*Rivka Horwitz*

# KAFKA AND THE CRISIS IN JEWISH RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Dein Prozess begann auf Erden;
endet er vor deinem Thron
Du kannst nicht verteidigt werden,
hier gilt keine Illusion.*

The extensive and intensive work on Kafka, involving innumerable interpretations, raises doubts as to whether one can really know Kafka. Sometimes those voluminous learned works on Kafka remind one of the Rorschach Tablets which the psychologist uses to diagnose the mental diseases of patients. These charts consist of ink stains, each patient seeing in them objects from his or her own mind. I do not want to reduce Kafka (one of the greatest authors of our century) to contentless ink stains, but merely to say that there is a quality in Kafka's writings that lends itself to infinite symbolic interpretations. Hence the analysis of Kafka expresses very much the point of view of the reader. On the other hand, it is quite clear that Kafka's work affects the reader, thus limiting him or her to the themes under consideration. One is not free then, to ascribe just anything to Kafka, or to read anything into his works. In each case there is a dialogue between the work and the reader.

Kafka became an internationally celebrated figure perhaps due to of his excellent prose style, which reminds one of the Bible and is so multifaceted that one can always discover new secrets, new aspects, and new directions in it. His style engenders various readings. Thus some see him as an existentialist while others explain him psychoanalytically. Brecht saw him as "the truly Bolshevist writer,"[1] other interpreters consider him a religious Christian, to say nothing of the fact that, to many Jewish interpreters, he expresses the tragic alienation of the Jew in the modern world.

In *The Trial*, the apex of Kafka's writings, Joseph K, the hero, is ac-

*From a poem by G. Scholem published in the *Jüdische Rundschau* with the republication of Kafka's *Trial* in 1935.

Modern Judaism 15 (1995): 21–33 © 1995 by The Johns Hopkins University Press

cused and knows not what for. He tries in vain to free himself from those charges, but finds himself in a bewitched, evil world. In the end, Joseph K is shot "like a dog." The symbolism of guilt without salvation, without hope or light, is visible throughout the book; the accusations are unclear and the ruling is handed down by ugly, deceitful judges. This story could be understood as dealing with the destiny of the modern Jew who lost his way, his Law, his Torah. He is alienated from his father's home, from his family and from his country; he lives in an anonymous, modern, technical world, where nothing is clear and where there is no direction to one's life; a world in which the age-old relation between God and man has been lost. The helplessness of the modern Jew in his predicament is distinctly reflected in Kafka's writings. We live guiltily in a dark world and bear a heavy accusation, yet we do not know how, where and before whom can we purify ourselves. Gershom Scholem, who had a great sensitivity both for religious depth and for literary excellence, identified with Kafka's pessimistic outlook on the world, which comes close to that which Scholem found in Gnosticism.

On the other hand, the optimistic and hopeful Martin Buber, who knew Kafka personally, explained Kafka as a person who was seeking the good but somehow did not go all the way toward the speech and the trust that bridges the relationship between one human being and the other. Kafka appeared to Buber as a writer, who journeyed half the distance towards the dialogue, but admittedly never got there. Buber wrote: "The thread that leads out of the labyrinth [of *The Trial*] is not to be found in the book; rather this thread exists only when just that happens which did not happen, the 'confession of guilt.' "[2] It is as though Buber felt the need to add that missing facet to Kafka, in order to be able to incorporate him in his dialogical thinking.

Scholem, as mentioned above, felt a very close kinship with Kafka. In the thirties he wrote to the famous critic Walter Benjamin with regard to Kafka:[3] "I have, of course, already had 'individual thoughts' about Kafka, although these do not concern Kafka's position in the continuum of German literature (in which he has no position of any sort, something that he himself did not have the least doubt about; as you probably know, he was a Zoinist) but his position is in the continuum of Jewish literature."

Scholem's position appears an extreme expression of a Zionist, who feels he has no room in German literature. Kafka, as a Zionist, is an outsider even thought he had not yet emigrated. For Scholem, Germanism and Zionism are culturally worlds apart. Zionism was, for him, an extremely important issue. He saw in it the only refuge of future Judaism. Scholem emigrated to Eretz Israel in 1923. Whether Kafka was indeed a Zionist is not completely clear. I found contradictory statements on this matter. On the one hand, he dreamt of leaving Europe and becoming a

waiter in Tel-Aviv. On the other hand, Mordechai Langer remembers Kafka's definite non-Zionist attitude. At any rate, Scholem considered Kafka a Zionist despite his perfect German, and not part of German literature. It was probably in the same sense that Rosenzweig once wrote that *The Star of Redemption* should be remembered as a gift of the Jewish enclave to the German people.

Scholem saw Kafka's Judaism as related to the Book of Job. He wrote to Benjamin: "I advise you to begin any inquiry into Kafka with the Book of Job, or at least with a discussion of the possibility of divine judgment, which I regard as the sole subject of Kafka's production."

For Scholem, the theme of *The Trial,* that is, the fate of Joseph K, can be interpreted by the figure of Job. Job is a pure and righteous man who fears God and shuns evil, yet is persecuted for no clear wrongdoing. The just suffer and divine judgment cannot be found. Scholem apparently emphasizes the beginning of the Book of Job. To him, the Question and the answer are central, the end less so.

Job's story was often regarded as a symbol of the Jewish people in Jewish literature of the 20th century. It is a symbol of terrible suffering whose meaning one does not understand, nor can one comprehend the divine judgment behind it.

For Scholem, *The Trial* is a world without redemption. In that letter to Benjamin Scholem also wrote: "Here for once a world is expressed in which redemption cannot be anticipated—go and explain this to the goyim! . . .". "This is the theological secret of perfect prose. The overwhelming statement that the last judgement is, rather, a martial law was made, unless I am mistaken by Kafka himself." Scholem's strong statement of 1931, considering the world as bewitched and without redemption, reminds one of reactions to the Holocaust. The human being has no place to hide; he is exposed and judged wherever he stands.

Scholem thought that Kafka's writings resembled the Kabbala, not merely because Kafka was studying the *Zohar* and was influenced by it, but on account of a deeper, inner similarity. That dark world of Joseph K reminded Scholem of the dark world of the Gnostics whom he considered the forerunners of the Kabbala, and whose thought bore a resemblance to it. The dynamic symbols of the powers of darkness which change their position on every page of *The Trial* could appear to Scholem as resembling the powers of the "Left Side" in the *Zohar,* though Scholem thought that Kafka had no authentic or profound knowledge of the *Zohar.* Scholem's analysis of Kafka is not historically oriented, though there is some proof of Kafka's being acquainted with hasidism through his friend, Mordechai George Langer, who was a hasid of the Rabbi of Gur. There is proof of Kafka's ability to read Hebrew, and to hold Hebrew conversations with Mordechai George Langer[4] even in the streetcars of Prague. Karl Erich Groezinger, in his book *Kafka und die Kabbala,* shows many in-

teresting parallels between the *Zohar* and Kafka;[5] Groezinger finds interesting parallels between Kafka's writings and the *Reshit Chokhma* as well. This is especially illuminating since this ethical treatise of the 16th century may have played a role in the Jewish religious world of Kafka's grandparents. But Scholem may have seen in Kafka a soulmate. Kafka was for him not merely a great genius, one of the most inspiring persons of his time; rather he revealed a world which Scholem too was seeking to show by demonstrating the relevance of Kabbala to the modern world.

Scholem asked different questions than the historical questions of Groezinger. Scholem did not deal with Kafka as an historian would but as a philosopher or a critic. Scholem thought that through Kafka's stories, the modern person could approach this world. Stephan Moses relates that in the thirties, Scholem used to tell his students: "To comprehend the Kabbala you have to study Kafka, particularly *The Trial.*"[6]

This saying reveals that Scholem probably read Kafka's work as a secular theology and as a gnostic interpretation of Kabbala. Scholem thought that through Kafka's *Trial* one perceives the deeper meaning of the Zohar. One senses the existence of God and simultaneously knows the impossibility of any relation between God and man. He also found in Kafka a conception of the Law as stern and without grace, and an example of the failure of the tradition of our forefathers to reach us. Scholem, like Kafka and Agnon, emphasized the disharmony found in the world, the vain effort of attempting to reach one's goal. Agnon, who was also very dear to Scholem, wrote many stories about the failure of one's mission. This is undoubtedly a Kafka or a Rabbi Nahman motif. Agnon describes the Jew who wishes to go to the synagogue but cannot reach it, for he has lost the key, or the Jew who cannot pray. In other stories the hero fails to deliver an important letter or to rescue his fellow Jew who is in danger.

This motif was close to Scholem's heart and he was happy to have discovered a kafkaesque story of Jewish origin in Origen's writing, which he quoted in his essay on religious authority.[7] The anonymous ancient Jewish author whom Origen quotes says that the Holy Scriptures are like a large house with many, many rooms and that outside each door lies a key—but it is not the right one. To find the right key—that is the great task of man.

David Biale thinks that Kafka's twisting of Biblical parables could be what reminded Scholem of the gnostic or the Frankist hermeneutics. Biale thinks that the radical theology of the Frankists led to speculations in which the literal message of the Bible might be altogether inverted.[8] This kind of inversion was characteristic of the Gnostics and their way of reading the Bible. As Benjamin said, Kafka read the Bible against the grain.[9]

Scholem saw in Kafka the Jew who expresses the crisis of modern Judaism, for whom the synagogue visits with his father were devoid of sense. Kafka, like Scholem, expressed no interest in the rational philosophies of Judaism. The two also showed great sympathy to the East European Jewish folk, and to Jewish popular culture. Scholem felt a kinship with Kafka and created him in his own image.

In Kafka's writings, Scholem was especially interested in two matters: the expulsion from Paradise and the crisis of the Law. These two can indeed be seen as one. In either case, Scholem accepts that goodness, God, Paradise, and Torah exist, but these are somehow beyond reach. The good is infinitely remote and innumerable obstacles rise between us and it: so that the divine message cannot reach the human ear or eye.

When, in 1937, Scholem wrote Zalman Schocken a letter about his real reasons for choosing the study of Kabbala, he said: "Many exciting thoughts had led me [1916–1918] as much to the most rationalistic skepticism about my field of study as to intuitive affirmation of mystical theses which walked the fine line between religion and nihilism. I later [found in Kafka] the most perfect and unsurpassed expression of this fine line, an expression which, as a secular statement of the kabbalistic world-feeling in modern spirit, seemed to me to wrap Kafka's writings in the halo of the canonical."[10]

In the eyes of Scholem, Kafka had a theological outlook; his Judaism does not break off with the past. He walks as though on a tightrope, on a very thin line, between one abyss and the other; between the past, the Torah, and Paradise on the one hand, and the future, which in his writings appear grim, on the other.

Kafka expresses for Scholem the decline of Judaism and of its Law: a new era, a revolution is beginning. This revolution is no longer an Enlightenment-type revolution for modernism and light, neither is it the revolution of the Reform movement and of Abraham Geiger against medievalism and Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, nor that of Berdichevsky and Tschernichovsky against halakhic Judaism and Mount Sinai, which have lost their meaning and to which man has turned indifferent; rather, via Kafka, Scholem realized that the Frankist rejection of the Law of the Tree of Knowledge, the Law of Good and Evil existed already from the very beginning of mankind, from Paradise! In his article "The Crisis of Tradition in Jewish Messianism"[11] Scholem discusses the Sabbatian interpretation of the Tree of Knowledge versus the Tree of Life, and the hope of overcoming the Torah of the Tree of Knowledge. This idea he developed in the tenth of the Ten Unhistorical Statements on Kabbala, where, interestingly, Scholem ties Kafka to Frankism.

Due to its importance, I shall quote the following paragraph: "A hundred years before Kafka, Jonas Wehle wrote (with the help of his

son-in-law Loew von Hoenigsberg) his letters and writings which were never published and were later carefully collected by his Frankist disciples. He wrote for the last adherents of a Kabbala which was transformed to a nihilistic messianism that tried to speak the language of the Enlightenment."[12]

And Scholem continues: "[Wehle] was the first to ask himself and answer affirmatively the question *whether Paradise has not lost more by the expulsion of man than man himself* [my emphasis, R. H.]. This side of the matter was until now definitely not sufficiently taken into consideration. Was there some kind of sympathy of souls which a hundred years later brought Kafka to express similar thoughts in its depth again? Perhaps because we do not know what happened to Paradise, it rouses ideas about the good which are to some extent hopeless. These are thoughts which are derived from a nihilistic Kabbala, because in an extreme way Kafka gave an expression to the borderline between religion and hereticism. Therefore his writings are the secular expression of the Kabbalistic sense of the world (which was unknown to him). For some contemporary readers it was something of the harsh splendor of the canonical—the perfect form which shatters."

Scholem considers the question pertaining to the status of Paradise after expulsion to be the deepest question of a heretic of Kabbala. How are we to understand it? The interpretation should allude to the placing of good and evil in Paradise. The text reads that Wehle was the first to ask himself and to answer affirmatively the question of *whether Paradise has not lost more by the expulsion of man than man himself.* This means that Paradise is better off when it has the sinner within its territory. Paradise needs the sinning man in its midst, it needs the Frankist in the Garden of Eden. It needs the evil within the good. This is apparently the depth to which Scholem alluded in that statement of Wehle and Kafka. There is a need for evil or sin, in the form of a human being within Paradise. The expulsion of the evildoer from the Garden of Eden was a loss to the Garden; apparently he should not have been removed from it. For in the Garden there is also the Tree of Life, that is, the realm beyond good and evil. The realm of good and evil is symbolized by our Torah and its many commandments, to which Sabbatianism objected. Abraham Cardozo, one of the great metaphysicians of Sabbatianism explains: "The Torah of the Messianic age will be that of the Tree of Life, which no longer knows anything of all those separations and limitations,"[13] meaning those of the Tree of Knowledge and of good and evil. The expulsion from Paradise symbolizes the Fall; from that point on the world needs Commandments; the Jews are fragile and weak and need to be controlled by the Torah and its Commandments.

In the above quoted letter to Walter Benjamin of August 1st, 1931, Scholem also considers that the Law, the Torah, is the center of Kafka's

work, and, he continues, "I suppose this is what the moral reflection of a halakhist who attempted a linguistic paraphrase of a divine judgment would have to be like. . . . the light of revelation never burned as unmercifully as it does here. This is the theological secret of perfect prose."[14] For Kafka Judgment is always stern Judgment without mercy. The famous orthodox Agnon-interpreter and literary critic Baruch Kurzweil agrees with Scholem's interpretation. He quotes Kafka, "A false alarm on the night bell, once answered—it cannot be made good, not ever".[15]

In fact, neither Stephane Moses nor David Biale, both of whom dealt with Kafka and Scholem, realized the deep secret of Scholem's statement. They explained Scholem according to other parables which consider the expulsion from paradise as a division between the distant Divine and the human. They saw a major resemblance between Kafka and the radical Jewish mystic, in the general methods of the interpretations, in his obsession with the Law and in the conception of a world in which God does not reveal himself. They agreed with Scholem's view that there are infinite ways of interpreting the law yet an inability to realize it.

These important critiques do not focus on the Frankist direction of Kafka's Biblical parables which Scholem had discovered. Kafka also wrote: "We are sinful not merely because we have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge but also because we have not yet eaten from the Tree of Life,"[16] which could also be easily interpreted by Scholem in the heretical perspective which he gives to the understanding of Paradise.

One should also mention that, as already stated, Baruch Kurzweil comes very close to Scholem in his interpretation of Kakfa.[17] He represents the modern human being who feels both bound by the Law and realizes its inaccessibility. In his grim outlook he too thought that Judaism is Law, that there is a disconnection between God and man, and that, on account of that abyss, one feels impotent; for Kurzweil there is no revelation. Scholem and Benjamin debated whether Kafka's writings are theological. Scholem thought that they definitely are, whereas Benjamin denied it. Scholem thought that *The Trial* and the parable "Before the Law" are the key to the understanding of Kafka's major motif. He thought that according to Kafka there is a revelation, yet it is reduced to Nothingness, to the *Ayin.* But what is the demonic in that *Ayin?* It appears that Scholem believes that between the *Ein-sof,* the most hidden, infinite God, on the one hand, and the world and man, on the other, there lies an abyss. The kabbalists claimed to be able to penetrate that abyss, to overcome that emptiness, whereas Scholem claimed that *Ayin* is completely confounded by the utterly incomprehensible nature of revelation. This interpretation bears much from Scholem's thought himself, as no *Ayin* is mentioned in Kafka's writings. But according to Scholem, the despair engendered by the inaccessibility of the Law led

Kafka to burn his writings. Scholem claims against Benjamin that the absence of theology is not Kafka's problem, rather, its inaccessibility.

As an antithesis to Scholem's view, I wish to turn to Moshe Idel and point to his disagreement with Scholem's interpretation. Idel thinks that Kafka's parable "Before the Law," which portrays the man waiting before the gate, passive and powerless, *is not typical of the Jewish mystic.* While in Kafka's story the words of the first watchman suffice to deter him, in the Heikhaloth Literature one finds stories of ascent where mystics fight with adversary forces and succeed in climbing up to see the King in his palace. Idel reminds us that many a mystic discovered such a path and courageously faced the dangers along the way in pursuit of his goal. This resolute person who seeks the Divine can be found in various writings of our vast religious literature: in the midrash, in Merkabah Mysticism, in Abraham Abulafia's writings, in hasidic thought and in many more sources. The door is not always locked; the resolute mystic overcomes the obstacles.

Whereas Scholem identifies Kafka's passivity with Kabbala, claiming that the message never arrives, Idel writes, "Kafka's parable presents a situation that is totally antithetical to the basic conception of Torah study, mystical and otherwise. The Torah was given in order to be investigated, and it is man's obligation to confront this challenge. Moses, in many of the midrashic renditions of the biblical story, ascended to heaven in order to receive the Torah, although he knew he would encounter great peril. In Kafka's story, however, the watchmen are there to pacify and effectively subdue the defendent."[18] For Kafka, the ability to obtain justice is the demand of human nature, but the modern human being has lost the connection with the Torah and the ability to re-create this connection, thus the cold, abstract, estranged Law, is according to Idel, in complete contrast to the concept of Torah in Jewish mysticism.

Adding in a later work, Idel wrote, "Kafka's Law, like the maiden in the *Zohar* parable, is intended for everyone who dares, but the loss of self-confidence, faith and energy leaves man with only the capacity to tell mystical stories about an impersonal, fascinating world that, according to Kafka is *ex definitio* beyond his reach. All that remains is the awareness that 'a radiance streams immortally from the door of the Law.' Is not the basic Kabbalistic metaphor for the mystical dimension of the Law, *Zohar*—radiance? Does not the *Zohar* use the metaphor of entering a palace in order to reach the Law itself, not merely viewing its radiance from outside?"[19] It seems as though Idel's theory expresses greater hope for the modern lost Jew.

Idel alludes to Scholem's belief in the impossibility of tradition. Scholem ends his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism,*[20] quoting a hasidic story of the Baal Shem Tov who, when he had a difficult task before him, would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer—

and what he set out to perform was done. A generation later, the "Maggid" of Meseritz would, in a similar situation, go to the same place in the woods and say: We can no longer light the fire, but we can still speak the prayers and what he wanted was fulfilled. . . . When another generation or two passed, Rabbi Israel of Rishin said in a similar situation, "we cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done; and, the storyteller added, this had the same effect."

Idel argues gainst Scholem, who held that traditon became blurred when it was handed down from generation to generation because the truth cannot be handed down.[21] In the "Ten Unhistorical Statements on Kabbala," Scholem claims that the true tradition remains ever hidden.

Again we notice the opposition between Scholem, who believed in the breakdown of the Jewish tradition, and Idel, who realizes the internal continous forces of Judaism. It becomes clear that, for Idel, Kafka's view is not representative of Kabbala, in fact it contradicts it. Idel is closer in his approach to Buber, to whom we now turn.

Buber knew Kafka from 1909. In those years, Buber used to come once a year to Prague and deliver a lecture on Judaism or Zionism before the young Jewish intellectuals of the Bar-Kochba group. Hugo Bergman, who was Kafka's classmate and friend from the gymnasium, belonged to the Bar-Kochhba group, as did Robert Weltsch, Max Brod, Felix Weltsch, Hans Kohn, and many others. But it appears Buber and Kafka were not close, and ultimately they went different ways.

In the late forties, when Buber wrote *Two Types of Faiths* and developed a line of thought which deeply differentiates between the Pauline faith and the Jewish faith, he wished to show the difference between Kafka's interpretation of the Law and the negative Pauline view of it. Buber too went to Kafka's parable and discovered in it motifs far beyond that peculiar court.

Most interpreters identify with Josef K and see through his glasses a dark world where hardly a ray of hope is found. Buber, however, quotes a different line of thought: "We were created to live in Paradise, Paradise was appointed to serve us. Our destiny has been changed; that this also happened with the appointment of Paradise is not said."[22] In this parable Buber discovers anti-Paulinism in Kafka whom he calls "the painter of the foregound-hell", but not hell itself. Buber thinks that Paradise is; like the hope for the future, it exists to benefit us, wherever the dark ray meets the tormented heart. Buber also discovered that Kafka wrote "Every misery around us we too must suffer," words that Buber identified with the messianic hope, writing in relation to that quotation, "there it is again the word from the shoot of Israel"; this means that Buber saw in the suffering of the world—even through Kafka's eyes—a redemptive meaning and not an absurdity.

When discussing *The Trial,* Buber felt a personal biographical connection with its birth, for Kafka had once visited Buber in his home near Berlin in 1911 or 1912, just prior to his writing of *The Trial.* In a note in his diaries of that time, Kafka speaks of being occupied with the biblical figure of unjust judges. Buber thus quotes from Kafka's diaries: " 'I find, therefore, my opinion, or at least the opinion with Psalm 82 where the 'sons of God' or angels, to whom He had entrusted the regiment over the human world and who had vilely misused their office and 'judged falsely.' " Buber writes in his article "Guilt and Guilt Feeling" that "the content of this late psalm is connected with that of the oriental myth, elaborated by the Gnostics, of the astral spirits who fatefully determine the destiny of the world, but from whose power that man may become free who dedicates himself to the concealed highest light and enters into rebirth."[24] Buber believes that Kafka knew that myth when writing *The Trial* and made his own modification of it. For Buber, the interpretation of Psalm 82 and *The Trial* are intertwined. He rejects the common interpretation of the story and claims that only on the surface were human values shattered and life bereft of meaning; everthing seems uncertain, the court being cruel, senseless, and disordered, and man indefinite and directionless. According to Buber, that whole nightmare has one aim: to set oneself free! Joseph K is mistaken when using "indefinite advocates, indefinite women and other indefinite instruments"[25] to overcome the evil and grim world. Buber, however, thinks that Joseph K *is* guilty and that he projected the disordered world from his disordered mind.[26] Buber writes: "in accord with his own contemplation of the world, [Kafka] let the just accusation of an inaccessible highest judgment be conveyed by a disorderly and cruel court."[27] Buber claims that the accusation is just, only the court is not. Furthermore Buber's point of departure *is that man is guilty;* however Joseph K refuses to accept that and concerns himself superficially with technical means to rid himself from his real guilt. Therefore Joseph K said "how can anybody be guilty?" or "I am not guilty, this is simply a misunderstanding."

Buber thinks Joseph K is avoiding the truth when he hears the parable before the court in the Cathedral, when he comes by accident into a church and is there addressed by name by a clergyman unkonwn to him, and when the chaplain wishes to convey to him that the case is going badly. Joseph ignores the chaplain's allusions. Buber adds "What is denied here [in *The Trial*] is the ontic character of guilt, the depth of existential guilt beyond all mere violations of taboos." Buber thinks that Freud wanted to relativize guilt and Joseph K says "Indeed we are all men and one should not overestimate the difference between men." This Buber interprets as though Joseph K wishes to prove his innocence, "by talking about others instead of occupying himself with himself." The priest shrieks: "Can't you see two steps in front of you?" The priest

already sees the verdict—death. But Joseph K does not. Buber then relates of having discovered a note in Kafka's diary, from which he could learn that Kafka himself understood that story only when he read it to his fiancée. Then—as Buber thought—he discerned from the note in the diary that Kafka believed that *confession is what makes the door spring open.* It seems Buber thought that if Joseph K could have prayed, if he could confess his guilt before God—before the highest court—things would have turned out differently.

But as things turned out, Joseph was in the hands of unjust judges, 'sons of God,' angels who misused their office and judged falsely as described in Psalm 82. When Kafka visited him in Berlin they discussed the problem of evil in the Bible, and specifically in Psalm 82. To understand the subject further I wish first to quote a note from Kafka's diaries and then that short chapter of the Psalms.

Kafka wrote in 1915: "Opened the Bible. The unjust Judges. Confirmed in my own opinion, or at least in an opinion that I have already encountered in myself. But otherwise there is no significance to this, I am never visibly guided in such things, the pages of the Bible don't flutter in my presence."[28]

That chapter reads as follows:

A Psalm of Asaph

God stands in the divine assembly;
among the divine beings He pronounces judgement.
How long will you judge perversely,
showing favor to the wicked?
Judge the wretched and the orphan,
vindicate the lowly and the poor,
rescue the wretched and the needy,
save them from the hands of the wicked.

They neither know nor understand,
they all go about in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth totter.
I had taken you for divine beings,
sons of the Most High, all of you,
but you shall die as men do,
fall like any prince.

Arise, Oh God, judge the earth,
for all the nations are Your possession.[29]

Buber thinks that in *The Trial,* too, the power of God was relegated to tribal gods, mediators who abused their power. They do not obey God

but decide according to their own illusions and weaknesses. The end of the chapter, however, which tells how God decides to demote them and be the sole just ruler on earth, is absent in Kafka's work.

When interpreting selected chapters of the Psalms, Buber commented on this chapter and wrote: "A Jew of our time, Franz Kafka, has in his writings provided a commentary to the presuppositions of this Psalm. I say, to his presuppositions, not to the Psalm itself. Kafka describes the human world as one which is given over to the intermediary beings, with which they play their confused game. From the unknown One who gave this world into their impure hands, no message of comfort or promise penetrates to us. He is, but He is not present. What has not entered into the view of Kafka, of the man of our time, is to be found in this Psalm."[30] In a braoder sense one can see in those important words of Buber's an answer not only to Kafka but to Scholem as well.

BEN GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV

NOTES

The present article is based on a lecture first presented at a conference entitled: "The Jewish Presence in Europe: The Prague Experience" held at Charles University, Prague, in July, 1993. The conference was supported by Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, UCLA, and Charles University.

1. Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship* (Philadelphia, 1981), p. 175.

2. Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man* (New York, 1965), p. 141.

3. Scholem, *Walter Benjamin,* pp. 170ff.

4. Mordechai George (Dov) Langer, *Me'at Zori* (Tel-Aviv, 1984), p. 133.

5. Karl Erich Groezinger, *Kafka und die Kabbala* (Frankfurt, 1992), pp. 25ff.

6. Stephane Moses, "Zur Frage des Gesetzes: Gershom Scholems Kafka-Bild," in *Kafka und das Judentum,* ed. K. E. Groezinger, Stephane Moses, and H. D. Zimermann (Frankfurt/M, 1987), p. 18.

7. "Jewish Authority and Mysticism," in *On the Kabbala and Its Symbolism,* by Gershom Scholem (New York, 1977), p. 12. See also F. I. Baer on this subject in his Hebrew article in *Zion,* Vol. 21 (1956), p. 16 and E. E. Urbach, "The Homiletical Interpretation of Canticles," in *Scripta Hierosolymitana,* Vol. 22, p. 245, n. 2. Urbach quotes an interpretation ascribed to Saadiah; "know my brother that there are many interpretations to the Canticles, one can compare the Canticles to locks whose keys got lost."

8. David Biale, "Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah, Text and Commentary," in *Gershom Scholem, Modern Critical Views,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York, 1987), p. 121.

9. *Ibid,* p. 122.

10. David Biale, *Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 75, Scholem's letter to Z. Schocken.

11. Gershom Scholem, "The Crisis of Tradition in Jewish Messianism," in his book *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), pp. 70ff.

12. Biale, "Ten Unhistoric Aphorisms on Kabbalah," p. 120.

13. *Messianic Idea*, p. 70.

14. Scholem, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 171.

15. B. Kurzweil, *Masekhet ha-Roman* (Tel-Aviv, 1953), p. 388. "A Country Doctor," in *The Basic Kafka* (New York, 1958), p. 166.

16. Franz Kafka, *Parables in German and English* (New York, 1947), p. 25.

17. Kurzweil, *Masekhet, ha-Roman* pp 308–404; and on "Brenner, Weininger and Kafka," *in Ben Hazon u-vein Absurdi*, (Tel-Aviv, 1973), pp, 319–332.

18. M. Idel, "Mysticism," in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, ed. A. Cohen and Paul Mendes Flohr (New York, 1972), p. 655.

19. M. Idel, *Kabbala: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), p. 271.

20. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1946), pp. 349–350.

21. S. Moses, "Zure Frage des Gesetzes: Gershom Scholems Kafka Bild," pp. 30–31. Based on the Satz 1 of the "Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah," in Scholem's, *Judaica* 3 (Frankfurt, 1977), p. 264.

22. Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (New York, 1961), pp. 168–169.

23. "Guilt and Guilt Feeling," in Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man* (New York, 1965), p. 145 and footnote. One could compare Buber's view with that of Erich Fromm in his work *Man for Himself* (New York, 1947); only that Fromm develops his idea, not as Buber in a religious dimension, but in terms of a humanistic conscience.

24. Buber, *Knowledge of Man*, p. 145.

25. *Ibid.* p. 144.

26. *Ibid.* p. 140.

27. *Ibid.* p. 145.

28. Franz Kafka, *Diaries 1914–1923* (New York, 1965), p. 130.

29. *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 1206–1207.

30. Buber, "Interpretation of Psalm 82 'Judgement of Judges,'" in *Good and Evil* (New York, 1953), p. 30.