Thunder’s Relation to Immanence and Transcendence:

From Rabbinic Text to Hasidic Thought

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by

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1 Ps. 69:11, Aqdamut v.6-8
2 See Marc Herman, Orthodoxy and Modernity: Rabbi Hayyim Hirschensohn's Malki ba-Kodesh.
3 See Eliezer Buechler, The Innovation of Isaac Luria to Cover One’s Eyes with One’s Right Hand During Qeri’at Shema.
4 See Noam Cohen, And a Fire Came Down From Before the Lord: Examining the Relationship between Leviticus 10 and Numbers 16–18. As well, see Taanit 23a (lines 52-3).
Introduction

Abstract

Many Jewish texts speak of thunder, or *qolot* and *re’amim*, as the voice issued forth from god. This sound is connected to the deity, yet removed from it as well. How a text conceives of and interprets thunder, then, reflects its author’s views on the religious question of god’s engagement with the world. This thesis, which engages with biblical, rabbinic, and kabbalistic texts, contends that Hasidic interpretations of thunder draw from rabbinic and midrashic ideas of a transcendent god. In the first chapter I describe how Hasidic texts speak of *qolot* in the context of many layers of Jewish interpretation. In the second chapter I argue that Hasidic texts think about *re’amim* in light of rabbinic texts, specifically Talmud Bavli Berakhot 59a and the Mekhila de-Rabbi Yishma’el. In my third chapter, finally, I contend that Nahman of Bratslav, a third-generation Hasidic leader, incorporates this renewed rabbinic worldview into his mystical thought.

Historical Background

Hasidism is a Jewish mystical trend which began in the early 18th century in the southeastern portion of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in the region of Podolia, now southwestern Ukraine. Many scholars have posited different narratives for the origins of Hasidism, ranging from the historical to the ideological. Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) claimed that the religious movement represents a backlash against Sabbatianism, and a simplification of...
Lurianic Kabbalah. On the other hand, Martin Buber (1878-1965) claimed that Hasidism reabsorbed vitality of “myth” back into a stilted religious worldview. Benzion Dinur (1884-1973), whose thesis is now discredited, claimed that Hasidism was a folk movement resulting from the “social decomposition” of eastern European Jewry. Regardless of theory, any starting point for the study of Hasidism must begin with Yisrael ben Eliezer Baal Shem Tov (c. 1700-1760), whose teachings provided the ideological underpinnings for the movement. This study focuses on early Hasidic texts, roughly from 1733, when Baal Shem Tov “revealed himself” until Nahman of Bratslav’s death in 1810.

Debates in Hasidic Thought

In divergence with Gershom Scholem’s position, Rachel Elior asserts that Hasidic thought was not only a resolution of the tension between Sabbateanism and Lurianic Kabbalah. “Hasidic doctrine” she explains,

…created a multi-levelled conceptual system which simultaneously referred to both the divine being and human consciousness, while interpreting the divine processes of creation and the human processes of thought according to a single metaphorical structure of concept. ...Hasidism adopted the concepts of the Kabbalistic theogony, which discuss processes which are constantly repeated in upper worlds, and it transformed them into the cornerstone for understanding the true significance of reality on all levels.

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In the following pages, I add nuance to the above assertion of Hasidism’s characterization of the relationship between the self and the god. By interpreting *qolot*, sounds, and *re’amim*, thunder, Hasidism returns to a rabbinic conception of the universe. In doing so, the early Hasidic thinkers maintain their continuity with early stages of Jewish mysticism. The result is a rabbinic worldview imposed upon a perceived Lurianic reality. In this world, the self cannot identify as god, or directly interact with god. Instead, the individual must suffice with its situatedness in the prison of his own physical constraints, unable to directly contact the deity because of the rabbinic assertion of god’s transcendence.\(^\text{13}\)

This thesis, then, shows an affinity with Moshe Idel’s “Panoramic Approach” to Hasidism, which sees Hasidism development in light of a whole range of mystical texts from Pre-Lurianic Kabbalah to Sabbatean mysticism. He explains,

...such a panoramic approach would see Hasidism not as a reaction to a crisis, but, primarily, as the result of the interaction of a long series of spiritual concepts and paradigms and social factors. The basic assumption of this approach is the existence of the regular curriculum of the Jews, who were supposed to study the Bible and later on the basic halakhic texts…\(^\text{14}\)

Later on, Idel calls for a renewed discussion of the issues of immanence and transcendence within Hasidic thought.

\(^{13}\) This textual movement recalls a poetic parable discussed in a different situation, that of 12th century al-Andalus, albeit within the internal dynamic of Ashkenazi Judaism. See Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, Preface: “...In this complex intellectual world the ideas flow into each other, brazenly oblivious to communal barriers. The flow of ideas was never linear, but rather went back and forth, creating what I propose to call a “whirlpool effect,” where, when an idea falls, like a drop of colored liquid, into the turbulence, it eventually colors the whole body of water,” xiv. I do not assert that this flow of ideas from past to future existed of its own accord, but instead am positing that the Hasidic thinkers drew from previous strata of Jewish thought, laying a rabbinic worldview upon Lurianic and Zoharic contributions to concepts such as nature and divine immanence. Lachter argues against this “phenomenology of ideas” approach in his introduction to *Kabbalistic Revolution* (p.5). Quoting Harvey Hanes, Lachter writes, “[o]ne cannot divorce texts from context, and the kabbalists were not living in a vacuum.”

…Although there is room for further discussion on the problem of Hasidic pantheism or immanentism, the question of sources lies beyond the scope of this study; these sources should be analyzed in detail in order to point out what is old and what is new before deciding that this shift [of Hasidism towards immanentism] departed dramatically from existing theological paradigms.\textsuperscript{15}

This thesis, in looking at Hasidic interpretation of thunder, responds to Idel’s challenge, looking at \textit{qolot} and \textit{re’amim} as a litmus test for the Hasidic conception of god’s involvement with the world, and finding that there is a Hasidic “shift,” not towards immanentism, but towards transcendence.

\textit{Interpretive Lens: Semiotics}

The main lens of analysis in this thesis is the sign theory of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914). This area of thought, also known as semiotics, discusses the ways in which signs relate to objects. Pierce places signs into three categories. The first is the “symbol,” in which the sign is connected to the object through “a general rule of interpretation.” The second category, an “index” is a sign which “signifies according to a spatial connection between two actually existing things.” This third category is an “icon,” which signifies its connection to an object “according to its qualities alone.”\textsuperscript{16}

In this thesis, I apply Pierce’s terminology to Kabbalistic texts’ interpretation of the thunder sounds, and their relation to the object which they signify, God.


\textsuperscript{16} Massimo Leone and Richard Parmentier, “The Eucharistic Species in Light of Pierce’s Sign Theory,” in \textit{Theological Studies}, Vol. 75(1), p. 10. “Also well-known is Peirce’s classification of any given sign as \textit{icon}, \textit{index}, or \textit{symbol}, according to how that sign relates to its object. Following this division, an icon signifies according to its qualities alone, in the sense that one speaks of aspartame as an icon of sugar, or the pouring of baptismal water as an icon of bathing. An index then signifies according to a spatial connection between two actually existing things, as in the case of a wind vane, the distended belly of a pregnant woman, or the addressing of the statement “I baptize you” to some particular person. Finally, a symbol signifies by virtue of a general rule of interpretation, as is the case with words, emblems, or gestures; such that, for example, the Christian community understands the immersion of this particular person during the Rite of Baptism as having the effect of remitting the person’s sins.”
1. In this vein, the sound (or qol) can exist as a “symbol”; one interprets God’s presence by listening to the sound, understanding that it represents a gap between the individual and the deity, and concluding that a transcendent God exists.

2. The individual, secondly, may interpret the qol as an “index” of God. By hearing a sound from the sky, a person may observe: “The sound that I hear indicates that the deity is there, just above the clouds.”

3. Thirdly, the sound of thunder can serve as an “icon,” signifying the deity’s presence through its’ own qualities. “I hear the sound,” one may say, “It is overpowering, awesome, and frightening. It must come from a being who has those qualities.”

4. I add a fourth category, the “hypostasis,” in which the sign and signified object are virtually indistinguishable. Sound, then, as “hypostasis,” may be an emanation of the very being of divinity, an extension of its selfhood; much like a dandelion seed departs from the flower and floats in the wind to land on the grass, so too the qol is issued from the deity and enters the ear of the listener.17

These different categories--symbol, index, icon, and hypostasis--are four different points on the line of distance between the qol, and the object which it signifies, God. According to the above four definitions, Hebrew texts which speak of the voice in relation to deity may allow one to induce the writers’ views on the debate between transcendence and immanence. Transcendence is the concept of the deity’s separation from the world and its inaccessibility. Immanence reflects the god’s direct contact with the world. In conceiving of God’s transcendence, one experiences thunder as a physical occurrence. A notion of an extremely transcendent god leads one to see

17 For a discussion of “hypostasis: in biblical thought, see Azzan Yadin, “qol as Hypostasis in the Hebrew Bible,” Journal of Biblical Literature, 2003, pp. 601-626, discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis
thunder as a “symbol.” The loud sound may cause one to ponder over the deity’s separation from the world when one hears a boom and thinks of the deity’s power. Therefore, the god does, indeed, exist, but exists above, cognized by a manner of interpretation. Likewise, viewing god as extremely immanent results in the conception of the qol as a “hypostasis.” If the deity is within the world, interacting directly with it, then its voice, an extension of its own self, can echo throughout the world in the form of thunder-sounds. The voice comes forth from the god and shares the same essence as it. In understanding a text’s conception of qolot and re’amim, I attempt to define each sound’s connection to God. In this manner, I observe the text’s position on the relationship of the deity to the world, and the self. Exodus Rabbah, in this paradigm, for example, may be put in conversation with Moshe Hayyim Efraim of Sudilkov’s teaching. This analysis, therefore, crafts a narrative arc in which texts on qolot and re’amim debate the tension between immanence and transcendence. Hasidism takes these debates into account and creates its own answer, restructuring the earlier Kabbalistic universe in favor of a rabbinic worldview.
Chapter 1

Seeing the Sounds: Defining the Qol in Light of the Interpretation of Exodus 20:15

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the Hasidic reinterpretation of Exodus 20:15 through different levels of Jewish texts, from early rabbinic Midrash to the Zohar, Lurianic Kabbalah, and Isaiah Horowitz (the Shlah). I contend that the issue of sensory-pairing (synesthesia) prompts the biblical, midrashic, and mystical writers to interpret the qol with respect to the self and deity. These different interpretations of the qol allow one to perceive the texts’ struggle and resolution of the issue of god’s immanence or transcendence. The zoharic interpretation, for example, turns thunder from a rabbinic “index” into a “hypostasis,” reflecting a highly immanentist outlook. After dealing with the Shlah’s interpretation, I contend that early Hasidic figures-- the Baal Shem Tov, Dov Ber of Mezritsch, and Zeev Volf of Zhitomir--incorporate the rabbinic assertion of god’s transcendence, increasing the distance of thunder from that which it signifies, god. While Dov Ber of Mezritsch, for example interprets the sound as a “symbol,” Zeev Volf of Zhitomir skirts the definition of the qol altogether, seeking a different answer which emphasizes god’s transcendence on an even more extreme level.

Synesthesia

Synesthesia is “a sensation in one part of the body produced by a stimulus applied to another part.”\textsuperscript{18} This refers to the rare phenomenon in which an individual experiences a level of sensory switching when, for example, one sees the letter B and associates it with the color purple. There is a long history of the Jewish interpretation of synesthesia in the context of Exodus 20:15, from midrashic interpretation to modern Hasidic sermons. This mode of perception is a test case to understand how Hasidic thinkers deal with the above issues, as it

\textsuperscript{18} Oxford English Dictionary
allows them to situate sense experience in the context of topics such as religious boundaries and the experience of divinity.

In this chapter, then, I discover the manner in which Hasidic thinkers interpret and understand the place of the synesthetic verse of Exodus 20:15 within their theologies of revelation, and I assert that these statements about the verse are not just meant to be religious ideas, but are as well contextualized statements which weigh on on debates from rabbinic thought until the Zohar. I seek to understand, therefore, what is the relationship of a particular Hasidic text to its Zoharic predecessors? In doing so, I narrate the interpretation of Exodus 20:15, first in light of Biblical scholarship, in rabbinic text, Safedian Kabbalah, and, finally, early Hasidic thought.

**Exodus 20:15**

The account of theophany in Exodus 19 and 20 presents a scene of fear and expectation after the revelation:

וְאֶת הַשֹּׁפָר קֹלָּהָ וְאֶת הַלַּפִּידִים וְאֶת הַקּוֹלֲהָ, אֶת קֵרֶם הַהָר וַיַּעַמְדוּ וַיָּנֻעוּ הָעָם וַיַּרְא עָשֵּן הָהָר

And the whole nation saw the qolot and the lappidim, and the qol of the shofar, and the smoking mountain, and the nation saw and trembled, and they stood from afar. 19

William H.C. Propp, 20 in accordance with KJV and JPS, translates the text as “And all the people were seeing the sounds and the torches and the horn’s sound and the mountain smoking, and the people feared and recoiled and stood from afar,” (emphasis his). Noticing the incongruous nature of “seeing the sounds,” Propp states that the normal way of sensory perception was simply different in Israelite thought than it was conceived in the modern era:

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19 Exodus 20:15. In this thesis, all translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.
Listing Genesis 27:27\textsuperscript{21}, Exodus 5:21\textsuperscript{22}, and Ecclesiastes 11:7,\textsuperscript{23} Propp references Ibn Ezra, who “perceptively notes that the issue may be the confusion of the human senses in Israelite parlance and experience.”\textsuperscript{24} Propp asserts that \textit{lappidim} refers to lightning or the flashing of “minor deities” around the mountain. Earlier, on the definition of the \textit{qol}, Propp, quoting other sources, continues:

“The noun qôl may denote the human voice, the sound of an instrument of any noise at all. In present context, especially the plural qôlōt it is pealing thunder.

The storm theophany, a mythic \textit{topos} with Canaanite antecedents, situates the divine in meteorological phenomena...The thunderstorm has both beneficent and frightening aspects. Even at a psychological level, intense, subsonic sound waves provoke terror in all animals, ourselves included...”\textsuperscript{25}

In other words, “to see the sound”—in this case, terror-inspiring thunder, is possible because of a different way of experience by which the Israelites encountered the world. Thunder, according to the above interpretation, is a weather event which is interchangeable with the voice of the storm god—in this case, his replacement, YHWH. Thunder is the sound, indeed, the voice with which the storm god-Baal—communicates.\textsuperscript{26} Just as a human speaks, so does the god.

If one would put Propp’s work into Pierce’s semiotics, one can claim that the “thunder” is an “index” of the god, meaning that it indicates the god’s presence, yet does not reveal the deity

\textsuperscript{21}Genesis 27:27

\textsuperscript{22}Exodus 5:21

\textsuperscript{23}Ecclesiastes 11:7

\textsuperscript{24}ibid.


in its fullness. When one hears the voice, one does not experience the deity completely, yet, nevertheless, one is aware of its presence. Similarly, to borrow O’Brien’s example, when one sees a weathervane moving, one knows that the wind exists, though the wind may not be tangible. Biblical thunder, then, indicates the deity’s presence and its realness.

A different definition of the Biblical qol emerges in the work of Azzan Yadin. He claims that in the biblical conception, qol is a hypostasis, meaning an element which is somehow disconnected from the deity. Yadin recognizes the cloudiness of the meaning of “hypostasis,” that later rabbinic readings take into account the Biblical conception of the word’s plain meaning and build upon it, resolving tensions within the text, in this case, the tension of the logos, or the ability of god to impart wisdom to Man.

Taking this assertion into account, the biblical voice of god still retains its semiotic valence of indicating the deity’s presence. On the other hand, the qol acts as an independent entity, while similarly acting as an index of the divine. This tension


29 Yadin cites Numbers 7:89, claiming that the reflexive form of middaber refers to its independence from YHWH.

30 See Hava Tirosh-Samuelson’s Happiness in Premodern Judaism, “Ashrei: Torah, Wisdom and Living Rightly in Ancient Judaism.” She mentions the apocryphal work Wisdom of Solomon, presenting an equally vague definition of hypostasis, in accordance with Yadin’s. “In a language that suggests familiarity with Neo-Pythagoreanism as well as with Middle-Platonism, the author [of Wisdom of Solomon] turns Wisdom into a hypostasis, that is ‘a quasi-personification of certain attributes proper to god, occurring in an intermediate position between personalities and abstract beings,’ ” 79. See further on, where the author discusses logos theology in the context of ancient Judaism. Though this concept historically precedes the rabbinic texts discussed here, it still finds its way into the Midrash: “god is ontologically and temporally prior to the world, transcending time and place. The ontological gap between the all-perfect source of Being and the created universe is bridged by the Logos, a ‘rational thought of mind expressed in utterance or speech.’ The Logos is present in god, in the created order of the universe, and within man who is ‘created in the image of god,’” 84. For further reading on the logos, see as well Elaine Pagels, Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas. New York: Vintage Books, 2003.
between the sound’s representation of the deity and its hypostatized nature is unresolved in the Biblical passages.

*Exodus Rabbah 5:9: The voice’s indexical nature*

A short discussion of a passage in Exodus Rabbah will show the manner in which the writers of the passage, in accordance with the biblical theme, attempt to define the voice of god. As a text which deals extensively with the idea of speech, hearing, and sound, the Midrash quotes seven separate scriptural references to the voice of god.\(^{31}\) In this text, the authors emphasize that the *qol* can be an extension of god on one hand, yet inadequately represent the deity’s selfhood. The following midrashic narrative attempts to resolve a conflict which hypostasis poses, namely the confusion of the *qol*s as a “hypostasis” or an “index” of the deity.\(^{32}\)

The Lord said to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” So he went; and he met him at the mountain of god and kissed him (Ex. 4:27).” This is what is written, “God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend.” (Job 37:5). What does it mean “he thunders”? When the Holy One Blessed Be He gave the Torah at Sinai he showed great wonders to Israel. What did did he do? The Holy One Blessed Be He spoke and the voice would exit and go around the whole world. Israel heard the voice come upon them from the south, and they ran south to receive the voice. And from the south it returned to them from the north, and they ran to the north. And from the south it returned to them from the east, and they ran to the east. And from the east it turned to them from the west, and they ran to the west. And from the west it turned

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\(^{31}\) Ex 20:15, 19:19; Deut 4:36, 5:22; Job 37:4; Ps 29:4, 42:8

\(^{32}\) See as well Genesis *Rabbah* on Genesis 2:4 (*Bereishit Rabbah, Parashah Bereishit, Parashah* 12, which provides a foil: thunder is not a bridge between human and god, but instead a marker of god’s separateness. “R. Huna said: If you are unable to understand the essential nature of thunder, surely you will not be able to understand the essential nature of the world! And if a person tells you, “I can understand the essential nature of the world, tell him, “If you cannot understand a human king, surely you will not be able to understand the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He!”” (Translation adapted from H. Freedman Maurice Simon, eds. *Midrash Rabbah*. London, The Soncino Press, 1961.)
to them from heaven. And they raised their eyes and it changes [to emanate] from the earth. And they looked at the earth, as it says, “From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you,” (Deut. 4:36), and Israel told each other, “But where shall wisdom be found?” (Job 28:12), and Israel asked, “Where does the Holy One Blessed Be He come from--the east or the south?” As it says, “The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned (zarah) from Seir upon us,” (Deut. 33:2).

And it is written “god came from Teman (west),” and it says, “When all the people witnessed the thunder (ha-qolot)” (Exodus 20:15), does not say “the voice,” (ha-qol), but the voices (ha-qolot). Said R. Yohanan, “The voice would go out and split into seventy voices corresponding to the seventy languages, so the all the nations could hear, and every nation would hear the sound in its own language and [as a result] their souls would leave them. But Israel would hear and not be harmed.\textsuperscript{33}

Firstly, the Midrash ignores the issue of sensory pairing; like the Bible, the Midrash describes an experience of the deity’s voice in visual terms: “And from the west it turned to them from heaven. And they raised their eyes and it turned from the earth.” Instead, the Midrash focuses on the question of god’s self-separation and its ramifications for the transcendence of god.

Moreover, one must comment on the importance of the qol’s feminine aspect in this text. The association of hokhma, wisdom, with femininity, according to Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, stretches back to the wisdom literature and continues forward in post-canonical biblical texts,

\textsuperscript{33} Midrash Rabbah, on Exodus 4:27 (Shemot Rabbah 5:9).
which absorb Platonic conceptions of wisdom as an element of the divine which connects the highest part of the deity to mankind.34, 35

The Midrash’s authors show how the qol is separated from the weather event as the sound of the deity. This qol is an element of the deity’s selfhood, in other words, as a “hypostasis” of divinity. The qol, in this vein, does not indicate the deity’s presence, but instead is a slice of emanated selfhood. In this state, the “sound” need not hint to the existence of a transcendent being, for the qol is an expression, production, and extension of the very being which it represents. The voice, therefore, does not evaporate into thin air after the deity speaks it. Instead, it takes on an agency of itself and travels throughout all six directions mentioned. This qol can be split into many different parts, as well. Indeed, the text continues by narrating that even during Israel’s particular revelation at Sinai, the voice was issued to every Israelite “according to his ability.” The voice of god assumes a number emanated forms without matter, visible and almost tangible to the Israelites.36

Yes, Exodus Rabbah asserts that the voice is not fully accessible. The Israelites run after the voice but do not catch it. After the Israelites look in all directions and raise their eyes to heaven, the narrative reaches a climax when the characters, asking with the voice of Job 28:12 “Where can wisdom be found?”, denoting rabbinic writers’ agenda of a transcendental god.

Therein lies a tension of ideas which the Midrash solves by claiming that god is above. Exodus

34 See Hava Tirosh Samuelson, Happiness in Premodern Judaism, “Ashrei: Torah, Wisdom, and Living Rightly in Ancient Judaism,” 75, where Hava Tirosh-Samuelson argues that the earliest books of biblical wisdom literature set the stage for the later apocryphal books to see wisdom as a logos connecting Heaven and Earth. “...the scholarly consensus is that, by the beginning of the second century B.C.E., the identification of the Torah with Wisdom was fully in place, taking shape in the cultural matrix of the Hellenistic world,” (56). As well, Wisdom is seen as a female logos: “As a member of the assembly of the Most High, Wisdom proceeded from the mouth of god at the beginning of time, before anything else was created. She came down from her throne on a pillar of cloud to wander through the world in search of a resting place.”

35 Later, the Zohar itself associates re’amim with the divine feminine, specifically in the sefirah of Gevurah, while the qol in the Zohar occasionally associates the qol with the feminine, specifically in reference to Binah. Sefer ha-Zohar Balaq 3:193b (Pritzker Zohar Volume 9, p. 308 n. 41); Tiqqunei Zohar: Tiqqun 20 and 21 52a, Tiqqun 30 74a.

36 Thank you to Prof. Lachter for pointing this out to me.
Rabbah, therefore, moves away from the qol’s “hypostatic” quality and instead narrates that the sound is an index--or indicant--of the deity, an emanation of the self, yet still inaccessible.

Putting Exodus Rabbah--a late Midrash-- in conversation with other rabbinic texts which deal with sounds, especially the earlier Mekhilta De-Rabbi Yishmael\(^{37}\), one may assert that the Midrash seeks to maintain a gap between self and deity--in the case of the above analysis, this occurs by maintaining a disconnection between sign--the deity--and object--the deity itself.

Thunder--or the qol, is an “index.” In this manner, seeing the sound means to experience the voice of god in its hypostatic nature, yet to be situated within a world in which the deity is other and inaccessible.\(^{38}\) In both texts, a wall of being separates the self from God.

*Debates in the Zohar on Exodus 20:15*

The Zohar is a compilation of mystical texts, whose main body was written in the late 13th century by the Spanish rabbi, Moses de Leon.\(^{39}\) It was first printed in Mantua, Italy in 1588-1560.\(^{40}\) This body of text is attributed to the talmudic sage, R. Shim’on ben Yohai. It presents many interpretations the “voice,” or qol, which may be grouped into two general areas and answer a set of two questions.\(^{41}\)

\(^{37}\) *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma’el* Beshalah Masekhta de-Vayehi Parasha 5: “From the sound of thunder above, the waters from the ground were released from below.”

\(^{38}\) See as well, the liturgy of the High Holy Days, esp. Shofarot in the ‘amidah of Rosh Hashanah. See also Otto in *The Idea of the Holy*, “Appendix III,” p. 190, “A liturgy unusually rich in numinous hymns and prayers is that of Yom Kippur, the great ‘Day of Atonement’ of the Jews.”

\(^{39}\) See Lawrence Fine, “Kabbalistic Texts,” 311, where he attributes dates to the various strata of zoharic literature: Midrash ha-Neelam from 1275-1280, the main text from 1280 to 1286, Tikkunei Zohar and Raaya Meheimna “near the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century,” and Zohar Hadash published in “sixteenth century Safed.” As it is dealt with in a canonical manner by the Hasidic texts, for the purpose of this study I will look at the zoharic texts accessible to early Hasidic thinkers. I include the Zohar Hadash as well, which, though based on earlier texts, is the latest addition to the canon.

\(^{40}\) Ibid, p. 304. Thank you to Dr. Ann Brener for your help in introducing texts and databases.

\(^{41}\) See Tiqqunei Zohar: Tiqqun 30 74a, Tiqqun 20 and 21 46a, in which the qolot of Psalm 29 refer to the sefirot; Sefer ha-Zohar, Pinchas 235a-b and Tiqqunei Zohar, Tiqqun 22 63a in which the qolot are the voice of god and man simultaneously; Tiqqunei Zohar 69 104a-b, which speaks of the possibility of theurgy by using the voice; Sefer ha-Zohar, Metzora’ 54a when the qolot grow in water, like a tree, birthing the universe; Zohar Hadash Ruth 40a-b, when six of the 7 qolot are released by the sefirah of gevurah (symbolized by the rooster) at each of the six hours after midnight to rouse “people from their bed to study Torah,” this final source cited in Matt, Daniel C. (trans.) The Zohar: Pritzker Edition, Volume 9, n. 250.
The first set of texts, the smaller of the two groups, describes synesthesia, or sensory pairing. The second set of texts, while not isolated from the first set, weighs in on the debate in Exodus Rabbah, asserting that the voice of god is both separate from the deity and immanent. This moves beyond the rabbinic assertion of the “indexical” nature of the deity’s voice and instead sees the qol as a “hypostasis” of the divine structure.

The texts of the Zohar deal with this problem from two main perspectives, which occupy the two directions of “up” and “down,” to be elaborated. The set of texts, in the direction of “up” posit that Israel transcended its sense of hearing, merging it with that of sight during the theophany. The children of Israel “saw the voices” because they had reached a level of prophecy, seeing through the *aspaqlarya de-denehara*, the shining speculum. Their vision of the voice represents the becoming-visible of that which is generally unseen. Vision, moreover, in the Zohar, is the most revealed form of knowledge, one which even Moses was not privy to in its entirety. *Qolot*, therefore, mark the separation between humans and god, and the children of Israel transcend this separation, experiencing god through a more revealed sense--sight through the “shining glass.” This revelatory experience occupies the place of synesthesia, where, during the Jews’ exultation, the sense of hearing is transformed into a more supernal sense, sight. The Zoharic texts assume that senses, originally separate, are connected through an encounter with

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42 To use Wolfson’s term.
43 See Exodus 33:22-3:
44 See *Sefer ha-Zohar*, Bereishit 52b, which emphasizes the supremacy of sight:

As well, see *Sefer ha-Zohar* Parashat Ki Tisa 194a.
the deity. This trend accepts the text of Exodus 20:15 at face value, in which the sight and sound blend together.

The second direction, “down,” is characterized in the majority of zoharic texts as an answer to the issue of “seeing the voices.” In this group of texts, the Zohar moves past the Midrash’s relegation of the sound to the heavens, and instead allows the sound to become a “hypostasis” of the Godhead. The sound becomes a visible or otherwise sensed entity, more tangible than simple sound, an emanation of the Godhead. During revelation, the people do not experience synesthesia, but instead maintain their senses and see the voices as visual elements similar to any other visual experience. The tangibility of the sound is something that is difficult to downplay; one text describes the voices as animate beings, messengers of god which ask Israel to accept the minutia of the Torah’s commandments, and then kiss Israel after they agree to do so.45 A later text describes how Moses received a *qol* which emanated specifically from the Supernal Mother (The sefirah of *Binah* through the spinal column (‘*amudah de-‘emtzaita*) of the divine self, becoming the *Shekhinah*, or the lowest emanation of the godhead. Israel, on the other hand, saw the voices which exited from the mouth of god, because the *qolot* had turned into angels.46 Other texts, moreover, read the text more literally, claiming that Israel saw the voices because they read the text of the Torah, whether engraved on the angels’ bodies47 or as emanated letters.48

In all of the above situations, the sound is individualized, and the divinity interacts with the individual self--The *qol* kisses each person’s mouth, emanates specific letters seen by the individual, and transforms into as a plurality of angels. At the same time, the scene is that of

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45 See Sefer ha-Zohar Parashat Terumah 146a:
46 See Tiqqunei Zohar, Tiqqun 38 79a
47 See Tiqqunei Zohar, Tiqqun 22 64a
48 See Zohar Hadash Parashat Yitro 69a:
communal revelation, and the angels interact with all of Israel. The Jew is in the context of others, experiencing a specific revelation yet within a communal context of merged selves.

By categorizing sound, revelation, and the divine within the Neoplatonic system of sefirot, the Zohar reflects a collapse of the Midrash’s delicate balance between sign and object. If the Biblical text referred to qolot in an undefined manner as “hypostasis” or plain voice; and the Midrash, looking at it through the logic of wisdom literature and Middle Platonism, argues for the ultimate transcendence of the deity; the Zohar claims that the qol is an extension of god’s self which is both removed from the deity and the weather event of thunder. Instead, in the Zohar’s terms, all qolot are atoms of sound, pieces of pure revelation, whether as speaking angels or words themselves. “To hear the voice” is defined as receiving an individualized form of revelation, an essentialized aural element and to enter into an individual covenant with the deity in a communal context. Other concepts, such as fear, transcendence of the deity, and synesthesia are rendered irrelevant as the qol is now an element of god.

In dealing with the Zoharic qol, one must continue, as well, to place this within the topic of root r’m. The Zohar speaks of thunder as ra’am or re’amim in a few places, though much less extensively than it speaks of qolot. Almost always in the process of sefirotic development, or, to use Magid’s word, extentionation,49 re’amim are a small element of a larger sefirotic process, whether in the development of Gevurah50 or Tiferet51,52 or in the emphasis on man’s theurgic

49 Shaul Magid, “Associative Midrash: Reflections on a Hermeneutical Theory in Likkutei MoHaRaN,” in god’s Voice from the Void: Old and New Studies in Bratslav Hasidism. Ed. Shaul Magid, p. 44. “Extentionation is a term used to communicate the delicate nature of emanation whereby one thing brings forth another. This dialectical nature of independence and relation stands at the heart of the kabbalistic notion of creativity.”

50 Sefer ha-Zohar Bereishit 31a, Pritzker Edition I:31a p.188. This text comments on Psalm 29:3 and Job 26:14. When dew of the Holy Ancient One settles upon Him,” (“the next sefirotic configuration,” n. 375) “filling His head in the place called heaven...then He will thunder...—smashing the power and might of harsh judgments,” Pritzker Zohar, p.

51 Sefer ha-Zohar Vayeshev, Pritzker Zohar 1:186a p.133-4, esp. notes 306 and 308 on the sefirah of Tiferet in this context. This text comments as a whole on Psalm 18:14:
Although seen as the weather event in the physical world or in the sefirotic system, *re’amim* are almost always spoken about within a greater context of *qolot*, especially the seven voices in Psalm 29. While *qolot* refer to sounds, *re’amim* retain their real-world meaning as a weather event, and yet are a much smaller part of the tenfold system. Overall, the *re’amim* are associated with the feminine, containing elements of the godhead, which both receive and enable the god’s emanation. The following discussion will consider both *qolot* and *re’amim* in *Zohar III: Pinchas* 235a-b, a text which sets the stage for Lurianic and Hasidic interpretation.

### The Zohar’s Seven Voices of Psalm 29

The Zohar meditates on the necessity of the voices as a description of the divine body. This description significantly blurs the description between self and god, while at the same time providing a mythological account for the emission of thunder within the Neoplatonic system of the sefirot. It, therefore, maintains the previous assertion that the *qol* is an emanation of the deity. This narrative, while explaining that thunder is an emission of the divine self, does not deal with the issue of synesthesia and instead focuses on the aural element of thunder.

The trachea has six rings which connect as one, and these, called *bnei elim*, release the wind to blow on the world, and come from the side of Gevurah, [which brings rain], and

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53 *Zohar* Pinchas 235a-b, discussed later on in this chapter, as well as in Ch. 3 in the context of Nahman’s use of the text.

54 ibid.
when these six bnei elim [rings of neck] combine as one, they are called shofar of the ram of Isaac, because they are of the side of Gevurah, [whose root is Binah], which are “elim bnei bashan” “Render unto god sons of Elim,” which refer to the “elim” of Isaac, [the power and ram of Gevurah] which release wind and voice. And this voice goes out [from the angels] and touches the rain clouds, and then the sound of thunder is heard to the creations, and on this is written “And the thunder of his might, who can contemplate?”", for they certainly come from the side of Gevurah. 55 “The god of glory makes thunder, god is on many waters,” (Ps 29:3). It does not say ro’em, [he] thunders, but hir’im “[he] makes it thunder,” by way of the bnei elim, angels, [who are the six levels of angels, which correspond to the throat]. And no one is adequately able to praise this voice in Binah, and this is why it is written, “Who can contemplate?” (Job 26:14). 56

This text combines all sound phenomena into a process by which sound issues forth from a physical description “of the sefirotic limbs.” 57 It connects all sound within a dense associational web which focuses on the fifth emanation, Gevurah. This sefirah is associated with the second patriarch, Isaac, who was replaced with a ram after his binding. 58 The ram itself produces the shofar. 59 60 This horn-blowing results from the collective speech of six angels, who

55 See Sefer ha-Zohar, Pritzker Edition, Volume IX, p. 586 n. 246
57 Zohar 235b, Pritzker Edition Vol IX p. 581 n. 245
58 See Genesis 22:13:

60 Luria, Cordevoro, and pre-Sabbatean Isaiah Horowitz later expound on this, using the shofar as a type of mediating thunder talisman which enables the human self to change and purify the sefirotic system. See Hayyim Vital, Sefer Pri Etz Hayyim, Part 2, Sha’ar 26 (Sha ‘ar ha-Shofar), p. 72; see as well Isaiah Horowits, Shene luhot ha-berit, vol. 3, Masekhet Rosh Hashanah, Pereq Torah ‘Or, p. 167-176
correspond to six rungs which, in the zoharic conception, comprise the neck. The result is a voice which issues forth from Binah, touching rain clouds, which may themselves symbolize the lips of the divine body, or, perhaps the lungs.\(^61\) This text, according to Matt\(^62\), speaks of the issuance of the voice from the left side, beginning with Binah and continuing on to Gevurah.

As a commentary on this section, the Raayah Mehemna, written at the end of the 13th or the beginning of the 14th century,\(^63\) describes the process as a cycle of bodily fluids. Instead of favoring the sefirotic chart’s left side, the Raayah Mehemna focuses on a perfect combination of opposites. The voice does not come out of Gevurah, but instead from Tiferet, the synthesis of Hesed and Gevurah. The modern Matoq Midvash commentary (quoted below in brackets) adds that the weather phenomena speak of the different sefirot.

And the flames of the heart [Gevurah] encounter the rain clouds [Hesed], which are the lungs, by way of the trachea [Tiferet] [thereby making the qol]. This refers to “And the thunder of his might who can contemplate?” (Job 26:14). … and the heart is in the left, which is Gevurah, and Hesed is in the right side, from which flow the water in the lungs, which is the side of moah (brain, seminal fluid) of Hokhma. And from this side [from Hokhma, flows] “A spring of gardens, a well of living waters, flowing from Lebanon (LBNN), (Cant. 4:15),” which is the whiteness (LeBoNah) of the moah, flowing down the trachea of the lungs, after the ascendance of the clouds of the arousal of Binah to the

\(^61\) Frish, Daniel, ed. Sefer ha-Zohar, Perush Matoq mi-Dvash, vol. 14 Parashat Pinchas, p. 329. See also Zeev Volf of Zhitomir, Or Ha-Meir, Devarim Parashat ‘Eqev, which characterizes the rain clouds (’avei matra) as an individual’s lips.

\(^62\) Sefer ha-Zohar III:235a-b, Pritzker Edition Volume IX, p. 586

\(^63\) See Lawrence Fine, “Kabbalistic Texts,” in Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts, Barry W. Holtz, ed., p. 311, which assigns approximate dates all the sections of the Zohar.
moah of Hokhmah [which then descends and cools down the fires of Gevurah in the heart].

The above discussion places thunder in a timeline of arousal and release. The water in the lungs is a secretion from the “whiteness” of the brain. When this seminal fluid encounters the heart, it flows through the trachea and releases the sound, which is the thunder. According to the Matoq Mi-Dvash commentary, this process is circular; the release of vital energy from Tiferet, in turn, cools down the waters of the heart and enables the process of cooling, arousal, and release to begin again.

In the above texts, the Zohar separates the qol from the topic of thunder and redefines it as a release of “sound.” Secondly, the Zohar’s text moves away from the midrashic conception of the ultimate transcendence of the deity and instead describes a world imbued with the emanated qolot, or voices.

Moreover, the Zohar’s text blurs the boundaries between self, god, and world. Indeed, breath, which is warm, consists of both heat and water, which is a combination of opposites, taking into account the theory of the four humors which informs much of the corporeal conception of the Zohar. One speaks through the mouth, releasing a word. Thunder is the voice of god, and speech is the sound of the human. Both are sound phenomena, atomic bits of qol, placed into the sefirotic body, which is the human self.

Cordovero’s Voices

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65 See Lawrence Fine’s “Kabbalistic Texts,” 328. After defining the Zohar’s conception of theurgy, Fine continues (his emphases): “Thus there is a mutual and dynamic relationship between human beings and the transcendent realm with which they are essentially united. As a microcosm, a perfect paradigm of the upper world, and as one link in a cosmic chain of being, a person simultaneously reflects the world of the deity and arouses it--only to be aroused and nourished in return.”
Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (1522-1570) was a Safedian predecessor of Isaac Luria and Hayyim Vital. In his Kabbalistic dictionary Sha’ar ha-Kinuyyim, Cordovero, operating under the Neoplatonic chart of emanation, speaks at length about the qol. He differentiates between two types of voices, revealed and concealed. The shofar releases the sound and corresponds to the patriarch Jacob. In accordance with the Raayah Mehemna in Zohar III:235a, Cordovero describes how the qol, which is the synthesis of Hesed and Gevurah, ascends to Hokhma, continues on to Binah, and returns to Tif’eret in a circular fashion. In defining the qol in a systematic way, Cordovero enables his successors, Luria and Vital, to use this emanated “hypostasis” of god’s voice for theurgy.

Hayyim Vital’s Voices

Hayyim Vital (1542-1620) was one successor of Luria. Vital narrates the sound of god in relation to the differentiation of sound at Sinai and its relationship to chosenness. While the nations of the world received the qol, Israel was privy to a more differentiated revelation. By navigating the space between chosenness and particularism, Vital explains that at Sinai the revelation changed form depending on a nation’s chosenness.

“I am the Lord your god,” (Exodus 20:2). Know that on the third day [of Israel’s arrival at Sinai] in the morning, there were sounds and thunder and lightning...And, indeed, the seven sounds mentioned here [Psalm 29] were all given in the morning to frighten the...
whole world that there is no Torah but this one. And after these sounds He gave to his
nation alone the Torah.69

Vital continues:

God gave the Torah, which are the Ten Commandments to Israel alone in a speech
comprising separate letters, but the “whole nation” [the “mixed multitude”] did not hear
the separate letters, just expressed sound called qol.70

Vital explicates Psalm 29 in accordance with the theophany at Sinai. The seven voices
listed in the Psalm are significant in that they represent a condensed version of the ten
emanations of the Godhead. In his listing of the sound and visual phenomena at Sinai, Vital
counts thunder--the voice of god-- as something different than the “sound atom.” The voice and
its extension, speech, are not a function of the empirical reality of the world, but instead express
Israel’s election. Overall, Vital uses the qolot as a focal point by which to navigate the tension
between universalism and particularism. In this discussion, he distinguishes between dibbur and
qol, and the difference in their revelatory properties. While the Israelites heard a more particular
type of speech, the nations of the world were compelled to hear a more general, less tangible
type of speech, one which was frightening, describing their more distant relationship with the
deity.71 Although he does not deal with the issue of “seeing the sound” in Exodus 20:15, Vital

69 See Sefer Etz ha-Da‘at Tov 76b column 2
70 Ibid. 77a column 1
71 See Edwin Curley, translator and editor, The Collected Works of Spinoza, Volume II, pp. 80-81, paragraphs 13-14. There, Benedictus De Spinoza (1632-1677) discusses the event of hearing, summarizing Maimonides and Halevi’s positions. “In the opinion of certain Jews, God did not utter the words of the Decalogue. They think, rather, that the Israelites only heard a sound, which did not utter any words, and that while this sound lasted, they perceived the Laws of the Decalogue with a pure mind.” Spinoza, however, rejects this position on the basis that the plain meaning of the text is “that the Israelites heard a real voice.” Interestingly, Spinoza deals with the same issues of the “voice” of god expressing god’s selfhood. How can it be, he asks, that the voice at Sinai, a “created thing” expresses
provides the background by which thinkers such as Dov Ber of Mezritsch, discussed later, can distinguish between different experiences of revelation.

The Zoharic and Lurianic project moves past the rabbinic assertion that the voice is inaccessible because of the god’s transcendence. Instead, the Zohar and Vital describe thunder as *re’amim* and *qolot*, turning the sound into a “hypostasis,” and taking sides in a semiotic debate which began with the rabbinic interpretation of the biblical text. While Lurianic theurgy speaks of a world totally emanated from the divine, this worldview is focused on the mediation of sefirotic harmony through the action of the self by blowing the shofar. Discussion of early Hasidic interpretations of Exodus 20:15 will show the extent to which thinkers attempt to return to the rabbinic text, and, by extension, the possibility for thinking of *qol* in terms of thunder.

*The Shlah’s Voices*

Yesh‘ayahu ha-Levi Horowitz (1565-1630), also known as the Shlah for his book *Shenei Luhot ha-Brit*, served in clerical positions throughout Ashkenazic Europe until he moved to Safed in 1621. He is known most famously for his work mentioned above, which is a “detailed...
presentation of Jewish ethical thought,” according to Joseph Dan, Horowitz shifted Jewish mystical thought from an “esoteric doctrine” to a “meaningful foundation of Jewish religiosity and social behavior.” Horowitz, moreover, presents and organizes “a vast tradition so as to express the author’s worldview.” Drawing both from Cordovero and Luria in his discussion of the voice of the shofar, the Shlah allows for an equal, balanced direction of dependence from those previous Kabbalistic thought systems towards Hasidic thought.

Quoting Cordovero, Horowitz states that the voice of the shofar awakens the upper realms allowing the self to travel up the 10 sefirot to binah. Tracing the meaning of the words of the blessing over the shofar, Cordovero assigns each word a different sefirah. In accordance with Zohar III:Pinchas 235a-b and other places, the qol corresponds to Tif’eret, or fire and water, while the shofar corresponds to Binah, the Supernal Mother.

The Shlah, moreover asserts that both Luria and Cordovero hold that the purpose of the shofar is hamtaqat hadinnim, or sweetening the evil decrees by recalibrating the sefirotic chain. Horowitz, quoting Luria, states the following:

The purpose of the shofar is to sweeten the din and to express the voices (qolot) which include wind, water, and fire, in the same large shofar blast, for in the arousal of the

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75 ibid.
76 ibid. “In the Shlah, the struggle between the kabbalistic schools of Mosheh Cordovero and Yitsḥak Luria has not yet been decided. The author was still under the influence of the system of Cordovero, and of the ethics developed on that basis by Cordovero’s followers. Yet some indications of the emerging influence of the radical, revolutionary Lurianic Kabbalah can be discerned in the work, and when Luria’s school was completely victorious later in the seventeenth century, the Shlah did not lose its relevance and impact.” See Horowitz, Shnei Luhot ha-Brit, vol. 3, “Masekhet Rosh Hashanah,” Perek Torah ‘Or, pp. 167-176.
77 Ibid, p. 167 column 2 (he does not cite his source in his quotation of Cordovero).
78 See Nahman, how combination of opposites leads to hamtaqat hadinim, esp. Liqqutim II:18
dinim, the power of Samael\textsuperscript{79} increases, and in their sweetening he has no power or nourishment at all.\textsuperscript{80}

In short, according to the Shlah’s reading of both Cordovero and Luria, the qol is the perfect combination of opposites, allowing the self to ascend while, at the same time, bringing down theurgic results.\textsuperscript{81} It is an upward movement from the bottom, and also a top-down motion. While the shofar is the “lower voice [which] awakens the upper voice, it also “pulls down the hevel (breath) from keter to the lower world through the secret of Binah.”\textsuperscript{82} This reading of the necessity of sound phenomena for the sefirotic unity is, as well, an element which makes its way into the Hasidic sources.

In summary, according to the Shlah the shofar, and the qol which is really the intended result, is meant to engage in hamtaqat ha-dinim, sweetening god’s evil decrees by enabling sefirotic unity and therefore a more balanced flow of upper forces into the physical universe. Both upward and downward movements occur--the sound ascends to god, while the divine blessing emanates downward, unifying the sefirot and creating a theurgic result through the mediation of the shofar’s qol, initiated by Man.\textsuperscript{83} In quoting Luria and Cordovero, the Shlah channels a significant amount of Zoharic tradition, providing the basis by which Hasidic thinkers characterize the voice of god.

\textit{The Baal Shem Tov’s Parable of the Deaf Man}

\textsuperscript{79} The ruler of the demonic realm, Sitra Ahra. Married to Lilith.
\textsuperscript{80} Horowitz, Shnei Luhot ha-Brit, Masekhet Rosh Hashannah, Pereq Torah 'Or p. 167-176
\textsuperscript{81} As well, the Shlah simplifies Luria, ignoring the idea of chewing up the dinim, which Nahman brings up later in Liqqutim II:18.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid. Paragraph 14.
\textsuperscript{83} One may be tempted to view the shofar as example of the cross-cultural thunder weapon. For an old study, see Chr. Blinkenberg, The Thunderweapon in Religion and Folklore: A Study in Comparative Archaeology. Cambridge University Press, 1911. http://rbedrosian.com/Downloads/Blinkenberg_ThunderWeapon.pdf. Many thanks to Holly Walters for sending me this reference.
Yisrael ben Eliezer (c. 1700-1760), later known as the Baal Sham Tov or the Besht, was a miracle worker from Medzhibozh whose legacy began the Hasidic movement in Europe.\(^8^4\) The book *Sefer ha-Ba‘al Sham Tov*, although published in 1938, is a systematically-composed compendium of earlier teachings recorded by his disciples, especially Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl (1730-1797), Ya‘akov Yosef of Polonoye (d. 1783), Dov Ber of Mezritsch (1704-1772), and Moshe Hayyim Efraim of Sudilkov (d. c. 1800).\(^8^5\) Indeed, according to Rosman, “While the Besht’s spiritual legacy was mostly unwritten and inchoate, it inspired prodigious religious creativity in his name.”\(^8^6\)

The Baal Sham Tov thinks about the issue of divine transcendence in his interpretation of Exodus 20:15. The *Degel Mahane Efraim*, by Moshe Hayyim Efraim of Sudilkov, a grandson of the Besht, records his grandfather’s teaching:\(^8^7\)

\[ אדמן משל ששמעתי דרך על בזה לומר יש. \]
\[ והקולות את רואים העםוכל בכלי מנגן אחד שהיה הזה זקני אבי וני שהיו עד והתענוג המתיקות מגadol להתאפקיכלו לא זה שומעים הם ואותם גדול comunitàיבערלות במתיקות מאד יפה זמר לשמוע לעצמו ויהיה נוספים עתים שהו זמר הכלי הכלי של קול כל כל כל כל כל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל מכל❮


\[^8^5\] Moshe Hayyim Efraim of Sudilkov was the uncle of Nahman of Bratslav

\[^8^6\] ibid.

\[^8^7\] See *Degel Mahaneh Efraim*, Parashat Yitro quoted in Wodnik, Shim‘on Menahem Mendil, ed. (*Sefer ha Ba‘al Sham Tov*) *Ba‘al Sham Tov*..., Parashat Yitro: 55. Michael Fishbane, as well, discusses this teaching in “To Jump for Joy: The Rites of Dance According to R. Nahman of Bratzlav.” He states that the Besht’s story is a type of polemic against the Mitnaggedim’s lack of religious fervor. “...we may infer that the Baal Sham’s parable was originally intended to ridicule the opponents of early Hasidism (the Mitnaggedim), who aggressively criticized their counterparts’ ecstatic movements in prayer.” Accessed at https://judaic.arizona.edu/sites/judaic.arizona.edu/files/files-event/Fishbane.pdf. See as well Arthur Green, *Tormented Master*, Ch. 4 “Bratslav: Disciples and Master,” pp. 141-143, which considers the same texts as Fishbane’s paper.
“And the whole nation saw the voices,” (Exodus 20:15). One can comment on this verse using a parable I have heard from my grandfather of blessed memory: One was playing an instrument beautifully, with sweetness and great pleasantness. And those who would hear the music were unable to hold back from the great sweetness and enjoyment, so that they would dance, jumping almost up to the ceiling, on account of the great enjoyment, pleasantness, and sweetness. And all who would come close to hear the sound of the instrument would have more enjoyment and would dance very much. Now, amongst all this [commotion] came a deaf man who did not hear anything of the sweet sound of the instrument. He only saw that the men were dancing fervently. He thought that the people were crazy, and he said to himself, “Why are they so happy?” But, really, were he wise, knowledgeable, and understanding that the people were dancing on account of the playing of the instrument, he too would dance there.

The explanation of the parable is self-evident. One can explain “And the whole nation saw the sounds” to mean that god emanated the light of his divinity upon them as one, and that they understood together when saw the great joy that the angels of “hosts were fleeing, fleeing” (Psalm 68:13), they understood that the angels were doing so because of the sweetness and pleasantness of the light of the Holy Torah.

Looking at the text itself, one must ask: What is the sound, and how does it mark the distance between self and god? The qolot at Sinai were not a “hypostasis” or emanation of the divine. Instead, revelation consists of understanding that one has been previously deaf to divine ecstasy of the angels, and one now understands, in a removed manner, what it means to rejoice in
the divine. In other words, within the Besht’s homiletic parable lies a recognition of the
lowliness of the self and its separation from the deity. The gap between self and god cannot be
crossed or assumed nonexistent as the Zohar does, but is instead asserted, radically so. One can
only understand the inner-workings of divinity though a removed manner of understanding, in
which one observes but does not himself participate in the supernal ecstasy, in the *riqqudim*. To
see the sound means to understand in a cognitive manner the possibility of supernal ecstasy
before the divine, and the lack of attaining that possibility, which would entail becoming god
(apotheosis.)

What, then is the purpose of sound in this text? The *qol* is a marker of divine separation
by which god is able to communicate with his angels. Israel’s collective revelation allows them
to understand that ecstatic dancing occurs in the upper realm because of the “sweetness and
pleasantness of the light of the Torah.” In this case, then, the *qol* is an internal element of the
celestial realm, one which Israel does not hear, but still collectively *perceives*. The *qol* is
supernal, unattainable, and yet, somehow detectable. The voice, as explained in Shemot Rabbah
5:9, is separate from human existence.

Therefore, the separation of self and god in the Baal Shem Tov’s parable reconsiders the
problem of synesthesia preserved in the original text of Exodus 20:15. In explaining the
Israelites’ “seeing the sound,” the Besht redefines the verb *ro’im* altogether, from a visual
experience to a cognitive perception. The *qolot* remain, as in the Lurianic idea, intimately

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88 In this interpretation of the parable, I diverge from Michael Fishbane who states “… there is a striking discordance
between the parable and its application, insofar as the deaf man in the former [parable] stands aloof, in
incomprehensive mockery, while in the latter the people first perceive a limits, visual truth and desire a deeper
(aural) understanding. This difference, I think, suggests that the parable was formulated independently of the biblical
verse and its interpretation.” In my analysis, I read the parable and explanation as a whole, seeing is a one-to-one
 correspondence between the verse and its parable: Israel is the deaf man after he has understood the significance of
 revelation on a cognitive level.

89 Midrash Rabbah, on Exodus 4:27 (*Shemot Rabbah. Parasha* 5, section 9), discussed in Ch. 2.
connected to the deity. They are, still, “hypostases,” or emanations of god. However, the “deaf man,” or the Jew, may only perceive them.

Here, the Besht’s description of the Sinaitic revelation has a thematic similarity to the later Midrash, Exodus Rabbah 5:9, which describes the process of revelation in Psalm 29. Both texts share thematic similarities in their conception of sound phenomena at Sinai. Firstly, both assume a gap between the self and god. This gap is bridged by different sounds. Man has its realm, which perceives a lesser emanation of god’s power, and god, who is separate and unreachable is unable to interact with Israel except by the bridge of sound.  

If god can no longer enter the world through emanation, then how can the distance be bridged? How can immanence be achieved if god’s influence on the world is not clear? Man himself must engage in a cognitive exercise, bridging the gap through his own efforts. The Baal Shem Tov’s statement on thunder, therefore, solves the rabbinic issue of the assertion of divine transcendence by explaining how, through interaction with the physical world, one can ultimately achieve and mediate the self-disclosure of the divine. The Besht creates a gap, and yet, unlike the Midrash which claims that only god, through revelation as an impartation of knowledge, can reveal himself, the Besht explains that, indeed, the gap does exist, yet the human can recognize divine immanence.  

Early Hasidic texts tend to re-invoke a separation between self and god, reflecting on a religious problem: How can an individual bridge the distance between the self and the divine?

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90 Quoted in Schneur Zalman of Liadi’s Liqqutei Amarim, Ch 36 (p. 261, Pe’er Miqdoshim Edition)
91 See Tirosh-Samuelson, Happiness in Premodern Judaism, 128: “...in the rabbinic context, the joy in performing the mitzvot is derived from pleasing another person, from fulfilling the needs of the other--and ultimately, the Wholly Other, god. Here, indeed, the text emphasizes the “Wholly Other,” and its inaccessibility.
92 This statement is open to Jonathan Garb’s interpretation, that “Hasidism is...a highly complex form of positive psychology. “This way of looking at the world and conceiving of the psyche questions the existence of human agency: “...for many branches of Hasidism one can only open oneself up to divine grace.” One, therefore does not make a choice to look at the world differently, but instead comes to a salvific recognition of the absence of agency. “The Hasidic Contribution to Psychology,” delivered at Hasidism and the Academy: Dialogue, Research and Application, Jerusalem, Israel.
The Zohar and later Kabbalistic literature answers this question, asserting, like Fine’s general description of Jewish mysticism that because of the nature of the sefirotic system, the self can identify with the divine. Therefore, because of the radical ability of the self to identify with the divine, the issue of difference and separation does not arise in the first place. There is no problem to solve; the qol is part of self, which is god.

This assertion is not to posit that in Hasidic thought the self does not identify with the divine; indeed, many thinkers, such as Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl deal with issues such as the absorption into the divine and the self-identification with god as the purpose of mystical experience. However, the beginning of that experience, before ascension, includes an assumption of the bounded self which is situated within the physical world. This type of assertion on the sheer primal physicality of all things before mystical ascension is not the motivating assumption of Lurianic Kabbalah, which attempts to see beyond the physical to the reality of the sefirotic system which imbues all with divinity. Of course, the Hasidic thinkers did not see themselves as engaging in “textual archeology” by reusing themes from Exodus Rabbah. Indeed, the availability of midrashic texts, alongside biblical and contemporary works, enabled the Hasidim to mix and match what they pleased, drawing from traditional sources while discarding or deemphasizing others. The above discussion of qolot as the voice of god will continue with other

93 See Lawrence Fine, “Kabbalistic Texts.” “To the [Jewish mystics], the human personality...represents the totality of the sefirotic structure, and, even more, is imbued with divine life...the individual constitutes a microcosm of the sefirotic world...” 327. “Mystics tend to find in themselves something in common with the divine. They frequently turn inward in order to discover that an aspect of their being, or the totality of their being, corresponds to or is akin to god...Mysticism, in other words, it typically associated with the development of self-awareness, not as an end in itself, but as an attempt to discover an identity between the self and the Other,” 306.

94 See Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl (Twersky), Me’or ‘Einayim, Parashat Noah:

It is known that all depends on the awakening from below, and this is the aspect of the manna, which is the desire of the Nuqva for the male, and we the nation, the children of Israel, are called the aspect of Nuqva with respect to the Holy One Blessed be He, and when we arouse to cleave to our creator, blessed be He, from below to above, we arouse, as it were, a desire in our creator to overflow upon us all which is good, Selah.
early Hasidic commentaries on Exodus 20:15: The Magid of Mezritsch’s *Liqquetei Amarim*, and Zeev Volf of Zhitomir’s *Or ha-Meir*.

*The Magid of Mezritsch*

Dov Ber of Mezritsch (1704-1772), or the Magid of Mezritsch, interpreted and systematized the ideas of his teacher, the Baal Shem Tov. In his Hasidic thinking, the Magid shies away from the Zohar’s vision of self as god, instead asserting that the human exists in a lowly state, unable to fully be god, yet somehow imitating him.

In his commentary on Exodus 20:15, Dov Ber of Mezritsch explains in his *Liqquetei Amarim* that “to see the sound” does not mean to enter a synesthetic mind space, or to see a filtered version of god’s voice, but is instead to understand the revelation on a high cognitive level.

והעניין הוא שהכל על המילים ודברי התורה וה서ת ושם ושם והנה מעשה צרכן לומר הוא המקודש והברור והברור עד הרמה

And the matter is that it is written, “And the whole nation say the sounds”--”seeing the heard and hearing the seen.” The explanation of “saw” (Ex. 20:15) refers to understanding, because the written Torah and the oral Torah have two levels, *qol* and *dibbur*, and *dibbur* is the deeper of the two.

By placing *qol* and *dibbur* in opposition, Dov Ber of Mezritsch builds on Vital’s discussion of the sound’s revelatory aspect. The Magid asserts that Israel’s reception of revelation was not just singular because of their reception of a different type of sound--the *dibbur*--but, as well, consisted of a more honed understanding of the words of the Torah, not

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96 Ibid. Only the Tzaddik, according to Arthur Green, who understands this reality can become a bridge between the human and divine.
97 Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma’el Masekhta de-Bahodesh Parashah 9 (On Exodus 20:15, quoted below)
98Dov Ber of Mezritsch, *Liqquetei Amarim*, Sha’ar 3 Ch. 4 p. 184
through their plain meaning, but accompanied as well by an oral aspect--the *Torah She-Ba’al Peh*. While Vital explores the different sound categories, the Magid takes this one step further, contending that a heightened understanding took place, marking the election of Israel. The *qol*, therefore, is turned into a “symbol,” referring to a lower, individualized sound which is the revelation, the voice of god, separated from the being by many levels of interpretation.

Why is Dov Ber compelled to reinterpret Vital’s sound phenomena in a personalized manner of understanding? His use of the Mekhilta provides the answer. By engaging with the rabbinic text, Dov Ber downplays the Zoharic description of synesthesia, as well as the emanatory nature of the sound, in favor of Vital’s overarching theme of chosenness in the context of revelation. In returning to the rabbinic text, the Magid reinterprets the claim of sensory-mixing to refer to a heightened level of understanding. The connecting element between these two phenomenological worlds--the experience of revelation and chosenness, is the *qol* itself, as speech (*dibbur*), which allows greater understanding for the Israelites, and a lower level of revelation for the un-chosen nations.

This, more importantly, marks a shift away from the Zohar’s understanding of the *qol* as a piece of revelation. Dov Ber’s terse comment takes into account the cognitive psychology of the individual.99 The emphasis on understanding enables the restoration of a rabbinic boundary between self and god; the deity’s revelation cannot be imbibed into the selfhood through the self’s identification with the deity, and god cannot be affected through theurgy, but instead, the divine, and all its layers of interpretation, is contemplated. Although the voice at Sinai is not associated with thunder, it is instead related to a higher emanation of --*qol*--, which finds more differentiation is split into spoken words--*dibburim*. To see the sound, then, means to understand

99 Jonathan Garb in “The Hasidic Contribution to Psychology,” explains that although Hasidism may be seen as a sophisticated version of cognitive psychology, it differs in its emphasis on the reception of divine grace and “the salience of the nomian.”
in a clear manner the emanated words of the Torah, which find expression in speech, *dibbur*. The resolution of “seeing the sound” lies not in rising to a point of synesthesia, or experiencing a tangible emanation of the divine, but instead, the reception of the *dibbur*, the tailored understanding.

This idea is, nonetheless, an echo of the Zohar’s second set of explanations regarding the issue of Exodus 20:15. Israel was able to “see the sounds” because the sounds themselves, originally unformed, became physically manifest. The sounds became visible, and Israel retained the integrity of their sense perceptions, yet perceived--here, cognitively--the emanated revelation.

And, once again, what is thunder? Dov Ber’s explanation does not see *qolot* at Sinai as thunder, but as a higher form of emanation, an undifferentiated sound which corresponds to the written Torah. The *qolot*, then, refer to a raw form of revelation. *Dibbur* (speech), on the other hand, corresponds to the oral Torah. In this small text, Dov Ber is not interested in dealing with topics of the self’s experience of nature, but instead navigates the manner in which revelation was experienced on the spectrum of chosenness and universalism. Thunder is not relevant in this worldview, and instead the sound itself must be spoken of in relation to more pressing issues.

*Zeev Volf of Zhitomir*

Zeev Volf of Zhitomir (d. c. 1800)\(^{100}\), a student of Dov Ber of Mezritsch, offers a very different answer than his teacher. Instead of dealing with the emanation of the divine voice, Zeev Volf directly deals with the topic of synesthesia, building a theory of the senses around Exodus 20:15. He echoes --yet moves beyond-- the first category of the Zohar’s explanation of rising:

that the individual moves “up,” during the encounter with the divine, thereby entering a space in which the senses are transcended:

And see, that in the physical world there are five senses that one uses for the need of the body, and they are divided--every sense has an individual vessel to serve it. The sense of hearing’s serving-vessel is that of the ear, and the sense of sight with the vessel of the eyes, and similarly with the other senses, which have individual vessels for their use, and not sense can use the vessel other than it. As such, none cannot see that the heard or hear the seen, but, in truth there is also in the physical man the partnered sense in which all the senses are mixed together, and there one can experience any sense with the vessel which belongs to another sense, to see the heard and to hear the seen. And the Rabad in his commentary to Sefer Yetzirah brings a proof to this from our Holy Torah, as it says (Exodus 20:15), “And the whole nation saw the voices.” And it should have written, “They heard the voices”--from here there is a proof that an individual has a shared sense (hush ha-meshuttaf), in which all the senses are mixed together, and a person can

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his senses to sanctify them to the service of the Creator Blessed be He, and not do his [Evil Inclination’s] strange work\textsuperscript{102}, to use his senses not for the his physical needs, using them only for the need of his physical pleasure, instead using his whole self in them, only for an exalted service, in attachment and cleaving to god, then he raises the aspect of the separation of the senses to their root, the shared sense, and because of this his great benefit is to come to an exalted and high level, to hear the seen, just as in times of old, the Israelites properly prepared their level, at the holy gathering, at the receiving of the Torah, all of Israel merited to see that which is heard.\textsuperscript{103}

While the Zohar explains that the senses are transcended, Zeev Volf decides to move away from this explanation by asserting that, instead, the individual enters a space of the “sixth sense,” in which the individual’s bounded self simply gains another manner of experiencing the world. In this space, the individual does not transcend body, but instead remains within the body. This mechanism, therefore, is different than the Zohar because it emphasizes the individual’s situatedness, and his being constrained within the self, after which the individual does not transcend the self. While taking a position in a Zoharic debate, this text skirts the definition of qol altogether, and instead emphasizes god’s transcendence while asserting the bounded earthiness of the self. This sensory-blurring is not a result of the transcendence of the senses, but is the attainment of the most sublime sense--the *hush ha-meshutaf*, “the shared sense.” The awakening of this sense results from “cleaving to god,” after a time of purification.

The text is not so concerned in defining the sound in this situation as it is in explaining the self’s experience in having sound and sight blurred. On a metaphysical level, then, Zeev Volf

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\textsuperscript{102} Isaiah 28:21

\textsuperscript{103} See Zeeb Wolf of Zhitomir, *Sefer Or ha-Me’ir, Devarim Parashat ‘Eqev*. 
questions the reality of the sound, as well as other senses: Sound may not be real, and when one
perfects the human body, one realizes this truth.

The metaphysical ramifications of this statement, however, are tempered by the text’s
assumptions about the self’s bounded-ness, its inability to become divine, and its imitation
instead. Despite the use of words such as deveikut, man in this case does not achieve apotheosis.
Instead, the self mimics god’s transcendence of time and place, yet maintains a clear separation
from deity, one which is limited by its now exalted sense experience. The sensory blurring is a
carnal event, a sixth sense which is the source, shoresh, of all other senses, yet, it is still a human
sense. Man does not rise above the need for senses, as explained in Zohar’s “up” answer, but
instead develops the parts of the self which enables perception of god, the cleaving to him, but
not the full, complete self-identification with god observed in the passages of the Zohar. The
result, then is a type of compromise in which the self maintains its boundedness, yet still is
permitted to ascend, albeit through Zeev Volf’s newly-crafted sixth sense.

Is thunder, or qolot, in Zeev Volf’s text, a symbol of the line between god and
humankind? In this situation, Zeev Volf “outs” the sound as not being real at all, and yet, he is
required to create a new barrier between Man and god, that of the sixth sense which operated
within the closed self which seeks imperfectly to self-identify with god. The removal of the qol
as a classically rabbinic marker of separation is replaced with another barrier, that of the self.
The individual, then, is separate from god. The quality of the voice is less important than the
individual's self-perfection. The qol is so symbolic that it transcends the regular modality of

104See Maimonides, “Eight Chapters,” Chapter 1. Note the similarities to Maimonides’s conception of the soul,
which consists of five parts. There is, however a sixth category called the ‘aql, translated literally as “reason.” For
Maimonides“reason” is the organizational principle of the soul, the Aristotelian form of the soul’s matter. A soul
without ‘aql, reason, in other word, is not actualized, and therefore depraved. “If one were not to achieve this reason,
‘aql,” Maimonides explains, then the process of perfecting one’s soul would be “for naught.”
marking the separation between self and god; instead Zeev Volf of Zhitomir uses the *qol* to focus on inner virtue.

**Conclusion**

Other scholars assert Hasidism’s similarities to other mystical religious practices\(^\text{105}\), to Judaism’s own absorption of Neoplatonism\(^\text{106}\), or even to a resolution of tension between Gnosticism and rationalism\(^\text{107}\). I assert that, although any of the above may be true, Hasidism sought to be a mainstream movement and to preserve its mainstream heritage, reread Kabbalah through a rabbinic lens.

The above discussion provides a basis by which Hasidic thinkers deal with sound phenomena, interpreting previous texts, and reasserting the boundary between Man and god in a rabbinic text. It shows how Hasidic thinkers represent a phenomenological return to rabbinic themes, while dealing balancing the canonized acceptance of other texts, such as the *Zohar*. In this manner, Hasidic texts rework previous strata of Jewish thought in an attempt to reflect on the significance of the meaning of sound and its’ relationship as a mediating factor between Israel and god. In Jewish mystical tradition, the “voice” moves from an emanation of the deity in the *Zohar* (“hypostasis”) to a “symbol” in Hasidic tradition, which expresses a cognitive understanding, and an incomplete perception, of the divine.

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\(^{105}\) Fine, Lawrence, “Kabbalistic Texts,” in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, Barry W. Holtz, ed., 305-307


Chapter 2:

Defining Re’amim In Light of the Interpretation of Psalms 81:8 and a Statement in Berakhot 59a

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus the Hasidic interpretation of the word r’m. In the first section I look at the interpretation of a phrase regarding thunder in the Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 59a. I then explain how the Shlah (Isaiah Horowitz) incorporates this talmudic phrase into his own project of virtue. Next, I show how the Baal Shem Tov uses the phrase in crafting a rabbinic worldview upon other kabbalistic ideas which he inherited. In the second section, I explain how Dov Ber of Mezritsch, Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye, and David Shelomoh Eybeschütz directly engage with the Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma’el in their interpretation of Psalms 81:8. In this verse, the rabbinic ra’am is a “symbol” of god, referring to the deity through a process of interpretation. The early Hasidic commentary on Psalms 81:8 likewise reflects a return to a rabbinic notion of god’s transcendence. Hasidic thinkers, interpreting re’amim, reuse earlier rabbinic, creating a world in which the god is above and inaccessible.

Part I: The Interpretation of Berakhot 59a

Babylonian Talmud: Berakhot 54a-59a

A discussion of the Hasidic interpretation of re’amim begins with the Babylonian Talmud in the ninth chapter of Tractate Berakhot, 54a, where the Mishnah discusses the situations in which one responds with a blessing (berakha) to cosmic events, such as thunder, lightning, and

108 T. Bab Berakhot 59a, quoting Ecclesiastes 3:14

109 Psalm 81:8 quoted in Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye’s (d. 1783) Ketonet Passim; Dov Ber of Mezritsch (1704-1772), Torat ha-Maggid (on Psalms 81); David Shelomoh Eybeschütz (1755-1814), Arvei Nahal, Parashat Va-Ethan, as well as Shemuel Bornstein (1855-1926) of Sokhachev Hasidism, Shem mi-Shemuel Parashat Vayyigash 5677, 5778.
earthquakes. Later, in 58a-59b, the Gemara defines and explicates the words of the Mishna. A discussion is initiated, and various authorities define the cosmic occurrences according to their worldly knowledge. At the end of the discussion, almost as a footnote, the text includes the words of R. Alexandri.

R. Alexandri said in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi: Thunder was created only to straighten out the crookedness of the heart, as it says: God hath so made it that men should fear before him. R. Alexandri also said in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi: One who sees the rainbow in the clouds should fall on his face, as it says, “As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud, and when I saw it I fell upon my face.” In the West [the Land of Israel] they cursed anyone who did this, because it looks as if he were bowing to the rainbow; but he certainly makes a blessing.

Seen within the greater structure of the text, the statement of R. Alexandri has a flavor of existentialism, focusing on the experience of the self, and, indeed, internal transformation, when faced with the deity. From a cursory look, one sees that Berakhot 58b-58a is pushing an agenda

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110 To compare this with the Palestinian Talmud, Palestinian Talmud, Tractate Berakhot Ch. 9 Halakha 2
111 Eccl. 3:14—God made it that it is impossible to add or subtract from his creation so people will fear from before Him. (Both JPS and NRSV concur with this translation). According to the plain explanation, God is the creator, and the individual is the created being. Why did God make it that one cannot add or subtract to His creation? So that man might fear Him. There is this large gap between what it means to be a person and what it means to be god, and this verse answers the question: Why can the human not act in a similar way to god? Why can man not be the creator? Thunder, in this text, acts as a strong boundary marker between self and god.
112 The Babylonian Talmud, at least the Vilna Edition, removes כְּבוֹד деֹמוּת and instead inserts וגוּמֶר. Further research may explore if this removal reflects a theological impulse.
113 The context is Ezekiel 1:28, and the culmination of an ecstatic vision.
against the bounded, religious experience in favor of the worldview mediated by the berakha, the blessing. R. Alexandri’s statement’s ramification for individual worship does not figure prominently in the Talmud’s commentators.115

The Shlah’s Re’amim

The talmudic statement on thunder does not appear in Kabbalistic literature, though the Talmud’s association of thunder with god’s might does appear in the Cordoverian entry of re’amim.116,117 Similarly in the canonical work of Jewish law, the Shulkhan ’Arukh, Joseph Karo (1488-1575), a contemporary of Cordovero lists the option of attributing the thunder to god’s might in the recitation of blessings on cosmic phenomena.118

The statement of The Babylonian Talmud’s R. Alexandri next appears (albeit briefly) in the Isaiah Horowitz’s (1565-1930) Shenei Luhot ha-Brit.

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115 Shemuel Eliezer ben Yehudah ha-Levi Edels (1555-1631), an Ashkenazi contemporary of Yesh’ayahu Horowitz (and incidentally a Kabbalist himself, according to Meir Wunder), interprets R. Alexandri’s statement to refer to something completely different than individual devotional experience. Instead, he asserts that the thunder “is meant to frighten the hearts of the heretics, in order that they repent.”

116 See Cordovero’s entry for re’amim in his Pardes Rimmonim, Sha’ar Hakinnuyim:

117 One may note the thematic similarities between Berakhot 59a and the Zoharic text–there is an unspoken association between thunder and the heart in both R. Alexandri’s statement and the Ra’ayah Mehennna’s text. The rabbinic text describes the individual’s experience of the transcendent. The heart, there, may refer to moral purification as a result of achieving the rabbinic project of god-recognition: The deity’s transcendence and inaccessibility. This is a cognitive endeavor, culminating in a recognition of sorts. On the other hand, the Raayah Mehennna discusses a process by which the divine and human operate and the necessity of opposites for the continuous functioning of the cosmos. The authors of Zoharic texts purport them to be rabbinic texts. The connection of meaning between the Talmud and the Zohar’s statements on thunder set the stage for later thinkers.

118 See Shulkhan ’Arukh Orah Hayyim, Hilkhhot Birkat ha-Perot 227:1
The text of R. Alexandri’s statement in Berakhot 59a appears in the Shlah in the context of his discussion of the opposing merits of fear and love within the religious life.\textsuperscript{119} Thunder, according to Horowitz, is part of the Talmud’s reference to a less virtuous mode of religious fear, one which is not a combination of opposite forces, but instead represents one side of the sefirotic tree—the left, feminine side. Horowitz comes to this conclusion after listing a number of scriptural verses which list both the noun fear, \textit{yir’ah}, and the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, which he claims refers to the noble fear, \textit{yir’ah lefanai u’lefnim}.\textsuperscript{120} In his list of scriptural verses, Horowitz stumbles across another verse, which he includes for the sake of thoroughness. This verse, Ecclesiastes 4:14, which states, “And the Lord (Elohim) did so that they will fear him,” \textsuperscript{121} is quoted in Berakhot 59a by R. Alexandri.

\begin{quote}
יראת מפני שהיא בה עסקנו שלחוןعلיה מהוא הלוי והؤمن על יראה ההוהיניג שאני טסקוב בה שלוחה מפתי יראה
\end{quote}

And in the place where fear (\textit{yir’ah}) is discussed with the name of ‘Elohim, which is the attribute of judgment (\textit{din}), it hints to external fear, which we have not dealt with, which results from fear of punishment.\textsuperscript{122}

In this text, the Shlah downplays the religious significance of the fear mentioned in Berakhot 59a, and by asserting that it lies in a lower category than exalted fears—\textit{yir’ah rish’onah}, and \textit{yir’ah lefanai ulefnim}. Despite this denigration of the “external fear,” he does contend that Abraham used this lesser form of fear to cloak, (\textit{lehalbish}) his other emotions in sacrificing his son. Here, therefore, speaks of the idea of cloaking fear in order to comply with

\textsuperscript{120} Deut 10:20,2; Joshua 24:14; Ps 2:11, 19:10, 34:12, 102:1, 128:1
\textsuperscript{121} יִהְיֶה הוּא לֹהִים לֹהִי מִלְּפָנָיו שֶׁיִּרְאוּ עָשָׂה יִהְיֶה המילויו יֵשֶׁב בְּשֵׁם יִהְיֶה.\textsuperscript{122} See Shene Luhot ha-Berit, Vol. 1, “Be- ‘Asarah Ma’amarot,” Ma’amor Shlishi u-Ma’amor Revi’i, p.225, paragraph 42.
the wishes of god. The Shlah, however, sees the type of fear epitomized in Berakhot 59a as representative of a less significant mode of religious worship, significant in its use by Abraham, yet still not as exalted as the “innermost fear.”

In the Shlah, base fear of punishment is not intrinsically significant, and it does not cause an internal transformation. Indeed, the Shlah does not pay heed to the existential import of the statement in Berakhot 59a. In contrast, later, the Besht sees low, animalistic fear as an important step in exalting oneself to supernal fear, yir’ah elyonah. Thunder is a “symbol,” an example of an external fear, and disconnected from the deity.

And what of the storm event itself? The Shlah does quote Berakhot 59a, yet does not deal with thunder as a significant experience, seeing it as one example of many in a system of external, base fears. Overall, the Shlah deemphasizes the importance of Berakhot 59a. Despite this, the simple quotation of Berakhot 59a, coupled with the reflection on halbasha, opens the door for later thinkers to use the newly discovered statement of R. Alexandri within a philosophy of internal transformation. The definition of ra’m here is not important; what is significant is that the Shlah’s consideration of this lesser fear connects the Baal Shem Tov with the Zohar’s discussion of thunder and the heart, Luria’s radical theurgy, and Cordovero’s encyclopedic characterization of the divine self. It will be Hasidism’s job to interpret ra’am, once again, as the voice of god.

The Baal Shem Tov’s Re’amim

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123 The Baal Shem Tov draws from Horowitz’s use of the idea of cloaking, halbasha, as well as his reference to Berakhot 59a and the significance of religious fear. The Baal Shem Tov, however, goes beyond Horowitz by prescribing the use of the lesser fear, yir’ah hitzonit, to recognize god’s immanence in one’s individual life circumstances. See Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, Me’or ‘Einayim, Yitro.

124 ibid.

125 For future reading on the connection between Horowitz’s work and Hasidism, see Piekarz, Origins of Hasidism (Hebrew).
A consideration of the Besht’s statement on Berakhot 59a and its origination with Isaiah Horowitz’s *Shnei Luhot ha-Brit*, as well as his teaching on *Parashat ‘Eqev* shows that the Baal Shem Tov’s teachings transgress the limits of previous Kabbalistic definitions of thunder. By emphasizing the primary importance of the physical world, Yisrael Ben Eliezer engages with *re’امים* as “symbols,” indicating an interpretive connection between god and the listener. The Besht engages with the text of *Shnei Luhot ha-Brit*, thereby allowing for the rewriting of sound, specifically thunder, into the mystical canon in a rather unorthodox manner. In understanding the extent to which this change occurs, one must first describe the Besht’s conception of sound phenomena in general. Thunder, which incorporates the sound yet moves beyond its simple meaning, is then used as a salvific symbol. I will establish that the Besht and Hasidic thinkers draw on the Shlah’s teaching about fear, moving far past the Shlah’s use of it in an isolated circumstance, making this type of fear, and its paradigmatic example in thunder, as a central concept in that the divine speaks to each person.
Our Rabbis of blessed memory said, “Thunder was not created except to straighten the
crookedness of the heart, and the matter is stated in the name of the Baal Shem Tov,
whose soul is in the highest reaches: The Name Blessed Be He desires very much that all
of Israel should be fearful of Him, and one who has intellect will fear Him, “Because He
is the master and rules over the source and root of all worlds,” (Zohar Introduction 11b).
And were He to god-forbid remove His life, even for a moment as it says, all the worlds
would be wiped out. And because of this, he (Man) is afraid and trembling from the terror
of the Name Blessed be He, and from the presence of his glory….The above refers to one
who has intellect. But regarding one who does not have intellect to fear from the Blessed
Be He--the Name Blessed be He desires that they shall fear Him. Therefore, the Name
Blessed Be He frightens him with the matter that will be shaken and panicked because of
the smallness of his intellect. For example: When he hears the sound of thunder (qol ha-
ra‘am), and the intent of the Name Blessed Be He is: That he should go from that point to
Exalted Fear, when he thinks “Is thunder not one of the Gevurot (powers) of the Holy
One Blessed Be He, and how will I not fear from the Name Blessed Be He Himself?”
And similarly this refers to the other external fears that a person has. Such as: That he is
afraid of domination, or the death of his children--this is the intention of the Name
Blessed Be He, that he ascends from this [lower state] to the Exalted Fear, that he should
know that he fears only the Name Blessed be He. For the Exalted Fear, the fear of the
Name itself, is cloaked and diminished inside these things, to frighten him according to
the smallness of his intellect.127

127 See Menahem Nahum Twersky of Chernobyl, Me’or ‘Einayim Parashat Yitro, Shemini, as well as Wodnik, ed.
Sefer ha-Ba’al Shem Tov on Ps. 81, Berakhot 59a.
Now that the Baal Shem Tov’s worldview in relation to previous Kabbalah has been established, one can begin to understand his teaching on thunder. The first point of order is that the Besht situates the self squarely within a physical world, one which is taken as it is, not mediated through the Lurianic Kabbalah’s infinitely fractalized world of sefirot or even by a more simple Zoharic conception of the tenfold sefirot. This allows the self to experience thunder as the powers (Gevurot) of god, experiencing a “lower fear” which then allows a person to come to a cognitive recognition of god’s presence. The thunder as a physical experience originates from god in order to awaken the “higher fear.”

The human therefore, is wholly itself, apart from god and unable to connect with him except through the cognitive connection of thunder to god. The theme is rabbinic, and the self lives in a different sensory realm, unable to bridge the gap between himself and the transcendent deity. Note the opposition which the Besht puts between the one who “does not have intellect,” and the one who “has intellect.” He who has intellect--or cognitive understanding--looks past the deep physicality of the world and understand the world’s emanation from god. Others, however, need to experience the thunder of god and reach an exalted fear.

There is a difference, however, between the Beshtian emphasis on god’s separateness and the rabbinic sense of the same idea. The separation of the deity from the self in Beshtian Hasidism is only perceived, and false in reality. In the end of the day, the Besht, especially in his teaching on Berakhot 59a, asserts that god’s being imbues the world, a typical Kabbalistic claim. However, this reality, according to the Besht, is not easily perceived; indeed, few people can truly understand the extent to which the world is of god. Therefore, because of their lack of recognizing this--known as yir’ah ʿelyonah--god sends “messages” through the physical

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Lawrence Fine, “Kabbalistic Texts”: “Just as mystics tend to locate some aspect of the divine in themselves, they likewise tend to look upon the world of nature as a whole, as an opportunity for discovering the sacred. god is often construed as being immanent in all of nature,” 307.
cosmos to enable his creatures to recognize Him, in their lowly manner. Indeed, the Besht explains, Man can only truly understand god through a syllogism, though not directly: “Is the thunder not one of the gevurot of the Holy One Blessed be He, and how does not therefore fear from god may He be Blessed, Himself?”

Is this intellectual acknowledgement in the end an occurrence of salvation? Does the recognition of god’s power, the knowledge--to use Besht’s quote of the Zohar-- “That He is the master and rules over the source and root in every world,” relate back to the statement itself, that thunder was created “to straighten the crookedness of the heart.”? The ‘aqminut shebalev are those elements which block an individual from recognizing on a cognitive level that god is the root of all worlds. Thunder “straightens,” or clears up these cognitive doubts by allowing the individual to recognize that indeed, god is truly above, but also radically within the world. Through thunder, the self does not gain theurgic powers or merge with the Godhead. Instead, the self achieves an exalted fear, a mystical recognition by which colors and transforms the worldview within the physical realm.

Moreover, in his teaching on Berakhot 59a, the Besht uses qol as the rabbinic voice of god. This sound is subordinated to the weather phenomenon, the boom of thunder and related to the experience which it entails. The reconnection of re’amin to qol enables the original experiential element of thunder to return to the forefront; instead of being a material-less atom of revelatory information (cf. Bereishit Rabbah Yitro, Zohar), the qol is simply a sound, an experience of hearing which enables the self to fear in the simplest sense.

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129 See as well Liqqutie Moharan, Torah 206 (on Psalm 119), which describes how god calls out to the individual after he has strayed from the correct path:

130 Sefer ha-Zohar, Introduction 11b.
The Besht, then, asserts a type of transcendence which the Zohar and Luria had rewritten from the canon: Thunder is a “symbol” for god, existing as an event within the context of the storm, marking the separation between the self and deity. One reaches the deity through a matter of interpretation, by thinking, “Is this not one of the Gevurot of the Holy One?” In this Hasidic interpretation, the qol, sound, is associated with thunder, yet the thunder is not a “hypostasis,” an extension of the god’s self. By placing ra’am at a far “semiotic” distance from the object which it signifies, god, the Besht is returning to the original meaning of the rabbinic text. Both R. Alexandri and the Besht emphasize god’s transcendence.

The Baal Shem Tov draws directly from rabbinic sources in the case of re’amim from Berakhot 59a, engaging with thunder as both a weather event and a symbol for god. This innovation originates with Isaiah Horowitz, but the Baal Shem Tov texts magnifies its use, attempting to craft an open, mainstream Jewish mysticism.

Part II: “E’enkha be-Stirah Mineih u-Veih”: Interpretations of Psalms 81:8

Introduction

In this section I look at a line of Jewish interpretation on Psalms 81:8, which mentions the word r’m. All levels of the text, in dealing with the sound, navigate the idea of the self’s separation from god. Early Hasidic thinkers incorporate the ideas of an earlier rabbinic text, the Mekhila de-Rabbi Yishmael, reading their Kabbalistic traditions in light of a thought-world where god is transcendent.131

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131 For the discussion of Berakhot 59a in Habad Hasidism, see See Schneur Zalman of Liadi, Maamorei Admur Hazoken: Inyonim, Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 1983, p. 334. Schneur Zalman of Liadi fits re’amim into the cosmology of Hasidut, mentioning Berakhot 59a while speaking of a panentheistic doctrine. Thunder is connected to the enabling aspect of femininity, which culminates with gashmiyyut, physicality. As well, for a discussion of concealment and revelation in Islam, see Elliot Wolfson, “Unveiling the Ka’aba,” in http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/192913/unveiling-the-kaba, as well as his characteristically chiasmic phrasing in “The Cut that Binds,” p. 106: “The bow of prismatic colors is naught but image, indeed an image of an image, the doubling of vision that renders visible the invisible in the invisibility of the visible, a revelation that reveals itself in the revelation of that which is withheld.”
Psalm 81, commonly recited after prayers in the Jewish liturgy on Thursdays\textsuperscript{132}, contains a contradictory phrase which provides certain tensions which rabbinic texts seek to resolve.\textsuperscript{133}

The eighth verse of the psalm states,

\begin{quote}
\texttt{כִּיְמָרָהּ מְרִיבָה עַל־מֵי אֶבְחָנְךָ רַעַם בְּסֵתֶר אֶעֶנְךָ וָאֲחַלְּצֶךָ קָרָאתָ בַּצָּרָה}
\end{quote}

In distress you called, and I rescued you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah\textsuperscript{134}

Dahood asserts that the imperfect forms of the verbs \textit{wa'haltzekha} and \textit{‘ebhankha} are both in \textit{wayyiqtol} form, and therefore they refer to a past-tense event. In his opinion, the verse is translated as “In distress you called and I saved you, I answered you from hidden thunder, I tested you at the waters of Meribah, Selah.” He adds, furthermore, that the place of hidden thunder is Mt. Sinai, the point of revelation.\textsuperscript{135}

Assuming he is correct, and his reading of the phrase “seter ra’am” in construct (\textit{semikhut}) reflects an accurate reading of the text, then the original tensions are resolved. The tense is consistent, the contradiction of the words reflects a coherent idea, and a narrative of calling out and answering occurs in a linear fashion. After Dahood responds to the text’s issues, the verse nevertheless preserves themes which appear in future interpretations: Israel calls out to god: What is the nature of their calling out? Secondly, what is the nature of the deity who receives the prayer?

\textit{Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael}

\textsuperscript{132} See Berakhot 55a
\textsuperscript{133} I borrow this statement of methodology from Matthew Goldstone, “Research,” in http://matthewgoldstone.com/research/.
\textsuperscript{134} See NRSV
The *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, a third century Midrash deals with these issues, perceiving tensions in the text and attempting to solve them.

אמר רב אלעזר בן ר' יוסי הגלילий חיר כמארי ראש קראת המתוף़ והתאם את בתר רעך עד תוף, משמע שותרת תוף
וממוקמך עליך ומזיעך עליך את כל עולמך,.MODEך הקדש חיר כמארי הראש מסהר את חרו מפי שראה הגדולה עליך בן מריבות
ומאשרא שלמה וファー חיר כמארי ראש בחר עמו חרב כמארי ראש עמו חרב מקום מריבות עליך את כל עולמך

R. Elazar ben R. Yose the Galilean says: Behold, he says, “In travail you called and I strengthened you, I answered you “beseter ra’am”, I tested you [at the waters of Meribah, Selah],” (Psalm 81:8). At the moment that I answered you and protected you and thundered the whole world upon you, from that moment it was revealed to me what you would do in the future at the Water of Meribah. Abba Sha’ul says: Behold he [god] says: I will answer you with *seter ra’am*; You call out in hiding (*seter*) and I will answer you in the open (*bagalui*) and thunder for you the whole world.

R. Elazar’s issue with the text is the confusion between past and present. R. Elazar preserves the contradiction and solves it by asserting that indeed, there is a god who can transcend time because of its supernal knowledge, gained by contact with a chosen people. I term this “reciprocal revelation,” as it is an extreme example of what Hava Tirosh-Samuelson describes as the relationship between god and Israel as reflected in rabbinic text.

R. Elazar deals with the topics of prayer and the extent of the deity’s knowledge. Man can, in reality, affect god and therefore add to his knowledge, allowing the deity to transcend

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137 For more on this lens, see Matthew Goldstone’s upcoming dissertation. There, he demonstrates “the ways in which the key ambiguities of this biblical obligation [of rebuke] emerge as divisive tensions in the eyes of early exegetes,” http://matthewgoldstone.com/research/.
138 *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*. Masekhta de-Bahodesh, Parashah 1, on Exodus 19:2
139 According to Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, “The intensely personal depiction of god in rabbinic sources also manifests in the rabbinic preoccupation with cultivation of character, an activity that requires the interaction with other persons,” 130.
time after its contact with a people. There is a “pipeline” by which knowledge transfers from one being to another. In this occurrence, moreover, the self of Israel is not bounded by each individual body, but it instead part of a whole, which, as a unit engages in a collective self-revelation to the deity. R. Elazar maintains the tension between past and present, narrating the qualities of prayer, revelation, and the chosenness of Israel.

On the other hand, the second statement of the Mekhila focuses on seter ra’am as the main contradiction. While the first topic deals with the issue of tense shift, the statement of Abba Sha’ul speaks of the opposition between hiddenness and openness—seter and ra’am. Abba Shaul does not try to explain the grammatical construct of the text, maintaining that seter ra’am describes the relationship between the worshipper and god.

Reversing the order of events in the Psalm, Abba Shaul narrates that the Jew first calls out to god. Then, god answers in revelation. In this case, Israel calls out in secret, assumedly in an audible manner. God, on the other hand occupies the place of openness and revelation. The textual tension is explained by ignoring the meaning of the grammatical construct an instead maintaining the contradiction between seter and ra’am, using it to reflect the main difference between self and god—one operates in a revealed manner, using awe-inspiring weather phenomena (umar‘im ‘alekha et kol ha-‘olam). The other party must make do by calling out in secret.

In this Midrashic interpretation, the two statements maintain, or perhaps create, tensions which they seek to resolve by positing a theological agenda, one which maintains the chosenness of Israel and a clear boundary between the self and the deity. God “thunders,” mar‘im while the self “calls out” qar‘ata, and each emission of speech acts as a pipeline by which the deity and nation communicate. Here, thunder is an “index” of god, removed but not completely from god’s
selfhood, like a weathervane’s attesting to the existence of the wind. It is not a symbol, as it is not disconnected from the deity, nor is it an icon, or a “hypostasis” of the deity itself. Instead, rabbinic thunder occupying a “middle” semiotic space, asserts god’s transcendence.

Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye

The verse of Psalm 81:8 does not appear in the Zohar, and reappears in Hasidic thought within the discussion of concealment and revelation. Discussion of Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye, Dov Ber of Mezritsch, and David Shelomoh Eybeschütz’s teachings on Psalm 81:8 will show the extent to which each Hasidic thinker attempts to re-absorb the rabbinic worldview expressed above in Exodus Rabbah.140

Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye (d. 1783) was a first-generation Hasidic master, a student of the Baal Shem Tov, whom he encountered around 1748. Serving as the rabbi of Polonoye until his death, Yaakov Yosef published his main work Toledot Yaakov Yosef in 1780. Another work, Ketonet Passim, quoted below, was published long after his death in 1866.141 He echoes the Mekhita in his teaching.

וַהֲשָׁמֶת בָּיָר [הַפָּסָוק] צָפֵם אֶנֶךְ בַּשָּׁמֶר רַעְּם וּנְגוֹרִי אֶנֶךְ נְתָנֶה תַּחְפּוּלָתָךְ תַּעֲבַר מִמֶּךָ מְכַסֶּר
שֶׁיֵּשׁ רַעְּם תַחְפּוּלָתָךְ מִפְּרָט בְּחָמָה הָדוּף מִזֶּמַל שֶׁנְתוּ אֶנֶךְ בַּשָּׁמֶר נְתָנֶה לְחַסֵּק שֶׁנְתוּ אֶנֶךְ בַּשָּׁמֶר
רַעְּם וְזָא אֶנֶךְ בַּשָּׁמֶר רַעְּם

And the reason is explained in the verse itself, “I will answer you in hidden thunder”-For I will answer you that you will be answered as a result of your prayers, both in past and future, through the power of SeTeR, hiddenness, which is rosh tokh sof; the beginning included in the end, which are the first letters of SeTeR, which is “he was, is, and will

140 Psalm 81:8 quoted in Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye’s (d. 1783) Ketonet Passim; Dov Ber of Mezritsch (1704-1772), Torat ha-Maggid (on Psalms 81); David Shelomoh Eybeschütz (1755-1814), Arevi Nahal, Parashat Va-Ethan, as well as Shemuel Bornstein (1855-1926) of Sokhachev Hasidism, Shem mi-Shemuel Parashat Vayyigash 5677, 5778.
141 See Haviva Pedaya, “Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye.”
be,” therefore it is the opposite of רָע, that he will be a ruler and head and a faithful shepherd, which is Ra’AM, and this is why it is written, “I will answer you with hidden thunder.”

Claiming to comment on a teaching of the Besht, Yaakov Yosef assumes that the main textual issue is that of tense. Instead of solving the contradiction by providing adequate grammatical information, Yaakov Yosef maintains the tension and uses it to describe the process of prayer: After encountering god, the Jew has the ability to transcend time and affect the future. The solution to the past/present tension is, like R. Elazar in the Mekhilta, an assertion of one party’s transcendence of time. God transcends time, and therefore Man, after prayer, can affect events beyond the temporal flow. In this situation, as discussed above, the self in prayer imitates the actions of god in the rabbinic source, rising beyond time.

The bounded self, who seeks individual transcendence, calls out in secret, hust as god answers Israel in secret. The Jew imitates god, yet does not become him.

In accordance with the rabbinic separation of the self and the divine, moreover, the final decisor in the implementation of the prayer is god: Yaakov Yosef emphasizes that the answering of prayers is something which still transcends time, yet is in the hands of god. In Vital’s and Luria’s thought, the actor channels the energy of Tiferet by blowing the shofar. Hasidism

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142 See Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye, Ketonet Passim, Parashat Bemidbar and Parashat Balaq.
143 See Liggutei Moharan, Torah 5, which speaks about praxis as allowing the self to transcend time. Nahman’s apoteotic take sees Man as entering the mind of god. This is discussed in Ch. 3.
144 See Michael Fishbane, “To Jump For Joy: The Rites of Dance According to R. Nahman of Bratzlav.” Fishbane in his description of Nahman describes the manner in which the self imitates, eventually purifies, and completes the broken feet of the Godhead. Nahman provides an extreme example of this imitatio dei, as he sees the the actor as self-identifying with god. Regardless, Nahman maintains the Hasidic imitation of the divine as well as the bounded self which engages in this praxis.
145 For a more radical example of Man’s imitation of the sefirot, see Zeev Volf of Zhitomir, Or ha-Meir, Devarim Parashat ‘Eqev:

רבוחאמס פושט שומע ומשמע, גול יוספ תונה, המשמע בונה צורוח כפדר, המשמע בונה צורוח וח”י. הולו הלשון וה”י, כ פnoinspection הוה, מראתו מברך יוהו, משמע לשים, אולר ל שמחה מזרל מוהו... שומע יוהו, מראתו מברך יוהו, משמע לשים, אולר ל שמחה מזרל מוהו...

146 See Vital, Sefer Pri ‘Etz Hayyim, Vol 18 in Sidrat kitve Rabenu ha-Ari, Sha’ar ha-Shofar, 586 (column 2)
removes this manner of changing god, and regresses back to rabbinic conceptions of god as ultimately and completely separate. The becoming-god (apotheosis) as narrated by Luria and Vital is contracted, so that the actor reverts to a self who is separate from god. The Jew prays, and his statement undergoes a multistep process beginning with an emission from the mouth, continuing on to ascendance, acceptance, and final implementation.

One must ask again: Is thunder as an experienced weather event an important consideration? Yaakov Yosef, in his return to rabbinic concepts, nevertheless does not, like the Besht, see the thunder listed in Psalm 81:8 as a reference to the phenomenon of sound. Instead, he sees thunder as a concept opposed to hiddenness. Thunder as a sound of god is decontextualized from the storm event to refer to the transcendence of the deity, in accordance with R. El‘azar’s opinion in the Mekhila. This general erasure of thunder qua thunder, though, still remains within the weather phenomenon’s semantic web. One may stretch the “web” to allow it to encompass the original weather phenomenon—-thunder as an event and thunder Yaakov Yosef’s symbol share ideas such as ontological markers, sense experience, and blurring of temporality. While thunder may, in Yaakov Yosef’s plain sense, refer to the response of god, its true meaning according to the teaching reflects the atemporal aspect of prayer. The call of the bounded self out towards god is still the qeri’ah of the verse’s text, and the answer of god is reflective of the prayer’s atemporality. Thunder as the voice of god in Psalm 81:8 and as voice of Man in Luria is turned into a “symbol,” referring to time-concepts and the separation of the self from the divine.

Dov Ber of Mezritsch

In his interpretation of Psalms 81:8, Dov Ber of Mezritsch (“The Magid of Mezritsch,” 1704-1772) interprets “thunder” in the context of ‘avodah be-gashmiyyut. This idea contends that
“religious worship” be extended “to all areas of human life by according religious significance to all profane activities.”

It is found that one who does a commandment for the needs of the world and it is born in the service of the Name, may he be blessed, who engages in business, eating and drinking, and does so for the Name blessed be He, this is called “love that has offspring,” and this is “I will answer you,” the intention is to say that you are in “open hiddenness,” “seter ra’am.”

The statement above shows affinity to Lurianic Kabbalah and its doctrine of tsimtsum, which asserts that the world is created through the concomitant process of god’s revelation and concealment. Here, in one’s actions though business, eating, and drinking, the individual mirrors god’s own revelation through concealment. The individual, however, is not god, but instead an agent which mimes god’s own self-revelation. Through engagement with the physical world, the self in its recognition of the physicality of things enables the creative power of “love which has offspring,” which, earlier on in his text, the Magid likens to a sexual relationship between a man and a woman. In this situation, therefore, the ‘avodah begashmiyut copies the successive interplay of god’s male and female aspects and eventually mediates the Divine

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148 Arthur Green discusses this in comparison to Nahman’s own outlook, see Tormented Master, “Excursus I: Faith, Doubt and Reason,” pp. 311-314. For an introduction to Lurianic concepts, see Daniel M. Horwitz, A Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism Reader, Ch. 16, pp. 223-239. See also Liqquetei Moharan 56:3 (discussed in Ch. 3, this thesis), which speaks of the Torah as an example of concealment and revelation.
presence’s self-revelation. The self is disconnected from the Godhead, yet still acts as if it has the ability to control it.\textsuperscript{150}

Hasidic thought, according to Elior, contends that in order to mediate the Divine presence, one must recognize the “essential nothingness” of being in the face of divinity.\textsuperscript{151} This notion is relegated to the Dov Ber’s intended cabal of\textit{ tzaddikim}, who, act as a bridge between the corporeal and the divine.\textsuperscript{152} Like in Yaakov Yosef’s teaching, Dov Ber’s comment on Psalm 81:8 ignores the plain experience of thunder and instead presents thunder, \textit{ra’am}, as a symbol for the self’s reenactment of revelation. While in Yaakov Yosef’s teaching thunder represents the atemporality of prayer, in Dov’s Ber’s commentary, thunder is a symbol for the concept of the revelation which occurs inside of secrecy.

Dov Ber therefore believes that the construct of \textit{seter ra’am} as reflects a tension between concealment and revelation. While Abba Shaul resolves this teaching by placing clear boundaries between Israel and god, the Magid--rewriting the verse in context of Lurianic doctrines and his new agenda of religious worship--asserts the phrase’s inner meaning as the process of \textit{‘avodah begashmiyut}. The elevation of mundane action to divine power, however, does not reach the level of Luria’s blurred distinction between self and god. The actions of “eating and drinking,” imitate but do not replace god’s own gendered contraction and revelation to create the world. Finally, Dov Ber completely ignores the biblical verse’s plain meaning. The experiential meaning of calling out to god, as an individual or as a nation, is not relevant to him,

\textsuperscript{150} On \textit{‘avodah begashmiyut}, See Rachel Elior, “Origins of Hasidism,” “This concept refers to the name for the quest for the divine essence in the multi-faceted nature of material reality or the expansion of religious worship to all areas of human life by according religious significance to all profane activities, by virtue of the thought that illuminates them and the intention that accompanies them. The revelation of the divine substance in being requires the recognition of its essential nothingness.”
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid 20
\textsuperscript{152} See Green, “Dov Ber of Mezritsch,”; “Dov Ber also taught, however, that because god is to be found throughout the universe and His word underlies all that exists, all things physical as well as spiritual could become channels through which god’s creative energy might be uplifted and returned to its source.”
and instead he focuses on the main contradiction in the construct-hidden thunder. *Ra’am* is a “symbol,” not the true voice of god, or the voice of the self, but rather a coded reference to an expansive topic which describes the relationship between god and the world—*tsimtsum*.

David Shelomoh Eybeschütz

David Shelomoh Eybeschütz (1755-1814) was a third-generation Hasidic teacher and a contemporary of Nahman of Bratzlav. His posthumous work, ‘*Arvei Nahal*, is a collection of sermons on the weekly Torah reading.153 Eybeschütz presents a mirror image of the Mekhilta’s story of events. In the context of prayer, Eybeschütz states that the function of praying is to mediate the divine overflow, *shefa*, into the world. In arguing this, he describes the process of prayer:

And the matter is as such: For it is clear in the Zohar (III:195a) that even the prayer of every Israelite has no power to ascend upwards to most of the accusers, until it is hidden in the prayer of the poor one who occasionally prays from his need and complains (*mitra’em*) to the Holy One may he be Blessed, and pours out his soul. And this complaint (*tar’omet*) is like an enjoyment before god, and there is no power in any accuser to stop these words, which breach all the firmaments154 and ascend in front of

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153 Zeev Gries, “Preachers and Preaching.”
154 To wit, compare this to al-Busiri’s (c. 1212-c.1295) *Burdah* (verse 110, 112): “And you [Muhammad] continued ascending until you obtained the level of two bows’ length [from the Divine presence], which was not achieved or
god, and he [the one who prays] enwraps the prayers in the prayer of the poor one,\textsuperscript{155} and on this matter I heard commentators [who explain that] “I answered you in hidden thunder” as the language of complaint (\textit{tar’omet}).\textsuperscript{156, 157}

The self calls out to god, using the noun of thunder. The verb is transformed from a hif’il form, as in the Mekhilta’s \textit{mar’im}, to a verbal noun, \textit{tar’omet}, or complaint. The direction, instead of Abba Shaul’s “top-down” manner, is a “bottom-up” reenactment of revelation by hiddenness, \textit{seter}, when the self, operating under a cloaked manner, reveals a prayer to god.

At first glance, this passage from the \textit{Arvei Nahal} is a summary of the Zohar’s passage (III:195a) which emphasizes the importance of the poor individual’s prayer. However, the verse of Psalm 81:8 does not appear in the Zohar, and instead was accessible to the Hasidic thinkers in the Mekhilta De-Rabbi Yishma’el and other rabbinic texts. Eybeschütz’s words, therefore, must stem from the rabbinic text, which establishes a reciprocal manner of revelation through an interpretation of the verse. Eybeschütz, then reads the Mekhilta’s two explanations together as one in light of the Zohar: The individual’s revelation to god through prayer\textsuperscript{158} can only be effective through the process of cloaking.\textsuperscript{159} The self as revealer does not exist as a fractal of the Godhead, as is asserted in Zoharic and Lurianic Kabbalah. Instead, the self is separate in

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attempted [by anyone else]/… And you penetrated the seven Heavens with them in a procession you were the flag-bearer.” Many thanks to Prof. El-Tobgui
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Psalm 102:1: \textit{כִּי לְעָנִי, תְּפִלָּה}
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\textsuperscript{155} See Matt, Daniel C. (trans.) \textit{The Zohar: Pritzker Edition}, Volume IX, Balaq 3:195a, pp. 372-373: “…which is the most esteemed of all? You must say a prayer of a poor person. This prayer takes precedence over a prayer of Moses and over a prayer of David and over all other prayers of the world. Why? Because a poor person is brokenhearted, and it is written: \textit{YHVH is near to the brokenhearted} (Psalms 34:19). A poor person constantly quarrels with the blessed Holy One, and the blessed Holy One listens and hears his words. As soon as he utters his prayer, He opens all the windows of the heavens, and all other prayers ascending on high are pushed aside by that poor brokenhearted person--for it is written: \textit{A prayer of a person when \textit{יעטוף}... a delay, for all prayers of the world, and they do not enter until his prayer enters. The blessed Holy One says, ‘Let all prayers be delayed, and let this prayer enter…’}”
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\textsuperscript{156} In accordance with R. Elazar in the Mekhilta
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{157} In accordance with the Mekhilta’s Abba Shaul.
\end{flushright}
accordance with the rabbinic notion, albeit with Lurianic emphasis on the necessity of concealment and revelation.\textsuperscript{160}

The act of prayer, therefore, is part of a Kabbalistic system whereby the individual, establishing a line of communication with that which is above, allows divinity to flow down. While in Lurianic Kabbalah god reveals himself through parallel concealment and revelation, in Eybeschütz’s work, the self reveals itself to god, repeating and mimicking the Lurianic process of god’s creation. Thunder, reconfigured into a noun (\textit{tar’omet}) ceases to be a function of god’s action and instead is initiated by the human self, breaking through the barrier between world and god. This assertion of self-revelation, however, need not be confused with theurgy, which is the process by which self influences and changes the divine. Instead, the self creates a bridge by miming the sefirotic processes. Eybeschütz, then, maintains the rabbinic division between self and god. Thunder, as such, is removed further from the physical sound of a deity in the Mekhila to the essentially paradoxical emission of Man. The voice of god as \textit{ra’am} turns into an imitative voice with which the self attempts to contact the divine.

\textit{Conclusion}

It is useful, in narrating a story of ideas, to deal with questions of immanence, transcendence, and the text’s movement back to the roots of a rabbinic religious language. All of this is seen in light of the Hasidic simplification of Lurianic concepts, and the movement away from immanence to a transcendence. However, one must, as well, see how Hasidic texts are remarkably consistent in their interpretation of thunder as a feminine symbol, as a “cloaking

\textsuperscript{160} The Zohar (III:195a), as well, does not view prayer as emerging from the paradox of concealment and revelation. Indeed, the Zohar “interprets away” the idea of the poor man’s cloaking in accordance with Psalm 34:19 (\textit{כָּלָל קָנָי }\textit{לְעָנִי} \textit{תְּפִלָּה} \textit{שִׂיחו} \textit{יִשְׁפֹּךְ ה} \textit{ו} \textit{ו} \textit{ו} \textit{ו} \textit{יְלִיפָנָי} \textit{יַעֲטֹף} \textit{כִּי} \textit{זָה}) reading the word \textit{Tf} in accordance with its Aramaic and Arabic cognates, implying pushing away, or turning; god prefers the poor person’s prayer, \textit{pushing away} other emitted prayers to accept the poor one’s prayer.
device” which both conceals and enables. How can it be, ask the Hasidic texts, that an invisible deity makes himself known to a people?

Firstly Hasidic thinkers maintain the thunder’s Kabbalistic meaning as a concealing element, yet deal with its relevance in the topic of *avodah begashmiyut*, a topic mentioned by Rachel Elior.\(^1\) Therefore, Hasidut is consistent with its earlier Kabbalistic sources of categorizing and treating thunder in all instances as a feminine, encasing element which enables sefirotic emergence\(^2\) through concealing, and therefore enabling the flow of divine blessing. Despite this traditional approach, the Hasidic sources still treat this topic within the innovated concept of *avodah begashmiyut*, emphasizing Man’s physicality and his imitation of god. For a more complete discussion, however, one must emphasize that this *avodah begashmiyut* occurs by the reenactment of the sefirotic process through the experience of thunder. In this situation, thunder is both a sense experience and a marker of the feminine aspect of the deity.

Secondly, Hasidic thinkers diverge from mystical tradition, going back in time, drawing from rabbinic sources and ignoring the absence of zoharic discourse on Psalms 81:8. Like the midrashic authors, early Hasidic thinkers rework the tensions already apparent in the rabbinic text. Now, however, the answers deal with topics such as concealment and revelation, discussion of time, and the efficacy of prayer. In this matter Hasidic texts return to the rabbinic source, reading Kabbalistic themes back into rabbinic texts.

The Hasidic interpretation of Psalm 81:8 demonstrates the extreme nature of the Hasidic project’s shaping of mystical notions in light of rabbinic worldviews. While maintaining a clear boundary between self and god, early Hasidic writers, as well, consider the notions of Lurianic theurgy and identification with god through a more tempered concept, which I call “mimetic

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\(^1\) See Rachel Elior, “Origins of Hasidism.”

\(^2\) Shaul Magid defines this emergence as “extentiation,” see “Associative Midrash: Reflections on a Hermeneutical Theory in Likkutei MoHaRaN,” in *God’s Voice from the Void: Old and New Studies in Bratslav Hasidism.*
Theurgy.” This idea enables notions such as Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye’s two-step process of prayer, Dov Ber of Mezeritsch’s *avodah begashmiyut*, and finally, David Shelomoh Eybeschütz’s metaphysical description of calling out to god. In the process of crafting their rabbinic rereading of mysticism, the early Hasidic masters reclaim thunder from an atomized zoharic/Lurianic *qol*. Thunder as a highly-interpreted Kabbalistic creation is connected to, though not equated with, the rabbinic connection of thunder as speech: The self now speaks to god, establishing a line of communication which bridges two discrete entities. Yes, the Hasidic worldview, when explained on its deepest metaphysical level, sees the world as an emanation of god (panentheism). However, the process of extentiation—the emergence of the world from god—creates such a barrier that the individual must engage in a cognitive recognition of the divine.

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Chapter 3:

Ve-Ra’am Gervurotav Ani Yitbonan: Thunder in the Thought of Nahman of Bratslav

Introduction

Nahman of Bratslav, a third-generation of Hasidic thinker, was the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov. Growing up in Medzhibozh, the city of his great-grandfather and the center of the emerging Hasidic world, Nahman lived a short life, amassing a small number of devoted, pietistic Hasidim. In 1811, Nahman’s disciple, Nathan of Nemirov (1780-1845), published histeachings in the volume Lqqutei Moharan, “The Collection of our Teacher Rabbi Nahman.”

The text is the canonical document of Bratslav Hasidism.

In this chapter, I show how Nahman of Bratslav (1772-1810), situated within the rabbinic world of Hasidic thought, attempts to return to earlier zoharic and Safedian themes. This project fails because Nahman unsuccessfully navigates between the matters of immanence and transcendence. Nahman is inescapably trapped within a world in which a rabbinic veneer tantalizingly overlays the Lurianic universe. Nahman believes in--yet cannot quite reach--a world which is of the divine, where all being is a fractal of the cosmic process, having coming into existence through the deity’s own necessary and paradoxical contraction and revelation. In these three teachings, Nahman engages with three different elements of Zohar III:235a-b, in resorting to a ritual of self-purification. Nahman, then, is a tragic figure who unsuccessfully resorts to rituals of self-cleansing in order to break through the prison of rabbinic metaphysics. I explore this assertion through three close readings of the 5th, 56th, and 67th teachings in Nahman’s Lqqutei Moharan.

Torah 5: Thunder as a Prayer, Prayer as Praxis

163 For a comprehensive biography of Nahman, see Arthur Green, Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, The University of Alabama Press, 1979.
In his fifth teaching in *Liqquetei Moharan*, Nahman interprets Zohar III Pinchas 235a-b as a roadmap for purifying the self with the intent of achieving mystical knowledge. In sections 1-2, Nahman discusses the merits of mystical knowledge through performance of the *mitzvot*. In the rest of the teaching, Nahman engages with the text of the Zohar.

_Doing and Knowing (5:1-2)_

At the beginning of his teaching, Nahman places the persona in an epistemological bind: In one’s earthly situatedness, one is unable to know how to enact change from a God who acts in the world in accordance with the temporality of human perception. One is bounded by time, experiences the decrees of God in time, and cannot transcend time to know if one’s moment is before the divine decree, _qodem gezar din_ or after the decree, _ahar gezar din_. This teaching then, is a prescription of how to “know,” a specific divine point in time, thereby enabling the spiritual adept to achieve the proper divine result. Nahman continues by establishing a series of dichotomies that allow him to describe how to achieve supernal knowledge.

The only way, he explains, to know the point between the “before” and “after” of the divine decree is through an awareness generated by performing the *mitzvot* with “great happiness,” _simha gedolah_. In doing this, the Jew enters god’s mind and eventually binds with the creator. An intertwined relationship of action and emotion leads to knowledge –through fulfilling the commandments with the proper intention and emotion, _simha_, one transcends self, time, and space by ascending an ever-extending ladder of action (praxis). Action, not thought or contemplation, leads to knowledge. Proper praxis, then, transcends all classic modes of thought in its sublimity.^{164}

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^{164} Shaul Magid in “Associative Midrash” asserts that one main point of Nahman’s uniqueness as a Hasidic teacher is that he “shifts the focus of midrashic reading from text to praxis,” p. 12. This results in a “metahalkhic” type of “praxis” which engages with the “psycho/spiritual way in which devotion is practiced,” 42. By praxis, he refers to actions, as opposed to thoughts or beliefs. As well, see p. 45, “For R. Nahman _behina_ is a literary tool of
In arguing for the supremacy of this type of action, Nahman sets up in opposition two types of knowledge, the transcendent and the worldly. Nahman states:

כ"גדולה בשמחה המצוות כשעושין ודוקא דгазלאחר דין גזר קודם בין לידע אנחנו יכולין עושים שאנו המצוות ילוכד חзык כמאמר זוatzמצוה בשכר אחרת מצוה הכהללו שיזמין הוא אלא הבא עולם שכר בשום רוצה שאין עד.

By the mitzvoth (commandments) which we do, we can know [if the moment is] before the decree and after the decree. [And this knowledge is attained] exactly when one accomplishes the mitzvot with great happiness, to a great extent, until the point that one does not want any reward of the world to come, and rather, he wants that God will present him with a different mitzvah with the reward of this mitzvah. As the sages said, (Avot 4:2), “The reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah.”

In other words, even before Nahman begins to explain his associative description of knowledge, he asserts that that knowledge is attained through praxis. By asserting the unimportance of a commandment’s pleasure or its associated divine reward, Nahman comments that knowledge transcends any experience of time. Nahman further associates this transcendent, practical knowledge with the prophecy of Moses, who saw God through the “glass the shines.” For Nahman, action is total, in being done with the pure happiness, one is able to enter the mind-

reconstruction rather than interpretation. By this I mean that behina is used to construct the revised text of tradition...from the deconstructed fragments of tradition that serve as its core, enabling concealed elements of a word or phrase to emerge via their juxtaposition to another idea, all filtered through the vehicle of the refined imagination of the zaddik.” In this thesis work, I look at Nahman’s use of behina as a more “semiotically bound” concept than Magid’s interpretation. If reduced to a purely visual representation, the behina of thunder may be seen as a clear orb containing storm clouds, issuing forth sound. Nahman’s behina, in other words, contains all that is within the web of meaning in thunder--because the behina of thunder means nothing other than itself.

165 Liqqutim 5:2
space of the most revered prophets, and even transcend that knowledge by entering the divine mind.\footnote{See Levinas, Emmanuel, “The Temptation of Temptation” in \textit{Nine Talmudic Readings} (trans. Annette Aronowicz). There, Levinas (1906-1955) asserts that the issue which underlies western philosophy is a contradictory and ultimately absorbing pursuit of knowledge. On one hand, a person who engages in an action, or seeks an experience, wishes to both be completely absorbed within the action, and yet, at the same time have the “I,” or the “ego” completely separate from the event. Individuals wish to experience knowledge without realizing that such knowledge might change them in irreversible ways. It is knowledge on its own terms, knowledge which is pursued simply for its own sake. For an essay on Nahman and Levinas’s thought, see “Saying Nihilism: A Review of Marc Alain Oukanin’s \textit{Burnt Book},” in \textit{God’s Voice from the Void: Old and New Studies in Bratslav Hasidism}, Shaul Magid, ed, as well, for an essay on Lurianic Kabbalah and Levinas’s thought, see Jacob Meskin, “The Role of Lurianic Kabbalah in The Early Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas,” in \textit{Levinas Studies}, vol 2, 2007, 49-77.}

Nahman, as, well, sets up an endless cycles of action. The praxis of fulfilling the commandments is essentially virtuous, an end in itself, which leads to another end, ad infinitum. Fulfilling the \textit{mitzvot} is not a contradictory experience of ego-absorption and ego-dissociation. The ego is absorbed until it no longer is able to understand the difference between thought, self, and action, and, eventually merges with the divine \textit{gnosis}, a point in which time, space, and self are ultimately merged. In this space of collapsed boundaries, praxis and knowledge do not occupy the disparate realms of action and thought, but instead are identical, existing within a single epistemological entity.\footnote{Knowledge, or \textit{da ’at} is discussed later in the context of Torah 56.}

In summary, according to Nahman, \textit{simha} enables one to know the point before the decree and after the decree, and therefore, one can properly pray depending on the time of decree. Happiness in doing the commandments, which are “a complete unity with God,” allow one to experience the World to Come through praxis, achiever perfect knowledge, and understand the correct point at which the decree has been issued. One transcends self, (\textit{adam}), time (\textit{shana}), and place (\textit{olam}) in this state which blurs the boundary between praxis and knowledge. In entering God’s mind, one is able to look from above, and to remedy the decree.
This path of attaining knowledge is ever-ascending, mystically autotelic, moreover, for just as one mitzvah leads to another in an infinite loop, the self transcends time, self, and place.

The fulfillment of mitzvot, then, erases all boundaries between self, God, and the world. Through this lens, of collapsed boundaries one can begin to anticipate Nahman’s reading of thunder as a symbol which relates to the concept of lines of demarcation between ontological entities. The teaching then continues to speak about the topic of thunder in a remarkably systematic manner, connecting it to prayer, which like the epistemological ladder of praxis, enters an infinitely ascending spiral

*The Circle of Prayer (5:3)*

At first glance, Nahman is simply “connecting the dots,” moving from one concept to another at a whim, almost as if he uses schizophrenic speech. In reality, he engages Biblical, Rabbinic, and earlier Hasidic and Kabbalistic sources to speak of thunder in the context of the Jewish tradition. For him, thunder is a practical medium of knowledge, one which enables the spiritual adept to purify one’s prayer in order to achieve the goal laid out in the beginning of the teaching—entering god’s knowledge.

Nahman deals with a perceived problem: Once he has asserted that one can rise to a divine consciousness, how can one achieve simha, a happiness which results from the self-reward of the mitzvot? In answering this, Nahman connects simha to lev, whose crookedness is smoothed through re’amim. In achieving a straight heart, or a smooth one, one somehow engages with thunder in an experiential manner. Nahman, therefore, quotes both from Berakhot 59a,

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168 Nahman views verses as a repository of built-in meaning. The words in each verse are a building block, a locked symbol which Nahman opens with his game of connect-the-dots. He seeks to uncover that which is hidden. While Nahman’s interpretation veers significantly from the verse’s contexts, he struggles with questions that go to the core of the verse’s meaning. Just as he engages in the messianic project towards cosmic harmony, Nahman reveals what he believes to be the true meaning of the verses. For more on Nahman’s hermeneutics, see Magid “Associative Midrash: Reflections on a Hermeneutical Theory in Likkutei MoHaRaN.”
which states, “Thunder was only created to smooth the crookedness of one’s heart,” and Zohar III 235a-b.

The Zohar’s passage does not engage with the text from Berakhot 59a, though, as argued previously, there may be a tacit thematic connection between the two texts. Instead, Nahman newly connects the Talmudic aphorism to the Zohar, showing that thunder does not just consist as a mystical description of the divine body, but is a practical element which each person can achieve. The Talmudic passage emphasizes personal virtue in the presence of the overpowering sound of thunder, while the Zohar describes the inner dynamic of the Godhead. By connecting the personal, human experience with divine, Nahman bridges the two texts, placing them into his spiritual prescription.

The Zohar’s description of thunder, re’amim, is primarily related to the flow of sexual fluids. According to the Zoharic passage, thunder results from the sefirah of Tif’eret, which is the medial part of the sefirotic channel of fluid from the head, Keter, to the ninth sefirah, Yesod. The body releases qol, thereby penetrating the rain clouds and releasing re’amim into the world.

In the Zohar, this flow is an internal process that happens within the Godhead, and therefore the self. God, in this passage of the Zohar, has a body. This description of the inner workings of the Godhead reads like a mythic description of cosmic secrets. The endless cycle of movement, according to the Zohar, is something that happens of its own accord, and not as a

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169 See Chapter 1, this thesis
170 Arthur Green gives a summary of the ten sefirot in A Guide to the Zohar. In it, he describes the flow of male vitality: “But when the cosmic forces are gathered in Yesod it becomes clear that this flow is also to be seen as male sexual energy, specifically as semes, which the Greek physical Galen saw as originating in the brain (Hokhmah), flowing down through the spinal column (the central column, Tif’eret), unto the testicles (Netzah and Hod), an then into the phallus (Yesod). This sefirotic process thus leads to the great union of the nine sefirot above, through Yesod, with the female Shekhinah. She becomes filled and impregnated with the fulness of divine energy and in turn gives birth to lower worlds, including both angelic beings and human souls,” 49.
171 See Scholem’s “Shi’ur Komah: The Mystical Shape of the Godhead” for his interpretation of the corporeality of god. He contends that, despite the descriptions of god’s body, the Kabbalists “were also inspired by the certainty with which, in the course of comparing the theory of emanation with the mystical linguistic theory of the name of god, they grasped the imagelessness which, as a great modern thinker put it, is the refuge of all images,” (55).
result of human action. At the end of the short passage, the Zohar states, “No one knows how to praise with this voice, as it is written, (Job 36:14) ‘And the thunder of power [who can contemplate]?’”

Reb Nahman is, in accordance with Shaul Magid’s description, making the kabbalah practical, deriving praxis from orality and textuality. All of this is, of course, based in Kabbalah, especially the associational web that the Zohar III Pinchas 235a-b provides. While the Zohar narrates the descent of rain from the actions of angels, Nahman describes a mechanism that is practical. Each individual, through this sefirotic structure, is able to effect change in oneself and the cosmos.

Instead of seeing Job 26:14 as a rhetorical question, he accepts it as a challenge; he answers, telling his Hasidim that he can, indeed, “contemplate.” He rereads the text of the Zohar as part of his project of praxis, one which moves away from the Zohar’s descriptive manner of encountering the Godhead. Reinterpreting the Zohar, Nahman separates self from god, allowing the sound of the qol to affect the transcendent God, as opposed to describing an internal process. Nahman, as opposed to the Zohar, gives a person agency to affect this process. He emphasizes the theurgic process, as opposed to the Zohar’s mystical description. “Gevurot,” he states, “are the aspect (behina) of power and strength that a person releases the voice with great power.” It is this voice, which a person releases in this “with power during prayer” that enables this “thunder” to effect change in a person’s heart.

172 See Sefer ha-Zohar, Pinchas 235a-b. Here, the Zohar’s particular describes the universe, and does not suggest action:

No one knows how to praise with this voice, as it says, “Who can contemplate?” (Job 26:14)


174 Ibid.

The trachea has six rings which connect as one, and these, called bnei elim [angels], release the wind to blow on the world, and come from the side of gevurah, [which brings rain]
In the Zohar the release of the thunder, occurs after the qol, emitted from the self, has penetrated the rain clouds, thereby enabling the correct cycle of fluids to be exchanged in the body. Nahman, by contrast, asserts that an individual human, not the angels as stated in the Zohar, have the ability to affect this process. Therefore, Nahman’s Kabbalistic self is a human body, not a god/human complex as described in the Zohar. The human, not the angel or god, engages in this sound-making action. For the process to occur, therefore, God is separate from the self. It is the self, not a divine being, that has the ability to evoke the thunder, and, by doing so, merge with the Godhead.

After leaving the body, a person’s voice “encounters the rain clouds, which is the aspect of mohin, and from there descend many drops, and when it encounters the rain clouds, then the voice is head by the creation,” (5:3). The voice that a person releases, according to Nahman, encounters the divine other in the heavens, and releases thunder from the sky. An individual, therefore, is a type of weather deity, one who has the ability to engage with and encounter the divine atmosphere. By recreating a distance between divinity and human self, one that is collapsed in the Zohar, Nahman seeks to enable the self to affect that which is other. This divine separation, moreover, while asserting a distance between self and deity, ironically necessitates an apotheosis (god-becoming) of the self in giving him mystical weather-making powers over the “clouds,” ‘avim and “rain,” matra.

See Vital, Sefer Pri Etz Hayyim, Part II, Sha’ar 26 (Sha’ar ha-Shofar), p. 581 col. 1. The text describes how the shofar leads to the sweetening of the decrees. The blasts, which are an expression of the divine feminine and masculine, lead to the unity of Ze’ev ‘Anpin and Nuqva, or the last seven sefirot. Nahman, however, in enacting his own thunder ritual, needs no intermediary other than the voice itself. The self its own thunder talisman.

Ze’ev Volf of Zhitomir, Or Ha-Meir Parashat Eqev further internalizes the words of the Zohar Pinchas 235a-b by asserting speech, not the existential cry, is the true meaning of the text.
This apotheosis bridges the gap between self and divine, completing a cycle of divine energy flow described in Ra‘ayah Mehmena. For after a person’s voice penetrates the rain clouds, the heart—meaning, the human heart—is aroused, thereby straightening the crookedness of the heart and allowing the individual to achieve simha, thereby allowing him to pray properly. Here, Nahman focuses on one part of the process in Zohar III:235a-b in his attempt to close the gap between the Jew and god.

When Nahman quotes Berakhot 59a earlier, he endows each human type of apotheotic (god-becoming) agency. Nahman’s project attempts to mediate between the rabbinic source and the Kabbalah. The self, separate from god in this rabbinic outlook, engages in action as an expression of its separateness. Nahman’s physical, non-mystical action, which he asserts leads to a mystical realization, must be, first, completely human and non-divine. The affinity to recycle this old, forgotten rabbinic statement is reflective of a larger trend of incorporation of rabbinic text into mysticism, and yet, Nahman moves beyond this rabbinic worldview by creating an image of an individual who has attained godhood.

In resuming the discussion of synesthesia from Chapter 1, one can look at Nahman’s prescription of the process of prayer, tefillah, in his fifth teaching. By crafting another web of meaning that collapses the gap between divine and self, Nahman describes the properties of thunder as human speech. After creating the weather phenomenon, a person’s sense experience enters a circular spiral, in which hearing, speaking, feeling, and virtuous becoming, are all part of the same mechanism.

At the end of the third section in his fifth teaching, Nahman states:

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177 This moves far past the Baal Shem Tov’s teaching on Berakhot 59a, which describes a mystical/cognitive ascension, not a manipulation of the divine.
We are hearing the heart feeling, and this is “the utterance of my heart is wisdom” (Ps. 49:4), as it is written, “And I gave my servant a listening heart” (I Kings 3:9). And his words are also expressed to creation, and this is “to hear the voice of his words” (Ps 103:20). And this is the aspect of the sound of the shofar, which is the shofar of the ram, meaning the ram of Isaac, which is the aspect (behina) of “the thunder of his Gevurot” (Job 26:14).

This voice, which a person creates, is also, essentially, the sound of the shofar, which stems from the ram of Isaac. In the sefirotic system, Abraham is associated with hesed, Isaac is associated with gevurah, and Jacob corresponds to tiferet. The ram, therefore, which is related to Isaac, is essentially the voice of the shofar, which stems from Gevurah. In Zohar III 235a-b, as well, thunder is associated with the sefirah of Gevurah. The sound of the shofar, Nahman re-asserts while quoting from the Zohar, is intimately related to the sound of thunder. In this statement, as discussed above, lies a distillation of the Zohar and Luria’s teaching on the shofar.179

An individual who groans with “great strength,” therefore, evokes thunder from heaven, associates it with the shofar, and thereby re-experiences a result of his action. His heart then absorbs this action, is purified, and as one hears “His words,” meaning god’s words, one similarly hears the result of his own groaning, calling out to the divine, and the mystical process which he has initiated. A person’s action, therefore, enters him into a constant spiral, one which

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178 Translation of verses here from JPS Tanakh, p. 1470
results in the ultimate purification of the self, and the eventual self-identification with God. In this place of self-identification, one simultaneously listens, speaks, and knows.

Moving back up the convoluted system which Nahman has created, one must remember that this self-identification with god is, ultimately, the goal which Nahman has asserted in the teaching’s beginning, which prescribes one to enter the divine *simha* through an infinite loop of praxis. This entrance into god knowledge allows an individual to transcend self, time, and place, and therefore know the proper way to pray in the first place—whether to “cloak,” *lehalbish*, one’s prayer if the time is after the divine decree, or to pray in a normal manner, if the time is before the decree. Prayer purifies one’s heart, which, in turn, enables one to pray properly. This process of prayer is internal. Although Nahman subverts the Zohar’s words in asserting that the cry, as thunder, denotes the distance between individual and god, he does so in order to necessitate a practical, repeating, and active worship. After this scream-worship occurs, an individual begins to achieve knowledge. Groaning enacts thunder, straightens the heart, engages in effective prayer, leads to *simha*, allows one to transcend self, time, and place, leading to supernal knowledge of *qodem gezar din* and *ahar gezar din*, which then enables a person to know the proper way to pray—with cloaking or without cloaking. This spiral of ritual praxis, infinite knowing, constant praying, and, ultimately self-identification with god is endless. To enter the divine mind one must continue to ascend, infinitely.

This process mirrors Arthur Green’s characterization of Nahman’s path toward knowledge of god.180 Green looks at this type of knowledge in an existential manner. One must encounter questions and travails, internalizing the outer questions into the ego until the ego

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180See Arthur Green, Tormented Master, 310. “This dialectical approach Nahman proposed for the ongoing apprehension of *maqqifin* is more than a mere psychological tool. The dialectic reflects the inner nature of reality; the universe itself is born of paradox, and thus one a thought-method able to comprehend such paradox may give one an accurate picture of the world.”
eventually encounters the ultimate void (or Void), after which an individual is faced with the choice: To accept god’s existence, or to accept his absence, both of which are equally valid.

According to Green, Nahman believes that the person who ascends this select path of knowledge of God encounters obstacles, meniyot, which make the path more and more convoluted. These paths test an individual, and he must traverse them in order to reach divine knowledge. Each obstacle is a test, in which the self must achieve. In this teaching, Nahman’s description of attaining knowledge imitates the literary structure of his teaching. Indeed, just as each section of Torah 5 prescribes a way of approaching god’s knowledge, Nahman’s manner of speaking encounters barriers and false-starts which the spiritual “traveler,” the reader, must traverse:

In the first part of Torah 5, Nahman asserts that an individual states that one must say, “The world was only created for my sake.” This statement, however, requires one to pray for the repairing of the world, tiqqun ha’olam. In order to achieve that action, one must know the correct manner by which to pray—before gezar din (divine decree), or after gezar din. This manner of praying, Nahman asserts in the second part, is impossible unless one ascends to a level of divine knowledge through praxis (action), which is only achieved once one straightens one’s heart by calling out to God, which Nahman prescribes in the fourth section. In the fifth section, Nahman asserts further that all of this prayer is rendered null and void unless one removes sexual thoughts. Throughout the path to knowledge, therefore, the necessity of removing one obstacle becomes so urgent that Nahman continues to speak about the infinitely repeating obstacle, to obsess about it in manner that results in a tautology, to the extent that the self enters a trap of praxis that rivals Levinas’s philosophical problem: temptation of temptation. By the time that
one has entered the fifth section of the teaching, the reader--and perhaps Nahman himself--simply forgets where he has begun.

This reading, as well, may challenge Green’s assertion that Nahman searches for an end of a mystical/existential realization. For the constant, repeating obsession on purity of thought, action, and opinion, is essentially self-obsessive, leading nowhere, so convoluted that one cannot accomplish anything. Just as the self enters a loop of virtue, so too, the obstacles are endless, as well as the purification rituals. There is no escape.\textsuperscript{181} Despite the obviously neurotic implications of Nahman’s teachings, they also provide a comment on the way to achieve knowledge. According to him, knowledge is, ultimately, fractalized, like a Mandelbrot set\textsuperscript{182}; the more one looks deeper, the more options open up, the more one realizes the necessity to purify from a fallen state, and—ironically—the more one ascends towards divinity.

Indeed, as Nahman continues on in his fifth teaching, he asserts that creating the proper voice, which leads to thunder, is linked to sexual purity. By cleansing the impure prayer, one engages in a holy marriage discussed above. This purification is necessary “to release the voice to touch the moah (brain, divine thought),” and to enable it to release thunder. One who thinks

\textsuperscript{181} For a clearer example of Nahman’s obsessive nature and guilt, see Torah 72: After describing an infinitely repeating loop of obsessive, intrusive thoughts, Nahman prescribes the following: “Anyone who...has these thoughts, whether thoughts of sexual licentiousness of thoughts of idol worship, God forbid, has no cure other than to sanctify and purify his body so his blood will become cleansed and purified.” As well, see Liqquitim II:8, where—in a discussion of thunder as well—Nahman describes prayer as an act which causes the sitra ahra, demonic realm, to vomit the good forces which it has swallowed.

\textsuperscript{182} See Rohan Saxena and Gali Rotstein. "Mandelbrot, Benoit." Encyclopaedia Judaica, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 13, Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, pp. 460-461. The Mandelbrot set, discovered by Benoit Mandelbrot (1924-2010) is an infinitely repeating, bounded curve. No matter how much one “zooms in” to the curve, one sees the same pattern. “Over time, his theory of fractals was found to be applicable to a very wide variety of phenomena, from turbulence to the dispersion of blood vessels through the body. Increasingly, it came to be recognized that fractality reveals an important and hitherto unrecognized characteristic of nature and natural development as a whole. The theory exerts a profound influence upon modern scientific theory, helping to provide descriptions of anything from the behavior of the human heart under stress to the shapes of mountains and clouds or the pattern of water seepage into the soil, in addition to forming a key tool in modern chaos theories.” See also Green, Tormented Master, 310, where Nahman compares his fractalized universe to a dreidel.
evil thoughts blemishes the drops of *moah*, or the upper sexual fluids, thereby preventing the correct cycle of prayer and purification to occur.\(^{183}\)\(^{184}\)

Furthermore, Nahman seeks to arrive at a point of sexual purity through the masculinized feminine which he sees as thunder. Indeed, Elliot Wolfson, in his essay “The Cut that Binds” asserts that Nahman idealizes the feminized masculine, viewing it as virtuous.\(^{185}\) This idea of thunder, though stated by Nahman, reflects a hyper-literal reading of the Zohar (Pinchas 235a-b), discussed above. This passage, like Nahman, shows a preference for the left side of the sefirotic web, thereby privileging the feminine, containing aspects of the Godhead.\(^{186}\) Thunder, in this way, is a feminine aspect, which contains, reflects, and expresses the male penetrative act of prayer.\(^{187}\)

Nahman concludes his teaching by to “unlocking the true meaning” of the original verse which he states at the beginning of his teaching: “With trumpets and the sound of the shofar, sound before the Lord God,” (Ps. 98:6). The calling-out to god, therefore, is not just the act prescribed in the Biblical verse of sounding the trumpet, but the engagement in a fractalized, infinitely long process of theurgic weather-control. This process is part of a complicated, circular, ascending, and associative formula for the person’s self-transcendence and merging with the Godhead through the praxis of prayer. By blurring the boundaries and acting as a feminized masculine agent, a person becomes like god, changing both divine and the self in

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\(^{183}\) For more on the discussion of Nahman’s idea of sexuality, and his idealization of the feminized masculine see Elliot Wolfson, “The Cut that Binds: Time, Memory, and the Ascetic Impulse.” In *God’s Voice from the Void: Old and New Studies in Bratslav Hasidism*, ed. Shaul Magid. 103-154

\(^{184}\) As well, see Green’s conclusion regarding Nahman’s sexuality and a wider analysis of this theme in his work. “...the theme of sexual guilt and the sense of overpowering evils and the dangers of sex colored much of his thinking.” *Tormented Master*, 39.

\(^{185}\) See Wolfson, “The Cut that Binds,” 112. “Perfection of knowledge, which entails the transcendence of time and the abolition of temporal limitations, is the esoteric intent of the rite of circumcision.”

\(^{186}\) See Green, *A Guide to the Zohar*, 50, which describes the lowest emanation: “While Malkhut receives the flow of the upper sefirot from Yesod, She has a special affinity for the left side.”

\(^{187}\) On the feminine aspect of fear, *yir’ah*, see Menahem Nahum Twersky, *Me’or ‘Einayim*, Parashat Yitro, which quotes the Besht’s teaching on this subject.
manner which blurs the senses. By emphasizing the mechanistic nature of accessing the
Godhead, this teaching places itself within the context of Zoharic and Lurianic teaching. In this
way, the aspect of thunder is simply a part—an integral part, of course, in the circular, fractalized
Kabbalistic system. Finally, by invoking Berakhot 59a, Nahman is able to rewrite thunder back
into the religious discussion, not seeing it as a symbol, as others do, but as a genuine storm-act.
In his attempt to remove the rabbinic veneer of transcendence, Nahman typifies, the Buberian
turn to the world of myth and the re-communion with nature.188

**Torah 56: “The True Groan”**

A close reading of Nahman’s 56th Torah will emphasize a different aspect of prayer, that
of the “aspect of hands” and its connection to thunder and the image of weather-control.189
Nahman’s enables the self to channel the power of sound, thereby creating a picture of Man as
apotheosized weather-god, and the orchestration of a ritual which enables the self to achieve
da’at.

According to Chani Haran Smith in *Tuning the Soul*, Nahman’s “aspect of the hands”
stems from earlier Kabbalistic writings, which interpret hands as revealed actors in Kabbalistic
praxis.190 She asserts, moreover, that according to Nahman, the hands gather and release *ruah*
(wind, breath), a type of energy that induces prophecy and bridges the human and the divine.191
In her thesis, the “aspect of hands” is an integral part of music-making, through which the player

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188 See Claire Sufrin, “On Myth, History, and the Study of Hasidism: Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem,” p. 48. She claims that according to Buber, Hasidism is an example of a living, everyday, hallowed religiosity which stems from the world of myth. History, for Buber, is “the struggle to actualize life under God’s rule,” and myth is an expression of this struggle.


190 *Zohar Tiqqunim* 69. This text speaks of a God/Man complex, explaining how the voice is a perfect combination of left and right forces.

191 See Chani Haran Smith, *Tuning the Soul: Music as a spiritual process in the teachings of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav*, p. 80: “...through playing music, the human hand draws down the divine ‘hand’ so that divine inspiration comes to rest on the musician.”
induces prophecy, recombines Kabbalistic letters, and connects with the divine. More significant, however, is the appearance of the aspect of hands in the context of thunder. One can associate Ruah, breath or wind even without the Zohar, with weather-making. Nahman, using the Zohar as a source text, asserts that the hands, therefore, have the unique power to affect the divine meteorological system, and therefore allow the self to achieve divine knowledge.

Like in Torah 5, Nahman deals here with the same issue: How can reach da’at, or transcendent, divine knowledge? Here, the answer is reached through an emphasis on thunder as an agent of purification. One achieves da’at, not as part of an ever-ascending spiral of prayer, but through a process of cleansing. The ladder of knowledge ascends forever, but the mechanism to achieve knowledge, however, is through purification, not prayer.

56:2-4

For Nahman, as it is for earlier Hasidic teachers, such as Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, the concept of rebuking an individual has a deeper significance of cleansing the soul. Nahman asserts here that each person, endowed with malkhut, which he describes as a saving power, can return the rebuked individual to his own malkhut, soul root.

Nahman begins with a long discourse of the Kabbalistic necessity of parallel concealment and revelation, the motivating factor for the sefirotic process. For Nahman, by engaging in action to use Malkhut (the tenth and lowest sefirah) properly, one can reveal that which is hidden and bring into reality that which is covered by sin. By engaging with that which is the paradigm of hiddenness and revelation-- the Torah itself, associated with Malkhut-- one may be able to achieve a level of knowledge that transcends the necessary concealment. Even in the most

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192 See Menahem Nahum Twersky, Me’or ‘Einayim Parashat Noah. For more on the rabbinic conception of rebuke, see Matthew Goldstone’s forthcoming dissertation. For a good summary: Goldstone, Matthew, “Research,” in http://matthewgoldstone.com/research/.
hidden part of the world, an individual who has reached this level of knowledge can rebuke others, bringing out the divine within them, and restoring them to the sefirotic tree. This type of knowledge results from a long chain of associations, allowing the individual who has penetrated the mysteries of the world to achieve transcendent divinity, which is the Torah.

And in reality, even in the hiddenness which is within the hiddenness, even there is cloaked the name may he be blessed, which are the letters of the Torah, because without him [god] there is no life for anything, as described above... 193

Despite this hiddenness, an individual has the ability to break through this necessary concealment, to achieve knowledge. Nahman’s conception is radical, therefore. This knowledge even transcends the Torah, which, in this teaching, Nahman asserts, is only a medium of knowledge, an emanation of divinity. While in the fifth teaching, Nahman describes the attainment of knowledge as done through an infinite loop of praxis, in the 57th teaching, Nahman asserts that by studying Torah, the paradigm of concealment and revelation, one can enter God’s transcendent knowledge.

This teaching, like the fifth one, is geared towards an end-result. Through the action of studying Torah, one does not gain information, but instead is able to enter a state which transcends the words of the Torah themselves. This process, like that described above, works through a specific mechanism: The feminized masculine, which is related to knowledge.

According to Zvi Mark, Nahman’s conception of da’at is not just a superficial definition of knowledge, such as the accumulation of facts, or a rational understanding of the universe, or even an intellectual understanding of the inner secrets of Kabbalah. Instead, da’at is the

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193 *Liqqutei Moharan* 56:3
“measuring rod for the degree of absorption into God.” A specifically gendered process occurs when one engages in this mystical absorption, according to Mark.

Nahman continues:

Therefore, one must reveal the hidden elements as discussed above, and this is done by one who extends lengthy days (arikht yamim) into Malkhut, which is the concept (behina) of knowledge (da’at), as discussed above, and through this knowledge (da’at), one can know even inside the hidden element itself, and even inside the hidden element within the hidden element, that there god is cloaked, meaning the Torah. And after one knows that even in the hidden elements exists the name may he be blessed—from this itself the hidden elements are revealed, and are made into Torah, and even from the hidden element within the hidden element, Torah is made.195

Nahman, through his associative tool of the behina, has de-contextualized and re-contextualized concepts, while drawing on earlier Hasidic themes as well, to produce an unapologetically sexual description of the holy marriage between Jew and god. This union, however, is not just a description of the joining of two separate beings. Rather, it is a mystical merging. The male self, moreover, does not enter the female as an expression of power and domination, but instead is engulfed by the female. By entering deeper and deeper, revealing

194 There, Mark maintains “This model is intrinsically different than the standard Hasidic model, which deals with the connection between a person’s focus and spirit and thought on God, on one hand, and on cleaving to Him, on the other, without any reference to and connection with the degree of the Hadid’s apprehension,” Mysticism and Madness, 70.
195 Liqqutei Moharan, 56:3
successive elements of covering and finally ending up in the highest place—da’at—one undergoes a process of feminization by being absorbed into the other.  

Agency in Reb Nahman

Quoting from three places in the Zohar¹⁹⁷, Nahman explains how Torah is itself a different type of agentic being.

For in truth, the Torah declares and cries out and rebukes constantly...but one does not listen to the declared sound of the Torah because of the hidden element, discussed above. And after they are revealed and the hidden elements are returned and made into Torah, through da’at, discussed above, then, immediately as they are made into Torah, the Torah itself declares, “How long will you fools [love foolery], as discussed above.¹⁹⁸

By engaging in the process discussed above--the sexual act of entering God’s knowledge through feminized masculinity, one allows the Torah to overcome one’s agency and allow one to rebuke others. The Torah’s will, therefore, overcomes the individual’s will.

What is striking about Nahman is his assignment of agency to non-agentic things. All is ensouled, seeking to return to its creator. In the Besht’s description of thunder, one finds that the self is a lonely actor, a sole searcher for god. Nahman, however, does something different. He

¹⁹⁶ See Tzvi Mark, *Mysticism and Madness: The Religious Thought of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav*, p. 55. “The image of intimate union as being swallowed up describes a specific kind of mystical union. On the one hand, the unification is a state of being absorbed and swallowed up into the innerness of God...On the other hand, the person remains a distinguishable and independent being even during the time of the mystical experience, He comes into contact with the divine and is even swallowed into it, but is not entirely nullified.” See as well Jonathan Sacks’s talk at the University of Oxford, “Truth and Translatability,” where places da’at in a second category of knowing outside of empirical knowledge.

¹⁹⁷ *Sefer ha-Zohar* Shemini 36a-b, Acharei Mot 58a-b, Naso 126a-b

¹⁹⁸ *Liqtuw* 56:3. See Prov 1:22
asserts that the Jew is one agent among agents, a will among other wills, all of which are separate from god, yet seek to cleave to and eventually be absorbed into him. Indeed, while in Lurianic Kabbalah it is the Jew’s job to gather up the fallen sparks, in Nahman’s world, these hidden elements of divinity, in fact, call out to the self. Nahman’s world which is dictated by obsessive praxis, is also connected to a radical conception of agency. On the deepest level, for Nahman, as is true in from the early Kabbalah as well, there is will. One’s actions, a result of the individual will, allow one to come into contact with the deepest urge of all things to be absorbed into the divine.\textsuperscript{199}

What does this have to do with thunder? Man is not a person in a world of things, but a person in a world of wills. This viewpoint attempts to turn all being into a “hypostasis” as an extension of the all-pervading will, which is god. If one will births a result, such as the release of a “sound,” a \textit{qol}, then that emission is also a will. Nahman endows \textit{qolot} and \textit{re’amim} with theurgic power. Thunder, though contingent on the one who creates it, is nevertheless an element which goes beyond voice, communication, and sound. It is a separate being, an element evoked for its uniqueness.\textsuperscript{200}

\textit{Dibbur (56:7)}

In \textit{Liqqutim} 56:7, Nahman equates the notions of leaving Egypt to the giving of the Torah; both are processes of the emerging divine which is explored through the concepts of \textit{dibbur}, \textit{da’at}, and \textit{peh}, mouth. In this way, \textit{dibbur}, speech, is necessarily part of the sefirotic

\textsuperscript{199} For a discussion of the vision of nature’s ensouled ecstasy, see Green, \textit{Tormented Master}, Ch. 4: “Bratslav: Disciples and Master,” pp. 138-9, where he quotes \textit{Liqquetei Moharan} II:63: “Every shepherd has a particular melody, according to the grasses in the place where he tends his flock. Each and every animal has its own special grass which it needs to eat; since the shepherd does not always take his flock to the same spot, his melody varies according to the places where he leads them, as we know from \textit{Pereq Shirah}, each blade of grass has its own song. The melody of the shepherd is made up of all these songs…” For a Zionist interpretation of this vision of ensoulment, see Naomi Shemer’s “Shirat ha-‘Asavim,” \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xe4H1sCCAJo} \textsuperscript{200} This recalls Azzan Yadin’s “‘י ת as Hypostasis in the Hebrew Bible,” Journal of Biblical Literature, 2003, pp. 602, which states that hypostasis, though possessing an ambiguous definition, expresses “an independence of the entity in question from God.”
doctrinal. Speech is intangible, one the one hand, and wholly external on the other hand. It exists not of its own accord, but by virtue of that which releases it and hears it. It can only become actualized by engaging with that which actualizes it, allows it to come to existence, by being in contact with something which is completely passive and receptive—the ear, which receives the sound. Speech, and therefore thunder—elements of the purely aural—are the most essential markers of the meaning of Kabbalistic doctrine. Indeed, it is fitting that speech, the formless yet extremely real sound, be a revelatory marker. If god reveals himself to the world through a process of self-concealment and revelation (at least in the Lurianic system), then sound as a symbol is extremely useful. It helps, moreover, that the Scriptural account of revelation—one which described a transcendent deity—speaks of sounds—qolot and beraqim. Male and female, revelation and concealment, expression and ephemerality, are then linked to elements of the same religious conversation.

56:9

Finally, in Liqqutim 56:9, Nahman enters the discussion of thunder’s necessity in bringing one to da’at. In the fifth teaching, Nahman had explained that one must “straighten the crookedness of one’s heart” in order to reach da’at. Once again, in the teaching, a basic question—what is knowledge?—does not end with an answer, but with a normative prescription. This physical action—an execution of will—is the only path towards achieving knowledge. Likewise, Nahman asserts, in order to achieve da’at, one must engage in a practical imitation of revelation: The purification of the skies (shamayim).

ולאת למטה קולות קול משם צורצ בולבוד והשם שלא היה בלבו אלבישו עם קדחות לקודח והשם לא
השם אין וענתו בצמא
And to come to an argument for the sake of heaven (mahloqet le-shem shamayim), one must purify and cleanse the heavens, so he will not be in the aspect (behina) of “I clothe the heavens in cloud,” (Isaiah 50:3). And one purifies and cleanses the heavens by truly groaning.

Up until this point, Nahman employed his unique associative method to establish the efficacy of knowledge. This, of course, sets the stage for an obstacle: impurity, which blocks an individual from attaining that which he seeks. Nahman goes into his description of the body/spirit complex, which is governed by the ruah hadofeq, the pulse, which acts as an agent of purification. From this point, Nahman again enters into a study of the body, focusing not on the heart, but on the hands. In a commentary compiled on the Besht’s teachings on the Talmud, the editor includes a parenthetical remark, that “[True yir’ah] is not in accordance with the fools who say that true yir’ah is black bile.” This denigration of medical theory reflects a common Hasidic teaching, one which is nonetheless emphasized in Nahman’s work: Everything that humans experience, feel, and undergo, is a manifestation of one matter: His distance from da’at. Body, mind, and spirit are all related, all part of god, or distanced from him.

Just as there is a constant ascent of prayer, discussed in Torah 5, so too one is at risk, through sadness and impurity, of negatively affecting the pulse. Sadness leads to more sadness, and this cycle continues “until his soul leaves him, god forbid.” Depression is at risk of
spiraling into death. Emotion, in Nahman’s thought-world, is total, at risk of eternally descending until the very end. Nahman opposes this fallen state with its mirror image, the eternal ascent. He prescribes the action of groaning to allow an individual to reverse the state from sadness to happiness. Groaning, therefore, is a marker of liminality, pointing out the departure from one state and the beginning of a journey to its opposite pole. The severe, total action—*anaha be’emet* (a true groan)—marks the movement from one end of depression to a height of exultation. This groan is enacted and embodied as a reflection of human will, and shows the totality of what is needed in order to move an individual from one state of existence to another. As an initiator of the purification process, groaning cleanses the hands, purifies the self, leading back to the point of origin, the *mahloqet leshem shamayim* (argument for the sake of heaven), and therefore knowledge, *da’at*.

Possessing a flavor of religious existentialism, Nahman’s thoughts, like in Torah 5, stem from Kabbalistic tradition, especially Zohar 235a-b. Nahman asserts that the hands are significant, not just because they are the most external appendage and therefore represent engagement with the world, but also because they are signs for the dual nature of the self, the universe, and god. The right hand in the divine body corresponds to the sefirah of *Hesed*, the masculine element, while the left hand represents *Gevurah*, and therefore the feminine, containing element. The heart, which the Zohar asserts is the place of *Tiferet*, contains and combines the opposites in a proper manner, enabling the pulse of man to continue. By purifying the hands, the pulse, and the heart, one restructures the human self into a reflection of the true divine body. The “groan” is the voice of god, and the *qol* in both beings is an emission, or “hypostasis” of divinity.

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207 See Green, *Tormented Master*, Excursus I, “Faith, Doubt and Reason,” 318, where he claims that “…the existential and the mystical in Nahman are inseparable.”
Conclusion of Torah 56

The following statement connects an individual’s speech to the distance between the self and god:

כ כל הדיבורים مق Insets מהשמם כשם כל הדיבורים כמות לועות הדבר נצב דברך להעולם שเสมอ

For one receives all the *dibburim* (speech-acts) from the heavens, for there are all the *dibburim*, as it is written, “Forever, God, your word stands in Heaven” (Ps 119:89). And the *dibburim* that one receives from Heaven, one receives through thunder, in the aspect (behina) of (Ps. 18:14) “The Lord thunders from Heaven,” in the aspect of (Job 37:4), “God thunders wonders with his voice.” Therefore, one receives *dibburim* from the hands, because they are in the aspect of heaven (shamayim), for there lie all the *dibburim*.208

Here, groaning, associated with thunder, is a boundary marker, an expression of one’s separateness from god and his need to reverse the descent into depression. The individual groans, ceases his descent into individuality, and allows the self to become purified and therefore absorbed into god. The Jew’s audible recognition of a boundary, therefore, results in the dissolution of the ultimate boundary, the transcendence of god. The individual’s mystical entry into a world is, as well, synesthetic—if speech and action are separate processes in a depraved, fallen state, then the becoming-god (apotheosis) of the self necessitates a break with reality and an ascendance into an unbounded world of in-distinction. In this world, speech can be received by the hands, one’s groans match the voice of God, and one stimulates the heavens to thunder.

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208 *Liqquitim* 56:8
Transcendence has been shattered as Nahman returns to a world of immanence, in which the voice is a “hypostasis,” the speech of god.

Nahman includes a verse from Lamentations 3:41: “We raise our hearts to our hands, to god in heaven.” Through a three-part process, this verse moves from internality to externality, evoking as well the movement of the voice in Zohar III: Pinchas 235a-b: One’s heart, a combination of the opposites of hesed and gevurah properly purifies the hands, who correspond to those two sefirot. This act affects the heavens, which send thunder (re’amim) and speech (dibburim) back to the self, completing the circle. In invoking his spiral of knowledge-seeking, Nahman returns the third part of Lamentations 3:41 to the beginning, allowing “heaven” to affect the “heart,” as the self ascends towards absorption into God. The image created is that of a storm deity, one who lifts his hands, connects with the heavens, and completes a circular mystical process, thereby achieving da’at.

For even Moses did not achieve this level [of transcendent knowledge], for they are the aspect (behina) of “the ways of God [which one cannot grasp], the aspect of thunder, which are the wonders which (Job 37:16), “by him whose understanding is perfect.”

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209 See Lamentations 3:41:

210 For a builds on Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy*, one can add that this break with reality, moreover, reflects a base human experience: The sense of touch, as felt through man’s hands and pulse, and the sense of hearing, evoked through the cry, find a meeting place in a sensed, yet undefined visceral vibration. One who feels the vibrations of the vocal cords or the beat of one’s heart are all related in that they go to the core of the body’s feeling—these elements are unheard, yet sensed as very real.
which is impossible to understand. And therefore, when one receives *dibburim* from
Heaven, from the aspect of hands as discussed above, one cannot denigrate him, even if
the halakha is not according to him. For this is the aspect of “an argument for the sake of
heaven,” *mahloqet leshem shamayim*, that in truth “this and that are the words of the
living God,” but is just impossible to understand this. For “by him his understanding is
perfect,” in the concept of thunder, as discussed above.\(^{211}\)

In his 56\(^{th}\) teaching of *Liqqutei Moharan*, then, Nahman takes a slightly different angle
than his fifth teaching. He emphasizes another element of Zohar III:235a-b: the Jew’s power as
exerted through the concept of hands, the sefirot of *Hesed* and *Gevurah*. By emphasizing the
external, as opposed to the internal heart, Nahman reveals his belief in radical human agency:
The will is the truest mode of human existence. This claim requires human action to arrive at
knowledge.

Moreover, he provides a “switching mechanism” from deep depression to eternal
exultation through the process of purification. In this way, he views spiritual cleansing through
physical action—groaning—as the only way to transcend the self. Groaning, which enables the
self to break with the earthly, fallen state, is boundary marker, employed to transcend all human
limitations. Nahman, finally, connects thunder with the concept of groaning, showing how one
simultaneously releases thunder, experiences, and hears. One makes thunder come from one’s
mouth, while at the same time, enables the divine to release thunder. The *qol* of the self is the *qol*
of god, a piece of divinity which returns to its source. Nahman attempts, in his 56\(^{th}\) teaching, to
reach a world in which god’s transcendence collapses into immanence, becoming the self and the
world.

*Torah 67: The Shock of Thunder*

\(^{211}\) *Liqqutei Moharan* 56:8
In contrast, the next teaching, Torah 67, emphasizes thunder as a shock to the system, not the beginning, but an end. This teaching, more than the previous two, employs thunder as a total, ultimate, and personal experience which leads to virtue, purification, and completeness. Thunder, here, is a shocking agent, approaching Otto’s creature feeling.212

67: 7

In his 67th teaching, Nahman speaks about thunder in the context of repentance (teshuvah). The shocking nature of the ra’am culminates this narrative in restoring the self to its original root of divinity. Thunder, then, is not just a bridge that connects the disparate aspects of the self, but is a feminine element which allows the self to return to its root, Malkhut. Nahman speaks about this “return” in the context of the tzaddiq, the righteous leader endowed with the power of soul-reattachment. In an earlier teaching, Torah 4, for example, Nahman speaks about repentance as a sudden shift to a previous, pure childlike state:

The first element [of fixing bad traits] occurs when one sees a tzaddik… And this aspect (behina) dissolves the evil traits which result from the two foundations of inanimate objects and plats, meaning sadness and its offshoots, and evil desires. For the tzaddik of the generation is called Mother because he nurses Israel with the light of his

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Torah...We see this intuitively; when a child, who is upset or lazy sees its mother, he is roused with great zeal in front of his mother, his root. We also see intuitively that when a child is engaged in nonsense, even though he may have a great desire to continue his actions, when he sees his mother, he ceases what he is doing and pulls himself towards his mother. Similarly, bad traits of the two levels of inanimate objects and plants are dissolved by looking at the face of a tzaddik.\(^{213}\)

The return to god is a return to the childhood self; by encountering the ultimate form of purity—the tzaddiq—an individual’s sense of will is abrogated, causing him to return to divine feminine. There are strong overtones of existentialism in this vision—the encounter with the righteous one is not just a visual or cognitive experience, but is a transformative experience, one which changes one’s orientation towards the world, and therefore towards the self. This return of purification is the return to one’s childhood, associated necessarily with one’s mother. In this state, one is free of any urge other than uniting with the force of motherhood, Malkhut, which, as the lowest emanation of the Godhead, is the most accessible pathway towards divine ascendance.

The sudden nature of this “encounter” is reflected later on in Nahman’s 67th teaching, when he mandates purification by shocking oneself through immersion in cold waters. Before speaking of Nahman’s consideration of the shocking nature of repentance in his 67th teaching, he connects the notion of childbirth to childish return. Instead of describing the soul’s purification in a regressive manner, like in the 4th Torah, Nahman speaks in a way that goes forward in time, describing how one can give birth to the soul in a proper manner. Indeed, in the first six sections of this teaching, Nahman describes the elements of a healthy soul, namely the necessity of using kavod correctly, raising up one’s element of malkhut in order to extricate the kavod from the

\(^{213}\) Liqqutei Moharan 4:8
Other Side, or the demonic realm. In the eighth part, however, Nahman describes how one can allow this properly prepared soul to emerge.

ואזエリア תכבוד חוה אל תאמ תומצב מתוכו נשדקוש כי תרייך להולדת האנפה בתכלי קרי
והולדת כי תכבוד היא אם כל כי הנטפה מלווה את כעובר בשתי אמי לפצבר נשייה יוחי בה' תיני קרי
לתשמקל שיניה י'高度重视 ותאמ תכבוד והנפשה ואלפנשוש עותקל אמא מה' כי עניין עחיה יוחי-img001
להראות לחהידי בנקל בלא קרי

And then, when the honor (kavod)\(^\text{214}\) comes anew to a man, and cloaked within it is the soul of holiness, as it is stated above, he must see to it that he bears his soul easily, without birth complications. Because honor is the mother of all living (em kol hai), as stated above, and the soul is cloaked within it as a fetus in the innards of its mother. And sometimes, god forbid, when there is the aspect (behina) of birth difficulty, both of them--the mother and child--can become lost---meaning the honor (kavod) and the soul (nefesh). Or, sometimes, one of them is lost, god forbid because degree of birth difficulty, and one must see to it that he give birth without difficulty.\(^\text{215}\)

The emergence of the soul is connected to the process of childbirth. The potential of new life carries the risk of tremendous loss. Nahman emphasizes that the aspect of returning is the uniting with the em kol hai, the mother of all living, which is the lowest part of the Godhead, Maklhit. Like in the fourth teaching, the acceptance of honor (kavod), and therefore the restoration of the soul to its root (Malkhit), hearkens back to the earliest moment of a human’s existence: childbirth. In this case, however, one does not regress to childbirth, but instead one progresses, allowing the feminine aspect of the soul to be born, thereby allowing the soul to ascend to its proper divine connection. Nahman’s ascetic practices and his description of action

\(^\text{214}\) Here, kavod refers to an honor which one may receive in the communal context, such as being called to read the Torah, or receiving a compliment from another person.

\(^\text{215}\) Liqqutei Moharan 67:7
enables one to purify the self in an attempt to birth one’s soul, thereby allowing it to reunite with
the feminine aspect—Malkhut.

The concept of birth is likened to a correct combination of opposites, one which figures
well into his focus on thunder’s ability to bridge the disparate elements of the Godhead.

And after the soul (nefesh) is born, one must rear it. And there are two matters that have
to do with this rearing: The Birth and Rearing. This is done through fear and love, which
refers to the two hands the large hand and the small hand. Because the birth is done
through fear, in the concept of (Ps. 41:7) “They were seized there with a trembling, like a
woman in the throes of labor.” And after it is born, then they rear it through love, in the
way of (Gen 2:4) “These are the offspring of the heavens and the earth when they were
created”--”When they were created,” BeHiBaR’AM, means that after they were created
and born, then they rear it [the soul] through the concept of Abraham (ABrHaM), which
is the concept (behina) of love, which is the concept of the right hand…

In this case, because Nahman is dealing with the notion of soul-birth and not mystical
ascendance, Nahman still favors the feminine side while asserting the synthesis of opposites. In
doing so, he connects birth to the left hand, yir’ah (fear), and rearing to ahavah (love), the right
hand. These two opposites are associated with the fourth and fifth sefirot, hesed and gevurah.
When these two antitheses interact in the proper manner, the individual brings the soul into the world, out of hiding.\textsuperscript{218}

67:8

The eighth part of Nahman’s 67th teaching sets up a problem: By praying, \textit{belo lev}, “without heart,” an individual distances the soul from the soul-root and causes, “tiredness to the soul.” In his classic manner, Nahman solves this conceptual Kabbalistic issue through prescribing the concrete action of shock, associated with thunder:

ולפעמיםишעירפתאלהנספהעלשנתרחקהמאמהוהנהיגתבהכבודכנ”לועירידלהיהוהוהולדבריאתעל”_flat
בברח"(משלי:כ)משקורמהעפשיה如有侵权 السلامיבלאל춰ודתרוקמההנספהמכבודברח(ישעיהכ)
בשפותהכבודשיתברחוכ

And sometimes the soul has tiredness, because it is far away from its mother, which is honor (\textit{kavod}), as stated above. And one needs to revive it and to heal it through cold water, in accordance with (Prov 25:13, 25), “Cold waters on a tired soul,” meaning that when one prays without heart (emotion), the soul is distanced from the honor in the manner of Isaiah 29:13, “With their lips they have honored me, but their heart is far, etc.\textsuperscript{219}

Like in the sudden encounter with the \textit{tzaddiq}, the righteous leader, who returns oneself to a previous state of purity, an individual reunites the disparate parts of the self through shocking his system. Cold water, like other human experiences such as the encounter with a righteous person, is a changing experience, one which marks a clear “before” and “after,”

\textsuperscript{218}See \textit{Zohar Hadash, Megillat Shir ha-Shirim}, 2a which directly associates birth with thunder in relating a creation story: “...And just as a woman has birth-pangs at the time of childbirth, so too, when the Holy One Blessed Be He sought to bring the land into the light of the world, the water would ascend and descend-- ‘It ascends mountains and descends into valleys,’ (Ps 104:8). What did the Holy One Blessed Be He do? He brought thunder, \textit{re’anim}, and earthquakes out of the firmament, and the waters fled. As it is written, ‘From your rebuke they flee, from the voice of your thunder they hasten,’ (Ps 104:7)...”

\textsuperscript{219}\textit{Liqqutei Moharan 67:8}
prompting the individual to observe a tangible manner of change. This occurrence prompts one to reunite the opposites, allow the proper cosmic flow, and the self to reconnect with the divine.

Nahman continues by including thunder in his program of reuniting the soul with its root. Thunder is a Kabbalistic agent of awakening, which work through the aspect of *mayim qarim*, cold waters, in that both initiate the soul in the process of rising towards its ultimate unity with god. Thunder is not invoked by calling out, as in Torah 5, or by weather-control by groaning, as in Torah 56, but is summoned by immersing in cold water. As an element which awakens, thunder is likewise a uniting force that brings together the elements of self, almost like a sewing needle which restructures the Kabbalistic self:

But when the heart is far from the speech of prayer, then it is related to the matter of the distancing of the soul, which is the matter of the heart, of honor, in the idea of “His lips have honored me but his heart is far.” (Is 29:13). And then there is tiredness in the soul, and one must heal it through cold waters, as stated above, “and cold waters (Prov. 25:25),” which one achieves through the matter of thunders. And thunders are made when one gives honor to an elder who forgot his learning, as our Rabbis of blessed memory say (Berakhot 9b): “Be careful around an elder who forgot his learning” that one
needs to be careful to honor him. And through this are made thunders, and from them the cold waters come to revive the soul, as mentioned above.²²⁰

Encoded in this is, once again, the Kabbalistic web of associations, which stems from the Zohar III Pinchas 235a-b. Speech, or the dibbur, is an element separate from the body, possessing its own will. Speech stems from the heart, the seat of unity and the beginning of the synthesis of opposites. The self becomes fractured through the absence of prayer, and must be restructured in the proper manner. One engages in exactly the same type of self-referential Kabbalistic process discussed in Torah 5, yet from a different direction. In Torah 5, prayer allows an individual to enter the fractalized circle which ends in transcendental knowledge. In Torah 56, however, the direction begins on top, moving downwards; when the process of being absorbed in God’s knowledge goes wrong, one must fix it by engaging with another element of the Zohar’s description: water. The process is recycled and renewed through top-down motion—the self engages with the physicalized Zoharic element, like the qol from the heart in Torah 5, but now with the water from the heavens. Because thunder comes from “without,” and is heard in nature from the heavens, Nahman emphasizes its sense experience. Inasmuch as the self is, before unification with its root, fallen within in the physical world, it must come into contact with the most physical of senses, touch, in order to raise itself up to the most spiritual of senses,

²²⁰ Torah 67:8. Nahman continues by comparing the act of honoring an elder to engaging with a cloud. “For thunders are made when mists and hot smoke rise and enter inside the cloud and are heated up in there, and through this the cloud is ripped, and from this the sound of thunder is heard.” Nahman mirrors the explanation which is incidentally rejected by the Muslim philosopher, Fakhr-al-Din Al-Razi (c.1150-1209). See Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghayb (al-Tafsir al-Kabir), on Qur’an 13:12: “For the wind is confined inside the body of the cloud and the coldness overpowers its exterior and the external surface is frozen from it, and then, this wind rips it apart violently, and a violent movement is generated from this severe ripping, and the violent movement [explained later as thunder] leads to heating, and this is the lightning. Thank you to Prof. Carl Sharif El-Tobgui.
hearing, in the context of thunder. Nahman connects knowledge, sexual purification, mystical unity, and revelation.\textsuperscript{221}

\textit{Conclusion of Torah 67}

Nahman’s ideas react to the Hasidic project to place the self within a rabbinic worldview which emphasizes boundaries between self and god. This metaphysic situates the self squarely within the physical world. In this manner, the individual is not able to exist in a place other than its own boundedness, its own situatedness, in the face of god’s transcendence. As a result, Nahman, through a prescription of mystical praxis, seeks to enable the self to ascend its earthliness, and by doing so, rise towards the zoharic ideal of self-identification and engagement with the Godhead. On one hand, parts of Nahman’s description of thunder narrates the apotheosis of Man in his command over the cosmos, as creator of the divine element, the \textit{qol}, which enables the self to act like god. On the other hand, as demonstrated in the analysis of Torah 5, Nahman is almost trapped the “rabbinized” world of Hasidism which separates self from God. In this world, one cannot \textit{really} ascend to the Godhead. As a result, Nahman’s literary style, as well as the purifications he describes, are, ultimately endless. His work focuses so intently on breaking through the boundaries which contain him, yet, tragically, his style repeats on itself, obsessively continuing. Nahman is bound within the world which is separate from god,

\textsuperscript{221} In doing this, Nahman connects thunder directly to the virtue of not knowing. One can only truly know when one does not know. Therefore, by honoring the ultimate symbol of knowledge: The Elder who has forgotten his learning. \textit{(Liqqutim 67:8)}. As discussed in the beginning of the Torah, one who becomes old loses his hair, the symbol of virility, and therefore becomes open to true knowledge as a feminized masculine self. His brain has been purified, and he has access to supra-rational knowledge. This elder who contains the elements of purity and ultimate lack of knowledge has the power to act as the agent of revelation, initiating the process of mystical unity, the cleaving of the soul to God.

For more on the virtue of “not knowing” in later Hasidut, see Zadoq ha-Kohen of Lublin (1823-1900), \textit{Divrei Sofrim}, 38: 23

\begin{quote}
כי חללה מזוההfläche שלא נין הוה תשמנה עמך כמת בוף יברא מכפש לזרשה כליל כי לא מתשבותי מעשה י’hא ואפשר מצוה ליו י’d הנותנה ושתה, ודינהה כר על י’hא ושתה הנותנה: \end{quote}
and cannot really return to earlier Kabbalah, which saw the world as “of god.” This rabbinic transcendence of god is too strong in Hasidic thought, and the qol cannot bridge the gap.

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<td>Calling out (qol be-kol koho)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense</td>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>Touch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sefirotic movement of the qol</td>
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<tr>
<td>Element in Zohar III:235a-b</td>
<td>The Heart</td>
<td>Hesed and Gevurah (the hands)</td>
<td>Water</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion: Final Reflections

In describing an interpretation of thunder in Jewish texts, this thesis tells a story of Jewish texts’ conceptions of god’s transcendence and immanence. I posit that early Hasidic thinkers, when interpreting thunder—qolot and re’amim—return to rabbinic texts’ conceptions of god’s transcendence. This sound phenomenon presents a way to understand the early Hasidic views on the world and god.

The Experience of Thunder

Ranging from a sign of the radical transcendent to a singular personal experience, thunder is an experience—the vibrations that result from a nearby thunderclap can be deeply shocking. Thunder’s totality, moreover, breeds a wide range of possible associations, from radical transcendence to radical immanence, from ecstatic optimism to ultimate fear. Thunder can be synesthetic, leading to sensory confusion: One can feel the vibrations and see the flash which accompanies the thunder. On the other hand, thunder is an aural experience; in is overwhelming sound, its power bleeds over into other senses. As the loudest sound experienced in nature, it is sound’s ideal definition. Thunder, may, then easily fit into Rudolf Otto’s description of the divine as an experience. 222

Like Otto, Jewish texts ask: How can something supremely tangible, yet totally unseen, fit into the religious narrative? The answers, however, do not simply describe the experiential

222 See Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational. (John W. Harvey, trans.) Oxford University Press, 1958, in which he claims that the non-rational, which is God, “can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes of spirit must be awakened,” p. 7. Otto, as well, uses his new terminology—“the numinous,” “mysterium tremendum et fascinans” to enable him to solve sweeping religious problems, such as the miracle and predestination, with an answer that the god is experienced, which means that it exists. The experience of the miraculous is the result of natural occurrences that arouse within the self, “the demonic dread and numinous feeling,” 54. For Otto’s descendants in the field of anthropology, see Tuzin, Donald et. al. “Miraculous Voices: The Auditory Experience of Numinous Objects [and Comments and Replies],” in Current Anthropology, Vol. 25 No. 5, pp. 579-596. The University of Chicago Press on behalf of Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, December 1984, as well as an article in the field of Bible studies by George Savran, “Theophany as Type Scene,” in Prooftexts, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 119-149. Indiana University Press, Spring 2003, who incorporates Otto’s terminology.
element of god. Thunder is the “stuff” of revelation in its disembodied nature and supreme marker of the presence of a divine other. Thunder is, then, not only a weather phenomenon that results from an accident of nature, but a test case for the position of the god itself in relation to the world. Does the world pulsate with divine life, breathing with the vitality which is god? Is the world stagnant, brought into existence by a separate being? The texts deal with these questions whose answers move beyond a description of a primal experience of fearful repulsion and attraction.223

In this body of this work, I did not deal with the halakhic analysis of the blessing of thunder, nor Hasidism’s relation to the modern scientific explanation for sound and weather.224 Future research may examine the halakhic discussion of the berakha on thunder,225 and thunder’s place in other areas of halakha.226 Further research could incorporate references to thunder in the Palestinian Talmud,227 and look more closely at Cordoverian Kabbalah and Habad Hasidism. Another thesis like this could examine the interpretation of kavod, (honor) which refers to the divine presence.228

223 Thank you, Alan Mittleman, for corresponding on this topic.
224 For Zionist writers’ interpretations of thunder, see the modern Hebrew author Micha Yosef Berdichevsky’s (1865-1921) Beseter Ra’am, ch. 38 as well as S.Y. Agnon’s (1888-1970) Tmol Shilshom (Only Yesterday) Hebrew, Tel Aviv: Schocken Publishing House Ltd., 1998.
225 See Joseph Karo, Shulkhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim, Hilkhot Bircat ha-Peirot 227:2-3
226 For thunder’s place in ritual slaughter, see Joseph Karo, Shulkhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, Hilkhot Tereifot 36:14. For Maimonides’s connection of thunder to communal fasting, see Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Taaniyot 2:12, as well as its iteration in Shulkhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim, Hilkhot Taanit 576:4
227 See Palestinian Talmud, Tractate Berakhot Ch. 9 Halakha 2
228 Thank you, Professor Decter for this idea.
**Appendix I: Selected Verses in the Bible and Zohar, including qolot (For future reference)**

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<tr>
<th>Appearances in Zohar</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tr>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>נַחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-הַשָּׁמַיִם, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ וּאֶל הַבָּרָד, וְרַב וּבָרָד אֱלֹהִים, וְרַב וְרַב אֱלֹהִים, וְרַב וְרַב אֱלֹהִים</td>
<td>Ex. 9:13</td>
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<td>נַחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-הַשָּׁמַיִם, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ וּאֶל הַבָּרָד, וְרַב וּבָרָד אֱלֹהִים, וְרַב וְרַב אֱלֹהִים</td>
<td>Ex. 9:23</td>
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<td>נַחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-הַשָּׁמַיִם, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ וּאֶל הַבָּרָד, וְרַב וּבָרָד אֱלֹהִים, וְרַב וְרַב אֱלֹהִים</td>
<td>Ex. 9:28-29</td>
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<td>נַחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-הַשָּׁמַיִם, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ וּאֶל הַבָּרָד, וְרַב וּבָרָד אֱלֹהִים, וְרַב וְרַב אֱלֹהִים</td>
<td>Ex. 9:33</td>
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<td>נַחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-הַשָּׁמַיִם, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ וּאֶל הַבָּרָד, וְרַב וּבָרָד אֱלֹהִים, וְרַב וְרַב אֱלֹהִים</td>
<td>Ex. 9:34</td>
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<td>יָוֵר בִּית הַשָּׁלֶשׁ שֶׁשֶּׁלָּהּ בֵּית הַבָּרָד, וְיָוֵר בִּית הַבָּרָד שְׁלֵמוּת שֶׁל הַבָּרָד, וְיָוֵר בִּית הַבָּרָד שְׁלֵמוּת שֶׁל הַבָּרָד, וְיָוֵר בִּית הַבָּרָד שְׁלֵמוּת שֶׁל הַבָּרָד</td>
<td>Ex. 19:16</td>
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<td>יָוֵר בִּית הַשָּׁלֶשׁ שֶׁשֶּׁלָּהּ בֵּית הַבָּרָד, וְיָוֵר בִּית הַבָּרָד שְׁלֵמוּת שֶׁל הַבָּרָד, וְיָוֵר בִּית הַבָּרָד שְׁלֵמוּת שֶׁל הַבָּרָד, וְיָוֵר בִּית הַבָּרָד שְׁלֵמוּת שֶׁל הַבָּרָד</td>
<td>Ex. 20:15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


229 Zohar also quotes the verse without the word qolot in the following places:

230 Zohar also quotes the verse without the word qolot in the following places:

231 Zohar also quotes the verse without the word qolot in the following places:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extensive references, look esp. In</th>
<th>See Ps. 29</th>
<th>Ps. 29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>שמשר, ואת תכש, כש; בכע עמע ועמע, ובשכתי</td>
<td>I Kings 19:12</td>
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<td>מָכַה מַעֲצָמוּ, כִּי יָשַׁמֶּךָּ עִם יָהְמַךְ</td>
<td>Judges 5:11</td>
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<td>הרב רבארשׁית ל</td>
<td>I Sam 12:17</td>
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<td>I Kings 12:17</td>
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<td>I Sam 12:17</td>
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<td>I Sam 12:17</td>
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| Judges 5:11 |        |        |
| I Sam 12:17 |        |        |
| I Sam 12:17 |        |        |
| I Sam 12:17 |        |        |
| זוהר (ד׳ ל’). | Ps. 93:4 |
|ZNIGHU (ך’ח’ג) | מִכְלֹלוֹת, פִּים רֶבֶם, אֲדֻרִים תְּלוֻשִּׁים, יָם: אֵדֶר | Ps. 107:29 |
|ZNIGHU (ך’ח’ג) | ט’א ל’ח | כִּי יָדַעְתִּי הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר לְעֹלָם יִהְיֶה הוּא | ECC 3:14 |
|ZNIGHU (ך’ח’ג) | ט’א ל’ח | זָהָר wur כְּרָך אֶל כֵּסֶף: זָהָר wur כְּרָך אָל כֵּסֶף | Job 38:35 |
|ZNIGHU (ך’ח’ג) | ט’א ל’ח | זָהָר wur כְּרָך אֶל כֵּסֶף: זָהָר wur כְּרָך אָל כֵּסֶף | Job 28:26 |
|ZNIGHU (ך’ח’ג) | ט’א ל’ח | זָהָר wur כְּרָך אֶל כֵּסֶף: זָהָר wur כְּרָך אָל כֵּסֶף | Job 4:16 |
|ZNIGHU (ך’ח’ג) | ט’א ל’ח | זָהָר wur כְּרָך אֶל כֵּסֶף: זָהָר wur כְּרָך אָל כֵּסֶף | Job 28:26 |

### Table Explanation

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<tr>
<th>זוהר</th>
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<tr>
<td>זוהר</td>
<td>מִכְלֹלוֹת, פִּים רֶבֶם, אֲדֻרִים תְּלוֻשִּׁים, יָם: אֵדֶר</td>
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<td>זוהר</td>
<td>ט’א ל’ח</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>זוהר</td>
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<td>ט’א ל’ח</td>
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<td>זוהר</td>
<td>ט’א ל’ח</td>
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## Appendix II: Verses with the Root *r’m* in the Bible and Zohar (For future reference)

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Appearances in Zohar</strong></td>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
<td><strong>Verse</strong></td>
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<td>I Sam 1:6</td>
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<td>פִּסְקוּתָהּ וְכִעֲסַתָּה וְכִעַס קוֹלַעַרְרוּ עַל־פָּרָק מָיִם עִלָּיוֹן וְכִעַס עַל־אָלָיוֹן:</td>
<td>I Sam 2:10</td>
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<td>I Sam 7:10</td>
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<td>I Sam 22:14</td>
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<td>Is. 29:5</td>
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<td>Ez. 27:35</td>
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<td>Ps 18:14</td>
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<td>Ps 29:3</td>
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<td>Ps 77:19</td>
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<td>Ps 81:8</td>
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<td>Ps 96:11</td>
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<table>
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<th>lok</th>
<th>פסוק</th>
<th>בָהּ וְיֹשְׁבֵי</th>
<th>תֵּבֵל וּמְלֹאוֹ</th>
<th>הַיָּם יִרְעַם</th>
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<td>Ps 98:7</td>
<td>מִ sunscreen בְּקַלָּרְךָ מִן־קֹל יְנוּסוּן מִן־גַּעֲרָתְךָ</td>
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<td>Ps 104:7</td>
<td>טוֹרָנִים יָשִׁינוּ בֶּן־מֶאָה</td>
<td>מִשְׁרֵי מַיִם מְרִיצִים</td>
<td>מִמְּזוֹנִים מְרִיצִים</td>
<td>מִשְׁרֵי מַיִם מְרִיצִים</td>
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<td>Job 26:14</td>
<td>מִי תַּקְעֵר מִי תַּקְעֵר בְּקַלָּרְךָ</td>
<td>מִקְרָו מְרִיצִים</td>
<td>מִקְרָו מְרִיצִים</td>
<td>מִקְרָו מְרִיצִים</td>
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<td>Job 37:4</td>
<td>אֲן־יִשָּׁמַע קִרְיָה יָשִׁינוּ בְּקַלָּרְךָ</td>
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<td>Job 37:5</td>
<td>יֶחְפְּזוּן רַעַמְךָ מִן־קֹל יְנוּסוּן מִן־גַּעֲרָתְךָ</td>
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<td>Job 39:25</td>
<td>אֵי יַרְעֵם — נֵדָע וְלֹא גְדֹלוֹת עֹשֶׂה נִפְלָאוֹת בְּקוֹלוֹ</td>
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<td>Job 40:9</td>
<td>וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ הַשָּׂדֶה יַעֲלֹץ וּמְלוֹא הַיָּם יִרְעַם</td>
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<td>1 Chron. 16:32</td>
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Further Reading


