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STUDIES IN JEWISH MYSTICISM

Edited by Joseph Dan and Frank Talmage

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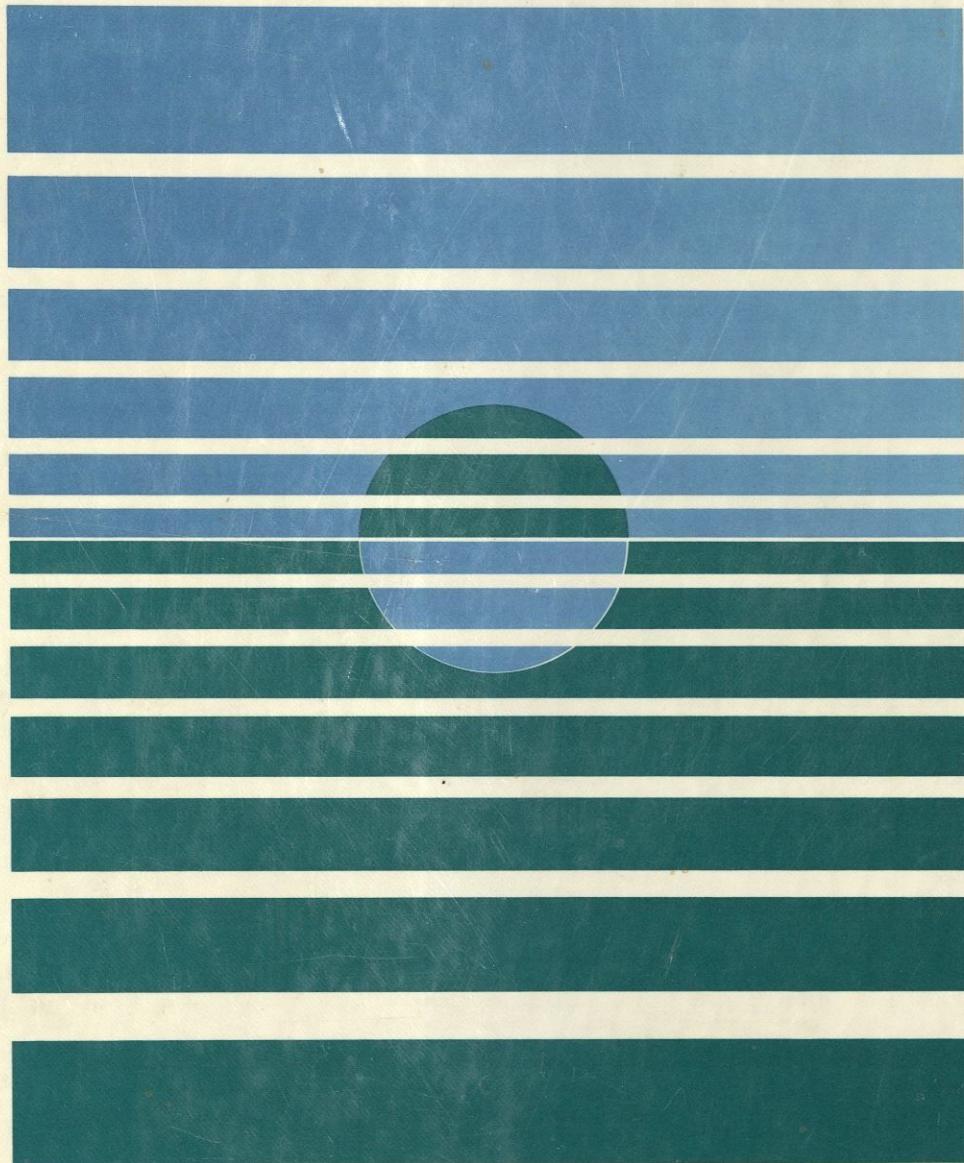
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These papers, presented at Regional Conferences of the Association for Jewish Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles and at McGill University in April, 1978, analyze aspects of the history of Jewish mysticism from the Hellenistic-rabbinic period through Hasidism. Specialists in cognate areas illustrate how their own disciplines can be used to illuminate the study of mystical documents. Contributors include Arnold J. Band, David R. Blumenthal, Joseph Dan, Amos Funkenstein, Ithamar Gruenwald, Lawrence Kaplan, David Lieber, Ivan Marcus, Alti B. Rodal, and David Winston.

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Studies in Jewish Mysticism

Proceedings of Regional Conferences
Held at the University of California, Los Angeles
and McGill University in April, 1978

Edited by
JOSEPH DAN

and

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Association for Jewish Studies
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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The Emergence of Mystical Prayer

JOSEPH DAN

I

The mystical concept of prayer in Judaism emerged in the same period during which Hebrew mystical literature began to flourish among the Jews of Europe,¹ the second half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. The discussion of the nature and meaning of the liturgy is one of the most prominent characteristics of the writings of these early Jewish mystics, and this sets them apart from other schools of thought of the same period, which devoted only scant attention to this subject. One of the early descriptions of the kabbalah, written by an opponent, characterizes the kabbalists as innovators mainly—or even only—in the realm of mystical prayer.² It is evident that the development of a new attitude toward the liturgy is closely connected with the emergence of the various Jewish mystical schools, so that the analysis of this particular problem may shed some further light upon a crucial phase in the history of Jewish mysticism and religious thought in general.

Jewish mysticism in Europe developed in several places at about the same time. The period between the last decades of the twelfth century and the first years of the thirteenth was that during which various schools of Jewish mystics produced their first written works. Foremost among these is the school of Rabad of Posquières in Provence,³ which was followed by the great kabbalistic school in Gerona in Northern Spain.⁴ In Germany there were several schools and circles which were occupied with esoteric speculation, the most prominent being the school of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, headed by Rabbi Judah ben Samuel the Pious,⁵ as well as some

circles whose geographical and chronological background is quite uncertain. These include the school that attributed its writings to the tradition of Joseph ben Uzziel⁶ (the "Special Cherub" circle), or the author of the *Sefer ha-Hayyim* (The Book of Life). The same period produced the pseudepigraphic literature of the 'Iyyun circle⁷ among others.⁸ While some of these different groups had close connections with others, as did the Provençal kabbalists with the Gerona school,⁹ it seems that others flourished independently, without influencing other circles or being influenced by them.

The independence of these various circles gives the scholar an opportunity—a rare one in the history of Jewish mysticism—to study the mystics' attitude toward prayer in its many aspects when there is a possibility of distinguishing between original contributions and the influence of common sources. Whereas in later phases of the history of the kabbalah—especially after the publication of the *Zohar*—it is very difficult to ascertain which ideas in the writings of a mystic were motivated by his own experience, and which are a development of the mystical tradition which he received. Such a possibility exists in the period discussed here, for no common, normative mystical tradition united the various schools. Over a period of many decades, these early circles of esoteric lore developed their own ideologies, theologies and systems of symbols in relative independence. Each of these groups had its own preferred ancient sources, its own traditions and very often its own body of pseudepigraphic material, which they used to develop their own doctrines. At that time no attempt was made to create a unified system of mystical symbols, and thus the individual characteristics of the thought of each circle were preserved.

This unusual diversity of schools, which gave Jewish mysticism works like the *Book Bahir*, the basic text of the early kabbalah,¹⁰ the works of Rabbi Isaac the Blind, the most prominent kabbalist in the Provence,¹¹ the esoteric works of Rabbi Judah the Pious and his disciple Rabbi Eleazar of Worms,¹² the works of Rabbi Elhanan ben Yaqar of London,¹³ and many others, offers a unique opportunity for comparative study of these circles. It is possible to follow the development of the major mystical ideas and to distinguish be-

tween the elements found in the works of all or most of these circles and those which are particular and specific to one group alone. The possibility of comparing parallel mystical phenomena and discovering both the common and divergent attitudes toward a central problem can bring into sharp focus the religious problems which were facing Judaism at that time, and enable us to analyze the various responses to them.

This paper is an attempt to analyze some of the basic attitudes of the Jewish thinkers, mystics and esoteric writers, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries toward the concept of prayer; to look for a common denominator in their formulations concerning this problem: and to try to form some conclusions which will link together religious and theological developments in that period with the mystical treatment of the subject of prayer and intention during prayer.

II

Until the late twelfth century, the prayer book was treated by Jewish scholars mainly as a halakhic and not as a theological concern. Monographs on prayer were written by the Gaonim in Babylonia, but these were compilations of halakhic rules concerning the text and practice, the time and the manner of praying. Only in the last two decades of the twelfth century did Jewish thinkers begin to write comprehensive and detailed commentaries on the text of the liturgy, discussing basic religious problems and treating the prayer book in the same way that biblical pericopae were studied. It seems that the earliest comprehensive commentaries on the liturgy were written by Rabbi Judah the Pious and by his disciple, Rabbi Eleazar of Worms.¹⁴ Rabbi Judah's commentary was lost, but we have a description of the book, which states that it was an eight-volume work.¹⁵ Rabbi Eleazar's commentary is extant today in several manuscripts¹⁶ and served as a basis for later commentaries.

The question of what prompted the Ashkenazi Hasidic teachers to decide to devote so much effort to exposition of the text of the liturgy is, of course, the crucial problem: Did it signify a change in

the basic attitude toward prayer which occurred in this circle at that time? A partial answer, at least, can be gleaned from the study of the extant quotations from Rabbi Judah the Pious's lost commentary on the liturgy. These quotations were preserved in a short thirteenth-century treatise called "Sodot ha-tefillah" ("The Secrets of the Liturgy"), which has been preserved in several manuscripts.¹⁷ This treatise was compiled by a disciple of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms and its aim was mainly polemical. The quotations the author used from Rabbi Judah's work were intended to prove the correct wording of some of the basic portions of the liturgy and to justify the tradition accepted by the Ashkenazi Hasidim. His criticism was directed against Jews in France and England, who, according to Rabbi Judah, used to change a few words and adopted a different tradition. One of the quotations reads:

The people [Jews] in France made it a custom to add [in the morning prayer] the words: "Ashrei temimei derekh [blessed are those who walk the righteous way]," and our Rabbi, the Pious, of blessed memory, wrote that they were completely and utterly wrong. It is all gross falsehood, because there are only nineteen times that the Holy Name is mentioned [in that portion of the morning prayer],¹⁸ . . . and similarly you find the word 'Elohim nineteen times in the pericope of *Ve->elleh shemot*. . . .¹⁹ Similarly, you find that Israel were called "sons" nineteen times, and there are many other examples. All these sets of nineteen are intricately intertwined,²⁰ and they contain many secrets and esoteric meanings,²¹ which are contained in more than eight large volumes.²² Therefore, anyone who has the fear of God in him will not listen to the words of the Frenchmen who add the verse "Ashrei temimei derekh," and blessed are the righteous who walk in the paths of God's Torah,²³ for according to their additions the Holy Name is mentioned twenty times . . . and this is a great mistake. Furthermore, in this section there are 152 words, but if you add "Ashrei temimei derekh" there are 158 words. This is nonsense, for it is a great and hidden secret why there should be 152 words . . . but it cannot be explained in a short treatise. Furthermore, according to the words of the

Frenchmen who add "Ashrei temimei derekh" "ashrei" appears four times: "Ashrei temimei derekh," "Ashrei yoshevei," "ashrei ha-'am," "ashrei ha-'am." This is a mistake and a gross lie, for there are only three occurrences of "ashrei," in keeping with the three occurrences of "Yom Kippurim" in the Pentateuch, and in keeping with the three occurrences of "God the Lord of Abraham, Isaac and Israel,"²⁴ and in keeping with the three occurrences of "God the Lord of Israel" in the Book of Psalms . . . , and in keeping with three thousand year length of the Garden of Eden,²⁵ and in keeping with the three times that we say "holy" every day. All these are intricately intertwined, and they are connected with grand and great mysteries, written in several volumes. Therefore, everyone who fears God should always pray and say: May my soul never be together with that of the Frenchmen, and may I never be part of their congregation, for they invent things out of their own imagination and add in their prayers several words which are not needed. Thus they cause exile to themselves and their children until the end of all generations.²⁶

In another passage we read:

Give heed, you inhabitants of France and the Islands of the Sea [England], who err utterly and completely, for you invent lies and add several words in your prayers, of which the early sages who formulated the prayers never dreamed, when they commanded us to say the prayers in place of the sacrifices in the Temple. Every benediction which they formulated is measured exactly in its number of words and letters, for if it were not so, our prayer would be like the song of the uncircumcised non-Jews. Therefore, give heed and repent, and do not go on doing this evil thing, adding and omitting letters and words from the prayers.²⁷

Similar statements concerning many of the basic benedictions abound in this treatise, thus making it impossible to assume that the fury of Rabbi Judah and of his disciple is directed toward people who distort the meaning of a certain ancient text because of some

ideological or theological consideration. In order to understand this religious phenomenon, we have to take the basic contention of this treatise exactly as it is stated: every addition or omission of a word, or even of a single letter, from the sacred text of the prayers destroys the religious meaning of the prayer as a whole and is to be regarded as a grave sin, a sin which could result in eternal exile for those who commit it.

The attitude expressed in this document is unique. It is very difficult to find a similar example throughout the long history of Jewish polemical literature on this subject. The vehemence expressed here stands in sharp contrast to the usual relaxed Jewish acceptance of the ancient fact that there are differences in the customs of praying and the text of the prayers among the major Jewish communities. Sometimes even small communities had their own distinctive traditions. These variations tend to be very minor in scope, and seldom, if ever, carry any theological implications. In most cases, Jewish respect for ancient tradition overcame the annoyance at the differences in the customs of prayers, and sometimes communities were praised because of their adherence to their particular tradition. From the premedieval differences in prayers between the customs of Babylonia and Eretz Israel to the variation between modern Ashkenazi and Sephardi customs, Judaism tolerated the various traditions and did not try to impose one dogmatic text at the expense of the respected traditions of various communities.

The unusual attitude of Rabbi Judah the Pious and his school toward these variations in the neighboring French Jewish communities stemmed from the emergence of a new attitude toward the liturgy as a whole. This school of the Ashkenazi Hasidim was intensely interested in the problems of the liturgy and Rabbi Eleazar's voluminous commentary on the prayer book written in the late twelfth century and probably edited by the author himself,²⁸ is in itself a proof of this change, both by its being the first such commentary to reach us, and by its contents. All the Ashkenazi Hasidic teachers put the problem of the liturgy in the center of their exegetical and theological works, thus opening a

new era in Jewish speculation on this subject, after it had been neglected for many generations.

Rabbi Judah's explanation for this new attitude is found both in this work, "The Secrets of the Liturgy," and his other esoteric works. He and his disciples evolved a mystical theory, according to which the words and letters of the various prayers are not accidental, nor are they only vehicles for their literal meaning. Their order, and especially their numbers, reflect a mystical harmony, a sacred divine rhythm, which was introduced by the rabbis who formulated the daily prayers during the period of the Second Commonwealth.²⁹ This mystical harmony can be discovered in historical events, directed by God; in nature, especially in the miraculous occurrences directly influenced by divine powers; and first and foremost, in the Bible. According to Rabbi Judah and the Ashkenazi Hasidic school in general, there can be nothing accidental in the Bible, not even the forms of letters, the punctuation, the vocalization, and especially—in the numerical structures—the number of certain letters, consonants or vowels in a certain verse; the number of words from the same root; the number and variety of divine names in a certain pericope, the absence of one or more letters from a chapter, and many other elements of the Scriptures besides their content.³⁰ The most important is the element of *gematria*—the numerical value of each letter of the alphabet combined to form connections and parallels between different parts of the Bible. It sometimes seems that where other readers would see letters and meanings in the Bible, the Ashkenazi Hasidim would see only rows of figures and numbers, mystically connected. The main characteristic of Rabbi Judah's commentary on the liturgy seems to have been—judging by the quotations before us in this short treatise, "The Secrets of the Liturgy"—to treat the text of the liturgy in the same way as that in which the Bible was studied by the Ashkenazi Hasidim, and to claim that the mystical harmony inherent—by divine revelation and inspiration—in the biblical text is to be found also in the text of the prayers.³¹

Ashkenazi Hasidic literature does not reveal to us whether this

novel mystical concept of the liturgy had any practical significance which influenced the behavior of a Jew when actually praying in the synagogue.³² It is possible that this new approach was merely "academic," and it was not regarded as necessary to keep all the numerical combinations and associations in mind when actually praying. However, there can be no doubt that this new attitude had two results, one of which is manifested in this treatise, while the other is evident from all Ashkenazi Hasidic treatments of the subject: (a) No change can be tolerated in the text of the prayers, not even a minute one, because every change—even of one letter—would destroy the numerical harmony inherent in the text. It does not matter, therefore, whether the change is beneficial from the point of view of meaning and content, for this level of meaning is not the most important one in the prayers. The text was formed to reflect mystical harmony, and any change would destroy it. (b) The liturgy received new importance and new meaning within the framework of religious practice. A completely new dimension was added in this way to the daily prayer service; it stopped being just a reciting of requests and praises of God in ancient formulas, and became a vehicle for becoming a participant in a mystical, divine harmony. The prayers suddenly received a new depth of meaning and importance, which was undreamed of in the thousand years that had passed since they were formulated. The commentary on the liturgy by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms (d. ca. 1230) and the quotations from Rabbi Judah's lost commentary are the first book-length nonhalakhic treatment of the liturgy in Jewish thought. There can be little doubt that there had occurred a major conceptual and religious change, of which the appearance of these works is but one manifestation.³³

The fierce polemical tone of Rabbi Judah's criticism of the changes introduced by the "Frenchmen" in the prayers can therefore be explained as a result of his fear that the prayers may be regarded as completely human in origin and meaning, making them secular and meaningless in religious and mystical practices. According to him, even if the content and meaning of the prayer is religious, expressing love and devotion to God, it still will be just "a secular song like that of the non-Jews" if it does not have the

added mystical dimension of hidden truth, which cannot be revealed by the literal meaning of the words alone. In his polemic, Rabbi Judah does not defend only the specific tradition of prayer which he received from his parents and teachers; he also defends prayer as an elevating force, forming a connection between man and God, a connection that no mere words can achieve. The problem which should be answered is: Was there a real danger of dissociating prayer from worship in the highest sense? Was the threat imaginary or real?

III

Before these questions can be answered, it is necessary to establish the fact that in the eyes of the early Jewish mystics and esoterics of that period the problem of the liturgy was a theological one, and not merely an exegetical question; that is, these problems were closely connected with the developments in the concept of the divine world, and not only with problems of worship. Several texts written late in the twelfth century and at the beginning of the thirteenth could serve this purpose, but most of them are purely esoteric texts, obviously not written for the instruction of the general public. One of the few exceptions is the short text translated below, which is entitled: "Pesaq ha-yir'ah ve-ha-emunah," "A Decision concerning Fear of God and True Faith." It seems that this text includes in a popular, brief form, a summary of the most crucial theological problems of that age, the most important among them being that of the meaning of the prayers.

This short treatise is one of the works of the circle of mystics who developed the theology of the "special cherub,"³⁴ and who relied on a body of pseudepigraphic sources attributed to Joseph ben Uzziel.³⁵ We do not know exactly where and when the teachers of this circle—most of them anonymous—wrote their works, but it is probable that their center was in Northern France and that they flourished during the second half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. The most important work from this circle is a commentary on the *Book of Creation* known as the pseudo-Saadia,³⁶ and the three works of Elhanan ben Yaqr of

London,³⁷ written in the first half of the thirteenth century and constituting a summary of the theology of this circle in previous generations. The "Pesaq" with which we are dealing here, was printed by A. Jellinek,³⁸ who was misled by a manuscript in Munich to suppose that this was a section of a treatise by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms.³⁹ The "Pesaq" is found in at least one other manuscript as an independent work,⁴⁰ and there can be little doubt that it is a popular synthesis of the teachings of this circle, intended for a public which could not study the esoteric works based on the *Book of Creation*.

The text begins with the statement:

All God-fearing people, when they pray, have to direct⁴¹ their prayers, when they say "Blessed is God," and when they kneel before Him and thank Him and direct their prayers in their hearts, only to His Holiness alone, which is His Glory and which has neither form nor image, only voice, spirit and speech,⁴² and so Isaiah said: "To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?" (Isaiah 40:18).

The opening sentence declares clearly that the following "decision" is not directed to mystics or theologians alone, but is relevant to every God-fearing person. This becomes even clearer when he defines his subject: the necessary intention when one blesses the name of God. According to Jewish law, such blessings constitute the core of the thrice-daily prayer, and a Jew is expected to bless God in these words one hundred times every day.⁴³ The decision refers, therefore, to the most common daily practice of Jewish faith, relevant always and everywhere to every Jew. The polemical tone of this treatise is also evident from the opening, because it is formulated as a prohibition of a prevalent practice and substitution instead of as the correct way to worship God.

The instruction emphasized here, which is repeated later in the treatise, is that one should not direct his prayers to a visible divine power, but to the Holiness, or Glory, of God, which does not have any form, likeness or image. The author interprets the verse which speaks about "El," "God," to refer to this holiness or glory.

The background of this instruction can be understood clearly once we know the history of the term "glory" (*kavod*) during the Middle Ages. When the problem of the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible and in talmudic passages first arose, one of the main answers offered by Jews was the use of the term *kavod*, often found in the Bible in connection with divine revelation and anthropomorphic statements, as denoting a supreme being which is not really God himself but a secondary power which can assume form and image, and can thus be described in anthropomorphic and material terms. We find this method used often in the Aramaic translation of the Bible, but it was theologically defined by Saadia Gaon in his philosophical work⁴⁴ and in his other writings. Saadia states that the Glory, the *Kavod*, is the greatest of angels, created by God for the specific purpose of revealing it to the prophets. This Glory serves as proof to the prophets that it really is God who is being revealed to them, and he assumes the proper form for the fulfillment of this purpose. In this way, Saadia preserved both the unity of God—there is no other divine being—and answered the question of the anthropomorphic descriptions: They describe the Glory, who is a created angel, and not God himself.

It is clear from the opening sentence translated above that the concept of the Glory in this treatise is diametrically opposed to that of Saadia, for here the author states, in unambiguous terms, that the Glory, or the Holiness, is that aspect of God which does not have any form or image, and he interprets the prophet's prohibition against attributing such likeness to God ("El") to the Glory. Obviously, the system offered by Saadia and adopted by many of his followers among the Jewish philosophers was abandoned here.

This process of change occurred long before the "Pesaq," and the main stages can be clearly identified.⁴⁵ The process began, most probably, in the writings of Saadia himself, who, when arguing against the Karaites concerning the ancient anthropomorphic mystical text of the *Shi'ur Qomah*,⁴⁶ suggested that the enormous measurements of the divine being described there by Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiba is another created angel, a higher one, who was created by God in order to be revealed to the highest angels.⁴⁷ This formulation led later writers to decide that there is

more than one Glory, that indeed there is "Glory above Glory,"⁴⁸ a succession of such powers which could easily enough be turned into a series of emanated divine manifestations, in the current neo-Platonic environment dominant in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This tendency already includes within itself the concept of a "hidden Glory" (*kavod nistar*), for the "glory above glory" is not revealed to man. This concept of the hidden Glory, which was impossible and paradoxical in the framework of the Saadianic concept of the Glory, became one of the cornerstones of the emerging Jewish mystical schools at the end of the twelfth century, most notably in the "Sefer ha-*Iyyun*" ("The Book of Contemplation").⁴⁹

The description of the Glory as a created angel, as described by Saadia, was gradually replaced by the concept of the divine, emanated Glory. This process was enhanced by two flaws in the Saadianic concept. First, it was very difficult to identify the divine being described by Rabbi Ishmael in the *Shi'ur Qomah*, a being called in that ancient text "the creator,"⁵⁰ with a created angel. Second, Saadia identified the Glory with the Shekhinah, one of the basic rabbinic appellations of God Himself.⁵¹ It was impossible to accept the description of the Shekhinah as a created being, and, as the identification was accepted, the Glory was elevated from the status allotted it by Saadia into a clearly divine being.

One of the major steps in this direction was made by Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, in his commentary on the Torah and in his other works.⁵² Ibn Ezra—who is often mentioned in the literature of the "special cherub" circle⁵³—described the Glory as an emanated being,⁵⁴ whose upper aspects were completely hidden from the prophets and from the world in general, while its lower aspects were revealed to human beings on some occasions. Thus the Glory became a divine intermediary between the supreme Godhead and the created world, an intermediary who could be described as manifold, containing several aspects and fulfilling several functions. This concept of the Glory was the one adopted by most of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, among them Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms,⁵⁵ and it had a dominant influence in the development of the theology of the "special cherub" circle which produced the "Pesaq."

Against this background it is possible to understand the polemical tone of the opening words of the "Pesaq": It seems that the readers of the "Pesaq" conceived of the Glory as an object for their prayers, and at the same time believed that it had anthropomorphic attributes, for it is revealed to the prophets in physical images. The author, therefore, states clearly that these images cannot be attributed to the Glory, which is hidden and does not have any likeness, and only thus can it indeed serve as an object for human prayer, for prayer to a being which does have a physical image might be considered pure idolatry. The necessity of seeing the divine Glory as the power toward which one turns in prayer makes it imperative that it be denied all anthropomorphic attributes. This seems to be the "Pesaq" author's main concern.

The most important aspect of this attitude for our subject is that we find here the earliest evidence—in this treatise and in parallel discussions in other texts of the same period—for the existence of a hitherto unknown problem: Who, or What, is the object of human prayer? The subject is developed further in the text of the "Pesaq":

Concerning what is written "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,"⁵⁶ and "the eyes of God," and "a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above"⁵⁷—all these metaphors⁵⁸ do not refer to the place of His Holiness and the Shekhinah. For I have explained that His Holiness does not have any image or form, only voice, spirit and speech, and the heavens and the earth are full of Him. No created being can know the place of His Holiness and Glory, nor can any angel or seraph or all the hosts and legions of the heavens, as it is said: "Blessed be the Glory of the Lord from His place."⁵⁹ Rather, all the metaphors in the Scriptures, such as "Let us make man in our image," refer, as I have explained, to His Greatness, which is His Kingdom, which is in the East.

Instead of Ibn Ezra's explanation that the revealed element in the divine world is the lower aspect of the divine Glory, which was accepted by most of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, we find here a different symbolism: the revealed aspect of God, described in the anthropomorphic verses of the Bible, is a separate being called here

"Greatness" and "Kingdom," a being that resides in the East, while the Glory or the Shekhinah cannot be seen either by man or angel, and it resides in the West.⁶⁰ The author proceeds to describe this being:

And so the *Shi'ur Qomah* of Rabbi Ishmael refers to that Greatness and Kingdom, and it is called the special cherub, who is emanated from His great fire, which is a fire that feeds on fire. . . . That fire which feeds on fire is His Holiness and His Glory, and from that fire He emanated and created the special cherub, not from the same fire from which the angels were created . . . but from the fire which He emanated from His Holiness, and not from the fire from which the hosts of heaven were created, so that His glory would not be the same as theirs.⁶¹ And He created for him an image and a form, the form of a man, eyes and hands and hips, and on his forehead is engraved "YAH 'Akhatri'el,"⁶² and [there are] phylacteries on his head⁶³ . . . and he has the Measurement of the Height (*Shi'ur Qomah*) of Rabbi Ishmael, and man was created in his image, and he sits on the throne of Glory.

It is evident that this being, the special cherub, is considered by the author to be the subject of all anthropomorphic images—those in the Bible, those in talmudic literature, and those in the early Hebrew mystical works of Heikhalot and Merkavah mysticism. His endeavor to explain away all physical descriptions of God is quite similar to that of the Jewish philosophers in the Middle Ages, with one clear difference: the author here does not try to cleanse God from such metaphors, for this is taken for granted; he concentrated his efforts on proving that the divine Glory, the Holiness, cannot be described in such terms, which refer, according to him, to a lower, emanated being which he calls Greatness, Kingdom⁶⁴ or the special cherub. The term "special cherub" probably originated in Saadia's writings, for the Gaon also attributed all physical images to a lower being which he described as an angel created specifically for that purpose. But in this mystical circle, that being is not the *kavod*-Shekhinah of Saadia, but a lower being—albeit emanated—while the *kavod*-Shekhinah is cleansed from such attributes.

How difficult this task was, from a terminological point of view, becomes evident from the last sentence of the section quoted: The power which sits on the Throne of Glory is not the Glory, as the term denotes, but the special cherub, while the Glory cannot be described with such an anthropomorphic term as "sitting."

In the concluding passage of this brief treatise the author returns to his main subject—the liturgy:

That special cherub which sits on his throne of Glory has a partition made of electrum, in various colors, which is called 'Ishiel, and it is somewhat like light blue. That partition encircles the throne of Glory on three sides, except the western side, where His Holiness in the West shines on His greatness in the East on the throne of Glory. And this is the meaning of "Blessed is the Glory of the Lord"⁶⁵—the Glory of the Lord is His Holiness, "from its place"—it goes and shines over His greatness and His kingdom. And it is to this Glory that we direct ourselves when we say the benedictions and say "Blessed is the Glory of the Lord from its place." In the same way every "Blessed" (*barukh*) which is uttered by those who fear God should be intended to bless and thank and pay homage to that Glory of His Holiness. . . .⁶⁶

. . . For God made that special cherub so that all the princes of heaven will have an allotted place to praise and glorify their creator . . . , for His Holiness does not have either form or image. This is why we end the third benediction⁶⁷ "the Holy God" (*ha-El ha-qadosh*), and not "the great God" (*ha-El ha-gadol*), as I have explained, so that, while worshipping his creator, one should not intend or bless anything but His Holiness which does not have any form or image, for Thou art a Great and Holy King, Great in His greatness, and His kingdom is the special cherub, and holy is His Holiness which is in the West, and this is our faith."

The concluding words refer to the author's sources: "This is a secret, studied in the Baraita of Joseph ben Uzziel⁶⁸ who revealed it from the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah and it should be revealed

only to those who can keep secrets, from the book of Rabbi Avigdor ha-Sarefat, of blessed memory."⁶⁹

It is evident that the primary concern of the author of the "Pesaq" is to clarify to his readers the object of human prayers, the divine aspect which is intended to listen and receive human worship. In order to achieve this purpose he has to overcome an obstacle: the anthropomorphic attributes in ancient literature. Obviously, the same divine aspect cannot serve both functions—revelation to the prophets which necessitates assuming human form, and acceptance of the prayers—for praying to a being which has form and image is construed as idolatry. Therefore his main object is to explain to the readers that God has a special aspect which has a form and is revealed to the prophets, which is called His greatness, His kingdom, the special cherub which sits on the throne of Glory and resides in the East, while the prayers should be directed toward another divine aspect, from which the special cherub is emanated. That is the divine Glory, which is called His Holiness, or Shekhinah, and resides in the West, in a place unknown to all the hosts of heaven because it does not have any form or image.

This distinction between the revealed aspect of God and the hidden power which receives the prayers is a new one, as is the whole concept of the special cherub; we do not know of any similar formulation before the second half of the twelfth century. In this period, however, there are parallels to the structure described in the "Pesaq," most clearly in the works of the Ashkenazi Hasidim from the circle of Rabbi Judah the Pious, who adopted the Ibn Ezra system of a dual divine Glory, the higher "face" of which is hidden, and a lower face which is revealed to the prophets, both being aspects of an emanated Glory. However the Ashkenazi Hasidim added to the Ibn Ezra system a crucial element—prayers should be directed toward the upper, hidden "face" of the divine Glory.⁷⁰ The author of the "Pesaq," and his sources in the circle which relied on the pseudepigraphic works attributed to Joseph ben Uzziel, preferred a structure which includes separate beings, the lower one for the purpose of revelation and the higher one for the purpose of prayers. It is evident, however, that the changes in

the concept of the Glory and the divine world introduced by these esoteric writers in the systems of Saadia and Ibn Ezra stem from one basic difference: The earlier philosophers never discussed the problem of intention during prayers; the object of human prayer was not one of the theological questions they set out to solve. The Ashkenazi Hasidim, and the "special cherub" circle, had to adopt earlier systems to the new spiritual environment, in which the problem of the object of human prayer was a paramount one.

There is a close connection between the religious problem of the anthropomorphic expressions and that of the object of prayer: Both these problems tend to enhance a system which describes various aspects in the divine world, for both questions postulate divine functions which are difficult to attribute to the supreme Godhead. But while both of them are quite similar as problems, the answer to one can never be an answer to the other. They must be mutually exclusive, because one and the same divine aspect cannot be invisible in order to receive the prayers and yet be revealed in form and image to the prophets. This is the reason why in the writings of these early Jewish esoteric writers we find an increasing tendency to identify various aspects in the divine world and create systems of emanating divine powers. There are at least two functions which have to be performed by lower powers and not the Godhead itself, while these two functions cannot be carried out by the same lower power. Thus, the seeds of a mythological concept of the divine world, which includes various powers which perform different functions, have been planted in these esoteric works. When the early kabbalistic texts, which describe a system of ten such powers, were first received by Jewish thinkers late in the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, the concept which their symbolism represented was, therefore, not as novel as one tends to suppose, for even if the answer—the kabbalistic symbolism—was a new one, the problems which necessitated a divine hierarchy of powers were not new any more.

Rabbi Judah the Pious's commentary on the prayers, as reflected in the quotations in "Sodot ha-Tefillah," represents a new departure in the medieval Jewish attitude toward the text of the prayers. The "Pesaq" translated above is an example of a new attitude

toward the relationship between a person praying and the divine power which accepts his prayer. Both new attitudes were the cornerstones for a completely novel concept of the liturgy developed later by the kabbalah. The question which should be discussed at this point is: Can we identify the reason for the emergence of this new attitude in the cultural and religious environment of the late twelfth century?

IV

The problem of directing oneself during prayer toward a certain aspect in the divine world did not arise in earlier Jewish sources, the Bible, the Talmud, the Midrash and the writings of the geonim, because the concept of God in these sources did not prevent the worshipper from believing that God listens to his prayers and may answer them. The concept of God which was open to images according to which God participated in human battles, rewarded the righteous and punished the wicked, was consistent with a religious system according to which God demands prayers at certain times and places, and inspired the sages to compose a mandatory text for these prayers, combining the practice of daily prayer in the wider system of divine providence and guidance of human affairs.

When this concept of the divine was replaced in the Middle Ages by a completely different one, based mainly on the writings of Aristotle, the old concepts could not be preserved unchanged. The new definition of God insisted, first and foremost, on the eternal existence of God, and this eternity necessitated a concept of an eternally unchanging God. Every change, argued the medieval philosophers, denotes a certain lack that existed before, which the change came to correct; therefore, by definition, God cannot change. Thus, He cannot be influenced in any way, either by prayers or by any other means. Since He is the supreme wisdom, He cannot receive new information, for if it really were new, it would mean that He was ignorant before receiving it, which is impossible by definition. Therefore, God cannot "listen" to a human prayer; he cannot absorb it as information, and He cannot

be influenced by it, because neither change nor ignorance are possible in the divine realm. The Aristotelian Prime Mover, which became the basic concept of the divine in all Jewish schools of thought in the Middle Ages, even the mystical ones,⁷² necessitated a new approach to all problems of divine "activity," casting doubts upon old concepts not only of divine providence, but even on the act of creation itself. Jewish philosophy, from the tenth century onwards, was created in order to reconcile the new concept of the unchanging God with the old traditions in the sacred religious texts, and offered a new way of religious worship, based on spiritual and intellectual attitudes that lead man toward pure contemplation of God.

It is instructive for our problem that the Jewish philosophers did not dwell in any detail on the problem of reinterpretation of the Jewish concept of prayer in order to reconcile it with the new spiritual worship described by them, for the difficulties were enormous. The halakhic attitude toward the liturgy was—and is—very clear and definite, and the philosophers who were also halakhists did not deviate from it. Saadia wrote a halakhic monograph on the text and laws of prayer, and so, of course, did Maimonides in his *Mishneh Torah*; both are perfectly orthodox works, neither reflecting nor referring to the implications of the new concept of God for the practice of daily prayer. This is not the proper place to deal in detail with Maimonides' brief treatment of the subject of prayer in the *Guide for the Perplexed*.⁷³ Suffice it to say that this work did not—and does not—offer the average reader any clear answer to the problem of how the Prime Mover can listen to an individual's daily prayer.

To this basic question there was added another as a result of the spiritualization of religious life that was prevalent among the adherents of rational philosophy.⁷⁴ Even when prayers were given a significant place in the framework of the relationship between man and God,⁷⁵ the religious emphasis remained on the personal, individual contact between the worshipper and the divine world, and the connection was described in terms of love and communion, sometimes expressed in words. Naturally, these words of worship were considered to be a reflection of the specific charac-

teristics of the moment of worship, expressing the feelings and thoughts of the worshipper on that particular occasion. This concept of the verbal connection between God and man had nothing in common with the traditional Jewish laws concerning prayer: Jewish prayer is not personal, because it insists that everybody use the same text; it is not individual, because it insists that prayers should be said in a fixed social structure, at certain times and certain places, in a public place together with other Jews. This traditional character of prayer could not be explained on the basis of rationalistic, individual worship. Every person should have the right—and the need—to express his feelings toward God in his own words, which reflect the specific moment and circumstances in which he addresses Him; he should be able to apply to God in any place and at any time that he feels the need to do so, without being bound by the halakhic laws concerning the traditional prayers. This contradiction between the teachings of rational, individualistic philosophy and the demands of the halakhah was characteristic of the more general conflict between the new concept of religious life and the traditional *mishvot*, only more so. While other commandments, like *sha'atnez* or *shisit* seemed to be meaningless in the framework of rational, personal worship,⁷⁶ the text and laws of the prayers seemed to contradict the prevailing concept of religious life. Moreover, while other commandments were based on clear biblical demands and were believed to express divine demands, even if their reasons were hidden, the text of the prayers and the laws concerning them were derived from a historical occurrence—the destruction of the temple and the impossibility of offering sacrifices. Both the text and the laws were instituted by relatively late rabbinic authorities, who composed the wording of the benedictions and taught the halakhah concerning the place and time of worship. For the Jewish intellectual in the twelfth century, the problem of prayer was, therefore, one aspect of the overall contradiction between prevailing concepts of spiritual worship and the old tradition, but it was one of the most difficult and perplexing sections of this problem, for which even the *Guide* did not offer a clear answer.

It seems that the emerging mystical attitude toward prayer in the

second half of the twelfth century should be understood against the background of these problems—the need to reconcile praying with the new concept of God as the unchanging, eternal power which cannot be influenced, and the feeling that the text of the liturgy does not bring man, as an individual worshipper, closer to God. This does not mean that we should regard the mystical attitude as a polemical, antiphilosopical reaction to the prevailing mood of the age, as had been done two generations before.⁷⁷ Quite the contrary: The mystical attitude toward prayer, as reflected in the "Pesaq ha-yir'ah ve-ha-'emunah" and similar sources could not evolve if it were not for the fact that the mystics themselves craved to accept the crucial elements of rationalistic philosophy concerning the nature of God. The author of the "Pesaq" does not argue that, contrary to Maimonidean-Aristotelian concepts, God does listen to human prayer and that He can be in touch with every praying person and answer his requests; the author, like other mystics, only insists that below the Godhead that is completely hidden and remote from human worship there is another divine power which can and does listen to prayers and answers them. This is an attempt to preserve the transcendence of God and at the same time describe the divine world in such terms that intimate human connection with it may remain possible. The only way to achieve this is to give up the philosophical concept of the "unity" of God, and treat lower divine powers as the object of human religious life in mystical terms. This mystical attitude is not a reaction toward the philosophical upheaval of the Middle Ages; it is an attempt to preserve the most important concept introduced by the philosophers—the transcendent character of God and His remoteness from any activity in the created world, while at the same time not to give up the belief in a personal God, who provides for the created world and listens to human prayers. This dual purpose could not be achieved while still holding fast to the rationalistic methods of medieval philosophy. The philosophers themselves, naturally, preferred loyalty to rational methods even at the cost of undermining the belief in a personal, provident God; the mystics preferred the content of the ideas of rationalistic orthodoxy, and thus they could disregard the departure from

rational method as long as both contrasting concepts of God were upheld. Obviously, the term "reaction" is completely inappropriate for a description of the relationship between Jewish mysticism and Jewish philosophy. Medieval universal concepts made a drastic choice mandatory for every thinker in that period; nobody could uphold all elements of the traditional beliefs and embrace, at the same time, completely and conclusively, the new, Greek-influenced methods of inquiry into the nature of the divine realm. A choice had to be made, and this choice divided the mystics from the rationalistic philosophers. While the former accepted the possibility of a division within the divine world and the existence of divine emanations, which included, below the Prime Mover, various aspects of the personal God, the latter followed logical methods and denied the possibility that such divine powers took part in providence over the created world. Scholars have already pointed out the similarity of the problems facing Jewish philosophers and mystics even when their answers differed,⁷⁸ and it seems that the attitude toward prayer is one of the clearest examples for such a situation.

Another aspect of the same process is the attitude toward the text of the prayers. Rabbi Judah warned his neighbors in France and Britain that if they allow even the most minor changes in that text, their prayers will become "like the songs of the uncircumcised non-Jews." Free expression of feelings, religious or secular, was regarded by Rabbi Judah as a non-Jewish song, which has no place in the framework of worship. While this argument was not directed against rationalistic philosophers but against fellow halakhists and pietists, the problem faced in this commentary by Rabbi Judah is the same one that bothered the philosophers and all thinkers of that period: Why does God insist on a repetitive prayer, said again and again several times every day in exactly the same words, instead of allowing free expression of the individual's religious feelings in his personal words, reflecting every special occasion? The framework of rationalistic philosophy did not offer a popularly accepted answer to this question, a fact that necessarily weakened the position of the traditional text of the liturgy in the eyes of the intellectuals of the age. It seems that the school that

Rabbi Judah represented was the first to offer an answer to that problem—a nonrational answer, bordering on a mystical attitude, namely, the existence of a hidden, esoteric harmony between the text of the prayer and a divine structure, mainly a numerical structure, which is also reflected in the Scriptures, in history and in the creation. Therefore, every deviation from this structure destroys that harmony and secularizes the text of the prayers, turning them simply into collections of words and meanings, like the songs of the non-Jews. Clearly, the driving force behind such a concept of the liturgy was the attempt to give religious meaning, even if it be a mystical one, to the fixed, repetitive text of the prayer book, and the polemics against the minor changes held by the "Frenchmen" was a secondary outcome of the main process. Here also, while rationalism pointed the way toward forsaking the traditional text of the prayers, Rabbi Judah did not defend it by claiming, for instance, that only by the daily repetition of the *Shema*^c can a person express his own individual and changing feelings. The school he represented chose to depart from rational thought and present a mystical system that gave a completely new (and hidden) layer of meaning to the practice of prayer.

V

This departure from rationalistic attitudes was not an easy one for most Jewish mystics. The study of the various attitudes toward prayer in the writings of the early Jewish mystics does not reveal a unified system, but a plethora of terms, explanations and exegeses which clearly denote the enormous difficulties which faced them while formulating their novel approaches to this central problem. It seems that none of them defined these difficulties more clearly than Rabad himself, the main teacher of the kabbalistic school in Provence, who, in one paradoxical sentence, expressed the complexity of the religious problem he was facing.

We do not have in our possession any kabbalistic text written by Rabad himself. Very few sentences in his writings can be interpreted to reflect a kabbalistic attitude, and the rest are "traditions" (*qabbalot*) preserved by later kabbalists, which have to be carefully

analyzed before credence can be given to their being original expressions of Rabad's positions. One such tradition is preserved in manuscript,⁷⁹ in a series of such *qabbalot* concerning prayer, of which the main speaker is one of the early kabbalists in the Provence, Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir.⁸⁰ Rabbi Jacob's attitude is expressed very clearly, in a way undoubtedly accepted by the later redactors of the text, because it reflects the views which became the basic ones in later kabbalah and those accepted as normative in most details. Rabbi Jacob teaches his readers to direct every part of the prayers to the relevant *sefirah*, divine power, which can and will listen and answer. Thus, the first such "tradition" reads: "The first three [benedictions in the 'Amidah] and the last three—to *Binah*, and the middle ones—in daytime to *Tiferet* and at night all of them to *Binah*".⁸¹ The six blessings which are usually regarded as praises of God should be directed to the third *sefirah*, which is the first one, or the highest one, which influences the created world, while the intermediate ones, which are regarded as requests, should be directed to the central power which rules the world, the sixth *sefirah*, *Tiferet*. This attitude is probably reflected also in an antikabbalistic text, the epistle of Rabbi Meir ben Simeon of Narbonne.⁸² Later in the text there are more "traditions" of Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir, all reflecting the same basic system. But before those further traditions are quoted, the text has the following statement: "The tradition of Rabbi Abraham [Rabad], the first three and the last three to *'Illat ha-'Illot*, and the middle ones to *Yošer bereshit*." Unlike the statements of Rabbi Jacob, this system presented in this sentence was not accepted by later kabbalists and was not used in their systems of intentions in prayer. This fact seems to prove that we do have here an original tradition of Rabad's, for while one may suspect later pseudepigraphy if Rabad is quoted as one more witness for the accepted systems of later mystics, it is very difficult to imagine anyone inventing, or editing in a radical way, an utterance which disagrees with the prevalent beliefs of the age. There can be little doubt about the authenticity of this sentence, and its attribution to Rabad can be accepted.

G. Scholem analyzed in detail the terminology used by Rabad in this sentence,⁸³ and there is little doubt that the use of the

Aristotelian term *'Illat ha-'illot* ("The Cause of causes," the first cause, the prime mover) is quoted here in a sense completely in agreement with the original meaning—the supreme Godhead, be it *'Ein Sof* or *Keter*, the highest *sefirah*. For in any way that we interpret this term it will still mean a divine power which is far removed from the created world and does not take any part in the daily providence over all existence. Therefore, the first and last blessings of the prayer should be directed, according to Rabad, to a divine power which cannot listen and cannot answer, being completely transcendent, and it makes no difference whether we take the words themselves to denote a philosophical or a mystical term. *Yošer bereshit*, the creator, the demiurge, on the other hand, is clearly an active power who is central to the process of creation and therefore also the process of daily providence, be it a reference to *Binah* or just a general term for the active aspect of God. These "practical" requests of the thirteen intermediate blessings are to be directed, according to the Rabad, to a divine power which can listen to them and answer them.

When formulating such an attitude, Rabad deviates both from the accepted philosophical attitude and the mystical one. He accepts the division of the divine world into transcendent and active, which the philosophers, especially the Maimonidean school, opposed. Yet, on the other hand, he does not join his fellow mystics in designating every part of the liturgy to its proper divine power which was emanated for that particular purpose, for he insists that the first six should be directed to the transcendent Godhead. This is the classical compromise in which the combined system loses all the advantages of both ideologies it tries to reconcile. Rabad, who was familiar with Aristotelian philosophy as well as with the early ideas of the kabbalah,⁸⁴ was undoubtedly aware of the nature of the compromise he was putting forward in this system. Why did he choose this way?

What may be illogical in the framework of systematic thinking can be well understood on the background of religious needs. We emphasized above the fact that Jewish mystics joined the Jewish philosophers in the acceptance of the new concept of the transcendent God, as defined with the help of Aristotelian philosophy.

Rabad, as one of them, could not adopt a system which, while recognizing the existence of such supreme divine power, divorces it completely from the horizons of practical, daily religious worship. He undoubtedly knew that such a divine power cannot listen to or answer human prayers, and because of this he directed the requests in the prayers to an active, lower divine power; yet he felt that he had to insist that some part of the practice of worship should be directed to the supreme Godhead, even if it could not have any practical, religious meaning. It is as if he were saying to his disciples, to people like Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir: "It is a beautiful system of intentions in prayers that you are describing; take my thirteen intermediate blessings and divide them according to your traditions. But the six first and last, these I shall keep and say in another way, the Maimonidean one, even though I know that it is of no avail. At least a part of the prayers should be directed to the supreme Godhead, and it does not matter whether He can listen or not." This attitude is completely paradoxical and unsystematic, but very understandable and true from a religious point of view, which does not hesitate to adopt paradoxical, illogical ideas if they satisfy basic religious needs. If the needs be conflicting—like the need for a personal, close, intimate divine power and a need for an eternal, remote, transcendent Godhead—a paradox must be the result. Scholem summarized this deep conflict in the hearts of the early kabbalists in a sentence that reads: "Their gnostic conception penetrates and enters their prayers also, but does not conquer them completely."⁸⁵

VI

The great variety and the conflicting attitudes in the schools of the early Jewish mystics concerning the liturgy can be demonstrated by one more text, which is probably the earliest appearance of a mystical, kabbalistic concept of prayer in a halakhic, popular work. Rabbi Asher ben Saul of Lunel wrote his *Sefer ha-minhagot*⁸⁶ early in the thirteenth century. He was undoubtedly close to various mystical circles, though it is doubtful whether he himself was a kabbalist. It is however clear that his brother, the same Rabbi

Jacob ha-Nazir, was one of the first kabbalists who formulated a detailed system of intentions for prayer based on kabbalistic symbolism.

The halakhists of the thirteenth century usually were careful not to combine kabbalah with halakhah, and Rabbi Asher was no exception. Yet when he was dealing with the explanation of the structure of the verse of *Shema' Yisra'el*⁸⁷ he deviated somewhat and did include a sentence which revealed mystical interpretation of that key verse:

The meaning is that each Israelite says to himself and to others: Accept God, our Lord, who is the divine Glory (=*kavod*) who resides above the cherubs. God is one, who is the Supreme Crown (*Keter 'Elyon*), and about Him it was said: Before one, what to do you count? But others say that it was said with reference to *Tif'eret Yisra'el*, and that it is a great mystery.

The problem that Rabbi Asher discussed is the syntactical one: Why does the verse repeat twice, unnecessarily, God's name ("God is one" could serve the purpose of the meaning; why repeat "God, our Lord, God is one"?). After the passage quoted here the author deals with several grammatical explanations, but here a theological reason is given—the repetition is necessary because it refers to various aspects of God. Among these he mentions: (1) the divine Glory, which in this context is undoubtedly synonymous with the Shekhinah, for the Shekhinah is the traditional term for the divine power which resides above the cherubs in the Temple; and (2) the Supreme Crown, which is a term used in the *Bahir*, the earliest kabbalistic book, to denote the highest divine power, but which was often used in previous Jewish sources in a less defined manner to describe a power in the divine world,⁸⁸ so that this term does not necessarily signify that a kabbalistic system is being used here. This term too, refers to the first *sefirah* in the nonkabbalistic system of the *Book of Creation*, or perhaps to the divine power above the *sefirot* according to that ancient text of the talmudic period.⁸⁹ Thus the multiple references to God in the key verse of every Jewish prayer are explained by a system which recognizes various

aspects in God without using the kabbalistic symbolism of ten divine powers, and the terminology used could be completely independent of kabbalistic symbolism.

The second sentence offers another explanation, which is not given in full. Rabbi Asher hints that there is another system, according to which the seemingly superfluous name of God in the verse refers to the power called *Tiferet Yisra'el*. The context is therefore clearly kabbalistic, for this term is found only in purely kabbalistic texts (even the *Bahir* does not use it).⁹⁰ Rabbi Asher terms this system "a great mystery" and does not wish to elucidate it any further. One might guess that if he were pressed on this point, he could have said, "Go ask my brother, Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir, he is an expert on this subject." Indeed, until the writings of the Gerona kabbalists Rabbi Jacob was the only one who explained in detail how one should direct his prayers to the various *sefirot*.

This passage seems to prove the independence of the mystical interpretation of the liturgy from the emergence of the kabbalah even in places and circles where the kabbalah was known. Rabbi Asher, who knew at least some kabbalah, regarded kabbalistic symbolism concerning the liturgy as one possible explanation, but not the only one, and the idea that different divine powers take part in the structure of the prayer can be gleaned from Hebrew esoteric ideology and terminology which developed before or alongside the kabbalah. This seems to be a clear testimony to the fact that the problem of the direction of the prayers was not sought only in the circles which produced the kabbalah, but far and wide among Jewish intellectuals in the twelfth century.

VII

Another indication of the centrality of the problem of prayer in Jewish nonkabbalistic esoteric and mystical thought is to be found in a short treatise from the beginning of the thirteenth century, which is probably the first which deals not only with the intention of the prayers but with the mystical status of the prayers themselves. Many bibliographical and terminological problems with

which we cannot deal here, are raised by this text. The important facts, are, however, these: The text was included in Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's work known as "Sefer ha-Hokhmah" ("Book of Wisdom"), which was written in the same year that his teacher, Rabbi Judah the Pious, died, and the exact date, 1217, is mentioned in the preface to the book.⁹¹ It is very doubtful, if not completely impossible, that Rabbi Eleazar is the author of this text; it uses terminology and concepts which cannot be found in the many volumes of esoteric works by Rabbi Eleazar which are known to us. The editor of the "Book of Wisdom," who did his work after Rabbi Eleazar, notes that this text is a commentary on the holy name of forty-two letters by Rabbi Hai Gaon.⁹² It seems, therefore, that Rabbi Eleazar included in the series of commentaries on the holy names, which comprise the first half of the "Book of Wisdom," one text which was attributed to Hai, without trying to integrate its terminology and content with those found in Rabbi Eleazar's own attitude toward this problem. Thus, it is impossible to date this text with any certainty, but it is probable that it was written late in the twelfth century.

The text is very difficult to translate, because of the frequent use of *gematria* and other Hebrew homiletical methods,⁹³ but its major theses can be described as homiletical attempts to combine various mystical symbols with the essence of prayer. The author identifies Yufiel (an angelic name, but like similar names in this text, they do not refer to inferior angelic powers but to divine aspects) as the "priest" in the divine world. He is the one who accepts the key part of the prayer, the blessing of the *kohanim* (priests) through the 1800 angels who receive it from Israel and transfer it to Yufiel the Priest. Then it is sacrificed on the divine altar by the power called Barkiel.⁹⁴ Then it is given to Sandalphon, a talmudic angelic name,⁹⁵ who is identified as the power revealed to Moses, and the name "God" in the Bible refers to him.

Yufiel is then identified with the Crown (*atarah*) on the head of the Creator, a crown which is comprised of the holy name of forty-two characters, and it was revealed to Ezekiel in the chariot. This Crown is the divine power which Moses could not see (Exodus 33:23).

The author continues this series of identifications and states: "When the Crown is on the head of the Creator, it is called Akhatri'el,⁹⁶ and then it is the Crown (*keter*)."⁹⁷ Both these terms, *'atarah* and *keter*, are key kabbalistic symbols, but the first refers to the tenth and lowest divine power, while *keter* is the first and highest; only in a nonkabbalistic system can they be identified as one and the same. This power, *'atarah-keter*, is then described by the author as being the divine glory (*kavod*) and at the same time the prayer: "for the prayer (*tefillah*) is a prayer (*selota*) to God, and she sits to the left of God like a bride beside her bridegroom, and it is called princess (*bat melekh*), and sometimes because of her function she is called 'echo' (*bat qol*)."⁹⁸ The author then identifies the prayer as the Shekhinah, which is described as an emanated power which resides with God, and is called a princess because she resides in His home. He concludes this section by stating: "He [God] has a Prayer, which is called *'ešlo* ['with Him']⁹⁹ and she is the Tenth *Malkhut* (*malkhut 'asirit*), and she is the supreme mystery (*sod kol ha-sodot*)."

In the second half of this short text, the author emphatically identifies this divine power as the *Shi'ur Qomah* described in *Heikhalot* literature,¹⁰⁰ and the power seen by the prophets even though it is an emanated power. According to him, this Shekhinah resided on earth before the deluge, and only because of the sins of those generations she left earth and ascended to heaven. He emphatically states that while the Shekhinah can be revealed to prophets, the Creator himself is completely hidden. In one half-sentence he hints at a connection between the Shekhinah and the cherub.¹⁰¹ Further descriptions of the Crown (*keter*) follow, and the author concludes with homiletical interpretation of another portion of the prayers, and then finishes by stating: "This is the mystery of the Crown and the Shekhinah; everybody who knows it has a portion of the next world, he will be saved from the judgment in hell and inherit both worlds [this and the next one], and he is beloved both in heaven and on earth."

The relationship between the symbolism used by this author and kabbalistic symbolism is very problematic, because it is very difficult to assume that the symbols of *keter*, *'atarah* and *malkhut*

‘asirit were known in a prekabbalistic and nonkabbalistic context, and it is even more difficult to interpret this whole text as a kabbalistic one. But the central point for this study is that it does not depend on the way that one may solve this problem: It is clear that in this text, the prayer, the *tefillah* or in Aramaic *selota*, is a divine power itself, not only a means by which contact with a divine power is achieved. The theological context of this text is not one debating whether the prayers should be directed toward the Shekhinah or not, and whether the Shekhinah is a divine, emanated power or a created one; in this text the prayer is the Shekhinah, and the prayer itself is an emanated power, which has a place in the divine world as a crown of the hidden Creator. Thus the prayer is transformed from being a mystical way toward God into being a mystical essence by itself. When a person prays, according to this mystical attitude, he does not pray to the Shekhinah or the Creator; he is praying to the prayer itself. Human prayer becomes here a lower manifestation of the divine prayer, an earthly symbol of the mystical entity of the prayer, one mysterious part of the whole “mystery of all mysteries.”

Our knowledge of this period is certainly incomplete, but it is still wide and detailed enough to be certain that the attitude reflected in this pseudo-Hai text was not the prevailing one, not even a fairly common one. It might even be regarded as a unique, disregarded phenomenon. But two facts have to be borne in mind while analyzing it. First, it is an indication of things to come, for in later Jewish mysticism, from Zoharic kabbalah on, similar attitudes toward prayer are to be found, sometimes in a central position and often as one dimension in a much larger system. Second, the text should be viewed as one indication of a much wider religious phenomenon, the search for a new meaning to the liturgy. Most thinkers in the late twelfth century and the early thirteenth did not reach such radical mystical conclusions, but most of them were inching their way from the one extreme of the rationalistic denial of any contact between prayer and the Prime Mover toward a more meaningful, somewhat mystical attitude, represented by the various texts surveyed here.

Notes

1. Ancient Jewish mysticism in the talmudic period, known as Heikhalot and Merkavah mysticism (holy palaces and holy chariot), did not deal with the problem of liturgy, especially not in connection with the mystical ascent to the divine realm, described in detail in Heikhalot Rabbati and Heikhalot Zutarti. (See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 2d ed. [New York, 1954], pp. 40–79, and his book devoted to this period, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* [New York, 1960]). Though some of their mystical hymns later became a part of the Jewish prayerbook, there is no specific reliance on prayer in connection with mystical experience.
2. Rabbi Meir ben Simeon of Narbonne, in a polemical epistle against the kabbalists (published by G. Scholem, "Te'udah hadashah le-toledot reshit ha-qabbalah," *Sefer Bialik* [Tel Aviv, 1934], pp. 148–50): "It is now some time since fools and ignoramuses have wrongly interpreted our faith in God and the matter of prayers and benedictions," etc. His polemic is directed mainly against the kabbalists who directed various parts of the liturgy, at different times, to various aspects of the Godhead, that is, to the different *sefirot*.
3. On Rabad see Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquieres* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), especially pp. 286–300; on the kabbalistic school in Provence see G. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Berlin, 1962), pp. 175–272.
4. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge*, pp. 324–406.
5. A short description of these schools and their major works is presented in my *Torat ha-sod shel hasidut 'Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 46–67.
6. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge*, pp. 273–91.
7. See my *'Iyyunim be-sifrut hasidei 'Ashkenaz* (Ramat Gan, 1975), pp. 89–111.
8. While the *'Iyyun* circle relied mainly on "tannaitic" sources (especially those mentioned in Heikhalot and Merkavah literature) and geonic sources, the "special cherub" mystics relied on a tradition described as if transmitted by the family of Ben Sira, beginning with his father, the prophet Jeremiah, through Sira's son, Uzziel, and his grandson, Joseph ben Uzziel.
9. The correspondence between these schools was analyzed by G. Scholem in *Sefer Bialik*, pp. 141–47.
10. A translation of this text into German was published by G. Scholem in *Das Buch Bahir* (Leipzig, 1923; reprint ed., Darmstadt, 1970).
11. Rabbi Isaac's most important work, the commentary on *Sefer Yesirah* (*The Book of Creation*), was printed by G. Scholem in his *Ha-Qabbalah be-Provens* (Jerusalem, 1963), pp. 1–18 in an appendix.
12. Very few of their works were printed; see the list of the printed works and works in manuscript in *Torat ha-sod*, pp. 256–67.
13. His commentary on the *Book of Creation* was printed by Georges Vajda, "Perush Sefer Yesirah le-Rabbi Elhanan ben Yaqr," *Qoves 'al yad* 16 (1966): 145–97. Two other works were printed by me in *Torat ha-'Elohot shel Hasidei 'Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem, 1977).
14. See E. E. Urbach, *Arugat ha-bosem*, 4 vols. (Jerusalem, 1939–63), 4: 73–111, and my comments in *'Iyyunim*, pp. 58–71.
15. For one of the descriptive quotations, see below, n. 22.

16. The most important ones are those of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Opp. 160 (Neubauer 1204), Paris (MS 772) and Vienna (MS 108). Some of the differences between the various manuscripts should be explained as resulting from Rabbi Eleazar's own corrections and reediting of the work.
17. See a short list in *Torat ha-sod*, p. 15, n. 2.
18. If the verse under discussion is added, there are twenty such names.
19. According to the author, the number of holy names in this section of the liturgy should correspond exactly to the number of times that the name is mentioned in the first portion of the book of Exodus.
20. Literally: by clasps and loops (*bi-qerasim u-ve-lula'ot*). This term, based on B. T. Shabbat 99a (cf. Exodus 26), is repeated frequently in this text.
21. *Sodot u-te'amim harbeh me'od.*
22. *Mahziqim yoter mi-shemonah quntresim gedolim.*
23. The author here uses the language of the verse under discussion, thus stating: You achieve the content of this verse by *not* using it in the liturgy.
24. Meaning that this specific form appears three times in the Bible (1 Kings 18:36, 2 Chron. 30:6, and probably referring to 1 Chron. 29:18).
25. I could not find an early source for this statement.
26. MS Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, 8° 3 296, fol. 2.
27. *Ibid.*, fol. 7r.
28. See above, n. 16.
29. It is clear that Rabbi Judah did not regard the prayers as divine in their origin, but completely accepted the traditional description of the development of the prayers and their role after the destruction of the temple. The sages who wrote the prayers followed, however, a divine esoteric harmony.
30. Parts of Ashkenazi Hasidic esoteric literature are dedicated to biblical commentaries describing these characteristics of the Scriptures. See *'Iyyunim*, pp. 52–57.
31. Sections of Rabbi Eleazar's commentary on the liturgy follow the same system (besides literal interpretation and theological discussion), and comparison of the quotations included in this treatise and Rabbi Eleazar's commentary suggest that Rabbi Eleazar made use of his teacher's traditions when composing his work.
32. See *'Iyyunim*, pp. 66–67.
33. This is in contrast to the *piyyutim*; a whole literature of commentaries on them emerged long before Rabbi Judah (see Urbach, *'Arugat ha-bosem*, 4: 24–72).
34. I described the works of this circle in detail in "Hug ha-keruv ha-meyuhad bi-tenu'at ḥasidut 'Ashkenaz," *Tarbiz* 35 (1966): 349–72, reprinted in *'Iyyunim*, pp. 89–111.
35. Joseph ben Uzziel is described as the grandson of Ben Sira in the pseudo-Ben Sira (tenth century?). See my *Ha-sippur ha-'ivri bi-yemei ha-beinayim* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 69–78.
36. See Abraham Epstein, *Mi-Qadmoniyot ha-Yehudim* (Jerusalem, 1957), pp. 211–16.
37. See above, n. 13.
38. "Sha'rei ha-sod ha-yihud ve-ha-'emunah," *Kokhevi Yishaq* 27 (1862): 13–15 (based on MS Munich 92).

39. I published the text of Rabbi Eleazar's work in "Sha'arei ha-sod ha-yihud ve-ha-'emunah," *Temirin* 1 (1972): 141–56.
40. MS Adler 1161 (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York), fol. 70v.
41. *Yesh le-khavven ke-she-hem mevarekhim.*
42. According to *Sefer Yesirah* (*The Book of Creation*), 1:9, in the description of the first *sefirah*.
43. B.T. *Menaḥot* 43b.
44. 'Emunot ve-de'ot, chap. 2. Concerning this problem see my detailed discussion in *Torat ha-sod*, pp. 104–15.
45. The main text in which the Ashkenazi Hasidim discussed this problem was published in *'Iyyunim*, pp. 153–87.
46. Concerning this key text see G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 63–67; and his *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 36–42.
47. Saadia's answer is quoted by Judah ben Barzillai ha-Bargeloni in his *Perush Sefer Yesirah*, ed. S. J. Halberstam (Berlin, 1885), p. 21.
48. See the notes in *Torat ha-sod*, p. 112.
49. In the better versions of this work (MS British Museum Add. 15299, Cat. 752), the author, Rav Hamai, is described as knowing the secrets of the Hidden Glory in the opening sentence of the treatise.
50. *Yoser bereshit.*
51. See G. Scholem, *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit* (Zurich, 1962), pp. 135–90; E. E. Urbach, *HaZAL*, 'Emunot ve-de'ot (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 29–52.
52. Especially in his commentary on Exodus 33:23, and in chap. 12 of his short ethical treatise, *Yesod mora*.
53. See *'Iyyunim*, pp. 103–4.
54. Isaiah Tishby suggested that Sabbatai Donolo in tenth century Italy had already expressed the idea that the Glory was emanated; see *Torat ha-sod*, pp. 112–13.
55. A description of their attitude is presented in *Torat ha-sod*, pp. 129–42.
56. Genesis 1:26.
57. Ezekiel 1:26.
58. *Kol hanakh dimyonot.*
59. The verse in Ezekiel 3:12 was interpreted as indicating that the angels themselves did not know the place of the Glory, and this verse is included in the *qedushah*.
60. Compare Exodus Rabbah 2:2.
61. *She-lo le-hashvot kevodah li-khevodo.* (To prevent a misunderstanding *kavod* was not translated here as "glory," though the author certainly hints at a distinction between their status and His in the heavenly spheres.)
62. See B. T. *Berakhot* 7a.
63. See B. T. *Berakhot* 6a.
64. This term, *Malkhut* (Kingdom) became the most frequent symbol used by the kabbalists for the Shekhinah, the tenth and lowest divine power. The attribution of this term to the Shekhinah is unknown in early sources, and it is quite possible that it occurred in prekabbalistic esoteric circles. G. Scholem suggested that the source was in Judah Ibn Tibbon's translation of several sections of Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari*, and see below, sec. VII.
65. Ezekiel 3:12.

66. The author repeats in a sentence which is not translated here a formula describing five divine worlds, which appears in all the writings of this circle. See 'Iyyunim, p. 110 and n. 72 there.
67. The third benediction of the eighteen is the *qedushah*, which is discussed by the author.
68. This "baraita" is a medieval text, based on the *Sefer Yesirah*, which was attributed to the grandson of Ben Sira. See 'Iyyunim, pp. 92–93.
69. This scholar is not known from any source other than the texts from this circle. See 'Iyyunim, p. 98.
70. The relevant text by Rabbi Judah the Pious is his short commentary on "Aleinu le-shabbeah," which I published in *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature: Sifrut ha-yihud shel hasidei 'Ashkenaz*, pp. 82–84.
71. See, for instance, Maimonides' *Guide*, 1:33, and see below, n. 73.
72. Philosophical terminology describing the Prime Cause was used by kabbalists to describe either *Keter*, the highest of the *sefirot* (sometimes indistinguishable from 'Ein Sof), or 'Ein Sof Himself, the supreme, eternal Godhead.
73. See the detailed analysis by Marvin Fox, "Ha-Tefillah be-mahshavto shel ha-RaMBaM," in *Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan, 1978), pp. 142–67.
74. See my *Sifrut ha-musar ve-ha-derush* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 47–68; Isaiah Tishby, *Mivhar sifrut ha-musar* (Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 114–21 et passim.
75. Rabbi Bahya Ibn Paquda, for instance, rated the traditional prayers as part of the physical commandments, as opposed to the spiritual ones (which included man's nonverbal adherence to God). See references in the previous note.
76. A survey of medieval attitudes to this problem is to be found in Isaac Heinemann, *Ta'amie ha-misvot be-sifrut Yisra'el*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1959), 1: 46–116.
77. David Neumark, *Toledot ha-filosifyah be-Yisra'el*, 2 vols. (New York, 1921–29), 1: 166–354; and see G. Scholem's remarks concerning his thesis, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, pp. 6–9.
78. An analysis of the attitudes of the philosophers and the kabbalists toward the Greek concepts is to be found in Isaiah Tishby's discussion of the Godhead in *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1949–61), 1: 96–98.
79. MS Jewish Theological Seminary of America 838.
80. On his position among the early kabbalists see Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, pp. 200–6.
81. G. Scholem, *Reshit ha-qabbalah* (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 1948), p. 73, n. 2.
82. Rabbi Meir states that the kabbalists demanded, among other things, that one "pray to one created God during daytime and to another, a higher but still created one, at night." G. Scholem, in *Sefer Bialik*, p. 149.
83. Scholem, *Reshit ha-qabbalah*, pp. 75–78.
84. Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières*, pp. 273–86, and see my note on the subject: "Haqdamat ha-RaVaD le-Sefer ba'alei ha-nefesh," *Sinai* 77 (1975): 143–45.
85. Scholem, *Reshit ha-qabbalah*, pp. 96–97.
86. Published by Simḥah Assaf in his *Sifran shel rishonim* (Jerusalem, 1935), pp. 123–82.
87. Assaf's edition, p. 133.
88. The term appears usually in the plural, *ketarim*; but see the title *keter nora* (Solomon Musayoff, *Merkavah shelema* [Jerusalem, 1925], p. 6a).
89. An interpretation of this section is suggested by Ithamar Gruenwald in

"Some Critical Notes on the First Part of *Sefer Yezirā*," *Revue des études juives* 132 (1973): 475–512.

90. This term is derived from the mystical interpretation of the verse in 1 Chron. 29:11, which is not to be found in any nonkabbalistic circle nor in the *Bahir*. The first users of the terminology based on this verse are the kabbalists in the Provence, Rabbi Jacob ha-Nazir being one of the earliest.

91. The introduction to the Book of Wisdom, which includes the date, is printed in *'lyyunim*, pp. 45–50.

92. See my analysis of this problem in *Torat ha-sod*, pp. 123–28.

93. The text in Hebrew was published in *Torat ha-sod*, pp. 119–22; a German translation was included by Scholem in *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, pp. 162–66.

94. The name Barkiel is explained by the author as referring to sacrifices (*yaqriv-barqi*, the same letters in Hebrew).

95. B. T. Hagigah 13b, where Sandalphon is described as a power associated with Ezekiel's chariot, and his duties include putting crowns on God's head (because of this he is coupled with Akhatriel, whose name includes the element *keter*, crown).

96. See the previous note, and above, n. 88.

97. The Hebrew term for emanation, *'asilut*, was often connected homiletically with this term, and here both meanings are employed.

98. See above, n. 46.

99. See above, section III.