

Our Land and the Land of Our Fathers: The Case of Aaron David Gordon

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To my parents:

Pioneers of wisdom, planters of kindness, sowers of love.

## ABSTRACT

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The following study confronts a current wave of Israeli historiography seeking to separate myth from reality in *halutz* ethos during the second and third *aliyot*. While leading historians argue for a political and social desacralization of this spiritually rich era, I insist on the legitimacy and sincerity of religious and mystical language ubiquitous in pioneer writing and practice. Using Aaron David Gordon as a paradigm of this movement, I propose an analysis of Israeli pioneer history free from metaphor, where the Land of Israel becomes the focal point of a newly interpreted religiosity.

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## Introduction

*“And when, O Man, you will return to Nature—on that day your eyes will open, you will gaze straight into the eyes of Nature, and in its mirror you will see your own image. You will know that you have returned to yourself. When you return you will see that from you, from your hands and from your feet, from your body and from your soul, heavy, hard, oppressive fragments will fall and you will begin to stand erect. You will understand that these were fragments of the shell into which you had shrunk in the bewilderment of your heart and out of which you had finally emerged. On that day you will know that your former life did not befit you, that you must renew all things: your food and your drink, your dress and your home, your manner of work and your mode of study—everything!”<sup>x</sup>*

- Aaron David Gordon, “Logic for the Future”

*“The Holy One, blessed be He, sowed this light in the Garden of Eden, and He arranged it in rows with the help of the Righteous One, who is the gardener in the Garden. And he took this light, and sowed it as a seed of truth, and arranged it in rows in the Garden, and it sprouted and grew and produced fruit, by which the world is nourished. This is the meaning of the verse “Light is sown for the righteous...” (Psalm 97:11).”<sup>xi</sup>*

- Zohar, II, 166b

The complex, often ambiguous, history of Labor Zionism knows no figure more paradigmatic of the movement’s political, social, and cultural ethos than Aaron David Gordon. Born into a Russian agricultural milieu of Orthodox

tradition, Gordon left the agrarian life of provincial Podolia, and at the age of forty-seven, settled amidst a community of day laborers in Petah Tikva.<sup>iii</sup> Insistent on exercising the same strenuous responsibilities of his significantly younger cohort, Gordon drew from physical labor and his new found relationship to the Land of Israel to develop a Zionism of cosmic significance. Spurred by a dedication to a spiritual idealism of agricultural redemption, Gordon became a prolific writer and iconic leader of a new model of Zionist - the pioneer, the *halutz*.

The above quotation from Gordon's essay, "Logic for the Future," typifies the poetic and inspirational rhetoric of Zionism's "secular saint."<sup>iv</sup> On its surface, it is an emphatic call to action, a rallying cry that urges Jews of both Palestine and the Diaspora to free themselves from the bondage of cosmopolitan complacency, to shake off the shackles of false comforts and cleave to their source of redemption, the Land of Israel. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that during Zionism's maturation into a momentous campaign of Jewish nationalism, various movements of the political whole readily adopted Gordon's insistence on a spiritually derived physical national connection. Especially privy to Gordon's land based rhetoric were the socialist Zionists of Eastern Europe, such as *Hapoel Hatzair*, the Young Worker,<sup>v</sup> who considered Gordon's emphasis on agriculture and manual labor to be the uniting and edifying ideology of Jewish redemption. However, when divorced from mythified political application, the language of this quotation echoes with a strikingly antithetical familiarity of Jewish esotericism.

Gordon's directive is one of return (*tshuva*, in the original Hebrew). A

concept of critical import to Jewish religiosity, the notion of *tshuva* carries serious emphases of introspection and divine awareness. Often weakly translated as “repentance,” the Hebrew parlance centers, rather, on a visceral moral imperative. The word reflects an abrupt stopping in one’s path and returning to the elemental source of creation, a complete *tshuva* to God. It is a term so powerful that the *Talmud* lists the presence of *tshuva* as one of seven elements that existed prior to God’s creation of the world,<sup>vi</sup> and *Midrash* credits the first *baal tshuva*, or master of return, as Adam after being expelled from *hagan Eden*.<sup>vii</sup> By littering the essay with this idiom, Gordon is willfully connecting his reader to a much deeper relationship than that of Jew and soil. The message is one of cosmic gravity, replete with eschatological and messianic significance inspired by a tradition predating Gordon by almost two millennia.<sup>viii</sup>

Return and awareness, mirrors and reflection, fragments and shells, renewal and life – these prevalent concepts in Gordon’s oeuvre, seemingly unrelated to land and labor, belong in fact to the hidden and complex history of Jewish mysticism.<sup>ix</sup> Far from merely subjects of coincidental repetition and accent, Gordon’s motifs draw their origins from the writings and practices of ancient Jewish esotericism, including *Merkabah* mysticism, *Kaballah*, and *Chasidut*. Ignoring this strange and obscure language, Gordon is mislabeled as a secular Zionist revolutionary, a title ascribed to many legendary icons of the Labor movement. However, by analyzing these thematic elements through the lens of their original appositeness, a different image of the spiritual pioneer emerges. Though Gordon is the paragon of *halutz* spiritual authorship, his is not



a lone voice. On the contrary, the incorporation of mystical elements and practices is ubiquitous in *halutz* writing and invaluable to the movement's culture. Our challenge arises in the deciphering of this recondite interpretation and pinpointing its evolution from an already cryptic tradition. To do so is to uncover the rich narrative of a misunderstood community and to expose a far more religiously minded era of Jewish immigration than previously believed.

This essay is thus meant to lift the veil that covers the elusively spiritual face of the *halutz*. At a time when Israeli historiography is committed to exposing the true character of its national development, the problematic phraseology and unique customs of the *halutzim* are often irresponsibly ignored. It is my intention, therefore, to recover these buried and forgotten spiritual adoptions and to present them in their intended context. To be clear, I do not aim to convince the reader that the men and women of the *halutz* were traditional religious Jews who had implemented the *halachah* and orthopraxy of Jewish observance. Rather, it is my contention that the pioneers, influenced by their spiritual and political leaders, were interpreters of their own Jewish religiosity, founded on convolutions of Jewish mysticism. I will defend this position through historical and theological evaluation, focusing primarily on the writings of A.D. Gordon, whom, I posit, has been falsely labeled (in regards to his relationship to Zionism and Jewish mystical tradition) through misreading of his definitive and personal works. In so doing, I will invariably respond to leading voices of Israeli historiography, including Boaz Neumann and Anita Shapira, whose historical positions represent disparate narratives of the *halutz* paradigm.

The current study will involve the dissection of Gordon's primary content, including essays, letters, and lectures. These materials will be analyzed alongside primary and secondary texts of Jewish mystical tradition as well as sources containing *halutz* memoirs and personal writings. The argument will be constructed according to theme as opposed to chronology but will remain within the historical relevance of the *halutzim*. In order to provide sufficient historical context, I will begin with a brief history of Labor Zionism's inception and will then continue into the thematically structured core of the essay.

The introductory chapter, "The Pioneer and the Godhead," will expose the *Kabbalistic* and traditionally mystical language incorporated into *halutz* ideology. Establishing this terminology, I will then illumine the application of these terms by the *halutzim*. The second chapter, "The New Covenant," will rely on the centrality of this *Kabbalistic* terminology to provide insight into the divine relationship of the *halutz* and their godhead, which I posit, is rooted in the Land of Israel. Following this, "The Beautiful Death" will present the theological implications of death in the Land. Finally, "*HaLashon HaKodesh*" will illustrate the role of Hebrew in this mystical methodology.

## The Fin de Siècle and the Rise of Labor Zionism

*“Li yesh gan, u’began tahat ohg keved-tzel,  
harhek harhek mayir u’मितिम, nechbah tel,  
kuloh atuf yerakrak, kuloh omer sod El –  
Sham nechabeh, nanuach, ach nayim”<sup>x</sup>*

*“I have a garden, a resting place with heavy shade,  
far away from the city and the dead - a hidden hill,  
wrapped in green, that speaks the secret of God –  
Hidden there, my brother, we may find our rest”*

-Chayim Nachman Bialik, “On A Hot Summer’s Day”

The term *halutz* refers to a specific time and character of Jewish immigration to Palestine from Eastern and Western Europe.<sup>xi</sup> This specific wave of immigration is marked from the beginning of the second *aliyah* (app. 1903-1904) until the end of the third *aliyah*, (app. 1923)<sup>xii</sup> and epitomizes the definitive era of Zionist ideology in Palestine. Though a minority amidst Jewish settlers of the time<sup>xiii</sup>, the pioneers of the *halutz* movement constituted a crucial representation of social and political leaders responsible for the propagation of a new Jewish identity in Palestine. This identity however began its development in the uncertainty of Europe as a growing Zionist mentality matured into structured movements and organizations. While an adequate account of Zionist history is

beyond the scope of this essay, a brief summary may provide a point of departure for the topic at hand.

The ideology of *halutz* Zionism progressed with the maturation of Zionism as a fundamental whole. With growing tumult facing fin de siècle Jewry in both Eastern and Western Europe, the Jewish question took on a new and palpable sense of urgency. Throughout the Pale of Settlement, increasingly violent pogroms surged in frequency, while in the West, the trial of Alfred Dreyfus negated the established myth of Jewish equality in a Post-Enlightenment European society. While tension and uncertainty spread throughout Jewish Europe, the threat of escalating anti-Semitism proliferated innumerable responses from leaders within the Jewish community. Newspapers, pamphlets, books, and lectures composed in myriad languages and appealing to all levels of Jewish observance circulated, evolving from a fearful whisper to a public din of nationalist enthusiasm. On August 29, 1897 in Basel, Switzerland, the ripened mentality of political Zionism reached a unified public watershed. The journalist and politician Theodore Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress, bringing to the political forefront an international call of Jewish national action.<sup>xiv</sup>

Combining a renewed cultural and spiritual Jewish ethos with a growing Eastern European socialist political mentality, a new paradigm of the European Jew was born. Palpably rejecting the pejoratively designated model of the “ghetto Jew,” a term associated with weakness, blind piety, and social incompetence,<sup>xv</sup> the creation of a new “*Muskeljuden*,” as defined by Max Nordau, became the nationalistic objective of Zionists movements throughout Europe.

As Michael Stanislawski illustrates in his brief biography of Nordau at his Zionist zenith, the masculine image of the nationalist Jew became an obsessive ideal equated with the positive influence of Zionism on Diasporic Judaism.

For Nordau, a central goal of Zionism was transforming both the “ghetto” and the bourgeois Jew—both alleged to be effeminate, weak, cut off from nature, cowardly, sickly, desexualized—into a physically robust, healthy, and sexually potent man, in the process rebuilding himself, his land, and his people.<sup>xvi</sup>

The popularity of the “*Muskeljuden*” archetype led to establishment of Jewish youth movements throughout Eastern and Western Europe. Adopting names of historical Jewish uprisings and revolutionists, these youth groups worked adamantly to fashion a Jewish identity modeled after Jewish heroes of antiquity and thereby distancing themselves from the paradigmatic *Torah* and *Talmud* scholars of “ghetto Jewry.” In an iconic speech presented to the Bar Kochba society (a branch of the Jewish Gymnastic Society) in 1903, Max Nordau elucidated the critical importance of this new Jewish persona.

Two years ago, during a committee meeting at the Congress in Basel, I said: “We must think again of creating a Jewry of muscle.”

Again! For history is our witness, that such once existed, but for long, all too long, we have engaged in the mortification of our flesh. I am expressing myself imprecisely. It was others who practiced mortification on our flesh, and with the greatest success, evidenced by the hundreds of thousands of Jewish corpses in the ghettos, church squares, and highways of medieval Europe. We ourselves would happily have renounced this “virtue.” We would rather have cared for our bodies than allowed them to be destroyed—figuratively and literally. We know how to make rational use of our life and we appreciate its value. Unlike most others, we do not consider [our bodies] our greatest good, but they are valued and we look after them with care. But for centuries we could not do so. All the elements of Aristotelian physics were meted out to us in a miserly fashion: light and air, water and earth. In the narrow Jewish street, our poor limbs forgot how to move joyfully; in the gloom of sunless houses our eyes became accustomed to nervous blinking; out of fear of constant

persecution the timbre of our voices was extinguished to an anxious whisper, which only rose to a strong shout when our martyrs on their stakes cried out their last prayers in the face of their executioners. But now, force no longer constrains us, we are given space for our bodies to live again. Let us take up our oldest traditions; let us once more become deep-chested, tightly muscled, courageous men.<sup>xvii</sup>

As the physical and cultural reforms of Nordau and Herzl spread east from France, Germany, and Austria, they met in Eastern Europe and the Pale of Settlement an already augmenting socialistic Zionism. Though a Zionist proposal of socialism was absent from the First Zionist Congress, within several years time Zionist-Socialists comprised a powerful and influential faction of the movement.<sup>xviii</sup> Inspired by the ripening political revolutions of the Russian worker and peasant, the Jews of Eastern Europe saw themselves in a similar oppressed position. However, their national claims to the socialist doctrines of Russia were quickly extinguished by their exclusion from both worker and peasant identities.<sup>xix</sup> This rejection prompted a new national vehemence amidst the numerous Jewish socialist divisions, shifting focus to a strictly Jewish nationalism.

As Socialist Zionism took root, ideological conflicts became unavoidable. An already eminent and influential Eastern European Jewish socialism, the Bund, saw the developing nationalism of politically like-minded Jews as a threatening utopianism falsely disguised as proletarian rebellion.<sup>xx</sup> Diametrically opposed to Jewish religiosity, the spiritual and *halachic* tones of the left-wing Zionists deepened the divide between the two camps. The historian Walter Laqueur illustrates this anti-religious sentiment of the Bund and its role in dividing the different socialist parties, showing that

The Bund was militantly anti-clerical. It ridiculed the traditional religious taboos and deliberately contravened some of them, such as the one forbidding work on the Sabbath. The Socialism of the left-wing Zionists was suspect in its eyes because they wanted to build up their country under the guidance of the rabbis and according to the prescription of the *Shulkhan Arukh*.<sup>xxi</sup>

Contrasting goals and philosophies between the Bund and the Socialist Zionists became more apparent as the parties squared off more and more frequently.

Reaching a catalyst with the Zionists' rejection of Yiddish,<sup>xxii</sup> the Hebrew advocating nationalists officially broke from any Bundist political support and focused their sights on Palestine while the Russian proletariat neared the inception of its first revolution. With the advent of political reform in Eastern Europe, the second wave of Zionist immigration officially began. With this new *aliyah* came the presence of the new Zionist archetype, the *halutz*.

A biblical term found in *parashah* "Metzur Yerichu" in the book of Joshua, the *halutz* led the siege of Jericho, blowing *shofarot* and leading the priests and the Ark of the Covenant into battle.<sup>xxiii xxiv</sup> Adopted by Labor Zionists to maintain this messianic image of leadership, the term was used to describe the original pioneers during the middle of the third *aliyah*, and was only then used to label those of the second *aliyah* as well.<sup>xxv</sup> With the official designation of the messianic laborers, the image of the spiritual pioneer was born, and the character of Zionism took a radical new shape.

## The Pioneer and The Godhead

### *Kabbalistic Language in Halutz Ideology*

*“On that day you will cast your eyes round about you, and above you, O Man. And you will see the earth and all existence therein, and you will see the heavens with all their hosts, with all the worlds that are in them – worlds without end and limit. All of them will be near to you and all of them will bear a blessing for you. Then you will grasp the eternity that is in the moment.”<sup>xxvi</sup>*

A.D. Gordon, “Man and Nature”

The goal of the mystic, divorced from hidden and complex practice, is itself quite intelligible in definition – to abandon the self and to meet in union with God.<sup>xxvii</sup> The esoteric element of Jewish mysticism is thus found not in the fulfillment of this transcendent cleaving, or *devekut*, but rather in the approach of the mystic in order to obtain such a state of ecstasy. Though connected through a rich history of Jewish mystical terminology and practice, the *halutzim* experience this *devekut* in a manner *sui generis*, for their image of God and the elemental structure of the Godhead deviate from their spiritual predecessors.

In *halutz* ethos, God is present through the holiness of the Land. Before expounding on this fundamental principle, the theological implications of this statement must be explicated. Though the language of the *halutzim* carries with



it provocative physical and spiritual ties to the Land, soil, and nature of *Eretz Yisrael*, it should not be mistaken for a mystical pantheism. To the *halutzim*, God is certainly present in the dirt and the harvest, in the rain and the trees, but God is *not* the Land herself. As I will illustrate, the Land becomes a personification of the *Shekinah*, of God's holy presence, which serves as an outlet to achieve this *unio mystica* and not an end within itself.<sup>xxviii</sup> Furthermore, "God," in this specific idiom is certainly not conceptualized as the god of the hostile and profane *galut*. To the *halutzim*, the god of Jewish Europe – a god of pogroms and blood libels, poverty and alienation, cowardice and fear, is, for the benefit of the Jewish people, dead.<sup>xxix</sup> The religiosity of the *halutzim* is consequently a direct response to the unacceptable portrayal of God engendered by the "ghetto Jew" mentality. Physically and theologically separated from the dogmas of the *shtetl*, the *halutzim* shed their religious traditions and began recasting a Judaism centered on the tangible holiness of the Land.

Reworking Jewish tradition and religious sentiment, however, depends on the maintenance of foundational concepts and terminology, even if the significance and application of which is ultimately reinterpreted. A propagation of a spiritual and religious ethos fomented by the Land of Israel without Jewish historical and theological grounding, would make such a connection meaningless. For this reason, the *halutzim* shape their unique Jewish exegesis on those elements of Jewish religiosity that reflect their personal situation<sup>xxx</sup>. It is therefore no coincidence that the language of *halutz* memoirs and essays, diaries and historical accounts, incorporate *Talmudic* and rabbinic references and a

lexicon of *Kabbalah* and other forms of Jewish mysticism, all of which carry messianic hopes and systems of redemption.

Gordon especially has a proclivity for alluding to *Talmudic* passages and rabbinical legends. A Jew's inherent connection to the soil of *Eretz Yisrael*, Gordon illustrates, is found repeatedly in the sea of *Talmud*. In his reading, Gordon describes the relationship of Jew and Israel not as a fleeting historical convenience, but rather as a cosmic and eschatological imperative.

From this angle the ideal of labor may be regarded in the words of the Talmud: if man is worthy, it becomes the spice of life to him and if he is unworthy, it is a deadly poison. The worthy man thus becomes a partner to nature in creation and in eternal life; he who is unworthy remains a slave of the soil and of a degenerate life. Here individuals, pioneers, workers who seek a life in labor until they find it are necessary to carry out eternal aims.<sup>xxx1</sup>

Messianism and labor are not themes foreign to *Talmud*, and Gordon's cogent transmission of the text into a more physically driven nuance demonstrates the religious literacy of the *halutzim*.

The labor of learning, celebrated as the vocation of the Jewish paradigm in Europe, is alternatively expressed by the *halutzim* as a physical, but equally spiritual labor. Arthur Green, in his definition of *Talmud*, accents the laborious nature of learning the text's dense and intricate tractates, and in doing so, depicts the very essence of spiritual life adopted by the *halutzim*. He writes,

*Talmud* came to be the central text of Jewish learning. Study of the *Talmud* requires mastery of its terse interrogative style, ... the associative patterns by which seemingly unrelated subjects are drawn together, as well as the vast array of topics actually discussed among the rabbis.<sup>xxxii</sup>

In the same manner, the *halutzim* saw the Land as a rich and holy entity that required the same discipline and mastery to elicit the hidden worlds buried there within. Green continues with his definition, again showing the parallels in *halutz* interpretation. “*Talmud* study, while difficult and often abstruse in content, is seen by the true *talmid hakham*<sup>xxxiii</sup> as a labor of love and the source of great joy. The completion of a tractate is an occasion for celebration.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> These parallels were obvious to the *halutzim*, especially Gordon who believed the physical life in *Eretz Yisrael* was the holy embodiment of *Torah* and *Talmud*, a life that, according to him, he could feel in the 248 members of his body, and in every one of his 365 veins.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Boaz Neumann and Aviva Ufaz both see the spiritual language of the *halutz* as inspired and esoteric, yet pregnant with conscious metaphysical value<sup>xxxvi</sup>. While both historians maintain that this language serves to disguise the secular reality of the *halutzim*, they insist on the undeniable influence of Jewish historical and religious movements to the *halutz* ideology.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Similarly, Anita Shapira sees the influence of mystical and *Kabbalistic* language as response to the simplicity of the agricultural communal life and the messianic surges of historical significance. In her essay on religious motifs in Labor Zionism, Shapira states, “Religiosity was especially manifest in the rites of simplicity adopted by the *kvutzot* (agricultural communes) and the *kibbutzim*, the youth movements, and the Halutz (Pioneer) movement.”<sup>xxxviii</sup> While these historians confront the prevalence of this mystical argot, any consideration that the words have a religious function within *halutz* society is rejected, and literacy

of sacred texts is readily ignored. This is visibly problematic in Shapira's understanding of Berl Katznelson's spiritual identity. Analyzing a letter written by Katznelson to the cast and crew of the Ohel Theater upon their completion of the play, *Hamekubla'im* (The Mystics)[!], Shapira reduces Katznelson's religiously worded letter to a brief exposure of *halutz* emotional expression.

The traces of this hidden fabric were rarely exposed. Berl Katznelson revealed a little of this emotional frame of mind in his letter to "My Friends in the Ohel Theater." ... In the same letter Katznelson used the following expressions: "the holy spirit of the generation"; "The divine presence [*Shekinah*] did not forsake us"; "seeing the public in its ascension [*Aliyah*]." He defined the qualities characterizing this public: "an atmosphere of communality, of devoutness, of true enthusiasm and self-sacrifice, of patriotism, of social idealism, of yearning for cultural roots."<sup>xxxix</sup> (Hebrew in brackets my addition)

Disregarding the religious competency, and indeed the very upbringing of many *halutzim*, such limiting historiography proves disadvantageous to a clearer understanding of the *halutz* makeup.

The words of Katznelson and Gordon (not to mention the countless pioneers whose presence was not felt in the political and social forefront) are not brief insights into a suppressed emotional state, but the very foundations of the *halutz* spiritual edifice. When Katznelson refers to the ascension, *aliyah*, of the public, he is using a term that has already been established and popularized in *halutz* circles and is drawn from the mystical tradition of the *Kabbalah*. *Aliyah* is not a social or physical ascent, but one of holiness and spirit. It is a path to that leads through different levels of spiritual consciousness; the higher one ascends, the holier s/he becomes. This theme is prevalent through myriad *Kabbalistic* texts, and is easily understood from a passage of *Mesillath Yesharim* (The Path

of the Straight Walking), composed by the Italian mystic, Moses Hayyim Luzzatto in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The highest level of holiness is a gift; all that man can do is to attempt it, through the pursuit of true knowledge and constant concentration of the intellect upon the holiness of one's acts. But it is attained when the Holy One blessed by He will guide him in the way that he wishes to follow, and bring upon him His holiness and sanctify him. He will then succeed in this thing, so that he may continue to commune with God, may He be blessed, continuously....until there rests upon him a spirit from on high, and the Creator, blessed be He, will cause His name to rest upon him, as he does to all His holy ones, so that he will literally be like an angel of God.<sup>x1</sup>

The *halutzim* brought this definition to their labor and agriculture, making it synonymous with the knowledge developed from farming the soil. The term itself was not used in regards to immigration to the Land of Israel until the second and third *aliyot*, when the reunion with the Land took on a more sacred significance.<sup>xii</sup> With the *halutzim*, *aliyah* evolved into a spiritual necessity of labor. Every raise of the hoe was similar to uncovering a line of *Torah*, filling the worker with joy and a new level of cosmic understanding. Building from traditional models of Jewish esotericism, the *halutzim* developed their own metaphysical understanding of God's immanence through their relationship to the Land, and in so doing, established a formulaic Godhead of their own cultural tenor.

*Kabbalistic* construction of the Godhead stems from several evolving traditions of Jewish mysticism, the most influential of which being the system of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Palestinian rabbi, Isaac Luria Askenazi of Safed, more colloquially known as the *Aryeh*, or "The Lion." Lurianic *Kabbalah* operates on the belief of three principle conceptions: limitation, destruction, and reparation.<sup>xlii</sup>

These three abstractions are interwoven in a complex *modus operandi* that involves creation, spiritual labor, and ultimately, redemption. This final task of salvation is one left to mankind where the individual works to reunite emanations of God that burst and were scattered during the creation of existence, *bereshit*. These ten *sefirot* produce the interlaced and cosmically connected Godhead of the *Kabbalah*.<sup>xliii</sup> *Halutz* ideology espouses this redemptive system, even maintaining some terminology and conceptual elements, but the redemptive act itself is put into the physical relationship to the Land.

Every act of manual labor is therefore capable of redeeming the world. A strike of the shovel is equal to the completion of a *mitzvah* or to the saving of a life and is directly tied to the cosmic system of redemption. In his study of *halutz* desire, Boaz Neumann elucidates the holiness of the worker by analyzing his or her relationship to the tools of agriculture. Using both Gordon and Berl Katznelson as exemplary adherents to this ideal of redemption, Neumann captures the seriousness of labor to these figures.

The hoe (as well as the mattock and similar tools) was a central implement of pioneer praxis. A.D. Gordon asserted that the hoe was “sacred.” During a trip through the country, Yosef Klausner met Gordon at Migdal and asked what he was doing there. Gordon responded that he, too, was touring the country: “You tour with a carriage and I tour with a hoe.” According to Berl Katznelson, the hoe operated not just on a physical level, but on a metaphysical-mystical one. “Raising the hoe...,” he said, “makes a mark on all the *sefirot* ... including those termed the most sublime.”<sup>xliv</sup>

Other tools, such as rifles and other weapons of self-defense, absorbed this same sacralization. While hoes and shovels were considered inseparable parts of a worker, (indeed the worker and his/her tool of agriculture were considered

one and the same)<sup>xlv</sup> the weapons of the *kvutzah* were holy ritualized objects. Neumann again stresses this devotional adaptation, showing that “Pioneer guards treated their guns, like their tools, as sacred objects. They compared the experience of being handed their first gun with that of receiving their first set of *tefillin*—prayer phylacteries—from their fathers.”<sup>xlvi</sup> As the sanctity of work grew within *halutz* culture, placing traditional objects of religiosity with tools of physical germaneness furthered the mystical shape of *halutz* redemption.

Advancing this evolution was a new attitude toward sacred text. As shown earlier, the *seforim kodeshim*, or holy books of *Torah*, *Talmud*, and mystical tradition, were not foreign to the *halutzim*. However, religious literature held a different essence to the pioneers who saw themselves at the gates of salvation. While the Jews ghetto Europe relied on scripture for closeness to God, the *halutzim* were settling and cultivating the once exiled *Shekinah*. The *Shekinah*, or the divine presence of God, lies at the heart of *Kabbalistic* and mystical tradition. Cleaving to God, or *devekut* is the metaphysical oneness between the essence of God and the essence of Man, the *Shekinah* and *Adam Kadmon*.<sup>xlvii</sup> The relationship between the *halutz* and the *Shekinah* will be discussed at length in the section, “The New Covenant,” but the idea of obtaining this unity is pertinent to the redemptive system at hand. While generations of Jews prior to the Zionist movement sought *devekut* and the *Shekinah* in prayer and study, the *halutzim* relied on the sacred literature of the soil.

Neumann again illustrates this point but fails to see the religious import of the Land's sacred textual recasting. Maintaining the loaded *Kabbalistic* language of Degania (the first *kibbutz*) settlers, Neumann notes that

God spoke to the old Jews through scripture, but he [sic] began to speak to the Hebrew pioneers through the territory, the soil of the Land. In Degania, settlers felt very close to their new God: "Here they walk in the furrow and He [God] speaks to them from the furrow, from the sprouting, burgeoning field, from the gold of the grain field as evening falls." ... Eliezer Yaffe wrote from Kinneret in a letter to his brother: "When the *shekhina* permeates you, you are focused within yourself, and all the clamor around you that reaches your ears is but a distant echo, like the song of the birds in the forest or the croaking of the frogs in the marsh. Sounds indeed strike the eardrum, but one simply senses the harmony that makes them part of the song of the entire universe—the song that awakens and lifts the soul higher and higher, taking pleasure and dissolving in longing and in pleasure..."<sup>xlviii</sup>

Interpreting the transmission of the *Shekhinah* from scripture to the Land, Neumann sees a secularization, insisting that, "They [the *halutzim*] exchanged the *Shekhina* (divine presence) of the Exile for the holy presence of nature."<sup>xlix</sup> Similarly, Anita Shapira views this recasting of the *Shekhinah* as secular metaphor. It is with metaphorical secularism that she dismisses religiously pregnant expressions such as Uri Zvi Greenberg's allusions to Jerusalem and the Jezreel Valley as being the *tefillin* of the Land and to a steamroller paving the roads of Palestine as "the carriage of the messiah."<sup>1</sup> Where the *halutzim* find redemption, modern historians instead see poetry and the romanticization of traditional language.

Union with God, and the salvation which stems from this *unia mystica*, is, in fact, imperative to the *halutz* spiritual mindset. The conversion of a mystical Godhead, of sacred text, of tools of worship, and of the very dwelling place of



God into the physical spiritualism of the Land is augmented further by the prophetic voice of the *halutz*. If the myriad examples of *Kabbalistic* imagery and references of sacred concepts attributed to *Eretz Yisrael* are in fact metaphor, the rallying cries of Gordon and other pioneer leaders are inauthentic and stripped of meaning. No image captures the true cosmic character of the *halutzim* better than that of prophet and *Moshiach* (messiah).

The *halutz* ideology, perfected in the writing of A. D. Gordon, sees the worker and the individual as the true messiah, a messianic belief first implemented by the Lurianic system of *Kabbalah*.<sup>li</sup> As in the *sefirotic* methodology of the *Aryeh*, the act of redemption is the responsibility of every individual Jew, who reunites the *sefirot* through holy acts. As *Kabbalah* after the *Aryeh* teaches, and Gershom Scholem explains,

Here, for the first time, we have an organic connection between the state of redemption and the state preceding it. Redemption now appears not as the opposite of all that came before, but as the logical consequence of the historical process. We are all involved in one Messianic venture, and we all are called up to do our part.

The Messiah himself will not bring the redemption; rather he symbolizes the advent of redemption, the completion of the task of emendation. It is therefore not surprising that little importance is given to the human personality of the Messiah in Lurianic literature, for the Kabbalists had no special need of a personal Messiah.<sup>lii</sup>

Using this exposition, Gordon's mandate of a personal redemption of labor assumes a palpable gravity. Especially poignant in his speeches and essays to fellow laborers, Gordon's messianic calls to action incorporate such rhetoric as: "As for the crown of the 'prophet,' I, for one, neither for him nor expect him. The prophet will not redeem the nation, since he will not redeem the individual,"<sup>liii</sup> and

“The nation is the prophet; man is the savior.”<sup>liv</sup> These bombastic disquisitions, while strange and aggressive in a political light, thrive with hidden and personal sentimentality in the religious setting to which they belong.

While the complexities of the *halutz* relationship to *Kabbalah* and a mystical Godhead are not exhausted in this brief summary, the critical importance of recognizing the parallels and evolutions should, at this point, be clear. Reiterating the argument, the terminology, allusions to sacred text, sacralization of tools and soil, and the reconstruction of a unique mystical system of redemption by the *halutzim*, are not merely secularized metaphors, but represent a reinterpretation of an inherited religious tradition. The oeuvres and personal accounts of A.D. Gordon, Berl Katznelson, and numerous other icons of the *halutz* thus illustrate the intricacies of this Land centered spiritual development and fit comfortably within a *Kabbalistic* model of salvation.

## The New Covenant

### Sacred Feminization and Mystical Marriage

*“It is the way of the world that if one man wishes to take another’s wife, [the other] becomes angry and does not allow it. But the Holy One, blessed be He, does not act in this way! “This is the offering” [Exod. 25:3]—this is the Congregation of Israel. Even though all of her [i.e., the Shekhinah’s] love is for Him, and all of His love is for her, [the children of Israel] take her away from Him, that she may dwell among them....And even though they take her, they are only able to do so with the permission of her husband and his will, so that they may perform the service of love before Him.”<sup>lv</sup>*

*-Zohar, II, 135a*

The edification of the *halutz* godhead, in comparison to numerous *Kabbalistic sefirotic* formulas, places the divine presence, or *Shekinah*, as the system’s focal element – the metaphysical bridge between the *En Sof*<sup>lvi</sup> and the Jewish people.<sup>lvii</sup> As previously illustrated, this divine indwelling, articulated as a transcendent spiritual element of the Divine in *Kabbalistic* Jewish tradition, manifests itself to the *halutzim* as the sacred Land of Israel. *Halutz* connection to the *Shekinah* therefore takes on a physical, yet equally mystical, Land-centered theology. Daily prayer is carried out through manual labor and agricultural interaction with the soil; sacred ritualized objects, such as *tefillin* and *tallit*, evolve

into tools of labor - shovels, hoes, and rifles; and the *beit midrash*,<sup>lviii</sup> found in the expanses of the fields and gardens is dutifully attended morning, afternoon, and evening by the devout community. While religious evolutions and adaptations are apparent in *halutz* methodology, the theological structure serving as the foundation of pioneer orthopraxic expression maintains the rich esoteric ideology of the *halutz*'s mystical predecessors.

*Shekinah*, as a religiously loaded concept, can be traced back to *Talmudic* Judaism (perhaps even prior), predating the structured systems of mystical tradition, *Merkabah*, *Hasdei Ashkenaz*, *Lurianic Kaballah*, etc.<sup>lix</sup> The term, derived from the biblical word, *kavod*, also meaning the glory or indwelling of God, as well as the Hebrew verb *shachan*, to dwell, is, according to Gershom Scholem, "... a concept that has intimately accompanied the Jewish people for some two thousand years, through all phases of its turbulent and tragic existence."<sup>lx</sup> Simultaneously evasive and immanent, the paradox of the *Shekinah* became a rich source of hope and mystery to the uncertain condition of Jewish history.

As an omnipresent constituent of the Jewish people, regardless of their plight, the *Shekinah* became a critical comfort for exiled Jews after the destruction of the second temple. For this reason, it has invariably taken on an association with the Diaspora and *galut*.<sup>lxi</sup> Though seemingly an exoteric aspect of Jewish history, its complex mystical properties are exposed through its elusive yet readily attainable nature. While the *Shekinah* follows Israel into exile and remains with her *ad infinitum*, full spiritual awareness is only achieved by the

devout after series of sacred practices, varying by tradition.<sup>lxii</sup> Through the experience of *unia mystica*, therefore, the mystic provides the fundamental divine qualities and relays the experience to the community. This allows for a general personification of the Divine and the transmission of its sacred essence.

Unique to the *Shekinah*'s mystical makeup is its historically maintained feminine ascription. Though the origins are contested,<sup>lxiii</sup> personifying the *Shekinah* as wholly female in divine nature permeated Jewish mystical tradition. According to Arthur Green, this image is one of a bride or lover, and reaches its maturation in *Kabbalistic* tradition.

In Kabbalistic writings, especially those stemming from the *Zohar*, *shekhinah* is described primarily in feminine terms, as the bride of the blessed Holy One and the Queen of the universe. Their sacred marital union (which is in fact a reunion, since they are originally one) becomes the goal of all religious life. As Kabbalists perform the commandments they dedicate their actions to “the union of blessed Holy One and His *shekinah*, in love and fear, in the name of all Israel.” The reunion of “male” and “female” within the Godhead is understood as the restoration of harmony to the entire universe, allowing the flow of Divine Presence to become fully manifest in the world.<sup>lxiv</sup>

Adhering to the historical designation of the *Shekinah* and her attributes, the *halutzim* bestow the *Shekinah* of *Eretz Yisrael* with her inherited femininity. Functioning as both interpreters of the Land's divine dialogue as well as her betrothed husband, the *halutzim* perpetuate the holy marriage of Jewish mystical tradition.

Jewish immigration to *Eretz Yisrael* was the *halutzim*'s answer to the long anticipated divine male-female reunification of Jewish religious history. A.D. Gordon wrote that the pioneer presence was an act of sacred symbiotic

redemption, a rebuilding of the damaged and forsaken relationship of Jew and Divine.<sup>lxv</sup> Though finally reconciled through the messianic narrative, the centuries of neglect made for a *tabula rasa* wherein both holy elements, *Adam* and *Adamah* (Man and Land), were foreign to one another. Gordon writes,

In my dream I come to the Land. And the Land is abandoned, and wasted, and delivered into the hands of strangers. The devastation darkens the light of its countenance, and embitters its spirit. Far from me and strange to me is the Land of my Fathers. I, also, am far from her and strange to her.<sup>lxvi</sup>

The painful failure of immediate recognition furthered *halutz* ideology of a *unia mystica* redemption. Eliminating the distance that formed the rift between Divine and *Adam* became a critical step to *halutz* salvation. Achieving this was only possible through rebuilding the holy marriage and covering the shameful nudity of the pioneers' wasted and exposed bride.

Boaz Neumann refers to the nudity of the Land in *halutz* ideology as, "the body-of-the-Land-without-organs."<sup>lxvii</sup> The objective of the pioneer was thus to clothe and reconstruct the withered body. The Land's nudity, the result of Jewish exile and the presence of cruel alien nations, was seen as a violent profanation of the sacred. As Neumann shows, "The body-of-the-Land-without-organs was a naked body, its earth, boulders, and mountains as bare as the day they were born. The *halutzim's* desire clothes this body and covered its private parts."<sup>lxviii</sup> Draining her obscene swamps, covering her desert skin with trees and crops; every meticulous detail of labor, the *halutzim* celebrated as an act of love and redemption.

Further developing this marital concept, the increasingly clothed and reintegrated bride, beaming with the renewal of her Jewish body, demanded sexual penetration in order to produce the fruits of her womb. Though invariably inhabited and oppressed by foreign entities during Jewish exile, the *halutzim* insisted that their bride maintained the status of a virgin, for only Jewish hands and tools were capable of penetrating her fragile soil.<sup>lxi</sup> Neumann stresses the importance of this mentality, saying, “Recall that the pioneers experienced the Land of Israel as female, a virgin whose virginity the pioneers pierced, a lover whom they sought to marry, the Mother Earth to whose womb they sought to return.”<sup>lxx</sup> Penetration of the virgin Land was carried out through various means - agriculture, labor, and self-defense all served as powerful modes of insemination. Gordon saw the propagation of family and labor as paramount in the sexual union with the Land, for even if it were impossible to bring all of *Am Yisrael*, to the Land, the penetration of those few pioneer *shorashim* (roots) would be capable of creating new life.<sup>lxxi</sup> Regardless of methodology, it was evident to the *halutzim* that the virgin soil necessitated Jewish impregnation, and the tangible seed of the *halutz* was central in this delicate process.

Liquids from the *halutz* body, including sweat, blood, tears, and semen were the most potent resources for the fertilization of the soil. Neumann provides several examples for these disparate practices.<sup>lxxii</sup> Discussing the role of sweat, Neumann states,

The *halutz* wet the Land and thus became part of it. But, this same flow also simultaneously creates and establishes boundaries, since by wetting the soil with their sweat the *halutzim* transformed it from undifferentiated earth into cultivated soil, and from unowned [sic] soil into Jewish soil.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

Neumann also illustrates the sexual rhetoric incorporated into this practice. Using the personal account of an early *halutz*, Neumann shows that, “They opened themselves up to the Land and yearned to assimilate into it. There are moments, one *halutz* wrote, when it seems as if ‘I embrace the entire world, I kiss it all. And within that embrace I approach God...”<sup>lxxiv</sup> The image of a divine kiss is frequently found in *Kabbalistic* articulation of the *Shekinah*. Moshe Idel provides numerous examples, most poignantly using the words of Rabbi Menahem Recanti, a thirteenth century *Kabbalist*, who asserts that, “The kiss is a metaphor for the cleaving of the soul.”<sup>lxxv</sup> This “embrace” or holy kiss, Gordon believed, was the very cosmic element of Jewish rebirth. For Gordon, the penetration of the Land penetrated the Jewish people. The insemination of her soil fertilized life and vitality in the Jewish being, and birth from her womb was simultaneously a rebirth of *Am Yisrael*.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

Jewish exclusivity to the Land, implicit in the divine marriage formula, complicated relationships with non-Jewish neighbors. The Arab population specifically became a source of contention. Under the principles of the *halutzim*, the Land could flourish only from Jewish impregnation. The hiring of Arab laborers or an agricultural partnership was considered sinful, analogous to the unforgivable sins of adultery and idol worship.<sup>lxxvii</sup> Anita Shapira accepts this biblically centered philosophy, insisting that the employment of Arab workers was seen as sacrilege. She equates the practice to the sin of idolatry, arguing that

It was one of the three sins—along with bloodshed and incest—rather than commit which, a Jew preferred to be killed. Application of this



concept to describe the work of Arabs in Jewish colonies depicted it as being equivalent to breaking a taboo. In the eyes of these young immigrants, for whom physical labor had the status of a supreme value, the employment of Arabs appeared like a desecration of the sanctity of the land.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

As in the belief systems of their mystical antecedents, the *halutzim* saw the *Shekinah* as inseparable from the Jewish people and the Jewish people alone.

So firmly dedicated to this ideal were the *halutzim* that trees and crops planted by Arabs were promptly uprooted. In one specific case, Neumann emphasizes, a group of Jewish laborers in Petah Tikvah received word that Arab workers were hired to plant trees in the nearby town of Ben Shemen. Outraged by this desacralization of the Land, the workers walked to Jaffa where they rallied other Jewish laborers. The assembled gathering then continued to Ben Shemen where they removed every sapling planted by Arab hands. Upon completing this uprooting, each tree was systematically replanted by the Jewish workers.<sup>lxxix</sup>

Neumann concludes this not uncommon account with a powerful image, illustrating that, "On the following Saturday, large groups of workers from Jaffa, Petah Tikva, Rehovot, and Rishon LeTzion streamed to the site to congratulate the uprooters. They celebrated the action with song and dance."<sup>lxxx</sup> Such enthusiasm was typical of the *halutzim*, as they considered the trees, plants, and crops, to be sacred gifts from a once virgin soil. It therefore comes as no surprise that one of the most celebrated Jewish holidays in the *halutz* was *Tu biShvat*, where each member of the community would plant a tree in dedication to the rejuvenation of the Land.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Production of agriculture and successful harvests created an image of the feminized Land as child-bearer and mother. In many of his writings, Gordon refers to the Land as *ima*, the Hebrew word for mother.<sup>lxxxii</sup> As previously illustrated, the birth of the Land was, to Gordon, synonymous with the birth of the Jew. To emphasize this point, Gordon frequently referred to the “rebirth” of the Jewish people in natural and organic terminology. The renewal of marriage to the Land signals that “the Jewish people blossom again,”<sup>lxxxiii</sup> that “This new life, like a tidal river, will go on, will renew itself, and flow onward, onward, onward...”<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Gordon’s relationship to the Land was a Mother-Son symbiosis. “The only tie that binds me to her, and the only memory I have that she is my mother and that I am her son,” Gordon writes, “...is ... that my soul, too, is as desolate as the Land, that on my soul, also, were laid the hands of the stranger to ravage to destroy it.”<sup>lxxxv</sup> As redemption flows from *Adam* to *Adamah*, it likewise flows from *Adamah* to *Adam*.

Most telling in Gordon’s partnership is the allusion to the mystical element, the secret esotericism that dwells within the soil. In his essay, “Our Tasks Ahead,” Gordon incorporates both natural language and *Kabbalistic* allusion, namely the scattering of the elements to form the *halutz* godhead. With a cryptic fervor, he insists that

The center of our national work, the heart of our people, is here, in Palestine, even though we are but a small community in this country, for here is the mainspring of our life. Here, in this central spot, is hidden the vital force of our cause and its potential for growth. Here something is beginning to flower which has greater human significance and far wider ramifications than our history-makers envisage, but it is growing in every dimension deep within, like a tree growing out of its own seed, and what is happening is therefore not immediately obvious. Here, in Palestine, is the

force attracting all the scattered cells of the people to unite into one living national organism. The more life in this seed, the greater its power of attraction.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

Experience of *devekut* in sexual impregnation and birth imagery is again, not unique to Gordon or to the *halutzim* in general. Popularized in twelfth and thirteenth century *Kabbalah*, sexual union was perceived, as Moshe Idel suggests, “to ensure an ideal behavior.”<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Thus sexual *devekut*, as originated in *Kabbalistic* practice, and further augmented by the *halutzim* and the oeuvre of Gordon, was an individual *unia mystica* that benefited the community as a whole.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

Union with the Land in *halutz* ideology is thus unmistakably redemptive by nature. Individual encounter with the soil elicits the Divine Presence, but the ramifications of the personal encounter affect the spiritual status of the community as an inextricably bound cosmic synthesis. The sexual moment between the *halutz* and the Land thus raises *Am Yisrael (aliyah)* and draws the *Shekinah* down from its hidden allusiveness (Immanence). This image is paralleled by the sexual *devekut* of medieval *Kabbalah*, as shown in this text by an anonymous *Kabbalist*:

It is well known to the masters of Kabbalah that human thought stems from the intellectual soul, which descends from above. And human thought has the ability to strip itself [of alien things] and to ascend and arrive at the place of its source. Then it unites with the supernal entity, whence it comes and it [the thought] and it [its source] become one entity. ... Our ancient sages stated that when the husband copulates with his wife, and his thought unites with the supernal entities, that very thought draws the supernal light downward, and it [the light] dwells upon that very drop [of semen] upon which he directs his intention and thinks upon...that this very drop is permanently linked with the brilliant light...as the thought

on it [the drop] was linked to the supernal entities, and it draws the brilliant light downward.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

With this mystical concept transferred to the godhead of the *halutz*, Gordon too argues for the redemptive spark of light found within the divine union.

Son of Man! Look closely at these ruins! Look attentively thereon once again; do not shut your eye to them. Then you will know and you will add understanding to your knowledge that this destruction is the destruction of your soul, and the ruin is the ruin within your life which you have lived in strange lands that still cling to you. Remember, you do this as part of your destiny!

As you will continue to gaze attentively, to concentrate your whole mind on the sight, you will then see under the ruins one lone, ruddy ember which has been saved and is hidden in a secret spot; and the spirit of the Land blows over it and keeps it alive. When you will utterly abandon the life that was created by others, given it up as completely as you have given up their land, and you will come to create here a new life, a life of your own, then the glowing ember will again be rekindled; it will become a blaze, and you will revive again, your people, and your land.<sup>xc</sup>

Found in these two sources, separated by hundreds of years of Jewish history, is the same equation of sexual divine union yielding salvation. While the *Kabbalistic* examples warrant a hierarchal structure of study and meditation, the *halutz* find the same system in the redemptive power of labor.

*Devekut* and the conceptualization of the *Shekinah*, thus enters *halutz* Zionism in a recast but undeniably familiar religious tradition. Absorbed from *Talmud*, *Kabbalah*, and numerous mystical constructions predating the Zionist movement, the *halutz Shekinah* conserves the fundamental qualities of its rich history. The physical entity of the feminized Land contains the hidden mysteries of spiritual union and redemption. Characterized as a bride and virgin, the Land

is penetrated and impregnated by devout Jewish hands. Finally, in its role as *ima*, or mother, the Land bestows upon her faithful husband the physical rewards of nourishment as well as the spiritual rewards of redemption. The accounts of Gordon and myriad other *halutzim* accent the depth and intricacy of this cosmic relationship and in so doing, echo the traditions of their Jewish ancestors.

## The Beautiful Death

*“What should one do in order to live? ... He must kill himself ... What must one do to kill himself?... he must live.”*

*-Babylonian Talmud, Tamid 32a:8*

*“Let your soul cleave to your Creator, and thus death will be for you a rest. This is the true meaning of what our sages said: “He who wants to live should die.”...and by this path [of mortification] it is like killing oneself. Thereby one truly revives one’s soul, and separation from this world will be felt as a profound rest by cleaving to the Creator. For if the soul adhered to the Creator even while imprisoned in this vile body, how much more will it cleave to the Creator and be illumined by the light of life once it has separated itself from matter?”<sup>sci</sup>*

*-Rabbi Joseph Karo “Maggid Mesharim”*

As shown in the previous chapter, the spiritual marriage and cosmic unity with the *halutz Shekinah*, i.e. the Land of Israel, enabled the individual pioneer a moment of spiritual transcendence capable of redeeming the individual, the community, and the Land itself. This *unia mystica*, adopted from previous Jewish mystical systems, represented the metaphysical bridge between the pioneer and the messianic age, and was thus a rare moment of ecstasy felt by only the most devout laborers. In the *Kabbalistic* and mystical traditions predating *halutz*

Zionism, this *devekut*, or cleaving to the Divine, often incorporated an even higher rung of spiritual union – a moment where one achieved perfect oneness with the *Shekinah*. This involved a complete separation of the mystic from his/her physical self, where the souls of creation unite, killing the devoted one in a moment of ecstasy.<sup>xcii</sup>

*Halutz* ideology, though laden with images of life and birth,<sup>xciii</sup> firmly established the necessary importance of death. Whether sacrificing one's life in defense of the community or dying a holy death by giving oneself physically and spiritually to the Land, to bleed and be buried in the soil was the ultimate reward for the devout *halutz*.<sup>xciv</sup> To offer one's life for the Land was, in *halutz* rhetoric, to die the "beautiful death."<sup>xcv</sup> Simultaneously, the only way to truly die for the Land, as in the spiritual death of the *Kabbalist*, was to live *for* the Land. It is this paradox, a word of invaluable import to the mystic, which permeated the *halutz* and allowed a life in death – a death in life.

Sustaining the eroticism of the Male-Female relationship of *devekut*, the "beautiful death," is referred to, in *Kabbalistic* and mystical texts, as a divine kiss, or the kiss of God. In his important study of this long-upheld convention, Michael Fishbane shows that the death of the righteous by holy kiss has its inception in *Talmud*, where the rabbis ascribe the deaths of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Miriam, and Aaron in this manner, "...that they died by the mouth of the Lord."<sup>xcvi</sup> From this reading, mystical tradition reserves such death for the righteous, those who are capable of spiritual and sexual union with the *Shekinah*. The ensuing duality is divided into the masculine and feminine, a holy marriage that ends (in

the material realm that is) with the physical and spiritual death of the *tzadik*.<sup>xcvii</sup>

Fishbane expounds on this idea by saying that

The femininity of the soul and the masculinity of the divine intellect, combined with the figure of the kiss and the idiom “rises upon her,” give this portrayal of an intellectual conjunction a starkly erotic cast. It is a *hieros gamos*, or sacred marriage of sorts, in the most (philosophically) idealized of terms.<sup>xcviii</sup>

The sexual emphasis of relationship with the *Shekinah*, again explained in the previous chapter, reaches its apex in the *Zohar*,<sup>xcix</sup> the whole of which, as Gershom Scholem posits, is based upon the doctrine of the Male-Female divine marriage.<sup>c</sup> So central is this partnership to the *Zohar* that its initial lines begin with the sexual image of a rose being pollinated.<sup>ci</sup> Shaped and elaborated throughout the text, the *Shekinah* is finally accredited as the fountainhead of two critical images, *Etz Chayim* and *Etz Mavet*, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Death.<sup>cii</sup>

While concurrently the focal point of two seemingly contradicting elements – life and death – the *Shekinah*, serves both through the same divine connection. The *halutzim* therefore embraced the *Talmudic* adage that to live, one must die, and to die, one must live. As A.D. Gordon demonstrates, the secrets of eternal life through death are discovered in the hidden realm of life with the knowledge of death. Unpacking this difficult equation: death is the “eternal source of creation,”<sup>ciii</sup> and as such, the deceased enter into the eternal relationship that one cannot truly comprehend in life. The secret to embracing this unknowable transcendence is to identify that very transcendence as unknowable. “Before



them lies an eternal secret which they must treat as an eternal secret.”<sup>civ</sup> While there are glimpses of the cosmic in the constant affirmation of life, the true union is only found within death.

This sacred action, the *halutzim* believed, was only possible in the Land of Israel. In the *galut*, they asserted, death was meaningless, for the *Shekinah* did not dwell in the foreign fields of Russia or in the ghetto walls of Poland. Boaz Neumann expands on this mentality, adding, “The death of Jews in the Exile was a useless death, a death with no alternative. To die as a Jew in a pogrom was meaningless.”<sup>cv</sup> However, to die in the Land was to hasten the redemption of Jews everywhere. Neumann continues, “But in dying on the soil of the Land, the *halutzim* did not die, because a 'beautiful death' replaced mortal life with immortality. And through their deaths they bestowed life...”<sup>cvi</sup> The return of Jews to *Eretz Yisrael* thus altered the preset theological construction of Jewish death, celebrating the “beautiful death” of one who died in the Land as a redemptive act for the ubiquitous purposeless deaths of the Diaspora.

Embracing this ideology, death outside of the Land, was not seen as death at all, but rather a meaningless limbo. Every Jewish death in Diaspora, regardless of its merit, was, to the *halutzim*, a profanation. Neumann provides an example of a *halutz* woman who had survived the pogroms in the Ukraine. Upon her arrival in Palestine, she declared “that if there were no Land of Israel, Russia’s Jews would be unable to simply die, since there were pogroms everywhere and the fate suffered in a pogrom was worse than death.”<sup>cvi</sup> “The

beautiful death,” was thus a messianic cleaving to the Land, providing meaning for the Jews whose deaths in the *galut* were in vain.

Anita Shapira sees the recasting of the theological emphases on death as proof of *halutz* secularization. Mistaking the elevation of the martyr, the hero, and death in general as an intentional deviation from religiosity and a move towards human-centered reverence, Shapira drastically underplays the power and importance of death as a *halutz* theological institution. Shapira references a labor movement practice of altering the language of the *yizkor*<sup>civiii</sup> book. Using this breach of traditional decorum alongside a poem by Berl Katznelson entitled, “*Yizkor*,” Shapira issues the following argument,

The traditional *yizkor* prayer asks God to preserve the memory of the deceased; it does not identify the cause of death—natural causes, a pogrom, or martyrdom. Katznelson’s “*Yizkor*” addresses not God but the Jewish people, exhorting them to remember the heroes “who gave their lives for Israel’s dignity and Israel’s land.” The indeterminate death in the traditional *yizkor* becomes, in the modern version, a heroic death for a national cause. The memory of the dead heroes becomes a tool in the struggle for the revival of Jewish sovereignty in its land.<sup>cix</sup>

Even with the putting aside of Katznelson’s religious biographical information,<sup>cx</sup> Shapira’s argument does not present a problem to the previously discussed convention of *halutz* death in a theological context. Omitting the name of God and redirecting focus to the Land merely places recognition of the Divine in a context more familiar and meaningful to the *halutzim*. In the same vein, the inclusion of the individual’s means of death, does not downplay, but rather emphasizes the importance placed on “the beautiful death,” the willingness to die for the Land. It is this stringent admiration paid to the righteous fallen that

parallels the holiness of the truly ascended *Kabbalists*, who die the beautiful death for the *Shekinah* and in their death, experience the Tree of Life.

Congruent with the harmonious dichotomy of *Etz Chayim* and *Etz Mavet*, the blood of those who died the “beautiful death” redeemed both the *Shekinah* as well as the Jewish people. Neumann states simply, “Pioneer blood sanctified the soil.”<sup>cxix</sup> What sweat, semen, and tears achieved for the birth of crops and the *Halutz*-Land union, blood shed into the soil achieved for the salvation of Jewry both in and outside of Palestine. Citing a recorded account by the pioneer Ya’akov Zerubavel, Neumann includes the following declaration: “Masses of Hebrews [see chapter 4] will settle on the land, cultivate it, water it with their blood and the best of their vital fluids ... This is the essence of redemption.”<sup>cxii</sup> The focus from an unseen spiritual idea of the Divine to the physical mystery and spirituality of the Land allowed the *halutzim* to tangibly devote themselves to the *Shekinah* for the first time since exile. With their holy deaths and the spilling of their blood, each deceased *halutz* was, in part, responsible for the advent of *Moshiach*.

This messianic ideal manifested a sacralization of blood shed in the Land. As the blood of the deceased made contact with the soil, the area was considered sacred. For this reason, Jews who fell in battle with the Arab population, who were ambushed and killed while traveling, or who died in the throws of labor, were often buried at the scene of their death.<sup>cxiii</sup> Neumann gives an account of a murdered *halutz* named Yosef Saltzman, who was murdered by Arabs as he returned to Kinneret after a day’s work of plowing. Neumann shows

that, “His friends decided not to bury him near the settlement but rather in the place he was killed, where the soil had been ‘slaked’ with his blood.”<sup>cxiv</sup> The friends explain their reason for doing so, saying, “With his spilt blood, we have reestablished our covenant with Kinneret.”<sup>cxv</sup> In this manner, blood was seen as a necessary sacrifice to the Land that, in turn, displayed her loyalty to the divine marriage by producing trees and plants from the blood-fertilized soil. This symbiosis was evidence to the *halutzim* that the relationship with the Land existed in the material world as well as the spiritual life of death and *devekut*.

“The beautiful death,” as a *halutz* paradigm was not, however, adopted by Gordon, the movement’s spiritual leader. While Gordon did emphasize the cosmic oneness engendered through death, he was clear in his position on the sanctity of life. Not dismissive of death for the Land entirely, he was diametrically opposed to an organized unit of self-defense. Military, he insisted, not only was a product of exile, but was invariably a system of irresponsibly exercised hypnotic power.<sup>cxvi</sup> As Gordon referred to organized labor as holy redemption, he considered the military “the blind, elemental force of the people, the collective fist turned outward but also turned inward.”<sup>cxvii</sup> Labor, he argued, was the most exulted act of Judaism, an act that united the Divine and *Adam* in the holy work of creation. War and aggression, on the other hand, was the work of beasts and animals, the direct antithesis of sacred creation.

Considered in the light of the national spirit, the army is a remnant of the period when the nation, animal-like, beast-like, did not yet know how to define its individuality, how to assert its relationship to the other tribes except by beating, pushing, biting. There are those who glorify the fist. There are those who see in the deeds of the fist lofty heroism. There are those who become enthusiastic at a sacrifice along these lines without

seeing that there is in this not only no substitute for the holiness of sacrifice, which at bottom, is directly opposed to the deeds of the fist that governs military affairs.<sup>cxviii</sup>

To Gordon, the death of war was not “the beautiful death,” but rather animalistic barbarism. It was a non-Jewish exilic entity that retarded the true redemption of labor and creation. “The beautiful death,” in Gordon’s conceptualization of the term, was found in the authenticity of life for the sake of the Land.

The death of the military signaled a return to the empty murders of pogroms and anti-Semitic violence, but the death of labor, the losing of one’s identity to mold into oneness with the Land was an act of love and salvation. In the ruined corpses of meaningless battles, Gordon argued, the expert surgeons would find no existence of Life, not “in any of the separate parts, nor in the sum total of the parts.”<sup>cxix</sup> In the death of the individual I for the sake of the All, however, Life bursts forth from every dimension, illuminating the truth of the eternal cosmic relationship.

If you have loved a human being with an altruistic love; more, if you have been filled with compassion for man; if you have sought for truth, for righteousness; if you have devoted yourself whole-heartedly to the search for a new world, for a new man; if this is rooted deep within your soul, then you may rest assured that all this exists, that is a force sustaining itself.<sup>cxx</sup>

Gordon, in the words of the prophet Moses, insists that his reader choose life, for only in life is one able to truly die.

A rich world lies before us, wide vistas, great depths, infinite, boundless, unquenchable light. Plunge, O Man, into the depths of this vast ocean! Open the chambers of your heart to these currents of light and of life. Live! live [sic] in every atom of your being! Live and you will see that there is still room for love, for faith, for idealism, for creation! and [sic] perhaps, who knows, there may yet be worlds still undreamed of!...<sup>cxxi</sup>

*Halutz* adoption of the “beautiful death” played an integral role in the divine partnership between pioneer and the Land. As the holiest act of pioneer ideology, dying for the Divine was incorporated into the corpus of theological, social, and spiritual tenets. Implementing the rich sexuality of *Kabbalistic* death-through-divine-union ideology, the *halutzim* recast the traditional *Shekinah* bride as the virgin Land of *Eretz Yisrael*, and thus transferred the complex spiritual eroticism of their mystical forbearers to the literal and mystical penetration of the soil. While doing so, they emphatically cleaved to the *Talmudic* maxim that shaped this ancient concept – What does one do to live? One must kill himself. How does one kill himself? He must live.

## ***HaLashon HaKodesh***

### **The Role of Hebrew in *Halutz* Redemption**

*“For in Erez Israel we would be Jews anyhow, and that was what we wanted. It was this assurance that we found in the Hebrew language. In this language, the writer feels himself more a citizen of the world than he does in Yiddish. His national certainty is stronger in it, his consciousness of his own peculiar character deeper-rooted; and therefore he feels a wider freedom in it, too. In this language he feels that, whatever he does, whatever interests he has, whatever activities he pursues, he still spins in a mysterious way, tacitly and without attention, the eternal thread of his people.”<sup>cxxii</sup>*

-Rahel Kaznelson [Shazar] “From Language to Language”

Of the unifying elements of *Halutz* Zionism, the revitalization of the Hebrew language was publicly and privately the most critical and contentious. Invaluable to the development of a redoubtable Hebraic culture, writing, speaking, and reading in *HaLashon hakodesh*, the holy tongue, became an obligation of paramount importance to the social construction of the *halutz*.<sup>cxxiii</sup> New immigrants were encouraged to begin speaking the language immediately upon arrival, and Hebrew language and culture classes were included in the communal daily schedule, amidst physical labor, self-defense and guard duty, and agriculture.<sup>cxxiv</sup> While Hebrew grew in popularity amidst Zionists in both

Palestine and the Diaspora, it was not without its critics. The proposal to make Hebrew the official language of Jewish Palestine was met with hostility by Yiddish, Russian, Polish, and German speaking immigrants in many Zionist circles. The *halutzim*, however, saw the influential power and communal holiness of the language as a manifest connection to Jewish history – a connection that dramatically augmented their cosmic relationship to the Land.

Initially, Hebrew was one of many weapons in the fight against assimilation and the mentality of “ghetto Jewry.” If the ancient national language of Judaism were spoken both in Palestine and the *galut*, Zionist leaders maintained, an international movement would be formed, thus protecting against the influence of foreign culture and the diminution of Jewish identity.<sup>cxxv</sup> A.D.

Gordon argues this point in an essay on Zionist responsibility in the Diaspora.

Our thinking, too, must be wholly our own, bearing the impress of our own soul, of our Hebrew language. In the diaspora, no less than in Palestine must we bend all our energies toward making Hebrew a living tongue—the expression of the word and the thought of the Jew—if we wish the complete regeneration of the nation wherever it may live. The language will be the strongest living bond between the nation in Palestine and the parts of the nation in other lands; it will be the most powerful defence against assimilation.<sup>cxxvi</sup>

Gordon sees a worldwide Hebrew renewal as a pivotal steppingstone in the spiritual and physical rebirth of the Jewish nation.<sup>cxxvii</sup> While it was the political duty of Diasporic Zionism to disseminate the Hebrew mission in the *galut*, Gordon and the *halutzim* advanced literacy in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Working alongside teachers and different institutions, mostly in northern Palestine, the *halutzim* were among the most influential proponents of Hebrew



education during the second and third *aliyot*.<sup>cxxviii</sup> In general, the language came easier to these pioneers, for many had already acquired a limited vocabulary from their European upbringings. As Boaz Neumann illustrates, Hebrew played an important role to the *halutzim* before their immigration, as

Their parents spoke it, they had learned it in *heder*<sup>cxxix</sup>, with private teachers, in clubs, or in youth groups. David Ben-Gurion had his first Hebrew lesson with his grandfather, who held him on his knee and taught him Hebrew *in* Hebrew when he was three years old. His grandfather would point to an object with his finger, say, “what’s this?” and the young Ben-Gurion would remember the Hebrew word. With this, the boy would recall the names of objects throughout the house as well as hundreds of verbs and nouns: “I go,” “I sit,” “I write.” After some time, his grandfather spoke to him only in Hebrew, and would require his grandson to answer in his new language.<sup>cxxx</sup>

Having this firm antecedent connection to the language facilitated a quick yet knowledgeable adaptation of Hebrew to a powerful mystical *halutz* ideal. While the Hebrew of Jewish Europe was a link to a dead Jewish past, the Hebrew of Palestine became the holy tongue to a strong Jewish present.

While historians frequently discuss the secularization of the Hebrew language within early Zionism, (Anita Shapira argues that Hebrew in Labor Zionist mentality represents a continuation of maskilic ideology, whereas adoption of the Sephardic accent was “understood as in keeping with efforts to cut ties with the Eastern European Ashkenazi tradition,”) <sup>cxxxi</sup> it is evident that the *halutzim* acknowledged their inheritance as one of religious sustainability. Rahel Kaznelson-Shazar, the daughter of Berl Katznelson, referred to Jewish religiosity as the ‘guardian of Hebrew.’<sup>cxxxii</sup> She wrote that,

The religious life filled and refilled the heart of the Jewish people with perpetually renewed confidence, flooding every corner of it with spirit. It was this religious life which returned to the Hebrew language that intimacy of which it had been deprived by the other language—the language of the home and street.<sup>cxxxiii</sup>

Her father upheld a similar conviction, insisting that Hebrew should not be labeled as “instruction,” but rather as “bequest,” or *hanhalah* – the term is from the *TaNak*<sup>cxxxiv</sup>, meaning an inheritance.<sup>cxxxv</sup> This biblical allusion was typical of Katznelson, who according to Neumann refused to speak any language other than Hebrew upon his arrival in the Land (though he was incapable of forming an organized sentence). When forced to say something, Neumann says, “he would quote a verse from the Bible that was related in one way or another to the subject at hand, even it really made no sense in the context.”<sup>cxxxvi</sup> Comprehension of Jewish religion’s preservation of Hebrew thus promulgated a messianic biblical continuation in the *halutz* mindset.

The *halutzim* considered themselves heirs to a historically rich Jewish presence in *Eretz Yisrael*. Consequently, their initial geographical and historical knowledge of the Land was taken directly from *TaNak*. Arrival to Palestine brought the biblical stories of their childhoods to life, greeting them as the long exiled *am Yisrael* reunited at last with their holy Land. Anita Shapira does not dismiss the importance of biblical history to the *halutzim*; in fact, she credits this narrative as an important emotional and cultural influence on pioneer ethos. Analyzing the prevalence of biblical allusion and use in cultural settings, Shapira states that

The Bible was, in fact, woven into the emotional and cultural fabric of the Second Aliyah. It was found in the rooms of the workers, and passages from it decorated every youth convention, every camp or celebration. Almost all the labor leaders admitted its enormous impact. Through the stories of the Bible, Palestine came to life as a tangible reality.<sup>cxxxvii</sup>

While accepting this, however, Shapira also staunchly defends the secularization of the *TaNak* by *halutz* educational systems, and in so doing, ignores the spiritual significance of passages stressed by *halutz* teachers. “Portions of the Bible dealing with the commandments were treated as marginal,” Shapira explains. “On the other hand, those chapters that described the life of the Jews in their ancient land were emphasized in the belief that the students would be attracted by its vigor.”<sup>cxxxviii</sup> As has already been discussed, the evolution of *halutz* religiosity was concentrated on the Land itself. Pedagogy of biblical passages that recapitulate this theological stance is, therefore, not only logical, but presumed. Shapira continues, again misreading *halutz* religiosity while stressing a more political intention to the teaching of these biblical passages,

The Bible not only strengthened “rejection of the *galut*” concept; it also served as a link to ancient Jewish history and the Jewish cultural heritage without demanding religious commitment. One could be a Jew of national convictions, with an attachment to Jewish heritage, without observing the commandments.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

Missing in this analysis is the commonplace *halutz* recasting of Jewish tradition and religious values into a physical and spiritual relationship, as arbitrated by the Land herself. The theological paradigm of the *halutzim* does not reject religious commitment, nor does it exclude the centrality of *mitzvot*, or religious

commandments, in the worker's life. Rather, the strenuous daily formula of agriculture, manual labor, and Hebrew study assume the capacity of the former religious obligations. Gordon holds firmly to the *mitzvah* of Hebrew development, clearly and emphatically encouraging his reader to take on this commandment, saying, "In regard now to the Hebrew language: whoever has a mind or a heart alive and sensitive knows that this is a direct obligation upon him."<sup>cxl</sup> The traditional texts and commandments were thus quickly remodeled to fit the tenets of *halutz* orthopraxy, and evolved with the influence of the holy soil.

Boaz Neumann labels this action as the exchange of text for territory. "The pioneers therefore replaced the Exilic written text with a territory," Neumann writes, "exchanging the Torah, halacha, and their sacred books for the soil of the Land."<sup>cxli</sup> Emphasizing the seriousness of the *halutzim*, Neumann insists that this does not constitute a rejection of the sacred texts, but alternatively represents an exchange of ideology – namely that while the Jews of the ghetto spoke to God through the use of *sforim*, or holy books, the pioneers would speak to the same God through the sacred text written in soil.<sup>cxlii</sup> In this model, the same mystical concept of the *halutz* godhead is found in the holy tongue that speaks through the Land instead of through the book. Neumann illustrates the holiness of this adaptation by using the personal testimony of the pioneer Eliezer Yaffe.

When the *shekhina* permeates you, you are focused within yourself, and all the clamor around you that reaches your ears is but a distant echo, like the song of the birds in the forest or the croaking of the frogs in the marsh. Sounds indeed strike the eardrum, but one simply senses the harmony that makes them part of the song of the entire universe—the song that awakens and lifts the soul higher and higher, taking pleasure and dissolving in longing and in pleasure...<sup>cxliii</sup>

While the aspiration of pre-Zionist Orthodox Judaism was to reach God through the sacrosanct ritual of Hebrew prayer and study, the *halutzim* saw themselves as inextricably engaged in a dialogue that did not require the mediation of written text. While the *unia mystica* of *devekut* remained allusive to the average worker, the Hebrew-speaking pioneer was always connected to the *Shekinah*, for the Land herself spoke Hebrew.

By revitalizing the language of ancient Israel, the *halutzim* felt that they had renewed a spiritual conversation muted for nearly two millennia. Yiddish, Russian, and the ghetto languages of the *galut* were seen as useless, as the Land spoke and understood only the holy tongue.<sup>cxliv</sup> Rahel Kaznelson expressed the knowledge of Hebrew as a type of cosmic osmosis, influencing the *halutzim* subliminally while rejecting their sentimental ties to Yiddish. “Yet it was this deep and natural bond which we severed on coming to Erez Yisrael. None of us here feels any longer that he is a child of Yiddish!” She continues, stressing the emotional role still present with the sounds of Eastern Europe,

And when we speak Yiddish sometimes, or hear it spoken and listen with joy to the sure, unfaltering words, it gives us such pleasure as one may feel in hearing someone speak a language well, having all its secrets at his command—yet not a language to which we are intimately bound! The passionate attachment to Yiddish no longer exists for us. We master the language, but it does not master us.<sup>cxliv</sup>

To the *halutzim*, the use of Diasporic languages was profane disrespect for the Land of Israel. The cosmic relationship of pioneer and Soil, like the holy link between God and the Jewish mystic, relied on mutual love and reverence. To ignore the language of the Land was believed to put the *halutzim* in jeopardy –

just as maintaining the religious obligation of Hebrew could open pioneer eyes to cosmic secrets, so could abandoning the holy tongue create confusion and misguidance.<sup>cxlvi</sup>

Dedicated to sustaining the mystical symbiosis of Jew and Land, the *halutzim* constructed a purely Hebrew identity. They shook loose the epithets of the *galut*, no longer referring to themselves as Jews, but rather as Hebrews.<sup>cxlvii</sup> As Neumann adds, “They were Hebrew workers, Hebrew laborers, part of the Hebrew nation of Hebrew people. ... They tilled Hebrew soil and desired to be Hebrew men and women. ... Pioneer labor and self-defense, pioneer blood, the pioneers themselves and the soil could all only speak Hebrew.”<sup>cxlviii</sup> The birth of the Hebrew in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was to Gordon *the* cosmic moment in Judaism. Any expression of Jewish nationalism before immigration to the Land was considered historical by nature, but the reunion of the Hebrew speaking Jew with the Hebrew speaking Land sparked an event of true transcendence.<sup>cxlix</sup>

This *tshuva*, or return, engendered not only a new relationship to the divine, but a unification, a true cosmic oneness between People and Land, or *Am-Adam*<sup>cl</sup> in Gordon’s denotation.<sup>cli</sup> Though seemingly unique to *halutz* religiosity, this concept of a supernal unit, half human – half Divine, is a key element in multiple schools of Jewish mysticism. As Moshe Idel demonstrates, this concept was foundational in ecstatic *Kabbalah*, Safedian *Kabbalah*, and *Hasidism*. He states that, “All these schools envisioned *devekut* as a reintegration of the human in the primordial unity, whose other half is the Divine.”<sup>clii</sup> Of these circles, the *halutz* abstraction of holy oneness is most similar

to the conceptualization of the ecstatic *Kabbalists*, who understood this unification to be a holy reassembling of a feminine universal soul. Idel uses the words of the *Kabbalist*, *Sha'arey Zedek*, to expand on this point, “The universal soul is one, and she was divided into two [parts] because of the division of matter.”<sup>cliii</sup> Idel continues, creating an image of a circle constructed from two semi-circles – those semi circles being man and the divine feminine element, or *'Aravot*, in this specific model.<sup>cliv</sup> Comfortably fitting into the system of feminine attribution of the Land, as discussed in the chapter, “The New Covenant,” the teachings of disparate strains of Jewish mysticism eliminate any conception that *halutz* spiritual mentality was *sui generis*. Similarly, the application of this union also contains theological nuances. Belief in the metaphysical partnership generated a sense of godliness within the *halutzim*. While they remained physically human, their work and labor, as assisted through the spiritual connection to the soil, was capable of mystical creation.

Ability to harness the cosmic power of the People-Land union was denoted as an essential elemental force for the redemption of both the relationship's halves. As the Land awaited its redemption with the help of the Hebrew-speaking *halutz*, the *halutz* relied on the Hebrew-speaking Land for the same. Neumann shows how this symbiotic redemption formulated the rhetoric and belief systems of the *halutzim*, pointing out that, “Some even compared the pioneer word to the divine word—the word that creates the world.”<sup>clv</sup> In the same selection, Neumann cites a public forum of assimilationist Jews in Lvov, where a young pioneer named Yedidya Shoham insisted, “that Hebrew was not simply a

neutral means of communication, but rather the medium through which existence manifested itself.” He went on to add, “When Jews spoke Hebrew, the things they spoke of came into being.”<sup>clvi</sup> Gordon explained the function of the spiritual element (comprised of the historical *Adam* and the cosmic *Am*) as a harmony that continually grows in intensity.<sup>clvii</sup> “...the united, collective voice is effective only as this is true: that each voice maintains its intrinsic quality and to the degree that this quality is maintained.” Gordon continues, “In a similar manner, the value of each voice gains in proportion as its union with the other voices produces a harmonious effect through blending with those voices.”<sup>clviii</sup> The harmonious voices of *Am* and *Adam* echo in their shared ability, the power of creation, and compliment each other as the work develops through holy intervention.

In summary, the holy tongue of Hebrew functioned as both a unifying element of *halutz* spirituality as well as a mystical tool of cleaving to the Divine. Accredited with an organic power that vehemently rejected the foreign languages brought to Palestine, Hebrew surged through the Land and functioned as the cosmic epicenter of the *halutz-Eretz Yisrael* relationship. For this reason, the Land thrived only under the hoe of those who spoke its foreign tongue. This, the *halutzim* argued, was the reason the Land remained a wasteland for the Palestinian Arabs as well as the Yiddish speaking Jews who arrived during the first *aliyah*. In addition, a divine partnership was viewed by the *halutzim* as developed through the Hebrew dialogue of pioneer and soil. This *unia mystica*, as shown above was not a deviation from Jewish mystical tradition, and its



spiritual properties should therefore not be relegated to categories of unique nationalism or inspired environmentalism. The oneness with the soil was the cosmic and historical objective of the pioneers, and through the development of maintaining this relationship, their own adapted religiosity evolved.

## Conclusion

### “There Will Yet Come a Day”

*“Work, O Man, let not your work be insignificant in your eyes. Then will you make perfect what I have left imperfect in order that I may make perfect what you have left imperfect...”<sup>clix</sup>*

*A.D. Gordon, “Man and Nature”*

Pioneers in every sense of the word, the *halutzim* of the second and third *aliyot* sparked the advent of a new Jewish identity in both body and spirit. Every swing of the hoe or thrust of the shovel penetrated the very being of the *halutz* as well as the Land’s Jewish soil. With a recast *Eretz*-centered theology, the *halutzim* reinterpreted their Jewishness while simultaneously cleaving to the rich traditions of their ancestors. The product of this amalgamation is a religiosity formed from elements of Jewish mystical tradition and socialistic agricultural labor. Though the edification of *halutz* religious methodology depends on foundational structures of the past, its esoteric ideology is directed towards a messianic eschatological future.

With the incorporation of *Kabbalistic* expression, professions of *unia mystica* and sacred marriage to *Eretz Yisrael*, a holy desire to die for the sanctification of the soil, and belief in the divine creative power of the holy tongue of Hebrew, the *halutzim* see themselves as central to the immanence of redemption. This certainty in the approaching eschaton echoes with the messianic rhetoric of Jewish mystical history. A.D. Gordon insists that his fellow *halutzim* are prophets and saviors, true *tzadikim* who are capable of shedding their earthly identities for the sake of ushering in the salvation of Jewish labor. It is the job of these holy pioneers, therefore, to break free from the earthly and rise to holiness in the footsteps of the prophets. As Gordon says,

Then I recalled that in yonder valley to the south, among those mountains, Elija of Gilead rose to heaven in a storm. Indeed, it could not be otherwise. Elijah had to rise alive to heaven from here—and surely in a storm. I remembered further: “And behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to the heavens.” And what are we looking for – is it not a place for a ladder? ...<sup>clx</sup>

Berl Katznelson reasserts these sentiments, implementing the layered profundity of mystical expression and divine hiddenness of the Land. In his words, “... we do not sense that it is the sublime mystery of all time whose name is Eretz Israel. And blessed be every moment which enhances and strengthens this feeling.”<sup>clxi</sup> As sages and saviors, the pioneers have no need for the *Moshiach* of their devout predecessors. They are the inheritors of the physical and spiritual *Shekinah*, the indwelling of the Holy One, Her holy husband. In their possession is the sacred relationship of *Am-Adam*, reunited after centuries of oppression and alienation. Their reunion, destined throughout Jewish history, proclaims the truth

of *Moshiach* – they are the transcendent link of both physical and cosmic history, the foreseen redeemers of the Jewish people.

The present study is simply a call to recognize the mystical theology and spiritual complexity of these intriguing men and women. My research and analysis, which I hope to be identified as diverse, extensive, and balanced, posits that the social and religious identities of the *halutzim* are not black and white images of labor-influenced secularism, but rather intricate interpretations of a hidden past and an eschatological future. This undertaking is presented during a fructuous surge of Jewish mystical studies as well as Israeli historiography in American academia. If I achieve nothing else through the arguments of this work, I hope that I at least further interest in these quickly augmenting fields and the research of their current forerunners.

Finally, I would like to express the direct influence of professors Boaz Neumann and Anita Shapira on the concept of this essay. These two accomplished Israeli historians and their invaluable contributions to Israeli historiography are featured in this work as necessary obstacles to a complicated historical reality. Though I have only incorporated books and essays by these two figures that deal directly with the issue at hand, I am deeply indebted to the whole of their oeuvres, as they have provided vital background information, richly researched primary texts, and numerous counterarguments that demand direct confrontation for this work to be lucid and legitimate.

*Our Land and the Land of Our Fathers: The Case of Aaron David Gordon* is therefore a direct response to the labeled *halutz* categorizations of Shapira and

Neumann. What Neumann considers pioneer desire and Shapira calls “secular religion” or “political messianism,”<sup>clxii</sup> this essay argues, is an oversimplification of a complex and hidden tradition (the complexity and elusiveness being intentional and an integral element of Jewish mystical history). Despite difference of intention and influence, the argument from all remains relatively similar. In the words of Anita Shapira,

Basically, the Palestine labor movement was a religious movement. It might be called a “secular religion” or “political messianism,” to use terms current in modern historiography, but it stands as a religious movement even without the secular modifiers. Its inner character was religious and it parallels the millenarian sects in Christianity and the mystical movements that had accompanied normative Judaism. It was first and foremost a great fraternity of believers—people whose lives were directed by an all-consuming faith. This faith had many shades and was variously perceived by different groups, but it had a common denominator: the belief that the end of days was within sight, that the realization of the Zionist idea was immanent.<sup>clxiii</sup>

Indeed the *halutz* movement was one of certain religiosity. It is the presence of the spirit of Jewish tradition and the recast image of God that makes the *halutz* an intriguing and vitally important era of the Land’s history. And it is for this reason that the analysis of this foundational moment must continue. The studies will invariably disagree, the debates will continue, and the reality of the *halutz* will live in abstraction. But while the words of the pioneers persevere through the systematic desacralization of Israeli historiography, the cosmic moment, the holy bridge between *Halutz* and *Eretz* remains, and the rallying cry of A.D. Gordon resonates with its intended redemptive significance,

On that day you will cast your eyes round about you, and above you, O Man. And you will see the earth and all existence therein, and you will see

the heavens with all their hosts, with all the worlds that are in them – worlds without end and limit. All of them will be near to you and all of them will bear a blessing for you. Then you will grasp the eternity that is in the moment.<sup>clxiv</sup>

## Appendix A

### ***Shekinah* In Exile and the Pathway to Redemption**

The goal of Jewish mysticism is to form a connection with holiness, to transcend time while grasping the ineffable. To obtain spiritual ecstasy exceeds an abandonment of the self alone. It requires the pushing forward of humankind to a realm of otherworldliness, to bring reality as close to the Divine as possible. Though the individual may use his or her personal spiritual experience to strengthen the soul in pursuit of aiding his/her neighbor, redemption lies in the hands of all.

To the mystic, this redeeming of man is not a superfluous suggestion but rather a commandment of the utmost importance. It is a matter of spiritual life and death. However, this task requires a heavenly assistance, a holy symbiosis that aids both God and man. The relationship as such makes an audacious theological claim, that God needs man and that this partnership alone determines the salvation of all. God's assistance then is invaluable. It comes in the form of the presence of God, the *Shekinah*, or indwelling of the LORD, and it is this presence that guides the way of the pious through the pain and difficulty of uniting the earthly with the heavenly.

The presence of the *Shekinah* in the world is considered by the Jewish mystic to be a comforting fragment of the Divine amidst the wasteland of human reality. Sin, hatred, indifference, and humiliation are truths of the exile into which humanity has been cast. From the transgression of Adam, a separation developed, breaking the unity of the holy and earthly, and the world now lays in the division's wake, waiting to be reassembled and reunited with the *Ein Sof*, the one who is without end.<sup>clxv</sup> While man is thrown into a broken world separated from its creator, God provides the *Shekinah* to follow God's people into exile and to assist in closing the divisive abyss. This doctrine of the *Shekinah* in exile becomes a foundational element in Jewish mystical theology and praxis, expounded upon and debated by iconic figures in the study of Jewish thought and history.

Amongst these philosophers, theologians, and exegetes, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel contributes a history and theology of the *Shekinah* and its exilic state with a pathos and seriousness *sui generis*. To Heschel, the presence of God exiled in the world of man represents a combination of process theology and messianic salvation.<sup>clxvi</sup> The work of the individual is significant in itself only if it provides a beacon for others to follow. Whether the individual fragments of the redemptive community of humankind are Jewish, Christian, or Muslim is of no difference to Heschel. All are exiled, and all have a duty to bring about salvation. "Not only Israel but the whole universe, even the *Shekinah*, 'lies in dust' and is in exile. Man's task is to bring about the restitution of the original state of the universe and the reunion of the *Shekinah* and the *Ein Sof*. This is the meaning of



messianic salvation, the goal of all efforts.<sup>clxvii</sup> The response to Heschel's call for a leap of action rather than a leap of thought<sup>clxviii</sup> is then a taking seriously of the ancient idea of the *Shekinah* in exile while coupled with an implication of redemptive responsibility.

Different Jewish mystical scholars of the twentieth century including Gershom Scholem, Moshe Idel, and Joshua Abelson are faced with an ancient concept loaded with new theological significance. As these figures are more or less contemporaries, Idel being the most modern, born in 1947 and presently teaching at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the emphasis on the *Shekinah* in exile is one that is shared in the study of mystical Judaism. Whether understood solely as a historical element in the evolution of Judaism or treated with the utmost seriousness, a la Heschel, the doctrine of the *Shekinah* in exile gains new complexity when placed in a category of eschatology.

## I

### Heschel's Call to Action – Mysticism and Prophecy

Heschel's philosophy that action engenders redemption stems from an experience of the world at its darkest hour. Born in Poland and a student in Germany during the ascension of Nazism, Heschel's European life was one of fear and uncertainty. Expelled from Germany in 1938 and escaping Warsaw

shortly before its ghettoization to immigrate to America<sup>clxix</sup>, Heschel's sincere words echo with a personal sadness.

I speak as a member of a congregation whose founder was Abraham, and the name of my rabbi is Moses.

I speak as a person who was able to leave Warsaw, the city in which I was born, just six weeks before the disaster began. My destination was New York; it would have been Auschwitz or Treblinka. I am a brand plucked from the fire in which my people was burned to death. I am a brand plucked from the fire of an altar of Satan on which millions of human lives were exterminated to evil's greater glory, and on which so much else was consumed: the divine image of so many human beings, many people's faith in the God of justice and compassion, and much of the secret and power of attachment to the Bible bred and cherished the hearts of men for nearly two thousand years ...

... I speak as a person who is convinced that the fate of the Jewish people and the fate of the Hebrew Bible are intertwined. The recognition of our status as Jews, the legitimacy of our survival, is possible only in a world in which the God of Abraham is revered.<sup>clxx</sup>

As Edward Kaplan shows in his work, *Holiness in Words*, Heschel was convinced that "We are responsible for God's exile. This is not a metaphor of a human conception, such as the 'eclipse of God.' It represents a theological insight from God's perspective."<sup>clxxi</sup> While one would assume that Heschel's personal connection to the *shoa* and the evil of the world would be crippling to his theological perspective, the opposite is true. For Heschel, God's exile is not an end but rather constitutes a necessity in humanity, delivering painful and difficult energy to the world while eliminating spiritual defeat as an option.<sup>clxxii</sup>

Heschel's belief in a spiritual activism is seen immediately upon his arrival to the United States. In *The Earth is the Lord's*, Heschel pays homage to the destroyed world of East European Jewry. Asserting his position as a descendent of *Hassidic* and *Kabbalistic* tradition, Heschel accredits the faith of his roots as

the fountainhead of Jewish responsibility in reuniting God and man. In this financially poor but spiritually rich world of *Hasidut*, knowledge and learning become the first steps to messianic redemption. In the Jewish villages of Russia and Poland,

the sexton would go at dawn from house to house, knocking at the shutters and chanting:

Get up, Jews,  
Sweet, holy Jews,  
Get up and worship the Creator!  
God is in exile,  
The Shekinah is in exile,  
The people is in exile.  
Get up to serve the Creator!<sup>clxxiii</sup>

Unifying the *Shekinah* with the *En Sof* in this paradigm begins first and foremost in the *Beit Midrash*, the house of study. For to free mankind and the presence of God from exile requires responsibility and knowledge of its undertaking. Respect and dedication to God and man is a step towards redemption, while a rejection of either realm of heaven and earth is a desecration.<sup>clxxiv</sup>

Mysticism becomes a source of wisdom through experience to Heschel. In an act of prayer or worship, the individual loses all comprehension of the self and glimpses the majesty of God's presence. This experiential phenomenon provides the individual with a view of life in its polarities, the goodness of God and the darkness of exile. To the Hasidim of Eastern Europe, according to Heschel, the ultimate knowledge of responsibility and redemption comes with the awareness of good and evil in mysticism and transcendent consciousness.

As a consequence of that consciousness and strongly convinced of man's ultimate superiority to the power of evil, the Jews mobilized their might,

attempting to subdue the foe within the heart, the appeal of a brute matter. They fasted every Monday and Thursday and underwent fierce mortifications to purify themselves. The evil urge, they believed, pursues every man, ready to make him stumble at any false step. This state of mind led both to rapture and to sadness: the Jews felt the infinite beauty of the heaven, the holy mysteries of piety, and also the danger and the gloom of this world. Man is so unworthy and disgraceful and the heavens are so lofty and remote—what must man do in order not to fall into the Nethermost Pit?<sup>clxxv</sup>

Heschel emphasizes, however, that though this mystical experience is a moment of insight to the individual, the “ultimate goal of the kabbalist is not his own union with the Absolute but the union of all reality with God; one’s own bliss is subordinated to the redemption of all...”<sup>clxxvi</sup> Therefore, the role of Jewish mysticism is pedagogic only in its relation to the community. The experience happens to the individual, but the true mystic speaks always in the plural.<sup>clxxvii</sup>

If redemption of the all is the ideal eschaton of the mystic, revelation is the means by which God calls the community to action. It is implied that the Hebrew Bible is the bedrock of God’s relationship with humankind. Wisdom of the self comes from wisdom of the marriage between God and Israel, expressed throughout the pages of the *TaNaK*. Though attention is certainly given to the books of Moses, Heschel more often directs the individual to the message of the prophets.

To Heschel, the prophets are not the mouthpieces of God, but rather the paragons of the divine / human connection.<sup>clxxviii</sup> They represent not morality through reason but goodness through law and the human heart. To hear the voice of the prophets is to obtain a knowledge of the *Skekinah* in its most intense and truthful expression.

God's demand for justice means not only outward duty but the love of the heart. Knowledge of God does not turn man away from man. It means sharing God's concern for justice, sympathy in action. Injustice is condemned not because the law is broken but because a person is hurt, a person whose anguish may reach the heart of God. The prophets do not discuss ideas or norms, like the moralists. They demand and insist that what ought to be shall be.<sup>clxxxix</sup>

The message of the prophet does not die with the prophets themselves. Heschel argues that within every individual is a grain of the prophetic spirit.<sup>clxxx</sup> The revelation of God's presence in the world is not exclusive to any individual but rather can be felt and understood by any who are perceptive to God's love and sense of justice. Thus, the prophets become the models of morality, ethical guides in navigating exile's difficult and exhausting terrain. While their physical bodies may be gone and forgotten, their words and their call of accounting, repenting, and living God's love become breathing pulsing bodies of moral knowledge.

The prophets and the words of the *TaNaK* are not revelations etched into a linear view of history. Rather, they are alive and prone to the same consequences of neglect and apathy as any living organism of human experience. Heschel, alluding to a section of the *Zohar*, sees the upholding of Torah and the prophetic messages to be adorning symbolic vestments upon the *Shekinah*. "When a man sins it is as though he strips the Shekinah of her vestments, and that is why he is punished; and when he carries out the precepts of the Law, it is as though he clothes the Shekinah in her vestments."<sup>clxxxix</sup> The prophets' job is encapsulated in this symbolism. Their anger and accusation comes from the frustration of removing the vestments of the *Shekinah*; their

hopeful pleas and promises are signs of comfort and joy that the vestments will someday cover the *Shekinah* entirely, reuniting man and God. It is this polarity that motivates Heschel to action. There can be no hope without concern. A dualism must be present, for

The words of the prophet are stern, sour, stinging. But behind his austerity is love and compassion for mankind. Ezekiel sets forth what all other prophets imply: 'Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?' (Ezek. 18:23.) Indeed, every prediction of disaster is in itself an exhortation to repentance. The prophet is sent not only to upbraid, but also to 'strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees' (Isa. 35:3). Almost every prophet brings consolation, promise, and the hope of a reconciliation along with censure and castigation. He begins with a message of doom; he concludes with a message of hope [Emphasis Heschel's].<sup>clxxxii</sup>

Models of spiritual piety appear throughout history in Heschel's theology. While the prophets portray the most extreme examples of the divine / human connection, they are not alone in their dedication to God and *halachah*. The *Hasidim* of Eastern Europe, the *Kabbalists* of the Middle Ages, and the most pious among those presently living all offer insight into the pathway out of earthly exile. The gates to God are never closed to Heschel, for the *Shekinah* remains in exile with the world until the eschaton of success or ultimate failure.

## II

*Torah Min HaShamayim* – Developing the *Shekinah*

“It is analogous to a person who tethered two ships together with anchor chains and iron moorings, put them out to sea, and built a palace on them. The palace endures so long as the ships are tethered to one another; were the ships to float apart, the palace could not endure. So it is here: when Israel fulfills God’s will, the chambers of heaven are built up, but when Israel does not, God’s vault, as it were, founders on earth.”

-Heschel’s translation of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai<sup>clxxxiii</sup> in *Torah Min HaShamayim BehlspakLaryah Shel HaDorot*

As Heschel continued developing his rich theology, publishing his definitive *works God in Search of Man, Man Is Not Alone, and The Sabbath*, his understanding of the *Shekinah* in exile became more complex and powerful. It was not until the release of his posthumous *Torah Min HaShamayim BehlspakLaryah Shel HaDorot* (Heavenly Torah As Refracted Through the Generations) that the significance of this ancient mystical doctrine was seen clearly in Heschel’s writing. In contrast to *The Earth is The Lord’s* and the essay “The Mystical Element in Judaism,” which cover concepts of the *Shekinah* in about four pages each, *Torah Min HaShamayim* dedicates an entire chapter to its theological relevance.

The very structure of *Torah Min HaShamayim* allows for multiple interpretations on the nature of the *Shekinah*. Embossed with layers of footnotes, including Rabbinic and mystical sources, Heschel’s chapter on the Divine Presence includes insights from the most iconic names in Jewish history, from Rabbis Akiva and Ishmael, and the author(s) of the *Zohar* and mystical *seferim*, to the commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. The addition of these conflicting theological viewpoints adds a profound seriousness to the topic at

hand. What was once seen as an esoteric *Kabbalistic* doctrine becomes a living page of *Talmud*.

Heschel uses the Rabbis to begin his conversation. With Rabbi Eliezer starting from a single element of God's nature, the topic expands.

For example, Rabbi Eliezer raised the question, 'Why did the Holy and Blessed One, in revealing Himself from the highest heavens, speak to Moses out of the thornbush [sic]? Because just as the thornbush [sic] is the lowliest of all the trees in the world, so the people Israel had sunk to the lowest level of degradation and the Holy and Blessed One descended with them and redeemed them, as it is written, 'I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians' (Exodus 3:8)."<sup>clxxxiv</sup>

God's presence descending into the world became synonymous with God, as it were, "sharing the lot" of Israel.<sup>clxxxv</sup> Heschel expounds upon this notion, claiming that salvation of humanity exists as a dogma paramount throughout Jewish history. "Among the fundamentals of the faith is the idea that the Holy and Blessed One participates in the sufferings of Israel."<sup>clxxxvi</sup> However, the significance of the relationship between the *Shekinah* and Israel changes dramatically with the interpretations of the Rabbis.

Rabbi Akiva's contribution to the Divine Presence in relationship to humanity is the genesis of Heschel's Depth Theology, anchored on the idea that God needs man. Rabbi Akiva begins an audacious new theological interpretation by seeing God's pain in the exile of God's people. It is to be understood that while

The Sages of the second generation of the Tannaim used words such as "descent" only as further explanation of the concept "I am with him in suffering." "The Shekinah descended with them" was to be understood as saying that it shared their lot—that is, as signifying empathy. But along came Rabbi Akiva, who taught that the participation of the Holy and



Blessed One in the life of Israel is not merely a mental nod, a measure of compassion born of relationship to God's people. The pain of compassion amounts to pain only at a distance; it is the pain of the onlooker. But the participation of the Holy and Blessed One is that of total identification, something that touches God's very essence, God's majestic being. As it were, the afflictions of the nation inflict wounds on God.<sup>clxxxvii</sup>

The theological danger in this bold notion, of course, is the questioning of God's omnipotence. How could the creator of the heavens and earth be dependant on a sinful nation for the redemption of God and the world? The very uttering of this denial of God's power, says Heschel, ripped the theology of Judaism apart.

Where there once existed two separate realms of reality, one belonging to God and the other to the errant and sinful world of humanity, now there was to be only one, the two worlds of the former theory merged into a single spiritually troubling truth.<sup>clxxxviii</sup>

Heschel follows the historical division of Rabbi Akiva's interpretation to the schools of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael who cling to two different images of God. Rabbi Ishmael's school, careful not to associate any human language with the all-powerful creator of the universe, reserves the study of *Torah* and the fulfilling of *mitzvot*, or commandments, to finding favor with God. Akiva, however, maintains his belief in the God of compassion and partnership. While Ishmael teaches that following divine laws brings favor to an individual, Akiva instructs his students to obey the commandments for it is God's desperate plea for Israel to do so.<sup>clxxxix</sup> As Heschel appropriately states, "One school views the study of Torah as a gift of wise counsel. The other views it as the object of God's deepest

yearnings.<sup>”cx c</sup> The two schools remain separated, leaving the argument to be dealt with by the sages, who join in the struggle for clarifying this difficult notion.

After Akiva and Ishmael, Heschel posits that the question of God’s presence in exile was now a fixed question of Jewish theology. “It seems as though this polemic adjoined itself to the murmuring of religious thought in every generation. And each mode of thought that emerged bore the stamp of one or the other of these two positions.”<sup>cx ci</sup> As Rabbi Ishmael’s followers maintained their master’s original opinion that a theology wherein God relies on humans is absurd and limits God’s power, the followers of Rabbi Akiva gained more support and expanded the pathos of the God of exile. Heschel suggests that this division must be seen in a historical manner – that to the outsider the argument seems moot, but to the Rabbis it contains the most important theological questions.

The Rabbis recorded their words during periods of great distress and confusion in Jewish history. Therefore, to ask if God is either lacking power or compassion requires knowledge that

The Rabbis in the generation we are considering experienced things that others have not seen: the sacking of Jerusalem, the humiliation of the house of Israel, and the profanation of the Holy Name in the sight of the whole world. Stormy eras filled with human agony also harbor troubling thoughts; even the pillars of heaven shudder. And a nation that has been belittled by the nations of the world is likely to verge on belittling the great presumptions: that God is merciful and compassionate and that God is the great and the powerful. If there is mercy, there surely is no power; and if there is power, there surely is no mercy! For could one maintain that the Holy and Blessed One empathizes well but does not carry through?<sup>cx cii</sup>

While the school of Rabbi Ishmael inserted into their writings a questioning of God’s silence, “Who is like You, God, among the mute [ba-‘ilemim], who is like

You in how you [sic] see the humiliation of Your children and remain silent?"<sup>cxci</sup>

Rabbi Akiva's school remained content in the belief that a limit to God's power is less troubling than an idea that God is unconcerned with God's people.

Though Heschel gives equal attention to both sides of the argument, it is clear that his personal theology sides with that of Rabbi Akiva. As discussed above, Heschel's interpretation of the *Shekinah* in exile is founded on the belief that God and man form a symbiotic partnership. Heschel's conception of the divine relationship, however, goes beyond the ambiguity of Rabbi Akiva's interpretation and gains a radical element. To Heschel, the presence of God can be seen within every individual. Quick to dismiss symbolism in relation to authentic religious experience, Heschel adheres to one symbol, the "real symbol"<sup>cxci</sup> of the human as an image of God.

Edward K. Kaplan argues that this concept of "sacred humanism"<sup>cxci</sup> should not be viewed as an exoteric dogma, but should rather be considered an understatement, a glimpse of what can only truly be known by God.

Heschel's claims are understatements [Kaplan's emphasis] whose transcendent meaning is understood only by God, not hyperboles of social or psychological reality. His philosophy of religion represents an 'accommodation of words to higher meanings,' not an inflation of thought to the level of absolute fact. Hence, to consider a person as an image of God reflects the divine view of persons, not a rational picture of humankind by itself.<sup>cxci</sup>

With this in mind, it is evident that to Heschel the *Shekinah* in exile is itself an understatement, one of inconceivable importance to both man and God. While the individual represents the bridge between heaven and earth, true unification cannot take place in a symbol alone. It is this "real symbol" that serves as a

constant reminder of the severity of redemption. The face of a human provides a glimpse into the divine, a moment of tranquility in God's presence amidst the cacophony of exile's frustrations.

### III

#### Contemporary Interpretations:

#### Scholem, Idel, and Abelson on the *Shekinah* in Exile

It is of interest to note that in his writings on the *Shekinah*, Heschel refers to only one twentieth-century scholar of Jewish mysticism, Joshua Abelson.<sup>cxvii</sup> Abelson's quotation within Heschel's "The Mystical Element of Judaism" states that the *Shekinah*

continually accompanies a man and leaves him not so long as he keeps the precepts of the Torah. Hence a man should be careful not to go on the road alone; that is to say, he should diligently keep the precepts of the Torah in order that he may not be deserted by the *Shekinah*, and so be forced to go alone without the accompaniment of the *Shekinah*.<sup>cxviii</sup>

Heschel's inclusion of Abelson is a departure from his ubiquitous mystical secondary sources, in that Abelson is by and by a systematic historian of Jewish mysticism and not an exegete or traditional philosopher. Abelson's inspection of the *Shekinah* includes an etymological analysis of the word (coming from the verb *shachan*, to dwell, used in Exodus 25:3)<sup>cxix</sup>, and a systematic categorization

of uses of the concept in Rabbinic literature. Abelson lays out his organized findings showing that

An examination of Shechinah passages throughout the greater portion of the realm of Rabbinic literature, suggests the following classification of the various senses attaching to the word. I tabulate them as follows (and have discussed them in this order) : --

- (I.) Conception of Shechinah as Light or other material object.
- (II.) Shechinah used in a personified sense under the following aspects : ---
  - (a) Face of Shechinah.
  - (b) "Cloud," "Wings," etc., of Shechinah.
  - (c) As the Immanent God in Palestine, Temple, and Synagogue.
  - (d) As the Immanent God in Israel.
  - (e) Shechinah and Sin.
  - (f) Shechinah and Torah.
  - (g) Shechinah and Word (Dibbur).
  - (h) The Memra of Targumic literature.<sup>cc</sup>

The *Shekinah* in Abelson's writings is merely an evolving concept in Jewish history. The word could have changed definitions due to disagreements between debating schools of thought, but what is significant is its diversity in theological usage. Abelson argues that more often than not, the term simply serves as a synonym for God. He alludes to Rabbinical sources and maintains that "frequently where one passage in Rabbinic literature has the word 'Shechinah,' a parallel passage somewhere else uses the term 'God.' And more

than this [sic]. Frequently the two terms are used indiscriminately in one and the same passage.<sup>ccci</sup> Therefore, while Abelson does not specifically rule out Heschel's interpretation of this mystical concept, Heschel's position is far from reinforced with the citation of Abelson.

A more comparable analysis of the *Shekinah* in exile to Depth Theology can be found in the work of Moshe Idel, who offers a historical and theological interpretation closer to that of Heschel. While using a similar system as Abelson of historical analysis to ascertain the differing definitions of *Shekinah* throughout Jewish history, Idel emphasizes the descent of the *Shekinah* into the human body. While explaining this popular reading utilized by the Rabbis, Idel subtly mentions the necessity of this embodiment for God rather than man.

...but I would like to highlight a specific form of drawing down the Shekhinah. According to some texts, the structure is not a building, but the human body, which is the living statue on whom the indwelling of the Shekhinah takes place; this kind of indwelling on human beings is evidenced by ancient Jewish texts. No prerequisites, however, were mentioned for this dwelling, it being presented as a necessity of the Divine rather than of man.<sup>ccii</sup>

In this specific reading of the *Shekinah* doctrine, Idel stands beside Heschel, using ancient Jewish texts as evidence that the existence of the *Shekinah* was considered, and continues to be, a divine imperative – that the redemption of God and humanity depends on the presence of God in the exilic world of humankind. However, while Heschel modernizes the classical interpretation, applying it to his system of Depth Theology, Idel offers a *Kabbalistic* perspective of the Divine Presence.

Applying mystical literature and *Kabbalistic* tales to the tradition of the *Shekinah*, Idel links himself to a history of feminizing the Divine Presence and characterizing the *Shekinah* with emotion and pathos. This emotion, Idel argues, is crucial in eliminating the division between the *Shekinah* and man. “By emotional or intellectual identification, the distance between the *Shekhinah* and man is obliterated, and she comes to dwell upon man and is clothed by his words.”<sup>cciii</sup> Feminization of the *Shekinah*, a practice begun by the *Kabbalists*, expresses the same metaphorical dressing of the Divine Presence as used by Heschel. While Heschel is careful to avoid the application of gender to his interpretation, his allusion to adorning the *Shekinah* with vestments fits clearly into a *Kabbalistic* schema of God’s presence. Idel, however, takes this feminine personification ever farther, displaying accounts of experiencing the *Shekinah* in a womanly form.

To the *Kabbalists*, the *Shekinah* constitutes the lowest form of divine presence, i.e. the closest divine manifestation to the earthly realm.<sup>cciv</sup> Its role is thus to form the relationship of God and man through an earthly obtainable process. This, then, is the purpose of the mystical experience. By reaching a mystical union with the Divine presence, it is as if one is affirming the marriage of the divine and the earthly. Traditionally,

the *Shekhinah*, plays the feminine role in relationship to the *Zaddik*, the righteous human being, who functions as the male. This view is repeatedly expressed in the *Zohar*, although it is not entirely novel; it was alluded to in the *Midrash* and by R. Moses of Burgos in connection with Moses’ description in the Bible as the “man of God” (“man” in Hebrew—‘ish—also has the meaning of “husband”). According to these texts, Moses is the “man,” the husband of *Elohim*, a symbol for the *Shekhinah*.

In the Zohar, however, these scanty allusions were expanded and extended to the righteous in general.<sup>ccv</sup>

So popular was this feminization of the *Shekinah* that it became common practice for the spiritual elite to conjure up an experience of her presence. To do so, the individual would enter a strict regimen of fasting, self-imposed suffering, and incessant weeping, attempting to reach the zenith of human emotion in order to connect with God's sympathetic and comforting presence. Stories of the success of these experiences are many and often take place on the eve of Shabbat or *Erev Shavuot*, the evening before the holiday of the receiving of the Torah. An example of this can be found in the account of Rabbi Isaac Yehudah Yehiel Safrin where he explains that

in 1845, on the twenty-first day of the 'Omer, I was in the town of Dukla. I arrived there late at night, and it was and there was no one to take me home, except for a tanner who came and took me into his house. I wanted to pray Ma'ariv and to count the 'Omer, but I was unable to do it there, so I went to the Beit Midrash alone, and there I prayed until midnight had passed. And I understood from this situation the plight of the Shekhinah in exile, and her suffering when she is standing in the market of tanners. And I wept many times before the Lord of the world, out of the depth of my heart, for the suffering of the Shekhinah. And through my suffering and weeping, I fainted and I fell asleep for a while, and I saw a vision of light, splendor and great brightness, in the image of a young woman adorned with twenty-four ornaments. . . .And she said: "Be strong, my son," and so on. And I was suffering that I could not see but the vision of her back and I was not worthy to receive her face. And I was told that {this was because} I am alive, and it is written, "for no man shall see me, and live."<sup>ccvi</sup>

With these examples of self-imposed suffering to achieve mystical experience, Idel exposes a dubious interpretation of the *Shekinah* in exile, one that goes against the theology of Heschel.



Idel discusses myriad interpretations of the Divine Presence throughout Jewish mystical history, but sides with Heschel on the frivolity of some attempts to reach God. Like Heschel, Idel's conception of the *Shekinah* involves the participation of the community, not the individual. However, it must be mentioned that Idel sees Heschel's personalized mystical system as a deviation from authentic *Kabbalah*. To Idel, Heschel's Depth Theology expresses a mystical pathos designed for pluralism with an English vernacular.<sup>ccvii</sup> Heschel's religious understanding comes from a tradition of Hasidism, not *Kabbalah*, Idel stresses, and therefore comparing his theology to *Kabbalistic* tradition proves difficult. Idel emphasizes this by creating his own comparison, aligning Heschel's philosophy next to that of Gershom Scholem.

While Scholem and Heschel both discuss the concept of *Galut*, or exile, Idel argues that Heschel's theology is more akin to 'exaltation,' as opposed to the pessimistic exile discussed in Scholem's *Kabbalistic* tradition.<sup>ccviii</sup> Idel shows that the major point of divergence between the two thinkers is embodied by these different concepts of exile. While Heschel considers the *Shekinah* in exile to be a call of action and spiritual living, Scholem sees rather a world of symbolism where knowledge can be discovered. To Heschel,

Hasidism is a lived experience, which cannot be properly understood without direct contact with this living tradition. For Scholem mysticism was much more a matter of symbolic expression of some form of experience, and what is available to the scholar of mysticism are the literary manifestations of this experience. If, for Heschel, life in a community is the locus where the essence of Judaism, identified as a form of plenitude he called exaltation, it seems that, for Scholem, that was much less the case. For Scholem Jewish life in exile is what he designated as life in deferment, while for Heschel, on the contrary, celebration and exaltation are conceived of as experiences attainable in the present, anywhere.<sup>ccix</sup>

However, it appears that Scholem and Heschel share similar readings of the text, even if their understandings of *Kabbalah* itself differ.

Scholem's explanation of the *Shekinah* in exile is similar to Heschel's. The major contrast is in Scholem's use of gendered language wherein he discusses the Divine Presence as the female aspect of God separated from the masculine.<sup>ccx</sup> The definition of the exile itself is strikingly similar and calls upon the same sources. "In the Talmud this means only that God's presence was always with Israel in its exiles. In the Kabbalah, however, it is taken to mean that a part of God Himself is exiled from God [Emphasis Scholem's]."<sup>ccxi</sup> Idel's elaboration on the symbolic interpretation of Scholem's mysticism creates a further divergence between Scholem and Heschel. While Heschel sees the *Shekinah* as the comforting presence of God, Scholem finds a vulnerability in the Divine Presence that makes it a vessel for evil.

This evil comes in the definition of *Shekinah* as both woman and soul.<sup>ccxii</sup> The weakness of the *Shekinah* can be seen by evil leaking through other *Kabbalistic* symbols and affecting all of the earth. Scholem warns that

Insofar as all the preceding sefirot<sup>ccxiii</sup> are encompassed in it and can exert a downward influence only through its mediation, the powers of mercy and of stern judgment are alternately preponderant in the Shekhinah, which as such is purely receptive and 'has nothing of its own.' But the power of stern judgment in God is the source of evil as a metaphysical reality, that is to say, evil is brought about by a hypertrophy of this power. But there are states of the world, in which the Shekhinah is dominated by the powers of stern judgment, some of which have issued from the sefirah of judgement, made themselves independent and invaded the Shekhinah from without. As the Zohar puts it: 'At times the Shekhinah tastes the other, bitter side, and then her face is dark.'<sup>ccxiv</sup>

The vulnerability of the *Shekinah* in Scholem's understanding is theologically impossible in the Depth Theology of Heschel. Symbols and conflicting *sefirot* are meaningless in a world of unimaginable chaos and hatred. The order, to Heschel is in God and God alone. The role of the *Shekinah* is to provide a glimpse of that order and perfection. It is here where Heschel stands separate from his contemporaries as the only theologian with a true redemptive eschatology.

#### IV

### Conclusion

#### The Individual as a Fragment of the Messiah

Scholem, Idel, and Abelson concern their studies with an emphasis on the past. Heschel, in contrast, is concerned with the future. Where *Kabbalistic* systems of symbols and ritual make up the focus of his contemporaries, Heschel concentrates on the radical amazement caused by the ineffable in everyday life. To Heschel, we are more than individuals;

we are God's stake in human history. We are the dawn and the dusk, the challenge and test. How strange to be a Jew and to go astray on God's perilous errands. We have been offered as a pattern of worship and as a prey for scorn, but there is more still in our destiny. We carry the gold of God in our souls to forge the gate of the kingdom. The time for the kingdom may be far off, but the task is plain: to retain our share in God in spite of peril and contempt. There is a war to wage against the vulgar, against the glorification of the absurd, a war that is incessant, universal. Loyal to the presence of the ultimate in the common, we may be able to make it clear that man is more than man, that in doing the finite he may perceive the infinite. <sup>CCXV</sup>

The kingdom may indeed be far off, but Heschel's message is one that speaks universally against despair and stands boldly in the face of nihilism. By the simple words "God in search of man," or "man is not alone," Heschel creates a theology driven by an eschatological partnership of unparalleled necessity.

It is Heschel's thesis that man needs God and God needs man. The audacity of this statement lies not in the questionable omnipotence of God, but rather in the philosopher's optimism of human virtue. His call is not one of science or reason; Heschel is unconcerned with system, instead, he focuses on the pathos and emotional awakening of the fire that lays slumbering within every individual.<sup>ccxvi</sup> He asks repeatedly for a leap of action rather than a leap of thought, and with this call challenges the individual to glimpse the infinite in the finite.<sup>ccxvii</sup>

Humanity is in exile, but as long as we remain in exile the *Shekinah* remains as well. For the redemption of the world depends on a symbiosis that transcends the limits of earthly existence. No longer can man sit idly by as his world descends into the profane. The individual has a responsibility, because the individual is a piece of holiness. Created in the image of God and serving as the only true symbol of salvation it is his/her deeds that joins in the construction of the bridge to God.

By every holy action, by every pure thought, man intervenes in the "supernal worlds." A pious deed is a mystery. By virtue of the devotion invested in it man constantly builds spiritual worlds, the essence of which the mind, as long as he is still of this world, cannot conceive. But his deeds are relevant not only for the upper spheres, but for this world as well. An architect of hidden worlds, every pious Jew is, partly, the messiah.<sup>ccxviii</sup>

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### Notes to Introduction

<sup>i</sup> A.D. Gordon, "Logic for the Future," in Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 371.

<sup>ii</sup> Zohar, II, 166b-167a [English: *Wisdom of the Zohar*, I, p. 442.] translated in Gershom Scholem *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 113-114.

<sup>iii</sup> Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 369-370.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

<sup>v</sup> Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 151.

<sup>vi</sup> Arthur Green, *These Are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 137.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>viii</sup> This dating corresponds to the approximation of *Merkabah* mysticism's genesis. The date used in this study uses the broad dating of Gershom Scholem who, in *Gnosticism, Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, places the inception of the *Merkabah* revelations between the first and fourth centuries C.E.

<sup>ix</sup> Arthur Green's *These Are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life*, is an accessible introduction to these mystical concepts and many others that will be relevant to this essay.

### Notes to "The Fin de Siècle and the Rise of Labor Zionism"

<sup>xx</sup> Chayim Nachman Bialik, "*Be Yom Kayitz, Yom Hom*" *B'Shirim* (1907).

<sup>xi</sup> Though I have included Western Europe in this definition, it should be noted that the overwhelming majority of *halutzim* emigrated from Russia, Poland, and other Eastern European countries with sizeable Jewish populations. Historical reasons for this regional emigration are discussed at length in the introductory chapter.

<sup>xii</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Tshoket haHalutzim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2009), 15.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid.* 18-19.

Historians differ on the official population represented by *halutzim* in the *second* and *third aliyot*. In his introductory notes, Neumann uses the numbers of historians Gur Alroey, Baruch Ben-Avram and Henry Near. Alroey's calculations suggest a pioneer labor population between one and two thousand out of some 35,000 Jewish immigrants of the time. The study of Ben-Avram and Near reports that approximately 40 percent of immigrants during the *third aliyah* answered



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positively to three *halutz* characteristics: “young, affiliated with a pioneering youth movement, and engaging in manual labor for the purposes of Zionist *hagshama*.” Land as one engendered by numerous ideological influences.

Boaz Neumann, *Tshoket haHalutzim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2009), 15.

<sup>xiv</sup> Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel* (New York: Schocken, 2003), 103.

<sup>xv</sup> Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 91.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xvii</sup> Max Nordau, “Muskeljudentum” in *Zionistische Schriften*, cited in entirety from Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 92.

<sup>xviii</sup> Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel* (New York: Schocken, 2003), 270.

<sup>xix</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>xx</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>xxi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxii</sup> The Bundists wrote and taught their social and political agenda in Yiddish. To accept Hebrew, a language of the yeshiva and *beis midrash*, as a national Jewish language was seen as an unacceptable reversion to the ghetto mentality of European Jewry. The previously cited works by Walter Laqueur and Shlomo Avineri provide further detail of the Bund movement and the role of Yiddish in Eastern Europe during the fin de Siècle and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Tshoket haHalutzim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2009), 15.

<sup>xxiv</sup> English translation of Joshua 6:6-9: “And Joshua, the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, ‘take the ark of the covenant for seven priests with seven *shofarot* shall go before the ark of HaShem.’ And he said to the people, ‘march and surround the city, and the *halutz* will go before the ark of HaShem.’ When Joshua had commanded the people, seven priests with seven *shofarot* went before HaShem, they blew their *shofarot*, and the ark of HaShem came behind them. The *halutz* went before the priests blowing the *shofarot* and the last of the troops went after the ark, while the *shofarot* sounded.”

<sup>xxv</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Tshoket haHalutzim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2009), 16-17.

#### Notes to “The Pioneer and the Godhead: Kabbalistic Language in *Halutz* Ideology”

<sup>xxvi</sup> Aaron David Gordon, “Man and Nature,” in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 252.

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<sup>xxvii</sup> Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 35.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Boaz Neumann, in *Tschoket haHalutzim*, insists that the Zionist pioneers are, in fact, the first Jews to experience the Land as two distinct entities: physical and spiritual. The difference between *halutz* and pre-Zionism forms of desire, he argues, stems from the fact that “the Zionists actually consummated their desire.” While Jewish life in exile had continuously viewed Israel as a single holy destination, the pioneers were able to separate the holy from the purely physical and therefore develop a new and unique connection to *Eretz Yisrael*.

<sup>xxix</sup> See Boaz Neumann’s, *Tschoket haHalutzim* for an alternative reading of this theological construction. Neumann argues for a Nietzschean concept of *halutz* theology, positing that the driving force of *halutz* ideology is desire rather than religion.

<sup>xxx</sup> I.e. those texts and traditions that stress the holiness of the Land of Israel – *halutzim* rely mainly on the more esoteric writings and concepts of *Kabbalah*, but are also privy to Talmudic passages dealing with agricultural commentaries, *mitzvoth* completed only in *Eretz Yisrael*, and more mystical legends of the rabbinical sages.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Aaron David Gordon, “Human – Nation” in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 21.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Arthur Green, *These are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 64.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Literally “the wise student,” this term denotes one is learned in *Talmud*, *Torah*, and Jewish law.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Arthur Green, *These are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 64.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Aardon David Gordon, “*HaChalom v’Pitrono*” in *HaUmah v’HaAvodah: Kitve Gordon* vol 1. (Yerushalayim: HaSefriah HaTzionit, 1952), 86.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Aviva Ufaz, *Sefer ha-kevutsah : Kevutsat ha-Sharon 682-696 : hagut, levaṭim u-ma’ayave ḥalutzim / mevo’ot ye-he’arot* (Yerushalayim: Yad Yitshak Ben-Tsevi, c1996)

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Tschoket haHalutzim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2009), 21-26.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Anita Shapira, “The Religious Motifs of the Labor Movement,” in *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998) Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinhartz, and Anita Shapira, eds., 255.

<sup>xxxix</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xl</sup> *Mesillath Yescharim*, chaps. 13, 26. Translated by Gershom Scholem in Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York, Schocken Books, 1991), 119.

<sup>xli</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 111.

<sup>xlii</sup> Gershom Scholem, “The Messianic Idea in Kabbalism,” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism: and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 43.

<sup>xliii</sup> See Appendix for detailed graph and explanation of the *sefirotic* system.

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- <sup>xliv</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 175.
- <sup>xlv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Ibid., 181.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York, Schocken Books, 1991), 147.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 226-227.
- <sup>xlix</sup> Ibid., 226.
- <sup>i</sup> Anita Shapira, "The Religious Motifs of the Labor Movement," in *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998) Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinhartz, and Anita Shapira, eds., 257.
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- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid., 47-48.
- <sup>iiii</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "Matter and Spirit," in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 102.
- <sup>lv</sup> Ibid., 103.

Notes to "The New Covenant  
Sacred Feminization and Mystical Marriage"

- <sup>lv</sup> Zohar, II, 135a, Translated by Gershom Scholem in Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York, Schocken Books, 1991), 184.
- <sup>lvi</sup> Literally "without end" – *Kabbalistic* designation for the unknowable Divine.
- <sup>lvii</sup> Arthur Green, *These are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 33.
- <sup>lviii</sup> "The house of study" in a religious Jewish community, where Jews of all ages study the holy texts of Talmud, Torah, mystical literature, etc.
- <sup>lix</sup> For more information regarding these important trends in Jewish mystical evolution, consult the superb works of Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel. For an introduction, one should begin with Scholem's definitive text, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*.
- <sup>lx</sup> Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York, Schocken Books, 1991), 141.
- <sup>lxi</sup> See Appendix: Jonathan Dahlen's "Shekinah in Exile," for a more detailed analysis of this theory.
- <sup>lxii</sup> Joshua Abelson, *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction to the Kabbalah* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2001), 88-89.

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<sup>lxiii</sup> Scholem lists several possibilities of historical consideration, including influence from the feminine Hebrew word *Hokhmah*, or wisdom – which in turn retains its femininity when adopted into Greek Gnostic literature in the word *Sophia*. Another possibility is the derivation of feminizing cities and regions in Jewish tradition. The *shekinah* is often depicted as *Tsion*, or Zion, following her children into exile. As *Tsion* possesses the feminine qualities of cities, the *shekinah* too receives this personification.

Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York, Schocken Books, 1991), 144-145.

<sup>lxiv</sup> Arthur Green, *These are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 33-34.

<sup>lxv</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "The Dream of the Aliyah," in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 1.

<sup>lxvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lxvii</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 127.

<sup>lxviii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lxix</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>lxx</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lxxi</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "Am-Adam," in *HaUmah v'HaAvodah: Kitve Gordon* vol 1. (Yerushalayim: HaSefriah HaTsionit, 1952), 261.

<sup>lxxii</sup> This study only incorporates the most extreme of these examples. For excellent analysis and myriad cases of *halutz* insemination, see Boaz Neumann's *Tschoket haHalutzim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2009).

<sup>lxxiii</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 102.

<sup>lxxiv</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>lxxv</sup> Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 44.

<sup>lxxvi</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "Our Tasks Ahead," in Arthur Hertzberg *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 379.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 64.

<sup>lxxviii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lxxix</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 139.

<sup>lxxx</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lxxxi</sup> Anita Shapira, "The Religious Motifs of the Labor Movement," in *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998) Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, eds., 264-265.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> This designation is especially prominent in Gordon's letters. See the chapter *Mektavim L'gulah* in *HaUmah v'HaAvodah: Kitve Gordon* vol 1. (Yerushalayim: HaSefriah HaTsionit, 1952), 517-560.

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<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "Letters," in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 139.

<sup>lxxxiv</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>lxxxv</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "Our Tasks Ahead," in Arthur Hertzberg *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 382.

<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 52.

<sup>lxxxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>lxxxix</sup> Chavel, *Kitvey ha-Ramban*, 2:333, translated by Moshe Idel in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 52.

<sup>xc</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "The Dream of the Aliyah," in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 1-2.

#### Notes to "The Beautiful Death"

<sup>xc</sup> Joseph Karo, *Maggid Mesharim*, in Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 45.

<sup>xcii</sup> Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 12.

<sup>xciii</sup> See Chapter 2:

<sup>xciv</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 130.

<sup>xcv</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xcvi</sup> Talmud Bavli: Bava Batra 17a in Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 17.

<sup>xcvii</sup> "The righteous one" - from *tzadek* in *TaNak* meaning "righteous" or "just."

<sup>xcviii</sup> Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 27.

<sup>xcix</sup> The central text of *Kabbalism*, composed circa 13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>c</sup> Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York, Schocken Books, 1991), 185.

<sup>ci</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>cii</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>ciii</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "The Immortality of the Soul," in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 294.

<sup>civ</sup> *Ibid.*

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- <sup>cv</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 130.
- <sup>cvi</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>cvii</sup> Ibid., 131.
- <sup>cviii</sup> Memorial book for members of the Jewish community who have died.
- <sup>cix</sup> Anita Shapira, "The Religious Motifs of the Labor Movement," in *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998) Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, eds., 263.
- <sup>cx</sup> Katznelson was born into an Orthodox Jewish home. He attended religious school and was well versed in traditional texts and practices. There are several excellent biographical studies of Katznelson, the best researched and most informative of which being by Shapira herself. Further reading should include the following: *Berl: Biographia*, by Anita Shapira, *Berl Katznelson: Halsh v'torato*, by Adam Doron, and the collected memoirs and personal accounts of Katznelson composed in the book, *Ad Paneh HaYom, Berl Katznelson Al Etzmo*, edited by Muki Tsor.
- <sup>cxii</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 141.
- <sup>cxiii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>cxiv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>cxv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>cxvi</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "Thoughts on Military Service," in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 256.
- <sup>cxvii</sup> Ibid., 254.
- <sup>cxviii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>cxix</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "Oil For Light," in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 178.
- <sup>cxx</sup> Ibid., 179.
- <sup>cxxi</sup> Ibid., 181.

Notes to "HaLashon HaKodesh:  
The Role of Hebrew in Halutz Redemption"

- <sup>cxxii</sup> Rahel Kaznelson [Shazar], "From Language to Language," in *The Plough Woman: Records of the Pioneer Women of Palestine* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 257.
- <sup>cxxiii</sup> Shmuel Almog, "The Role of Religious Values in the Second Aliyah," in *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998) Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, eds., 237.
- <sup>cxxiv</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>cxxv</sup> Nahum Sokolow, *Hibbath Zion: The Love for Zion* (Tel Aviv: Cooperative Printing "Hapoel Hazair," 1935), 204.
- <sup>cxxvi</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "The Work of Revival in the Diaspora," in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 79.
- <sup>cxxvii</sup> See Also: Aaron David Gordon, "Avodah Hitchayah B'artzot-HaGulah," in *HaUmah v'HaAvodah: Kitve Gordon* vol 1. (Yerushalayim: HaSefriah HaTzionit, 1952), 263-269.
- <sup>cxxviii</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Tschoket haHalutzim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2009), 185-186.
- <sup>cxxix</sup> Religious school for children
- <sup>cxxx</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.
- <sup>cxxxii</sup> Anita Shapira, "Religious Motifs of the Labor Movement," in *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998) Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, eds., 260.
- <sup>cxxxiii</sup> Rahel Kaznelson [Shazar], "From Language to Language," in *The Plough Woman: Records of the Pioneer Women of Palestine* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 252.
- <sup>cxxxiv</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>cxxxv</sup> The Hebrew Bible constructed in acronym form. *Te* = *Torah*, "teaching" - the five books of Moses, *Na* = *Navi'im*, the prophets, *K* = *Ketuvim*, the writings – wisdom literature, the five *megilot*, Psalms, historical books.
- <sup>cxxxvi</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 215.
- <sup>cxxxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.
- <sup>cxxxviii</sup> Anita Shapira, "Religious Motifs of the Labor Movement," in *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998) Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, eds., 261.
- <sup>cxxxix</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>cxl</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>cxli</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "Labor: The Core of the Matter," in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 59.
- <sup>cxlii</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 226.
- <sup>cxliii</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.
- <sup>cxliv</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.
- <sup>cxlv</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.
- <sup>cxlvi</sup> Rahel Kaznelson [Shazar], "From Language to Language," in *The Plough Woman: Records of the Pioneer Women of Palestine* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 250.
- <sup>cxlvii</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 219-220.
- <sup>cxlviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.
- <sup>cxlix</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>cxlix</sup> Aaron David Gordon, "Am-Adam," in *HaUmah v'HaAvodah: Kitve Gordon* vol 1. (Yerushalayim: HaSefriah HaTzionit, 1952), 260.

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<sup>cl</sup> Literally, “Nation-Man” or “Land-Man”

<sup>cli</sup> See Aaron David Gordon, “*Am-Adam*,” in *HaUmah v’HaAvodah: Kitve Gordon* vol 1. (Yerushalayim: HaSefriah HaTsionit, 1952), 259-262.

<sup>clii</sup> Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 63.

<sup>cliii</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>cliv</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>clv</sup> Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011) (from the Brandeis manuscript pagination), 219.

<sup>clvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>clvii</sup> Aaron David Gordon, “Nationalism and Socialism,” in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 37.

<sup>clviii</sup> *Ibid.*

### Notes to “Conclusion – There Will Yet Come a Day”

<sup>clix</sup> Aaron David Gordon, “Man and Nature,” in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 251.

<sup>clx</sup> Aaron David Gordon, “Letters,” in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 134-135.

<sup>clxi</sup> Berl Katznelson, “Address to the Ohel Theater,” in Anita Shapira, “The Religious Motifs of the Labor Movement,” in *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998) Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, eds., 254.

<sup>clxii</sup> Anita Shapira, “The Religious Motifs of the Labor Movement,” in *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998) Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, eds., 254.

<sup>clxiii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>clxiv</sup> Aaron David Gordon, “Man and Nature,” in *Selected Essays* (New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938), trans. Frances Burnce, 252.

### Notes to Appendix A

<sup>clxv</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Mystical Element in Judaism,” in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, New York, 1996, p. 171.

<sup>clxvi</sup> *Ibid.* p. 172.

<sup>clxvii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>clxviii</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God In Search of Man*, New York, 1955, p. 283.

<sup>clxix</sup> Edward K. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words: Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Poetics of Piety*, Albany, 1996, p. 117.



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- clxx Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No Religion is an Island,” in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, New York 1996, p. 235.
- clxxi Edward K. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words: Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Poetics of Piety*, Albany, 1996, p. 122.
- clxxii Ibid.
- clxxiii Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord’s*, New York, 1949, p. 48.
- clxxiv Ibid. p. 73.
- clxxv Ibid. p. 73-74.
- clxxvi Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Mystical Element in Judaism,” in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, New York, 1996, p. 173.
- clxxvii Ibid. p. 174.
- clxxviii Maurice Friedman, *Abraham Joshua Heschel and Elie Wiesel: You Are My Witnesses*, New York, 1987, p. 67.
- clxxix Ibid.
- clxxx John C. Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith: The Depth Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, New York, 1985, p. 116.
- clxxxi Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Mystical Element in Judaism,” in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, New York, 1996, p. 173.
- clxxxii Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, New York, 1955, p. 12.
- clxxxiii *Mekhila de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Pisha 14.
- clxxxiv Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Torah Min HaShamayim BehIspakLaryah Shel HaDorot*, New York, 2008, p. 105-106.
- clxxxv Ibid. p. 106.
- clxxxvi Ibid. p. 105.
- clxxxvii Ibid. p. 106.
- clxxxviii Ibid. p. 108.
- clxxxix Ibid. p. 112.
- cxc Ibid.
- cxci Ibid. p. 114.
- cxcii Ibid. p. 118.
- cxciiii Ibid.
- cxciiv Edward K. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words: Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Poetics of Piety*, Albany, 1996, p. 88.
- cxcev Ibid. p. 4.
- cxcevi Ibid. p. 88.
- cxcevi Joshua Abelson (1873 – 1940) English minister. Born in Merthyr Tydfil (Wales), Abelson was ordained at Jews' College in London, and occupied pulpits in Cardiff and Bristol. He became principal of the Jewish theological preparatory school Aria College in Portsmouth, after which he was appointed minister to the United Hebrew Congregation of Leeds. Abelson's works include *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature* (1912), in which he examined the theory of the Shekhinah in the rabbinic sources, and its connection with the later development of Jewish mysticism. This work was followed by *Jewish Mysticism* (1913), the earliest serious study of the subject in English. He assisted Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz in the editing of Hertz's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, published in 1929-36.

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Information from: [Encyclopaedia Judaica (Germany)]

*Encyclopaedia Judaica 2nd* Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007 v. 0001

(Abelson is cited on page 172 of Heschel's "The Mystical Element of Judaism" in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, New York, 1996, p. 172.)

<sup>cxviii</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Mystical Element in Judaism," in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, New York, 1996, p. 173. Citing:

"On the concept of *Shekinah* in rabbinic literature, cf. J. Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinic Literature* (London 1912).

<sup>cxlix</sup> J. Abelson, *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction to the Kabbalah*, New York, 1913, p. 86.

<sup>cc</sup> J. Abelson, *The Immanence of God In Rabbinical Literature*, New York, 1912, p. 81.

<sup>cci</sup> *Ibid.* p. 108.

<sup>ccii</sup> Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven, 1988, p. 168.

<sup>cciii</sup> Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, Albany, 1995, p. 169.

<sup>cciv</sup> Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven, 1988, p. 209.

<sup>ccv</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>ccvi</sup> *Ibid.* p. 83.

<sup>ccvii</sup> Moshe Idel, "Abraham J. Heschel on Mysticism and Hasidism," in *Modern Judaism: A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience*, Ed. Professor Steven T. Katz, Volume 29, Number 1, Cary, 2009, p. 84.

<sup>ccviii</sup> *Ibid.* p. 98.

<sup>ccix</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>ccx</sup> Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, New York, 1965, p. 107.

<sup>ccxi</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>ccxii</sup> *Ibid.* p. 106.

<sup>ccxiii</sup> Divine emanations that comprise the system of Kabbalah. Each interact and communicate with one another to create the world.

<sup>ccxiv</sup> Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, New York, 1965, p. 107.

<sup>ccxv</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's*, New York, 1949, p. 109.

<sup>ccxvi</sup> Edward K. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words: Abraham Joshua Heschel's Poetics of Piety*, Albany, 1996, p. 34.

<sup>ccxvii</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's*, New York, 1949, p. 109.

<sup>ccxviii</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71-72.