer; there is, accordingly, room for doubt that he was still in Salonika in Sivan (the month that includes Shavuot) of that year. Moreover, in his epistle on the Shavuot-night revelation, Alkabez does not take leave of his colleagues in the manner of one soon to depart for the Land of Israel; and the year 5293 (1533) better suits the data on the time of the revelation. On the place of Shavuot in the Zoharic tradition and the background for *tiqqun leil shavu'ot*, see below, n. 45.

¹⁵ For a list of Karo's writings, see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 308-310.

¹⁶ See Dimitrovsky, 'Vikuah she-avar bein maran rabbi yosef qaro ve-ha-mabbit'; Y. Refael (Ed.), *Sefer rabbi yosef qaro* [R. Joseph Karo volume], Jerusalem 1969; Benayahu, *Yosef behiri*, 9-98.

¹⁷ See Joseph Karo, *Beit Yosef*, Introduction, *Orah Hayyim* (Venice 1550). Karo began to write *Beit Yosef* in 1522, in Turkey. The first edition of the *Orah Hayyim* section was printed in 1550; the two other sections were printed in 1551-1553. On the innovative nature of *Beit Yosef* and its significance, see Y. Ta-Shma, 'Rabbi yosef qaro bein ashkenaz li-sefarad: le-heqer hitpashtut sefer

of the Ashkenazi and Sefardi halakhic traditions, assigning unprecedented halakhic authority to the *Zohar* and incorporating laws drawn from the kabbalistic literature into the decision-making process in a manner previously unknown. In *Maggid Meisharim*, the nature of these innovations is reflected in the *Shekhnah's* comments to Karo: 'Therefore, be strong and of good courage in your Torah study, as you engage in Torah, *Mishnah*, *gemara*, Rashi, *Tosafot*, halakhic rulings, and Kabbalah. For you link them to one another, and all the celestial angels seek your peace and wellbeing' (*MM* 258).¹⁸

It is evident from *Maggid Meisharim* that while Karo was developing his new method for codifying *halakhot*, he was simultaneously seeking out the metaphysical significance of the commandments and looking beyond the tradition in an effort to find the spiritual purpose of religious activity. This can be seen in the repeated references in his diary to the fundamental connection between the commandments and the kabbalistic tradition. He writes, in the name of the *Maggid*, 'that every positive commandment and every negative commandment is dependent on the ten *sefirot* [divine emanations] such that [even] a minor transgression is dependent on a high mountain, that is, the *sefirot*' (*MM* 381). And: 'Inasmuch as the sacred aspect has revealed itself, all our efforts are directed toward repelling the impure aspect from the sacred aspect, and that is the mystery of all the commandments' (*MM* 257). In other words, the commandments were given to separate the forces of evil from the sacred, and to resolve the cosmic struggle.¹⁹ These characterizations show that Karo, in his spiritual vision, identified *Mishnah* with Kabbalah, the halakhic element in legal decision-making with the mystical element. The *Maggid's* words attest to that identification of *Mishnah* and Kabbalah: 'You must recognize that it is I, the *Mishnah*, who speak in your mouth (...) I am the *Mishnah*, and within me is the true wisdom [i.e., Kabbalah]' (*MM* 12-13). That identification generated a complex connection between the revealed terrestrial purpose, inferred from the *Mishnah* and its ramifications, and the hidden

ha-zohar' [Rabbi Joseph Karo between Ashkenaz and Sefarad: On the dissemination of the *Zohar*], in: *Tarbiz* 59 (1990), 153-170; J. Katz, 'Yahasei halakhah ve-qabbalah be-dorot she-le-aharei hitgalut ha-zohar' [The relationship of *halakhah* and Kabbalah in the generations following the appearance of the *Zohar*], in: *Da'at* 4 (1980), 57-74 (=J. Katz, *Halakhah ve-qabbalah* [Halakhah and Kabbalah], Jerusalem, 1986, 52-70); M. Haramish, 'Qabbalah ba-pesiqah shel rabbi yosef qaro' [Kabbalah in Rabbi Joseph Karo's halakhic rulings], in: *Da'at* 21 (1988), 85-102; Benayahu, *Yosef behiri*, 333-390.

¹⁸ Cf. *MM* 193. To appreciate the distinctiveness of Karo's work, cf. the view of his contemporaries on incorporating Kabbalah into halakhic ruling: M. Benayahu, 'Vikuah ha-qabbalah im ha-halakhah' [The dispute between Kabbalah and *halakhah*], in: *Da'at* 5 (1980), 61-115; Elior, *Ha-ma'avaq*. On the place of kabbalistic literature in *Beit Yosef*, cf. M. Lavi, 'Ozar ha-sefarim shel maran ha-beit yosef' [Joseph Karo's library], in: *Ha-ma'ayan* 34 (1994) no.2, 21-42.

¹⁹ *Parashat Vayaqhel* (*MM* 196) offers a prominent example of halakhic reasoning flowing from a kabbalistic worldview.

mystical purpose, dependent on Kabbalah and its revelations. *Maggid Meisharim* includes a detailed account of the dialogue between Karo and a heavenly entity that explains to him the hidden purposes of serving God in light of kabbalistic thought and draws a connection between halakhic analysis and kabbalistic ascent and union. That entity simultaneously embodies the *Mishnah* and the Kabbalah, the *Shekhinah* and the Torah – that is, both the revealed source of the law pertaining to the terrestrial community of Israel and its concealed meaning, pertaining to the heavenly community of Israel.

Creating a new construct that sets out new principles requires the ability to breach accepted norms and transcend conventional modes of thought. In the traditional world, which looks to the past as for authority, departures of that sort cannot be legitimated conventionally and therefore require internal validation or higher support. Karo, whose great halakhic treatise was an unprecedented work, hoped that it would gain acceptance by a wide range of congregations and communities. Naturally, he was concerned that his overall method for combining the sources of *halakhah* would not be well received and that his innovation – interweaving rulings from the *Zohar* and the kabbalistic literature into the halakhic system – would not be properly understood.

These concerns are clearly evident in the frequent references in *Maggid Meisharim* to *Beit Yosef* and in the *Maggid's* recurring promises, in Karo's visions, that his book would be accepted by the major Jewish communities of his time throughout the world: 'And I will grant you the favor of completing all your treatises, with your rulings free of dissent or error, and of printing them and disseminating them throughout the Jewish world. And after that, you will be burnt for the sanctification of My Name and you will depart [this world] as a clean sheaf [i.e., free of chaff]' (*MM* 150). 'Be strong and of good courage; do not fear and do not dread. For God will bring success to all your efforts, and all that you have done and taught to this day will be sustained by God. And it is agreed in the heavenly academy, as God lives, that this ruling is true and established, as a law given to Moses at Sinai – the *halakhah* is in accordance with your view and reasoning' (*MM* 381).²⁰

²⁰ A considerable part of *Maggid Meisharim* was written while Karo was also writing *Beit Yosef*. Cf. Shazar, *Zofayikh zefat*, 296-299; and Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 96, 186-187. On Karo's aspirations, see his prayer at the conclusion of *Beit Yosef*: 'I beseech God, I plead before Him that he grant that [my book] be spread throughout all Israel, so I will cause the multitude to act righteously'. (In *Hoshen Mishpat*, Venice 5318 [1559, 332b.]) See also *MM* 3, 362. On his self-image as a halakhic decisor recognized on high and the distinctiveness of his halakhic enterprise, see *MM* 7, 151. The *Shekhinah's* frequently recurring promises, described in detail throughout *Maggid Meisharim*, attest to Karo's hopes for the completion of *Beit Yosef* and its wide acceptance throughout Israel and to his mystical yearnings to be burned at the stake.

Karo's mystical experience – in which he received 'speech of the *Maggid*' or 'revelation of the *Shekhinah*' – seems to have afforded him heavenly confirmation that he was on the right path. *Maggid Meisharim* thus appears to have been conceived by Karo in multiple contexts: against the background of his inquiry into the metaphysical meaning of the *halakhah*; as a quest for divine confirmation of the propriety of his innovations in halakhic decision-making; and against the background of his profound personal identification with Solomon Molkho's act of sanctifying God's Name – an act tied to the hidden meaning of the myth of Exile and Redemption.

Maggid Meisharim illustrates well the power of mystical experience, influenced by the premise that a hidden, mysterious layer of meaning lies beyond the plain sense of a text. That hidden layer, which can be uncovered by means of the generative language shared by God and man, is grounded in the nexus between the written text and the hidden reality of the supernal world. It is expressed in the theurgic connection between human acts and thoughts in the terrestrial world and the hidden divine processes that go on the worlds above. Against the background of Karo's inquiries into the concealed and the revealed, the hidden divine being comes to be personified in Karo's mind in the multifaceted image of the *Shekhinah*, which represents simultaneously the divine voice as it speaks and the written terrestrial text, the active element and the passive element, the masculine element and the feminine element in the supernal worlds. What results from this duality is a new, mystical meaning for the service of God.

Karo's journal points to the complex psychic world of one bound up in study; the multi-layered dialogue he carries on with the text; and the vitalization of the kabbalistic myth of the *Shekhinah*, in which the *Shekhinah* is transformed from a hallowed literary entity into a mythic-mystical figure bursting from one realm to another. The threefold identity in *Maggid Meisharim* – between the *Shekhinah* and the *Mishnah*, between the *Shekhinah* and its varied embodiments in kabbalistic myth, and between the *Mishnah* and Karo's soul – explains why the *Shekhinah* reveals itself to him when he is reading and studying *mishnayot*: the *Shekhinah*, which defines itself as Karo's soul and *Mishnah*, or as a multi-faceted, bisexual, multi-vocal entity, reveals to him kabbalistic mysteries on the one hand and, on the other, encourages his halakhic work and explains its supernal significance:

For you have been exalted through the merit of your innovations regarding *mishnayot*; and I, the *Mishnah* speaking with you, [say] that even though you have not yet completed all of them, inasmuch as you have learned most of *Seder Qodashim* [the portion of the *Mishnah* dealing with the laws of the Temple and sacrifices], any time you read from it, you are bringing sacrifices and burnt offerings before me in the Holy Temple. And you embrace the entire *Mishnah* and she embraces you, and I say to you, 'come greet me, my sister, my beloved, etc. [cf. Song of Songs 5:2]; I desire you, I love you'. (*MM* 379)

The study of *Seder Qodashim* and the laws that govern sacrificial offerings in the terrestrial Temple is transformed in Karo's mind into a mystical experience of bringing sacrifices in the heavenly Temple. In other words, the textual reality involved in reading and studying passages that pertain to the destroyed terrestrial Temple and defunct sacrificial cult becomes, in his mind's eye, a palpable metaphysical reality tied to the actual bringing of sacrifices in the heavenly Temple. The connection drawn in *Maggid Meisharim* between the composition being studied and the student – who is changed from reader to listener, from scholar to mystic acting as a medium through whom the text speaks with a divine voice – is a bond of mystical union formulated in bisexual erotic language calling for unending *deveiqut* (bonding, adhering). That connection, based on the transformation of the student's voice, reciting *mishnayot* aloud, into the voice of the *Mishnah* speaking in and to him, is evidence that the textual material (the written *Mishnah*) has metamorphosed into a tangible mystical reality (the *Mishnah* speaking in and through him, identified with the *Shekhinah*, with the 'voice of my beloved', with the *Matronita*, with the congregation of Israel, and with the mysteries of the *Kabbalah*). The mystical union is based on the identity of human and divine thought and speech ('I, I am the *Mishnah*/the *Shekhinah* speaking in your mouth') and on an ascent beyond the boundaries of terrestrial space and time. This multi-vocal connection reflects the opened passageways between heaven and earth that underlie the mystical experience and the breaching of the boundaries of past and future that takes place when the divine and the human are united beyond the boundaries of time and space.

THE PLACE OF THE *SHEKHINAH*/MAGGID IN KARO'S WORLD

Maggid Meisharim is an extraordinary autobiographical text that reveals the complex spiritual story of a learned mystic conversing with a multifaceted inner voice. Karo gives this voice a variety of names influenced both by scholarly tradition and by Zoharic myth: *Shekhinah*, *Mishnah*, *neshamah* ('soul'), *Matronita* ('the Lady'), *eim meyasseret* ('rebuking mother'), *Maggid*, *kinnor menaggen meilelav* ('harp playing on its own') and *qol dodi* ('voice of my beloved'). The voice has no name or single identity, not even a fixed gender or set tune; it is, rather, a multi-faceted, protean entity that breaches all boundaries of time and place: 'I, I am the *Mishnah* speaking in your mouth. I dry the seas and pierce *rahav* [a sea dragon]. I am the rebuking mother. I am the redeeming angel through the mystery of Jacob, who said, 'the angel who redeems me' [Gen 48:16]' (*MM* 114; cf. 391); 'He said to me as well (...) that I am the mother of whom it is said "his mother rebukes him" [Prov. 31:1]' (*MM* 381); 'I, it is I who speak with you; your soul (*neshamah*) – not life (*nefesh*), not spirit (*ruah*), but the soul

(*neshamah*) itself. Although prophecy has departed from Israel, it has not departed from within you, for I continually come to you to guide you in the path to follow' (*MM* 370); 'And everything said by the *Maggid* depends on that mystery' (*MM* 254); 'wherever you may be, do not cease to think of me (...) for you will be the encampment of the *Shekhinah*, and the *Shekhinah* will speak in your mouth' (*MM* 156); 'Behold, the voice of my beloved pounds within my mouth, and a harp plays on its own' (*MM* 124; cf. 73); 'Behold, a harp plays on its own' (*MM* 358).

The designation most often used in *Maggid Meisharim* for the mystical entity heard by Karo is 'the *Mishnah*', which usually speaks in the feminine voice. Where, however, the voice refers to itself and quotes statements made on earlier occasions, he uses the term *Maggid* or *ha-mal'akh ha-go'el* (*MM* 254, 367, 391). Karo generally speaks of the voice in masculine terms – as 'the voice of my beloved pounds within my mouth' uses masculine nouns and verb – but uses the feminine in citing its words.²¹ The bisexual, multifaceted nature of the *Maggid* draws on the Zoharic symbolism of the of *sefirah* of *malkhut* (sovereignty), which oscillates between masculinity and femininity, between mercy and justice, between good and evil – and is variously known as 'the redeeming angel', 'the community of Israel', *Matronita*, *Shekhinah*, *Mishnah*, 'mother', 'harp', 'beloved', etc.²² This entity alternates between speaking in the authoritative voice of a heavenly messenger and in the pleading voice of the exiled *Shekhinah*; in the chastising voice of the rebuking mother and the murky symbolic wording of the *Zohar*; it forges a new interdependence between the mystic and the supernal world. It describes to Karo the heavenly congregation in whose presence he lives in thought and deed and the complex connection between his activities in the terrestrial world and the raising of the *Shekhinah* and its unification with God in the supernal worlds. To that end, it explains kabbalistic mysteries to him, explicates his life-events and those

²¹ On the androgynous nature of the divine, cf. Mircea Eliade, *The two and the one*, New York 1965, 80-124. I consider the significance of this complex aspect of Karo's personality more broadly in my study of mystical autobiography, mentioned above.

²² On these epithets for the *sefirah* of *malkhut* in the *Zohar*, see the references to them in Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, Jerusalem 1962, *Sha'ar* 23, *Sha'ar erkhei ha-kinuyyim*. On the connection between the *Maggid* and the symbolism of the *sefirah* of *malkhut*, see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 296-286. On the complex characterization of this *sefirah* in the Zoharic tradition and its essential oscillation between masculinity and femininity ('that is the angel that sometimes is male and sometimes is female'), see *Zohar*, part 1, 232a; part 3, 42a-b. Cf. Y. Tishby & P. Lachover, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* [The teaching of the *Zohar*]. Vol. 1, Jerusalem 1957, 219-263; on its metamorphosing nature, see id., 219-220. On its feminine nature, its duality, and the rich symbolism ascribed to it in kabbalistic tradition, see G. Scholem 'Ha-Shekhinah' [The *Shekhinah*], in: *Pirquei yesod be-havanat ha-qabbalah u-semaleha* [Introduction to understanding the Kabbalah and its symbolism], Jerusalem 1976, 259-307. On its dual essence and the sobriquet 'redeeming angel', see id, 297. Cf. Tishby & Lachover, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1, 226, 237.

of people close to him, reveals the future to him, interprets the *Zohar* for him, and explains the lofty significance of constant study and of an ascetic way of life that leads to sanctification of God's Name and self-sacrifice. The *Maggid* guides Karo in developing a mystical-ecstatic spiritual stance flowing from unending study and *deveikut* and explains to him the infinite power of meditating on the words of the Torah and its decisive importance for raising the *Shekhinah* and promoting her union with God in the supernal worlds. In order to develop the desired mystical consciousness, the *Maggid* encourages strict asceticism, renunciation of physical pleasures, and alienation from this world – the realm of the *sitra ahra* (the 'other side'; the forces of evil). Separation from the world, in thought and deed, and division between the physical and the spiritual are preconditions to *deveikut* with the *Shekhinah*. The *Maggid* goes on to set forth the complex image of the divine world, the dualistic concept of the world, the mystical commingling of realms under the influence of human actions, the kabbalistic reasons for the commandments, the mysteries of reincarnation, and the critical theurgic import of reciting the written words of the divine voice, of engaging in Kabbalah, and of concentrating one's thoughts on the supernal worlds.

The voices and visions that Karo heard and saw afford a many-sided expression to the vision of an extreme individualist who creates a world of his own through the use of mystical concepts both familiar and novel. It likewise expresses his self-perception as a halakhic innovator, forging novel principles of halakhic creativity and drawing his authority from heavenly sources, as did Moses and Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai.²³ In addition, the voices convey the sense of a divided ego, made up of opposing forces that draw on the adaptation and internalization of earlier literary mystical traditions and their visual counterparts within him. Karo personifies within his mind the kabbalistic text of the *Zohar*, recites the written text of the *Mishnah*, and transforms a meta-temporal textual reality into a personal, immediate, visual reality that speaks to him and instills new

²³ Alkabez, who uses terms and images borrowed from the biblical account of the encounter at Sinai (Ex 19:16-20; 20:18) to describe the *Maggid's* words at the *tiqqun leil shavu'ot*, refers to the heavenly being speaking in Karo's mouth as a 'speaking voice' (*gol medabber*) – an allusion to the verse 'And when Moses went into the tent of meeting that He might speak with him, then he heard the Voice speaking unto him from above the ark-cover that was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and He spoke with him' (Num 7:89). The *Zohar's* comment on Moses – the Holy One blessed be He speaks through his mouth and wrote these mysteries through his hands (part 3, 232a) – likewise is linked to the voice of the *Shekhinah* that spoke from Karo's throat. The profound identification with the figure of Moses as the redeemer bringing the people to the Land of Israel, as the giver of the Torah, as one through whose throat the *Shekhinah* speaks, and as one favored to hear divine speech pervades the entire account of the Shavuot-night revelation, linked in Alkabez's account to the giving of the Torah and the encounter at Sinai.

kabbalistic significance into his halakhic activity. In his imagination, he dramatizes the text of the *Zohar*, animates it, and transforms it into a dual entity that, on the one hand, pleads with him to be diligent in his study and his contemplation of halakhic and kabbalistic ideas and, on the other, entices him to give himself over to worldly pleasures and sensual desires. He brings the *Zohar*'s anthropomorphism to life and creates, in his mind's eye, a personification of sanctity in the multi-vocal image of the *Shekhinah* – which, as noted earlier, encompasses the *Mishnah*, the Torah, the *Matronita*, the redeeming angel, the *Maggid*, the *sefirah* of *malkhut*, the exiled community of Israel, and even Karo's own soul, craving union in the supernal worlds. This polyphonic entity addresses him in endearing terms and teaches him, admonishes and assuages him, confirms his way or deprecates his practices, explicates mysteries for him, implores him to take part in her redemption, and demands of him, to that end, that he will not interrupt his study and *deveiqut* even for a moment. The voice assures him fulfillment of his physical and spiritual requests as long as he directs his thoughts to raising up the *Shekhinah* and to its union with God.

THE PLACE OF THE 'OTHER SIDE' IN KARO'S THOUGHT

In contrast to his representation of sanctity in the form of the *Shekhinah* / *Maggid*, Karo creates as well a mythic animation of impurity in the form of the world of the *qelippot* ('husks'; sing., *qelippah*). This world encompasses Sama'el, the serpent, the Satan, the 'other side' (*sitra abra*), and the evil impulse. These figures pursue Karo, threaten him, and try to divert his attention from ongoing *deveiqut*; they intend thereby to extend the *Shekhinah*'s fall and imprisonment. In mythical, mystical thought, the 'other side' represents the continued power of the archaic forces of evil and the destructive, tragic aspect of both the supernal and the human worlds – the accumulated stychic forces of the material, the libido, and the physical eros.²⁴ This mythic entity, which symbolizes to Karo the triumph of exile over redemption, incorporates the portions of his psyche that are drawn to physicality and embodies hedonistic eros and sinful thoughts about physical needs and the delights of the terrestrial world. It reflects as well all that is forbidden by the ascetic ethos – things Karo feels drawn to but from which he wants to distance himself.

²⁴ On the Zoharic myth's identification of Sama'el and the serpent as the male force of the 'other side', see Tishby & Lachover, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1, 224, 285-360; G. Scholem, '*Sitra-abra, ha-tov ve-ha-ra ba-qabbalah*' [The 'other side': good and evil in Kabbalah], in: *Pirquei yesod*, 187-212. Cf. *MM* 5, 198, 278, 381. See also below, nn. 26, 28.

Karo lives his inner life, as described by the *Maggid*, between the heavenly congregation and the terrestrial:

For you shall adhere to me and my Torah, and my awesomeness and my *mishnayot* and shall not depart even for an instant, and I will grant you passage among those who stand here [i.e., the angels; see Zech 3:7]. I will favor you with the unerring completion of all your treatises and with their publication and dissemination throughout the Jewish world (...) and all the angels on high will seek your welfare. (*MM* 258)²⁵

Karo's life oscillates between the axis of sanctity and the axis of impurity, which are correspondingly reflected in his spiritual and physical existence:

It admonished me to reflect constantly on the *Mishnah* and rebuked me about speaking much (...) or thinking of stray matters while praying; for Sama'el and the serpent pursue you in those thoughts, but you must burn them with the straw of reciting the *Shema* and the fire that issues from the breath of your mouth. (*MM* 33)

These congregations and axes are constructed from the concepts of Zoharic world that come to life in Karo's vision. Karo's perspective is influenced by the dualistic concept of the Zohar's author, who unambiguously recognized the metaphysical reality of evil and saw the relationship between good and evil as an ongoing, irreconcilable battle between opposing forces. The battle is fought on both the cosmic and the terrestrial planes, by means of the theurgic elements in the performance of the commandments and the mystery of intentions (*kavvanot*) and prayers. Cosmic evil is represented by the figure of the 'other side' and his agents, Satan and Sama'el, who are understood as beings with ontic reality and are represented in the evil impulse within the human psyche. Cosmic good is represented by the figure of the *Shekhinah*, and her terrestrial embodiment is in the Torah, the *Mishnah*, prayer, and performance of the commandments. The forces of impurity and sanctity are represented in human thought and action, for performance of the commandments is taken as a way of doing battle against the 'other side'. Man's psychic world constitutes a key battlefield in the dualistic war, for a man fighting against his evil impulse is thereby fighting against the 'other side'. Karo identifies the physical world with metaphysical evil, with the reign of the 'other side', and with the forces of impurity that hound a person. He accordingly sees the fulfillment of physical needs as yielding to Sama'el, reinforcing exile, and casting the *Shekhinah* into the domain of the *qelippah*. Inasmuch as the tangible world, sunk in exile, is subject to the authority of the forces of evil and of the *qelippah*, contact with it should be avoided insofar as possible. One must turn

²⁵ This is but one of many examples of Karo living his life with reference to both the terrestrial and the celestial congregations. See, e.g., *MM* 133, 381.

one's back on its charms, withstand its influence, and treat it with indifference.²⁶ The supernal world, in contrast, is identified by Karo with the heavenly Temple and the supernal palaces, with the sanctity of the sacrificial cult, the world of the *sefirot*, the celestial academies of the righteous, and the angels. He regards his accomplishment as unity with the *Shekhinah*, as redemption, as offering sacrifices in the heavenly Temple, and as sanctification of God's Name.²⁷ He therefore strives to break out of his personal existence, to be raised beyond the boundaries of this world, to leave the domain of the impure, and to reach the realm of the sacred and cleave to the supernal worlds. As he sees it, being raised to the supernal is conditioned on suppressing physicality; distancing oneself from the realm of the impure; self-mortification, equanimity, and self-purification; uninterrupted study tied to the divine speech emanating from within the text; constant bonding of one's thought to the divine via the letters, words, and language; and assigning kabbalistic significance and mystical content to religious activity overall.

This dualistic concept of sanctity and impurity at war within his consciousness led Karo to mystical self-mortification; he believed his bodily existence required penance and purification, and that its only remedy was for his body to be offered as a sacrifice and his sins purged by fire. 'I have granted you the favor of being burnt for the sanctification of God's Name so that your sins may be atoned and you will be raised up, as I have told you' (*MM* 279); 'He said to me as well in innumerable visions that I was destined to be immolated for the sanctification of the Name of the Holy One Blessed Be He, in order to be cleansed of my filth and sins' (*MM* 182); 'You will have the favor of being immolated for the sanctification of God's Name, whereby all your guilt will be entirely cleansed, and all your dross and decay will be eradicated by fire' (*MM* 194).²⁸

²⁶ On dualism in the *Zohar*, see Tishby & Lachover, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1, 288-298; Scholem, *Pirquei yesod*, 204-210. On the critical importance of this duality in the human soul, see R. Elior, 'Soul', in: P. Mendes-Flohr & A. Shapira (Eds.), *Contemporary Jewish religious thought*, New York 1987, 887-896. On alienation from the world and indifference to reality, see below.

²⁷ On associatively linked imagery of the supernal world, involving Temple, altar, purity, binding (of a sacrifice), burnt offering, sacrifice, atonement, sanctification of God's Name, supernal holy beings, and angels, see *MM* 52, 149, 151, 166, 379-381.

²⁸ On preferring death, see *MM* 139, and see the discussion below of sanctification of God's Name. A possible source for Karo's extreme self-mortifying position is Solomon Molkho's treatise, *Sefer ha-Mefo'ar* (Salonika 1529). The book identifies man's physical needs with sin, the fall, the evil impulse, and movement away from one's spiritual element; it recommends extreme self-mortification in order to return to one's pre-sinning state (Warsaw edition, 1884, 12-15). Molkho's *auto da fe* reinforced the power of his words in the world of sixteenth-century kabbalists, for his sanctification of God's Name afforded a tragic realization of the ascetic, self-abnegating ideal directed toward revival of the spirit and death of the flesh. The view that physicality is connected to the *qelippah* and that bodily pleasure has its source in the 'other side'

Karo understands the purpose of life – at least from the mystical point of view – to be immolation, thereby putting a final, absolute end to the ego confined within his sinning physical consciousness and material bodily. The religious enterprise is directed entirely to realizing that purpose. Karo lives his true life in the supernal world; and abstinence is required of him so he may move from physical consciousness – dependent on the senses and tied to the realm of impurity and exile (*deveiqut* with Sama'el and falling to the *qelippah*) – to spiritual consciousness dependent on mental focus and constant reflection on God and His Torah and tied to the realm of holiness and redemption (*deveiqut* with the *Shekkinah*, elevation to the heavens).

The traits enjoined on Karo by the *Shekkinah* – equanimity, abstinence, intense self-mortification, negation of the material – convey rejection of the physical world and estrangement from its values. These ascetic positions reflect liberation from the rule of the forces of evil, which embody destruction and exile, impurity and *qelippah*. They also reflect the premise that life is a process whose purpose is obliterating the self, attaining nothingness, divesting of the physical, sanctification, and returning to the source of being. But absolute immersion in the world of thought, in endless study and the *deveiqut* inherent in it, becomes transformed into the mystical way that expresses unification, raising-up the *Shekkinah*, construction of worlds, sanctity and purity, and redemption and the associated self-sacrifice. Putting the body to death – a process reflected in alienation from this world, yearning to sanctify God's name; terminating the sensory world; asceticism and abstinence – brings about the spiritual revival and mystical elevation associated with unification, coupling, and *deveiqut*. Physical eros, identified with Sama'el, the symbol of exile, is entirely cast aside and replaced with a mystical eros of union and coupling with the *Shekkinah*, the

brought about a way of life based on an ascetic ethos aimed at distancing oneself from impurity by putting the body to death and turning it into a sacrifice: 'for separating oneself from pleasures is effective in repelling the force of Sama'el' (*MM* 380); 'to inform you not to pursue meat and wine, which are the abode of the evil impulse' (*MM* 264); 'Eating is solely to maintain the species and in all other respects it is from the realm of Sama'el and the serpent, who pursue [a man] to do away with him and destroy him' (*MM* 278). There is almost certainly a connection between the prevalence in medieval Christian society of the ascetic, monastic ideal as a condition for repairing an individual's soul and a basis for individual and societal perfection and its widespread internalization in Jewish mystical circles. On the place of this concept in Christian society, cf. J. Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, (trans. Rodney J. Payton & Ulrich Mammitzsch) Chicago 1996, Chapter 2. Gentile ascetic and self-mortifying practices are referred to favorably in *Maggid Meisharim* (*MM* 204-205). On the background for Christian loathing of the body, the connection between the material world and metaphysical evil forged by the powers of evil, and the consequent spread of the concept of abstinence, see I. Osborne, *The poisoned embrace: A brief history of sexual pessimism*, New York 1992; E. Pagels, *Adam, Eve and serpent*, New York 1988.

symbol of redemption. Bringing the *Zohar's* tradition to life within his own being and internalizing within his consciousness the figures and roles of Moses and Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai – both linked by the Zoharic tradition to the idea of mythic coupling and mystical union with the *Shekhinah* – Karo set that coupling as his own goal, attainable through the death of the body, the elevation of the soul, and the redemption of the exiled *Shekhinah*.²⁹

Maggid Meisharim reflects its author's mystical way and the profound influence of the Kabbalah's dualistic conception of the world on his thinking and his way of life. Through dialogue between the *Maggid* in its wealth of identities and Karo in his many aspects, the book reveals and explicates the interdependence of the contrary forces within his soul and the various parts of the kabbalistic cosmic reality. Moreover, it affords these revelations and the practices derived from them the authority and force of a heavenly source and the power of authentic, directly recounted, human experience.

The evidence strongly suggests that mystical union, as powerfully experienced within Karo's psyche and committed to writing in *Maggid Meisharim* in unmediated form, exerted a critical influence on Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov and left its mark on the Hasidic conception of the world. As noted, the literature of Jewish mysticism contains almost no autobiographical works, and the few that have come down to us and attest directly to their authors' mystical experiences remain in manuscript and have not been widely disseminated. Joseph Karo's journal appears to be the only autobiographical mystical work printed in the seventeenth century and available to the men who shaped the Hasidic mystical viewpoint during the first half of the eighteenth century.³⁰

²⁹ On Karo's tie to Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai in the *Zohar*, see above, n. 23. On the mystical eros linked with sanctity and its foil, the hedonistic eros linked to the 'other side', see *MM* 19, 116, 166. On the mystical eros, see J. Liebes, 'Zohar ve-eros' [Zohar and eros], in: *Alpayyim* 9 (1994), 67-119; on the mystical background of union between man and the *Shekhinah*, see Scholem, *Pirquei yesod*, 295-299; Tishby & Lachover, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1, 221. On Moses and Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai as mates of the *Shekhinah*, see Scholem, *Major trends*, 199-200; J. Liebes, *Peraqim be-milon sefer ha-Zohar* [Aspects of the *Zohar's* lexicon], doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University in Jerusalem 1977, 182-184; id., 'Ha-mashiah shel ha-Zohar' [The Messiah in the *Zohar*], in: Shmuel Re'em (Ed.), *Ha-ra'ayon ha-meshihi be-yisra'el: yom ivyun le-regel melo't she-monim shanah le-gershom shalom* [The Messianic idea in Jewish thought: A day of study in honor of Gershom Scholem's eightieth birthday], Jerusalem 1982, 191-194.

³⁰ As noted, Karo's mystical essay was written, for the most part, during the second third of the sixteenth century, years before other kabbalistic works, composed in Safed by Karo's disciples and their schools, that include autobiographical elements and mystical viewpoints concepts. Among the latter works are *Pardes Rimmonim* by Moses Cordovero; *Sefer ha-Haredim* by Eliezer Azkari, *Sha'arei Qedushah* by Hayyim Vital; *Tomer Devorah* and *Or Ne'erav* by Moses Cordovero, and *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit*, by Isaiah Horowitz. See B. Zak, *Bi-she'arei ha-qabbalah shel rabbi mosheh qordovero* [Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero], Jerusalem 1995, 12, 280-281.

MAGGID MEISHARIM AND THE BEGINNINGS OF HASIDISM

Students of Kabbalah and Hasidism have long noted the influence of Safed Kabbalah on Hasidism's conceptual world and have considered in general terms the links between Hasidic thought and the world of Moses Cordovero (1522-1570), Isaac Luria (1534-1572), Elijah de Vidas (c.1542-c.1585), Eliezer Azkari (1533-1600), and other kabbalists who lived in sixteenth-century Safed. But no detailed comparison between specific thinkers of the two periods has been conducted as yet, and the definitive contribution to Hasidic thought of Joseph Karo (1488-1575), who preceded the foregoing Kabbalists and taught several of them, has not yet been examined. Moreover, the mystical underpinnings of the Ba'al Shem Tov's world have not been studied systematically, and none of the various writers about him have directed their attention to the decisive influence on him of *Maggid Meisharim*.

Examination of the traditions that convey the spiritual world of Hasidism's founder, Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov ('the Besht'), shows that he was deeply influenced by Rabbi Joseph Karo's mystical journal and its ascetic-ecstatic conception of reality; and it appears that key concepts in Hasidic thought owe an important debt to the world of the author of *Maggid Meisharim*.³¹ The Besht claimed that his doctrines were derived from the supernal worlds, and he was

³¹ The statements cited below in the Besht's name are drawn from the following sources: (1) statements explicitly attributed to the Besht by his prominent disciple, Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye; (2) statements found in *Iggeret ha-Qodesh*, written by the Besht in the mid-eighteenth century; or (3) traditions in the Hasidic literature of the 1770s-1790s, directly attributed to the Besht. These traditions, based on autobiographical accounts or on accounts of the Besht's immediate disciples, fixed the late-eighteenth-century perception of the Besht's spiritual image and contributed significantly to the shaping of the Hasidic worldview. The nature of the Hasidic traditions that quote the Besht and the methodological problems they present are considered in my book on the Besht, mentioned earlier. On the image of the Besht, see S. Dubnow, *Toldot ha-Hasidut* [History of Hasidism], Tel-Aviv 1960, 70-75, 484; B-Z. Dinur, 'Reishitah shel ha-Hasidut vi-yesodotehah ha-sozialiyim ve-ha-meshihyyim' [The origins of Hasidism and its social and messianic elements], in: *Be-mifneh ha-dorot* [At a turning point in history], Jerusalem 1972, 181-296 (first published in *Zion* 8-10 [1943-1945]); G. Scholem, 'Demuto ha-historit shel rabbi yisra'el ba'al shem tov' [The historical image of Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov], in: *Molad* 18 (1960-1962), 335-356 (=id, *Devarim be-go* [Explications and implications: Writing on Jewish heritage], ed. A. Shapira, Tel-Aviv 1976, 287-324); M. Piekartz, *Bi-yemei zemihat ha-Hasidut* [Beginning of Hasidism], Jerusalem 1978, 21-22, 39, 253. Several recently published studies treat the image of the Besht from various perspectives. See I. Etkes, 'Meqomam shel ha-magiyah u-ba'alei shem be-hevrah ha-ashkenazit be-mifneh ha-me'ot ha-17-18' [The place of magic and 'masters of the Name' in Ashkenazi society at the turn of the eighteenth century], in: *Zion* 60 (1995), 69-104; M. Idel, *Hasidism between ecstasy and magic*, Albany 1995; M. Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A quest for the historical Ba'al Shem Tov*, Berkeley 1996; R. Elijor, *The mystical origins of Hasidism*, Oxford 2006.

deliberately obscure with respect to their sources. But while he never explicitly acknowledged his debt to *Maggid Meisharim*, a comparative study of Karo's mystical thought and the Hasidic worldview, grounded in traditions cited in the Besht's name, clearly shows the crucial role played by *Maggid Meisharim* in shaping the spiritual world of Hasidism's founder. Evidence from the 1770s and 1780s shows that *Maggid Meisharim* was known within the circle of the Besht's followers;³² and an analysis of the Besht's statements shows clearly that he himself knew of the book, as we shall see below. The Besht considered himself a mystical innovator who, without relying on human teachers, disseminated a new

³² For evidence of the place of *Maggid Meisharim* in the Hasidic tradition tied directly to the Besht, see Meshullam Feibush Heller of Zbarazh, *Liqqutim Yeqarim*, Jerusalem 1934 (Lemberg 1792), 117b (the 1792 edition was censored, to the point of entire pages being deleted; the material appears in full in editions dated 1800 or later); id., *Yosher Divrei Emet*, Brooklyn 1974, 15b. Heller's account was written in the 1770s and pertains to the tradition about the Besht stemming from the *Maggid* of Zloczow and the *Maggid* of Mezhritch. See also Moses Hayyim Ephraim of Sidlikov, *Degel Mahaneh Efrayim*, Jerusalem 1963 (Koretz 1810), 207, 118; these accounts were written in the 1780s. A Hasidic prayer book written in Minsk in 1779 cites numerous practices and teachings from *Maggid Meisharim* in the name of the angel, the *Maggid*. The prayer is rife with statements along the lines of 'the *Maggid* told our master Rabbi Joseph Karo that he should read an abridgment of *Hovot ha-Levavot*, because *Reishit Hokhmah* had not yet been written' (108b) or 'the *Maggid* told our master Rabbi Joseph Karo, may his memory be for a blessing, that he should read a chapter of *Mishnah* at his table' (75a). The prayer book is now in the possession of Prof. Simon Abramsky of London, and I am grateful to Prof. Abramsky for calling it to my attention and graciously allowing me to examine it. On the importance of *Maggid Meisharim* in Hasidic circles, see ms. National Library in Jerusalem 8°3759, 166b-167a: 'His students [those of Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz] wrote in his name that he considered the *Beit Yosef's* book *Maggid Meisharim* to be a great and important work, that its words were of heavenly origin, and that it should certainly be esteemed; the book almost never left his table. Cf. A.J. Heschel, 'Le-toledot rabbi pinhas mi-qorez' [On the biography of Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz], in: *Alei ayin: minhat devarim le-sh-z shogon* [Essays in honor of Sh. Z. Schocken], Jerusalem: Schocken, 1948-1952, 213-244: 151. The wide availability of *Maggid Meisharim* across Eastern Europe is evident from the references to it in various Hasidic texts composed around the time of the Besht's death. See, e.g., Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, *Zafanat Pa'aneah*, Koretz 1782; id., *Zafanat Pa'aneah*, (ed. G. Nigal) Jerusalem 1989), 82a; Gedaliah ben Isaac of Linitz, *Teshu'ot Hen*, Jerusalem 1965 (Berdichev 1816), 55. On the place of *Maggid Meisharim* in Zloczow Hasidism during the 1770s, see Mor Altshuler, *Mishnato shel rabbi meshullam feibush heller u-meqomah be-reishit ha-tenu'ah ha-hasidit* [The teachings of Rabbi Meshullam Feibush Heller and its place in early Hasidism], doctoral dissertation, Hebrew Univ. in Jerusalem 1995, 5-6, 83-87, 104-109, 119-120, 191-193, 235-242 (hereafter: Altshuler, *Meshullam Feibush*). On the influence of *Maggid Meisharim* on the Seer of Lublin during the 1880s, see R. Elior, 'Bein ha-'yesh' la-'ayin' – *iyun be-torat ha-zaddiq shel rabbi ya'aqov yizhaq, ha-hozeh mi-lublin*', in: R. Elior, Y. Bartal, & H. Shmeruk (Eds.), *Zaddiqim ve-anshei ma'aseh – mehqarim be-hasidut polin* [Hasidism in Poland], Jerusalem 1994, 219-240; English translation: 'Between Yesh and Ayin: The doctrine of the Zaddik in the works of Jacob Isaac, The Seer of Lublin', in: A. Rapoport-Albert & S.J. Zipperstein (Eds.), *Jewish history: Essays in honour of Chimen Abramsky*, London 1988, 393-455.

doctrine of supernal origin,³³ and he seems to have sought heavenly confirmation for his novel ideas and to have identified with the explicit reliance on a higher source reflected in *Maggid Meisharim*. In general terms, one may say that the intimate conversation carried on in *Maggid Meisharim* between Karo and the angel speaking within him was the basis relied on by the Besht in formulating the mystical entity that shaped the early Hasidic worldview. The ascetic practices and ecstatic guidance encompassed in this heart-to-heart conversation, conducted in first-person and second-person singular during the first half of the sixteenth century, served as the inspiration for the mystical Hasidic practices cited in the Besht's name in the third person plural during the second half of the eighteenth century. The difference is not simply one of genre, in that a journal by the nature of things is written in first person singular, while doctrines and practices based on disciples' reports of their master's statements, understood as directed to all, will accordingly be written in second or third person. It flows, rather, from the different circumstances in which these mystical traditions came to be and the different areas to which they applied. Karo – who brought the kabbalistic-Zoharic myth to life within himself as a complex dialogue between himself and the supernal worlds, and who saw himself in the image of Moses – sought the mystical-ascetic way of life within himself and generally involved no one else directly. The Besht, on the other hand, saw himself in the image of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai. Turning to the assembled members of his circle and seeking unmediated contact with heavenly entities through the inspiration of Karo's journal and of Lurianic mystical and hagiographic literature, the Besht instilled in the members of his group, his 'treasured ones' (*anshei segulato*), the concept of the world he had acquired through his mystical experience. He therefore cast the requirements of the mystical ethos in the plural rather than the singular.

Maggid Meisharim and the traditions attributed to the Besht are connected by more than conceptual matters, quotations, and textual similarities. Karo and the Besht were two mystics who were conscious of having broken through the boundaries of space and time as the passageways between heaven and earth opened up before them and the mystical text came to life in their vision; and their distinctive connection was one of identification and incorporation, internalization and inspiration. The basic mystical concepts of *Maggid Meisharim*, which their author understood to be grounded in heavenly revelation, became

³³ The Besht, as is widely known, considered Ahiyah the Shilohite to be his teacher. See Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, *Toledot Ya'aqov yizhaq*, Koretz 1780, 201a. See also below, text at nns. 79-80. The Besht's innovative teaching, he believes, was revealed to him by the Messiah, as is evident from his comment in *Iggeret ha-Qodesh*, quoted at the end of Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye's *Ben Porat Yosef*, Koretz 1781. And see further, below.

key concepts in the traditions cited in the Besht's name, also expressly attributed to a heavenly source.

For both Karo and the Besht, these concepts are connected to the link with the *Shekhinah*, referred to in the mystical tradition as 'the world of speech' (*olam ha-dibbur*). In their minds' eyes, the *Shekhinah* speaks with them through their mouths, talking about her union and her redemption; she sees in them agents charged with elevating her by means of study for her sake, adhering to her, and promulgating a new mystical ethos directed toward her redemption. Their mystical experiences are shaped by their tie to the kabbalistic myth regarding the *Shekhinah's* fate and by their interdependence with the *Shekhinah*, as she speaks through human mouths. According to this myth, a human being plays a critical role in the battle between sanctity and impurity and in the raising of the *Shekhinah* from her imprisonment; and he does so by recognizing the divine essence of human thought and its analogues in 'the world of speech' or by means of the link between the redeeming thought and the redeemed *Shekhinah*. These concepts flowed from Karo's inner world, which drew on the kabbalistic tradition that he experienced in unmediated form in his mind's eye, and they appeared anew in the Besht's statements, where they are cited as guidance and practices directed to others as well as to himself.

Maggid Meisharim's mystical concept of the divine, which postulates a dual reality – God exists both in a personified form having a palpable presence in the human soul and in an abstract form, functioning in a mystical, mythological universe – can be seen as well in the underpinnings of the Hasidic concept of the divine, which recognizes the *Shekhinah* as an unmediated, palpable presence existing side by side with a transcendental, dialectical divine being.

What appears to have influenced the Besht more than anything else, however, is the power of the unmediated mystical experience that is evident on every page of *Maggid Meisharim* – an experience nurtured by the soul's deepest, unconscious recesses and by the kabbalistic textual tradition seen in a new light. It is the autobiographical accounts in Karo's journal that mediated between the written mystical tradition and the living sensation welling up within the Besht's soul and that transformed the text into a point of departure for a new mystical experience.

The Besht, like Karo, saw himself as belonging to the supernal world, as one situated above nature and living in direct juxtaposition to supernal beings. He described his distinctive quality allusively – 'as one who conducts himself on a supernatural level'³⁴ – but regarded himself explicitly as having an unmediated connection to the supernal worlds. Evidence for this can be found in his auto-

³⁴ *Toledot Ya'aqov Yizḥaq, Mishpatim*, 56b, Jerusalem 1973, 209.

biographical writings in *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* (The Epistle of Holiness)³⁵ and in the accounts of his disciples and relatives who quote from his remarks.³⁶ This charismatic connection appears to have been formed both by the inspiration of the *Shekhinah's* revelation to Karo – which the Besht identified with and internalized – and by the inspiration of the hagiographical traditions about Rabbi Isaac Luria ('the Ari'), which had served as a model for mystical practice from the time they were published at the beginning of the seventeenth century.³⁷

³⁵ On the various versions of *Iggeret ha-Qodesh*, see *Shivhei ha-Besht*, facsimile of the ms., (ed Y. Mondschein) Jerusalem 1982, 229-239. On how it was understood in later Hasidic tradition, see Menahem Mendel Shneerson [the *Zemah Zedeq*], *Sefer derekh emunah ha-niqra sefer ha-haqinah* (Paltava 1912), 65; Yizhaq Izak of Kamarna, *Nozeir Heseq – peirush al masekhet avot* [Commentary on Avot], Lvov 1887, chapter 6, sec. 6; cf. 'Sefer Me'irat Einayim', in: B. Mintz (Ed.), *Shivhei ha-Baal Shem Tov*, Jerusalem 1969, 239-282. I do not refer to the Rubenstein edition of *Shivhei ha-Besht* (Jerusalem 1991) because it does not include the Hasidic books and letters that appear in the Mintz and Mondschein editions.

³⁶ A well known account of how he was regarded by his contemporaries appears in the words of Rabbi Me'ir Margolis of Ostrog: 'From my youth, from the day I came to know the bond of love with my teacher, my friend, our master, our teacher Rabbi Israel, may his memory be bound in the bonds of life, I knew faithfully that his practices were those of holiness, purity, great piety and abstinence; and his wisdom – the righteous lives through his faith – was revealed to him by Metatron, the glory of God, a hidden matter' (*Sod Yakhin u-Bo'az*, Ostrog 1794, 6a). On the charismatic way in which his disciples saw him and his ability to pierce the bounds between Heaven and earth, cf. the comments of Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye: 'For my master engaged in ascents of the soul and saw how [the angel] Michael, the great guardian of Israel, advocated on Israel's behalf' (*Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef*, part 2, *Devarim*, 614); 'For I heard from my master [the Besht] that they showed him and led him beneath the tree of knowledge of good and evil (...) and afterward that they led him under the tree of life (...) and then brought him into the inner Garden of Eden' (*Ben Porat Yosef*, Jerusalem 1971, 17b). Solomon of Lutzk cites the words of his teacher, the *Maggid* of Mezheritch, regarding the latter's teacher, the Besht: 'I heard from his holy mouth, why are you surprised that he experienced the revelation of [the prophet] Elijah and attained other [incidents of] very high status' – see Dov Ber of Mezheritch, *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov* (Koretz 1781), introduction; id., *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov*, (ed. R. Shatz-Uffenheimer) Jerusalem 1976, introduction to the book, p. [2]. His extraordinary self-perception is evident from the words of his grandson: 'I heard from the late rabbi (...) Jacob Joseph ha-Kohen may his memory be a blessing in the life of the world to come, who heard from my master, my grandfather, may his memory be a blessing in the life of the world to come, that sometimes the world exists in an exalted state and sometimes the world exists in a degraded state, and now that I am in the world, the world exists in an exalted state; thus far the words of my master, my grandfather, may his memory be a blessing in the life of the world to come' (id., 212). For additional accounts regarding his mystical consciousness and self-perception as one who ascended heavenward, see id., 282 and cf. *Iggeret ha-Qodesh*. For accounts of his mystical image, cf. Aaron ben Zevi ha-Kohen of Zelechov, *Keter Shem Tov*, Brooklyn 1981 (Zolkov 1794), 40, 42, 47, 76, 106.

³⁷ The '*Haqdamah le-sha'ar ha-haqdamot*' [Introduction to the preliminary section] that opens Hayyim Vital's *Eiz Hayyim*, a work portraying the mystical figure of Rabbi Isaac Luria and written from an eye-witness's point of view, exercised a substantial influence on the shaping of the Besht's mystical image as reflected in *Shivhei ha-Besht*. See Hayyim Vital, *Eiz Hayyim*, Koretz

The autobiographical and hagiographic mystical tradition reappeared and was revived in the Besht's consciousness, there undergoing a visual and experiential metamorphosis, as is evident in the Besht's comments about himself to his grandson, Rabbi Ephraim of Sedlikov. In interpreting the verse 'who shall ascend heavenward for us' (Deut 30:12), the Besht said: 'Here I swear to you that there is a man in the world who hears Torah from the mouth of the Holy One Blessed Be He and His *Shekhinah*'.³⁸ These words, which allusively transform him into a figure like Karo, who also heard Torah from the mouth of the *Shekhinah*, supplement his well-known account, in *Iggeret ha-Qodesh*, of the Torah he learned from the mouth of the Messiah and from his heavenly teacher, the prophet Ahiyah the Shilohite. *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* provides a clear example of the internalization of earlier mystical traditions; for even though it is presented as a visual revelation granted to the Besht in the supernal worlds, it recalls wording in *Maggid Meisharim*, *Shivhei ha-Ari*, and the *Zohar*. It attests to the Besht's inclination to weave his mystical experiences into the kabbalistic fabric and to intertwine earlier mystical concepts with the novel ones of his visions. It appears that the Besht, in his mind's eye, even appropriates the revelations of Karo's *Maggid* as his own, and the foundations of the mystical worldview held by the author of *Maggid Meisharim* become transformed into the underpinnings of his own world. The Besht's profound identification with Karo's kabbalistic image gave him an extraordinary ability to penetrate

1782. The work, to be sure, was not printed until twenty-two years after his death, but it is not at all impossible that the Besht had manuscripts of it available to him. Meanwhile, Lurianic hagiographic literature exercised a decisive influence on the shaping of the Besht's self-consciousness. The literature originated with the letters of Rabbi Shlomil of Dresnice sent from Safed to the Diaspora in 1607-1609 and printed in Joseph Solomon Rofe of Candia, *Ta'alu-mot Hokhmah*, Basilia 1629. Cf. J. Dan, 'Le-toledotehah shel "sifrut ha-shevaḥim"' [On the history of hagiography], in: *Mehqerei yerushalayim be-folqlor yehudi* [Jerusalem studies in Jewish folklore] 1 (1981), 82-100. On Lurianic hagiographic literature and the associated bibliographical and chronological disputes, see M. Benayahu, *Toledot ari* [Life of Isaac Luria], Jerusalem 1967; G. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem 1974, 41; Tamar, *Mehqarim be-toledot ha-yehudim be-erez yisra'el u-ve-italyah*, 166-193; Y. Tishby, 'Ha-immut bein qabbalat ha-ari le-qabbalat haramaq bi-khetavav u-ve-hayyav shel rabbi aharon berakhyah mi-modina' [The conflict between Lurianic Kabbalah and the Kabbalah of Moses Cordovero in the writings and life and Rabbi Aaron Berakhiah of Modena], in: *Zion* 39 (1954), 80-83 (= id., *Hiqrei qabbalah u-sheuihotehab* [Studies in Kabbalah and its ramifications]. Vol. 1, Jerusalem 1982, 177-254; and see id., 180-182). Scholarly views are divided on the connection between *Shivhei ha-ari* and *Toledot ha-ari*. Benayahu's argument for the greater antiquity of the latter cannot withstand critical examination, but there is no doubt that from the seventeenth century on, various versions of these texts were widespread and well known, for they were printed in various editions. It is of course possible that the Besht was aware of other mystical biographical sources in ms. form, such as Hayyim Vital's *Sefer ha-hezyonot*, but this cannot be known with any certainty because the distribution of mss. cannot be determined.

³⁸ *Degel Mahaneh Efrayim*, 282.

and empathize with Karo's world and set up the mystical model by whose light he grounded his own concept. But while the *Maggid's* words pertained directly only to Karo's own life, the words of the Besht, 'who hears Torah from the mouth of the Holy One Blessed Be He and his *Shekhinah*', become a touchstone for anyone who is mystically inclined, without limitation.

Karo and the Besht lived their lives in entirely different circumstances. The well-born scion of a prominent family, Karo was raised in the traditional manner of a young Torah scholar. The Besht, on the other hand, was a nameless orphan who grew up with no formal education and no social structure. Karo attained his stature by reason of his extraordinary halakhic scholarship, while the Besht was distinguished by his mystical inspiration. But despite their major differences of time, place, social standing, and scholarly talent, their mystical worlds had much in common, and both drew on the kabbalistic tradition that cut through boundaries of time and place to unite the divine 'world of speech' with the human world of speech, the terrestrial world with the heavenly. The mystical tradition, centered as they saw it on the myth of the fate of the *Shekhinah* 'world of speech', gave rise to a comprehensive ethos that shaped kabbalistic pietism in Safed in the sixteenth century and the Besht's Hasidism in the eighteenth century. Both were centered on the world of 'speech, thought, and action' and on language that, in its various forms, bridges heaven and earth and forges a living continuum between the mythic past and the mystical present. Both experienced the transition from written myth to living mystical reality and the unmediated connection to the heavenly world. It is no surprise, therefore, that the basic mystical concepts of *Maggid Meisharim* became key concepts in the traditions attributed to the Besht. The kabbalistic thought construct that connects redemptive human thoughts to the redeemed *Shekhinah* underlies both of these mystical traditions. In what follows, we shall see in detail how the basic concepts of Hasidism – *mahshavah* ('thought'), *deveikut* ('bonding, adhering'), *hishtavut* ('equanimity'), *avodah ba-gashmiyut* ('service [of God] through the physical'), *middat ha-bitahon* ('the quality of trust'), *mesirat nefesh* ('dedication', self-sacrifice), *qiddush ha-shem* ('sanctification of God's Name', 'martyrdom'), *yihud* ('unification'), and *hitpashtut ha-gashmiyut* ('divesting oneself of physicality') – took shape and were formulated under the influence and inspiration of *Maggid Meisharim*.

But despite the clear conceptual and linguistic resemblance between the traditions attributed to the Besht and the *Maggid Meisharim*, it remains necessary to consider whether the Besht in fact drew his own forms of mystical experience and concepts directly from *Maggid Meisharim* or whether the resemblance between their experiences and their ideas means only that both figures drew on a common textual tradition. The premise of direct influence appears to be the more likely,

for the autobiographical mark of the earlier figure can be seen clearly in the biography of the latter. We shall see below how the Besht was influenced by the autobiographical, conceptual, and experiential totality of *Maggid Meisharim*, identifying with the kabbalistic tradition tied to the *Shekhinah*'s redemption and with the mystical experience tied, in an unmediated manner, to a living, eternal, non-temporal figure. The Besht seems to have regarded himself, to a degree, as bearing Karo's mystical image, inspired in its formation by the figures of Moses and of Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai in the Zoharic myth. Like Karo, the Besht saw himself as a link in the mystical chain of figures bridging the earthly and celestial realms and acting beyond the boundaries of time and space.

HUMAN THOUGHT AND ITS CONNECTION TO REDEMPTION OF THE SHEKHINAH

Maggid Meisharim assigns first-order significance to human thought – the bridge between the earthly and the celestial worlds and the arena in which the changes in consciousness demanded by mystical service are played out. Karo's *Maggid*'s revelation establishes, for the first time in mystical thought, the basic premise that identifies contemplative thought with mystical *deveiqut*. The *Maggid* describes the transformation from thought to *deveiqut*: 'Of necessity, the place you think of constantly is where you adhere to' (*MM* 139). This linkage between human thought and the supernal worlds is influenced by the Zoharic tradition that the *sefirah* of *malkhut* (sovereignty) is referred to as thought (*maḥshavhah*), as are the Infinite (*ein sof*), the supernal crown (*keter ehyon*), wisdom (*hokhmah*), and understanding (*binah*)³⁹.

The Besht likewise adopts that identification as an axiom, as is made evident by the author of *Keter shem tov*, who collected the quotations of the Besht's words that appear in the writings of his preeminent student, Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye: 'wherever a person thinks, that is where he adheres to'.⁴⁰ The rabbi

³⁹ See *Tiqunei ha-Zohar*, *Tiqqun* 19. And cf. Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, *Sha'ar* 19, *Sha'ar Erkei ha-Kinyuyim*, entry for *maḥshavhah*. On *deveiqut* in *Maggid Meisharim*, see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 156-161.

⁴⁰ *Keter Shem Tov*, Brooklyn 1981, 16, 58, 71; for a similar formulation, see *Liqqutim Yeqarim*, Lemberg 1792, 4, and the statement is cited frequently in the Besht's name in *Ben Porat Yosef* (above, n. 33). On *deveiqut*, cf. G. Scholem, 'Deveiqut o hitqashrut intimit im elohim be-reishit ha-ḥasidut' [*Deveiqut* or intimate connection with God in early Hasidism], in: *Devarim be-go*, 325-350; R. Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Ha-ḥasidut ke-mistiqaḥ* [Quietistic elements in eighteenth century Hasidic thought], Jerusalem 1968, index s.v. *deveiqut*; R. Elior, *Torah Ahdut ha-hafakhim, ha-te'osofiyah ha-mistiit shel ḥabad* [Unity of Opposites], Jerusalem 1993, index s.v. *deveiqut*; English translation: *The paradoxical ascent to God*, Albany, NY 1993; M. Piekarz, *Bein idi'ologiyah li-mizi'ut* [Between ideology and reality], Jerusalem 1994, 150-178.

of Polonnoye adds: 'I heard expressly from my teacher that wherever a person thinks, that is where he is in his entirety',⁴¹ and he frequently reiterates this idea in terms paralleling the wording of *Maggid Meisharim*.

The connection between focusing thought on the supernal world and realizing *deveikut* in its various mystical embodiments is clearly formulated in the *Maggid's* words to Karo: 'You separate from this material so that your soul may unite with your Creator; for inasmuch as your reflections and thoughts are only about Him, of necessity, where you constantly think is where you will adhere' (*MM* 139).

What is said in second person in *Maggid Meisharim* can be found attributed to the Besht in similar terms in *Zava'at ha-Ribash* [The testament of Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem], where he describes in third person the passage from the terrestrial to the supernal world and identifies thought that is directed to the supernal worlds with *deveikut*: 'He, in his unimportance, will be in a state of great *deveikut* with the *Shekhinah*; and afterward, in an instant, as he thinks of the supernal world – of him in the supernal worlds – for as a person thinks, that is where he is'.⁴²

⁴¹ *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef, Hayyei Sarah* 23a. On the Besht's statements regarding the divine significance of human thought, cf.: 'a person must believe that the entire world is filled with His glory, may He be blessed; there is no place void of Him, and he is present in all human thought, and each thought is of great importance' (*Ben Porat Yosef*, 99); 'There are worlds above a person, standing over him, that correspond to the person's thoughts. If his thoughts are pure and spiritual, so too are the worlds above him' (*Keter Shem Tov*, 13).

⁴² *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, in: Mintz, *Shivhei ha-Ba'al Shem Tov*, 224. Except where there are variants, all quotes below are translated from this edition. *Zava'at ha-Ribash* is variously attributed by scholars to the Besht himself, to the circle of the *Maggid* of Mezhrich, or the circle of the *Maggid* of Zloczow. The work no doubt comprises multiple layers, but certain parts can clearly be attributed to the Besht himself, as is evident from analysis of the texts and comparison to other sources. It is interesting that Shneur Zalman of Lyady, in his letter on the matter that appeared in his *Tanya*, attributed the content of the testament to the Besht. His view is of considerable significance, for he was a prominent student of the *Maggid* of Mezhrich and presumably was familiar with his teachings: 'to understand wise statements, what is written in the book called *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, even though it is not in fact his testament, and he issued no testament at all before his death; they are, rather, a collection of his pure statements, collected one by one, and they did not know how to properly arrange the wording. But what is meant is the essence of truth' (*Tanya* [Slavita 1797, Vilna 1937], *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* 138a-b). On the composition and editing of *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, see Z. Gries, 'Arikhat *zava'at ha-ribash*' [The editing of *Zava'at ha-Ribash*], in: *Qiryat Sefer* 52 (1977), 193-195, 206-207; id., *Sifrut ha-Hanhagut* [Conduct literature], Jerusalem 1990, 149, 181-182, 230; and, recently, Altshuler, *Meshullam Feibush*, 62-78. Altshuler sees Rabbi Yehiel Mikhel of Zloczow as the transitional link between the Besht and the generation of Meshullam Feibush, editor of *Liqqutim Yeqarim*, who cites traditions in the name of the Besht. The connections among the various traditions attributed to the Besht in *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, in *Liqqutim Yeqarim*, and in *Keter Shem Tov*, all published in the early 1790s, is a matter of still-unresolved controversy. The bibliographical questions warrant reexamination, which I hope to undertake elsewhere.

The identity between thought and *deveikut* is set forth as a general principle in *Maggid Meisharim*: 'For it is natural that where one thinks and reflects is where one's soul adheres' (*MM* 140). A similar identification can be found in quotation from the Besht cited by Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye: 'In the name of my teacher I heard at length but will write briefly that wherever a person's thought is, that is where he himself is in his entirety – so, too, spiritually; if he thinks with his spirit, that is where his soul is'.⁴³ The Besht's grandson cites his position in similar terms: 'Know that wherever a person's thought is situated, that is where he in his entirety is to be found'.⁴⁴

Concentrating one's thought on the divine being – referred to as *yihud* (unification) or *deveikut*, or as unification of human speech with the divine 'world of speech' – has great importance in Karo's conception, for it is the critical mystical process, the precondition to redemption of the *Shekhinah*, to establishing the divine being and unifying the world of the *sefirot*, to replacing exile with redemption, and to replacing destruction and expulsion with supernal nuptials and unification.

According to *Iggeret Alkabez*, the *Maggid* expressly tells Karo and his circle, at a *tiqqun leil shavu'ot* (an all-night prayer and study ritual on the festival of Shavuot) influenced by the one described in the *Zohar*, that the redemption and raising up of the *Shekhinah* are conditioned on constant thought about the supernal worlds and unceasing study that connects speech with the 'world of speech'. Speaking in the *Shekhinah's* voice, the *Maggid* says:

Peace to you, my beloved friend. May you be happy (...) in this world and may you be happy in the world to come, for you have taken it upon yourself to crown me this night, it being some years since my crown [*atarah*] fell from my head and there has been no one to comfort me – I have been cast into the dust, clutching at trash. But now, you have restored the crown to its former [glory] and you have been favored to be in the King's palace and the sound of your Torah and the breath of your mouth have risen up before the Holy One Blessed Be He, breaking through several firmaments and several atmospheres until it ascended [there]. And the angels were quiet, the seraphs were silent, and the [supernal] creatures stood still, as the entire heavenly host and the Holy One Blessed Be He heard your voice. And I, the *Mishnah*, the mother who rebukes a man have come to speak to you (...) through you, I have been raised up this night (...) Accordingly, my children, be strong and of good courage and rejoice in love of me, in my Torah, and my awe. And if you could imagine but one infinitesimal fraction of the suffering I endure (...) and so, be strong and of good courage (...) and do not interrupt your study

⁴³ Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, *Ketonet Pasim* (ed. G. Nigal), Jerusalem 1985, 278. Cf. *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef, Hayyei Sarah*, 20a; *Shelah*, 129c.

⁴⁴ *Degel Mahaneh Efrayim, Bereshit*, 4.

(...) Therefore stand on your feet, my beloved children, raise me up, and say loudly, as on Yom Kippur, 'Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever' (...) And he repeated and said, may you be happy, my children, return to your study, do not pause even for an instant, and go up to the Land of Israel.⁴⁵

The *Shekhinah's* words resonate simultaneously with the mournful tones of the Book of Lamentations (1:17.21; 4:5), in which the daughter of Zion, cast into the dust, keens over the destruction and exile, and with the hope for redemption and exaltation heard in the voice of the bride, the crown, preparing herself for the celestial nuptial night – the night of the festival of Shavuot, according to the Zoharic tradition (Zohar I, 8a). The words suggest a jumbling of the upper and lower realms and depict a new staging of the kabbalistic myth. The *Shekhinah* – 'the world of speech', which reflects varying dimensions of divine existence – comes to be understood no longer as a redeeming entity but as an entity that is herself to be redeemed; man, who thinks and speaks during his studies, is now understood not as exile but as redeemer. The *Shekhinah* simultaneously embodies the *sefirah* of sovereignty (*malkhut*) and the congregation of Israel, the bride and the exile. She is the fallen captive, suffering in exile and pleading for redemption; man, who focuses his thought on the supernal worlds by means of ecstatic love and mystical elevation and raises his voice in endless speech of prayer and study, is the redeemer who raises her from her captivity.⁴⁶ From here on, the fall and rise, exile and redemption, become an interdependent relationship between the upper and lower realms. In the context of that relationship, the *Shekhinah* is seen as a passive entity (exiled, imprisoned, bound, fallen, a rejected bride, one with 'a fallen crown'), while man is seen as the active player ('raising up' through his redemptive thoughts, 'restoring the crown to its

⁴⁵ *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit*, part 2, Amsterdam 1649, *Masekhet Shevu'ot*, *Amud ha-Torah*, 180a (see above, n. 14). Cf. *MM* 391. *Atarah* (crown) is a well-known name for the *Shekhinah* in the mystical tradition, related to her being understood in the Zoharic tradition as a bride (cf. 'the crown with which his mother has crowned him in the day of his espousals', Song of Songs 3:11). Sovereignty is termed *atarah*, and see *Sha'ar arkhei ha-kinyuyim* (above, n. 22) s.v. *atarah*. This tradition compared the covenant at Sinai to the marital covenant and saw the night of Shavuot (when the Torah was given) as the night of nuptials between the *sefirot* of *malkhut* and *tiferet*, or between the congregation of Israel and its beloved. On Shavuot night in Zoharic tradition as the nuptial night of the *Shekhinah* and the Holy One blessed be He, and on *tiqqun leil shavu'ot* in kabbalistic tradition, see M. Margaliot (Ed.), *Sefer ha-Zohar*, 1, Jerusalem 1951, 8a-9a; Y. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2, Jerusalem 1961, 512-513, 529-532, 570-571; Y.D. Wilhelm, 'Sidrei tiqqunim' [Order of *tiqquns*], in: *Alei Ayin* (above, n. 32), 130-143; Scholem, *Pirquei yesod*, 131-133, 295; Liebes, 'Ha-mashiah shel ha-zohar' (above, n. 29), 111, 208-215; Althuler, *Meshullam Feibush*, 104-109.

⁴⁶ See R. Elijor, 'Messianic expectations and spiritualization of religious life in the 16th century', in: *Revue des Études Juives* 145 (1986), 35-49; reprinted in D. Ruderman (Ed.), *Essential papers on Jewish culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, New York 1992, 283-298.

prior [glory]', piercing celestial firmaments with his voice and immigrating to the Land of Israel with his entire body, unifying, adhering, and altering the relationships between holiness and impurity in the upper and lower realms). This mystical conception attributes decisive theurgic significance to *deveiqut* and to concentrating one's thought on the supernal realms by means of prayer and study and ties them directly to the redemption of the *Shekhinah* and to her union with God in the supernal realms. In that light, we can readily understand the high degree of importance assigned to thought and *deveiqut* in both Karo's words and the Besht's.

The demand that Karo concentrate his thought at all times in order to attain total, all-encompassing focus on the divine typifies the *Shekhinah*'s words to him throughout *Maggid Meisharim*: 'Therefore, my son, devote all your thoughts exclusively to my service, my awe, and my Torah' (*MM* 140); 'Devote your heart constantly and exclusively, at every moment and every instant, to thinking of nothing but me, My Torah, and my service' (*MM* 138).⁴⁷

Zava'at ha-Ribash uses similar wording in citing the Besht's directive to focus one's thought totally on the supernal realms: 'At all events, one must set oneself at all time in [a state of] *deveiqut* with the Creator, may His Name be blessed' (*Zava'at ha-Ribash* 218); 'one should think constantly and adhere to the Creator in total love (...) and his thought should be constantly bound to the supernal world, to Him, may He be blessed' (227). The directive conveyed by the *Maggid* to Karo in the singular becomes, in the Besht's words, an absolute obligation cast on anyone inclined to the kabbalistic-Hasidic way and wanting to participate in redeeming the *Shekhinah* and 'restoring the crown to its former [glory]'

In *Maggid Meisharim*, the directive is reiterated frequently, sometimes as absolute command, sometimes as entreaty, sometimes as admonition. It pertains to all times, all places, and all thought; and it is intertwined with a connection of *deveiqut* and intimate closeness to the figure of the *Shekhinah*: 'Let your thoughts constantly be of my Torah, my awe, and my love, never taking your thoughts away from me' (*MM* 119); 'only adhere to me and my awe, and divert not your thought from *Mishnah* even for an instant (...) and have I not admonished you not to separate your thought even for an instant from my awe and my *Mishnah*' (*MM* 5). The identity between the intellectual and the emotional-erotic aspects of spiritual elevation is clearly evident in the *Shekhinah*'s words to Karo, in which thought, study, and reflection are identified with love of and *deveiqut* with the *Shekhinah*: 'Therefore, my son, heed my voice and what I command you: engage constantly in my Torah day and night, without interruption; do not reflect

⁴⁷ Cf. *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 98:1.

on anything worldly, but only on the words of the Torah and on my awe and my *mishnayot* (...) And do not separate your thought even for an instant from my Torah and my awe, and I will grant you the favor of rising to great heights' (*MM* 8); 'Wherever you may be, do not separate your thought from me' (*MM* 156); 'Be strong and adhere to me, my awe, and my Torah, and do not separate your thoughts even for an instant from reflecting on my worship and my *mishnayot*; for I am the *Mishnah* that speaks in your mouth' (*MM* 361).⁴⁸

The *Mishnah* – which symbolizes intellectual inquiry and is associated with thought, voice and speech, recitation, analysis, law, and study – is identified with the *Shekhinah*, 'the world of speech', symbolizing the two-faceted mystical being and the exiled community of Israel looking forward to redemption. It is identified as well with the soul, which expresses the various permutations of understanding, bisexuality and multi-vocality, the internalization of the exile experience and the hope for redemption, exaltation to the supernal realms, and man's redeeming thought, which unifies supernal worlds together and unites with them.

In *Maggid Meisharim*, this intellectual-emotional command pertains to Karo and his *deveiqut* with the *Shekhinah*. In *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, which reports the Besht's words, it becomes a directive pertaining to every person of kabbalistic-Hasidic inclination: 'Let his thought be constantly secluded with the *Shekhinah* so that he thinks constantly only of his love for her, adhering to her and saying constantly in his thought, "when will I be favored to have the light of the *Shekhinah* dwell with me?"' (*MM* 216). Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye ties these words to their theurgic significance: 'From the Besht, with regard to prayer, the primary consideration is that he believes that God, may He be blessed, fills the entire world, and thereby raises and exalts the *Shekhinah*'.⁴⁹ 'I heard from my teacher that the *Shekhinah* is called prayer, as is written in the holy writings, "I am all prayer" [Ps 109:4]. And it is explained there that when one prays, one should direct his face toward the *Shekhinah*, to unify her with her consort'.⁵⁰

The significance of this all-encompassing demand and its critical influence on the supernal worlds can be appreciated if one considers the consequences of responding to it or rejecting it. As noted, the significance of *deveiqut* with the *Shekhinah* and thinking of the celestial worlds lies in the raising of the *Shekhinah* from its exile, redeeming it from among the *qelippot*, uniting the *sefirot*, and

⁴⁸ Identical or similar formulations appear in *MM* 19, 91, 109, 122, 133, 136, 145, 149, 155, 166-167, 170-172, 204, 214, 252, 258, 298, 302, 317, 322, 323, 326, 334, 381, and elsewhere.

⁴⁹ *Keter Shem Tov*, 19; cf. *Ben Porat Yosef*, 127a.

⁵⁰ *Zafnat Paneiah*, 3.

establishing harmony in the supernal world. On the other hand, diverting one's attention from *deveiqut* and from concentrated thought on the supernal brings about the *Shekhinah's* fall into the realm of the *qelippot*, devastation and destruction, the intensification of the exile, separation of the worlds, and interruption of cosmic unity. The *Maggid* explains to Karo the responsibility he bears on account of the weighty theurgic significance of this sort of distraction and of diverting his thoughts from the *Shekhinah*: 'You must never interrupt the connection and *deveiqut* of God, may He be blessed, or [cease] reflecting on my Torah even for an instant, for if you stop even for an instant, God forbid, the *Shekhinah* falls; and woe to him and woe for the misfortune of one who causes destruction of all the worlds (...) For the instant that you interrupt your reflection on words of Torah, you bring about, God forbid, the community of Israel's fall' (*MM* 184); 'For if at any instant you divert your thoughts from God's awe and His Torah and His worship, you terminate the unity. Therefore take great care not to reflect at any time on anything outside my Torah and my awe and my worship' (*MM* 139); 'Only adhere to Me; for were you to know how many worlds you build and how many worlds you destroy when you separate [from Me], you would not separate even briefly. Accordingly, be strong to unite all your thoughts with Me' (*MM* 17); 'For I have told to you several times how many worlds you build when you reflect on my *mishnayot*, and how many worlds you destroy when you stop' (*MM* 395).

Cosmic construction and destruction, supernal and terrestrial exile and redemption, the *Shekhinah's* rise and fall, and unity or division in the divine world – all of these depend on a man's thought and his *deveiqut* with the *Shekhinah*. The mystical service called unification, *deveiqut*, or self-sacrifice, carried out by concentrating one's thought on divine existence and diverting one's thought from physical existence, is the precondition to redemption of the *Shekhinah*, establishment of divine existence, and unification of the world of the *sefirot*. That service, identified with study and prayer, reflection and thought, bringing sacrifices and sanctifying God's Name, sustains sanctity and the supernal worlds; on the other hand, a pause in this concentrated thought, or an interruption in *deveiqut*, means termination of the unity and abandonment of the supernal world to the forces of impurity, to the dominion of the 'other side' and the *qelippot*:

For if you knew how many worlds are lost on your account the instant you cease meditating on the words of the Torah, you would choose death rather than life at the time you cease. And Sama'el and the serpent pursue you regularly to introduce this-worldly thoughts into your heart so as to stop you from reflecting on words of Torah and from praying. (*MM* 51)

He admonished me and chastised me at all times to follow the practices of His Torah and [stand in] awe of Him, so that I not divert my thoughts even for an instant and only raise my thoughts to their source; for that is the mystery of the

sacrifice: a person causes his spirit to adhere to the sacrifice and, through the act of the sacrifice, the person's spirit, adhering to the sacrifice, rises on high as well (...) In other words, it is actually the sacrifice of your spirit (...) and it is good for a man to give up his life to sanctify the Name of the Holy One blessed be He. (*MM* 205)

This extreme dualistic concept of the cosmos, which regards the supernal and terrestrial world as the arena for a perpetual battle between sanctity and impurity, leaves no neutral zone in man's thought or deeds. A human being bears an unbearably heavy responsibility, for the interactions between Sama'el and the *Shekhinah*, between the *qelippah* and sanctity, between exile and redemption, between *deveiqut* and idolatry all depend on his thoughts. In *Maggid Meisharim*, these interactions are dependent on Karo's thoughts, on his study, his concentrated reflection on the *Shekhinah*, his abstinence, his prayers, and the extent of his *deveiqut*; and the *Maggid* calls on Karo to keep that in mind at all times. The Besht, in contrast, casts this obligation on every person who is aware of the interdependence between the *Shekhinah's* exile and her redemption within human thought:

Also [learned] from the Besht is explanation of the mystery of the alphabet – how one must make each word an act of submission, separation, and remission (...) And when he takes to heart the *Shekhinah's* exile – that is, a trace of the *Shekhinah* clothed in the filth of the *qelippot* – he will suffer a great fright, and then all evildoers will be scattered and unification will occur (...) And the spark of the holy will be clarified and be joined to the supernal creatures in mystery, and the creatures will rush to and fro and that is the redemption from imprisonment.⁵¹

The Besht conveys, tersely but forcefully, the critical theurgic significance implicit in human thought, within a dualistic conception of polarities that, as noted, allows for no neutral zone or middle ground: 'When a person separates himself from God, may He be blessed, he immediately commits idolatry, and there is no intermediate position'.⁵²

In Karo's writings and the Besht's remarks, the *deveiqut* of one's thought with the supernal worlds is understood, simultaneously, as redemption of the *Shekhinah* and raising her from the depths to the heights, as uniting the world of the *sefirot*, as mystical unity between the human being and the *Shekhinah*, as bringing sacrifices in the celestial Temple, as purification, as divesting oneself of physicality, and as self-sacrifice and sanctifying God's Name. In the traditions cited in the Besht's name, as in *Maggid Meisharim*, the attitude toward sanctity in general and its personalized embodiment, the *Shekhinah*, in particular, is a mystical-erotic

⁵¹ *Keter Shem Tov*, 40; cf. 'and the *qelippah* is called a curse, for it is *מחשבה זרה* and it is the exile of the *Shekhinah* within the depths of the *qelippah*' (*Keter Shem Tov*, 28).

⁵² *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, 225.

one, expressed in uninterrupted *deveikut* in one's thought and in bringing the mythic being of the *Shekhinah* to life as something desired and loved. The link between Karo and the *Shekhinah* is reflected in his tense anticipation of the coming of the *Maggid*, which he refers to, in words borrowed from the Song of Songs, as 'the voice of my beloved', and in terminology of union, coupling, and bonding that describe his arrival. The connection is both alluded to and referred to openly in the *Maggid's* suggestive language, which again borrows, throughout the book, from the love poetry in Song of Songs: 'I will again give you my love' (*MM* 87); 'Behold, now is the time of love' (*MM* 122); 'And you embrace the entire *Mishnah* and she is with you, and I say to you, go forth to greet me, my sister, my friend, etc., I desire you and love you' (*MM* 379); 'You must adhere regularly to my *mishnayot*, not pausing even for an instant, for I constantly embrace and adhere to you' (*MM* 130).

This erotically charged, unifying mystical connection is evident as well in the Besht's directives to his followers. It is alluded to through terminology of love, *deveikut*, and coupling, applicable simultaneously to the coupling of the *sefirot* in the supernal world, brought about by worshipper's prayers, and to the worshipper's unification with the *Shekhinah* while praying: 'His thought should always be secluded with the *Shekhinah* and he should think constantly only of his love for her, to which he adheres. And he should always say, in his thought, "when will I be favored to have the *Shekhinah's* light dwell with me?";⁵³ 'Prayer is coupling with the *Shekhinah* (...) and he should adhere to the *Shekhinah* with great *deveikut*'; 'From the Besht, of blessed memory, [we learned] that just in a physical union, one will not procreate unless he cohabits [*meshammesh*] in a state of sexual arousal, desire, and joy, so, too, in a spiritual union – that is, speaking of Torah and prayer – one will procreate only if he engages [*meshammesh*] in a state of arousal, joy, and pleasure'.⁵⁴ The Besht's comments about the correspondence between the spiritual and the physical and about the love and the coupling associated with prayer draw on the terminology that the Hebrew language reserves for both physical love and love of God – terms such as union, *deveikut*, coupling, *shimmush* ['cohabiting'; 'mating'], delight, and sanctification. The Besht's words can be understood in comparison to what the *Maggid* tells Karo about the mystical union promised to him: 'Because of that, the Holy One blessed be He will love you. And when you arise to pray, He will delight in you

⁵³ *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, 216. The Kehot [*Habad's* publishing arm] edition of *Zava'at ha-Ribash* (Brooklyn 1975) quotes a slightly different version: 'His thought should always be secluded with the *Shekhinah* and he should think constantly only of his love for her, and that she adheres to him. And he should always say, in his thought, "when will I be favored to have the *Shekhinah's* light dwell with me?'" (2a).

⁵⁴ *Keter Shem Tov*, 7; *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, id., 11.

as well, and He will kiss you with kisses of love and embrace you. And the *Shekhinah* will speak with you' (*MM* 193).⁵⁵

In *Maggid Meisharim*, as noted, the emphasis is on constant study, uninterrupted reflection on words of Torah, mystical love, *deveiqut* of thought, devoted prayer, and readiness to offer oneself as a sacrifice and die for the sanctification of God's Name. The Besht likewise stresses uninterrupted thinking about God and His *Shekhinah*, mystical love and union, praying devotedly and in a state of *deveiqut*, and willingness to die for the sanctification of God's Name. These concepts are based on the vitalization of the mystical figure of the *Shekhinah* in Zoharic myth, whose erotic quality has already been considered. In addition, they assign a dimension of unmediated closeness to the *Shekhinah's* feminine image, linked to the 'world of speech', Torah, *Mishnah*, prayer, and its state of being beloved – a dimension portrayed in the expression 'the *Shekhinah* speaks with you' – and to its masculine image, linked to the image of the loving God and portrayed in the expression 'my beloved pounds in my mouth'. This transformation is achieved by making the *Shekhinah* into a figure speaking in the first person, addressing the mystic directly and speaking with him and within him, and also by understanding her as the partner of the worshipper, who unites her with her divine partner and has the favor of having her speak from within his mouth. These concepts express ecstatic-erotic closeness to the *Shekhinah* accompanied by identification with her fate in one's consciousness, thought, and emotion. Those processes are accompanied by a distancing from the temporal world and a reversal of the domains of life and death, along with a change in their spiritual meaning.

SELF-MORTIFICATION AND MYSTICAL UNION

As noted, Karo strove to cast aside the world of physical desires – the realm of the 'other side' symbolized by the serpent, Sama'el, and the evil impulse; the world of *qelippah* and exile. His purpose was to ascend to the spiritual world, symbolized by the *Shekhinah*, the Torah and the *Mishnah*, various aspects of the celestial Temple and altar, the Garden of Eden, holiness, and redemption. To that end, he sought to suppress physical eros and sublimate it into spiritual eros: 'For he has no wish at all for physical pleasures, and in that sense, it is as if he had put himself to death. In that way, his soul will truly live, and he will depart from this world and attain great comfort in adhering to his Creator' (*MM* 139).

⁵⁵ Cf. Moses Cordovero's comments in *Sha'ar arkei ha-kinuyim*, s.v. *neshiqah*: 'The kisses involve an arousal of love between *tiferet* and *malkhut*, and there are no kisses except when they are united (...) and the kisses are *deveiqut* of spirit with spirit'.

Karo and the Besht defined the proper attitude toward the physical world – the realm of the ‘other side’ – from both the spiritual and the physical perspectives. Regarding matter, one should adopt for one’s body an ascetic, self-mortifying position, alienating himself from physical being and distancing himself from sensory pleasures. Regarding the spirit, what is needed is an acosmistic-mystical stance, deployed within one’s consciousness as one strives to annul the value of the world and see it as nothingness. Reflections on physical matters and this-worldly thoughts are understood as assisting the ‘other side’ and sacrificing to Sama’el; they strengthen the serpent and the evil impulse, abandon the *Shekhinah* to the dominion of the *qelippot*, and provoke separation in the supernal worlds.⁵⁶ In contrast, self-mortification, abstinence, negation of the material, divesting oneself of physicality, or being offered up as a sacrifice lead to the creation of a spiritual expanse in which the yearned-for closeness to the *Shekhinah* can develop, in which the ‘world of speech’ speaks from within a person’s mouth. That closeness is expressed as union in the supernal world, in which the *sefirah* of *malkhut* (sovereignty) rises to that of *tif’eret* (splendor); and as unity in the lower world, in which the *Shekhinah* speaks in the mouth of a person who has annulled his physical existence and opened a space in his consciousness for the *Shekhinah* ‘world of speech’.

In *Maggid Meisharim*, the *Shekhinah* promises Karo that she will speak from his mouth and ‘will be gracious’ to him if he adheres to her in his thoughts: ‘Wherever you are, do not separate your thoughts from me. “I will mention my name”, that is, when you mention my name, it will be I who mention it, for you will be the encampment of the *Shekhinah*, and the *Shekhinah* will speak in your mouth’ (*MM* 156).

Karo refers to the *Shekhinah* speaking within him when he is united with her as ‘a harp playing on its own’ and as ‘the voice of my beloved speaking within my mouth’. Similarly, the Besht describes a mystical stance of this sort as the purpose of *deveiqut*: ‘At times, when the *Shekhinah*’s spark of holiness within his soul spreads, she actually speaks the words within his mouth, and it appears as if he [himself] is not speaking, for the words emerge from his mouth on their own; and that is an exalted state’; ‘And one must listen to every word he utters, for the *Shekhinah*, the world of speech, is speaking’.⁵⁷ Ecstatic mystical union attains

⁵⁶ See *MM* 205, 380, and cf. ‘and be careful of thoughts that the evil impulse and the serpent introduce into your heart, for they pursue you’ (*MM* 19). See also *Zava’at ha-Ribash*, 225.

⁵⁷ *Keter Shem Tov*, 55; *Zava’at ha-Ribash*, 225; *Liqqutei Yeqarim* 12c, 4a. On the ‘world of speech’ speaking within a human being, see further *Keter Shem Tov*, 80, 117, 120. On the *Shekhinah* speaking in a person’s mouth within the Hasidic tradition, cf. J Weiss, ‘Via Passiva in Early Hasidism’, in: *Journal of Jewish Studies* 11 (1960), 137-155; Schatz, *Ha-hasidut ke-mistiqah*, 110-128; Altshuler, *Meshullam Feibush*, 127-148.

its pinnacle when the *Shekhinah* speaks within a person's mouth or when divine speech displaces silenced human speech.

In stressing to Karo the importance of this mystical moment, the *Maggid* ties it to the figure of Moses, master of the prophets. For Karo, Moses the man of God is the archetypal mystical figure, the model to be emulated by, and the source of inspiration for, a person in whom and to whom the divine voice speaks. Like Moses, who heard 'the voice speaking to him from above the ark-cover' (Num 7:89) and of whom it is said 'with him do I speak, mouth to mouth' (Num 12:8), the *Maggid* speaks in terms associated with Karo's state of passivity – a divine voice speaks within him while he becomes as nought.

Karo's words about the *Shekhinah* speaking from within his throat, which recall as well 'the angel speaking within me' of Zech 1:9, recur in various formulations in traditions attributed to the Besht that connect this sort of speech to the image of 'Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, through whose throat the *Shekhinah* would speak'. Hasidic tradition cites numerous discourses on 'as the musician played' (2 Kgs 4:15; the music in that episode inspires prophecy), referring to divine speech playing of its own accord within the mouth of a person who has annulled his physical existence, cleared a space in his psyche for 'the world of speech', and transformed 'I' (*'ani*, spelled *'n-y*) into 'nothingness' (*'ayin*, spelled *'y-n*). The annulment of physical existence – expressed as alienation from the sensory world, removal of self-conscious speech, and silencing the world of the senses – leaves space for the divine substance, symbolized by 'the world of speech' speaking of its own accord in the person's mouth:

As soon as I say 'O Lord, open my mouth' [Ps 51:17; used as an introduction to prayer], the *Shekhinah* garbs herself in it and says all the words; and when he has faith that it is the *Shekhinah* speaking, great awe comes upon him, and the Holy One blessed be He also contracts Himself and dwells with him, etc. The divesting of physicality results in his not at all sensing bodily sensations or the image of this world, but only the image of the supernal worlds, that is, the angels and seraphs (...) Ribash [i.e., the Besht] says of this, 'when I attach my thought to the Creator, may He be blessed, I allow the mouth to speak what it wills, for I tie the words to the supernal root in the Creator, may He be blessed'.⁵⁸

EQUANIMITY

Equanimity (*hishtavut*) signifies a posture of absolute indifference to physical reality and complete separation from it, so that one's consciousness can submerge itself in divine reality – a reality in whose context the accepted distinctions in

⁵⁸ Mintz, *Keter Shem Tov*, 204.

human understanding and physical reality are annulled. This indifference to physical reality and alienation from worldly values are a precondition to changing physical eros into spiritual eros and to passing from sense-based understanding to contemplative understanding; for equanimity conveys the recognition of God's presence in existence and the consciousness that it is God Who is the true agent. The essential stance *vis à vis* the world is unambiguously formulated in *Maggid Meisharim*: 'Accordingly, do not worry about anything in the world other than those matters bearing on His worship, may He be blessed; but with respect to all matters of this world, you should be indifferent as between anything and its opposite (...) For, in truth, one who is not indifferent as between the good in this world and the bad is not completely engaged in union' (*MM* 140).

A similarly worded statement of the idea appears in *Zava'at ha-Ribash*: "I have set" [*shiviti*; cf. Ps. 16:8, "I have set the Lord before me always"]; the word also means "I have equated"] implies equanimity; whatever happens is all the same to him, regardless of whether it is something for which people praise him (...) or disparage him, and so with respect to all other things and with respect to foods, whether he eats delicacies or other foods; it is all the same to him' (*MM* 215).⁵⁹

The practice that expresses this alienation from worldly reality as described in *Maggid Meisharim* is self-mortifying conduct that rejects and annuls all sensory pleasures and strives toward total separation from physicality: 'Be warned against taking pleasure in eating or drinking or sexual intercourse; rather, be as one seized by a demon and compelled to engage in that eating or sexual activity. If it were possible to live without food and drink and to reproduce without sexual intercourse, that is what you would greatly desire'.⁶⁰ 'Do not eat or drink in any pleasurable manner (...) your thought should be only that if it were possible to sustain the soul within the body without any pleasure, that is what you would greatly desire' (*MM* 5). The ascetic acts that affect body and soul also operate in a symbolic manner – they represent a different world, organized on

⁵⁹ On the place of equanimity in Karo's world and in Hasidism, cf. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 159-160; Schatz, *Ha-hasidut ke-mistiḡab*, index, s.v. *indifrentiyut, hishtavut*; M. Idel, 'Hitbodededut ke-rikkuz ba-qabbalah ha-eqstatit ve-gilgulah' [Seclusion as concentration in ecstatic Kabbalah and its development], in: *Da'at* 14 (1985), 40-76; Z. Gries, *Sifrut ha-hanbagot* (above, n. 42), 210-212; R. Elior, 'Bein "hitpashtut ha-gashmiyut" le-vein "hitpashtut ha-ahavah gam be-gashmiyut": ha-qituv bein ha-tefisah ha-ruḡanit le-vein ha-mezi'ut ha-hevratit ba-havayah ha-hasidit' [Between 'divesting of physicality' and 'extending love to physicality as well': The polarity between spiritual concept and social reality in the Hasidic experience], in: Y. Bartal, H. Turnyanski, & E. Mendelson, *Ke-minhag ashkenaz u-polin: sefer ha-yovel le-h. shmeruk* [Studies in Jewish Culture in Honour of Chone Shmeruk], Jerusalem 1993, 220-226; Altshuler, *Mesullam Feibush*, 212-230.

⁶⁰ The quotation is from the Jerusalem edition of 1960; the 1990 edition (p. 2) has a censored version.

a basis diametrically opposed to that of the terrestrial world: angels do not eat, do not procreate, have no evil impulse or bodily needs. Self-mortification symbolically moves Karo from the world of human beings to the world of angels and creates the sacred space that can be entered by the *Shekhinah/Maggid*.

The practices cited in the Besht's name in *Zava'at ha-Ribash* and *Liqqutim Yeqarim* use similar wording to formulate the suitable stance *vis à vis* physicality: 'Let him attach his thought on high, neither eating nor drinking too much and taking no pleasure but [doing so] only to sustain his health. And he should not look at all on worldly matters nor think about them at all, so he may separate himself from physicality' (*Zava'at ha-Ribash* 215).

Early Hasidic tradition expressly notes the connection between the Besht and Karo with respect to this world: 'The principal divesting of physicality should be in his heart, with all worldly desires being repugnant to him, including those that are required, which should be treated as unintended. This is as written in the book *Maggid [Meisharim]*, in *Parashat be-Shalah*, that the *Maggid* always admonished the *Beit Yosef* [i.e., Karo, referring to him by his book's name] regarding this.⁶¹

DIVESTING ONESELF OF PHYSICALITY

Indifference to existence and renunciation of sensory pleasures and generally valued physical qualities are the external dimensions of the attribute of equanimity. Its internal dimension is 'divesting oneself of physicality', 'slaying the ego', and favoring death of the body over physical life, which lacks mystical significance. In *Maggid Meisharim*, the relationship between life and death is clearly formulated in terms indicating that the mortification of the flesh and death of the body in the terrestrial world bring about the birth of the spirit and the resurrection of the soul in the supernal world:

Let all manner of pleasure be removed from you; even when you are required to sustain your body or fulfill a commandment, you should regard yourself as obligated and as compelled to experience that pleasure. In that way, your soul will adhere to your Creator (...) For it has no desire at all for bodily pleasures; and in that way, it is as if he had put himself to death and thereby caused his soul to live truly. And his departure from this world should be a great source of comfort, as he adheres to his Creator (...) For one who acts thus, death will be true life; for he can be assured that he will adhere to his Creator. (*MM* 139)

⁶¹ Meshullam Feibush of Zbarazh, *Yosher Divrei Emet* 15b; id., *Liqqutim Yeqarim* (1974 edition) 117b.

The Besht, too, took a positive view of ascetic practices calling on a person to act 'as if he had put himself to death'; in his view, a person's true life takes place in the supernal world and death is understood as spiritual rebirth and true life. He uses similar terms to define the relationship between life and death and demands that a person 'think constantly of the supernal world, his primary dwelling place, within his Creator' and that one 'free himself of all worldly matters, as if he were dead'.⁶²

The dialectical tension between expunging the human element and drawing near to the divine element is expressed in the yearning to negate material existence and cast off physicality in order to attain ecstatic exaltation and *deveiqut*. *Maggid Meisharim* is rife with descriptions of sanctification of God's Name, death, immolation, binding on the altar, and sacrifice; for in Karo's consciousness, the death of the body leads to the divesting of physicality, the attainment of supernal union, and the realization of perfect *deveiqut*.

The *Maggid* connects sanctification of God's Name to Karo's being offered as a sacrifice and assures Karo 'that I will sacrifice you so you will be butchered for the sanctification of My Name and will go forth before Me and be burnt for the sanctification of My Name and your spirit will ascend as sweet-smelling incense' (*MM* 37). The Besht, meanwhile, directed the worshipper to internalize within his thought the image of death, sacrifice, negation of material existence, and mortification of the flesh; prayers are to be prefaced with the declaration that 'Behold, I wish to afflict myself so I can serve God, may He be blessed (...) so that I may bring about His union. I therefore wish to afflict myself, to offer myself as a sacrifice before Him (...) All my afflictions are to ease the *Shekbinah's* suffering and remove the *qelippot* from us through my affliction; and I will have the effect on high of causing all the *qelippot* to depart from the *Shekbinah*, and she will be purified and united with her husband in complete union'.⁶³

In these comments by Karo and by the Besht, we can see the affinity between asceticism and ecstasy. The former entails renunciation of physical existence and withdrawal from the world for the sake of *deveiqut* with God; the latter connotes encountering God through renunciation of conscious spiritual existence and stepping outside of oneself – a process variously termed 'divesting of physicality', 'giving up one's soul', 'offering myself as a sacrifice', or 'sanctification of God's Name'. The transition from equanimity, self-mortification, and dying to union, *deveiqut*, and divesting of physicality is the mystical transition

⁶² *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef* 208d; cf. 'The Ribash explained that one who dies on the eve of the Sabbath refers to one who causes himself to die to this-worldly pleasures, which are [as] Sabbath eve'. Benjamin ben Aaron of Zlazitich, *Amtahat Binyamin*, Minkovitz 1796, 73.

⁶³ *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, 219-220.

from asceticism to ecstasy – from a consciousness that strives to free itself from the limits of this-worldly perception and suppress its physical force to an ecstatic consciousness that renounces any defined spiritual identity and unites with divine speech and thought in the supernal world.

SANCTIFICATION OF GOD'S NAME

Sanctification of God's Name, annihilation of the body, being offered as a sacrifice, self-mortification and living death – all played a role in Karo's abstemious, ascetic world in the wake of Solomon Molkho's sanctification of God's Name. Their purpose, in Karo's mind, was to foster the *Shekhinah's* unity and *deveikut* with the divine. In Hasidic practices, these concepts are cited as directives to abstain from the world for the sake of *deveikut* with God, and as manifesting willingness to sacrifice oneself and give one's life for the sanctification of God's Name. The process takes place during prayer, which is transformed into a mystical state in which sanctification of the Name occurs. The *Maggid's* directives to Karo are worded explicitly: 'Therefore take heed that your intention, at the time of reciting the *Shema*, is to give your life for the sanctification of His Name' (*MM* 17); 'At the time of reciting the *Shema*, unite all your thoughts so they become a base for the *Shekhinah*, and all your bodily organs should come together to be given in sanctification of His Name' (*MM* 51).⁶⁴ The *Maggid* frequently draws a connection between Karo's yearning to be immolated and die for the sanctification of God's Name and his seeing himself as a bound sacrifice: 'I have singled you out to go to the stake for the sanctification of My Name because you will remain clean and pure and will ascend to a high plane, as I have taught you. See yourself, therefore, as a perfect sacrifice, in which no invalidating flaw is to be found (...) and after that, you will be favored to go to the stake for the sanctification of My Name' (*MM* 52).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ On the spiritual-historical interchange between the concept of 'giving one's soul' (*mesirat nefesh*) and sanctification of God's Name (*qiddush ha-shem*), cf. J. Katz, 'Bein 4896 le-5408-5409' [Between (the massacres of) 1096 and 1648-1649], in: S. Ettinger et al. (Ed.), *Sefer ha-yovel le-yizhaq ber* [Yitzhak Baer jubilee volume], Jerusalem 1961, 318-337; A. Shohet, 'Qiddush ha-shem be-hagutam shel megoreshei sefarad u-mequbbelei zefat' [Sanctification of God's Name in the thought of the Spanish exiles and Safed kabbalists], in: *Milhemet qodesh u-martiologiyah be-toledot yisra'el u-ve-toledot ha-amim* [Holy war and martyrology in Jewish and general history], Jerusalem 1967, 143-145; I. Gafni & A. Ravitzky (Ed.), *Qedushat ha-hayyim ve-hiruf ha-nefesh, qovez ma'amarim le-zikbro shel amir yequti'el* [Sanctification of life and martyrdom], Jerusalem 1993; Elior, *Ahdut ha-hafakhim* (above, n. 40), 171-175, 200-203.

⁶⁵ Cf. *MM* 183, 205.

The Besht transforms the *Maggid's* personal martyrological directive to Karo into a comprehensive mystical directive, expressed in general terms: 'Before praying, one should think that he is prepared to die during that prayer on account of the [intensity of] the intention (...) and I want to afflict myself so I may serve God, may He be blessed, with truth, with a full heart, with love, and with awe, so that I may bring about His unification. Accordingly, I wish to afflict myself and to offer myself as a sacrifice before Him'.⁶⁶

Affliction, self-mortification to the point of death, and devoted self-sacrifice for the purpose of promoting union in the supernal worlds are understood to play a substantial role in the mystical order of prayer within Hasidism. These ideas are expressed through the use of concepts, recurring frequently in Hasidic thought, that negate physical existence, such as 'annulment of [physical] being', 'annihilation of life', 'giving one's life', 'sanctifying God's Name', 'sacrifice', 'transforming oneself into nothingness', and 'divesting oneself of physicality'. These concepts, which convey a sense of alienation from the terrestrial world, are influenced by Karo's yearning to go to the stake, to unify the *Shekhinah*, and to sanctify the Name of Heaven – yearnings reborn in the Besht's mind and becoming the province of the public rather than of an individual. They draw as well on the internalized mystical tradition that blends asceticism and ecstasy, death of the body and rebirth of the spirit. Karo, in his *Shulhan Arukh*, quotes the following statement by Rabbi Jacob Ba'al ha-Turim: 'Pious and worthy men would seclude themselves and so focus their intention in their prayers that they would come close to divesting themselves of physicality and to dominance of the intellect's spirit, almost reaching the level of prophecy'.⁶⁷ These words became the backdrop for the order of Hasidic prayer cited in the Besht's name: 'While at prayer, one must be divested of physicality';⁶⁸ 'At prayer, one must be as if divested of physicality and must sense nothing of his existence in this world'.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, 219-220.

⁶⁷ *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim, Hilkhot Tefillah* 98. Cf. 'And this is the order of prayer, as is written in *Tur Orah Hayyim* sec. 39, it requires divesting oneself of physicality and strengthening the intellectual force almost to the level of prophecy' (*Ketonet Passim*, 323).

⁶⁸ *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, 231.

⁶⁹ *Zava'at ha-Ribash* (Kehot edition, see n. 53), 19, 34. On divesting oneself of physicality, see R. Elior, 'Yesh va-ayin: defusei yesod ba-mahshavah ha-hasidit' [Being and nothingness: Fundamental models in Hasidic thought], in: M. Oron & A. Goldreich (Eds.), *Masu'ot: Mehqarim be-sifrut ha-qabbalah u-ve-mahshevet yisra'el muqdashim le-zikbro shel e. gotlib* [Studies in Kabbalistic literature and Jewish philosophy], Jerusalem 1994, 53-74; Elior, 'Bein "hitpashtut ha-gashmiyut" le-vein "hitpashtut ha-ahavah gam be-gashmiyut"'.

RELiance ON GOD – THE QUALITY OF TRUST

A further aspect of the quality of equanimity is the entrusting to divine providence of all this-worldly matters and the recognition that human actions have no significance with respect to satisfying material needs, for God is the true actor. As noted, a person is called upon to dedicate his entire being to the spiritual realm, to think without pause of the supernal world, to unify the *Shekhinah*, to be absolutely indifferent to his terrestrial existence and physical needs, to divert his attention from them, and to rely entirely on divine providence. The *Maggid* conveys this message to Karo both indirectly and directly:

Therefore do not be troubled, for all your needs are [taken care of] by the Holy One blessed be He (...) Therefore do not be troubled at all, for the Holy One blessed be He will take care of your concerns; but you should engage in Torah without interruption, and He will act for you, with no need for you to burden yourself at all, except with His Torah, uninterruptedly (...) Therefore, my son, engage constantly in My Torah without interruption, and devote all your thoughts exclusively to My service, and I will be responsible for all your needs, and I will take care of your concerns; only adhere to me and to my *mishmayot*; do not separate your thoughts from them even for an instant (*MM* 9-10). Therefore, rely on God (*MM* 404).⁷⁰

The Besht's words likewise demand adoption of a passive stance toward the world and indifference to worldly values and physical needs: 'Let him regard not at all the matters of this world, nor think about them at all, so he may thereby separate himself from physicality'.⁷¹ That position is made possible by reliance on God and diverting one's attention from one's physical existence. The quality of trust, insisted on by Karo, is formulated similarly in the name of the Besht: 'A great principle: turn over your [physical] actions to God (...) One should cast away everything; all one's concerns and needs will be His responsibility, may He be blessed'.⁷²

The *Maggid* explains this position by arguing that Karo in his thoughts is in any event situated in the supernal world and has no need for physical commodities: 'Since your thoughts adhere always to me, you lack nothing, and you will be one of those who stand before Me always; for you should always portray yourself in your soul as if you were standing before me and performing My service' (*MM* 149). Those who stand are the angels, denizens of the supernal world (see Zech 3:7); according to the *Maggid*, Karo is one of them.

⁷⁰ On this position, see R.J.Z. Werblowsky, 'Faith, hope and trust: A study in the concept Bit-tahon', in: *Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies* 1 (1964), 95-139.

⁷¹ *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, 215.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

Zava'at ha-Ribash likewise sets this as the point of departure, demanding that a person see himself as one of the inhabitants of the supernal world and that he alienate himself from this world and its physical existence: 'He should think that he is one of the inhabitants of the supernal world; and all the people who dwell in this world should be of no importance in his eyes' (*MM* 216). From that point of departure, which turns its back on the material world, the quality of trust follows: 'His thought should be on high, in the supernal world, serving God, and he should adhere to God and have trust that he will attain what he desires' (*MM* 218).

SERVICE THROUGH PHYSICALITY

The uncompromising demand that one concentrate his thought on the supernal worlds and contemplate words of Torah uninterruptedly can best be understood, in its full significance, by considering it concurrently with the demand that one unite his thought with God even while dealing with unavoidable physical needs. That course, which later became known in Hasidic circles as 'service [or 'worship'] through physicality' (*avodah ba-gashmiyut*) is based on the *Shekhinah's* words in *Maggid Meisharim* regarding the sanctification of physical action: 'Even while eating, reflect on my *mishnayot*, and your eating will be considered as offerings and sacrifices before the Holy One blessed be He' (*MM* 9). The change in meaning of the physical act occurs through two mechanisms: alienation from the sensory pleasure inherent in the act, and concentrated reflection on words of Torah that accompany it. Terrestrial food, eaten that way within physical reality, can be transformed in mystical reality into an offering in the heavenly Temple: 'Only adhere to me and my teachings and *mishnayot* and do not divert your thought even for an instant (...) While eating, do not intend to derive any pleasure; [intend] only to worship Me (...) and then your food will be like an offering; but otherwise, it is a bestial act' (*MM* 149). The prohibition on physical pleasure and the requirement to turn one's mind away from the physical dimension and reflect constantly on words of Torah transform eating into a sacrificial offering and effect the transformation that instills mystical-ritual significance in a concrete act: 'If you reflect on *mishnayot* while eating, how good and how pleasant that is; and your eating and drinking will be counted as sacrifices and libations before the Holy One blessed be He' (*MM* 276); 'Do not eat for pleasure; but with each bite reflect on words of Torah, and then your eating will be in the manner of a sacrifice' (*MM* 401).

The mundane physical act of eating is thus transformed into 'an exalted requisite' by means of a three-fold demand: concentrating one's thought on the figure of the *Shekhinah*; reflecting on words of Torah while satisfying the physical need and divesting it of any element of pleasure; and dedicating the physical act

to heavenly purposes. But the *Maggid* does not limit that process to the act of eating and applies it to all of a person's physical needs and all his experiences at any time and any place: 'Reflect constantly on My *mishnayot*, even while you are speaking with people; and while you are eating, reflect on My *mishnayot* with each bite' (*MM* 160); 'Let your thoughts constantly adhere to my Torah, even when you are speaking with people and when you are eating and drinking' (*MM* 210).

This uncompromising demand, which requires constant *deveiquit* on the part of every person in every act, at every time and place, is formulated in the Besht's reported words in the context of explicating the verse, 'Know Him in all your ways' (Prov 3:6). '*Know Him in all your ways* – this is a great rule (...) In all his actions, even physical matters, he must be acting solely for the sake of an exalted requisite and should not intend any other purpose even to the slightest extent; he should not intend it for himself, but only for the sake of Heaven'.⁷³ The source for this statement is in the *Maggid's* words to Karo regarding the comprehensive applicability of mystical modes of worship to all of a person's terrestrial actions: 'He commanded me in visions that my intention in eating, drinking, and speaking be for the sake of Heaven' (*MM* 252).

The Besht converted this directive, which applied to Karo alone, into a fundamental claim that there was no area unfit for mystical transformation, no time unsuited to it, and no matter unconnected to a person's religious destiny. This can be seen in the words of the Besht's student Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, author of *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef*: 'He should pay attention to "know Him in all your ways", which is a wondrous thing, as I heard in private communications from my teacher, [telling] how, in every physical act, he would direct his attention to elevating the act and connecting it, and jointing the [parts of the] tent so they become one'.⁷⁴ Jacob Joseph frequently reiterates, in various formulations, the Besht's teaching with regard to uniting the physical action with thought in the supernal worlds: 'I heard something like that from my master: "Whatever you are able to do, do with all your might" [Eccl 9:10], that is, the physical act should be done with the might of the thought about uniting the Holy One blessed be He and His *Shekhinah*'.⁷⁵ This all-encompassing demand, which connects the full array of mundane acts with constant reflection on supernal matters, is portrayed by Solomon ben Abraham of Lotzk as the essence of the Besht's teachings: 'For [the Besht] uncovered the source of this precious, glorious wisdom in every jot and tittle of the ways of the supernal world and united it to the terrestrial world with every movement, step, word, and deed'.⁷⁶

⁷³ *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, 230.

⁷⁴ *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef, Va'eira*, 144.

⁷⁵ *Ketonet Pasim*, 45.

⁷⁶ *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov* (above, n. 36), Introduction.

The all-inclusiveness of the religious demand cited in the name of the Besht, applicable to every person and act, to every time and place, exercised a decisive influence on Hasidism. The principle is formulated at the beginning of *Zava'at ha-Ribash*: 'Every person should serve God, may He be blessed, with all his strength, for everything is an exalted requisite because God, may He be blessed, wants them to serve Him in all manners' (215). This egalitarian all-inclusiveness, pertaining to 'every person' and formulated as 'he is able to serve God in every [activity]' (217), follows necessarily from the requirement of constant reflection, in any situation, on the supernal worlds and the premise that God is equally present at all times and all places throughout the worlds. This concept of human service of God is derived from Hasidic mystical thought's point of departure regarding the all-inclusive nature of God's presence, as defined in the verse 'the entire world is filled with His glory' (Isa 6:3), conjoined with the Zoharic statement that 'no place is unoccupied by Him'. This divine presence, situated close to human thought at all places and all times – as is clear in the Besht's statement that 'wherever a person thinks, there [God] is' – is reflected in the all-inclusiveness of divine service, inferred in Hasidic formulation from the verse 'know Him in all your ways'.⁷⁷ This concept annuls the traditionally accepted ranking of manners of worship; for if every person can serve God in every way, because everything is for 'an exalted requisite' and God wants to be worshipped in all ways, then the accepted hierarchical preferences with respect to worshipping God ipso facto lose their force.⁷⁸

MYSTICAL EXALTATION

The ascent from concrete situations to visions of kabbalistic imagery takes place under the inspiration of the written mystical tradition. Elevation is conditioned on exchanging human consciousness, which relates to the needs of body and soul, for the consciousness of denizens of the supernal world, who have broken through the boundaries of life and been raised beyond human requisites. The mystical process that Karo hopes for – beginning with absolute separation from physicality, continuing with the metamorphosis involved in refining his material

⁷⁷ Cf. R. Elior, "'Melo' kol ha-arez kevodo" ve-khol adam: bein tehiyah ruhanit li-temurah hevratit be-reishit ha-hasidut' ['The entire earth is filled with His glory' and everyman: Between spiritual revival and social change in early Hasidism], in: A. Hallamish (Ed.), *Alei Shefer: Studies in the literature of Jewish thought presented to Rabbi Dr. Alexandre Safran*, Ramat-Gan 1990, 29-40.

⁷⁸ G. Scholem, 'Peirusho shel martin buber la-hasidut' [Martin Buber's interpretation of Hasidism], in: *Devarim be-go*, 361-382: 372.

existence, and attaining its pinnacle with his transformation from man to angel by going to the stake and being burnt for the sanctification of God's Name – is inspired by the image of primeval Enoch, son of Jared, whose transformation from man to angel is recounted in ancient literature: 'Your body and your organs will be refined in the manner of Enoch, whose flesh became fiery torches and balls of fire' (*MM* 150).⁷⁹ The metamorphosis from terrestrial to celestial creature and the refinement through consuming fire are tied to the purification of Karo's material being and to his desire to transform his physical existence into spiritual existence, to be offered as a sacrifice, and to be burnt for the sanctification of God's Name: 'And you will be favored to ascend the staircase of the righteous and to be burnt for the sanctification of My Name (...) and henceforth you will be considered as one who stands before God, for you are destined to be burnt for the sanctification of My Name. And your soul will henceforth be elevated, and your province will be the province of the supernal holy ones' (*MM* 381).

Karo, then, aspired to fiery elevation of his material being in order to be transformed from human to angel, and he pursued liberation from dependence on physical needs in order to purify an expanse within his bodily essence, thereby allowing entry to supernal beings instilling their spirit within him and speaking from his mouth. Similarly, the Besht craved liberation from dependence on bodily needs ('to separate himself from physicality', 'equanimity'), termination of terrestrial existence ('divesting physicality', 'annulment of [physical] existence'), and transformation of a person's being into a vessel for divine speech ('the world of speech speaks within him'). In exchange for the suppressed physical eros, offered up as a sacrifice, there occurs the mystical metamorphosis of *deveiqut* with the divine eros and union with the *Shekhinah*, which culminates in 'the world of speech' speaking within a person. The traditions cited in the name of the Besht attest that he directed his listeners to see themselves at all times as denizens of the supernal world and to regard this world from the alienated perspective of one who has no contact with terrestrial existence: 'And he should have no regard at all for this-worldly matters, nor think of them at all, in order to separate himself from physicality (...) and he should think that he is a denizen of the supernal world, and all the people dwelling in this [terrestrial] world should be of no import to him; for the entire world is as a mustard seed in comparison to the supernal world'.⁸⁰

There is considerable similarity between *Maggid Meisharim* and the traditions attributed to the Besht with regard to the details of mystical union with the

⁷⁹ On Enoch's transformation, cf. I Enoch 14:9, 20-23; III Enoch 15:1-2; P. Schäfer (Ed.), *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Tübingen 1981, pars. 1-20. Cf. H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, New York 1973, 80-82.

⁸⁰ *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, 215-216.

divine essence in the supernal world. The *Shekhinah* directs Karo to imagine himself as situated in her presence, standing near her, or to depict himself as seeing the divine being face-to-face: 'Always represent within your soul that you are standing before me and doing my service' (*MM* 149); 'Think within your heart as if you are standing before the king, the king of kings, the Holy One blessed be He, Whose *Shekhinah* hovers over you constantly, accompanying you' (*MM* 136).

Using similar wording, the Besht likewise asks his listeners to imagine mystical union: 'He should think that the Creator's glory fills the entire world and His *Shekhinah* is constantly near him [near the person] and he should think he is looking at the *Shekhinah* next to him as one looks at physical objects';⁸¹ 'It is a great virtue for a person to think constantly that he is next to the Creator, may He be blessed, and that He surrounds him on all sides (...) and he should so adhere [to the Creator] (...) that he sees the Creator, may He be blessed, in his mind's eye'; 'And it is a high level [of achievement] for a man constantly to see God, may He be blessed, with his mind's eye, as if he were looking at a person, and to think that the Creator, may He be blessed, is likewise looking at him (...) all this should be constantly in his thoughts'.⁸²

The moment of mystical union in the supernal worlds is described in Solomon Alqabez's account, previously cited, of the *tiqqun leil shavu'ot* conducted by Karo and his circle. The union is described in the plural, in the *Shekhinah's* voice, as she turns to Karo's group and depicts the mystical moment in terms that evoke the scriptural and midrashic descriptions of the encounter at Sinai: 'And you were favored to be in the king's palace; and the sound of your Torah and the breath of your mouths ascended before the Holy One blessed be He and breached several firmaments and several atmospheres until it ascended. And the angels were silent and the seraphs were still and the celestial beasts stood, and the entire heavenly host and the Holy One blessed be He heard your voice'.⁸³

That mystical moment, portrayed in suggestive language alluding to the union of heaven and earth in the past (at Sinai) and in the mystical present (the *tiqqun leil shavu'ot*), is described in similar terms in *Zava'at ha-Ribash*; it pertains, once again, to all people and all times: 'When he serves [God, i.e., worships] with grandeur, he fortifies himself with great might and, rising in his thought, breaches all the firmaments at once and ascends higher than the angels and the *ofanim* [angels envisioned as wheels of the celestial chariot] and the seraphs and the heavenly creatures, and that is perfect worship'.⁸⁴ A similar statement is

⁸¹ *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, 233.

⁸² *Keter Shem Tov*, 42, 58.

⁸³ *Maggid Meisharim* (Jerusalem edition, 1960), 18.

⁸⁴ *Zava'at ha-Ribash*, 234.

attributed to the Besht in *Keter Shem Tov*: 'And he should intend that the *Shekhinah*, whose glory fills the entire earth, garb itself in his thought from below to on high with great might, and he will breach the firmaments with his thought, as if they were open before him'; 'Divestment of physicality is [a state in which] he feels no bodily sensations at all; and his idea of the world is only that of the supernal worlds, that is, the angels and seraphs'.⁸⁵

The considerable influence of *Maggid Meisharim* on the Besht and on the traditions attributed to him in early Hasidism is evident as well in the detailed configuration of the personal mystical experience. The mystical experience entails an interaction between the upper and lower worlds in which the mystic himself takes an active part. The interaction can take place in a dream, in which visions of the supernal world are revealed to the dreamer, or it may occur while the mystic is awake (or half-awake), as previously unknown secrets are revealed to him by knowledgeable heavenly sources.

Iggeret ha-Qodesh, in which the Besht describes his well-known conversation with the Messiah at the time of his 'ascent of the soul' on Rosh Ha-Shanah, 5507 (15 September 1746), reports that 'I asked the Messiah, "When will the Master come?" He replied, "By this will you know it: it will be when what you have learned becomes widely known and manifest to the world and your springs disperse abroad what I have taught you and you have comprehended, so that others will be able to perform unifications just as you are. And then, all the *qelippot* will be destroyed and the time will be one of favor and salvation"'.⁸⁶ As quoted by the Besht, the Messiah's statement regarding the supernal sources of the Besht's teachings and the importance of disseminating them among the members of his circle bears a strong likeness to the wording with which the *Maggid* tells Karo of his hidden destiny and the hopes that hinge on the dissemination of his teachings: 'And I will work wonders and miracles through you (...) your renown and qualities will go forth in the world and your springs will be dispersed abroad. And I will grant you the favor of having many disciples' (*MM* 92).⁸⁷ Both speakers allude to the same verse – 'Let your springs be dispersed abroad' (Prov 5:16) – in telling of the supernal teaching they transmitted to their interlocutors together with the importance of its terrestrial dissemination.

In describing the Besht's heavenly ascent, *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* uses such terms as 'lower Garden of Eden', 'ascent to the supernal world', 'rejoicing of the groom

⁸⁵ *Keter Shem Tov*, 51, 72. Cf. *Liqqutim Yeqarim*, 3; *Ben Porat Yosef* 17b (above, n. 36).

⁸⁶ *Iggeret ha-Qodesh*, in *Keter Shem Tov*, 3. Cf. Mondschein (above, n. 35).

⁸⁷ Cf. *MM* 362.

and bride' – all of them recalling the recurring account in *Maggid Meisharim* of Karo's entry into Paradise after his immolation at the stake: 'And all the righteous ones in Paradise, led by the *Shekhinah*, will come out to greet you and they will receive you with songs and praises. They will set you before them, as a groom who walks at the head, and they will accompany you to your wedding canopy' (*MM* 6). In speaking to Karo, the *Maggid* refers repeatedly to his standing in the Garden of Eden and in the heavenly academy; similarly, the writings of Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye are rife with statements showing that the Besht conceived of himself as one who ascended to paradise during his lifetime: 'I heard from my master, the Besht, that he was shown himself being led under the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and many Jews were with him, and later, when he was passed under the tree of life, there were few [with him], and later still, when he was brought into the inner Garden of Eden, there were even fewer, until there were only a very small number'.⁸⁸

The traditions associated with Karo and the Besht also resemble each other in their accounts of the heavenly figures the protagonists encountered or sought to encounter so they might learn from them the mysteries of the Torah. In *Maggid Meisharim*, the *Maggid* tells Karo: 'And you should mortify yourself, as I said, so you will have the favor of seeing Elijah while awake, face-to-face, and he will speak to you mouth-to-mouth and greet you, for he will be your master and teacher in order to teach you all the mysteries of the Torah' (*MM* 9).

The Besht notes on various occasions that he studied in the supernal world with Elijah's teacher, Aḥiyah the Shilohite, whom he calls 'my master and my teacher'. In *Iggeret ha-Qodesh*, in the course of describing the dangers of ascending to the supernal worlds, he says: 'I was seized by a paroxysm of trembling and actually gave up my life; and I asked my master and teacher to accompany me, for there is great danger in ascending to the supernal worlds'.⁸⁹ The identity of the Besht's 'master and teacher' is made plain by his disciple, Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye: 'Aḥiyah the Shilohite, who received [the tradition] from Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, and who was among those who left Egypt. He later was [a judge] of the court of King David, peace be upon him, and was the teacher of the prophet Elijah, and of my master, may his memory endure to the life of the world to come'.⁹⁰ According to tradition, Aḥiyah was also Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai's teacher and his collaborator in saving the world; and according to the *Zohar*, he is Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai's neighbor and study partner in

⁸⁸ *Ben Porat Yosef* 17b.

⁸⁹ *Keter Shem Tov*, 3; cf. *Iggeret ha-Qodesh*, in *Shivḥei ha-Besht* (Mintz edition), 166-169; *Shivḥei ha-Besht*, id., 64.

⁹⁰ *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef, Balaq*, 575, cf. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Introduction.

the Garden of Eden.⁹¹ He was chosen as the Besht's teacher because he is an emissary from the supernal worlds whose identity transcends boundaries of terrestrial time and space and whose authority bridges the gap in the historical chain of transmission. The Besht's tie to Aẖiyah connects him to the mystical chain of religious innovators, legislators, and redeemers who received their teachings from the supernal worlds – a chain that began with Moses, continued with Elijah, Rabbi Akiba, and Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai, and reached all the way to Karo and Rabbi Isaac Luria.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Rabbi Joseph Karo and Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov were path-breaking religious innovators who saw themselves as heralds of a new mystical concept revealed by a heavenly source. Both were profoundly influenced by the kabbalistic tradition that came to life in their minds, but their innovations did not rely exclusively on the written tradition: they were based as well on innovative mystical experience, on heavenly confirmation, and on unmediated connection to the supernal worlds. Both left us accounts of the complex meaning of breaching the barriers between the human and the divine while transcending boundaries of time and space; of the divine likeness that becomes evident in that breaching of barriers; and of the ethos that necessarily follows from it. The breakthrough takes place in the wake of a mystical episode tied to the myth of exile and redemption. In the course of that episode, through identification with earlier mystical figures, a direct link is forged with a multifaceted divine being, embodying the experience of exile and hope for redemption both in Karo's consciousness and in the Besht's spirit. The episode follows on the internalization of the written mystical tradition related to the *Shekhinah's* exile and redemption and the incorporation of the mythical images of earlier redeemers and heralds of new doctrines, such as Moses and Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai (as portrayed in the Zoharic tradition), in light of the mystic's own life situation. As a result of the experience, new life is breathed into the tradition, and there emerges a new concept of the interrelationship between the divine world and the human.

Joseph Karo in his vision revitalized the Zoharic myth; heard its protagonists in his mind's ear; and recorded their words in writing in his mystical journal.

⁹¹ See Tishby & Lachover, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, a, 32; Liebes, 'Ha-mashiah shel ha-zohar' (above, n. 29), 113-116; G. Nigal, 'Moro ve-rabbo shel rabbi yisra'el ba'al shem tov' [Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov's master and teacher], in: *Sinai* 76 (1976), 150-159; A. Rubenstein, 'Al rabbo shel ha-besht ve-al ha-ketavim she-meihem lamad ha-besht' [On the Besht's teacher and the texts from which the Besht studied], in: *Tarbiz* 42 (1979), 146-158.

The Besht, meanwhile, internalized Karo's one-time experience by bringing the text of *Maggid Meisharim* to life in his mind's eye, transformed it into the underpinning of his mystical experience, and made it speak again. Each established an abstract mythical model intended to uncover the hidden structure underlying the mystical service of God and instill new meaning in it. Each gave mystical expression to metamorphoses in the divine reality and their connection to the complex consciousness of a human able to break through terrestrial boundaries.

The mystical concept of the divine in *Maggid Meisharim* contemplates a dual reality: the *Shekhinah*/divinity exists within it both as a bisexual personification with a palpable presence, profoundly tied to the historical reality of the exiled community of Israel, and as an abstract force acting within the universe, within nature, and within the human soul. The former aspect establishes close interdependence between God and man, making man into the redeemer and the *Shekhinah* into the redeemed. The latter aspect, meanwhile, leaves a transcendent expanse in which God is active and man is passive. The Besht's concept of the divine likewise encompasses a personal-immanent aspect – reflected in the erotic personification of the *Shekhinah* as she is portrayed in kabbalistic myth and human thought and encompassing union and bonding with the *Shekhinah* as well as her redemption and elevation – and an abstract, transcendental aspect, reflected in his acosmistic doctrine of the divine nothingness that simultaneously appears and departs.

The visions of Karo and of the Besht were nourished by their reading of kabbalistic texts, their mystical internalization of those texts, and their instilling new life into those texts within the fabric of religious existence. They lived their lives within the opened passageways between earth and heaven, which they depicted in the image of kabbalistic myth that was newly illuminated in their minds' eyes and spoke to them in that light. Both transformed the imagery of kabbalistic myth into time-honored, visionary realities; and each formed a world view that forged a profound link between human thought and mystical *deveiqut* on the one hand, and the supernal world and its mythical happenings on the other. Each developed an ethos of extreme self-mortification, patterned on the qualities of supernal creatures and implied by a mystical concept of the divine tied to the exile and redemption of the *Shekhinah*, her union, and her coupling. Both likewise established a direct link between indifference to and withdrawal from the terrestrial world and *deveiqut* with the supernal worlds; or between the spiritual duty and ascetic conduct demanded of them and the redemption of the *Shekhinah* and the hastening of the Messiah's coming. Both lived with a consciousness of being 'above nature'; both saw themselves as 'denizens of the supernal world' and maintained unmediated contact with heavenly powers; and, by might of that contact, both heralded a new mystical concept, both private and public. Both were empowered by the visionary certainty revealed to them in their minds'

eyes; and both forged a complex array of kabbalistic concepts and theurgic practices designed to express the crucial interdependence between lower and upper realms and the significance of the mystical reality in the face of which man acts.

The prominent verbal similarities between *Maggid Meisharim* and the various traditions attributed to the Besht, and the profound connection between the mystical conceptual world of the sixteenth-century kabbalist and his eighteenth-century fellow, allow us to infer that Joseph Karo's mystical image was adopted by the Besht as a concealed source of inspiration and that his autobiographical journal took root in the Besht's spiritual personality and became a layer of living memory within his consciousness. The varied traditions that attest directly and indirectly to the Besht's spiritual image as seen by the members of his circle and family provide independent clarification of the elements of his mystical world and point to a repeated connection to the conceptual world woven in *Maggid Meisharim*. The Besht deliberately obscured his sources – because he attributed his teachings to mystical revelations by a heavenly informant – and we therefore cannot determine with any certainty the circumstances in which the world of *Maggid Meisharim*'s author came to his attention, was blended into his faith system, and ultimately was incorporated into his very being. But there can be no doubt that during the second half of the eighteenth century, the Besht's words, retold in various sources in the Hasidic literature, demonstrated the prominent mark left by Joseph Karo's mystical autobiography.