The Talmudic Zohar:
Rabbinic Interdisciplinarity in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*

by

Joseph Dov Rosen

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Joint Doctor of Philosophy

with Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley

in

Jewish Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Daniel Boyarin, Chair
Professor Deena Aranoff
Professor Niklaus Largier

Summer 2017

Abstract

The Talmudic Zohar:
Rabbinic Interdisciplinarity in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*
By
Joseph Dov Rosen

Joint Doctor of Philosophy in Jewish Studies with the Graduate Theological Union

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Daniel Boyarin, Chair

This study uncovers the heretofore ignored prominence of talmudic features in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* on Genesis, the earliest stratum of the zoharic corpus. It demonstrates that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, more often thought of as a mystical midrash, incorporates both rhetorical components from the Babylonian Talmud and practices of cognitive creativity from the medieval discipline of talmudic study into its esoteric midrash. By mapping these intersections of Midrash, Talmud, and Esotericism, this dissertation introduces a new framework for studying rabbinic interdisciplinarity—the ways that different rabbinic disciplines impact and transform each other.

The first half of this dissertation examines medieval and modern attempts to connect or disconnect the disciplines of talmudic study and Jewish esotericism. Spanning from Maimonides' reliance on Islamic models of Aristotelian dialectic to conjoin *Pardes* (Jewish esotericism) and talmudic logic, to Gershom Scholem's juvenile fascination with the Babylonian Talmud, to contemporary endeavours to remedy the disciplinary schisms generated by Scholem's founding models of Kabbalah (as a form of Judaism that is in tension with "rabbinic Judaism"), these two chapters tell a series of overlapping histories of Jewish inter/disciplinary projects. The section's juxtaposition of medieval and contemporary models of talmudic-esoteric interdisciplinarity provides a framework for overcoming the models of disciplinarity that the field of Zohar Studies inherited from Scholem's pioneering scholarship and clears theoretical space for rethinking the disciplinary commitments of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.

The second half of the dissertation demonstrates that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* uses talmudic reasoning and rhetoric for three purposes: (1) to formulate a model of divine cosmogenesis that is akin to talmudic creativity; (2) to advocate for applying talmudic reasoning to secrets as a way to expand esoteric knowledge; (3) and to represent a scholastic community in which rabbis search for secrets together and debate each other's esoteric lore.

Dedicated to my Zeidy
of blessed memory -

Rabbi Marvin Luban

מים עמוקים עצה בלב איש
ואיש תבונות ידלנה

Acknowledgments

This work could not have reached fruition without the support, encouragement, friendship, and guidance rendered by several people and departments, to whom I wish to express immense gratitude.

Daniel Boyarin has been an exemplar of a scholar who cares equally about the past and the present, and has constantly reminded me that "if there is no flour there is no Torah." Deena Aranoff has made herself available for endless hours of conversation and has constantly challenged me to be as clear and gracious in my writing as possible. And Niklaus Largier has opened my work to new horizons of mystical thought and critical imagination.

Without the financial and administrative support of Jewish Studies Joint Doctoral program and its staff—Sandy Richmond, Shorena Kurtsikidze, Erica Roberts, Etta Heber—this doctorate would surely have taken double the time and fourfold the toll.

That the final chapter of my dissertation addresses "scholastic sociality" and the centrality of friendship to a spiritual life has only underscored my indebtedness to my own community of scholar-friends. My local peers at UC Berkeley—Jerilyn Sambrooke, Jennifer Valentina Mackenzie, Raphael Magarik, Eli Rosenblatt, Eyal Bassan—have incredulously made my time on campus a time wherein sociality does not come at the cost of scholarship. And the many friends and mentors who have offered support, insight, edits, and a listening ear—Avishai Bar-Asher, Jonatan Benarroch, Hillel Broder, Eitan Fishbane, Amit Gvaryahu, Joel Hecker, Gilah Kletenik, Jana Jett Loeb, Ronit Meroz, Moulie Vidas, Nathan Wolski—have transformed the solitariness of dissertation writing into a time of convocation.

Finally, over the past two years, my partner, Amy Rae Ruben, has reminded me daily that, "you got this." Her trust and love are an undercurrent present throughout these pages.

Table of Contents

Introduction

I. Toward a Bibliographical History of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*

Printed in the sixteenth-century, partly in *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Cremona and Mantua, 1558-1560) and partly in *Zohar Hadash* (Salonika, 1597), *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* on Genesis is an eclectic and often esoteric midrash on the first thirty-two chapters of Genesis. The relationship between *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* and the Zohar is an historical enigma. The early-modern editions of the Zohar present *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* as a vertical column with its own title, configured alongside a parallel column that is simply titled, *Zohar* (or *Zohar Hadash*). Although they share narratological[1] and rhetorical features,[2] modern scholars have identified stylistic and theological differences between *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* on Genesis and other strata of zoharic literature.[3] Stylistically, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* contains a heteroglossic mixture of Aramaic and Hebrew (almost all other sections of zoharic literature are written solely in Aramaic), an assemblage of short *midrashim* (in contrast to the longer homilies of "*Zohar*"), and references to a wide, dispersed network of rabbinic sages (many other sections of zoharic literature revolve around "the *hevraya*," an intimate cohort of ten rabbis). Theologically, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* on Genesis is devoid of the kabbalistic theosophy and erotic mythology that defines other zoharic strata. Instead, its pericopes feature philosophical allegoresis and pre-kabbalistic traditions on a (comparably) small set of themes: cosmogony, the nature of the soul, the afterlife, eschatology, and the angelic realm.

This dissertation introduces an additional quality that distinguishes *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*[4] from other sections of zoharic literature, namely, the talmudic orientation of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. I contend that both the Babylonian Talmud and the medieval discipline of talmud study inform multiple features of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*: its disputational rhetoric, its advocacy of creativity, its representation of rabbinic sociality, its model of divine cosmogenesis, and (in at least one instance) its compositional style. Because these talmudic features cut across stylistic, cultural, and theological registers, they encourage a historiography of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* that incorporates both the formal and ideational developments of medieval Judaism.

Given its unusual textual form (as a text within a text, so to speak), a bibliographical history of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is required before a formal-intellectual history of "the talmudic

---

[1] See David Greenstein, *Roads to Utopia: The Walking Stories of the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 6.

[2] For instance: (1) the zoharic phrase, *"ta-hazi*," already occurs several times in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*; and (2) the temporal marker, "*ad d'havi*," found in most narratives from later strata of zoharic literature, can also already be found in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.

[3] See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1995), pp. 181-184; and Isaiah Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1961), p. 18 [Hebrew].

[4] Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, "*Midrash ha-Ne'lam*" refers specifically to *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* on Genesis, unless otherwise noted. On *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* on Exodus, see Ronit Meroz, *Headwaters of the Zohar – Research and Editions of Zohar, Exodus* (Tel Aviv: The Haim Rubin Tel Aviv University Press, forthcoming) [Hebrew]. On *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* on Song of Songs, Ruth, and Lamentations, see *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, Vol. 11, translation and commentary by Joel Hecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), pp. xi-xiii. The historical and literary relations between these various *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* commentaries is, for the moment, unknown.

Zohar" can be presented. A bibliographical history of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* ought to address three central conundrums: (1) the history of the passages that came to be printed as *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*; (2) the relationship between *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* and "the Zohar"; (3) and the history of the phrase, "*Midrash ha-Ne'lam*." The remainder of this introductory section surveys twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship on these questions. Because the philological study of zoharic texts is a young and burgeoning sub-field of Zohar Studies, and the heart of this dissertation addresses related but methodologically distinct questions, this introduction serves more to distill the operant and still open questions than to offer final answers to the bibliographical mysteries that surround the genesis of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.

The earliest citations of the passages printed as *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*[5] occur in late thirteenth-century Spain, though they are not cited as *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. The earliest citation is from Isaac ibn Sahula's *Mashal ha-Qadmoni*, which Scholem dates to 1281.[6] Raphael Loewe has recently argued to push the date of *Mashal ha-Qadmoni*'s composition back a few years, with the coronation of Alfonso X in 1271-2 as the *terminus a quo*.[7] The earliest citation from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam,* therefore, occurs in Spain sometime between 1271 and 1281. Both ibn Sahula and Moses de Leon resided at this time in the Castilian city of Guadalajara, and Scholem raises this proximity as evidence for his thesis on de Leon's involvement in the composition of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* (Scholem's theory of zoharic authorship is more fully explored later in this section).[8] It is telling that the citation from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* in *Mashal ha-Qadmoni* is not a verbatim quote. Rather, ibn Sahula was using a short fragment from MS Cambridge 1023 (one of the earliest Zohar manuscripts) on Gen. 1:14-19, a text that is in the style of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* but is not included in any printed edition of the Zohar.[9] Scholem hypothesizes that this fragment, cited by ibn Sahula, is one of the earliest attempts by de Leon to invent a new midrashic discourse. But for some reason, the periscopes included in MS Cambridge 1023 eventually fell out of the zoharic corpus. They were a a rough draft, replaced by the a commentary on those verses that was eventually published as *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. Both commentaries share thematic similarities, a fact that grants some plausibility to Scholem's reconstructive hypothesis. Two other citations appear in the writings of another Spanish Rabbi, Todros Abulafia, probably also from the early 1280's, and are introduced with the generic title, "ha-midrash."[10]

The first rabbis to cite sections from *Sefer ha-Zohar* as Zohar, Menahem Recanati and Joseph Angelet in the early fourteenth century, do not differentiate between *Sefer ha-Zohar* and *Midrash ha-Ne'lam.* They both conceive of the pericopes later published as *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*

---

[6] See Gershom Scholem, "The First Quotation from the Zohar's *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*," *Tarbiz,* Vol. 3 (1932), pp. 181-183 [Hebrew]. See also, "Rabbi Isaac Sahula's Commentary on the Song of Songs," edited by Arthur Green, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6:3-4 (1987), pp. 393-491 [Hebrew].

[7] See Raphael Lowe, *Meshal Haqadmoni: Fables from the Distant Past* (Portland and Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), pp. xv-xvi.

[8] See Scholem, *Major Trends,* p. 187.

[9] See Gershom Scholem, "A New Chapter from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* in the *Zohar*," in eds. S. Lieberman, S. Spiegel, S. Zeitlin, and A. Marx. *Louis Ginzberg Jubille Volume on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, (New York: The American Academy for Jewish Research, 1946), pp. 325-346 [Hebrew].

[10] See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 188.

as no different than any other zoharic pericopes—Recanati's citations that match the printed edition of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* are cited as "*Sefer ha-Zohar.*" However, as Boaz Huss points out, Recanati came across passages from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* (specifically on Genesis) after his first exposure to zoharic literature.[11] While his early work, *Ta'amei Hamitzvot*, cites many zoharic texts under the title *Sefer ha-Zohar*, none match "*Midrash ha-Ne'lam*." It is only in his later commentary to the Torah that he includes citations that match our *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. Indeed, on one occasion, before he cites a passage from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, he states " I have found more from the book of the Zohar, gleanings after gleanings [*liqutei betar liqutei*]."[12] A similar trend occurs in the writings of Joseph Angelet. Throughout his early treatise, *Korpat ha-Ruchlin*, he frequently cites sources as "Zohar," but, again, none of these match the printed *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. It is only in his later work, *Livnat ha-Sapir*, from 1334/5, where he does the exact opposite of Recanati and cites all his zoharic sources as *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, that some of these match the printed *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.[13] From this bare evidence we can infer two conclusions: (1) in the early fourteenth century, not all zoharic manuscripts contained texts from "*Midrash ha-Ne'lam,"* and at least some *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* pericopes circulated separately (*liqutei betar liqutei*);" nevertheless, (2) early transmitters of zoharic material appraised these sections of zoharic literature as parts of a single corpus.

Early Zohar manuscripts follow a similar trend. To the best of my knowledge, no medieval Zohar manuscript contains the title *Midrash ha-Ne'lam,*[14] even as most of the earliest Zohar manuscripts—MS Cambridge Add. 1023, MS Vatican 68, MS Vatican 213, MS Toronto 5-015[15]—contain large sections of "*Midrash ha-Ne'lam.*" This reinforces the sense that already at an early stage in the circulation of zoharic material (at the latest by the 1330's), *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* was an integral part of the zoharic corpus. The status of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* during this early stage of zoharic composition and manuscript copying is further illuminated by an odd editorial feature of early zoharic manuscripts. Many of the earliest Zohar manuscripts, made in fourteenth-century Spain and fifteenth-century Byzantine, contain numbered sections, which

---

[11] See Huss, *The Zohar*, pp. 69-70.

[12] Menahem Recanati, *Perush ha-Torah*, *Bo*, 42c. Cited in Huss, *The Zohar*, p. 70.

[13] See Huss, *The Zohar*, pp. 70-73.

[14] Yet some manuscripts differentiate between other Zohar section such as *Tosefta, Matnitin*, and *Sitrei Torah t*hrough use of these titles. See MS Munich 217. See also Avishai Bar-Asher, "The Earliest Citation from Sefer ha-Zohar and from Whence Had the Book of Zohar Received its Name," *Kabbalah*, Vol. 39 (2017), p. 120: "Many sections of the "Zohar" to Genesis, to which the printers gave numerous titles, like *heikhalot*, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, *Sitrei Torah*, and more—are found in the pre-print era in only a minority of manuscripts, and generally in separate units and in a different order."

[15] For a survey of Zohar manuscripts, see Boaz Huss, *The Zohar: Reception and Impact*, trans. Yudith Nave (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016), pp. 78-83. For studies on specific Zohar manuscripts, see Israel Ta-Shma, "Rabbi Joseph Karo: Between Spain and Germany," *Tarbiz*, Vol. 59 (1990), pp. 153-170 [Hebrew]; Abraham Elqayam, "Sabbatai Sevi's Manuscript Copy of the *Zohar*," *Kabbalah* 3 (1998), pp. 345-387 [Hebrew]; Daniel Abrams, "The Earliest Manuscript of the Zohar - Ms. Vatican 202, Circa 1300: A Quote in Aramaic in the Name of R. Shimon bar Yohai in the 'Secret of Leverite Marriage' and the Various Copyings of Zoharic Texts in the Manuscript," *Kabbalah*, Vol. 34 (2016), pp. 315-320 [Hebrew]; Avishai Bar-Asher, "The Earliest Citation," pp. 79-156 [Hebrew]; and Jonatan Benarroch, "An Edition of Early Versions of Idra Zuta and An Unknown Hebrew Translation from Ms. Vatican 226, Copied in 1311," *Kabbalah*, Vol. 39 (2017), pp. 157-248 [Hebrew].

correlate to the same passages across different manuscripts. Amiel Vick has recently demonstrated that numbered sections "three" through "eighteen" refer to *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* (numbers one and two have yet to be located).[16] This data demonstrates that not only was *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* an integral part of the zoharic corpus by mid fourteenth century, it was positioned as the opening section of that corpus.[17] Vick's forthcoming publications on this feature of Zohar manuscripts will certainly shed further light on the early bibliographical history of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.

The early-modern zoharic corpus contains more material than any previously created manuscript, and certainly contains many more sections than are numbered by the early transmitter(s) of zoharic literature. *Sefer ha-Zohar,* published in the 1550's, includes some twenty distinct literary sections, many of which are given separate headers.[18] The breadth of texts included in *Sefer ha-Zohar* is indicative of the printers' fantastical endeavor to produce a sellable and comprehensive Zohar book, though their product seems more an anthology than a homogenous book or singular literary structure. Gershom Scholem aptly expresses the situation the scholar faces when confronting this philological pluralism: "At first sight, the existence of a multitude of writings of apparently very different character, loosely assembled under the title of "Zohar," seems to leave no argument against the view that they do in fact belong to different writers and periods."[19] Famously, though, Scholem negates this only-apparently indisputable conclusion of textual difference; only a few paragraphs later, Scholem nominates the thirteenth-century Castilian, Moses de Leon, as author of almost all of what was "loosely assembled under the title of 'Zohar.'"[20]

Since the 1990's, scholars have attenuated if not altogether replaced Scholem's model of zoharic unity with a model of zoharic literature as a heterogeneous literature. Created by a plurality of people, writing in different styles and with dissimilar theologies, zoharic texts have no single source of origin or single author; "the Zohar" is more a literary movement than a book. Discerning how these different zoharic texts became woven into early manuscript collections and editions[21] is a task that a growing number of contemporary Zohar scholars are working on.[22] By tracking the histories of zoharic passages in the centuries before the printed editions of *Sefer ha-Zohar,* these new bibliographical studies on the Zohar make visible the historical relationships and stylistic affinities between zoharic texts, as well as the bibliographical processes that led to

---

[16] See Amiel Vick, "Numbered Sections," https://www.academia.edu/19905792/פרשיות_ממוספרות.

[17] The fact that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is a commentary on the first thirty-two chapters may play some factor in this editorial structure. Yet, given that there are many other zoharic strata that address these same chapters, there must be an additional criteria for their position as the inaugural pericopes of the zoharic corpus.

[18] Gershom Scholem isolates twenty-one literary sections. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 159-163. The Cremona edition includes even more material.

[19] Scholem, *Major Trends*, 159.

[20] In his early research, Scholem believed that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is the latest section of the Zohar. See Gershom Scholem, "Chapters from the History of Kabbalistic Literature, 6: The Kabbalah of R. Isaac ben Shlomo ben Abi Sahula and *Sefer Ha-Zohar*," *Kirjath Sepher* 6 (1929), pp. 109-119 [Hebrew].

[21] On the importance of differentiating between an early Zohar collection (*asufa*) and edition (*arikha*), see Daniel Abrams, "The Earliest Manuscript of the Zohar."

[22] See sources cited above in n. 5 as well as throughout this introduction.

the notion of *Sefer ha-Zohar* as a book.

Yehuda Liebes instigated this social turn by proposing a new model of collective authorship that better accounts for the thematic and stylistic uniqueness of many zoharic sections, such as the *Idrot, Midrash ha-Ne'lam,* and *Guf Ha-Zohar* ("the body of the Zohar," a modern coinage that refers to those parts of zoharic literature that have no other title and form the majority of *Sefer ha-Zohar*).[23] Jonathan Benarroch, one of Liebes' students, has recently identified other sections of the zoharic archive as belonging to what he calls "the middle stratum."[24] This intermediate stage in the archive's texts includes some of the more boldly epic sections, such as *Sava De-Mishpatim*, the *Yenukah* and *Sabba* stories, and the *Idrot*. These texts are now thought to emerge in the last years of the thirteenth century after much of the *Guf ha-Zohar* had already been composed, but before the fourteenth century zoharic adaptations of *Tikunei Zohar* and *Rayah Mehemna*. Touting a hybridic philological-literary perspective, Ronit Meroz has begun to meticulously excavate the archeology of the zoharic archive by working backwards from print to manuscript. She has been able to use these textual archaeologies to suss out a few sections that, she alleges, predate de Leon by several centuries.[25] She further concludes that the majority of the epic frame of the *Zohar* – the exegetical adventures of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and friends—is later than much of the theological exegesis woven through that frametale.[26] Boaz Huss' work adds a further social-history perspective to these questions of zoharic composition. Honing in on the early and late reception history of zoharic texts, Huss makes visible the ideological production of "the Zohar," as a textual idea, a material artifact, and a field of symbolic value.[27] More recently, Daniel Abrams has published a comprehensive deconstruction of the single-text, single-author Zohar thesis. In a two hundred page chapter titled, "The Invention of the *Zohar* as a Book," Abrams canvasses the methodological and historical shortcomings of the notion that the Zohar is a book, or that it has an author in our modern sense.[28] His critical strategy traces the historical stages of the fantasy that the *Zohar* is a *sefer* (a book), and exposes how this fantastical assumption in one form or another still anchors much of contemporary Zohar scholarship. These contemporary trends of scholarship seek to attend to the rhetorical uniqueness of each zoharic macroform (whether that difference be indexed as a difference of myth, midrash, or poetics) and to develop a fuller textual-history of the manifold writings that have come to be known and adored as the Zohar.

---

[23] See Yehuda Liebes, "How the Zohar was Written," in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache and Penina Peli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 85-138.

[24] See Jonathan Benarroch, *Sabbah and Yenuqa: "Two that are One"—Allegory, Symbol, and Myth in Zoharic Literature*, PhD, Hebrew University, 2011, pp. 283-304 [Hebrew].

[25] See Ronit Meroz, 'The Middle Eastern Origins of the Kabbalah', *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry*, Vol. 1:1 (2007), pp. 39-56.

[26] See Ronit Meroz, "'Rashbi's Biography' as a Zoharic Unit and the Epic Layer of the Zohar," in eds. Yehuda Liebes, Jonathan M. Benarroch, and Melila Hellner-Eshed, *The Zoharic Story* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2017), pp. 63-97 [Hebrew].

[27] See Huss, *The Zohar.*

[28] See Daniel Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory: Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem and Los Angeles: Cherub Press and Magnes Press, 2010), pp. 224-449.

Of the twenty-some Zohar sections, Scholem works the hardest to prove that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is by the same author as "the bulky part which has no specific title,"[29] which for reasons of stylistic grace we now call *Guf Ha-Zohar*. Scholem maps both of these works onto his intellectual biography of Moses de Leon in a manner that supports his broader historiography of Jewish Mysticism. This requires some literary reconstruction since very little biographical information is available on this thirteenth-century Castilian Jew. De Leon seems to have been born around 1240, lived in Guadalajara, and passed on in 1304. Scholem contends that the first concrete evidence we have for his existence is a Hebrew translation of *The Guide for the Perplexed*, dedicated to "*ha-maskil* Rabbi Moses de Leon," dated to 1264.[30] Subsequently, de Leon authored *Or Zaruah*, a pre-kabbalistic treatise which Alaxander Altmann dates to 1274 based on its similarities to Gikaltilla's *Ginat Egoz,* composed in that year.[31] This early work contains a rich amalgamation of Heikhalot tropes and linguistic speculation that seems miles away from the kabbalistic theosophy what would soon dominate his Hebrew writings. In 1286 he authored his first properly kabbalistic treatise, *Shushan Edut*, and continued to write at least six other such volumes before 1294.

Around this biographical skeleton, Scholem fleshes out both a psychological narrative of de Leon and a literary history of the Zohar, as the two are ultimately inseparable for Scholem.[32] In Scholem's historiography, all of the works of the Zohar were composed in the years between *Or Zaruah* (1274) and *Shushan Edut* (1286), but in two stages. In the years 1275-1280, de Leon wrote *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* while still under the receding sway of philosophy and allegorical reading practices. De Leon then had a conversion to theosophy, "a mystical doctrine, or school of thought, which purports to perceive and describe the mysterious workings of the Divinity, perhaps also believing it possible to become absorbed in its contemplation,"[33]and at a rapid pace composed the remaining sections of the Zohar between 1280 and 1286. He would then revert to a less sublime style—his Hebrew texts are formally inconspicuous—in an attempt to grant and gather support for his novel ideas, which he only began to copy and circulate in 1293 and continued to do so until his death twelve years later. This tenuous biography—one that has been disputed, both by Tishby[34] and Wolfson[35]—traces a clean developmental arch from Maimonidean philosophy to zoharic theosophy, wherein *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* serves as an overcome middle ground that elicits little attention in the wider sweep of Judaism's medieval

---

[29] Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 159.

[30] See Scholem, *Major Trends,* p. 194. Avishai Bar-Asher has recently demonstrated that this is a mistaken read of the manuscript and this copy of *The Guide* is not connected to de Leon. See R. Moses de Leon, *Sefer Mishkan ha-Edut*, Critically edited, introduced, and annotated by Avishai Bar-Asher (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2013), p. 13 n. 94.

[31] See Alexander Altmann, "*Sefer Or Zaruh le-Rabbi Moshe de Leon*," *Qovetz al Yad* 9 (1980); cf. Asi Farber, "*Le-Meqorot Torato ha-Qabbalit ha-Mequdemet shel Rabbi Moshe de Leon*," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984), pp. 67-96 [Hebrew].

[32] See Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 186-204.

[33] See Scholem, *Major Trends,* p. 206.

[34] See Isaiah Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1961), 1:106-107 [Hebrew].

[35] See Elliot Wolfson, *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses De Leon's Sefer ha-Rimmon* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 4-10.

evolution. To his credit, Scholem acknowledges that there was more to the intellectual and literary picture in Castile during the late 1270's than permutations of Maimonides and Geronse Kabbalah. For in a notable passage, Scholem introduces two other literary models in order to stress the differences between the two stages of de Leon's composition of Zohar:

> In the *Midrash ha-Ne'lam,* the author is still endeavoring to find for his thought a place within the frame-work of the old Merkabah mysticim; the other parts no longer show any trace of this tendency. In the *Midrash ha-Ne'lam,* too, his literary method is more dependent on the genuine older Midrashic literature than in the later parts.[36]

To summarize Scholem's position, then, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* was written while de Leon was still under the throes of that text he had had translated fifteen years earlier, *The Guide for the Perplexed.* But as already evidenced by his 1274 *Or Zaruah,* eclectic models of speculation were infusing his Maimonideanism and opening it toward new directions. *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is the first real fruit of that new direction, a project that finds de Leon struggling to find his own voice within three different discourses: Maimonidean philosophy, Merkabah speculation, and Midrash. To our loss, Scholem never followed through with this insight—to trace the ways that these discourses mingle and transform each other in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* before being ironed out into the sublime and symbolic style of later sections of the Zohar.

Further evidence on *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s relationship to zoharic literature, as least as per early-modern conceptions of this relationship, can be elicited from paratextual cues within the early printed editions of *Sefer ha-Zohar*.[37] The title page of the Mantua edition reads: "*Sefer ha-Zohar* on the Torah, from the divine, holy, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Z"L, with *Sitrei Torah*, and *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, and *Tosefta* on a few *parshiot*…" And the title page of the Cremona edition reads: "*Sefer ha-Zohar* on the Torah, from the divine and holy man, the tanna, Rashbi, with many innovations [*im hidushim harbei*], and they are *Sitrei Torah*, and *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, and *Tosefta* on some parshiot." Both of these title-pages (and especially Cremona's) articulate *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s distinction from "*Sefer ha-Zohar*," even as they are published in that very context. Reinforcing this sense of textual bifurcation is a fascinating note that the Mantua editors include before the beginning of *Zohar vayehi*:

> The editors say: from the language (of this section) it is apparent that it is not from *Sefer ha-Zohar*, as light is distinguishable from darkness. And in our estimation it is from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* and it was originally in the sacred tongue [i.e., Hebrew]. And the cunning ones changed the true language and they effaced the intention and meaning of the passage...and we would have omitted it because in the manuscript that came from Safed we did not find it. But we printed it as it is so that others should not boast on our

---

[36] Scholem, *Major Trends,* p. 183.

[37] On the social history of these editions, see Huss, *The Zohar*, pp. 98-111, 191-205; Marvin J. Heller, *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book: An Abridged Thesaurus*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2004); and Jan Doktór and Magdalena Bendowska, "*Sefer Ha-Zohar*–The Battle For Editio Princeps," *Jewish History Quarterly*, Vol. 2 (2012), pp. 141-161.

account that our work is incomplete, and we do not have the power in our hands to remedy its distortions.[38]

This note captures the ambivalent feelings the Mantua editors had toward *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. On the one hand, the note makes clear that they do not consider *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* to be just a subsection of *Sefer ha-Zohar*; rather it is a completely different text that originally existed in Hebrew and over time became eroded by translators who sought to make it stylistically analogous to other, Aramaic, sections of the Zohar. Yet, on the other hand, the Mantua printers were competing with the Cremona printers to publish a more comprehensive and compelling edition of *Sefer ha-Zohar*, and were therefore going to incorporate as much zoharic material as possible, even if it did not appear in all the manuscripts they were working with. These paratextual data only make clear that by the mid-sixteenth century, there was no clear sense of how *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* fit into the wider scheme of zoharic literature. The only thing that was clear was that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* somehow belongs to "the Zohar," and that it is distinguishable and out to be demarcated as distinct from "*Sefer ha-Zohar*."

To add to the puzzle, *Zohar Hadash* (Salonika, 1597) adds significant further material under the title of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* on the early books of Genesis. Later editions of *Zohar Hadash* include further sectioned titled as *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* on Lamentations and the Canticle (Krakow, 1603) and on Ruth (Venice, 1662), though the latter was previously published as *Yesod Shirim* (Thuengen, 1559) without any mention of belonging to the Zohar or *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.

While all modern scholars agree that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is the earliest strata of Zohar, over the past eighty years, scholars have dated sections of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* as early as the first century,[39] as late as the thirteenth,[40] and as "in-the-middle" as the ninth-eleventh centuries.[41] In truth, at least three distinct styles can be identified within *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, each reflective of one of the historical contexts proposed by scholars: an allegorical mode of midrash that at least formally and thematically recalls Jewish Hellenistic reading practices; cosmic, psychological, and eschatological speculations that recall Heikhalot literatures and their early medieval developments in midrashic form as collected by A. Jellinek (*Beit ha-Midrash*) and S. A. Wertheimer (*Batei Midrashot*); and narratives of midrash, wherein acts of interpretation take

---

[38] *Sefer ha-Zohar*, 1:211b:

אמרו המגיהים מתוך הלשון ניכר שאינו מספר הזוהר והאור נכר מתוך החושך ולדעתנו כי הוא ממדרש הנעלם ובלשון הקודש היה. והמתחכמים להתהלל שנו שפת אמת והפסידו כונת והבנת המאמר כי לא ידעו ולא הבינו לעשות הלשון על מתכנתו והנה יהיה בעיני כל מעיין כדברי הספר החתום וכבר היינו משמיטין אותו כי בהעתקה שבא מצפת תוב'ב לא מצאנו אותו. אלא מפני הרואים שלא יתפארו עלינו לאמר כי מלאכתנו חסרה הדפסנו אותו כאשר הוא ואין כח בידינו לתקן את אשר עותו.

See Huss, *The Zohar*, p. 103.

[39] Shmuel Belkin, "*Midrash ha-Ne'lam* and its Sources in Early Alexandrian Midrashim," *Sura* 3 (1958)), pp. 25-92 [Hebrew]. Cf. R.J Werblowsky, "Philo and the Zohar: A Note on the Methods of the Scienza Nuova in Jewish Studies," *The Journal of Jewish Studies* 10 (1959), pp. 25-44; and ibid., "Philo and the Zohar: Part 2," *The Journal of Jewish Studies* 11 (1960), pp. 113-135.

[40] See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 188; and Nathan Wolski, "Moses de León and *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* – On the Beginnings of the Zohar," *Kabbalah*, Vol. 34 (2016), pp. 27-116.

[41] Ronit Meroz, "'*And I Was Not There': The Complaints of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai According to an Unknown Zoharic Story," Tarbiz* 71 (2002), pp. 163-193 [Hebrew]; cf. Michal Oron, "*Midrash ha-Ne'elam*—Old and New," *Kabbalah* 22 (2010), pp. 109-148 [Hebrew].

on a performative and social expression, a literary style that is the trademark of many of the other sections of *Sefer ha-Zohar,* which scholars date to the late thirteenth century. This does not mean that parts of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* were authored in all of these time periods, but it opens the possibility that it is a text made of many historical and stylistic strata.[42] Even Gershom Scholem's strong theory of authorship acknowledges that certain sections of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* feel later than the rest: "One has the impression that he (Moses de Leon) simultaneously wrote the later parts of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* simultaneously with the main part...as though he was occasionally tempted to continue for a while in the old direction."[43]

Given the lack of any medieval evidence as to the existence an individuated section of *Sefer ha-Zohar* that is called *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, where did the sixteenth-century publishers get this bibliographical notion? This is a difficult historical questions to answer, and one can only hope that further research into the reception of zoharic texts in the late medieval period will prove helpful. For now, some help can be gleaned from the genealogy of this odd locution, "*Midrash ha-Ne'lam.*"

The term first appears in an undated letter by Moses of Burgos (1230-c.1300), a student of the Castilian kabbalist Jacob ha-Kohen.[44] The letter responds to an inquiry concerning the proper intentions for reciting the forty two letter name of God. The adjective *ne'lam* appears in three different contexts in the first few lines of the letter. First it used in an encomium to his addressee, whom he says, "understands hidden secrets" [*meivin sitrei ha-ne'lmot*]. A few lines later, the nature of the addressee's esoteric inquiry is referenced as a matter of "hidden/lofty wisdom" [*hokhmah ne'lmah*]. The third and definitive usage occurs in Moses' recitation of his addressee's question: had he received or heard anything about this matter from "*ga'on mi-geonei ha-Midrash ha-Ne'lam*"? The odd locution clearly refers to the kabbalists with whom Moses was in contact, orally or via text. Scholem stipulates that this usage of the locution proves that the zoharic section, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, means a "mystical Midrash" and not "a hitherto unknown Midrash,"[45] though he defers from explicating how he reached that conclusion. Scholem goes so far as to propose that this was de Leon's reason for titling his early work such, despite the fact that there is zero evidence that de Leon ever called anything he wrote *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. It is noteworthy that Isaac ibn Sahula, the very person who first quotes *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, testifies that Moses of Burgos was his teacher.[46] However, it seems highly unlikely that Moses was referring to our *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, least of all because the forty-two letter name of God is not a topic addressed in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. I believe that it is more likely that the locution initially refered to local readers of *Sefer Ha-Bahir*. Not only is it "a hitherto unknown midrash" that was

---

[42] Meroz, "And I Was Not There," p. 186: "Perhaps even *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* itself is made from multiple literary strata, and therefore multiple narrative strata."

[43] Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 184.

[44] See Scholem, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moses of Burgos: The Disciple of Rabbi Isaac," *Tarbiz*, Vol. V (1934), p. 51 [Hebrew].

[45] See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 183, and p. 393, n. 104.

[46] See Lowe, *Meshal Haqadmoni*, p. xvii.

beginning to be held in high esteem at this period,[47] but in a passage from his Commentary to the Torah (Gen. 1:3), Nahmanides speaks of the *Bahir* in strikingly similar terms: "Our rabbis have in this matter a midrash concerning a hidden secret" ("*midrash be-sod ne'lam*").[48] Nahmanides is certainly not saying that the *Bahir*'s title is *midrash be-sod n'elam*, but the almost identical locutions might indicate that in the latter half of the thirteenth-century, this was an epithet attached to the *Bahir* among Spanish kabbalists. What changed then between Moses of Burgos' use of the locution to refer to his contemporary kabbalists (and perhaps in reference to readers of the *Bahir*), Joseph Angelet's use of it to refer to another "unknown" midrash (i.e., zoharic literature), and the printers' adoption of "*Midrash ha-Ne'lam*" as the title for one small section within their bibliographical invention, *Sefer ha-Zohar*?

In late fifteenth century Spain, many rabbis still used *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* as a title for all of Zohar, for instance throughout *Akedat Yizhak*, authored by Isaac Arama (c. 1420-1494).[49] Isaac Aboad of Castile testifies explicitly to this co-identification in an epistle: "I heard that it is written in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, which is *Sefer ha-Zohar*…."[50] Abraham Saba (1440-1508) is the sole Spanish exception to this trend. Throughout his *Zeror ha-Mor* on the Bible, he uses *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* (some twenty-eight times) as a title for select parts of the Zohar (i.e., he also uses *Sefer Ha-Zohar* to refer to regular sections of Zohar some forty times). Saba is a fascinating figure in this story, as he testifies that before he was forced to flee Portugal he had many versions of the Zohar, which he had to leave behind: "It will not be believed when it will be told/ that I had editions upon editions ("*mahadurot*")/ of the books of Zohar (*"sifrei ha-Zohar*)..."[51] His library of multiple Zohar editions ("*mahadurot*") suggests that his use of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* as a title for select parts of Zohar might be based on an earlier Zohar manuscript (titled *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, in the Spanish tradition) lost to history when it was stolen from him.

The earliest uses of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* to refer to specific sections of Zohar occur in Safed, but they do not refer to *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* on Genesis. In *Beis Yosef* (written before 1550), Joseph Karo (1488-1575) uses the locutions *Midrash ha-Ne'lam to Song of Songs*[52] and *Midrash Ruth ha-Ne'lam*.[53] Similarly, (as far as I can tell) Moses Cordovero never references

---

[47] See Daniel Abrams, *The Book of the Bahir: An Edition Based on the Earliest Manuscripts* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 1994), pp. 1-54 [Hebrew].

[48] Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Genesis, 1:3.

[49] See Huss, *The Zohar*, p. 76.

[50] See Isaac's commentary on the Tur (MS New York 01961), cited by Moshe Hallamish, "Joseph Karo—Kabbalah and Halakhic Decisions," *Da'at*, Vol. 21 (1988), p. 87 [Hebrew]:
ושמעתי שכתו׳ במד׳ הנעלם שהוא ס׳ הזוהר שאין לקרו׳ אלא א׳ וראוי לחוש לדבריו אם האמת הוא כך שאני לא ראיתיו כתוב אלא ששמעתי.

[51] See Abraham Gross, *Iberian Jewry from Twilight to Dawn: The World of Rabbi Abraham Saba* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 68-72. Cf. Huss, *The Zohar*, p. 85.

[52] *Beit Yosef*, *Orakh Hayim* 31.

[53] *Beit Yosef*, *Orakh Hayim* 182, 183, and *Hoshen Mishpat* 2. Moshe Hallamish, "Joseph Karo," claims that at the time he wrote *Beit Yosef*, Karo did not have access to all sections of zoharic literature.

Midrash ha-Ne'lam to Genesis.[54] Hence, for now, all we can conclude is that in the first half of the sixteenth century, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* became a signifier that was not synonymous with "the Zohar." Instead it either referenced a specific collection of zoharic materials (as per Saba) or *midrashim* on the *megillot*. It is not inconceivable then that soon afterwards (either right before the first editions were published in the late 1550's or by the Cremona and Mantua printers themselves) *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* was extended as a title to those sections of Zohar on Genesis that are stylistically distinct but never received a distinct title. We can only hope that future textual scholarship will shed further light on the bibliographical history of the enigmatic midrash now known as *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.

Given the current historical haze surrounding the emergence and bibliographical evolution of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, this dissertation seeks less to apply the tools of philology to discover the origins of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* than to analyze the rabbinic discourses and disciplines of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. The following section introduces the models of rabbinic disciplines and interdisciplinarity in Late Antiquity, which provide the backbone for the interdisciplinarity of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s own literary project.

II. A Heap of Nuts: On Rabbinic Interdisciplinarity

Throughout late antiquity, rabbinic disciplines were typically formulated as a trivium: *midrash, halakhot*, and *aggadot*.[55] Some early sources, however, add *mishnah* and/or *talmud* to this taxonomy of disciplines.[56] Throughout this dissertation, I speak of rabbinic interdisciplinarity to refer to the use of rhetoric or styles of thought of one rabbinic discipline in the framework of another rabbinic discipline. One of the more suggestive reflections on this sort of disciplinary

---

[54] For instance, in *Or Ne'erav*, Cordovero writes:

הספרים שידבק בהם האדם להשגיח בהם, הם, חבורי הרשב"י ע"ה כמו הזהר והתקונים ורעיא מהימנא ושה"ש וסבא וינוקא ומהקודמים אליו, ספר יצירה, וספר הבהיר, ומדרש רות, ומדרש איכה מהזהר. ומהמאוחרים, מדרש מגלת אסתר מהזהר. וגם ספר מעין החכמה, ופרקי מרכבה, ופרקי מעשה בראשית, וכיוצא, וקצת פקודין הנמצאים להרשב"י ע"ה.

[55] On disciplinary lists in rabbinic literature, see Eugene B. Borowitz, *The Talmud's Theological-Language Game: A Philosophical Discourse Analysis* (Albany: State University of New York, 2006), pp. 13-19. On the terminological fluidity of these "disciplines," see H. Albeck's note in L. Zunz, *The Sermon in Israel and its Historical Development*, supplemented by H. Albeck (Jerusalem, 1954) p. 237, n. 18 [Hebrew]. Given the lack of institutions during the early-rabbinic period, there existed a high degree of curricular and disciplinary instability. See, for instance, Tosefta, *Sotah*, 7:13 and *Avot De-Rabbi Natan* A, 8. On the history of rabbinic institutions in late antiquity, see Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "Social and Institutional Settings of Rabbinic Literature," in eds. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 58-74.

[56] See Tosefta, *Brachot*, 2:12 and Tosefta, *Sotah*, 7:13.

mingling occurs in *Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, a late-rabbinic text that is itself an unusual tapestry of rabbinic genres:[57]

> Rabbi Judah the Prince used to list the excellences of the Sages and give them a nickname: to Rabbi Tarfon, Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Johanan ben Nuri, and Rabbi Yose the Galilean.
>
> He called Rabbi Tarfon, "a heap of stones" or, some say, "a heap of nuts," because when a person removes one from the pile, they all go tumbling into each other. This is what Rabbi Tarfon was like. When a scholar came to him to ask him on some matter, Rabbi Tarfon would cite for him Scripture, Mishnah, Midrash, Halakhot, and Aggadot. When the scholar parted from him, he went away filled with blessing and goodness.
>
> He called Rabbi Akiva, "a well-stocked storehouse." To what might Rabbi Akiva be likened? To a laborer who took his basket and went out to the field. When he found wheat, he put some in his basket; when he found barley, he put that in;lentils, he put that in. Upon returning home, he sorted out the wheat by itself, the barley by itself, the lentils by themselves, the beans by themselves. This is how Rabbi Akiva assorted the whole Torah (like) different coins.[58]

This passage metaphorizes two approaches to rabbinic disciplinarity as two different modes of collecting, cataloging, and collaging. Each approach is linked to a sage, and given due praise. Like a heap of nuts that stands without any definite structure and is liable to scatter when a single nut is extracted, Rabbi Tarfon's pedagogy does not pay heed to the borders of rabbinic disciplines. His teaching style is comparable to the kinetics of loose nuts crashing down, knocking into each other, and setting each one on a new course. Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, values compartmentalization. Although he learns each of the disciplines during his school-house studies, when he is alone he works to differentiate each into its proper place, a methodology comparable to the interior-design of an agrarian storehouse that is careful to separate and label each of its foods.

It is important to note that Rabbi Akiva's rabbinic virtue is not exemplified here as a form of pedagogy, as is the case for Rabbi Tarfon, but as a style of literary composition. The concluding line, with its image of coins, is glossed accordingly by Rashi, the eleventh century

---

[57] In his introduction to Schechter's edition of *Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, Menahem Kister notes that it is one of the most variegated of rabbinic books: "It contains *memrot*, stories (including *aggadot* related to the destruction of the Temple), *midrashim* (some very lengthy exegeses on the Torah) which are brought tangentially; it includes many genres." See Menahem Kister, *Avot De-Rabbi Natan: Solomon Schechter Edition, with References to Parallels in the Two Versions and to the Addenda in the Schechter Edition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1997).

[58] *Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, 18 (MS JTS Rab. 25):

וכנגדן היה ר' יהודה הנשיא מונה שבחן של חכמים וקרא להם שם. לר' טרפון ולר' עקיבא ולר' אלעזר בן עזריה ולר' יוחנן בן נורי ולר' יוסי הגלילי. לר' טרפון קרא לו. גל אבנים. ויש אומרי'. גל של אגוזים. שכיון שנטל אחד מהן כולן מתגלגלין ובאין זה על זה. כך היה ר' טרפון דומה. כשתלמיד חכם נכנס אצלו לשאול ממנו דבר מביא לו מקרא ומשנה ומדרש והלכות ואגדות. נמצא אותו אדם יוצא מלפניו מלא טוב וברכה. לר' עקיבא קרא לו אוצר בלום למה ר' עקיבא דומה לפועל שנוטל קופתו ויצא לשדה מצא חטים נתן בה שעורים נותן בה עדשים נותן בה כשנכנס לתוך ביתו מברר חטים בפני עצמו שעורים בפני עצמו עדשים בפני עצמו פולין בפני עצמו כך היה ר' עקיבא עושה כל התורה מטביעות מטביעות.

French commentator, as follows (in his comments on a condensed version of our text, located in the Babylonian Talmud, *Gitin*, 67a):

> When Rabbi Akiva would learn from his masters, he would listen to a scriptural teaching, and afterwards a halakhic teaching, and afterwards a midrashic teaching, and afterwards an aggadic teaching. He focused his heart so as to return to each and set their proper wording (*gorsan*) until they were organized in his mouth. And he did not say, "I will learn scripture by itself, midrash by itself." Rather, when he became a great sage he made all the Torah into coins: he organized *midrash Sifrei* and *Sifra* by themselves, and he recited them by themselves to his students, and (so too) with halakhot by themselves and aggadot by themselves.[59]

The uniqueness of R. Akiva, according to Rashi, is located exclusively in his compositional style. During his years as a student, he would study the rabbinic disciplines together ("and he did not say, "I will learn scripture by itself, midrash by itself"). Only at a later stage in his life, did Rabbi Akiva extract each discipline and fashion singularly focused anthologies of midrash, Halakhah, and Aggadah: "when he became a great sage he made all the Torah into coins." Analogous to the material singularity of a currency, Rabbi Akiva creates treatises that only contain one type of rabbinic discourse.

Rabbi Akiva's model of discursive compartmentalization is emblematic of much of Palestinian rabbinic literature. While Rabbi Akiva is formally connected only to the production of the *Sifrei* and *Sifra* (two midrashim that are largely law related), all rabbinic texts produced in Palestine follow a similar model of generic specificity. Rabbi Tarfon's style, however, is much closer to the form of literary production that became iconic of Late-Antique Babylonian Jewry. Babylonian rabbis did not produce *midrashim*, books of Aggadah, or collections of *halakhot*. Instead, all forms of rabbinic discourse were woven together in one book, the Babylonian Talmud.[60] This stylistic fatness is reflected on in the Babylonian Talmud itself, when the Palestinian Rabbi Yohanan (*Sanhedrin*, 24a), perhaps condescendingly, explains the etymology of Bavel: "Rabbi Yohanan said: It (Babylonia) is mixed (*belula*) with scripture, mixed with mishnah, mixed with talmud." Playing off the closeness between the Hebrew name for Babylonia, *Bavel*, and the Hebrew word for a mixture, *belul*, Rabbi Yohanan's pun suggests that long before the actual literary production of the Babylonian Talmud (created several centuries after Rabbi Yohanan), Babylonia was viewed as a place of intellectual mingling, a region where disciplines were widely mixed together. This heterogeneity would lead later Jewish scholars to praise the exclusive study of the Babylonian Talmud as a sufficient form of pedagogy because of its inclusion of all other types of Jewish knowledge.[61] It is hence appropriate that a text as

---

[59] Rashi, BT *Gittin*, 67a:
כך ר"ע כשלמד מרבותיו שמע דבר מקרא מרבותיו ואחריו הלכה ואחריו מדרש ואחריו אגדה נתן לבו לחזור עליהן ולגורסן עד שהיו סדורין בפיו ולא אמר אלמוד מקרא לעצמו מדרש לעצמו אבל כשנעשה חכם גדול עשה כל התורה מטבעות מטבעות סידר מדרש ספרי וסיפרא לבדן ושנאן לעצמן לתלמידיו והלכות לעצמן ואגדות לעצמן.

[60] For a historical contextualization of the Babylonian Talmud's genre blending, see Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[61] Tosafot, *Avodah Zarah*, 19b

interdisciplinary as *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* (as will be demonstrated) adopts literary features of the Babylonian Talmud for its effort to integrate the newer, medieval rabbinic disciplines of philosophy and esotericism into the classical rabbinic discipline of midrash.

III. Summary of Chapters

The subsequent two chapters of this dissertation survey models of inter/disciplinarity at work in modern and medieval attempts to disconnect or connect the study of talmudic literature and the study of Jewish secrets. The first of those chapters analyzes the modern processes that engendered a disciplinary division between two academic fields of Jewish Studies: Rabbinics and Kabbalah. To tell this history, I map a mostly ignored chapter in the intellectual biography of Gershom Scholem, the founder of Kabbalah Studies—his decade long fascination with the Babylonian Talmud. I contend that this early period in Scholem's life sheds new light on why he came to theorize Kabbalah as a cultural project at tension with rabbinic Judaism. In the second half of the chapter, I explore the interdisciplinarity turn that has been transforming Kabbalah Studies since the 1990's, as scholars have begun locating new intersections between rabbinic and esoteric literature.

After documenting the modern trends that govern the disciplinary allegiances of Kabbalah Studies, Chapter Two, "Maimonides' Pardes," argues that Maimonides fashioned an unprecedented analogy between talmudic reasoning and the mode of reasoning needed to rediscover Jewish secrets (lost during the Jewish diaspora). I suggest that Maimonides' interdisciplinarity model adopts the strategies of a parallel Islamic attempt to bridge the methodologies of jurisprudence and theology.

The second section of this dissertation then argues that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, written just a few decades after Maimonides' writings began to circulate Spain, builds on and transforms Maimonides' model of esotericism by integrating elements of talmudic discourse into emerging medieval discourses of esotericism. More specifically, I demonstrate that three features of the Babylonian Talmud play a significant role in the theology, poetics, and rhetoric of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*: (1) talmudic reasoning as a creative, analytic practice; (2) talmudic composition as a temporally sensitive model of intertextuality; (3) talmudic rhetoric as a literary device that constructs an imagined scholastic community in action. Each of the dissertation's final three chapters are dedicated to case-studies of these phenomena.

Chapter Three investigates the practices and logic of *binah*—a rabbinic mode of analytical creativity—in rabbinic and esoteric sources. The first half of the chapter explores why and how *binah* became associated with talmudic reasoning. The second half begins by offering a survey of medieval Hebrew texts that advocate for performing analytical techniques connected to *binah* in order to expand received secrets into new esoteric knowledge. The final section then demonstrates that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is one of the first texts to shift the referent of *binah* from the creativity of the human scholar to the cosmic creativity of God, thereby generating an unprecedented analogy between talmudic creativity and divine creativity.

Chapter Four examines the medieval politics of esoteric creativity as negotiated in one extended section of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* (*Zohar Hadash* 25c-26a). I argue that this section's talmudic format—a Hebrew source cited before an Aramaic elaboration on that source—

diagrams a relationship between secrets (*sod*) and creative reasoning (*svara*). Paradigmatic of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s project at large, the compositional strategy of this narrative-homily casts secrets as ancient (mishnaic), and *sevara* as the method for reviving, questioning, and expanding secrets.

Chapter Five analyzes the talmudic rhetoric of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. I argue that its talmudic rhetoric produces a sense of scholastic sociality—an imagined scholarly community. Typically studied for its eroticization or fictionalization of mythic theosophy, zoharic literature also differs from other treatises of medieval Kabbalah in its underlying critique of spiritual experiences that are asocial. In place of the figure of the isolated contemplative, many zoharic texts advocate for a communal form of mysticism in which rabbinic friends walk together, share scriptural secrets with each other, and receive heavenly epiphanies together. I demonstrate that isolating the talmudic rhetoric of debate and collaboration used in different strata of *Sefer ha-Zohar* brings to light a genealogy of this communal spirituality and introduces a new method for historicizing the relationships between mysticism, esotericism, and sociality. In a field once dominated by phenomenological examinations of theological concepts, this chapter swerves toward an analysis of the rhetoric of community, collaboration, and dissensus in the earliest stratum of zoharic literature. After mapping earlier critiques of amoraic anachronisms in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam,* I suggest that a deeper anachronism has gone unnoticed. *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* also adopts two rhetorical practices that are central to the Babylonian Talmud: disputational rhetoric [*masa u-matan*] and connective rhetoric ["*d'amar*..."]. By mapping the evolution of these techniques from their legal, talmudic origins, to their role in the theological homilies of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, I argue that these literary techniques of the Talmud enable *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* to represent a social-field organized around talmudic practices of debate and collaboration. If previous chapters explored Talmud as a mode of creativity, here Talmud is imitated as mode of (representing) community.

Chapter One
Jewish Esotericism and Talmudic Studies in Modern Jewish Scholarship

Over the past three decades, scholars have begun to bridge together medieval Jewish esotericism and late-antique rabbinic midrash, two areas of study that have long been divided by disciplinary and periodizing borders.[62] This dissertation broadens this interdisciplinary trend by looking not to the poetic, theological, and narrative features of midrash but to the cognitive, compositional, and rhetorical features of the Babylonian Talmud. The core of the dissertation therefore maps instances where the textuality of the Babylonian Talmud and the analytical techniques used to study its legal logic mold the discourses and practices of medieval Jewish esotericism.[63] Before turning to these sites of intersection, this opening chapter examines how the Talmud came to play a more divisive role in modern times. I argue that the hegemony of the Babylonian Talmud within modern rabbinic culture catalyzed the disciplinary rift that distanced Kabbalah from Rabbinic Studies in mid-twentieth century Jewish scholarship.

Gershom Scholem, the founder of modern Kabbalah Studies, frequently portrays the relationship between Kabbalah and Rabbinic Judaism as one of cultural tension and rebellion. To trace the emergence of Scholem's outlook on rabbinics, this chapter's first section narrates an early chapter in Scholem's life (ages 16-24) when the study of Talmud became cathected with a combination of enthusiasm and critique. Throughout these years, Scholem had an almost daily practice of Talmud study and would write extensively about his passion for and disillusionment with the text. When brought together, the autobiographical documents of Scholem's talmudic courtship cast a new light on the ambivalent role that "the Rabbinic" plays in his Kabbalah scholarship. The chapter then concludes by documenting the revisionary work that has been done since the late nineteen-eighties to better study the nexus of Kabbalah and Rabbinics. I

---

[62] Some representative studies include, Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, trans. Batya Stein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jonathan Dauber, *Standing on the Heads of Philosophers: Myth and Philosophy in Early Kabbalah*, PhD Dissertation, NYU, 2004; Yair Lorberbaum, *In God's Image: Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Oded Yisraeli, *Temple Portals: Studies in Aggadah and Midrash in the Zohar* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016). On the historical context of this trend, see Dov Weiss, "The Rabbinic God and Medieval Judaism," *Currents in Biblical Research,* Vol. 15:3 (2017), pp. 369-390.

[63] Throughout this dissertation I use the term "Jewish esotericism," rather than "Kabbalah" or "Jewish mysticism," to refer to relevant medieval sources, for several reasons: (1) to accommodate the diverse range of medieval disciplines interested in the discovery, development, and, often, creation of Jewish secrets: astrologers, philosophers, scriptural interpreters, magicians, and, most important for our contexts, talmudists; (2) to avoid the theoretical problems inherent in grouping all Jewish esoteric traditions under the rubric of 'mysticism'; (3) to include traditions of Jewish esotericism (*torat ha-sod*) from the early medieval period that are not yet oriented around a notion of "Kabbalah" or the symbolic system of the sephirot; (4) "esoteric" translates a native term (*sod, raz, ne'lam*) in the discourses under study. On these questions of scholarly terminology, see Boaz Huss, *The Question about the Existence of Jewish Mysticism: The Genealogy of Jewish Mysticism and the Theologies of Kabbalah Research* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press, 2016) [Hebrew]. I reserve the term "Kabbalah" for discussions of modern scholarship where the term serves an important, disciplinary function.

demonstrate that these advancements can be organized into two paradigms of interdisciplinarity, and gesture toward yet a third model to be taken up in the next chapter. Together, these two sections provide a panoramic view of both the disciplinary borders that divide the fields of Talmudic and Jewish Esoteric Studies and the routes that have begun to undermine those borders.

I: "Don't Become Frum": Scholem's Talmudic Studies (1913-1921)

On December 2, 1911, at age fourteen, Gerhard Scholem was bar mitzvahed in a Reform synagogue in Berlin. He was a third-generation Berliner, born into a middle-class family, emblematic of the emancipated Jewish bourgeoisie of Wilhelminian Germany.[64] His great-grandparents migrated from Poland to Berlin during the nineteenth century, and like many of those families, slowly shed their Orthodox lifestyle for a more liberal Jewishness. In his first journal entry, written soon after his bar mitzvah, Gerhard traces his ancestry back to Glogau, a town in southwestern Poland. Dismayed that he is unable to locate any reputable rabbis within his lineage, Gerhard singles out a cantor "named Isaac from Koeben" as the sole member in his family who cultivated a religious vocation.[65]

Gerhard's bar mitzvah, delayed a year because his father deemed him too immature at age thirteen,[66] was a turning point in his Jewish journey. Closing that first journal entry, Gerhard confesses that "since that day I have been an Orthodox Jew (I hate the Linderstasse [synagogue], where my bar mitzvah took place)."[67] Orthodoxy was Gerhard's first of many rebellions. While it would not last long, it would not be his last attempt to overcome and escape his German-Jewish milieu.[68]

Soon after his bar mitzvah, Gerhard became a regular at the Orthodox services at the Alte Synagogue. He attended because of his appreciation for the congregants' rapport with the cantor (the congregants knew Hebrew, a feature lacking in Reform synagogues) and because Yetka, his first romantic interest, often sat in the women's section on Shabbat afternoons and would allow him to go on strolls with her after services.[69] A central impetus in his teenage turn to Orthodoxy was a desire for a deeper Jewish literacy and a working knowledge of Hebrew. That desire would

---

[64] See Gershom Scholem *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, trans. Harry Zohn (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2012), pp. 3-5 and pp. 21-31. For a social analysis of the Scholem family-unit and the distinct Jewish lifestyles of Gerhard and his three brothers, see Jay Howard Geller, "The Scholem Brothers and the Paths of German Jewry, 1914–1939," *Shofar*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter 2012), pp. 52-73. Cf. Nils Roemer, "Breaching the 'Walls of Captivity': Gershom Scholem's Studies of Jewish Mysticism," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 72:1 (1997), pp. 23-25. On the identity-politics of Jewish bourgeois families in Wilhelminian Germany, see Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 170-223.

[65] *Lamentations of Youth: The Diaries of Gershom Scholem, 1913-1919*, ed. and trans. by Anthony D. Skinner (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 22. Cf. Gershom Scholem *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, trans. Harry Zohn (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2012), pp. 1-20.

[66] See Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, p. 37.

[67] *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 22.

[68] See George L. Mosse, "Gershom Scholem as a German Jew," *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 10:2 (1990), pp. 117-133.

[69] See Scholem *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, pp. 39-40 and p. 57.

soon draw him into a ten-year study of the Babylonian Talmud, a commitment that tested his post-assimilatory Jewish identity and his estimation of rabbinic literature. In the following pages, I chart the contours of Scholem's Talmud study, attending to both the social dimensions of Talmud study in Weimar Germany and the existential and philosophical issues it raised for the precocious Gerhard. By examining Scholem's early devotion to rabbinic literature and analyzing the reasons why he eventually redirected his energies toward the study of Kabbalah, this section offers a new perspective on Scholem's formulation of Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism as disciplines and religiosities that are at odds with Rabbinic Judaism.

Gerhard Scholem first encountered the Babylonian Talmud, in its original form and language,[70] on a Sunday in April 1913.[71] Scholem was sixteen at the time, several years past the age when Orthodox boys typically begin talmudic training. But because the Scholems were not Orthodox and the Berlin Jewish Community Council refused to hire Talmud teachers for any of its religious day schools, Jewish teenagers from liberal families had little access to talmudic education. Gerhard overcame these social handicaps with the help of a few Conservative Rabbis who organized a talmudic study group for teenagers, facilitated by an Orthodox teacher in a small synagogue on Dresdenerstrasse. Over the next four years, Rabbi Isaak Bleichrode—the great-grandson of one of Eastern Europe's talmudic luminaries, Rabbi Akiva Eiger—taught Gerhard how to learn the Talmud,[72] to navigate its routes of logic, and to follow the cadences of its Aramaic grammar.[73]

At the age of eighty, many decades after Gerhard emigrated to Palestine and took on a Hebrew first name, Gershom Scholem spoke of his inaugural encounter with the Talmud as an experience that jolted and restructured his Jewishness: "If I ask myself whether I ever had what one might call an *Erlebnis* [a living experience] in my relationship to things Jewish, I can only give one answer: it was the thrill I experienced on a Sunday in April 1913 when Bleichrode taught me to read the first page of the Talmud in the original."[74]

Scholem's word choice is bewildering. For many early-twentieth-century Jews, *Erlebnis* was a fraught concept. Among young Jews living in pre-war Berlin, the concept was associated with the neo-romanticism of Martin Buber and the Jewish youth movements that were fashioned

---

[70] In a journal entry from February, 24. 1913, Gerhard writes that he had just read Samson Raphael Hirsch's *Beziehung des Talmuds* (1884), and was deeply disappointed: "The reader fails to get a picture of the Talmud. On the basis of the passages he cites, one would think that the Talmud is composed of exclusively moral proverbs and the like, which isn't the case." See *Lamentations of Youth*, pp. 24-25.

[71] Details in this paragraph are drawn from Scholem's own accounts in Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, pp. 46-48; and Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2012), pp. 8-9.

[72] "One did not study the Talmud, one 'learned' it." Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, p. 48.

[73] Throughout his long life, Scholem held Isaak Bleichrode (1867-1954) in the highest esteem. In Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1981), p. 21, he relates an exchange he had with Walter Benjamin in 1915: "I commended to Benjamin my teacher Isaak Bleichrode, the very pious, modest, and reclusive rabbi of a small private synagogue association in our neighborhood. This great-grandson of one of the last great Talmudists of Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century had a great gift for interpreting a page of Talmud and teaching the Jewish tradition generally." (Benjamin declined Scholem's offer.)

[74] Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, p. 47.

after the *Wandervogel*, a German youth movement dedicated to hiking as a method of experiencing the natural and agrarian dimensions of German history and society.[75] In opposition to the abstractness of historical understanding, *Erlebnis* was touted as a technique that could bring one into immediate contact with the living embers of one's heritage—a solution for overcoming the historical distantiation that ailed young German Jews in search of a richer Jewish identity. One of these groups, the Blau-Weiss youth group, would embark on Sunday hikes, filled with Hebrew sing-alongs and community-building exercises, in hopes of experiencing a rural Jewish culture that was unburdened of urban utilitarianism. After going on two such outings with Blau-Weiss, Gerhard decided that the type of Jewishness he was seeking could not be cultivated by a hike, by camaraderie, or by the anti-intellectualism of *Erlebnis*.[76]

Martin Buber, a mentor to a majority of the Jewish youth movements,[77] stressed the importance of *Erlebnis* as the engine of Jewish renaissance.[78] For modern Jewish culture to flourish again, Buber preached, Jews would need to look beyond the objective forms of Jewish religiosity and reacquaint themselves with Judaism's core experiences, its *urerlebenis*—mystical, untrammeled experiences of the Jewish spirit.[79] Young German Jews would only overcome their existential alienation from Jewish tradition if they "experienced" their Judaism.

A few young Jews at the time, however, were not enamored of Buber or the prestige of religious experience.[80] When Scholem and Walter Benjamin met in August of 1916 they forged their teenage friendship around a shared antipathy for the Jewish popularization of *Erlebnis*. In a journal entry from that period, Scholem states that their friendship was sparked by their shared critique of religious experience:

---

[75] On the role of *Erlebnis* among German youth-movements, see Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, *The Rhythm of Eternity: The German Youth Movement and the Experience of the Past, 1900-1933* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), pp. 56-74. On the Jewish youth-movements in Germany, see Chanoch Rinott, "Major Trends in Jewish Youth Movements in Germany," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* XIX (1974) pp. 87-90; and Glenn R. Sharfman, "Whoever Has the Youth, Has the Future: The Jewish Youth Movement in Germany, 1900-1936: A Study in Ideology and Organization," Ph.D dissertation, The University of North Carolina, 1989, especially pp. 72-93.

[76] See Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, pp. 58-59.

[77] See Chaim Schatzker, "Martin Buber's Influence on the Jewish Youth Movement in Germany," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* XXIII (1978), pp. 151-171.

[78] See Asher D. Biemann, "The Problem of Tradition and Reform in Jewish Renaissance and Renaissancism," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 8 (2001), pp. 58-87.

[79] See Phil Huston, *Martin Buber's Journey to Presence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), pp. 30-35.

[80] In a journal entry from November, 6, 1916, Scholem frames his distaste for *Erlebnis* in terms of German-Jewish identity-politics: "One of the deep roots and connections of 'Deutschjudentum' to this impostering with Erlebnis lies herein: As a matter of fact, when one wishes to 'experience' [*erleben*] in Germany, one will always have a 'German-Jewish' experience. It is no wonder that the Erlebnis-people are so German-Jewish, but the important thing is not: to experience oneself, but to know oneself, and that is hard, very hard and for most much too inconvenient. If one were to do so he would never fall into 'German-Jewish' arms, but he who 'experiences the landscape,' who experiences this and that and absolutely everything, he saves himself from the ultimate Jewish demand. With Erlebnis one remains always a German-Jew, with Erlebnis one cannot go to Zion." See *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 147.

> During our entire period together we spoke an awfully lot about Judaism: about going to Palestine and 'agrarian Zionism,' about Ahad Ha-Am and 'justice,' but mostly about Buber, from whom after these four days not so much as anything remained. Benjamin was not wrong, when as he bade me farewell he said, were I to meet Buber I should give him a barrel of tears. Not that I learned anything in this matter from Benjamin. On the contrary, for more than nine months I thought exactly the same as he; only one point now became also verbally clear to me: the repudiation of the value of *Erlebnis*. From here is the question, the 'key question,' one may say: 'Have you already had the Jewish *Erlebnis*?'...Benjamin sought to induce me to include in [an article I was to write on Buber and his youthful followers], a decisive rejection of *Erlebnis*-cronies: Down with *Erlebnis*![81]

Scholem did not believe that the immediacy of experience should be promoted as the catalyst for religious revitalization. Instead, he began to foster for himself a more textually mediated encounter with the Jewish past.[82] Only the painstaking study of history, he believed, with its recourse to the artifacts, texts, and archives of the past, could sustain a reawakening of Judaism. It is worth wondering why, then, Scholem describes his first encounter with the textual remnants of post-biblical Judaism as an *Erlebnis*, the very concept that text study was supposed to combat.

Despite Scholem's ecstatic first experience of Talmud study, his slow acquaintanceship with the Talmud—a complex and often challenging corpus—was not painless, especially once he began to distance himself from Orthodoxy several months afterwards. The journals he kept during his first years of Talmud study capture his competing emotions as he struggled with the discrepancies between his own radical, emergent Jewish identity and the Orthodox provenance of Talmud study. In a journal entry from November 1914, a year and half after he started studying Talmud, Scholem writes: "This evening I'll study Gemara *Schir* with Bleichrode. I'm eager to know what he'll say when he finds out I'm no longer Orthodox. Still, I'm going with a good conscience, and not because of religion but to learn the Talmud thoroughly. And whoever wishes to do so has to go to the Orthodox."[83] "A good conscience" aptly describes Scholem's desire to find his own grounding in the Jewish tradition without adapting the religiosity of those who, at the time, held the intellectual keys to that tradition. Studying the Talmud with an Orthodox Rabbi for less than Orthodox reasons gave Scholem an early opportunity to both fashion and struggle with his own idiosyncratic Jewishness. To dedicate himself to a text whose entryways were guarded by Orthodox Jews, he first had to grapple with his own unorthodoxy.

---

[81] Cited in Paul Mendes-Flohr, "The Spiritual Quest of the Philologist," in *Gershom Scholem: The Man and His Work*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (New York: State University of New York,1994), pp. 13-14. For an account of Scholem's complicated relationship to Martin Buber, see David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 9-34.

[82] On the background to and content of Scholem and Benjamin's critique of Buber's "cult of *Erlebnis,*" see Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 122-130; and Nils Roemer, "Breaching the 'Walls of Captivity': Gershom Scholem's Studies of Jewish Mysticism," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 72:1 (1997), pp. 23-41.

[83] *Lamentations of Youth*, p.37.

Alongside his meditations on the role that religious identity plays in talmudic learning, Scholem articulates a series of critiques directed at the sacredness of the Talmud. The first of these, written on New Year's 1916, depicts the Talmud as a forlorn catacomb of fragments:

> Let's be honest. The Talmud is not a palace with many passages, to use the metaphor people like to use out of phony romanticism. The Talmud is a heap of ruins in which occasionally magnificent fragments can be discovered and upon which one can build something again. Still, it's a field of ruins, a gigantic structure that has unfortunately caved in. Ritual law is not an amphitheater; it's a field of corpses. The corpses whisper like spooks, as if they were alive. It's a heroic book, with an unusual object of heroism. The main point of this heroism is not what's being fought for (as an absolute) but *that* a struggle is being waged for something recognized as absolute.[84]

Two-and-a-half years after his original talmudic *Erlebnis*, the talmudic texts had become ghostly, a literary relic incapable of becoming animate again, not even by the romanticization of specters and ruins so popular among artists and intellectuals in the early twentieth century.[85] Despite the Talmud's occasional magnificence, Scholem expresses disbelief in its ability to rescue the Jewish past from the Talmud's literary structures that, over time, have caved in around it. Stripped of its capacity to coherently teach Jewish content, Scholem highlights the Talmud's minimal heroism as its redeeming contribution to Jewish culture: the Talmud models a tireless Jewish commitment to intellectual and moral struggle, the one absolute Jewish value. As Scholem notes at the close this entry, the policies and arguments of these talmudic struggles are less significant than the brute fact that they are performed repeatedly, on each page of the Talmud.

Ten days later, Scholem returns to the same concern to articulate an even more fundamental critique of the Talmud:

> For me, at least, I've known for quite some time that the Bible is a holy book, whereas the Talmud isn't. This is the major difference. Yes, within these entirely trivial comments resides the main difference between the deepest strata of Talmudic wisdom and the religiosity of the Bible—and this is the sense of being holy, the sense of something personally being born into us. It may be that we're born with the legalistic Talmudic

---

[84] *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 92.

[85] Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1925) contains a laudatory section on the role of ruins in the baroque imagination. On the aesthetic theory of ruins that emerges from that work, see Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), pp. 66-81. For a broader analysis of the early-twentieth-century German fascination with architectural and literary ruins, see Naomi Stead, "The Value of Ruins: Allegories of Destruction in Benjamin and Speer," *Form/Work: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Built Environment*, no. 6, October 2003, pp. 51-64. On Scholem's use of ruins as a metaphor for the history of Kabbalah, see Moshe Idel, *Old Worlds, New Mirrors: On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), pp. 113-117. On the shared discourse of Scholem and Benjamin on ruins, see Paula Schwebel, "The Tradition in Ruins: Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem on Language and Lament," in *Lament in Jewish Thought: Philosophical, Theological, and Literary Perspectives*, eds. Ilit Ferber and Paula Schwebel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 277-304.

> spirit, and with a legalistic dialectic, and all other such advantages and disadvantages. But deep down we know perfectly well that none of this is holy. What is holy is only that which is intact, and only the Torah and the prophets are holy.[86]

Scholem's adolescent rebellion against his more secular upbringing, wherein the Bible was the sole bastion of Jewish literacy, had arrived at a moment of crisis. The legal dialectics of the Talmud capture something fundamental about the Jewish spirit's commitment to legal rectitude. But in comparison with the Bible, the Talmud fails Scholem's existential litmus test of holiness —when one reads the Talmud, nothing is "born into us." A two-year-plus pursuit of the living legacy of rabbinic Judaism had seemingly been for naught, as it led Scholem to believe that the Talmud falls short of replicating or advancing the sacral style of the Hebrew Bible.

Scholem eventually quieted these philosophical and religious misgivings, at least for the time being, and resumed his Talmud studies. In late October of the same year, Scholem attests to a transformation in his relationship to the Talmud and Orthodoxy, an inner change that enabled him to return to his Talmud studies in good faith:

> My two-year-long flirtation with Orthodox Judaism, or rather with its deepest inner core has really been remarkable...The Talmud is another factor in all this, as I'm finding my way back to it after having consciously abandoned it. This is happening because I now understand things in a deeper and better way...Now I know that the driest "juristic" deliberation in the Talmud is religious. In a word: it is religious because Judaism desires justice.[87]

Long after renouncing his membership in the Agudah Yisrael, a nascent Orthodox youth movement, in May 1914, Scholem apparently continued to "flirt" with the "deepest inner core" of Orthodoxy, a core that, for him, centered around Talmud study. The exact factor that had led him to abandon the Talmud some ten-months earlier—the legalism of the Talmud—is now admired as the heart of Jewish religiosity: the pursuit of justice.

The following summer, in 1917, Scholem was finally drawn into the tumult of WWI and had to report for military duty in Allenstein (now part of Poland). While this event marked the end of his four-year talmudic apprenticeship with Isaak Bleichrode, it was not the culmination of Scholem's talmudic studies. After feigning symptoms of dementia for weeks on end, Scholem was released from military service and made his way to Jena in November 1917. Once he arrived

---

[86] *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 97. The Bible held a special place for the young Gerhard. In a journal entry from November, 17, 1914 (*Lamentations of Youth*, p. 36), he writes: "I am reading the Bible. There is no book in the entire world I read more. Each time it hits me with something fresh...I'm finding that I get much more out of the Bible than any Orthodox Jew. The reason for this must be—as Buber says—because I understand and honor it as a subject, rather than an object of religiosity. To take the Bible as an object would be terrible!" Cf. Scholem's journal entry from December, 4, 1914 (*Lamentations of Youth*, pp. 43-45).

[87] *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 145.

at the University of Jena, Scholem beseeched an Eastern European, Orthodox medical student to tutor him in Talmud.[88]

By now his Talmud lessons were no longer a side hobby. In April 1918, Scholem delivered a lecture on the development of the Talmud to a large crowd in the neighboring city of Erfurt. He describes his reasons for giving a public lecture on the Talmud in a letter sent shortly afterwards: "I tried my best to explain the spiritual foundation of the text in as clear a manner as possible….beginning with an internal metaphysical concept (constituting the spiritual essence of the Talmud) in connection with the historical development, I wanted to elaborate on the gradual and necessary formation of the Talmud."[89] Unfortunately, we do not possess any further record of his Talmud lecture, which would shed considerable light on Scholem's early theories of the Talmud. His claim to have constructed a relationship between the metaphysics and history of the Talmud is formally analogous to how Scholem approached Kabbalah—as a history that unfolds, almost necessarily, from conflicting, metaphysical axioms.[90] The brief, first-hand reference to this lecture indicates that Scholem was working to formulate and communicate an original approach to the Talmud, and testifies to a deeper immersion in talmudic historiography than is typically attributed to Scholem.

In 1919, Scholem moved to Munich to pursue his doctoral studies with the orientalist, Fritz Hommel. His academic life did not deter him from rededicating himself to his Talmud-studies. Over the next few years in Munich, he worked through the tractate of *Ketubot*—a central and demanding section of the Babylonian Talmud—with the help of the Rabbi of the local Orthodox synagogue, Dr. Heinrich Ehrentreu, an émigré from Hungary, whom Scholem once described as "a dyed-in-the-wool *lamdan*."[91] In an interview with Dan Miron conducted in the late nineteen-seventies, Scholem shared an anecdote that speaks to how his peers perceived his ongoing talmudic commitments:

> (S. Y.) Agnon and I were together in Munich for six months before his wedding...One time, we were walking together in Munich and I told him about my daily-life. At the time I was studying Talmud, every day, with a very great talmudic Rabbi, Rabbi Ehrentreu, and I told him all about it. One day, Agnon confronted me on the street….and he said, "Schulem" —he always called me "Schulem," never "Scholem," as he spoke with a Galician accent—"Schulem, I suspect that you want to be *frum*," using that exact term.

---

[88] Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, p. 108.

[89] Gershom Scholem, *A Life in Letters, 1914-1982*, trans. Anthony D. Skinner (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) p. 69; see also his comments on p. 36 [10/9/1916].

[90] See David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 94-111.

[91] Scholem, *A Life in Letters,* p. 107.

> The word '*frum*' has no good translation. He then said to me, "Schulem, I suspect that you want to be *frum*; don't become *frum*!"[92]

Agnon's suspicions of Scholem's *frum* fantasy exemplify the cultural politics surrounding Talmud study at the time. Unlike his study of Kabbalah (with its more inchoate Jewish identity-politics), Scholem's study of Talmud, especially when conducted in a non-academic context with an Orthodox Rabbi, suggested to Agnon that he was on his way towards becoming *frum*, a Yiddish term for someone who adheres to Orthodox forms of religiosity. At the time, neither Agnon (who had grown up *frum*) nor Scholem were very *frum*, but Scholem's daily Talmud study triggered something in Agnon, a fear that Scholem would lose his quirky Jewish secularism and fall into the ranks of *frumkeit*. Scholem seems to have paid little heed to Agnon, as he continued to study with Rabbi Ehrentreu throughout his doctoral studies, which did not lead him to become *frum*.

Scholem's devotion to unraveling the pages of the Talmud did not impact his doctoral studies. He chose to write his dissertation on *Sefer ha-Bahir*, one of the earliest and most arcane books of Kabbalah. In part, that choice was motivated by his growing sense that Orthodoxy, and culture of talmudic study at its core, could not account for the resiliency of diasporic Judaism. For Scholem, only a Judaism of mystical tendencies (as captured in *Sefer ha-Bahir*) could explain the durability of Jewish culture; and only a theology of a dynamic, affectable, and mythic God could explain the Jewish adherence to particularistic rituals and laws throughout the difficult vicissitudes of exile.[93] Many years later, Scholem attributed his turn to Kabbalah to an appreciation of Jewish history as a dialectical process of law (Halakhah) and mysticism:

> I was interested in the question: Does halakhic Judaism have enough potency to survive? Is Halakhah really possible without a mystical foundation? Does it have enough vitality of its own to survive for two thousand years without denigrating? I appreciated Halakhah without identifying with its imperatives. This question was tied up with my dreams about the Kabbalah through the notion that it might be Kabbalah that explains the survival of the consolidated force of halakhic Judaism.[94]

Halakhic culture, on its own, Scholem argues, could not overcome the catastrophes of Jewish history. Rather, there had to be some other explanation for the resiliency of diasporic Jews, some theological mystique unbeknownst to the Orthodox readers, teachers, and adherents of the Talmud. Only the cultural impact of Kabbalah, with its mystical model of Jewish ritual and

---

[92] *Continuity and Rebellion: Gershom Scholem in Speech and Dialogue*, ed. Abraham Shapira (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1994), p. 74. For a videorecording of the interview, see *Ha-Arkhion: Otzrot Ha-Hinukhit*, "Gershom Scholem-Shai Agnon, Part II," Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, December 5, 2016. Web. June 6, 2017. On Scholem's relationship with Agnon, see Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, pp. 117-125; and Dai Laor, "Agnon in Germany, 1912-1924: A Chapter of a Biography," *AJS Review*, Vol. 18:1 (1993), pp. 75-93.

[93] See Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), pp. 87-117.

[94] Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, p. 19.

identity, can explain the endurance of halakhic Judaism. Once Scholem sensed that Jewish resilience could not be understood through the framework of talmudic texts and legal theories of halakhic Judaism, he shifted his intellectual energies toward Jewish trends that run parallel to Halakhah. His Orthodox Talmud teachers had little wisdom to share about these trends of Jewish mysticism.[95]

By the time Scholem emigrated to Palestine in 1923, he was fully committed to analyzing and mapping the fragmented literary history of Kabbalah. Later in his life, Scholem speaks to this intellectual evolution—from Talmud to Kabbalah—in remarks that conclude his retelling of his early talmudic *Erlebnis*:

> It is safe to say that the encounter with Judaism, which I had in the years of my youth, kindled my intellect and my imagination equally. But this encounter was far removed from the vision that crystallized after an occupation of fifty or sixty years with so many aspects of this phenomenon. What fascinated me in those days, the power of a tradition thousands of years old, was strong enough to shape my life and to cause me to progress from the absorption of a learner to that of a researcher and thinker. In the process, however, my vision of that tradition has changed decisively...What I thought myself capable of grasping at the time—I filled many notebooks on the subject in my youth—became transformed as I grasped it, and the comprehension that I strove for turned into something that resisted conceptualization all the more emphatically the older I became; for it revealed a secret life, one which I had to acknowledge as being impossible to conceptualize, and which seemed portrayable only through symbols.[96]

In hindsight, Scholem characterizes the impact of his ten years of Talmud study more as a training in critical scholarship than as an attainment of rabbinic knowledge.[97] The Talmud demands of its readers a high level of participation, both logical and literary. Thus Scholem's decade-long immersion in talmudics taught him that "reading" was not a separate act from "thinking," a lesson that would greatly impact Scholem's career as a critical reader of kabbalistic texts. But as Scholem delved deeper into those kabbalistic texts, he began to rethink the very nature and media of Jewish wisdom. The knowledge that Scholem sought from the Jewish past was increasingly one that defied concepts or logic: the terrain of talmudic literature. His intellectual aims now centered on extracting the "secret life" of Judaism, an esoteric region of

---

[95] In 1915, when Scholem first became curious about Kabbalah, he bought a copy of the Zohar but could not make sense of it or find anyone who could teach him Zohar, not even his Rabbi (almost certainly a reference to Rabbi Bleichrode). When he and some friends pressed the Rabbi to teach them Kabbalah, "he suggested that a small group of us read the *musar* [ethical] book *Reishit Hokhmah* together. We learned till he stopped. He said, 'children I can't explain the quotations from the Zohar I don't understand them.'" See Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, p. 17.

[96] Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, pp. 48-49.

[97] In the subsequent paragraph (*From Berlin to Jerusalem*, p. 49), Scholem highlights the three elements of the Talmud that impressed him in his youth: (1) its uncensored relationship to tradition; (2) its stylistic laconism; and (3) its dialogicity—"the dialogue of the generations, uninterrupted for so many centuries, whose protocol is the Talmud. Here truly prevailed that 'dialogic' life which the later Buber so emphatically placed at the center of his philosophy."

Jewish culture that could be expressed and transmitted only through the art of symbols: the terrain of Kabbalah. The Talmud, with its focus on explicating the norms and concepts of Jewish life, is not the best text if one is seeking the elements of Judaism that transcend the limitations of common language.

Erlebnis, then, is the perfect term to describe Scholem's inaugural encounter with the Babylonian Talmud, for the exact reasons Scholem criticized the term. Reading the Talmud for the first time with Dr. Bleichrode gave Scholem a "thrill,"[98] an experience of a region of Judaism that had previously been withheld from his upbringing and education. Unlike baser thrills, this one impacted the course of his life—his *Erlebnis* was a storm, not an anchor. Yet, as Scholem shifted the nature of his Jewish search toward the ineffable, his dedication to the Talmud inevitably waned. Scholem's use of the term "*Erlebnis*" to capture the significance of his first encounter with the Talmud both underscores the event's importance and undercuts its gravity. An *Erlebnis* can be powerful, and even foundational, but its indiscriminate passion is a faulty gauge of what will become central to a person's Jewishness.

Scholem believed that the inability of an *Erlebnis* to differentiate between religious pleasure and religious wisdom is especially problematic for young adults who are just beginning to create their Jewish identity and lifestyle. In "Farewell: An Open Letter to Dr. Siegfried Bernfeld and Against the Readers of this Journal," a polemical essay Scholem published in 1918 in the newly created Zionist journal *Jerubbaal*, he lampoons the German-Jewish youth culture for its blind dedication to *Erlebnis*:

> Since (the) youth could not keep silent or speak, could not see or do, it had living experiences (*Erlebnisse*). In these pages, even the Torah has been turned into an *Erlebnis*. The vague mysticism to which Judaism is offered up on the altar of *Erlebnis*, that is the true crown of the youth movement. There is nothing great, from landscape to God and Torah, that in *Erlebnis* has not been connected to chatter. And they even had a living experience of the war when that was still fashionable...But in truth the *Erlebnis* is, after all, the chimerical, the absolute turned into chatter.[99]

While it's unlikely that Scholem appraised his youthful passion for the Talmud as a chimerical affection, it is not difficult to see how and why Scholem's first experience with the Talmud would undergo the same critique that he leveled against all *Erlebnis*: Jewish experiences are not informative. Experiences are unable to generate a genuine knowledge of the Jewish tradition or of the fragmentary character of that tradition in its modern guise.

Moshe Idel, one of Scholem's most significant successors, credits Scholem's fateful turn to Kabbalah to a lack of familiarity with the sources of classical Judaism: "Devoid of an intimate relation to those Jewish classical sources that informed most of the Jewish mystics, Scholem found the solution for his quandary as to the causes which contributed to the survival of Judaism

---

[98] Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, p. 47.

[99] Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, pp. 57-58. On Siegfried Bernfeld and his journal *Jerubbaal*, see Russell Jacoby, *The Repression of Psychoanalysis: Otto Fenichel and the Freudians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 39-61.

in religious material *en vogue* during his early reading on Kabbalah, viz. (Joseph Franz) Molitor, and his intellectual milieu."[100] The documents collated here on Scholem's early engagement with the Babylonian Talmud paint a different picture. When searching for the mystical proclivities of Judaism, Scholem did not overlook rabbinic literature out of ignorance. Rather, his belief that rabbinic culture and Jewish mysticism are incommensurate emerged out of his own experience grappling with the message and metaphysics of the Talmud. Scholem's sense of a foundational schism between Rabbinics and Kabbalah may be rightfully challenged, but it was not caused by a lack of familiarity with rabbinic texts. Rather, the history traced here of Scholem's ambivalent, decade-long relationship with the Babylonian Talmud paints a more complex picture of Scholem's relinquishment of rabbinic study-culture and his formulation of Jewish mysticism as a sort of counter-Halakhah.

How might we best approach this entanglement of Scholem's early life experiences with his subsequent scholarship? Some insight may be gleaned by exploring how Scholem himself approached a similar problematic.

The majority of Jewish mystics did not produce or circulate confessional writings, a feature that distinguishes Jewish mystical literature from the autobiographical style of Islamic and Christian mystical writings. Scholem laments this lacuna because it inhibits the scholar from recovering a vibrant, multi-dimensional history of Kabbalah: "It is obvious that the absence of the autobiographical element is a serious obstacle to any psychological understanding of Jewish mysticism."[101] With Scholem we are more fortunate. Throughout his long life, he maintained personal journals and preserved his numerous epistolary exchanges. These confessional

---

[100] Moshe Idel, "Rabbinism versus Kabbalism: On G. Scholem's Phenomenology of Judaism," *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Oct., 1991), p. 290.

[101] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 16.

documents enable a "psychological understanding" of Scholem as a person and scholar. How do these intimate resources reorient our perception of Scholem's Kabbalah scholarship?[102]

The documentary traces of Scholem's talmudic studies do not necessarily generate a psychological rereading of Scholem's kabbalah scholarship. But the history of Scholem's fraught experience with rabbinic literature and his subsequent decision to turn to a more symbolic, mythic, and theosophic substratum of Jewish creativity provides a new lens onto Scholem's compartmentalization of Judaism into two opposing styles: a traditional/Orthodox/Rabbinic Judaism and an anarchic/subversive/mystical Judaism.[103]

The earliest evidence of this schism in Scholem's scholarship can be extracted from the classificatory work he produced as a librarian during his early years in Jerusalem. In 1927, Hugo Bergman (the acting director of the Hebrew University Library) and Scholem (the director of the Judaic collection) developed an adaptation of the Dewey Decimal Classification for the purposes of organizing the Judaic collection into broad area-topics and sub-thematic taxonomies. The resultant guide, *Seder ha-Miktso'ot be-Mada'e ha-Yahadut* (Jerusalem, 1927), divides the "296" class number, dedicated by Dewey to "Jewish Religion," into eight subclasses: (296.1) Religion, Theology, and Philosophy; (296.2) Antisemitism; (296.3) Prayer and *Minhagim* (Traditions); (296.4) Ethics and Homilies; (296.5) Halakhah after the closing of the Talmud; (296.6) Sects,

---

[102] For a maximalist position on the power of Scholem's autobiographical documents to generate new perspectives on his scholarship, see Benjamin Lazier, "Writing the Judenzarathustra: Geshom Scholem's Response to Modernity, 1913-1917," *New German Critique,* Vol. 85 (2002), pp. 33-65. See especially his comments on pp. 36-37: "Scholem described his diaries as a 'place of honesty, where I am alone with myself'; they afford, it seems, an unparalleled vantage. Moreover, a detailed grasp of Scholem's early years—"decisive. . . for his entire life," as he later wrote—proves indispensable for a proper understanding of his subsequent academic and political trajectory. It enables us to de-divinize Scholem, by revealing his monumental work, in part, as the highly contingent and idiosyncratic product of his youthful obsessions. In doing so, it on the one hand helps to open a cultural space for competing approaches to Kabbalah studies, and on the other, helps us better appreciate the true virtuosity and force of Scholem's researches." For a different perspective, focused on the relationship between the diaries of 'Gerhard' and the scholarship of 'Gershom,' see Michael Brenner, "From Self-Declared Messiah to Scholar of Messianism: The Recently Published Diaries Present Young Gerhard Scholem in a New Light," *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn, 1996), pp. 177-182. See also Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), pp. 4-9. More recently, Amir Engel, *Gershom Scholem: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 3, has proposed that the plot of Scholem's life and the plot of his kabbalistic historiography must be read in light of each other. In a letter, penned on January 13, 1958, Scholem responded with a vengeance to Zwi Werblowsky's critical review of his book on Sabbatai Zvi. Among his many criticisms, he addresses the very methodological issue that concerns us here: "I find myself confronted here with a phenomenon that is completely foreign to me—namely, a psychological interpretation of the factors determining the relation between a researcher and his field of study. A major part of your essay is devoted to such reflections, and I cannot understand your interest in it. Was it a bad joke that led you to write about me in such a way? Or did you think you had discovered something about my innermost soul that has not revealed itself to me? I can only shake my head" (*A Life in Letters*, p. 371). For a similarly cautious approach to this methodological question, with a different range of concerns, see Daniel Abrams, "Presenting and Representing Gershom Scholem: A Review Essay," Modern Judaism, Vol. 20, No. 2 (May, 2000), pp. 226-243.

[103] On Scholem's ambivalence to the notion of an "Orthodox mysticism," see Eliezer Schweid, *Judaism and Mysticism According to Gershom Scholem: A Critical Analysis and Programmatic Discussion* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 156-160.

Religious Movements, and *Torat ha-Sod* (Esotericism); (296.7) Folklore; (296.8) Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash. Books related to Kabbalah are included in 296.6 (296.65) alongside books on other Jewish sects, such as the Karaites (296.63), and other modes of Jewish mysticism, such as *Gnosis* ("mysticism during the talmudic and geonic period"). The literature of Kabbalah, according to this taxonomy, has more in common with sectarian rebels than with talmudic Rabbis.

Scholem's subsequent writings on Jewish mysticism further accentuate this taxonomical schema. When approaching the relationship between rabbinic culture and Jewish mysticism (typically relegated to Halakhah and Aggadah, respectively), Scholem transforms a pedagogical distinction (who studies Halakhah and who studies Aggadah) into a phenomenological dialectic ("mysticism" and "rabbinism" differ even as they dynamically affect each other) and a historiographical discontinuity (medieval Kabbalah does not emerge from Late Antique rabbinic traditions). Thus, when we assess Scholem's eventual decision to fashion the study of Kabbalah as an autonomous domain within the history of religions, detached from Rabbinic Studies,[104] we need to explore how his kabbalistic historiography engenders both a synchronic schism between mystical and rabbinic orientations, and a diachronic disjunction between the literatures produced by Late Antique rabbis and medieval kabbalists.

On the synchronic plane, Scholem plots "rabbinism" and "mysticism" as overlapping but distinct arenas of Jewish life. Commenting on the *Lebenzeit* of Hekhalot texts (written around the middle of the first-millennium), Scholem writes:

> Too great was the danger, in this period of ubiquitous Jewish and Christian heresies, that mystical speculation based on private religious experience would come into conflict with that "rabbinical" Judaism which was rapidly crystallizing during the same epoch. The 'Greater Hekhaloth' show in many and often highly interesting details that their anonymous authors were anxious to develop their 'Gnosis' within the framework of

---

[104] In 1925 Scholem became a lecturer of "Kabbalah" at the newly founded Institute for Jewish Studies, housed at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. At that time in the institute, several others, including J. N. Epstein, focused on the study of rabbinic literature. In 1936 the university created a new department, "Hebrew Philosophy and Kabbalah," co-run by Julius Gutman and Scholem. Over the following decades, many professors joined the department to teach Jewish philosophy, but Scholem remained the sole instructor in Kabbalah. On this institutional history, see Gerhard Scholem, "Kabbalah at the Hebrew University," *The Reconstructionist*, Vol. 3 (1937); Assad Selzer, *The History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: Who's Who Prior to Statehood: Founders, Designers, Pioneers* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2013), pp. 198-200; Daniel R. Schwartz, "From Rabbinical Seminaries to the Institute of Jewish Studies," in eds. Shaul Katz and Michael Heyd, *The History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: Origins and Beginnings* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1997), pp. 457-475; David N. Myers, "A New Scholarly Colony in Jerusalem: The Early History of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University," *Judaism*, Vol. 45:2 (1996), pp. 142-159; Joseph Dan, "The Beginning of Gershom Scholem's Time in the Hebrew University: Two Enigmas," *Ha'aretz*, March, 31, 2002, http://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.783870; and Shaul Katz, "Gershom Scholem and the Beginning of his Time at the Hebrew University," *Katharsis*, 3 (2005), pp. 144-163 [Hebrew]. On the history of this early period of Kabbalah scholarship more broadly, see Moran Gam Ha-Cohen, *Trends in Kabbalah Research in Israel, 1929–2010*, PhD Dissertation, Ben-Gurion University, 2010; and Boaz Huss, *The Question About the Existence of Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 52-59.

> Halakhic Judaism, notwithstanding its partial incompatibility with the new religious spirit; the original religious impulses active in these circles came, after all, from sources quite different from those of Orthodox Judaism.[105]

Scholem's anachronistic identification of Late Antique rabbinic culture with Orthodox Judaism mirrors his own experience in early twentieth-century Europe of Orthodox Jews as the sole teachers of rabbinic Judaism. The larger semantic slippages in this excerpt, between rabbinic Judaism, Halakhic Judaism, and Orthodox Judaism, inhibit Scholem from aptly studying the variety of discourses and Jewish identities that flourished in Late Antiquity. Ra'anan Boustan diagnoses this shortcoming of Scholem's approach to Late Antique Judaism: "Scholem's understanding of the inner dialectic between the mystical and the halakhic-normative dimensions *within* a single but multifaceted Judaism has unwittingly encouraged a binary view of the Jewish tradition, in which the mystical and the rabbinic represent two diametrically opposed forms of Judaism."[106] Scholem's commitment to a phenomenological schism that divides rabbinic law from Late Antique mysticism deterred him from studying the relationships forged throughout Late Antiquity between the sensibilities of religious life depicted in the Talmud and those depicted in more mantic, magical, and apocalyptic texts of the same period. In place of a hybrid model of Late Antique Judaism, Scholem views the Talmud as the bastion of Halakhic Judaism. Meanwhile, Hekhalot texts—even as they try, for heresiological reasons, to smuggle their mystical tropes into boundaries of rabbinism—expose the vast chasm between rabbinic and mystical forms of religiosity.

Scholem maintains that the schism between rabbinic and mystical propensities continues into the medieval period as an orienting factor in the formation of Kabbalah in Spain and France:

> There has been no lack of kabbalists who either had no learning whatsoever, or who lacked the proper rabbinic training. Thus enabled to look at Judaism from a fresh angle, these men frequently produced highly important and interesting ideas, and so there grew up, side by side with the scholarly Kabbalah of the Rabbis, another line of prophetic and visionary mysticism. The pristine enthusiasm of these early ecstatics frequently lifted the heavy lid of rabbinic scholasticism, and for all their readiness to compromise occasionally came into conflict with it.[107]

The socio-cultural divide between two forms of Jewishness is clearly articulated: scholasticism and rabbinic training on one side, enthusiastic and ecstatic mystics with little rabbinic education on the other. For Scholem, among the latter grouping are Spanish kabbalists such as Abraham Abulafia and Isaac ha-Kohen who were known to lack a robust rabbinic education. However, as Scholem was surely aware, these were historical outliers. At large, even those medieval Spanish

---

[105] Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 47.

[106] Ra'anan Boustan, "Rabbinization and the Making of Early Jewish Mysticism," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 101:4 (2011), p. 487.

[107] Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 125.

kabbalists who were not part of the rabbinic elite demonstrate a mastery of rabbinic texts and tropes, either legal or theological.[108]

On the diachronic plane, Scholem's historiography of Kabbalah counters the origin narratives of more traditional accounts of Kabbalah. Medieval kabbalists mainly attribute their esoteric lore to biblical and rabbinic characters. Some attribute the origins of their traditions to an angelic revelation of secrets to ancient figures like Moses and Adam, while others point to rabbinic figures as the progenitors of esoteric texts.[109] After years of archival labor, Scholem arrived at the conclusion that a documentary history of Kabbalah does not substantiate these origin stories. Rather, the principles of modern philology prove that the central themes of Kabbalah originate within the medieval context of its production and circulation.[110] Although Jewish mystical traditions can be dated as far back as the Second Temple period, Scholem stresses their discontinuity, both in terms of content and transmission, with medieval Kabbalah: "the forms of Jewish mysticism that appeared in the Middle Ages from around 1200 onward under the name 'Kabbalah' are so different from any earlier forms, and in particular from the Jewish gnosis of Merkabah mysticism and German Hasidism of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that a direct transition from one to the other is scarcely conceivable."[111]

In Scholem's historiographical model, ancient Jewish esoteric traditions and medieval kabbalistic traditions may only be connected under the broad phenomenological rubric of "Jewish mysticism," but lack any firm genealogical ties.[112] Kabbalah is historically alienated from earlier esoteric Jewish traditions, such as Second Temple apocalypticism, talmudic cosmogony, magic, linguistic cosmologies, and ascent literature. Instead, Kabbalah's origins must begin outside of Judaism, in the neighboring (and nebulous) theosophies of medieval

---

[108] See Israel Ta-Shma, *Studies in Medieval Rabbinic Literature*, Vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2004), pp. 279-298 [Hebrew].

[109] See Oded Yisraeli, "Jewish Medieval Traditions Concerning the Origins of the Kabbalah," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 106:1 (2016), pp. 21-41. For earlier Jewish attempts to link esoteric traditions with rabbinic sages, see Ra'anan Boustan "The Emergence of Pseudonymous Attribution in Heikhalot Literature: Empirical Evidence from the Jewish "Magical" Corpora," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* Vol. 14, No. 1 (2007), pp. 18-38.

[110] See Gershom Scholem, *Origins of Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 3-48.

[111] Ibid., p. 7.

[112] Cf. Joseph Dan, "Periodization of the History of Jewish Mysticism," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 9, Division C: Jewish Thought and Literature (1985), pp. 93-100.

Gnosticism and Neoplatonism.[113] This historiography of discontinuity substantiates Scholem's broader, Hegelian theory of Judaism's evolution. A primordial mythic stage (pre-biblical) is overcome by the anti-mythic tendencies of "ethical religion" (biblical and rabbinic period). Eventually those tendencies are mitigated by the resurgence of kabbalistic mythology in the Middle Ages in a new register—the soul rather than nature now serves as the site of mythos.[114] Even as rabbinic literature contains flashes of "mysticism," those rare moments exist within an anti-mythic cultural milieu that is radically at odds with the mythic *weltanschauung* of medieval Kabbalah. Hence the historical (diachronic) and phenomenological (synchronic) distinctions that organize Scholem's approach to Kabbalah reinforce each other to thoroughly distance the rabbinic from the kabbalistic.[115]

The recent surfacing of Scholem's juvenilia has instigated a reappraisal of the ideology and passions that galvanized the founder of Kabbalah Studies throughout his six decades of scholarship. For the most part, contemporary historians have been making use of these autobiographical documents to excavate Scholem's political theology: the messianism, Zionism, and anarchic politics that engulfed his youth in Germany. By exploring Scholem's personal involvement in these early twentieth-century movements, a revisionary light is cast onto Scholem's theories of Early-Modern kabbalistic messianism and onto his perception of his scholarly labor as a secular form of nation-building.[116]

---

[113] "Theosophy" is Scholem's preferred term for what distinguishes Kabbalah (along with Gnosticism and Neoplatonism) from other forms of religious philosophy. The term was first made popular by Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) and the organization she founded, the Theosophical Society. On the role of Kabbalah in this movement, see Boaz Huss, "'Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews:' Jewish Theosophists and their Perceptions of Kabbalah," in *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah, and the Transformation of Tradition,* eds. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016), pp. 137-166. Scholem defines his use of the term (*Major Trends*, p. 206) as follows: "By theosophy I mean that which was generally meant before the term became a label for a modern pseudo-religion, ie. *theosophy* signifies a mystical doctrine, or school of thought, which purports to perceive and to describe the mysterious workings of the Divinity, perhaps also believing it possible to become absorbed in contemplation. Theosophy postulates a kind of divine emanation whereby God, abandoning his self-contained repose, awakens to mysterious life; further, it maintains that the mysteries of creation reflect the pulsation of this divine life."

[114] See Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 7-8.

[115] See Ivan Marcus, "Review of *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*," *Speculum*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (1992), p. 159: "For Scholem, classical Judaism, the Judaism of religious norms and traditions before modernity, derived from a desiccated time of religious alienation between man and God. Moreover, the living core of Judaism, Jewish mysticism, derives not from indigenous Jewish roots but from non-Jewish Gnostic influences. For Scholem, Judaism survived despite the rabbis, not because of them."

[116] See Willi Goetschel, "Scholem's Diaries, Letters, and New Literature on His Work: Review Essay," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 72:1 (1997), pp. 77-92; Michael Löwy, "Messianism in the Early Work of Gershom Scholem," *New German Critique*, No. 83, Special Issue on Walter Benjamin (2001), pp. 177-191; and Steven E. Aschheim, "The Metaphysical Psychologist: On the Life and Letters of Gershom Scholem," *The Journal of Modern History* 76 (2004), pp. 903–933. For an earlier study with a similar agenda, see Arthur Hertzberg, "Gershom Scholem as Zionist and Believer," *Modern Judaism* Vol. 5:1, Gershom Scholem Memorial Issue (1985), pp. 3-19. For an attempt to address similar questions with sources that postdate Scholem's emigration to Palestine, see Moshe Idel, "Messianic Scholars: On Early Israeli Scholarship, Politics and Messianism," *Modern Judaism* Vol. 32:1 (2012), pp. 22-36.

I have turned to Scholem's biography for insight into a different problem within Scholem's scholarship—namely, his excision of Kabbalah from rabbinic literature and culture. The documentary history of Scholem's devotion to the study of Talmud (1913-1921) provides a window onto his evolving relationship to rabbinism, both as an ancient textual phenomenon (the Talmud) and as a modern social formation (Orthodoxy).

The one constant feature of Scholem's ever-changing relation to the Talmud is his association of the Talmud with Orthodoxy. When he first began studying its Aramaic pages he fashioned himself as an Orthodox rebel; Talmud study gave him access to the parts of Judaism that were purged from his liberal upbringing. Later, after he shed all allegiances to Orthodoxy, Scholem continued to study Talmud with Orthodox rabbis. At the time, they were the only ones able and willing to mentor him in the logic of talmudic argumentation. This identification of Talmud with Orthodoxy, solidified throughout his youth in Germany, plays an implicit though significant role in the Kabbalah scholarship Scholem wrote in Palestine. Given that Scholem views Kabbalah, along with Jewish mysticism more generally, as an anarchic form of Judaism that is in constant dialectical tension with "Orthodox" rabbinic norms, and given that Scholem associates the study of talmudic literature with the latter, he is want to argue that talmudic and kabbalistic knowledge are produced within distinct cultural spaces.[117]

II: Models of Interdisciplinarity in the Modern Study of Medieval Jewish Esotericism

Since the late nineteen-eighties, many Jewish Studies scholars have resisted Scholem's disjunctive historiography of Kabbalah/Rabbinics. By broadening the disciplinary and period-based schemas of Kabbalah studies, these scholars have generated new methodologies for mapping the entanglements of Kabbalah and rabbinic culture.[118] These multidisciplinary paradigms reintegrate Kabbalah into the long duration of Jewish esotericism, re-explore Kabbalah's relationship to the medieval afterlives of rabbinic texts and modes of learning, and revise Scholem's models of kabbalistic phenomenology. While these trends do not necessarily reaffirm the traditionalist approach to Kabbalah (which sees no historical or generic gap between rabbinic and kabbalistic creativity), they do engage more seriously with the central role that rabbinic learning (the study of Talmud and Midrash) had for medieval kabbalists.

Two distinct paradigms may be identified within the recent revision of Kabbalah scholarship: source-history and curricular-history. Each of these paradigms has its own method of studying the historical relationship between "the rabbinic" and "the kabbalistic." Scholars who work in the source-history paradigm investigate how the emergence of Kabbalah in the post-rabbinic moment is enabled by a resurgence of rabbinic images, concepts, mythologies, and cosmologies. While the two forms of Jewish culture and literature emerge at two distinct

---

[117] This perspective may have also played a role in his decision to ignore the Orthodox kabbalists of Palestine. See Boaz Huss, "Ask No Question: Gershom Scholem and the Study of Contemporary Jewish Mysticism," *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 25 (2005), pp. 141-158; and Shaul Magid, "'The King is Dead [and has been for three decades], Long Live the King': Contemporary Kabbalah and Scholem's Shadow," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 102:1 (2012), pp. 131-153.

[118] For the most recent account of these ongoing trends, see Boaz Huss, *The Question About the Existence of Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 71-101.

historical moments—Kabbalah in the Middle Ages and Rabbinics in Late Antiquity—these scholars argue that they are bound up with each other as a candle to a flame (to borrow a kabbalistic metaphor). Scholars who work in the curricular-history paradigm transform Scholem's synchronic arguments. By focusing on the formation of multiple medieval Jewish study-cultures, they highlight the dynamic interactions between kabbalistic and rabbinic learning practices. One way to capture the difference between these two trends is that source-historians examine the antecedents of kabbalistic concepts and images, while curricular-historians examine the formation of kabbalistic practices and methods of learning.

Moshe Idel and Yehuda Liebes have both mobilized a "source-history" of Jewish mythology to make axial revisions to Scholem's historiography. In an early essay, Liebes writes of his indebtedness to and metamorphosis of Scholem's history of Judaism:

> I am a disciple of Scholem, but I have attempted to break further ground. Scholem did carve out a space for myth within Judaism, but restricted it to a specific, defined realm, opposed to 'ordinary' Judaism whereas, in this book, I try to show that Jewish myth spans far beyond the 'ghetto' to which it has been confined. The chief uniqueness of Kabbala is not its *mythologoumena,* in and by themselves, but in the form and in the patterns of thought in which they were expressed.[119]

Leibes approaches Kabbalah not as a radical theological revolution instigated by Gnostic mythologies but as a stylistic transformation of ancient Jewish symbols and myths. The goal of Kabbalah scholarship is to map those slow transformations of style and form so that a lineage can be traced from Kabbalah back to Rabbinic literature. In a subsequent essay, "'*De Natura Dei'*: On the Development of the Jewish Myth," Liebes highlights a cluster of mythological connections between texts from the Talmud and Kabbalah. Yet, Liebes is less interested in the stylistics of the Talmud than in the Talmud as a comprehensive repository of mythologies. He turns to the Talmud to help document the indigenous evolution of Kabbalah, "given the Talmud's central place in Jewish literature and its quality as a clear, early document, less influenced by outside currents of thought and marked by stronger mythical leanings."[120] In this model, Medieval kabbalists did not look to the Talmud for its formal and logical specificity—its textuality—but, rather, for its theological contents, its imaginings of the celestial realm, its stories of rabbinic miracle workers, and its angelic lore.

Moshe Idel also refrains from addressing the Talmud's precise role in the development of Kabbalah. His critique of Scholem is directed at his predecessor's phenomenological reduction of rabbinic culture into a mentality that is both monotonous and antithetical to the kabbalistic mentality. Idel proposes that in order to provide a more exacting model of rabbinic influence on Kabbalah, we need to be more precise with how we organize and label rabbinic sources:

---

[119] Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, trans. Batya Stein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. vii.
[120] Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth*, p. 9.

> In lieu of assuming such a profound contrast between two types of religiosity, (which were often cultivated by one and the same person) it would be better to make use of a more moderate description. Rabbinism was not a homogeneous religiosity; it incorporates diverging views on many issues, including the preference, or the rejection of mythical types of expression. It is therefore quite strange that Scholem implicitly identified Rabbinism exclusively with Halakhah, whereas the Aggadah was not included as part of the discussion of the dichotomy Rabbinism-Kabbalism.[121]

In the continuation of that essay, Idel hones in on the rabbinic origins of kabbalistic theurgy, the notion that rituals can empower or arouse God. Theurgy welds together myths about God with rabbinic laws about ritual, and therefore provides a powerful example of how to approach the interrelations in rabbinic thought between law and legend. Idel's scholarship continues to encourage other Kabbalah researchers to search through primary rabbinic sources and extracanonical traditions to locate the concepts that inspired later kabbalistic authors.[122]

Jacob Katz and Moshe Halbertal have also offered serious revisions to Scholem's theses and methods, and have done so from a unique angle. Both began their scholarly careers working and writing on medieval rabbinic culture and only later came to address the role of Kabbalah and esotericism within rabbinic culture. Their unique disciplinary orientation allows them to address questions and employ methodologies that are rather different than those common among Kabbalah scholars. Instead of mapping the origins of kabbalistic concepts within rabbinic culture, they turn to medieval Jewish curriculums as the cultural sites where kabbalistic learning and talmudic learning overlap, compete, and transform each other. Where "text-historians" map the emergence of Kabbalah, Katz and Halbertal map the medieval moments where Kabbalah merges together with other disciplines of Jewish scholarly life. The questions at the heart of their projects include: How was Jewish learning structured in the schoolhouses of kabbalists? Did kabbalists spend equal time studying exoterica and esoterica? And, most important for our context, what role did Talmud study play in the life of a medieval kabbalist? These questions shift the conversation from the ideational origins of Kabbalah to the curricular decisions medieval Jews had to make as they encountered new bodies of esoteric knowledge.

In an essay from 1979, Katz noted a significant lacuna in contemporary kabbalistic scholarship: Scholem and his students study the Kabbalah as a history of ideas; Heinrich Graetz and Yitzhak Baer elucidated the social history of kabbalistic movements; but little research exists on the social dimensions of kabbalistic learning—the institutional negotiations that must have occurred between the study of Kabbalah and the study of other fields of intellectual life, such as philosophy, Halakhah, Aggadah, and poetry.[123] Some of these concerns have been addressed, declares Katz, by modern scholars who mapped the intersections of philosophy and Kabbalah

---

[121] Moshe Idel, "Rabbinism versus Kabbalism: On G. Scholem's Phenomenology of Judaism," *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1991), p. 289.

[122] For further work in a similar vein, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jonathan Dauber, *Standing on the Heads of Philosophers: Myth and Philosophy in Early Kabbalah*, PhD Dissertation, NYU, 2004; and Yair Lorberbaum, *In God's Image: Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[123] Jacob Katz, "Halakhah and Kabbalah - First Contacts," *Zion* (1979), pp. 148-172 [Hebrew].

and tracked the influence Kabbalah had on medieval poetry. However, "the contact between Halakhah and Kabbalah, whose existence is apparent to the eye, has not yet found its advocates."[124] Katz indexes that contact along three criteria: (1) the preference of one field's legitimacy in the realm of legal decision-making, (2) the allocation of study time (curriculum), and (3) the mention and use of halakhot in kabbalistic writings. Focusing on the history of these scholarly negotiations allows Katz to study kabbalists as Jews who both made choices between competing disciplines and made new connections between areas of Torah study with multiple points of overlap.

The principles of Katz's model of disciplinary competition become explicit in his second essay on this topic, "Halakhah and Kabbalah as Competing Disciplines of Study."[125] Here, he organizes the data on different Jewish study practices into the arch-categories of Halakhah and Aggadah. The former designates all study related to ritual (*mitzvoth*), while the latter captures those Jewish attempts to provide the former with meaning and mystery. Katz indexes the competition between these two domains in units of study time (curriculum) and esteem (intellectual capital), and figures that competition as a zero-sum equation. Each Jewish scholar had to choose between giving eminence and priority to Halakhah or to Aggadah. Katz no longer stresses the points of contact between multiple medieval disciplines, as he had done in his earlier article. Instead, he highlights the inevitability of medieval competition between two arch-disciplines—Halakhah and Aggadah.

The exact theory motivating Katz's zero-sum model of disciplinary competition becomes visible in the essay's analysis of the early-modern kabbalist, Rabbi Moses Cordevero (Ramak). In *Or Ne'erav*, Cordevero's introduction to Kabbalah meant for a new and growing sixteenth-century audience, he writes that some knowledge of *pilpul*, the art of talmudic dialectics, is necessary for comprehending the non-material nature of metaphysics. Katz rightly highlights this moment as one of interdisciplinarity, where the specificity of talmudic thinking is brought to bear on the practices of Kabbalah. Yet Katz concludes that interdisciplinarity was unlikely to succeed in this context because of the fundamental difference between the two disciplines' epistemologies:

> An atmosphere of irrational tension pervaded kabbalistic study—the opposite of the mentality that obtained among those engaged in the analysis of talmudic passages or the classification of points in Halakhah. To move back and forth periodically between the two worlds obviously demanded considerable effort, and we have already noted the difficulties encountered by Ramak in preserving his ties with both. Such tensions would

---

[124] Jacob Katz, "Halakhah and Kabbalah - First Contacts," p. 148.

[125] Jacob Katz, "Halakhah and Kabbalah as Competing Disciplines of Study" in *Jewish Spirituality*, *Vol. 2: From the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present*, ed. Arthur Green (1987), pp. 34-63. Originally published as "Halakhah and Kabbalah as Competing Subjects of Study," *Daat: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy & Kabbalah*, No. 7, 1981, pp. 36-68 [Hebrew], and included in Jacob Katz, *Halakhah and Kabbalah: Studies in the History of Jewish religion, its Various Faces and Social Relevance* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), pp 70-101 [Hebrew]. See also, Jacob Katz and Chava Weissler, "On Law, Spirituality, and Society in Judaism: An Exchange between Jacob Katz and Chava Weissler," *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter, 1996), p. 97.

> presumably result if not in a declining involvement in Halakhah then in a weakening desire to increase and improve one's knowledge of it.[126]

Katz's assumption—explicit here, but implicit throughout the essay—is that the illogical methods of kabbalistic learning are irremediably distinct from the logical methods of halakhic learning and attempts to shuttle or create bridges between the two are fated to fail. It is no surprise, then, that the cognitive dissimilarity between kabbalistic and halakhic mentalities creates a scholarly environment of competition, one that enforces epistemological barriers against attempts at collaboration.

Katz's essays on Kabbalah and Halakhah gesture toward a new methodology of Jewish history, one that studies the interaction of disparate disciplines and situates the development of Kabbalah within a robust landscape of different styles of rabbinic learning and creativity. But his decision to collapse those disciplines into the binary of Halakhah and Aggadah, and to argue that their relation is inherently one of antagonism and competition, hinders the reach of his project.

This critique of Katz is remedied by Moshe Halbertal's studies on the relationship between Talmud study and other Jewish disciplines within medieval rabbinic culture.[127] Halbertal examines why a medieval scholar might have spent more time studying Kabbalah than Talmud, without arguing for the irrationality of a particular discipline. Adopting Moshe Idel's thesis that Kabbalah is best organized into two phenomenological trends, ecstatic and theosophic,[128] Halbertal argues that each of these trends produced its own critique of exclusive talmudism. Ecstatic Kabbalah names a group of kabbalists who developed techniques for attaining self-absorption in God, an experiential state they identified with *devekut* (cleaving). Halbertal argues that the specific end goal of these techniques runs counter to the demanding logic of the Talmud. He notes that, "Talmud study could not help one attain the mystical goal of *devekut*, for the demand for constant attention to intellectual detail conflicts with self-negation...In neo-Platonic terminology, the talmudist is on the way down while he should be on the way up."[129] The theosophical kabbalists, on the other hand, were less concerned with ecstatic experience and aimed at developing a dynamic mapping of the Godhead that could be both affected and harmonized through ritual action. Rather, they criticized the talmudists as being blind to the true, theosophical meanings of the commandments. Thus, only for the ecstatic kabbalist does the dialectical methodology of Talmud study hinder the kabbalistic aim. The theosophical kabbalist, who does not seek personal absorption within God, is more critical of the Talmud's *telos* than of the scholastic techniques of Talmud study. On its own, the Talmud does not lead a reader to the theosophical mysteries of the *mitzvoth*.

Halbertal also modifies Katz's model of curricular competition by highlighting that kabbalists and philosophers frequently impose their hermeneutics of depth upon the Talmud,

---

[126] Jacob Katz, "Halakhah and Kabbalah as Competing Disciplines of Study" in ed. Arthur Green, *Jewish Spirituality*, *Vol. 2: From the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present* (1987), p. 48.

[127] See Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, meaning, and Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 119-124.

[128] See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. xi-xx.

[129] Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah*, p. 120.

finding allegorical or symbolic resonances in talmudic discourses. The conflict between Talmud and Kabbalah is not only about curricular prominence. Each field of study also has its own discipline, reading strategies, and norms. Those disciplinary orientations tend be totalizing—many allegorical readings of the Talmud were produced by medieval philosophers and kabbalists.[130] Halbertal frames these disciplinary crossovers as acts of strong reading:

> Neither camp—kabbalist or philosopher—was content with merely supplementing the curriculum or, in more extreme versions, replacing it. They claimed that the supplement they proposed affected the reading of the shared textual material; that it was the hidden meaning of the traditional text, its allegorical interpretation, or its profound symbolic layer. This attitude expands the scope of the issue, for now it concerns not only the question of what, if anything, should supplement the Talmud, but also how to read the Talmud itself.[131]

This shift in analysis from *what* was studied to *how* it was studied opens up new avenues for analyzing the relational history of Talmud study and the study of philosophy and Kabbalah. By identifying how one discipline impacts another, historians can move beyond models of curricular competition to research the influence of each discipline upon the methodologies of other domains of Jewish learning. Halbertal limits his observations to a single direction of influence: the impact of philosophy/Kabbalah on talmudic reading practices. The next chapter of this dissertation extends Halbertal's concerns to the other side of the relationship: how did the methodologies and practices of Talmud study affect the medieval discipline(s) of Jewish esotericism? Maimonides' eclectic writings provide a compelling and unique data set for answering that exact question.

---

[130] See Marc Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis: A Thirteenth-Century Commentary on the Aggadah* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); James H. Lehmann, "Polemic and Satire in the Poetry of the Maimonidean Controversy," Prooftexts 1, no. 2 (1981), pp. 133-151; Frank Talmage, *Apples of Gold in Settings of Silver: Studies in Medieval Jewish Exegesis and Polemics* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999) pp. 128-132; and Jacob Elbaum, *Medieval Perspectives on Aggadah and Midrash* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2000), pp. 105-202. For medieval kabbalistic interpretations of talmudic aggadot, see Todros Abulafia, *Otzar Ha-Kavod*, and Azriel of Gerona, *Perush ha-Aggadot* (ed. Tishby, 1943).

[131] Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book*, p. 124.

Chapter Two

Maimonides' Pardes:
A Medieval Model of Jewish Interdisciplinarity

I: The Pardes in the Talmud

Few figures are more lauded than Maimonides for uniting disparate Jewish disciplines. His magnum opus, *Mishneh Torah*, begins by addressing theological topics and incorporates ruminations on non-legal tropes throughout its fourteen books of legal code. In this chapter, I expand upon this portrayal of Maimonides as an interdisciplinary innovator by analyzing how he blends together two disciplines, talmudics and esotericism, in a manner that is distinctly dissimilar from his synthesis of law and (exoteric) philosophy, of Torah and science. Our investigation into Maimonides' theory of talmudic disciplinarity will revolve around a seemingly straightforward claim that Maimonides makes in his *Mishneh Torah*: "The subjects called *pardes* are included in the Talmud."[132] To unpack the meaning and cultural stakes of this declaration of inclusion, I will first elucidate its two key terms—"Talmud" and "*pardes*"—beginning with "Talmud."

An influential rabbinic adage advises one to divide their hours of scholarship into equal thirds—a third for scripture, a third for mishnah, and a third for talmud.[133] Maimonides redefines the talmudic portion of that curriculum as follows:

> The time allotted to study should be divided into three parts. A third should be devoted to the Written Law; a third to the Oral Law; and the last third should be spent in reflection, deducing conclusions from premises, developing implications of statements, comparing dicta, studying the hermeneutical principles by which the Torah is interpreted, till one knows the essence of these principles, and how to deduce what is permitted and what is forbidden from what one has learned traditionally. This is termed Talmud.[134]

The portion of the rabbinic curriculum designated as "Talmud" no longer prescribes reading or interpreting the pages of the Talmud, but performing the very practices of ratiocination that characterize talmudic discourse, such as the production of teleological inferences, deductions,

---

[132] *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah, 1:12*.

[133] Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 30a:
אמר רב ספרא משום ר' יהושע בן חנניא מאי דכתיב (דברים ו) ושננתם לבניך אל תקרי ושננתם אלא ושלשתם לעולם ישלש אדם שנותיו שליש במקרא שליש במשנה שליש בתלמוד, מי יודע כמה חיי, לא צריכא ליומי.

[134] *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah, 1:11*. Translation by Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader, Edited, with Introductions and Notes* (Springfield, NJ: Berhman House, 1972):
וחייב לשלש את זמן למידתו שליש בתורה שבכתב ושליש בתורה שבעל פה ושליש יבין וישכיל אחרית דבר מראשיתו ויוציא דבר מדבר וידמה דבר לדבר וידין במידות שהתורה נדרשת בהן עד שיידע היאך הוא עיקר המידות והיאך יוציא האסור והמותר וכיוצא בהן מדברים שלמד מפי השמועה ועניין זה, הוא הנקרא תלמוד.

and analogies.[135] Study of the pages of the Talmud, one presumes, is only included in the second division of the curriculum, that of the "Oral Law."[136]

Maimonides' redefinition of Talmud study as a practice of thinking, in contradistinction to a practice of textual study, is a big part of why he composed the *Mishneh Torah* in the first place. In the introduction to the *Mishneh Torah,* Maimonides laments that rabbinic students of his milieu get bogged down in the labyrinthine rhetoric and dialectics of the Talmud. The remedy for this would be a more succinct summation of the Talmud's legal directives, and his magisterial code of Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah*, aims to provide exactly that stylistic concision. Hence, when Maimonides writes that the second third of one's study regimen should be dedicated to the Oral Torah, he does not wish students to devote too much of that time to dissecting the dialectics of the Talmud. Rather, he is prescribing the recitation of his own summation of oral tradition so that students will then have ample time to practice talmudic forms of knowledge production.[137] Maimonides makes this radical aim clear in the introduction to *Mishneh Torah*:

> I, Moses the son of Maimon the Sefardi, bestirred myself, and, relying on the help of God, blessed be He, intently studied all these works (of rabbinic literature), with the view of putting together the results obtained from them in regard to what is forbidden or permitted, clean or unclean, and the other laws of the Torah—all in plain language and terse style, so that thus the entire Oral Law might become systematically known to all, without citing difficulties and solutions or differences of view, one person saying so, and another saying something else—but consisting of statements, clear and convincing...so that no other work should be needed for ascertaining any of the laws of Israel, but that this work might serve as a compendium of the entire Oral Law...Hence I have entitled this work *Mishneh Torah* (Repetition of the Law), for the reason that a person who first reads the Written Law and then this compilation, will know from it the whole of the Oral Law, without having occasion to consult any other book between them.[138]

Maimonides' well-organized code of the Oral Law promises to free the rabbinic scholar from wading through the dense panoply of talmudic voices and dialogue—a demanding task that rarely leads to legal lucidity. These two passages, when read in tandem, suggest that Maimonides believes that Jewish scholars would be better off minimizing the time and effort they typically

---

[135] See David Novak, "Jurisprudence," in ed. K. Seeskin, *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 221-244.

[136] Hannah Kasher claims that Maimonides would not consider one who studies the dialectics of the Talmud as having fulfilled the requisites of "Talmud study" (i.e., talmudic reasoning). See her "Talmud Torah as a Means of Apprehending God in Maimonides' Teachings," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 5 (1986), p. 78.

[137] For a summary of the primary sources and scholarly debates that relate to Maimonides' critique of the study of the Talmud, see Shammah Friedman, "Maimonides and the Talmud," *Dinei Yisrael*, Vol. 26-27 (2008/9-2009/10), pp. 221-239.

[138] Translation by Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*, *Edited, with Introductions and Notes* (Springfield, NJ: Berhman House, 1972), pp. 39-40.

spend reading the Talmud and apply that excess intellectual energy to hone the very acts of rabbinic logic that the Talmud records.[139]

In truth, Maimonides' redefinition of Talmud study revives the original meaning of "talmud." As used in the talmudic adage that directs one to spend a third of one's life studying talmud, the term "talmud" refers to the analytical, discipline of Torah, wherein one analyzes the reasoning and implications of scriptural and oral laws.[140] By reinstating its original and practical meaning, Maimonides is resisting what Talya Fishman calls the "textualization of the rabbinic culture"—the medieval transformation of talmud from an oral negotiation of competing traditions to the study of talmudic texts as binding legal referents.[141] To resist the new trends of rabbinic study culture, Maimonides adopts an older, and largely outdated, theory of talmud as a discipline, a set of cognitive practices that generate deductions, inferences, and analogies from established Jewish traditions.

After elucidating the Maimonidean referent of 'talmud," I turn now to the meaning of "*pardes*." In an earlier chapter of *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides defines *pardes* as a rabbinic catchword for the study and elucidation of *ma'aseh bereshit* (the secret interpretation of Genesis 1) and *ma'aseh merkavah* (the secret interpretation of Ezekiel 1), two of the central branches of rabbinic esotericism.[142] But Maimonides also redefines the disciplinary nature of these two branches of esotericism to better align with Aristotelian philosophy. In a radical, far-reaching move, Maimonides identifies *ma'aseh bereshit* with sub-lunar physics and cosmogony, and *ma'aseh markavah* with metaphysics.[143] What exactly does Maimonides mean, then, when he argues that the speculative study of these philosophical (and esoteric) disciplines is a part of talmud? How are we to make sense of his claim that, "the subjects called *pardes* are included in the talmud."[144]

There are three plausible interpretations of Maimonides' formulation, two of which exemplify the two approaches to the relationship between Talmud and esoterica mapped in the previous chapter: Maimonides may mean that the teachings of *ma'aseh bereshit* and *ma'aseh merkavah* can be found in the text of the Talmud (as per "source-history");[145] that the study of these topics ought to occupy the same privileged portion of the curriculum as Talmud study (as

---

[139] See Menachem Kellner, "Maimonides' Disputed Legacy" in ed. Carlos Fraenkel, *Traditions of Maimonideanism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 263.

[140] In tannaitic and Palestinian amoraic sources "talmud" designates a practice akin to scriptural exegesis, as exemplified in the legal midrashim. See, Moulie Vidas, *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 120.

[141] See Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Book: Oral Torah as Written Tradition in Medieval Cultures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); for her comments on Maimonides, see p. 160.

[142] *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah,* 4:13.

[143] Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah, Hagigah* 2:1.

[144] *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah, 1:12*.

[145] See Elazar Rokeach, *Maaseh Rokeach* (Venice, 1742/3), p. 10:1.

per curricular-history);[146] or, that the disciplinary practices of talmudic reasoning are appropriate for the study of esoteric philosophy. Maimonides' terse words—"the subjects called Pardes are included in the Talmud"—thus serve as a synecdoche for a range of contemporary theories on the medieval nexus of Talmud and Jewish esoterica.

The shortcoming of the former two readings is that they do not accommodate Maimonides' transformation of Talmud from a textual study practice to an abstract analytical practice. It is therefore hard to justify the possibility that Maimonides claims that knowledge of *pardes* can be found in the pages of the Talmud or that the study of *pardes* is more appropriately relegated to the hours of talmud study rather than the hours of Oral-Torah study.[147] The interpretive desideratum is therefore to analyze how Maimonides views the relationship between the practices of talmud study and the practices of *pardes* study.

Maimonides defines talmud study as a set of cognitive practices: "deducing conclusions from premises, developing implications of statements, comparing dicta, studying the hermeneutical principles by which the Torah is interpreted, till one knows the essence of these principles, and how to deduce what is permitted and what is forbidden from given norms."[148] These techniques encompass three fundamental categories of jurisprudential logic: inference-making, analogy-making, and application of the thirteen rabbinic hermeneutical principles to deduce contemporary legal norms from traditional legal precedents. All three are creative, analytical techniques for extrapolating new legal knowledge from older legal wisdom. To clarify how these talmudic techniques of extrapolation are related to the philosophical techniques of speculation occasioned by the study of the *pardes*, we must turn to Maimonides' Arabic writings on law, logic, and metaphysics. These texts articulate the theory behind Maimonides' belief that talmudic reasoning and study of the *pardes* share methodological and epistemological affinities. As I will demonstrate, those affinities are engendered by Maimonides' decision to redefine both Jewish disciplines through the prism of *jadal*, the practice of Islamo-Aristotelian dialectics.

II: Jadal in Early Islamic *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence) and *Kalam* (Theology)

The etymology of *jadal* connects the Arabic term to verbs of "wrangling," "wrestling," and "twisting."[149] Commonly translated as "argumentation," *jadal* plays a significant role throughout the Qur'an, where derivatives of the root *j-d-l* appear twenty-nine times, predominantly with a

---

[146] See David Hartman, *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1976), pp. 233-235; Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 489-500; Leo Strauss, *Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), pp. 382-283; Joseph Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides Guide* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p.83; and Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.171, n.41.

[147] See Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code*, p. 500, for an answer to this problem that has conceptual analogues to my own approach.

[148] *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah, 1:11*.

[149] See Balil Abd Al-Karim, *Qur'anic Terminology: A Linguistic and Semantic Analysis* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017), p. 54.

condemnatory valence.[150] According to Qur'anic anthropology, man "is the most disputatious [*jadalan*] of all things" (18:54). Yet his argumentative tendencies can be used for both praiseworthy and destructive causes. Rejectors of Muhammad's prophecy "twist" the truth to aggravate the faithful into vain argumentation: "Those who disbelieve, dispute (*yujāadilul*) by [using] falsehood to [attempt to] invalidate thereby the truth and have taken My verses, and that of which they are warned, in ridicule" (18:56). Even among the faithful, the Qur'an is weary of *jadal* and warns pilgrims to Mecca not to provoke each other with arguments while making pilgrimage (2:197). And yet, other verses call upon the faithful to argue with disbelievers: "Call to the way of your Lord by means of wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them (*jādilhum*) according to what is best" (16:125). And the paradigmatic Qur'anic figures of Abraham and Noah are depicted as arguing with God for the sake of humanity.[151] Taken as a composite, the Qur'an seems less concerned with eradicating questioning than with disciplining its execution—to teach humans how and when to ask questions.[152]

These scriptural precedents orient subsequent Islamic traditions of debate, encouraging their flourishing as well as governing their tone and intention. Throughout the Ummayad Caliphate (7th and 8th century), Muslims cultivated a wide range of argumentative genres, some with pre-Islamic roots: satire (*al-hijā'*), poetic flyting (*al-naqā'iḏ*), religious polemics (*mujādalah*), and compilations of legal disagreements (*khilāf*).[153] Specifically, the latter two genres underwent pivotal transformations during the subsequent Abbasid Caliphate, primarily due to the impact of Aristotelian translations. In 782 Caliph al-Mahdī commissioned the Nestorian Patriarch Timotheus I to translate Aristotle's *Topics* from Syriac to Arabic. Al-Mahdī chose to translate this specific Greek text because of polemical motives. Christian clerics would frequently debate Muslims and make use of the sophisticated arts of argumentation discussed in the *Topics* to win these debates. Al-Mahdī therefore encouraged Muslim theologians to refute the arguments of Christian clerics by incorporating Aristotelian dialectic (*jadal*), the main subject of the *Topics*, into their defense of the Islamic faith.[154]

---

[150] See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Debate with them in a Better Way: The Construction of a Qur'anic Commonplace," in eds. A. Neuwirth, B. Embalo, S. Gunther, and M. Jarrar, *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Toward a New Hermeneutic Approach* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1999), pp. 163-188.

[151] Georgina L. Jardim argues that these different viewpoints are representative of two stages in the Qur'an's composition: "The development of questioning or arguing (*jadala*) from the earlier to later revelations point to an increasing distinction in the understanding of debate that differentiates between the debate of rejecters and the debate of those who reflect on the message of the Qur'an." See Georgina L. Jardim, *Recovering the Female Voice in Islamic Scripture: Women and Silence* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 163-180.

[152] See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "The Genre Boundaries of Qur'ānic Commentary" in eds. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, Joseph W. Goering, *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 445-461; and Rosalind Ward Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an: God's Arguments* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 92-102.

[153] See Mohammad Syifa Amin Widigo, *Imam Al-Haramayn Al-Juwayni on Jadal: Juridical and Theological Dialectic in the Fifth/Eleventh Century*, PhD, Indiana University, 2016, pp. 41-42.

[154] For an account of this intercultural context, see Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 174-186.

In his *Topics*, Aristotle defines dialectic as "a method (*methodos*) whereby we shall be able to reason from opinions that are generally accepted (*endoxa*) about every problem propounded to us and also shall ourselves, when supporting an argument, avoid saying anything contrary (*hyphenation*)."[155] In the chapters of the *Topics*, Islamic theologians found a system of argumentation, to which they could adapt existing *jadal* practices.[156] Although earlier forms of verbal disputation and *ikhtilāf* literature were dialectical in form (carried out through an exchange of questions and answers), both lacked systematization and theoretical formulations. Scholars in debate sessions and literary polemics did not develop methods, norms, or an ethics of debate that other scholars could follow and apply to their own debates.[157] By the tenth and eleventh centuries, theoretical works of *Jadal*, which enumerate and analyze models of argumentative exchanges, were widespread throughout Persia and Iraq. The techniques of argumentation (*jadal*) were even integrated into school curricula and honed by students in the colleges of law (*masjids* and *madrasas*) as scholastic exercises.[158]

Aristotle's dialectics offers a logic of *endoxa*, generally accepted opinions that cannot be proven by syllogistic demonstrations. The *Topics* answers a fundamental question: How can you formulate a convincing argument for an opinion that is unprovable? This question became especially pertinent for medieval Muslims. Since many Islamic beliefs are *endoxas*, Aristotle offered Muslims a systematic method to rationally argue for or against the validity of contentious theological propositions.[159] Rather than demand conclusive proofs that can engender certain knowledge (*'ilm*), dialecticians employed *jadal* to attain a "preponderance of conviction" (*ghalabat al-ẓann*), a form of certainty that stands below the certainty achieved by proofs (*qaṭ'īyāt*) but above the weak epistemology of probability (*ẓann*) and doubt (*shakk/ shubhah*).[160]

Medieval Islamic Jurists thus found in Aristotle a way to philosophically distinguish between epistemological gradations of proof. If a jurist cited a Qur'anic verse, a prophetic tradition (*sunnah*), or a legal consensus (*ijmā'*), their argumentation attained the legitimacy of a logical demonstration (*burhān*). However, legal argumentation based only on an equivocal Qur'anic verse (*ẓawāhir al-Qur'ān*), a tradition from the Prophet's companions, or a mode of analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) was deemed analogous to a proof based on an *endoxa*, as per Aristotelian dialectic. In that case, a legal claim could reach the level of *ẓann* (the probable) or the level of *shakk* (the doubtful), but not the level of *qaṭ'ī* (the epistemologically certain). *Jadal*

---

[155] Aristotle, *Topics* 100a18-21.

[156] See Larry Benjamin Miller, *Islamic Disputation Theory: A Study of the Development of Dialectic in Islam from the Tenth through Fourteenth Centuries*, PhD, Princeton University, 1984, pp. 1-51.

[157] See Widigo, *Imam Al-Haramayn*, pp. 29-56.

[158] See George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), pp. 105-110.

[159] See Miller, *Islamic Disputation Theory*.

[160] See Widigo, *Imam Al-Haramayn*.

is hence an art of Islamic argumentation,[161] with native origins and Hellenistic amplifications that was significant for both legal and theological modes of Islamic reasoning.[162]

III: Dialectics and Dissensus in Maimonides' Legal Theory

Maimonides' earliest composition, the *Treatise on the Art of Logic*, reinstates the Aristotelian notion that dialectics (*jadal*) is a method of reasoning other than scientific demonstration. Adopting the Arabic augmentation of Aristotelian logic,[163] Maimonides describes five genres of syllogisms: (1) demonstrative syllogisms based on apodictic premises, (2) dialectical syllogisms based on at least one conventional premise, (3) rhetorical syllogisms based on at least one received premise, (4) sophistic syllogisms based on at least one false premise, and (5) poetic syllogisms based on premises that are mimetic (forms of praise or blame that imitate their object of evaluation).[164]

These meditations on Aristotelian logic play a critical role in Maimonides' earliest formulation of Jewish jurisprudence, the introduction to his *Commentary to the Mishnah*, a momentous project Maimonides began in Fez at the age of twenty-three (in 1161) and completed at the age of thirty, soon after he had migrated to Egypt.[165] Al-Farabi, Maimonides mentor in all matters of logic,[166] had already set the philosophical groundwork for applying Aristotelian logic to jurisprudential contexts.[167] Maimonides uses this Arabicized Aristotelian logic to answer a

---

[161] On the shift from dialectics as method (in Aristotle) to dialectics as art (in Islam), see Miller, *Islamic Disputation Theory*, pp. 54-55.

[162] Contemporary scholars debate the historical relationship between theological and legal *jadal*. Miller, *Islamic Disputation Theory*, claims that early legal *jadal* is free of Aristotelian influence; muslim theologians first adapted the *Topics* for their polemical contexts, and only later jurists applied similar ideas to legal contexts. Edward W. Young argues that juridical *jadal* has its own indigenous traditions of dialectics that originate in *khilaf* literature. See Edward W. Young, *The Dialectical Forge: Juridical Disputation and the Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017). Cf. J. van Ess, "The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology," in ed. G. E. von Grunebaum, *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970), pp. 21-50.

[163] By the tenth century, Islamic Aristotelianism had integrated Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* into the *Organon*, the classical collection of Aristotelian logic. Thus for Maimonides, rhetoric was as much a part of logic as was dialectics. On the Islamic expansion of Aristotle's *Organon* (an expansion that had some precedent among the late Greek commentators of the school of Alexandria) and the consequences of that inclusion on medieval Islamic culture, see Deborah L. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

[164] *Maḳālah fi-ṣinā'at al-manṭiḳ*: *Maimonides' Treatise on logic, The Original Arabic and Three Hebrew Translations*, ed. I. Efross (New York, 1938), pp. 47-49.

[165] See Joel L. Kraemer, *Maimonides: The Life of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), p. 268.

[166] See Maimonides' letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon, included in Alexander Marx, "Texts by and about Maimonides," *JQR* 25 (1935), pp. 378-380. On the impact of Maimonides' praise of Al-Farabi on future Jewish philosophers, see Steven Harvey, "Did Maimonides' Letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon Determine Which Philosophers Would Be Studied by Later Jewish Thinkers?" *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 83, No. 1/2 (1992), p. 55.

[167] See Joep Lameer, *Al-Farabi and Aristotelian Syllogistics: Greek Theory and Islamic Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

fundamental question of rabbinic jurisprudence: Why did legal disagreement first emerge in rabbinic culture?

> Whatever...the elders received [from Moses] was not subject to discussion or disagreement (*ikhilāf*). But the applications (*furūʿ*) not heard from the Prophet were subject to discussion, the laws being extrapolated through analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), with the thirteen rules given to him at Sinai, and they are "the thirteen *middot* by which the Torah is interpreted." And among those extrapolated [laws were] matters that disagreement did not occur in them, but rather there was consensus (*ijmāʿ*) about them; but in some of them there was disagreement between the two syllogisms: for this one devised a syllogism and maintained it strongly, and the other devised a[nother] syllogism and maintained it strongly, for this typically occurs with the dialectic syllogisms (*al-maqāyīs al-jadaliyya*). And if such a disagreement arises, the majority is followed, because of the dictum of God: "Follow the majority" (Exod 23:2).[168]

Maimonides does not believe that the rabbis of Late Antiquity argued over the facts of oral traditions. Their disputes were solely directed at the adaptability of those traditions, their extrapolation to new legal cases. Hence the disputes and debates that define rabbinic literature emerge only after the sages began to apply the thirteen rabbinic hermeneutical techniques, a set of literary-logical principles that enable the development of new branches of law from scriptural cues. This historical thesis rebuts Abraham ibn Daud, Maimonides' contemporary, who claimed that differences of rabbinic opinion were generated by the gradual deterioration of the social bonds that sustain oral transmission.[169] But for Maimonides, rabbinic dissent emerged not because of history but because of epistemology. Maimonides refers to that epistemology of rabbinic hermeneutical principles as "*maqayis jadaliyyah*," "dialectical argumentation."[170]

The inability of *halakhic* logic to achieve the epistemological status of a syllogistic demonstration is dependent on two sub-factors. First, Maimonides' belief that aside for the first two of the ten commandments (which teach principles regarding God's existence and unity and are thus capable of demonstration), the commandments "belong to the class of generally accepted opinions and those adopted in virtue of tradition, not to the class of the intellecta."[171] Therefore, all attempts to formulate extrapolative arguments based on the norms of a commandment fall under the logical category of dialectic, the art of fashioning arguments based on received tradition (*endoxa*, in Aristotle's terms). And second, *halakhic* arguments cannot be scientifically demonstrated because legal extrapolation is never conclusive. As Moshe Halbertal formulates the issue, "the semantics of deductive principles (*kal va-homer*) and lexical analogy

---

[168] Maimonides, *Introduction to the Mishnah*, Shailat ed., p. 328 (Ar.); English translation from Mordechai Z. Cohen, *Opening the Gates of Interpretation: Maimonides' Biblical Hermeneutics in Light of His Geonic-Andalusian Heritage and Muslim Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 264.

[169] For an account of these competing medieval views, see Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 54-71.

[170] See Aviram Ravitsky, "Halakhic Arguments as Dialectical Arguments and Exegetical Principles as Aristotelian Topoi in Maimonides' Philosophy," *Tarbiz* Vol. 73, No. 2 (2004), pp. 208-212 [Hebrew].

[171] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 3:22, ed. and trans. Shlomo Pines, p. 364.

(*gezeira shava*) cannot be formulated in absolute terms," seeing as "there is always liable to be some further question."[172] Thus, for Maimonides, halakhic logic is dialectical both because of the epistemic status of its premises and because of the indeterminability of its styles of argumentation.

Maimonides' claim that rabbinic legal exegesis is non-demonstrable helps explain his frequent association of the thirteen principles of rabbinic hermeneutics with *qiyas*, an Islamic term for an analogical style of legal extrapolation that, while neither conclusive nor demonstrable, is essential to the practices of *al-fiqh* (Islamic law).[173] As defined by Mutahhar al-Maqdisi (c. 945-991), *qiyas* refers to "everything that is known by inference without being evident or perceived by the senses."[174] Since a *qiyas* is an uncertain judgment (*zanni*), it is often countered by an opposing jurisits' *qiyas*. In such cases, the two jurists adjudicate the two analogical inferences by dialectical procedures of *jadal* until they reach a consensus (*'ijma*).[175]

In the citation from Maimonides' *Commentary to the Mishnah* above, Maimonides uses the term *qiyas* twice to describe the role that extrapolative rabbinic legal reasoning plays in the creation of dissensus.[176] The similitude between rabbinic legal exegesis and Islamic practice of *qiyas* extends to the two other practices of legal reasoning that Maimonides associates with talmudic thought. In Islamic jurisprudence, the two most significant types of *qiyas* are *qiyas al-shabah* (legal arguments based on analogy) and *qiyas al-illah* (legal inferences based on applying the cause, the "*illah*," for one law to a related legal context).[177] Both closely parallel

---

[172] Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides: Life and Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 125. Halbertal's conclusion identifies *qiyas* with the realm of rhetoric: "this is why Maimonides called these analogies "rhetorical principles," emphasizing that these principles of deduction are not of a purely logical kind." Cf. Cohen and Ravitsky who both identify the logic of *qiyas* with dialectics.

[173] See Wael B. Hallaq, *Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 138-140.

[174] See Joseph van Ess, "The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology," in ed. G. E. von Grunebaum, *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970), p. 34-5. On *qiyas* in Islamic jurisprudence, see Bernard G. Weiss, *The Search for God's Law: Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf al-Din al-Amidi*, Revised Edition (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), pp. 542-584; and Avner M. Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 126-130. Cf. Ignaz Goldziher, *The Zahiris: Their Doctrine and their History a Contribution to the History of Islamic Theology*, trans. and ed. Wolfgang Behn (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 6-19.

[175] See Wael B. Hallaq, "A Tenth-Eleventh Century Treatise on Juridical Dialectic," *Muslim World*, Vol. 77: 2-3 (1987), pp. 198-227.

[176] For examples and commentary on the broader context of "*qiyas*" in Maimonides' milieu, see Aviram Ravitsky, "Saadya Gaon and Maimonides on the Logic and Limits of Legal Inference in Context of the Karaite-Rabbanite Controversy," *History and Philosophy of Logic,* 32:1 (2011), pp. 29-36. See also, Mordechai Z. Cohen, *Opening the Gates of Interpretation: Maimonides' Biblical Hermeneutics in Light of His Geonic-Andalusian Heritage and Muslim Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 264-280 and 466-472. On the broader semantic range of *qiyas* in the twelfth century, and its role at the intersection of law, philosophy, and mysticism, see Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's Kuzari* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) pp. 55-88.

[177] For a survey of these two forms of *qiyas* and the medieval disputes surrounding their legitimacy in Islamic jurisprudence, see Karmen E. Talbot, *Arguments Against the Sunni Legal Methodology: Ibn Hazm and his Refutation of Qiyas*, MA Thesis, McGill University, 1987.

Maimonides' characterization of the techniques of talmudic logic as *yotzi davar mi-davar* (legal inferences) and *yidmeh davar l-davar* (legal analogies).[178] Hence there is textual as well as contextual evidence to suggest that Maimonides conceives the three methods of talmudic reasoning—inference, analogy, *middot*—as epistemologically analogous to the methods of Islamo-Aristotelian dialectics. In the twelfth century, talmudic extrapolation and Islamic *jadal* were both scholastic disciplines that trained students to create and critique legal arguments, to formulate legal analogies, and deduce logically sound conclusions out of earlier legal norms.[179] In light of the cultural parallelism between Islamic and Jewish scholasticism, Maimonides was able to seamlessly redefine talmudic epistemology and talmudic reasoning through the Arabic terminology and Aristotelian theories of Islamic *jadal*.[180]

IV: Entering the Pardes: Dialectics and Dissensus in Maimonidean Esotericism

Despite the fact that the Arabic term for dialects (*jadal*) appears only once in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, a burgeoning trend in Maimonidean scholarship emphasizes the importance of

---

[178] I have yet to locate a Maimonidean source that explicitly links these two talmudic practices to Aristotelian dialectics. Suggestive evidence appears at the end of chapter eight of Maimonides' *Treatise on the Art of Logic*: "The demonstrative syllogisms do not use analogy under any circumstances, nor do they use induction except under certain conditions; but the art of dialectics does use general induction; and the art of rhetoric uses the analogical syllogism," trans. I. Efros, *Maimonides' Treatise on Logic* (New York, 1938), p. 49. The similarity between an inductive syllogism (which Maimonides defines elsewhere in the *Treatise* as "when there is a certain proposition whose particulars you have examined and some of them have been proven inductively to be true, we may take this proposition as a universal and posit it as a premise of a syllogism," *Maimonides' Treatise on Logic*, p. 46) and talmudic deduction (as formulated by Maimonides in *Mishneh Torah*) requires further analysis. I see no grounds on which Maimonides would identify talmudic practices dependent on the thirteen hermeneutical rules as dialectic but not those dependent on deduction and analogy-making. See chapter 3 of this dissertation for a genealogy of the terms Maimonides uses to describe talmudic deduction ("*mitbonen b-da'ato l-havin davar mi-davar*"). Cf. chapter 7 of the *Treatise on the Art of Logic*, wherein Maimonides alludes to the existence of "other syllogisms which we call juridical, (but which) we need not discuss in this connection" (Efros, p. 47). Many commentators interpret these "juridical syllogisms" as proofs based on the thirteen rabbinic principles of interpretation. See Aviram Ravitsky, "Halakhic Arguments as Dialectical Arguments and Exegetical Principles as Aristotelian Topoi in Maimonides' Philosophy," *Tarbiz* Vol. 73, No. 2 (2004), p. 17, n. 80 [Hebrew].

[179] See George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), pp. 105-110. Beyond their scholastic role, these forms of legal reasoning had binding juridical force. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Mamrim* 1:3.

[180] See Aviram Ravitsky, "Halakhic Arguments as Dialectical Arguments and Exegetical Principles as Aristotelian Topoi in Maimonides' Philosophy," *Tarbiz* Vol. 73, No. 2 (2004), pp. 202-3 [Hebrew]. For other instances where Maimonides adopts Islamic jurisprudential trends, see Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 61-69. Cf. Lena Salaymeh, "'Comparing' Jewish and Islamic Legal Traditions: Between Disciplinarity and Critical Historical Jurisprudence," *Critical Analysis of Law* 2:1 (2015), pp. 153-173.

dialectics to the esoteric project of the *Guide*.[181] This dialectical turn in Maimonidean scholarship revises Shlomo Pines' critique of Leo Strauss' theory of Maimonidean esotericism. Strauss famously argued that the esoteric stratum of the *Guide* is singular and straightforward: Maimonides' secret philosophical commitment to Athens (i.e., Aristotelian philosophy) is camouflaged by his explicit religious commitment to Jerusalem (i.e., biblical and rabbinic theology).[182] In the late nineteen-seventies, after Strauss' death, Shlomo Pines published a pivotal article that upended Strauss' thesis.[183] Pines argues that there are four, not two, levels of meaning in Maimonides' *Guide*: (1) traditional theology; (2) Aristotelian philosophy; (3) critical epistemology;[184] (4) and intellectual mysticism (sufism).[185] "Athens," to use Strauss' terminology, is but the exoteric meaning of the *Guide*. Strauss, Pines contends, was blind to the true form of Maimonides' concealed philosophy: a skepticism that critiques the epistemological certainty of Aristotelian metaphysics; and an intellectual eros that seeks communion with the unnamable. Maimonides' critical epistemology is born from the belief, explicitly articulated by al-Farabi, that humans are unable to achieve complete cognition of the separate intellects, let alone of God, because of their carnality. Pines concludes that, given Maimonides' disbelief in philosophical self-perfection, the *Guide*'s final chapters gesture at his esoteric platform: devotees should redirect their intellectual passion to the more practical domains of human ethics and social politics.[186]

The scholars who have subsequently mapped the centrality of dialectics to the *Guide* refuse to cede Maimonides' religious commitment to the theoretical life. Pushing back against Pines, they contend that Maimonides does not negate all modes of apprehending the separate

---

[181] See Arthur Hyman, "Demonstrative, Dialectical, and Sophistic Arguments in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides," in *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, ed. Eric L. Ormsby (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), pp. 35-52; Joel L. Kraemer, "Maimonides' Use of (Aristotelian) Dialectic," in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, eds. Robert S. Cohen and Hillel Levine (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press, 2000), pp. 111-130; Josef Stern, "Maimonides' Demonstrations: Principles and Practice," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001), pp. 47–84; Yair Lorberbaum, "On Contradictions, Rationality, Dialectics, and Esotericism in Maimonides's 'Guide of the Perplexed'", *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Jun., 2002), pp. 711-750; and Daniel Davies, *Method and Metaphysics in Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[182] See Leo Strauss, "How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*," an introduction to Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. xi-lvi.

[183] See Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, ibn Bija, and Maimonides," in ed. Isadore Twersky, *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 82-109; see also his, "The Relation between Maimonides' Halakhic and non-Halakhic Works," in eds., S. Pines and Y. Yovel, *Maimonides and Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987).

[184] On the Kantian valances in Pines' formulation of Maimonidean epistemology, see Warren Zev Harvey, "Shlomo Pines on Maimonides, Spinoza, and Kant," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, Vol. 20:2 (2012), pp. 173-182.

[185] See Warren Zev Harvey, "How Leo Strauss Paralyzed Scholarship of the *Guide of the Perplexed* in the 20th Century," *Iyyun* 50 (2001), pp. 387-396 [Hebrew].

[186] Pines does not devote much attention to the relation between Maimonides' esoteric Sufism and his critical epistemology. See Joel Kraemer, "Is There a Text in this Class?" *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism*, Vol. 8 (2008), pp. 288-293.

intellects, just the mode of apprehension achieved via demonstrative proof. Maimonides' aim in the *Guide* is not to curtail metaphysical investigation, but to encourage satisfaction with dialectical knowledge, which, epistemologically speaking, hovers between the verifiability of scientific knowledge and the aporias of philosophical skepticism.[187] In this new reading, the *Guide* does not offer a path out of perplexity, but an argument for the constitutive role that dialectical reasoning, philosophical dissensus, and doubt play in man's speculative efforts to know and cleave to the Divine.[188] The only way in and out of the *pardes* is through dialectics.

Maimonides' esoteric view of speculation as a dialectical discipline is motivated by the writings of Alexander of Aphrodisas*,* a third-century peripatetic philosopher whose commentaries on Aristotle were central to Maimonides' engagement with the Aristotelian corpus.[189] At two central moments in the *Guide*, Maimonides turns to Alexander as a guide for navigating the realms of philosophy that resist demonstrability and conclusivity. A short survey of those two moments illuminates why and how Maimonides applies dialectics to the esoteric topics of the *Pardes*.

In Book II of the *Guide* (chapter 22) Maimonides portrays Aristotle's proofs of the eternality of the cosmos as "something analogous to guessing and conjecture." To help navigate the epistemological uncertainty of cosmological speculation, Maimonides endorses Alexander's recommendation for how to best study topics that cannot be logically demonstrated and are therefore philosophically dubious:

---

[187] Early rejoinders to Pines' thesis do not explore the possibility of the *Guide's* dialectical epistemology and methodology. See Alexander Altmann, *Von der Mittelalterlichen zur Modernedn Aufklarung: Studien zur Judischen Geistesgechichte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), pp. 60-129 [English]; and Barry Kogan, "What Can We Know and When Can We Know It? Maimonides on the Active Intelligence and Human Cognition," in ed. Eric L. Ormsby, *Moses Maimonides and His Time* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), pp. 121-137.

[188] The original meaning of Maimonides' Arabic title, *Dalalat al-ha'rin*, underscores this claim. As Joel Kraemer suggests, "The word *dalala* means 'pointing,' 'guidance,' 'indication,' 'path marker,' and *ha'ir* is someone who strays, is confused, dismayed or perplexed. The term *hayra* (perplexity) often renders aporia in Arabic translations from Greek." See Joel Kraemer, "Maimonides, the Great Healer," *Maimonides Studies* Vol. 5, p. 10. For further reflections on the origins of the Arabic title, see Avner Giladi, "A Short Note on the Possible Origins of the Title *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*," *Tarbiz*, 48 (1979), pp. 346-347 [Hebrew]; and Jose Faur, *Golden Doves With Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986), pp. 74-76. On the function of the term *dalala* (and *dalil*) in Islamic jurisprudence and theology, see Joseph van Ess, "The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology," in ed. G. E. von Grunebaum, *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970), pp. 26-27; and Wael B. Hallaq, T*he Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 130.

[189] On Alexander's role in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, see Pines, pp. Lxiv-lxxv. On Alexander's theory of dialectics, see Marta Spranzi, *The Art of Dialectic between Dialogue and Rhetoric: The Aristotelian Tradition* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), pp. 102-105. In a passage that Maimonides does not cite, but is nevertheless philosophically central to Maimonides' employment of dialectics in the Guide, Aristotle underlines the critical role that dialectics play in the philosophical sciences: "(Dialectics) has a further use in relation to the ultimate bases of the principles used in several sciences. For it is impossible to discuss them at all from the principles proper to the particular science in hand, seeing that the principles are the prius of everything else: it is through the opinions generally held on the particular points that these have to be discussed, and this task belongs properly, or most appropriately, to dialectic" (*Topics*, 101a, 37-101b, 3).

> Do not criticize me for having set up doubts that attach to his (Aristotle's) opinion. You may say: Can doubts disprove an opinion or establish its contrary as true? Surely this is not so. However we shall treat this philosopher as his followers have enjoined us to treat him. For Alexander has explained that in every case in which no demonstration is possible, the two contrary opinions with regard to the matter in question should be posited as hypothesis, and it should be seen what doubts attach to each of them: the one to which fewer doubts attach should be believed. Alexander says that things are thus with respect to all opinions regarding the divine that Aristotle sets forth and regarding which no demonstration is possible.[190]

Siding with Alexander, Maimonides does not suppose that Aristotle's inability to generate a syllogistic demonstration for the eternality of the cosmos ought to halt a student's speculation on cosmic questions. Rather, cosmological doubt ought to transform the methods through which speculation generates assent and conviction. On Aristotelian topics that concern the divine realms, where no demonstration is possible, Alexander councils that the best way to speculate is negatively: contrast dissenting opinions and determine which produces fewer doubts. This practice of critically examining competing theses is a central mode of Aristotelian dialectics, known as aporetic dialectics, which differs in style from the more dialogical mode of dialectics, where two individuals debate the logical cogency of their propositions and conclusions.[191]

By accepting the appropriateness of dialectics for studying one of the most central topics of *Maaseh Bereishit*—the origins of the cosmos—Maimonides accedes that it is impossible to apply demonstrative logic to most questions about the supra-lunar spheres. The best method available for speculative cosmogony is the art of aporetic dialectics, where doubts are minimized but never fully resolved. In fact, Maimonides adopts this very approach several times in the *Guide* when addressing cosmogonical questions. In the chapters that Maimonides dedicates to the topic of creation (II:13-31), he cites and works through the strengths and weaknesses of three different cosmogonic approaches: Aristotle, Plato, and Torah.[192] Maimonides concludes there

---

[190] Pines, Vol. 2, p. 320.

[191] On aporetic dialectics, see Marta Spranzi, *The Art of Dialectic between Dialogue and Rhetoric: The Aristotelian Tradition* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), pp. 14-23; and Nicholas Rescher, *Dialectics: A Classical Approach to Inquiry* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2007), pp. 87-118. Maimonides addresses this branch of logic in his *Treatise on the Art of Logic*: "The masters of this art deal also with a kind of syllogism which they call apagogic. Thus, if, wishing to verify a certain proposition, we construct one of the categorical syllogisms which yields to us as a conclusion the proposition whose truthfulness we wanted to ascertain, we call it a straight categorical syllogism. But if we verify this proposition in another way, namely, by assuming hypothetically the contradictory of the proposition which we want to verify, and by forming a syllogism, proving the falsehood of that hypothetical contradictory proposition, so that the contradictory of that which we hypothetically assumed is the true one without a doubt, and is the proposition we want to substantiate, such a syllogism, demonstrating to us the falsehood of a contradictory of a proposition which we want to verify, we call apagogic" (Efros, pp. 45-46).

[192] For an analysis of the dialectical methodology in Maimonides' chapters on creation, see Daniel Davies, *Method and Metaphysics in Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 26-42.

that the Biblical-Rabbinic approach is epistemologically superior to the Hellenistic options only because it generates fewer doubts, not because it is revelatory or demonstrable.

Maimonides does not merely argue that the epistemic limits to human apprehension are best remediated through the dialectical examination of competing speculative claims. He also claims that epistemic impediments are the very cause of philosophical disagreements. Just as in jurisprudence, dissensus emerges where no conclusive demonstration is possible and arguments must be made that are probable but uncertain. Early in the *Guide* (I:31), Maimonides directly addresses this dynamic between doubt and dissensus:

> With regard to such things (to which man has a great longing to know) there is a multiplicity of opinions, disagreement arises between the men engaged in speculation, and doubts crop up; all this because the intellect is attached to an apprehension of them; and also because everyone thinks that he has found a way by means of which he will know the true reality of the matter. Now it is not within the power of the human intellect to give a demonstration of these matters. For in all things whose true reality is known through demonstration there is no tug of war and no refusal to accept a thing proven….The things about which there is this perplexity are very numerous in divine matters, few in matters pertaining to natural science, and nonexistent in matters pertaining to mathematics.[193]

Since seekers are typically unwilling to settle for anything less than demonstrable truth, and most of the topics of the *pardes*—the divine and natural sciences—elude demonstrability, an advanced student of the *pardes* must chart a course through the tug and pull of dissensus and

[193] *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 1:31, p. 66.

contradiction.[194] To accentuate this connection between the cognitive status of *pardes* and dissensus, Maimonides cites Alexander of Aphrodisias' claim that there exist three prime causes of disagreement: (1) the love of strife; (2) subtle and obscure objects of apprehension; (3) and ignorance. Maimonides is most directly interested in the second cause—the manner by which obscure topics engender disagreement. As he mentions in the conclusion to the citation above, the areas of obscurity are few in regards to *ma'aseh bereishit*, restricted to the eternality of the cosmos and the exact nature of the celestial mechanics.[195] *Ma'aseh merkavah* ("divine matters"), on the other hand, demarcates a realm of speculation where the limits of human apprehension are even more acute. Maimonides' aim, therefore, is not primarily to critique persons who speculate about divine and cosmogonic matters after they have gone through the proper intellectual training;[196] the *Guide,* after all, is a guide through those precise topics. What aggravates Maimonides is the insistence on producing philosophical demonstrations in areas where philosophical certitude is unattainable. A logical praxis other than demonstrable proof-making is required for students to properly apprehend the abstract thematics of the *pardes*.

Maimonides addresses that need in the ensuing chapter (I:32) where he outlines a dialectical methodology capable of guiding students through their speculations on the *pardes*. The chapter offers not a map of the *pardes* but the techniques one requires to steer through its

---

[194] Maimonides endorses a similar engagement with theological dissensus elsewhere in the *Guide*: "You must not find it incongruous that, having mentioned the interpretation of Jonathan ben Uziel (regarding Ezekiel's vision)...I propounded a different interpretation. You will find that many among the Sages, and even among the commentators, differ from his interpretation with regard to certain words and many notions that are set forth by the *prophets.* How could this not be with regard to these obscure matters? Moreover, I do not oblige you to decide in favor of my interpretation. Understand the whole of his interpretation from that to which I have drawn your attention, and understand my interpretation. God knows in which of the two interpretations there is a correspondence to what has been intended (III: 4:425)." On Maimonides' understanding of the proliferation of theologies spoken by Job's friends, see *The Guide of the Perplexed* III:23. Maimonides advocates a similar deferment of judgment with regards to rabbinic disagreements that have no legal repercussions. See Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, *Sotah* 3:3: "I have already told you numerous times that if sages disagree about a position that does not have an action as its telos, then it is inappropriate to say that the Halakhah is like one of them." For similar remarks see Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, *Sanhedrin* 10:3 and *Shevu'ot* 1:4. See also Maimonides comments in his *Epistle of Resurrection,* in *Epistles of Maimonides: Crisis and Leadership*, trans. Abraham Halkin (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985), p. 219: "But every issue that does not involve practice, on which opinions differ, cannot be resolved in favor of one over the other." Maimonides' understanding of medicine as an inconclusive science (see his *Iggrot*, ed. Kapah, p. 153) leads him to a similar valorization of collaboration and dialectical deliberations in matters of medical etiology; see Maimonides, *Treatise on Asthma*, in *Maimonides' Medical Writings*, Vol. 6, trans. Fred Rosner (Haifa: The Maimonidean Research Institute, 1994), pp. 132-133: "If all [the physicians] gather together [in consultation], as is done for kings and for wealthy people, and if they debate and deliberate and then render their opinion about what should be done [for the patient, the result] is helpful and good. The patient benefits from their collective opinions...If there are many [physicians together in consultation] one reminds the other and assists him in completing his line of reasoning until they reach the perfect treatment plan to which they all agree."

[195] See Joel L. Kraemer, "Maimonides on Aristotle and Scientific Method," in *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, ed. Eric L. Ormsby (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), pp. 76-84.

[196] See *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 1:33, pp. 70-72 (ed. Pines).

innumerable aporiai. Drawing on an analogy between the strain of intense sensory apprehension (i.e., forcing one's eyes to focus for a long time on a distant point) and intense metaphysical apprehension (i.e., attempting to prove metaphysical claims), Maimonides admonishes those who believe that metaphysical comprehension is simply a function of cognitive capacity. The brain is also a bodily muscle; it too can be dulled by excessive and strenuous effort. However, cognitive overexertion, for Maimonides, is not caused by intense intellectual effort per se. It all comes down to method (demonstrative or dialectical)—to how one approaches the epistemological arduousness of apprehending the topics of the *pardes*:

> For if you stay your progress because of a dubious point; if you do not deceive yourself into believing that there is a demonstration with regards to matters that have not been demonstrated; if you do not hasten to reject and categorically to pronounce false any assertions whose contradictions have not been demonstrated; if, finally, you do not aspire to apprehend that which you are unable to apprehend—you will have achieved human perfection and attained the rank of *Rabbi Akiva*, peace be on him, who *entered in peace and went out in peace* when engaged in the theoretical study of these metaphysical matters. If, on the other hand, you aspire to apprehend things that are beyond your apprehension; or if you hasten to pronounce false, assertions the contradictories of which have not been demonstrated or that are possible, though very remotely so—you will have joined *Elisha Aḥer*.[197]

Maimonides transforms the two central protagonists of the rabbinic *pardes* narrative[198]—Elisha/ *Aḥer* and Rabbi Akiva—into two types of philosophers.[199] Elisha is the gluttonous metaphysician, a philosopher who refuses to inhibit his cognitive desires. Rather than tarry among premises that cannot be demonstrably proven or demonstrably contradicted, Elisha is hasty to negate what has no direct contradiction and to affirm what is beyond the limits of human apprehension. In this reading, Elisha's heresy is less a theological mistake than a methodological mistake, a misconception of the methods of speculation. Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, is the paragon of dialectics, the one who speculates on cosmogonic and metaphysical matters free from the allure of scientific certainty. By dimming the passion of certitude, Rabbi Akiva achieves a maximal level of human perfection. Now this does not mean that Maimonides is counseling his readers to dally in doubt and dissensus. As he established elsewhere (II:22) in the *Guide*, when

---

[197] *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 1:32, p. 68-69.

[198] See Tosefta Ḥagigah, 2:2.

[199] See S. Stroumsa, "Elisha Ben Abuya and Muslim Heretics in Maimonides' Writings," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1995): 173–93; and ibid., *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 44-45.

confronted with an array of dissenting *endoxas*, one ought to negate the least persuasive premises and come to peace with the approximate certainty of the remaining hypothesis.[200]

Study of the *pardes* induces doubt and dissensus because one must speculate on topics that transcend the reach of human cogitation and syllogistic proof. Rabbi Akiva is able to enter and exit the *pardes* in peace only because he has mastered dialectical modes of reasoning—the cognitive techniques that guide one through the perplexities of doubt and dissensus. Given this conclusion, we may state that the esoteric principles of the *Guide* align with neither the empiricism of Aristotelian philosophy (as per Strauss) nor the fatalism of skepticism (as per Pines), but with the tentative epistemology of Islamo-Aristotelian dialectics.[201]

Conclusion: Talmud/Jadal/Padres

A single enigmatic sentence in Maimonides' law-code sent us on a scavenger hunt through the Islamic landscape of Maimonides' milieu, Maimonides' jurisprudential theory, Aristotelian logic, and one of the most labyrinthine of Jewish books ever written, *The Guide of the Perplexed.* The breadth of Maimonides' intellect and the range of intellectual sources that he engaged with necessitate this form of panoramic analysis, especially when the subject of study is a declaration about the interconnection between disparate disciplines. Much is at stake in how one interprets that declaration of Maimonides—"the matters called *pardes* are included in the Talmud." Might Maimonides be radically rewriting the rabbinic curriculum to include the philosophical arts? Is Maimonides merely affirming the talmudic roots of medieval philosophical tropes? Or is Maimonides insisting on a deeper, disciplinary affinity between talmudic reasoning and contemplation of the supra-lunar realm?

Disciplines may depend on social and institutional structures, but they primarily demarcate different epistemologies and styles of reasoning.[202] This section introduced a new reading of Maimonidean interdisciplinarity by focusing on the epistemological underpinnings of medieval Jewish disciplines. I proposed that Maimonides conjoins esoteric theology (*pardes*) and talmudic scholarship because both are styles of reasoning predicated on "conventional

---

[200] Alongside the certainty of demonstrable knowledge, Alfarabi delineates two lesser forms of knowledge (generated by dialectical and rhetorical arguments): (1) approximate certainty (*muqarib lil-yaqin*), and (2) assurance/trust (*sukun al-nafs*). On the role of these lesser epistemologies in Maimonides's thought, see Alfred L. Ivry, "The Logical and Scientific Premises of Maimonides' Thought," in eds. Alfred L. Ivry, Elliot R. Wolfson, and Allian Arkush, *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998) p. 90.

[201] On this dialectical mode of Maimonidean speculation as a spiritual practice, see Joseph Stern, "Maimonides' Epistemology," in ed. Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 128. For a more recent formulation, see Joseph Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 4-9.

[202] See William B. Dabars, *Disciplinarity and Interdisciplinarity: Rhetoric and Context in the American Research University*, PhD, University of California, Los Angeles, 2008, pp. 16-35.

premises" (*endoxa* in Greek; *mifursamot* in Hebrew).[203] Legal extrapolation (talmud) and philosophical speculation (*pardes*) share a precarious epistemology, and therefore are best performed through the principles and practices of Aristotelian dialectics. Thus Maimonides not only widens the range of rabbinic disciplines to include philosophical speculation; he also establishes an epistemological and methodological affinity between the two intellectual practices.[204]

Conceptualizing Maimonidean interdisciplinarity has its complications. First, Maimonides links together not two but three disciplines: jurisprudence, logic, and supra-lunar physics/metaphysics. Secondly, Maimonides adopted elements from multiple cultures of scholarship: to conjoin talmudic and philosophical-esoteric disciplines, Maimonides looked to Islamic scholarship, to how it integrated Aristotelian dialectics into jurisprudential and theological modes of conjecture. For instance, a century before Maimonides, Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni (1028-1085), al-Ghazali's teacher, composed a treatise on juridical and theological *jadal* as a means to forge an unprecedented synthesis between theological and jurisprudential practices. At the time, Shafi'i legal scholars were skeptical of the legitimacy of Ash'ari theology (*kalam*). By demonstrating that *jadal* is a central method of both *kalam* and *usul al-fiqh*, Al-Juwayni deflated that antagonism and helped integrate *kalam* into Sunni Orthodoxy.[205] Maimonides may have had a comparable project in mind—to legitimize the rabbinic study of Aristotelian esoteric philosophy by demonstrating that its epistemology is analogous to that of traditional talmudic inquiry. Is Maimonides an innovator of Jewish interdisciplinarity, then, or a borrower of Islamic models of interdisciplinarity? Since both seem true, perhaps we ought to conceive of Maimonides as an intercultural interdisciplinarian, as a scholar who embraced the relationships Muslims established between Islamic disciplines and then expressed an analogous interdisciplinary nexus between Jewish disciplines. These crisscrossing lines of interdisciplinarity and intercultural contact may be mapped as follows:

---

[203] Other medieval Jews made similar arguments about other disciplines of Torah-study. See Gersonides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Venice, 1547, 2c-d:

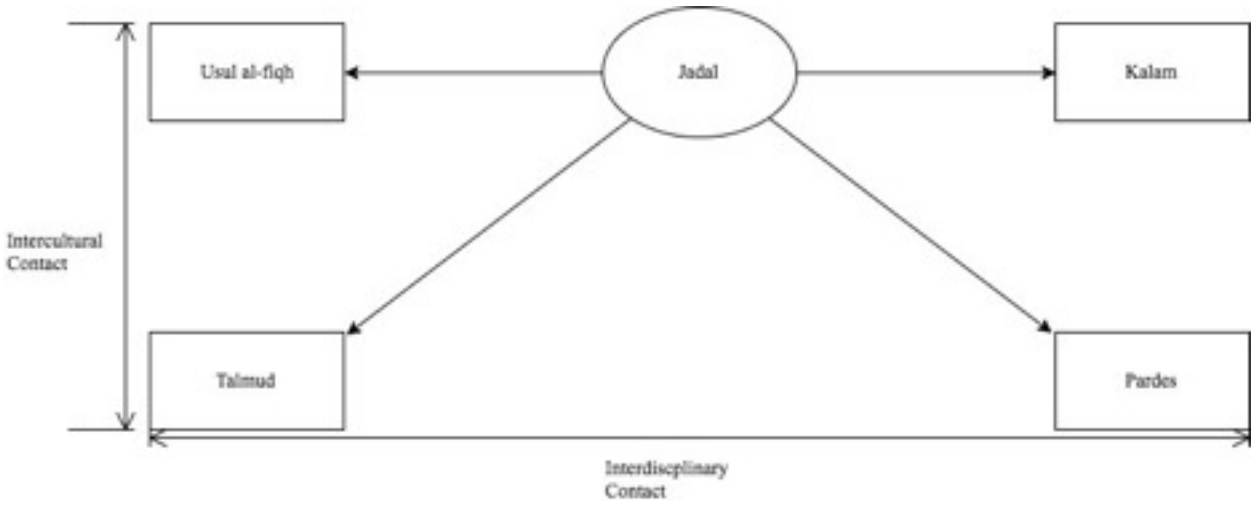
וראוי שלא יעלם ממנו שאי אפשר בנתינת הסבות בכמו אלו הדברים התוריים שינתנו סבות מחייבות מציאות המצוה ההיא חיוב הכרחי כמו הענין בחכמות הלמודיות ואי אפשר גם כן בזה נתינת הסבות ממי הסבות הנתונות בחכמה הטבעית כי זה ממה שלא יתכן בשום פנים לפי שטבע הנושא הרוריי אינו באופן שיקבל כמו זאת האמת.

See also Nahmanides' introduction to his *Milhamot Ha-Shem,* where he offers an explicit account (and defense) of the epistemic weakness of halakhic logic:

ואתה המסתכל בספרי אל תאמר בלבבך כי כל תשובתי על הרב רבי זרחיה ז"ל כולן בעיני תשובות נצחות ומכריחות אותך להודות בהם על פני עקשותך ותתפאר בהיותך מספק אחת מהן על לומדיה או תטריח על דעתך להכנס בנקב המחט לדחות מעליך הכרח ראיותי אין הדבר כן כי יודע כל לומד תלמודנו שאין במחלוקת מפרשיו ראיות גמורות ולא ברוב קושיות חלוטות שאין בחכמה הזאת מופת בדור כגון חשבוני התשבורות (math) ונסיוני התכונה (astronomy) אבל נשים כל מאדנו ודיינו מכל מחלוקת בהרחיק אחת מן הדעות בסברות מכריעות ונדחוק עליה השמועות ונשים יתרון הכשר לבעל דינה מפשטי ההלכות והוגן הסוגיות עם הסכמת השכל הנכון וזאת תכלית יכלתנו וכוונת כל חכם וירא האלהים בחכמת הגמרא.

[204] Cf. Aryeh Botwinick, "Skeptical Motifs Linking Together Maimonides' *Guide* and his *Mishneh Torah*" in ed. Georges Tamer, *The Trials Of Maimonides: Jewish, Arabic, and Ancient Cultures of Knowledge* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 151-174.

[205] See Widigo, *Imam Al-Haramayn*, pp. 205-270. For an early thirteenth-century Islamic *jadal* treatise with similar goals, see Weiss, *The Search for God's Law*.



Despite creating these generative intersections, Maimonides' model of esotericism differs from Islamic *jadal* in one pivotal way. It neutralizes the dialogical comportment of both the Talmud and Islamic dialectics. Legal deductions and metaphysical deliberation are figured by Maimonides as practices of ratiocination that an individual performs within the mind's confinement. The study of antecedent traditions may be a central part of these disciplines, but the authors of those traditions cannot argue back. Maimonides thus eliminates both the sociality and the rhetorical style of the Talmud in order to transform talmudics into a completely cognitive discipline.[206] Similarly, Maimonides recommends that the study of the *pardes* be a solitary venture.[207]

The emergence of Kabbalah in the decades immediately following the translation of the *Guide* into Hebrew (1204) is often portrayed as a reaction to Maimonides' equation of Jewish esotericism with Aristotelian philosophy. The kabbalists of France and Spain, troubled by Maimonides' claim that all lineages of Jewish esoteric traditions had been destroyed in the diaspora,[208] contended that they were recipients of ancient secrets and that the true meanings of *ma'aseh Bereshit* and *ma'aseh merkavah* are best deciphered through a neo-platonic rereading of rabbinic *aggadot*.[209] *Midrash ha-Ne'lam,* the earliest stratum of the Zohar, complicates this history. On the one hand it adheres to two central components of Maimonidean esotericism: (1)

---

[206] See Sergey Dolgopolski, *The Open Past:Subjectivity and Remembering in the Talmud* (New York; Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 167-170.

[207] In the introduction to his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Maimonides writes that the topics of the *pardes* are esoteric and ought not to be discussed in public, "because these matters are not part of what ought to be taught and meditated on in the academies of wisdom."

[208] See Maimonides' introduction to the third section of his *Guide*.

[209] See Moshe Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," in ed. I. Twersky, *Studies in Maimonides* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 31-81. For a modified version of this arguments, see Moshe Idel, "Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and the Kabbalah," *Jewish History*, Vol. 18:2/3 (2004), pp. 197-226. Cf. Elliot Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in eds. Gorge K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse, *Moses Maimonides (1138-1204): His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical "Wirkungsgeschichte" in Different Cultural Contexts* (Wurzberg: 2004), pp. 209-237.

its depictions of Jewish esoteric concepts are still heavily dependent on Maimonides;[210] and (2) it instantiates Maimonides' model of esotericism by integrating talmudic forms of reasoning into its discussions of esoteric tropes. On the other hand, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is replete with talmudic rhetoric and talmudic sociality, formal features that are absent from maimonidean esoteric discourse. The literary results of that formal revision provide a window onto a fascinating and largely untold development in the history of Medieval Jewish esotericism: the decades in between the Castilian reception of Maimonides in the early thirteenth century and the flourishing of kabbalistic theosophy in that region of Spain during the last two decades of the thirteenth century. To analyze *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* contestations of esotericism and its disciplinary hybridization, the following chapters survey its adoption and transformation of talmudic modes of reasoning, rhetoric, and composition. The subsequent chapter begins to tell this story by analyzing the transformation of *binah* from a mode of talmudic creativity to a mode of divine creativity in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, a shift that precipitates but is distinct from the elevation of *binah* into a theosophical-kabbalistic symbol. To appreciate the cultural and theological significance of this history, the subsequent chapter first assesses how talmudic reasoning came to be associated with *binah*.

[210] See Nathan Wolski, "Moses de Leon and *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*," pp. 38-48.

Chapter Three

The Logic of Binah:
A Genealogy of Generative Cognition in Pre-Modern Jewish Literature

Judah Loew ben Bezalel (d. 1609), the Maharal of Prague, adds a psychological layer to Maimonides' model of talmudic reasoning. The Maharal proposes that each of the three canons of rabbinic learning corresponds to a different cognitive modality:

> The three (canons of rabbinic Judaism)—Bible, Mishnah, and Gemarah—correlate to the three parts of the intellect—*hokhmah, da'at*, and *tevunah*. The Torah is *hokhmah*. The Mishnah is *da'at*, because through (studying) Mishnah one knows how to differentiate between one matter and another, and this is *da'at*, when a person separates between one matter and another...*Tevunah* is the (practice of) learning (Gemarah) ("*limmud*") since he derives and infers one matter from another (*meivin davar mi-tokh davar*).[1]

In the concluding clause of this excerpt, the Maharal correlates three distinct things: Talmud study (i.e., "Gemarah"), *tevunah*, and inferential reasoning—the cognitive techniques a scholar uses to generate new knowledge from old knowledge ("*meivin davar mi-tokh davar*"; "*meivin*" is a verbal form of *tevunah*). Four centuries earlier, Maimonides uses a similar formulation to describe the analytical practices of talmudic reasoning: "*mitbonen b-da'ato l-havin davar mi-davar*," "(he) contemplates in his mind to infer one thing from another."[2] While Maimonides does not explicitly connect the discipline of talmud to *tevunah*, he too links together three different things: verbs of *tevunah* ("*mitbonen*" and "*l-havin*"), a mode of reasoning that is relational (one thing is inferred from another; "*davar mi-davar*"), and the practices of talmudic analysis.

These two related texts prompt a cluster of questions: Why do Maimonides and the Maharal presume that *tevunah* is a mode of cognitive creativity that defines talmudic learning? Apart from Maimonides (as discussed in the previous chapter), is there evidence of other medieval Jews adopting practices of talmudic reasoning (i.e., *tevunah*-like modes of cognition) for the study of secrets? And how might this pre-kabbalistic history of *tevunah/binah* relate to later theosophic conceptions of *binah* as the third of the ten powers of the godhead (*sefirot*)? In other words: What prompts the correlation of *tevunah/binah* to talmud study? Did medieval Jews advocate for applying talmudic modes of reasoning to the study of secrets? And did the correlation of *tevunah/binah* and talmud study play a role in Jewish esoteric discourses about *binah*?

---

[1] *Tiferet Yisrael, 56*:
וכמו שבארנו כי אלה השלוש שהם מקרא משנה גמרא הם נגד שלושה חלקי השכל שנקראים חכמה דעת תבונה – שהתורה היא חכמה והמשנה הוא הדעת – שבמשנה הוא יודע להבחין בין דבר לדבר ודבר זה נקרא דעת כאשר יבדיל בין דבר לדבר ולכך קבעו ההבדלה בחונן הדעת, והתבונה הוא הלימוד שמוציא ומבין דבר מתוך דבר.

[2] Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 1:12.

To address these questions, I will first investigate how talmudic reasoning came to be associated with both *tevunah* (or *binah*, a more common cognate of *tevunah*) and the cognitive practices of inferring "*davar mi-davar*," "one matter from another matter." In the second half, I will then analyze how Jewish esoteric sources adopt and adapt talmudic techniques of creativity. I will argue that the logic of "*davar mi-davar*," a logic of inferences and analogies associated with *binah* and talmudic reasoning, is indeed a significant trope in medieval Jewish esotericism. To set-up this claim, the first half of this chapter offers a history of "*davar mi-davar*" terminology in rabbinic literature. I will demonstrate that inferential reasoning—inferring one *davar* from another *davar*—shifts from being a matter of contention in early rabbinic literature to becoming firmly associated with the analytical practices of talmudic reasoning by the crest of the rabbinic period (4th-6th century). The subsequent section then maps the medieval sources that advocate for the use of rabbinic practices of inferential reasoning to expand the breadth of esoteric knowledge. Specifically, I will explore how an ancient notion of *binah* as a mode of esoteric decipherment intersects with the rabbinic notion of *binah* as a mode of inferential creativity in late medieval sources. In the final section, I turn to passages in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* that characterize *tevunah* and inferential creativity less as a mode of rabbinic cognition than as a mode of divine cosmogenesis: God created the heavens "*davar mi-davar*," i.e., by deriving the celestial realm from a previously created angelic light. *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* will thus be identified as a pre-kabbalistic discourse that attributes *binah* to the creativity of the divine in a manner comparable to how earlier sources attribute *binah* to the creativity of talmudic scholars.

I: Davar mi-Davar: Analogical Inferences in Tannaitic Midrash

The expression "*davar mi-davar*," "a thing from a thing," appears for the first time in the tannaitic midrashim composed by the school of Rabbi Ishmael. A mainstay of the dialectical terminology that introduces and rejects hermeneutical possibilities, "*davar mi-davar*" deflates proposed legal analogies, as though to say, "do not analogize this legal case to that one but to an other, more comparable case."[3] Throughout tannaitic midrash, analogical reasoning provides a fundamental method for making legal inferences. By establishing an affinity between two legal cases, an inference can be adduced that the two analogues should share further legal properties. But a law can often be analogized to multiple legal cases that have dissimilar laws. In such confounding cases, "*davar mi-davar*" adjudicates between the opposing legal analogies by demanding that analogies derive from coherent patterns of conceptual resemblances, not merely from formal, lexical resemblances. Hence for these early midrashim, the legitimacy of inferential analogies (inferring that the law in case *b* is similar to the law in case *a* because they share similar features) is complicated by the inconclusiveness of analogical reasoning—one can often locate other cases that share properties with the target case but are governed by a different law. In what follows, I will argue that, at its origin, "*davar mi-davar*" terminology participates in a tannaitic struggle over the legitimacy of inconclusive methods of human reasoning (i.e.,

---

[3] See Richard Hidary, "Talmudic Topoi: The Hermeneutical Methods of Midrash and Greco-Roman Rhetoric," Paper presented at the 17th International Conference of the Jewish Law Association. New Haven, Connecticut. July 31, 2012.

analogical and inferential reasoning). By surveying how the logic of "*davar mi-davar*" remediates epistemological anxieties about the legitimacy of rabbinic reasoning, this section documents the rabbinic techniques of analytical creativity that evolve into and become associated with the discipline of Talmud study.

The function of the rabbinic phrase "*davar mi-davar*" can be gleaned from a tannaitic midrash on the *mezuzah*. The relevant biblical verse, "...write them on the doorposts (*mezuzot*) of your house and on your gates" (Deut. 6:9), is ambiguous about the required mode of writing. Are Jews commanded to chisel scriptural words into the stone panels of their doorposts, or to inscribe them onto parchment and affix that to the doorpost? Philo, an Alexandrian Jew living at the beginning of the first millennium, interprets the biblical command as a mandate to engrave the words of the Torah onto the stones of one's doorpost:

> He (God) bids them to write and set them forth in front of the doorposts of each house and the gates in their walls, so that those who leave or remain at home, citizens and strangers alike, may read the inscriptions engraved (ἐστηλιτευμένοις[4]) on the face of the gates and keep in perpetual memory what they should say and do, careful alike to do and to allow no injustice, and when they enter their houses and again when they go forth men and women and children and servants alike may act as is due and fitting both for others and for themselves.[5]

Philo makes no mention of scribal writing or scrolls that are to be attached to a doorpost. For Philo, the *mezuzah* is made of stone, visible to all who pass by a Jewish home. Ancient Samaritans living in Palestine practiced a similar interpretation of the *mezuzah*. They were known to inscribe the ten commandments onto stone slabs and erect the stones outside their homes.[6] This cultural backdrop to our midrash suggests that rabbinic inquiry into the material form of the *mezuzah* was not merely a scholastic exercise. A midrashic argument was required to

---

[4] "Εστηλιτευμένοις normally means engraved on a stone or a hard object since the verb stems from στήλη, i.e. 'stele.' Philo almost certainly uses it in that sense here, since he refers to φλίων (doorposts). He does use the verb metaphorically in other places as, for example, "engraved in the heart" or "engraved in nature." More important for this context is that Philo can use it with reference to sacred writings (*Heres*, 258; *Abraham*, 4, 177; *Virtues*, 15, 95), and I have found one place where he employs it with reference to something set forth in a letter (*Omnis Probus*, 95). But the passage here does appear to mean engraved on a hard surface" (Erich S. Gruen, personal communication). Furthermore, Philo's description of people reading the *mezuzah* as they pass suggests strongly that it was an inscription on the stone and not a scroll which would necessarily have to be protected by a covering, rendering it non-legible from the outside.

[5] Philo, *On the Special Laws* IV, 142, trans. F. H Colson, in *Philo, Vol. 8: On the Special Laws, Book 4*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), p. 96-97. For further analysis of Philo's conception of this commandment, see Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, "Ritual on the Threshold: Mezuzah and the Crafting of Domestic and Civic Space," *Jewish Social Studies*, Volume 20:3 (Spring/ Summer 2014), pp. 100-130.

[6] See *A Companion to Samaritan Studies*, eds. Alan David Crown, Reinhard Pummer, and Abraham Tal (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993) p. 131; and, Alexander Scheiber, "The Mezuzah of the Egyptological Collection of the Hungarian Museum of Fine Arts," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* Vol. 48:1 (1957), pp. 6-12.

legitimate the rabbinic interpretation of the biblical ritual[7] (to write the *mezuzah* on parchment) and void the scriptural arguments of competing Jewish practices (to inscribe the *mezuzah* on stone).

The midrash, with its logical moves enumerated, reads as follows:

> "...write them [on the doorposts of your house and on your gates]" (Deut. 6:9):
> (1) I hear that one may write these words on stones.
> (2) You may reason in the following way: Here "write" is mentioned, and further, "write" (Deut. 27:8). Just as the writing in that passage is to be written on stones, so here "write" means that it is to be done on stones.
> (3) Or perhaps pursue the argument in [the following] direction: Here "write" is mentioned, and further, "write" (Num. 5:23, in the setting of the wife accused of adultery). Just as in that latter passage, what is required is writing on parchment with ink, so here too what is required is writing on parchment with ink.
> (4) You may reason from the language of the latter verse and I will reason from the language of the dissenting opinion. Here "write" is mentioned, and further, "write" (Deut. 27:8). Just as the writing in that passage is to be made on stones, so here "write" means that it is to be made on stones.
> (5) You may, however, propose a distinction. I will learn this from that and compare this to that [דבר מדבר ואדון[8] דבר מדבר אלמוד]. I will learn the rule from a case that is applicable to all generations from another case that is applicable to all generations, and not learn the rule for a case that is applicable to all generations from a case that is applicable only to a particular moment.
> [Therefore] Here "write" is written, and further, "write" (Num. 5:23, in the setting of the wife accused of adultery). Just as in that latter passage, what is required is writing on a parchment with ink, so here too what is required is writing on a parchment with ink.

---

[7] *Mezuzot* on parchment were also found at Qumran. See J. T. Milik, "Qumran Grotte 4.II: Tefillin, Mezuzot et Targums (4Q128-4Q157)," *DJD* 6 (1977), pp. 35-39; M. Baillet, J. T. Milik, and R. de-Vaux, "*Les 'Petites Grottes' de Qumran*," *DJD* 3 (1962); and Julie A. Duncan, "Excerpted Texts of 'Deuteronomy' at Qumran," *Revue de Qumran* 18:1 (1997), pp. 43-62.

[8] On the meaning of *din* in tannaitic midrash, see Bacher's assertion that, "from the narrow concept of a judicial decision, which is derived from scriptural interpretations, the concept of 'din' is expanded to all matter of interpretation. Whoever clarifies a verse and derives from it a certain teaching, it is as though he derived a decision. He becomes a judge, and the teaching is the decision (din)" (Bacher, *Erkhe Midrash,* 1:15). See also, Moshe Halbertal, *Interpretive Revolutions in the Making: Values as Interpretive Considerations in Midrashei Halakhah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), p. 20, n. 15 [Hebrew]; Menahem Kahana, *Sifrei Zuta on Deuteronomy: Citations from a New Tannaitic Midrash* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2002), pp. 255-256 [Hebrew]; Tzvi Novick, "Din and Debate: Some Dialectical Patterns in Tannaitic Texts," *JSIJ* 11 (2012), pp. 187-215; and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, "Structure and Reflectivity in Tannaitic Legal Homilies, Or: How to Read Midrashic Terminology," *Prooftexts* 34 (2014), pp. 271-301.

(6) Even though there is no decisive proof, there is a least an indication of it: Then Baruch answered them, "He answered them, 'He himself recited all those words to me, and I would write them down in the scroll in ink'" (Jer. 36:18).[9]

The polysemous range of the biblical verb for writing, *ketiva,* prompts a midrashic inquiry into the word's meaning in other biblical contexts.[10] In one instance, Moses instructs the Israelites, after they had crossed the Jordan River, to inscribe his revelations onto a stone monument and then enter Palestine without him. The stones, he tells them, are to be coated with plaster, for, "on those stones you shall inscribe (*vekhtavta*) every word of this Torah most distinctly" (Deut. 27:8).[11] The writing that Moses asks for is an everlasting writing. Other biblical verses, however, indicate that *ketiva* is created by inscribing ink onto refined but far from permanent leather parchment. For instance, at the cultic trial for a married woman accused of adultery by her husband, the priest is to "write down (*vekhatav*) these curses on parchment (*sefer)* and rub it off into the water of bitterness" (Num. 5:23). Here writing must be dissoluble; the accused woman drinks the priest's ink to determine her innocence (if she is guilty, the ink magically distends her body).[12] Of the numerous models of writing described in the Bible, our midrash cites these two examples, and they could not be more disparate: *ktiva* as chiseling letters onto an everlasting object (etchings on stone), *ktiva* as creating impermanent language (dissolvable ink on parchment). The mission of the Sifrei is to clarify which form of writing Deuteronomy 6:9 demands when it directs the Israelites to "inscribe them (*ukhtavtam*) on the doorposts (*mezuzot*) of your house and on your gates." Is a *mezuzah* to be made of permanent or perishable writing?

The Sifrei dialectically explores these two semantic possibilities, raising and refuting arguments for each interpretation. The logical progression of its argumentation runs as follows: (1) the verse would seem to command writing on stone (likely, because the direct object of the verse's verb, "writing," is "the doorpost," and a mediating material—i.e., parchment—is never mentioned); (2) a lexical analogy from Deuteronomy 27:8 supports this reading; (3) but a lexical analogy can also be made with Numbers 5:23, which would support the opposite legal claim [*mezuzah* = parchment]; (4) but a multiplicity of lexical analogies does not inherently undermine the legitimacy of the first lexical analogy; (5) the two analogies are not equivalent—a lexical

---

[9] Sifrei, Deuteronomy, Vaethanan 36 (ed. Finkelstein, p. 66):
וכתבתם, שומע אני על גבי אבנים, הרי אתה דן, נאמר כאן כתב ונאמר להלן כתב, מה כתב האמור להלן על גבי אבנים אף כתב האמור כאן על גבי אבנים, או כלך לדרך זו נאמר כאן כתב ונאמר להלן כתב, מה כתב האמור להלן על הספר בדיו אף כתב האמור כאן על הספר בדיו, אתה דן בלשון הזה ואני אדון בלשון שלבעל דין חולק, נאמר כאן כתב ונאמר להלן כתב, מה כתב האמור להלן על גבי אבנים אף כתב האמור כאן על גבי אבנים, אמרת הפרש, אלמוד דבר מדבר ואדון דבר מדבר, אלמוד דבר שהוא מנהג לדורות מדבר שהוא מנהג לדורות ולא אלמוד דבר שהוא מנהג לדורות מדבר שאינו אלא לשעה, נאמר כאן כתב ונאמר להלן כתב מה כתב האמור להלן על הספר בדיו אף כתב האמור כאן על הספר בדיו. אף על פי שאין ראיה לדבר זכר לדבר ויאמר להם ברוך מפיו יקרא אלי את כל הדברים האלה ואני כותב על הספר בדיו.

[10] See *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume 4, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), p. 1157.

[11] For rabbinic approaches to the ambiguities of this verse—whether the plaster was added after the engraving or before and whether the Torah was to be written on the erected altar or on separate rocks—see Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Kipshuta,* Vol. 8 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955), pp. 699-701.

[12] See *Sifrei Naso*, 16 [Ed. Horovitz, p. 21].

analogy must be substantiated by formal-legal resemblances between the two analogues, and the *mezuzah* shares a substantive affinity to the *sotah* ritual in Numbers 5:23 (both are everlasting laws, whereas Deuteronomy 27:8 is addressed to a singular moment in Jewish history); (6) an episode from the book of Jeremiah that explicitly links writing to parchment offers a non-decisive verification of this position (since it is not about the *mezuzah*, and it occurs in a non-legal scriptural context).[13] At the structural level, the arguments shift back and forth before reaching a logical enjambment (in steps 3 and 4) that necessitates reorienting the analogical procedure from lexical congruities to legal affinities (step 5). At the methodological level, when a plurality of lexical analogues can be adduced, the Sifrei believes that the legal-interpreter must shift to a higher-order of analogical reasoning, one not based on surface-level, linguistic similarities but on conceptually-principled resemblances. The logical terminology that most concerns us—*elmod davar mi-davar v-adun davar mi-davar*—signifies this exact methodological claim (step 5): legal analogies must be governed by substantive similarities.

This legitimization of conceptually principled analogies is exclusive to the midrashim composed by the school of R. Ishmael. Only these tannaitic texts entrust human reasoning to generate substantive analogies. The midrashic texts of the R. Akiva school, on the other hand, consistently repudiate analogical reasoning.[14] As a heuristic means to analyze the methodological disparity between the two tannaitic approaches to analogical argumentation, we can examine how Ishmaelian and Akiban midrashim engage in dialectics after an analogy is introduced. Commonly, the phrase "or perhaps pursue (*kelakh*) the argument in [the following] direction," appears right after an analogical argument is adduced and introduces a counter-analogy. Our midrashic case-study from the Sifrei makes this move at step 3, where it advances the possibility that the *mezuzah* is at least as comparable to the priest's curse as to Moses' monument. Some thirty other midrashim also employ this rhetorical formula, leading scholars to call this group of midrashim, "the *kelakh braitot*."[15] Yet, given its function in all other twenty-nine occasions, the locution functions abnormally in our example from the Sifre. Our example is the only time that a counter-analogy introduces a norm that aligns with the midrash's legal conclusion; in all other cases, the counter-analogy adduced after the *kelakh* clause is rejected.

This rhetorical pattern was first noticed by Rabbenu Hillel, an eleventh-century scholar from Byzantine who composed the first commentary on tannaitic midrash. Rabbenu Hillel postulates that, "every time the formula, 'or perhaps pursue the argument in [the following] direction,' is employed, the first logical argument supports the conclusion."[16] Our midrashic

---

[13] On the rhetorical function of the phrase, "even though there is no decisive proof, there is a least an indication of it," in tannaitic literature, see Assaf Rosen-Zvi, "'Even Though there is no Decisive Proof, There is at Least an Indication of It': The Meaning, Character and Significance of the Phrase in the Tannaitic Literature," *Tarbiz* Vol. 78:3 (2009), pp. 323-344 [Hebrew]. Cf. Bacher, *`Erkhe Midrash* (Jerusalem: Carmiel, 1969), 1:36-38.

[14] See Azzan Yadin-Israel, *Scripture and Tradition: Rabbi Akiva and the Triumph of Midrash* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2015), especially pp. 63-67.

[15] Yaakov Elman identifies twenty-nine attestations of the phrase, "or perhaps pursue the argument in this direction," in tannaitic midrash. See Yaakov Elman, "The Order of Arguments in *Kalekh*-Braitot in Relation to the Conclusion," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 79:4 (1989), pp. 295-304.

[16] See Rabbenu Hillel's commentary on the *Sifre*, ed. Kolodetzky (Jerusalem: 1982), 18a.

pericope is one of the very few instances where this rule is broken. Even though the formula "or perhaps pursue the argument in [the following] direction" introduces step 4, the conclusion of the homily at step 6 differs from the initial hypothesis of steps 1-2. Recall the order of arguments in our local example: (1) stone (intuitive hypothesis), (2) stone (lexical-analogy), (3) parchment (lexical-analogy), (4) stone (lexical-analogy), (5) parchment (substantive-analogy), (6) parchment (non-authoritative prooftext). According to Hillel's rule, we expect the Midrash to conclude that the *mezuzah* is to be written on stone. But, strangely, the Sifrei arrives at the exact opposite conclusion. Shamma Friedman suggests that this aberration is due to the fact that all other instances of the clause, 'or perhaps pursue the argument in [the following] direction,' stem from midrashim composed by the school of R. Akiva.[17] Our midrash on the *mezuzah*, however, was composed by the school of R. Yishmael.[18] The difference testifies to two orientations to the legitimacy of using logic to construct conceptual analogies and arbitrate between those analogies. This apparent anomaly stems from two orientations to conceptually-principled analogies, as I shall now show.

Take the following example from the school of R. Akiva as paradigmatic of the opposite approach to analogical inferences, one that undermines the very legitimacy of analogical reasoning:

> "You shall celebrate it (the holiday of *sukkot*) as a festival of the Lord for seven days in the year…(you shall sit in booths seven days)" (Lev. 23:41-42).
> (1)"Days," the law seems to only stipulate days, where do I know (that the law applies to) nights?
> (2) I will reason: Here it says "seven," and by the (inauguration of the) tent-of-meeting it says "seven" (Lev. 8:33). Just as "seven" mentioned by the tent-of-meeting refers to both daytime and nighttime, so too "seven" mentioned here refers to both daytime and nighttime.
> (3) Or perhaps pursue the argument in [the following] direction: It says "seven" here and it says "seven" with reference to *lulav* (Lev. 23:40). Just as "seven" mentioned by *lulav* does not refer to both daytime and nighttime so too "seven" mentioned here does not refer to both daytime and nighttime.
> (4) Let us see to whom it is similar (*nir'eh le-mi domeh*)? We derive seven that are consistent all day long (the obligation to sit in a *sukkah*) from seven that are consistent all day long (the inauguration of the tent-of-meeting) and let not the seven of *lulav*, which are not consistently obligated all day long, serve as proof.
> (5) Or perhaps pursue the argument in [the following] direction: We derive seven that are an everlasting tradition (*sukkah*) from seven that are an everlasting tradition (*lulav*) and

---

[17] See Shamma Friedman, "'Or Perhaps Pursue the Argument in this Direction': The Term and its Usage in the Tannaitic Midrashim," *Sidra: A Journal for the Study of Rabbinic Literature* (1993), pp. 69-70 [Hebrew].

[18] Friedman, "Or Perhaps," p. 70. Although contemporary scholars largely agree that the Sifrei on Deuteronomy was composed by the Akiban school, Friedman cites a consensus of scholars (p. 70, n. 34) who confirm that the section of the Sifrei on Deuteronomy that contains our expect was composed by the Ishmaelien school.

let not the seven of the tent-of-meeting, which are not an everlasting tradition, serve as proof.
(6) Therefore the verse teaches "you shall sit for seven days" "you shall sit for seven days" for a *gezerah shavah*. Just as "you shall sit for seven days" mentioned regarding the tent-of-meeting treats the nighttime as the daytime, so too "you shall sit for seven days" mentioned here should treat the nighttime as the daytime.[19]

Scripture enjoins the Israelites to live in an impermanent shack (a *sukkah*) during the seven-day-long, harvest holiday of *Sukkot* held each autumn: "You shall celebrate it (the holiday of *sukkot*) as a festival of the Lord for seven days in the year…you shall sit in booths seven days" (Lev. 23:41-42). The verse, however, does not specify the temporal scope of that mandate. Must one sleep in the *sukkah* at night, or does the scriptural term "days" connote only daytime? With midrashic flourish, the Sifra clarifies a semantic incertitude by citing other biblical verses that use similar temporal terms. What sets our pericope apart from other midrashim, however, is that its dialectical analysis of lexical and substantive analogies, structured around the twice-repeated phrase, "or perhaps pursue the argument in [the following] direction," does not attempt to ascertain the legitimacy of legal analogies but, rather, to demonstrate the logical imprecision of analogical reasoning.[20]

In the Sifra, the response, "or perhaps pursue the argument in [the following] direction," acts as a refutation. It does not initiate a second analogy out of a genuine interest in amplifying the semantic range of scripture. Rather, it shuts down the force of the first analogy. *"Oh kelakh*," "or perhaps…" weakens the logic of the first analogy by illustrating the indeterminability of its analogical argument. In this refutational role, it exemplifies Rabbenu Hillel's rule: the conclusion confirms the first legal analogy, not the second, as the second analogy is a logical ruse. Our example from the Sifra enacts this exact dialectical pattern. In response to the legal query—must one dwell in a *sukkah* at night?— the arguments follow a precise Akiban pattern: (1) the verse seems to only mention daytime (intuitive hypothesis) (2) day and night (lexical analogy); (3) day (lexical analogy); (4) day and night (logical analogy); (5) day (logical analogy); (6) conclusion: day and night (*gezerah shavah*). As is evidenced by this structure, the Sifra shuts down both lexical and logical analogies because both are deemed equally indecisive. The polythetic nature of analogies—the ability for analogues to share both fundamental similarities and fundamental differences—illustrates that analogies are interchangeable, arbitrary, and therefore inconclusive. To reach a legal conclusion, the Sifra shifts from human reasoning to the certitude of a

---

[19] Sifra*,* Emor, 12:17 [ed. Weiss, 103a]:
ימים, אין לי אלא ימים, לילות מנין הריני דן נאמר כאן שבעה ונאמר שבעה באוהל מועד מה שבעה האמור באוהל מועד עשה בהם לילות כימים אף שבעה האמורים כאן נעשה בהם הלילות כימים. או לכה לדרך זה, נאמר כאן שבעה ונאמר שבעה בלולב מה שבעה אמורים בלולב לא עשה בהם את הלילות כבימים אף שבעה האמורים כאן לא נעשה בהן את הלילות כבימים נראה למי דומה דנין שבעה שהם תדירים כל היום משבעה שהם תדירים כל היום ואל יוכיחו שבעה שבלולב שאינן תדירים כל היום או לכה לדרך זו דנין שבעה שהם מנהג לדורות משבעה שהם מנהג לדורות ואל יוכיחו שבעה שבאהל מועד שאין מנהג לדורות תלמוד לומר תשבו שבעת ימים תשבו שבעת ימים לגזירה שוה מה תשבו שבעת ימים שנאמר באהל מועד עשה בהם את הלילות כימים אף תשבו שבעת ימים אמורים כאן נעשה בהם את הלילות כימים.

[20] For an analysis of how the Mekhilta mediates between conflicting analogies, see Natalie B. Dohrmann, *Law and Narrative in the Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael: The Problem of Midrashic Coherence*, PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1999, pp. 215-227.

scripturally taught analogy, known as a *gezerah shavah*.[21] In this context, that necessitates expanding the lexical breadth of the analogues from "days" to "you shall sit for seven days," a phrase which only appears twice in all of scripture.[22]

The Sifra's resistance to analogical reasoning exemplifies what Azzan Yadin-Israel calls the Sifra's "rhetorical camouflage."[23] Although the Sifra reads like a midrash, its midrashic rhetoric is veneer for a non-midrashic project: to transform oral traditions into rabbinically sanctioned Midrash. The Sifra engages in exegesis only to link tradition-based laws (*halakhot*) to scripture. Rabbenu Hillel's insight into how Akiban midrashim adjudicate between opposing analogies can be read as making a similar argument: these midrashim, which adduce logical arguments that confirm the hypothesis, are not examples of exegesis. The Sifra's *din* (logically-based) arguments affirm the initial hypothesis, as opposed to the more typical tannaitic pattern, wherein initial interpretive hypotheses are rejected by rabbinic exegetical techniques.[24] By affirming the first hypothesis in the conclusion, the Sifra makes clear that the intermediate steps of exegesis are less hermeneutical hypothesis than attempts to void any exegetical alternative.

The Akiban school's demotion of logically-derived legal analogies accentuates its divergence from the Ishmael school's approach to analogical reasoning. The Sifrei's analysis of the *mezuzah*, which shifts toward a substantive analogy ("*adun davar mi-davar*"), turns the table on the initial hypothesis. Once the Sifrei turns from lexical to substantive analogies, the dialectical back-and-forth is terminated. No further counter-analogies are needed, as a single conceptual analogy is enough to arbitrate between the two proposed legal possibilities (stone and parchment). Other midrashim from the Ishmael-school, however, provide data on how this school adjudicates between opposing substantive analogies. In one pericope, the Mekhilta generates a plethora of conflicting analogies (some lexical and some substantive) before identifying the legitimate analogue through logic: "I will learn this from that and compare this to that. I will learn a matter that is similar in four ways from a matter that is similar in four ways, and I will not learn a matter that is similar in four ways from something that is similar in one, or

---

[21] For representative studies on *gezerah shavah*, see Aldoph Shwartz, *Die hermeneutische Analogie in der talmudischen Litteratur* (Karlsruhe: J. Bielefeld, 1897); S. Zeitlin, "Hillel and the Hermeneutic Rules," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Oct., 1963), pp. 161-173; B. S. Jackson, "On the Nature of Analogical Argument in Early Jewish Law," in ibid. (ed.), *The Jewish Law Annual*, 11 (Boston: Institute of Jewish Law, 1994), pp. 137-168; and Michael Chernick, *The "Gezerah Shavah" Principle: Its Forms in the Midrashim and the Talmuds* (Lod: Habermann Institute, 1994) [Hebrew].

[22] The exact phrase in Lev. 8:35 reads, "תשבו יומם ולילה שבעת ימים," while that in Lev. 23:42 reads, "תשבו שבעת ימים."

[23] See Azzan Yadin-Israel, *Scripture and Tradition*, especially pp. 63-67.

[24] See Yadin-Israel, *Scripture and Tradition*, pp. 53-62; and ibid., *Scripture as Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and the Origins of Midrash* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 200, n. 12.

two, or three ways."[25] Rather than abandon analogical reasoning once opposing substantive analogies are identified, as the Sifra frequently does, the Mekhilta selects the analogue with the highest number of affinities as the appropriate target case from which one can rationally infer new binding norms.

The philosophical disparity between these two tannaitic stances on the legitimacy of non-lexical analogies is indexed by the presence or absence of one Hebrew phrase—*elmod davar mi-davar v-adun davar mi-davar*. Only Ishmaelian midrashim employ "*davar mi-davar*" terminology, and in each instance the similitude that binds the two *davar*s together (denoted by the "*mi*" preposition) transcends linguistic likeness. The Akiban midrashim make use of a different phrase to mark discursive shifts from lexical to logical analogies: "*nir'eh le-mi domeh,*" "let us see to whom it is similar."[26] As we previously saw, that phrase only functions to camouflage its anti-conceptual methodology. Analogies based on human reasoning are exposed as inconclusive, and Akiban homilies inevitably return to scripture's linguistic similarities (*gezerah shavah*) as the only legitimate guide for discovering the unspoken details of scripture's laws.

The tannaitic sages of Palestine were not the first to express misgivings about the power of analogies to determine the law. Several centuries beforehand, Cicero also struggled with the authority of analogical arguments in juridical debates. On the one hand, Cicero writes, analogies enable jurors to forge direct links between written laws and unprecedented legal cases. But, on the other, the opposing juror can persuasively argue against the validity of all juridical analogies by insisting that,

> It is not proper to consider anything except what is written; all laws are put in danger if comparisons are once allowed to be instituted; there is hardly anything which does not seem somewhat similar to something else; when there are many circumstances wholly dissimilar, still there are separate laws for each individual case; and that all things can be proved to be like or unlike to each other (*omnia posse inter se vel similia vel dissimilia demonstrari*). The common topics derived from ratiocination ought to arrive by conjecture from that which is written to that which is not written; and one may urge that no one can embrace every imaginable case in a written law, but that he frames a law best who takes care to make one thing understood from another. One may urge, too, that in opposition to a ratiocination of this sort, conjecture is no better than a divination, and that

---

[25] Mekhilta Pisha 8. See also Sifrei Numbers, Naso 6 and Sifrei Numbers, Behaalotecha 60. Cf. Sifrei Numbers, Korah 118, for the only instance in Ishmaelian midrashim where this style of analogical argumentation is attributed to named rabbis and performed in a narrative genre. Conceptual analogies are not resolved there in typical Ishmaelian fashion. Instead, R. Akiva supports one conceptual analogy by adducing an explicit scriptural analogy (*heqesh*), which is subsequently refuted as indecisive. At the conclusion of the narrative, R. Ishmael offers a harsh critique of R. Akiva's hermeneutical methodology (cf. the version in BT Zevahim 67a which heightens R. Ishmael's rhetoric of critique) and reaffirms the initial conceptual analogy. Thus this narrative can be read as a fascinating dramatization of the dissenting approaches to analogical reasoning proffered by these two founders of midrashic schools.

[26] See Bacher, *Erkhe Midrash*, p. 17.

> it would be a sign of a very stupid framer of laws not to be able to provide for everything which he wished to.[27]

The affinities between Circero and the Akiban school are substantive (subversive as it may be to compare two traditions that critique the legitimacy of comparativism).[28] They both deeply distrust analogical argumentation; to determine the law in an enigmatic case, one must believe that the creator of the law has already set-forth "everything which he wished to." They also both speak to the indiscriminate power of analogies to locate similitudes between a multitude of analogues. What Cicero states as a theoretical principle—"there is hardly anything which does not seem somewhat similar to something else"—the Sifra performs by consistently marshalling counter-analogies to both lexical and substantive analogies.

Given these expressions of Late Antique skepticism about analogical reasoning, internal and adjacent to rabbinic culture, the Ishmaelian phrase, "I will learn this from that and compare this to that (אלמוד דבר מדבר ואדון דבר מדבר)," is a bold assertion.[29] It entrusts human reasoning to perform cognitive tasks that do not have certain criteria of validity. Even when grappling with divine law—its minutia and applications—human discernment of substantive analogies is legally significant, even though those resemblances are equivocal and inconclusive. The expression "*davar mi-davar*," with its demand that inferences be governed by conceptual affinity rather than formal coincidence, ratifies analogical analysis as a sanctioned hermeneutic. The school of R. Ishmael may not give loose rein to the analogical imagination but it affirms that discovering new conceptual relationships between scriptural laws is a core rabbinic practice.

Despite the logical tentativeness of inferential and analogical argumentation, these modes of reasoning eventually became central to the creativity of talmud study. In the following section I trace the evolution of *"davar mi-davar*" terminology in post-tannaitic literature and examine why it became associated with talmudic reasoning.

II: "*Meivin Davar mitokh Davar*" as Talmudic Reasoning in Amoraic and Early Medieval Literature

After the wane of the tannaitic period, the relational locution, "*davar mi-davar*," became untethered from the analogical task of comparing one thing (*davar*) to another (*davar*). Instead, it began to signify a mode of inferential reasoning. Whereas the expression originally signifies a

---

[27] Cicero, *On Invention*, 2:50.148-153.

[28] On the affinities between rabbinic hermeneutics and Greco-Roman rhetoric, see David Daube, "Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 22 (1949): 239-64; Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), pp. 52-64; Burton Visotzky, "Midrash, Christian Exegesis, and Hellenistic Hermeneutics," in ed. Carol Bakhos, *Current Trends in Study of Midrash* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 111-132; Aviram Ravitsky, "Aristotelian Logic and Talmudic Methodology: The Commentaries on the 13 Hermeneutic Principles and Their Application of Logic," in *Judaic Logic*, ed. Andrew Schumann (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010), pp. 127-130; and Richard Hidary, "Talmudic Topoi."

[29] For a different, though complementary, reading of midrashic analogies as cultural interventions, see Natalie B. Dohrmann, "Analogy, Empire and Political Conflict in a Rabbinic Midrash," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. LIII, No. 2 (2002), pp. 273-297.

horizontal relationship between two analogous topics that generates new knowledge of (at least) one of them, for amoraim, "*davar mi-davar*" signifies a genealogical relationship between a topic, phrase, or object and the new meanings that may be deduced from that entity.[30] Both phases in the locution's rabbinic history allege that the formation of new connections, affinities, inferences, and conclusions from what is already evident does not merely produce new knowledge. It also extends the concepts and edicts of older traditions. For the Rabbis of Late Antiquity, analytical creativity—be it analogical or deductive—both clarifies the known (*davar*) and uncovers the unknown (*davar*).

One of the few attestations of this locution in amoraic midrash[31] occurs in a pericope from Genesis Rabbah that depicts Noah as a rabbinic scholar, as someone capable of creating inferences from God's words:

> *And he studies (hogeh*) *the teachings day and night* (Psalms 1:1)*:* Because he [Noah] deduced (*haga*) one thing from another (*davar mi-tokh davar*). He said, "For what reason did the Holy One, blessed be He, include more pure animals than impure animals [on the ark]? Is it not because He wants sacrifices to be brought from them (the pure animals)." Immediately, "[and Noah built an altar to the Lord] and took of every pure animal" (Gen. 8:20).[32]

By playing with the semantic range of "*hogeh*"—which comprises a spectrum of intellectual activities, including "to meditate," "to reason," "to study," and "to argue"[33]—Genesis Rabbah links Noah's cognitive skills to the depiction of a scholar that opens the Book of Psalms: "*and he studies (hogeh*) *the teachings day and night*" (Psalms 1:1). That linkage allows the Midrash to fill-in a scriptural lacuna: What prompts Noah to immediately sacrifice some of the animals he rescued from the flood? And why do his gift-offerings so appease God that they convince Him to never again "doom the earth because of man" (Gen. 8:21). The midrash's answer depicts Noah's decision as an act of logic, and not as an act of spontaneous devotion. By meditating on the reasons for God's earlier request (to rescue more pure than impure creatures), Noah infers what God wanted without having to be told explicitly. For this amoraic Midrash, the impulse to infer new conclusions from given knowledge—"deducing one thing from another"—characterizes the Torah student at large, as figured in Psalm 1:1. Noah is cast as a proto-rabbinic scholar precisely because he is able to create deductions and inferences from God's language.

A related text in Genesis Rabbah adds to the trope of Noah as a thinker:

---

[30] That semantic shift from analogy-making to inference-making is indexed by the substitution of the "*mi*" proposition for "*mi-tokh*." In almost all post-tannaitic uses of the locution, one therefore finds "*davar mi-tokh davar*."

[31] Cf. Midrash Mishlei 1.

[32] Genesis Rabbah, 26 [ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 244]:
ובתורתו יהגה, שהגה דבר מתוך דבר, אמר מה טעם ריבה הקב"ה בטהורים יותר מטמאים לא שהוא רוצה להקריב לו מהם, מיד ויקח מכל הבהמה הטהורה וגו'.

[33] See Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002), p. 158; and Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of Targumin, Talmud and Midrashic Literature* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), p. 331.

> "And Noah built (*va-yiven*) an altar to the Lord:" It is written, *va-yiven*, *nitbonen*, he cogitated. He said, "For what reason did God include more pure than impure animals? It must be to bring from them sacrifices." Immediately, "and (he) took of every pure animal" (Gen. 8:20).[34]

Here a verbal root of *binah*, "*nitbonen*," takes the place of "*haga davar mi-davar*," used in the previous pericope. By punning on *yiven/nitbonen* [ויבן/נתבונן], the exegete addresses the same lacuna as our previous homily only through a different allusion. Noah built (*va-yiven*) an altar because he cogitated (*nitbonen*) on the connotations of God's revelations. The implicit amoraic association of *binah* with inferential reasoning (*davar mi-davar*), evidenced here, will become definitive and explicit in all later rabbinic uses of "*davar mi-davar*" locutions.

The definitive association of *binah* with the cognitive processes of inferential reasoning appears in the Babylonian Talmud. In an often cited tradition, Rava, a fourth-generation Babylonian amora, enumerates seven practices that a man is judged by in the afterlife. Rava extrapolates these foci of heavenly judgment from the words of Isaiah 33:5: "Faithfulness (אמונת) to your charge was [her] wealth (עתיך)/ wisdom (חכמת) and knowledge (ודעת) [her] triumph (חסן ישועת), reverence for the Lord—that was her treasure (יראת יהוה היא אוצרו)." Working from the terminology of Isaiah, Rava states:

> When a person is brought to judgment (before God for the live they lived), they say to him: "Did you conduct business faithfully (באמונה)? Did you designate set times (עתים) for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation?[35] Did you await salvation (לישועה)? Did you engage in the dialectics of wisdom (פלפלת בחכמה) or understand one thing from another (הבנת דבר מתוך דבר)? And, no matter what, if the fear of the Lord is his treasure (יראת ה' היא אוצר), yes (he is judged mercifully), and if not, no, (these accomplishments have no value).[36]

Unfortunately, Rava gives us few clues as to what type of cognitive practice "understand(ing) one thing from another" is, except that its performance ought to be a core part of every Jew's life. Given its position in an (implicit) homily on Isaiah 33:5, we can deduce that the rabbinic phrase is meant to mirror "*da'at*," though that offers little additional knowledge as to the exact modality of this intellectual practice. The internal structure of Rava's discourse is more suggestive. The

---

[34] Genesis Rabbah, 34 [ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 317]:
ויבן נח מזבח לה': ויבן כתיב, נתבונן. אמר מה טעם ריבה הקב"ה בטהורים יותר מטמאים, לא שרוצה להקריב לו מהם. מיד, ויקח מכל הבהמה הטהורה וגו'.

[35] Rashi, *ad locum*, links this locution to "[her] triumph (חסן ישועת)" from Isaiah 33:5.

[36] BT Shabbat, 31a:
אמר רבא בשעה שמכניסין אדם לדין אומרים לו נשאת ונתת באמונה קבעת עתים לתורה עסקת בפריה ורביה צפית לישועה פלפלת בחכמה הבנת דבר מתוך דבר ואפ"ה אי יראת ה' היא אוצרו אין אי לא לא.

juxtaposition of dialectical studiousness (פלפלת בחכמה[37]) with "understand(ing) one thing from another," intimates that it too entails a form of intellectual virtuosity that goes beyond rote study.

A related association of *binah* with talmudic learning is evidenced first in the Jerusalem Talmud: "Rabbi Shmuel b. Nahman said, mishnah precedes talmud, and what is the reason? 'Acquire *hokhmah*, acquire *binah*' (Prov. 4:5)."[38] The curriculum of palestinian amoraim proscribes that the oral-recitation of mishnah precede the analytical practice of talmud. Rabbi Shmuel supports the legitimacy of this curricular formation by citing a verse from Proverbs that advises one to first acquire wisdom and then acquire understanding. Implied, is that study of the mishnah instills wisdom (*hokhmah*), while talmud study instills understanding (*binah*).

Working from these talmudic sources, Ashkenazi rabbis in the early medieval period articulate new perspectives on the relationship between *havanat davar mi-tokh davar* (inferential reasoning) and the practices of talmudic learning.[39] Several passages from Rashi's eleventh century commentaries on the Bible and the Talmud outline his claim that analytical innovation is an integral component of the discipline of talmud. In a gloss on Proverbs 1:5—"that the wise man (*hakham*) may hear, and increase in learning, and the man of understanding (*navon*) may attain unto wise counsels"—Rashi writes that a *navon* (one who has *binah*) "exceeds the knowledge of a *hakham* because he is capable of deducing one matter from another matter (*meivin davar mi-tokh davar*) and adding to the traditions he hears (*shmuato*)." One who exercises *binah* is preferable to one who has *hokhmah* because the ability to logically extrapolate traditions into novel adaptations exceeds the cognitive conservatism of mnemonics, which Rashi identifies with the self-replicating logic of *hokhmah*. In comments to Proverbs 4:7—"The beginning of wisdom (*hokhmah*) is: get wisdom; with all your ability get understanding (*binah*)"—Rashi further construes the relationship between *hokhmah* and *binah* as pedagogical, as one which necessitates a shift from schoolhouse-memorization to personal innovation:

> The beginning of your wisdom is to learn from others, acquire oral traditions from a teacher. Afterwards, with all your ability acquire understanding, contemplate (*hitbonen*) it by yourself in order to grasp the reasons/explanations of one matter from another (*davar mi-tokh davar*).[40]

Here, Rashi portrays *binah* (used here in its derivatives: *navon, meivin,* and *hitbonen*) as the practice that allows one to transform from being a student to being a self-practitioner of rabbinic reasoning. *hakham*. The exercise of *binah* entails searching for the motivating sensibilities

---

[37] On the etymology of "*pilpul*," see H. Yalon, "PLL, PLPL in Hebrew and Aramaic," *Tarbiz* 6 (1935), pp. 223-24 [Hebrew]; and E. A. Speiser, "The Stem PLL in Hebrew," *Journal of Biblical Literature,* Vol. 82, No. 3 (1963), pp. 305-306. On the role of *pilpul* in the Babylonian Talmud, see Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 48-51.

[38] yHor. 3:5, 48c.

[39] On the broader context of Ashkenazi approaches to rabbinic innovation, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Progress and Tradition in Medieval Ashkenaz," *Jewish History*, Vol. 14 (2000), pp. 287-315.

[40] Rashi on Proverbs 4:7:
ראשית חכמה קנה חכמה - תחלת חכמתך למוד מאחרים קנה לך שמועה מפי הרב, ואח"כ בכל קנינך קנה בינה, תתבונן בה מעצמך להשכיל הטעמים דבר מתוך דבר.

(*ta'amim*, "tastes") behind a tradition, so that one may, then, creatively adopt and apply its message. We see here that the inferential method of *binah* may sometimes flow from conclusions backward to implied premises, rather than from premise to probable conclusions.

Rashi's glosses on a mini-narrative from the Babylonian Talmud further elucidate his stance on talmudic studies as a practice of inferential creativity. The Talmud's anonymous editor(s) resolve(s) two conflicting traditions about the chronology of R. Meir's studies by suggesting the following resolution: "There is no inconsistency. He first went to R. Akiva, but when he was unable to follow (along) he went to R. Ishmael and memorized traditions (*gəmar gemara*). Afterwards, he returned to R. Akiva and was able to understand his reasonings (*savar sevara*)."[41] Rashi interprets the phrase *gamar gemara* as a reference to rote memorization of rabbinic traditions (*mishnayot*), "as his teacher had orally learnt from his teacher, and his teacher from his teacher." In opposition to this mnemonic replication of tradition, *savar sevara*, Rashi explains, entails a more investigative and innovative mode of learning:

> To understand the essential reasons of the mishnah, for what reason this is impure and this is pure, this forbidden and this permitted, and upon what does everything depend and upon which verse. And this is the talmud that existed in the times of the tannaim, to deduce one matter from another matter (*l'havin davar mi-tokh davar*). When there was something new, it was asked in the *beit midrash*, from where they should derive it and to which mishnah they should compare it.[42]

For Rashi, *sevara* comprises three creative modes of ratiocination: searching for the reasons behind a law,[43] searching for comparable laws, and deducing legal consequences from those laws. These assertive cognitive practices of *binah/sevara* made up "the talmud that existed in the times of the tannaim,"[44] and continue to define talmudic reasoning in Rashi's milieu.

Simha of Vitry (d. 1105), one of Rashi's more prominent students, reinforces Rashi's pedagogical theory of *binah*, with the modification that the initial process of acquiring knowledge is now connoted by the cognitive term *da'at*, rather than by *hokhmah*.

> "If there is no *da'at* there is no *binah*, (if there is no *binah* there is no *da'at*)" (*Pirqei Avot* 3:17). What he learns from his teacher is called *da'at*, and what he understands on his own (*meivin mi-libō*) is called *binah*. "If there is no *da'at*," this refers to one who has not learnt via traditions. "He has no *binah*," he has no independent understanding (*binat ha-lev*) in matters of Torah. For what will he comprehend in his heart if he has not heard

---

[41] BT *Sotah* 20a.

[42] Rashi on BT *Sotah* 20a, "*ve-hadar ata*." Compare Rashi's comments on the same story cited in BT *Eruvin* 13a. See also Rashi on BT, *Horiyot* 2b, "*ve-saver*."

[43] For other instances where Rashi equates *sevara* with searching for the operant *ta'am* (legal motive), see BT *Shabbat* 63a, "*ve-hadar lisvar*;" BT *Yoma* 33a, "*sevara lo yadana*;" BT *Sukkah* 28a, "*gemara*;" and BT *Bechorot* 20a, "*talmud*."

[44] On Rashi's theory of the formative stages of talmudic culture, see Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud: Oral Torah as Written Tradition in Medieval Jewish Cultures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) pp. 127-130.

> anything. "And if he has no *binah*," if he has no inner capacity (*binat ha-lev*) to understand and perform logical reasoning (*sevara*) by himself and to add onto what he has heard. "There is no *da'at*," meaning, what benefit is all his learning to him, for he cannot master the topic if he does not add on to what he has heard.[45]

Binah is defined here as an additive mode of logic, capable of extending one's teacher's traditions toward new insights. Playing off a mishnaic tradition that characterizes *binah* and *da'at* as codependent faculties—"If there is no *da'at* there is no *binah*, if there is no *binah* there is no *da'at*" (*Pirqei Avot* 3:17)—Simḥa of Vitry stresses that acquired knowledge (*da'at*) is only valuable if it can then become fodder for innovation, "for he cannot master the topic if he does not add on to what he has heard." Cognitive creativity (*binah*) is not merely an advanced stage of scholarly life. In its absence, even the basic level of understanding (*da'at)* eludes the rabbinic student. For Simḥa' of Vitry, the practices of *binah* are a core part of the rabbinic curriculum, as their creative aims challenge students to deduce the ramifications of received rabbinic traditions.

When, a century later, Maimonides' portrays talmud study as an analytical praxis of "*mitbonen b-da'ato l-havin davar mi-davar*,"[46] "contemplating in his mind to deduce one thing from another," he is embracing a long lineage of rabbinic sources that align verbs of *binah* and practices of deduction (*"davar mi-davar*") with talmudic analysis. This section analyzed how *binah* came to be aligned with talmudic reasoning in Late Antiquity and how early medieval Ashkenazi sources, which slightly predate Maimonides, conceptualize the creative imperative of *binah*.

III: "*Sod mi-tokh Sod*": A History of Inferential Esotericism

Before *binah* became synonymous with talmudic creativity, it was often associated with the

---

[45] *Maḥzor Vitri*, 3:517 (Berlin, 1893):

אם אין דעת אין בינה: אם אין דעת. מה שלומד מרבו קרי דעת. ומה שמבין מלבו קרי בינה. אם אין דעת. כלומר אם לא למד מפי השמועה. אין לא בינה. אין לו בינת הלב בדברי תורה. שמה יבין בלבו מאחר שלא שמע כלום. ואם אין בינה. ואם אין לו בינת הלב להבין ולעשות סברא מלבו ולהוסיף על שמועתו. אין דעת. כלומר מה יתרון לו בכל מה שלמד שהרי אינו יכול לעמוד בה אם לא יוסיף על מה ששמע.

Cf. The comments of Yonah of Gerondi (d. 1264) on the same mishnah from *Pirqei Avot*, 3:17 (ed. Jerusalem, 1968, p. 54):

אם אין דעת אין בינה. שלש מוחות הם ונחלקים לשלשה דברים - לחכמה. ולתבונה. ולדעת. חכמה מה שלומד מאחרים. ותבונה מוציא דבר מתוך דבר בדמיון. ודעת היא מה שמשיג מדעתו. וזהו שאמרו אם אין דעת אין בינה - כי מאחר שאין לו יכולת להשיג ולדעת עצם הדבר מדעתו. איך יוציא דבר מתוך דמיון דבר. שהדעת קודם לבינה. ובלא דעת אי אפשר להיות לו בינה: אם אין בינה אין דעת. אם אין כח להבין הדברים מדמיון דבר מחמת שאין בו דעת שלימה להשיג ולדעתו עצמו של דבר ההוא.

"'If there is no *da'at* there is no *binah*': There are three cerebral ventricles and they are dedicated to three different things—to *ḥokhmah*, *tevunah*, and *da'at*. *Ḥokhmah*: what one learns from others. *Tevunah*: he derives one thing from another through his imagination. *Da'at*: What he comprehends from his own cogitation. And this what they said, "If there is no *da'at* there is no *binah*," because, since he has no ability to grasp and understand the essence of the matter through his own cogitation, how can he derive one thing from imaging (a different) thing. For *da'at* preceds *binah*, and without *da'at* he cannot have *binah*. "If there is no *binah* there is no *da'at*": If there is no capacity to understand the matter through imagining a (different) matter, it is because he does not have the full cognitive capacity to comprehend and understand the essence of that matter."

[46] Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 1:12.

ability to decipher enigmas and mysteries. The claim that *binah* is integral to Jewish esotericism originates in the late biblical period, several centuries before the development of rabbinic Judaism and its methodologies of analytical study that became associated with *binah*. This section focuses on when and where the two models of *binah* converge (*binah* as decipherment; *binah* as deduction), a largely unexplored history that is critical for understanding how methods of talmudic speculation became methods for discovering secrets.

Throughout its opening Aramaic chapters, the book of Daniel uses the terms *hokhmah* and *binah* interchangeably, as is the case in all other wisdom literatures of the biblical period.[47] But in the book's later, Hebrew chapters, *hokhmah* disappears. For Daniel to understand the apocalyptic visions he receives in these later chapter, he needs one specific intellectual power: *binah*. At the close of his second vision, Daniel recounts: "While I, Daniel, was seeing the vision, and I asked for *binah*, there appeared before me one who looked like a man" (Dan. 8:15). *Binah* is thus singled out as a cognitive capability that Daniel can acquire only with angelic assistance. Similarly, when Daniel writes of his visitation by the angel Gabriel, he emphasizes the gift of *binah* that Gabriel bestows upon him: "He made me understand (ויבן) by speaking to me and saying, 'Daniel, I have just come forth to give you *binah*. A word went forth as you began your plea, and I have come to tell it, for you are precious; so examine (ובין) the word and understand (והבן) the vision" (Dan. 9:22-23). And again, in his final vision of the man dressed in linen and gold, the man tells Daniel: "I have come to make you understand (להבינך) what is to befall your people in the days to come, for there is yet a vision for those days" (Dan. 10:14). In each of these examples *binah* is the cipher to apocalyptic enigmas that cannot be otherwise cracked through ordinary cognition. For the author of Daniel, *binah* is a mode of interpretation that is as difficult to execute as it is necessary to make meaning out of mysterious signs and visions.[48]

Moshe Idel, in a short survey of *binah*'s role within Jewish esotericism, highlights the presence of this motif—*binah* as an aptitude necessary for understanding Jewish mysteries—in *The Manual of Discipline, The Scroll of Thanksgiving*, and *The Apocalypse of Levi*, texts from or preserved by the Qumran community.[49] As per Daniel, in these scrolls, only God can grant man *binah*, a "prophetic enlightenment of the (Qumran) community by its priestly leaders and by God."[50] By the rabbinic period, however, *binah*, as a prerequisite for understanding secrets, is no longer associated with mantic wisdom, with transcending human cognition. For the rabbis, *binah* is the sine qua non of achievable intellectual excellence. The famous Mishnah in Haggiga (2:1) states that the secrets of the *merkavah* may not be taught to a student at a time unless they are already wise and able to understand on their own ("*hakham u-mevin mi-da'ato*"). Here, *binah* (in

---

[47] See Michael A. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries) (New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 29-37.

[48] See Gerald H. Wilson, "Wisdom in Daniel and the Origin of Apocalyptic," *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985), p. 373-380. On the relation between Daniel and Wisdom literature, see J.J. Collins, "Cosmos and Salvation: Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Age," *History of Religions* 17 (1977), pp. 121-142.

[49] Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 206.

[50] Steven Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Tradition and its Interpretation in the Midrash to Deuteronomy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), p. 249, n. 140; cited in Idel, *idem.*

the verbal form, "*mevin*") is connected to the two other modes of human cognition—*hokhmah* and *da'at*—and no claim is made that the attainment or exercise of *binah* is dependent on supernatural aid.[51] To receive secrets, according to the mishnah, one has only to prove that they have reached a high level of cognition.

Several decades later, we begin to find sources that identify the cognitive flourishing necessitated of students before they may be taught scripture's secrets with inferential creativity. A stammaitic gloss on a phrase from Isaiah (3:3), "expert enchanter (ונבון לחש)," transforms the verse's meaning to refer to one who is able to apply *binah* to the realm of whispers, i.e., charms. "'Expert' (ונבון): this is one who can deduce one thing from another (זה המבין דבר מתוך דבר); 'Whisper' (לחש): this one who is worthy to be taught words of Torah that are given in whispers." The talmudic gloss transforms the referent of לחש from one who speaks in whispers (an enchanter) to one who receives wisdom by way of whispers.[52] Similarly, the stam shifts the meaning of נבון from someone with magical expertise to someone with intellectual expertise. To the Talmud's final redactors, a *navon* is a cognitive searcher, a person who cherishes the cognitive skill that are emblematic of rabbinic reasoning—*meivin davar mi-tokh davar*.[53]

A responsum of Hai Gaon (939-1038) elevates the analytical skills of inferential creativity to a new theological register:

And these [matters concerning the stature and form of God] are secrets and mysteries that

---

[51] Cf. Idel's assessment (*Absorbing Perfections,* p. 207) that, "understanding, being a requirement for the reception of the most esoteric kind of knowledge in Judaism, somehow transcends the kind of elementary comprehension that comes from having an ordinary intelligence (*da'ato*)."

[52] On the role of whispering in Jewish esotericism, see Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965), p. 58; Elliot Wolfson, "Beyond the Spoken Word: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Medieval Jewish Mysticism," in eds. Y. Ellman and I. Gershoni, *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, textuality, and Cultural Diffusion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 170-189; ibid., "Murmuring Secrets: Eroticism and Esotericism in Medieval Kabbalah," in eds. J. Kripal and W. Hanegraff, *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism* (Lieden: Brill, 2008), pp. 85-91; and Moshe Idel, "In a Whisper: On Transmission Of Shiur Qomah and Kabbalistic Secrets In Jewish Mysticism," *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, 47, 3 (2011), pp. 477-522.

[53] For another late-rabbinic text that connects esotericism to *binah* and inferential creativity, see Kallah Rabbati 5:2:

'לי עצה ותושיה' הכי קאמר שר תורה ואמרה איהי אני בינה - ואי בעית אימא, איהי דקאמרה אף על גב דלא קרובי מעצי וידעי ההיא עצתא דילי היא ומן שמי היא דאסכים דדעתייהו אבל גופי בינה ואף על גב דגוברין מנצחין לית גיבר אלא מאן דקאי בי .ונותנת לו מלכות וממשלה וחקור דין: דיני ממונות. ומגלין לו רזי תורה: דבר מתוך דבר. ונעשה כמעין שאינו פוסק: כמעין מכון, דמחכם, לא פסק וכנהר שמתגבר והולך: דכל יומא טעם חדש מתחדש לו.

"'Mine is counsel and comprehension' (Proverbs 8:14): This is spoken by the prince of Torah. And she says, "I am *binah*." And if you wish, she says (the whole verse) - "even though I am not close to my counsel and wisdom, this counsel is mine, and from my name they derive their wisdom, but my essence (*gufi*, lit. "my body') is *binah*. And even though men are combative, there is no man except one who exists through me…"and the secrets of the Torah are revealed to him:" one thing from another..."and like a river that does not stop:" for every day a new reasoning is made new for him." On the complicated issues involved in dating *Kallah Rabbati,* see David Brodsky, *A Bride Without a Blessing: A Study in the Redaction and Content of Massekhet Kallah and Its Gemara* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), pp. 179-421; and B. de Vries, "The Date of Compilation of the Tractate Kalla Rabbati," *Proceedings of the WOrld Congress of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 1 (1965), pp. 131-132.

> are unable to be given over to every person, except to one who has capacities at hand, and even chapter headings, and certainly their details...and with regards to matters that are below this, R. Ami said, "One does not give over secrets of Torah expect to a 'skilled artisan and expert at whispers" (BT Hag. 13a). And they whisper to him in whispers, and give him generalities, and he understands them (והוא בן בהם), and from heaven they show him in the mystery of his heart. As they said in a midrash: "expert at whispers; 'expert:' this is one who can deduce one thing from another" (BT Hag. 14a).[54]

Hai Gaon weaves together several strands of rabbinic esotericism into a three-stage paradigm for the transmission of secrets: (1) A teacher transmits only the generalities of an esoteric topic, its "chapter headings;" (2) the student applies his intellect (*binah*) to deduce the details; (3) God illumines the essence of the matter in the student's heart. Although the third stage is the most unprecedented part of this responsum, what interest us here is the relation between the first and second stage. How exactly does the student engage with the esoteric traditions of his teacher? How creative is the student's necessary exercise of *binah*? One 19th century edition, based on an unidentified Italian manuscript,[55] carries a variant verb for *binah* that emphasizes the student's creativity. Where most editions read, "and they whisper to him in whispers, and give him generalities, and he understands them (והוא בן בהם)," this edition substitutes the cognitive verb for understanding (ובן) with a more active verb: "והוא רץ בהם," "and he runs with them."[56] "To run with whispers" seems to connote a highly agentic and creative model of esotericism. Before God will reveal the essence of the secret in the student's heart, the student must embellish the brief allusions he receives. The three-word image of a student running with secrets narrates a more emboldened creative process than clarification of what was alluded to by the teacher's chapter headings. A student of whispers must show that he can enhance his teacher's esoteric traditions. After these acts of esoteric expansion, God reveals the essence of the secret, blurring the epistemic boundaries between origin (teacher), augmentation (student), and essence (God).

Hai Gaon's citation of the talmudic midrash on Isaiah 3:1—"expert at whispers; 'expert:' this is one who can deduce one thing from another"—as a prooftext illustrates that he views his esoteric model of reception, transformation, and illumination as analogous to the rabbinic model

---

[54] *Otsar He-Geonim: Thesaurus of Gaonic Responsa and Commentaries*, ed. B. M. Lewin (Jerusalem, 1931), 4:12:

והללו רמזים שלהם וסודות הן ורזים וסתרים שא"א למסרן לכל אדם אלא מי שיש לו מדות [המסורות] בידנו ואפי' ראשי פרקים וכל שכן פרטיהם כי על דבר זה ועל מה שהוא למטה ממנו ממעשה מרכבה אמרו חז"ל אמר ר'חייא אין מוסרין ראשי פרקים אלא לאב בית דין והוא שלבו דואג בקרבו. ובדברים שלמטה מכל אלו אמר ר' אמי אין מוסרין סתרי תורה אלא ליועץ חכם חרשים ונבון לחש ובלחש לוחשים לו וכללות נותנין לו והוא בן בהם ומן השמים מראין אותו בסתר לבו דאמרו במדרש ונבון לחש ונבון זה המבין דבר מתוך דבר.

[55] See *Teshuvot Ha-Geonim*, ed. J. Musafia (Lyck, 1864), p. 1.

[56] Ibid., 29, p. 12:

אמר ר' אמי אין מוסרין סתרי תורה אלא ליועץ חכם חרשים ונבון לחש ובלחש לוחשים לו וכללות נותנין לו והוא רץ בהם ומן השמים מראין אותו בסתר לבו.

The unstable textuality of geonic responsa has long been acknowledged. Already in a letter to Joseph ibn Migash (1077-1141), his questioners state: "Our master is not ignorant that the responsa (of the geonim) do not exist in one condition, especially the more ancient ones, in which degradation has occurred due to the many copiers…" (*Respona of Joseph ibn Migash*, 114).

of *meivin davar mi-tokh davar*, which concludes that midrash. In a sense, then, Hai Gaon's theological addendum to the talmudic approach to esotericism—wherein the process of esoteric creativity comes to a conclusion with a mantic revelation—is itself a performance of inferential esotericism, the very praxis necessary to enter into the realm of esoterica.

A fuller integration of rabbinic practices of inferential reasoning into esoteric education and theosophy begins in late-thirteenth-century Castile. Moses de Leon (1240-1305), one of the central figures involved in composing and circulating zoharic texts aligns with Moshe Idel's thesis that thirteenth-century Spanish Kabbalah was comprised of two competing elites: A primary-elite made up of ruling-intelligentsia, who were communal leaders, halakhic authorities, and conservative kabbalists (averse to kabbalistic innovation, systemic kabbalistic hermeneutics, and writing-down the traditions of Kabbalah at any depth); and a secondary-elite, made of "educated individuals who were uncomfortable with the more 'mainstream' intellectual stance into which they had been educated, and were in more or-less continuous search of new types of thought."[57] These secondary-elites developed what Idel calls "innovative Kabbalah," as their social position allowed them to experiment and try out new systems of thought without seeking legitimacy from the ruling rabbinic authorities of Spain. While de Leon, like most of the Castilian secondary-elite, did not compose halakhic treatises, he frequently appropriates rabbinic tropes for new kabbalistic purposes. One notorious example is de Leon's involvement in editing *Sha'arei Teshuva*, a collection of geonic legal responsa. Not only did he edit the collection, De Leon also forged and inserted several legal responsa in the geonic style. Drawing on a contemporaneous Provencal trend, these responsa depart from standard geonic jurisprudence and arrive at legal conclusions based on dreams and heavenly epiphanies.[58]

More pertinent to our context, de Leon composed an eclectic esoteric commentary to the

---

[57] Moshe Idel, "Transmission in Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in eds. Yaakov Elman and Israel Gershoni) *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality and Cultural Diffusion* (New Haven: Yale university Press, 200), p. 147. See also ibid., "Kabbalah and Elites in Thirteenth-Century Spain," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 9 (1994), pp. 5–19; and ibid., "The Kabbalah's 'Window of Opportunities,' 1270–1290," in eds. Ezra Fleisher, Gerald Blidstein, Carmi Horowitz, and Bernard Septimus, *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), pp. 171-208.

[58] See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1995), p. 200; ibid., 'Zohar,' *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 16 (Jerusalem, 1971), col. 1207; Israel Ta-Shmah, "Responsa from Heaven," *Tarbiz* 57 (1987), pp. 51-66 [Hebrew]; Nahum Danzig, "The Collection of Geonic Responsa *Sha'are Teshuvah* and the Responsa from Heaven," *Tarbiz* 58 (1989), pp. 42-48 [Hebrew]; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Hai Gaon's Letter and Commentary on *Aleynu*: Further Evidence of Moses de León's Pseudepigraphic Activity," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* Vol. 81:3/4 (1991), pp. 366-370; and Pinchas Roth, "Responsa From Heaven: Fragments of a New Manuscript of *She'lot U-Teshuvot Min Ha-Shamayim* from Gerona," *Materia Guidaica* 15-16 (2010-2011), pp. 555-564. On the broader medieval genre of legal responsa based on dreams and heavenly visions, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Dreams as a Determinant of Jewish Law and Practice in Northern Europe During the High Middle Ages," in eds. D. Engel and E. Wolfson, *Supplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy Series: Studies in Medieval Jewish Intellectual and Social History, Volume 15: Festschrift in Honor of Robert Chazan*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 111-143.

thirteen rules of rabbinic hermeneutics.[59] Ronit Meroz, who recently published this commentary for the first time, characterizes de Leon's aims as an attempt to identify God, "not only with the written and oral Torah, as is common among all kabbalists, but also with everything the sages invented over the course of all generations through the analogical techniques (*kəllalei ha-heikesh*). This is a mythic glorification of Jewish logic."[60] De Leon reinterprets the principles of rabbinic logic as exemplars of heavenly processes (connected to both the ten sephirot and the thirteen attributes of divine mercy) and alchemical transformations of the elements. Toward the end of the treatise, De Leon transforms the third of R. Ishmael's hermeneutical rules, *binyan av*, wherein an exegete derives a general legal principle from a biblical verse, into a theosophical relationship between *binah* (=*binyan*) and *ḥokhmah* (=*av*).[61] Finally, in one of his Hebrew kabbalistic monographs, de Leon stresses that esoteric creativity is modeled after rabbinic illation, a practice of inferring new concepts from older allusions:

> You should know that when you enter the Pardes of the marvels of wisdom, you will be able to attain the core of its contents with the help of a few hints of the great and lofty things. And from a subtle hint you will be able to infer one thing from the other (להבין דבר מתוך דבר).[62]

Just as with Hai Gaon, the difference between recovery (of what is hinted at by the esoteric *davar*) and discovery (of a new *davar*) is undone by a theory of illation wherein inferential reasoning both extracts and extends the core of a tradition. For de Leon, Pardes is an epistemic space where a concept's core (תוכו) and its corollaries (דבר מתוך דבר) are indistinguishable; to attain one, one must actively search for the other.

A similar theory of esoteric creativity is alluded to in *The Anonymous Chapters of the Elderly Master of Secrets*, a recently published manuscript that is likely connected to the early

---

[59] See Ronit Meroz, "Kabbalah, Science and Pseudo-Science in Ramdal's *Commentary on the Thirteen Attributes*," in eds. Maren R. Niehoff, Ronit Meroz, and Jonathan Garb, *And This is for Yehudah: Studies Presented to Our Friend Yehuda Liebes, on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2012), pp. 123-143 [Hebrew].

[60] Meroz, "Kabbalah, Science and Pseudo-Science," p. 129.

[61] Meroz, "Kabbalah, Science and Pseudo-Science," p. 140:

ויש לך להתבונן הענין על כי החכמה הקדומה משם התורה יוצאת, בסוד השלושים ושתים נתיבות ואמנם על כי החכמה ראש וראשון, ומשם הכל יוצא, נקרא אב, כלומר, אב לכל המציאות, אב לכל, בה על כי הוא המניע לכל, והוא הנותן לכל בכח האויר הזך אשר עליו מלמעלה. והתבונן כי זה אב הוא נעשה בנין להבנות ממנו, והוא גלגל השמיני המקיים את הכל. אבל זה גלגל הוא הקול הדק הפנימי ונקרא בנין אב ועל כל פנים בהתפשט החכמה הוא יוצא ממנו בנין. וזו היא הבניה, והוא בנין אב, זה הוא הנקרא בינה והוא אב לכלם.

"Contemplate this topic:...*ḥokhmah* is (the) head and the first, and from there everything emerges. (It is) called *av*, "father," in other words, *av* to all existence, *av* to everything, meaning that it is the motivating force of all, and it gives to everything through the power of the pure ether...And contemplate: this *av* becomes a *binyan,* "a building," to build from it, and it (*binyan*) is the eighth sphere that sustains all....when *ḥokhmah* expands, *binyan* emerges from it. And this is the act of building (*bi'niya*), and it is *binyan av*. This is what is called *binah* and it is father to them all."

[62] Moses de Leon, *Ha-Nefesh ha-Ḥakhamah* (Basle, 1601), par. 12:

תדע לך כי בהכנסך בפרדס נפלאות החכמה תוכל לעמוד על תוכו העניינים ברמזים (?) דברים גדולים טובים (?) וברמז מעת תוכל להבין דבר מתוך דבר.

stages of zoharic composition (i.e., *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*).[63] As is common in many zoharic narratives, the anonymous chapters describe an intimate group of students as they attempt to persuade their elder teacher to reveal to them scriptural secrets. In one narrative, an especially enigmatic exchange between teacher and students is presented:

> When we reached the verse in *Hayyei Sarah*, "food was set before him" (ויישם לפניו לאכול) (Gen. 24:33), we asked the elder, our teacher, what is the nature of these יודין, as it is written, ויישם. And why is it written in an enigmatic manner? And why is it not written וישימו לפניו לאכול, as it does by Joseph, as it is written, וישימו לו לבדו (Gen. 43:22)? He said to us, "our sages have already shed light on this matter, and they hinted to us a great matter when they said, 'a drug was placed on a plate.' And see, how far their true tradition (קבלתם האמיתית) reaches, for they invented it with their great dialectics (מפלפולם הרב), and from their tradition which illumines a secret from a secret (סוד מתוך סוד).[64]

Leaving the content of this exegetical discussion aside, the elder's statement at the conclusion of our citation undoes the boundary between talmudic reasoning and esoteric hermeneutics. The rabbis extrapolate (הוציאו) new secrets from their esoteric traditions not by means of epiphany or contemplation but by means of dialectical acumen, here figured as *pilpul*. Use of the term *pilpul* is surprising and rare in a theological, let alone esoteric, context. Its appearance here figures the rabbis of the Talmud as masters of multiple disciplines, as innovators who did not refrain from applying models of legal innovation to theological topics. Highlighting this methodological hybridity, the elder reformulates the classical talmudic phrase, "*davar mi-tokh davar*," "(inferring) one thing from another," as "*sod mi-tokh sod*," "(inferring) a secret from a secret." As is true for de Leon, here too the reach of an esoteric tradition is determined only by how far it can be extended through analytical creativity—"and see, how far their true tradition reaches, for they invented it with their great dialectics." Talmudic dialectics provides a method for producing new esoteric knowledge because it allows one to infer the unknown from the known.

Despite living some three centuries beyond the historical circumference of this chapter, Moses Cordovero, the great sixteenth-century synthesizer of medieval Kabbalah, helps us percieve and weave together the concerns at the heart of inferential esotericism more clearly and emphatically than earlier authors. Commenting on *Sefer Yetzirah*'s appeal to its reader to apply *binah* to *hokhmah* and visa versa, Cordovero addresses the necessary interrelation between the two cognitive modalities when it comes to the study of esotericism:

> Now we will explain…the language of the Mishnah (in Sefer Yetzirah) that says, "*haven*

---

[63] See Elliot Wolfson, "The Anonymous Chapters of the Elderly Master of Secrets – New Evidence for the Early Activity of the Zoharic Circle," *Kabbalah* 19 (2009), pp. 143-278.

[64] Wolfson, "The Anonymous Chapters," p. 222:

בפרשת ויהיו חיי שרה כשהגנו לפסוק ויישם לפניו לאכול שאלנו לזקן רבינו מה טיבן של אלו תחת יודין דכתיב בויישם ולמה נאמר בלשון סתום ולא נאמר וישימו לפניו לאכול כמו ביוסף שנאמר וישימו לו לבדו. אמר לנו כבר האירו רז״ל את עינינו ורמזו לנו ענין גדול באמרם סם הטילו לו בקערה. וראה קבלתם האמיתית להיכן הגיעה כי הוציאו מפלפולם הרב ומקבלתם המאירה סוד מתוך סוד...

> *b-hokhmah v-hakem b-binah*" ("understand with knowledge and know with understanding"). It seems to me that *hokhmah* is the esoteric tradition (*kabbalah*) and the teachings that a person learns from his teacher. (This is) in line with "we give him chapter headings" (BT *Haggiga* 13a). *Binah* is the investigation (*iyyun*) and expansion (*tosefet*) that a person performs by himself through the principles and chapter headings that were given to him. This is what they referred to when they said, "*haven b-hokhmah*," "understand with knowledge." In other words, thoroughly investigate what you learnt from your teacher regarding the wisdom of the (divine) attributes (*hokhmat ha-middot*), which are not transmitted except through chapter headings. A person must infer one thing from another (*yavin davar mi-tokh davar*), as they said, "one does not teach this except to a wise person who can understand on their own" (BT Hagiga 13), for a person must compare one thing to another and infer one thing from another so that he attains a procreative intellect (*sekhel molid*) and not a barren intellect (*sekhel 'akar*).[65]

Although "Kabbalah" means reception, Cordovero emphasizes that merely receiving and gathering esoteric traditions is an inappropriate way to master the Kabbalah. Because Jewish secrets (*hokhmah*) are only transmitted through hints and chapter headings, they demand of the student a high level of investigation and cogitation (*binah*). If the student cannot analytically expand the secrets they are taught, their intellect remains barren (*sekhel akar*). Only by deducing inferences from the teacher's allusions can the student's mind become a generative intelligence (*sekhel molid*) capable of birthing esoteric knowledge. In this pedagogical schema, Cordovero refracts the analytical creativity of *binah* through the prism of theosophical Kabbalah. *Binah*, the third of the ten sefirot (divine powers), is commonly associated with the maternal: she is the divine mother who births and nurses the lower seven sefirot.[66] Cordovero thus proposes that the praxis of creative reasoning, long associated with *binah* before the rise of theosophic Kabbalah, engenders a maternal mind. Only the practices of generative cogitation associated with *binah*—comparing one thing to another and inferring one thing from another—enable the male kabbalist to birth new secrets.[67] Hence, for Cordovero, the study of esoteric knowledge demands analytical creativity. Only by inferring/birthing new esoteric knowledge can the kabbalistic disciple properly unite *hokhmah* and *binah*—collected and original esoteric wisdom.

Cordovero's insistence on the importance of understanding "*davar mi-tokh davar*" may be the boldest source to adopt techniques of inferential reasoning for purposes of esoteric learning. But, given the other sources analyzed in this section, it is far from an outlier. The

---

[65] *Sefer Pardes Rimonim*, 1:6:

ועתה נשוב לבאר שאר לשון המשנה שאמר הבן בחכמה וחכם בבינה וכו'... נ"ל לבאר כי חכמה היא הקבלה והלמוד שאדם למד מרבו כענין מוסרין לו ראשי פרקים הבינה הוא העיון והתוס' שאדם מעיין ומוסיף מעצמו מתוך כללים וראשי פרקים הנמסרים אליו ועתה אל זה כוונו באמרו הבן בחכמה ר"ל עיין היטב במה שלמדת מרבך בחכמת המדות שאין מוסרין בה אלא ראשי פרקים וצריך האדם שיבין בה דבר מתוך דבר כענין אמרם ז"ל אין אומרים דבר זה אלא לחכם ומבין מדעתו הנה שצריך האדם לדמות דבר אל דבר ולהוציא דבר מתוך דבר כדי שיהיה לו שכל מוליד ולא שכל עקר...

[66] See Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 40-42.

[67] For related models of gender inversion in Kabbalah, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 79-122.

association of *binah* with esoteric decipherment originates with the only ancient Jewish apocalypse included in the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Daniel. Later sources then adopt the amoraic association of *binah* with "*davar mi-davar*" forms of inferential reasoning as a critical practice for esoteric learning. By mapping these evolving discourses of *binah*, this section highlighted the range of pre-modern Jewish sources that argue that generating inferences is a core practice not only of talmud study but also of the study of Jewish secrets.

IV: Celestial Inferences: Binah as a Method of Cosmogony in Midrash ha-Ne'lam

For the author(s) of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, humans are not the only ones who can generate inferences. On the second day of creation, God creates the celestial realm through a process of "*meivin davar mi-tokh davar*," "inferring one matter from another." In this schema, cosmogony, the primal genesis of the cosmos, is bound to the same creative processes as rabbinic reasoning. The latter is to concepts what divine creativity is to the cosmos—a method of generating something unprecedented from pre-existent entities, be they material or ideational. This section builds upon our exploration of *binah* as a nexus of talmudic-esoteric interdisciplinarity to demonstrate that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* transforms *binah* from a model of generative cognition (wherein rabbis infer new concepts from traditions) into a model of cosmogenesis (wherein God "infers" the heavens from a more ethereal luminescence).

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, *binah* is never ascribed to God; *binah* is solely a human faculty. To describe divine understanding, biblical authors employ *tevunah*, a cognate of *binah*. Oddly, the term is found in three disconnected verses that portray God as stretching (נטה; Jer. 10:12), making (עושה; Ps. 136:5), and establishing (כונן; Prov. 3:19) the heavens through His *tevunah*. What motivates this linkage between the heaven's creation and *tevunah*? After all, the claim that God does not necessarily create through words—a thesis that counters the first chapter of Genesis' emphasis on God's creative speech and the testament of Psalm 33:6, "by His word the heavens were created"—is typically formulated as an acknowledgment of the role of Wisdom (*hokhmah*) in cosmogenesis. If God does not create heavens and earth through His language, He does so through His Wisdom. The famous paean to Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8 celebrates Wisdom (*hokhmah*) as God's first creation and His confidante/creative artisan.[68] Similarly, the Wisdom of Solomon (especially in 6:22-10:21) uses the Greek word for wisdom, *sophia*,[69] to formulate a Middle-Platonic sapiential cosmogony in which *sophia* is God's artificer (*technitis*) of the cosmos.[70] To be sure, the Bible seems to use wisdom and understanding indiscriminately (in twenty-one biblical verses *tevunah* appears alongside *hokhmah* in semantic parallelism) and hence it may be little more than coincidence that three extra-pentateuchal verses attribute the

---

[68] On the meaning of "'*amon*" in verse 30, see Michael V. Fox, "'Amon Again," *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 115, No. 4 (1996), pp. 699-702.

[69] In the Septuagint *hokhmah* is typically translated as *sophia,* while *binah/tevunah* is typically translated as *phronesis*.

[70] *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:22 and 8:5. See *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Anchor Bible Series)*,* trans. and comm. David Winston (New York: Doubleday, 1979), pp. 176-177; and Ronald Cox, *By the Same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), pp. 70-74.

establishment of heaven to *tevunah*. But with midrashic verve and surety that there are no biblical coincidences, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* crafts an ingenious thesis for why *tevunah* is often associated with the celestial realm, and for why the sole biblical verse that differentiates between *hokhmah* and *tevunah* (Proverbs 3:19) assigns *hokhmah* to the creation of the earth and *tevunah* to the creation of the celestial sphere.

These scriptural queries motivate an extended homiletic investigation into the inferential modalities of cosmogenesis, worth examining *in toto*. The exegetical question is framed as follows:

> Rabbi Yehudah said, "May the Name of the supreme King of Kings—the blessed Holy one—be praised and exalted! For He is the first, and He is the last, and aside from Him there is no God. He created the world through the mystery of three great and magnificent things—*Knowledge, Wisdom*, and *Understanding*—as it is said: *YHVH founded the earth by wisdom* (*hokhmah*)*; He establishes the heavens by understanding* (*binah*) (Proverbs 3:19), and it goes on to say: *By His knowledge (da'at*) *the depths were split* (Proverbs, 20). "Why did the blessed Holy One create the earth—the lowly world—by the mystery of *Wisdom* and the heavens—a more sublime world—by *Understanding*, which is a lesser quality than wisdom? We have already learned: When is a person called 'wise in wisdom'? When he is asked about anything and he duly answers and replies,[71] grasping all, then he is called 'wise in wisdom'—which is greater than understanding or knowledge. Then, He (may He be praised) ought to have made the heavens by *Wisdom*, and the earth, which is lower than them, by *Understanding*![72]

What perplexes R. Yehudah is the word-choices made in Proverbs 3:19: "YHVH founded the earth by wisdom (hokhmah); He establishes the heavens by understanding (binah)." If *Wisdom* is a nobler cognitive faculty than *Understanding*, why does God "found" the earth through *Wisdom* and "establish" the heavens through *Understanding*? Given the superiority of the heavens over the earth, God should have created the heavens through *Wisdom* and the earth through *Understanding*, the lesser cognitive category.[73]

"R. Yehudah's" solution advances an unprecedented correlation between the cognitive model of *tevunah* and a cosmogonic model of *tevunah*:

---

[71] See BT *Shabbat* 114a, and BT *Qiddushin* 40b.

[72] *Zohar Hadash*, 4a; trans. by Nathan Wolski, ed. Pritzker (p. 15):
א"ר יהודה, יתברך ויתעלה שמו של מלך מה"מ הקב"ה שהוא ראשון, והוא אחרון, ומבלעדיו אין אלהים וברא את העולם בסוד שלשה עניינים גדולים וטובים והם דעת חכמה ובינה שנאמר יי' בחכמה יסד ארץ כונן שמים בתבונה בדעתו תהומות נבקעו ולמה ברא הקב"ה הארץ, שהוא עולם השפל, בסוד החכמה והשמים, שהוא עולם גדול ממנו, בתבונה, שהוא דבר קטן מן החכמה וכבר שנינו, אימתי נקרא אדם חכם בחכמה כששואלים אותו בכל דבר, ועונה ומשיב כענין, וידו בכל אז נקרא חכם בחכמה שהוא גדול על התבונה ועל הדעת ע"כ היה לו יתברך לעשות השמים בחכמה והארץ שהיא שפלה מהם בתבונה.

[73] On the verse's literal and contextual meaning, see Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), p. 151, n. 4; Dermot Cox, *Proverbs, with an Introduction to Sapiential Books* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982), p. 59; and Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), p. 54.

> "You should know that *Wisdom* is the greatest of them all, and that is why a person is called 'wise'—because he is wise in all the wisdoms. *Understanding*, however, is lesser than *Wisdom*; and that is why a person is called 'understanding'—that is to say, he can infer one thing from another, by himself and through his mind, inferring one thing from another. In other words, when he sees the foundational principles, he is able to build (*boneh*) upon them. Similarly the one who understands: when he sees a certain thing or an aspect of it, he is able to complete it.
>
> "The blessed Holy One (may His name be praised) created the heavens by the mystery of *Understanding* (*tevunah*), as per the meaning of *Binah*—derived from a foundation (*yesod*). In the beginning of all creations, He created the form of the holy angels—the first of all creations, emanated from the radiance of His majestic light. In their mystery they are called by ten names, and among their names they are called *Elohim*. Therefore Scripture comes to teach: *In the beginning He created Elohim* (Genesis 1:1)—that is to say, He (may His name be praised) created the form of the angels called *Elohim*, and they are the foundation of all other creations. From this foundation (*yesod*), the heavens were created afterwards through the mystery (*sod*) of understanding. Just as understanding signifies deducing one thing from another, so the heavens were created one thing from another: from the mystery of light of the angelic form—that is to say, they are a *binyan*, a construction, from a foundation (*yesod*). Therefore: *He establishes the heavens by understanding* (Proverbs 3:19)"—one thing from another. The heavens were created from the same light emanated to *Elohim*, and He fashioned them one thing from another.[74]

The fundamental thesis proffered by the author(s) of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* (speaking as R. Yehudah) is that the heavens were not created *ex nihilo*. Rather, God's first creation was the form of the angels, a form from which the heavens derive. R. Yehudah identifies the original angelic form with *Elohim*, one the ten angelic spheres enumerated by Maimonides.[75] That identification opens the radical hermeneutical possibility that Gen. 1:1, now interpreted as "In the beginning He created Elohim," proposes that God's inaugural creation is Elohim, reading Elohim as the object of "created" and not the subject. The angelic form, thus, serves God as the elemental substratum (יסוד) through which He builds (בונה) the heavens in the mystery (סוד) of Understanding (בינה). By collaging these terms together throughout his homily, R. Yehudah fashions a set of

---

[74] *Zohar Hadash*, 4a; trans. by Nathan Wolski, ed. Pritzker (pp. 15-16):
תדע כי החכמה גדולה מכולם, ועל כן נקרא אדם חכם מפני שהוא חכם בכל החכמות והתבונה קטנה מן החכמה וע"כ נקרא אדם מבין כלומר, מבין דבר מתוך דבר הוא מעצמו ומלבו מבין דבר מתוך דבר אחר כלומר, בראותו יסוד, בונה בנין עליו וכן הוא המבין, בראותו דבר אחד או קצתו משלים הענין עליו והקב"ה יתברך שמו, ברא השמים בסוד התבונה שהיא ענין הבינה מתוך היסוד ובראשית כל הנבראים ברא צורת המלאכים הקדושים שהם תחלת כל הנבראים הנאצלים מזיו אור הדרו ועשרה שמות נקראו בסודם ובתוך שמותם נקראו אלהים וע"כ בא להורות בראשית ברא אלהים כלומר ברא יתברך שמו צורת המלאכים הנקראים אלהים והם היסוד מכל הנבראים האחרים ומתוך זה היסוד, נבראו השמים לאחר כן בסוד התבונה כאשר תבונה הוא דבר מתוך דבר נבראו השמים דבר מתוך דבר שהם מסוד אור צורת המלאכים כלומר הם בנין מתוך היסוד וע"כ כונן שמים בתבונה אבל הארץ נהיה מתוך יסוד אחר אלא שהיא תלויה על המים והקב"ה יסד לה יסוד עשוי בחכמה ועל כן נאמר ה' בחכמה יסד ארץ, כונן שמים בתבונה דבר מתוך דבר והשמים נבראו מאותו האור הנשפע באלהים ועשה אותם דבר מתוך דבר.

[75] See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:7-8.

semantic linkages between *binah* (understanding) and *boneh* (building),[76] and element/ foundation (*yesod*) and mystery (*sod*).[77]

The purpose of these linkages is elucidated in the homily's middle paragraph, where R. Yehudah describes *binah* as a cognitive faculty that is constructive. When a rabbinic scholar exercises *binah*, he "infer(s) one thing from another...in other words, when he sees the foundational principles (*yesod*), he is able to build (*boneh*) upon them."[78] The generative practice of deriving a concept through the faculty of *binah*, according to R. Yehudah, is isomorphic to the generation of the heavens, which were also derived from a foundational entity (*yesod*). In both cases, something is created from something, a process closer to construction than innovation.

R. Yehudah then grounds his cosmogonic vision in the verb Proverbs 3:19 uses to describe how God made the heavens with *tevunah*: "He establishes (כונן) the heavens by understanding." In the Bible, to establish (*konen*) is to complete or solidify, not to create.[79] Accordingly, R. Yehudah depicts the person who uses *binah* as one who is able to fill-out a concept (משלים הענין) from a mere allusion. The creation of earth, on the other hand, is described in the same verse in Proverbs by a different verb—"YHVH founded (יסד) the earth by wisdom." Given the function ascribed to this verb throughout the homily—to serve as a formal substratum —perhaps R. Yehudah is suggesting that the earth was not constructed from a substratum, as were the heavens, but was created *ex nihilo*; the earth is its own element, its own *yesod*. If this is a correct interpretation (otherwise, it is hard to comprehend the proposed cosmogonic relationship between Wisdom and the earth), R. Yehudah is associating *<u>h</u>okhmah* with *yesod*, parallel to the association he fashions between *binah* and *binyan*. Although the comprehensivity that Wisdom bestows may have a higher social value in rabbinic culture,[80] the generative processes of Understanding more closely resemble how God composed the celestial sphere from angelic light. For our purposes, R. Yehudah's homily transforms a method of cognitive creativity, which had previously been only ascribed to proactive rabbinic minds, into a method of divine creativity. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I investigate the medieval debates, esoteric

---

[76] This etymological connection, which we already encountered in Genesis Rabbah 34 (on Noah), is also attested to in the Dead Sea Scrolls, 4Q372 (=4QapocrJoseph), frag. 2:5:

הנותן לו שכל להבין לבנות.

[77] On the relation between the terms "*sod*" and "*yesod*" in Medieval Jewish philosophy, see Israel Efros, "More about Abraham B. Hiyyas Philosophical Terminology," *JQR* Vol. 20, No. 2 (1929), p. 120; and Elliot Wolfson, "God, the Demiurge and the Intellect: On the Usage of the Word *Kol* in Abraham Ibn Ezra," *Revue des Etudes juives,* CXLIX (1-3) (1990), p. 93. n. 62.

[78] *Zohar <u>H</u>adash*, 4a.

[79] See *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, *Vol. VII*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Farby (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), pp. 89-99, especially, pp. 97-98. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), emphasizes that *konen* is "used in the Bible to characterize the solid foundations of houses and temples" (p. 161).

[80] Cf. BT *Hor.* 14a and *Ber*. 64a for the famous rabbinic debate on which is preferable: intellectual breadth ("*sinai*," i.e., someone who knows the whole Torah as it was given at Sinai) or intellectual creativity ("'*oker harim*," "an uprooter of mountains," i.e., someone with creative intellect). For an account of why this question emerged in the amoraic period, see Marc Hirshman, *The Stabilization of Rabbinic Culture*, *100 C.E. - 350 C.E.: Texts on Education and Their Late Antique Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 109-120.

traditions, and anonymous texts that inform and elucidate *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s equation of talmudic logic with cosmogenesis.

It is appropriate that R. Yehuda's cosmogony of derivation is itself derived from a mythologoumenon in *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, a late-rabbinic text whose influence on the Zohar runs deep:[81]

> Wherefrom were the heavens created? From the light of His garment. He took some of it, stretched it like a cloth, and thus they were extending continually until He said, "enough" (*dai*). Therefore He is called *Shadai*, for He told the heavens "enough" (*dai*), and they stood. From where (do we know) that it was created from the light of His garment? As it is said: "Who covers Thyself with light as with a garment. Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain" (Ps. 104:2). Wherefrom was the earth created? From the snow under the throne of His glory. He took some of it and threw it to the water, as it is said: "For He says to the snow, be thou earth" (Job 37:6).[82]

To be sure, *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*'s claim that cosmogenesis is engendered by means of a divine textile is a revision of an even earlier midrash. In Genesis Rabbah, a Palestinian Midrash from the fourth century, R. Simeon ben Jehosadaq challenges the notable homilist (*ba'al haggadah*), R. Samuel ben Nahman: "As I have heard that you are a master of Haggadah, tell me whence the light was created." To answer, R. Samuel whispers back a tradition he received by way of whispers: "The Holy One, blessed be He, wrapped Himself in a white garment, and its splendor shone forth from one end of the world to the other."[83] *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer* borrows

---

[81] David Luria's commentary to *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (Warsaw, 1851) highlights many parallels between *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer* and the Zohar, though he does not note this intertext.

[82] *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer, 3*:

שמים מאיזה מקום נבראו, מאור לבושו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שהוא לבוש, לקח ממנו ופרש כשמלה, והיו מותחין והולכין עד שאמר להם די. ועל כן נקרא שמו שדי, שאמר לשמים די ועמדו. ומנין שמאור לבושו נברא,שנאמר [תהלים קד, ב] עטה אור כשלמה נוטה שמים כיריעה. הארץ מאיזה מקום נבראת, משלג שתחת כסא הכבוד, לקח וזרק על המים ונקפאו המים ונעשה עפר הארץ, שנאמר [איוב לז, ו] כי לשלג יאמר הוא ארץ.

[83] *Genesis Rabbah* 3:4:

ר' שמעון בן יהוצדק שאל לרבי שמואל בר נחמן: אמר לו: מפני ששמעתי עליך שאתה בעל אגדה, מהיכן נבראת האורה? אמר לו: מלמד שנתעטף בה הקדוש ברוך הוא כשלמה והבהיק זיו הדרו מסוף העולם ועד סופו. אמרה ליה: בלחישה. אמר לו: מקרא מלא הוא (תהלים קד), עוטה אור כשלמה ואת אמרת לי בלחישה אתמהא?! אמר לו: כשם ששמעתיה בלחישה, כך אמרתיה לך בלחישה.

Cf. Alexander Altmann, "A Note on the Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation," JJS 7 (1956), pp. 195-206. On the theory of divine "garments," see Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism: Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition (New York, 1960),* pp. 56-64; Elliot Wolfson, "The Secret of the Garment in Nahmanides," *Da'at*, No. 24 (1989), pp. XXV-XLIX; Dorit Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Book of the Zohar* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1987) [Hebrew]; Avishai Bar Asher, "Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Secret of the Garment in the Sixteenth Century," *Da'at*, No. 76 (2013), pp. 191-213 [Hebrew]; and Adam Afterman, "'Glorified with Embroideries of Songs': A Chapter in the History of Mystical Prayer in Judaism," *Da'at*, No. 81 (2016), pp. 38-68 [Hebrew]. On the importance of the divine "garment of light" to Gnostic circles, see Menachem Kister, "Hellenistic Jewish Writers and Palestinian Traditions: Early and Late," in eds. M. Kister, H. Newman, M. Segal, and R. Clements, *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 167, n. 73.

this image of God's garment acting as an agent in the creation process. However, it adds its own spin by substituting the heavens for the primal light as the entity generated from the luminosity of God's garment. *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* then further modifies the motif of God's garments of light. In our homily, R. Yehudah assigns the generative substratum of cosmogenesis to an angelic form, not a divine garment. The significance of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s adaptation and alteration of this rabbinic model of cosmogenesis, can be evaluated by canvassing the medieval reception-history of the myth that God created the heavens with the luminescence of His garment.

As should be expected, the cosmogony of *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, with its unabashed anthropomorphism and materialism (i.e., God creates by means of textile material), incited Maimonides' philosophical ire. In the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides offers a sharp criticism of this materialistic approach to creation:

> Would that I knew what that sage believed! Did he believe that it is impossible that something should come into being out of nothing (trans. Alharizi, האם היה מאמין כי לא יתכן להמצא דבר מלא–דבר) and that there must necessarily be matter from which that which is generated is produced. Did he for this reason seek to find *wherefore were created* the heavens and earth?...If, however, he wished to signify by *the light of His garment* an uncreated thing and similarly by the *throne of glory* something uncreated, this would be a great incongruity. For he would have admitted thereby the eternity of the world, if only as it is conceived according to Plato's opinion...All in all, this statement will confuse very much indeed the belief of a learned man who adheres to the law.[84]

For Maimonides, the claim that God created the heavens through the intermediation of a luminous garment is too close to Plato's position in the *Timaeus* that the cosmos was fashioned from a primal matter, a Hellenistic cosmogony that both asserts the eternity of materiality and deflates the capacity of God to be a true creator (i.e., one who makes a world *ex nihilo*).[85] Maimonides is bewildered that R. Eliezer does not believe it possible that "something should come into being from nothing," a phrase that, in its Hebrew translation by Yehudah Alharizi[86]—"*davar mi-lo davar*"— runs directly counter to R. Yehudah's claim in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* that God created the heavens out of something else (*davar mi-davar*). Yet we would be mistaken to read R. Yehudah's homily as a direct response to Miamonides' critique of *Pirqei de-Rabbi*

---

[84] Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:26, pp. 330-331, trans. Pines.

[85] The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* emerges among the Early Church Fathers as a way to differentiate between human and divine creativity. See Athanasius, *De Decretis* IV: 77: "God creates and to create is also ascribed to men...yet does God create as Men do?...Perish the thought; we understand the terms in one sense of God, and in other of men. For God creates, in that He calls what is not into being, needing nothing thereunto; but men work some existing material." Cf. J. C. O'Neill, "How Early is the Doctrine of 'Creatio ex Nihilo'?" *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (2002), pp. 449-465. For a feminist exploration of the history and politics of *creatio ex nihilo*, see Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), especially, pp. 43-64.

[86] Gershom Scholem, in *Studies in Kabbalah* (1) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1998), p. 28, n. 82, claims that many Spanish kabbalists during the thirteenth century used Alharizi's translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, including Nahmanides, Ezra of Gerona, and Jacob ben Sheshet.

Eliezer. Several texts from thirteenth-century Spain, which, historically speaking, stand between Maimonides and *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, help pinpoint the stakeholders in this disagreement, and bring to light the precise author of our zoharic homily.

A famous thirteenth-century letter from R. Ezra of Gerona to R. Abraham ben Isaac singles out Maimonides' criticism of *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer* as the occasion where Maimonides most explicitly deviates from the theology of Kabbalah.[87] Unlike Maimonides, Ezra of Gerona endorses the Platonic conception of God as an artisan who reworks primal materiality (*hyle*) into new formations. Rather than discard the rabbinic trope of "God's garment of light," he reinterprets it as a theosophic symbol, as the sefirah of *ḥokhmah*, from which celestial entities such as God's glory and throne are emanated.[88] Ezra of Gerona encapsulates his kabbalistic model of cosmogony, in which formation and emanation take on a more central role than creation *ex nihilo*, as, "the essences were in existence; the emanation was innovated." Nahmanides, a Catalonian contemporary of Ezra, offers a modified version of this kabbalistic theory: primal matter is the sole entity that God created from nothing; "henceforth He did not

---

[87] Gershom Scholem, *Studies in Kabbalah* (1), pp. 28-29:

השאלה הרביעית באיזה דבר בא רבי׳ משה כנגד הקבלה. ידוע תדע כי דברי ר׳ אליעזר הגדול נכונים וברורים באמרו השמים מהיכן נבראו והארץ מהיכן נבראת והוא על דעת אפלטון האומר כי מן השוא שימציא הבורא דבר מלא דבר כי יש חומר נמצא והוא לא (צריך להיות: לו) על דרך משל כחומר ליוצר או הברזל לנפח אשר ייצייר ממנו מה שירצה וכן הבורא ייצייר ממנו מן החומר שמים וארץ ופעם ייצייר ממנו זולתי זה. הכל כמו שכתב רבי׳ משה במורה נבוכים בחלק השני פרק דעות בני אדם בקדמות העולם ועל זה אמר שלמה המלך אפריון עשה לו המלך שלמה הוא הקב"ה שהשלום שלו מעצי לבנון משפע זוהר החכמה שהוא לבושו וכן אחז"ל לבנון. והאפיריון ר"ל כבודו או שמו או כסאו ונתאצל מן החכמה שהיא באי"ן ואין לנו לשאול מאור לבושו מהיכן נברא שאין לנו להרוס הגבול ולדרוש במופלא ובמה שאין המחשבה תופסת...והאמת כי ההויות היו אבל האצילות מחודש מחדש ולא היה כי אם גלוי הדברים דכתיב מגלה עמוקות מני חשך…

"The fourth question: Where does our teacher Moses ben Maimon come into conflict with the Kabbalah? Know that the words of R. Eliezer the Great are absolutely correct in saying, "from where were the heavens created, and from where was the earth created?" For this is the opinion of Plato, who said that it is impossible that the creator should produce something from nothing (*yotzi davar mi-lo davar*), because matter has always been in existence. By means of a parable, this is like the clay to a potter, or the iron to a blacksmith who can fashion from it whatever he wishes...all this is in accordance with what Maimonides wrote in the second volume (of *The Guide of the Perplexed*), in the chapter (13) on the various opinions of the creation of the world. With regards to this King Solomon said, "King Solomon made him (a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon)" (Song of Songs, 3:9). This refers to Holy one, blessed be He, onto whom is the peace (*shalom*). "Wood from Lebanon," from the luminous emanation of Wisdom (*ḥokhmah*) which is His garment (*livusho*)..."A palanquin," means His Glory or Name or Throne, which was emanated from Wisdom (*ḥokhmah*), which is in the Nought (*ayin*)...The truth is that the essences were in existence; the emanation was innovated." On this passage, see Moshe Idel, "The Sefirot Above the Sefirot," *Tarbiẓ* 51 (1982), pp. 241-43 [Hebrew]; and Daniel Matt, "*Ayin*: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism," in ed. Lawrence Fine, *Essential Papers on Kabbalah* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 77-80. For an extensive bibliography on Maimonides' reputed relation to Kabbalah, see Eli Gurfinkel, "An Annotated Bibliography on the Linkage between Maimonides, the Kabbalists, and the Kabbalah," *Da'at* No. 64/66 (2009), pp. 417-485 [Hebrew].

[88] Cf. Azriel of Gerona, *Commentary on Aggadot*, ed. I. Tishby (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1945) pp. 110-111, where the equation of *or levush* with *ḥokhmah* is attributed to Isaac the Blind. On the identification of the primal hyle with *ḥokhmah* in Geronese Kabbalah, see Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R. Z. J. Werblowsky, trans. A. Arkush (Philadelphia: Jewish Publishing Society and Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 423-430.

create anything, rather He materialized something from something."[89] Nahmanides thus interprets "God's garment of light" as the primal matter (*hyle*) from which the heavens and earth were endowed with form and figure.[90]

Given that these theories of cosmogenesis orient the majority of subsequent thirteenth-century meditations on the origins of the cosmos,[91] the specificities of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s cosmogenic model stand-out. R. Yehudah's claim that God's first creation was the angelic form, and from it the heavens were "inferred," aligns neither with Maimonides and Nahmanides' interpretation of "the light of His garment" as primal matter, nor with Ezra of Gerona's interpretation of the locution as a reference to the divine potency of *hokhmah*. To locate the exact (pre-kabbalistic) sources behind R. Yehudah's homily, we turn now to the early-writings of Joseph Gikatilla and Moses de Leon, two Castilian authors closely connected to the production of zoharic literature.[92]

Several scholars have detected conceptual affinities between Gikatilla's treatise on linguistic cosmology, *Ginat Egoz*, written in 1274 when he was twenty-six, and *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.[93] For our investigation, three features in *Ginat Egoz* stand out as probable sources of

---

[89] *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*, in *The Writings of Nahmanides* (Jerusalem, 1963), Vol. 1, pp. 156-157:
...הקודם בבריאה דק מן השני, וכי הוא נאצל ממנו....ברא השמים והארץ, ר״ל מאפיסה מוחלטת ומאין גמור...והם היולי השמים והיולי הארץ, ומכאן ואילך לא ברא דבר אלא שהוציא יש מיש...כן בריאה אצל הוצאת יש מאין, כי אין מלה בתורה ראויה לזה אלא היא, כי עשיה ויצירה נפעלות דבר מדבר...

Cf. Nahmanides on Gen. 1:1 and 1:8.

[90] See Nahmanides on Gen. 1:8. Menahem Recanati (1250-1310), in his comments on Gen. 1:8, highlights the difference between this position and that held by the majority of kabbalists. After citing Nahmanides position, he writes:
וטובים דבריו לפי הפשט, אמנם דעת חכמי הקבלה היא, כי אור לבושו רמז לחכמת אלהים, והשמים העליונים נבראו משם.
"His words accord well with the literal meaning, but the opinion of the sages of Kabbalah is that the light of His garment alludes to the divine wisdom, and the supernal heavens were created from there." On Nahmanides' theological divergence from the main school of Geronese Kabbalah (centered around Ezra and Azriel of Gerona), see Moshe Idel, "Nahmanides: Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Spiritual Leadership," in eds. Moshe Idel and Mortimer Ostow, *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the Thirteenth Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), pp. 15-96.

[91] See Efraim Gottlieb, "The Significance of the Story of Creation in the Interpretations of the Early Kabbalists," *Tarbiz* (1968), pp. 313-314 [Hebrew]. For other significant interpretations of the motif, "the heavens are created from the light of His garment," see Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Cosmology and Cosmogony in *Doresh Reshumoth*, a Thirteenth-Century Commentary on the Torah," *Harvard Theological Review* 97:2 (2004), pp. 209-215; S. O. Heller-Wilensky, "The Problem of the Authorship of the Treatise *Sha'ar Ha-Shamayim*, Ascribed to Abraham Ibn Ezra," *Tarbiz* (1963), p. 280, 288-9 [Hebrew]; David Blumenthal, "The Rationalistic Commentary of R. Hoter Ben Shelomo to *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*," *Tarbiz* (1978), pp. 99-106 [Hebrew]; Don Abarbanel, *Ateret Zekenim*, ch. 23; *Judah Moscato Sermons*, *Edition and Translation, Volume One*, ed. G. Mileto and G. Veltri (Leiden: Brill, 2010), Sermon VIII; Eliyahu Stern, *The Genius: Elijah of Vilna and the Making of Modern Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 44-49; and Nahman Kromchal, *Moreh Nevuchai Ha-Zman*, ed. L. Zunz (Leopoli, 1863), p. 254 [Hebrew].

[92] See Yehuda Liebes, "How the Zohar Was Written," in ibid., *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany: SUNY University Press, 1993), pp. 85-139.

[93] See Alexander Altmann, "Moses de Leon's *Or Zarua*: Introduction, Critical Text, and Notes," *Kovez al Yad* 9 (1979), pp. 235-240 [Hebrew]; and Asi Farber-Ginat, "On the Sources of Moses de Leon's Early Kabbalistic System," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984), pp. 67-96 [Hebrew].

Midrash ha-Ne'lam's theory of inferential cosmogony: (1) the unusual phrase, "the form of the angels," central to R. Yehudah's cosmogony, also appears in *Ginat Egoz*[94] (and I have yet to locate earlier evidence of this locution); (2) R. Yehudah's ontological scheme of *yesod* (element/ foundation)/*binyan* (building) is axiomatic to *Ginat Egoz*,[95] so much so that the work's final section, on the ontology of the Hebrew vowels, is divided into three sections, titled: "*yesod;"* "*binyan;*" and "*tenuah"*; (3) Gikatilla's own interpretation of *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*'s celestial cosmogenesis leads him to a position that is almost identical to "R. Yehudah":

> The truth is that the heavens were brought into existence from the true being of the separate intelligences, which are called "the light of His garment," for the heavens are a second-order, below the intelligences. Behold, the heavens were created "from the light of His garment," for this refers to the form of the simple intelligences. He had to say, "wherefrom were the heavens created?" because the angels, which are called "the light of His garment," precede the heavens in terms of innovation, just like the form precedes materiality. And behold, he explained that materiality is generated from the truth of the form...And in truth, the words of master of the Guide, may his memory be blessed, are more difficult to me than the words of R. Eleizer, may his memory be blessed, were difficult to him (Maimonides)![96]

Gikatilla's comments presuppose an Aristotelian tri-part cosmology (as described in the Hebrew

---

[94] *Ginat Egoz* (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 192.

[95] These terms occur on almost every page of the treatise. For a particularly suggestive parallel, see p. 71, where *Elohim* is referred to as תחלת הבניינים ("the beginning of the buildings"). In the same context, Gikatilla criticizes both the Aristotelian and Platonic models of creation, and stipulates that the first *yesod* was not created from something else, but rather:

כשאין שם חומר, הוצרך להמציא היסודות בהויה, ואחר כך המשיך דבר מדבר...

"When there was not matter, He needed to bring the elements into existence, and afterwards, He drew them out from each other (*davar mi-davar*)."

[96] Joseph Gikatilla, *Ginat Egoz* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 166-167:

ובאמת כי מאמתת מציאות השכלים הנפרדים שהן נקראים אור לבושו נתהוו השמים כי השמים מעלה שניה למטה מן השכלים. הרי נבראו השמים מאור לבושו, שזהו צורת השכלים הפשוטים. הוצרך לומר השמים מאיזה מקום נבראו בהיות המלאכים הנקראים אור לבושו קודמים לשמים בחדוש כמו שהצורה קודמת לחומר והנה פירש כי מאמתת הצורה נתהוה החומר בהיות השמים מתהוים מאמתת אור לבושו שהם המלאכים... ובאמת כי קשים עלי דברי בעל המורה ז׳ל יותר ממה שהיו קשים עליו דברי ר׳ אליעזר ז׳ל.

Gikatilla's relationship to Maimonides was both formative and oppositional, as was true for many thirteenth-century Spanish Jews who came of age reading Maimonides and eventually forged their own theological systems that resisted Maimonides' Aristotelian metaphysics. One of Gikatilla's earliest treatises is a critical commentary on *The Guide of the Perplexed*, titled, *Hasagot al Ha-Moreh*, published in, Isaac Abravanel, *Ketavim 'al Mahshevet Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1967) vol. 3, 19a-31d. On Gikatilla's dependence on and disagreements with Maimonides, see Moses Cyrus Weiler, "Studies in the Kabbalistic Terminology of Joseph Gikatilla and his Relation to Maimonides," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 37 (1966), pp. 13-44. For bibliographical and cultural issues surrounding Gikatilla's early writings, see Hartley Lachter, "Kabbalah, Philosophy, and the Jewish-Christian Debate: Reconsidering the Early Works of Joseph Gikatilla," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 16 (2008), pp. 1-58; and Efraim Gottlieb, *Studies in Kabbalistic Literature* (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 1976), pp. 96-131 [Hebrew].

writings of Maimonides[97]) comprised of the separate intelligences, the celestial spheres, and the sublunar realm. Working from this ontic schema, Gikatilla is able to reformulate the mythic tones of *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer* into a more philosophically coherent cosmogony. The "light of His garment" is neither primal materiality nor a divine potency (i.e., the sefirah of *hokhmah*), but the form of the separate intelligences. Those intelligences are called separate because they stand above the heavenly spheres, both temporally and ontically speaking.[98] Since the intelligences (i.e., "the angels," in medieval parlance) are pure form and the heavens are a mixture of form and matter, Gikatilla argues that, "the angels, which are called 'the light of His garment,' precede the heavens in terms of innovation, just like the form precedes materiality."[99] In opposition to earlier medieval Jewish theories of materiality (such as Ibn Gabirol and Nahmanides), which assume that matter already exists within the world of forms, Gikatilla affirms that emanation of the forms is the initial stage of creation, followed by the matter of heaven and of earth, each of which is emanated from the first (angelic) form.[100] Akin to R. Yehudah in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, Gikatilla's cosmogony speaks of processes of derivation, in which God fashions the heavens out of a more sublime form. Yet, one essential component of R. Yehudah's cosmogony is not explicitly addressed in *Ginat Egoz*: the role of *Elohim*, one of the ten angelic forces which operates as the foundation (*yesod*) through which the power of *tevunah* constructs (*boneh*) the heavens. For evidence of this trope, we can turn to the early writings of Moses de Leon, who many scholars believe to have been the author of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.[101]

De Leon's *Or Zarua*, a pre-kabbalistic commentary to the first chapters of Genesis written circa 1274, has numerous affinities to both *Ginat Egoz* and *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.[102] His comments of the heavens' genesis suggest an even more radical model of R. Yehudah's cosmogony. De Leon's remarks are worth quoting in full:

---

[97] See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah*, 2:3.

[98] Cf. Asi Farber, "A New Section from the R. Joseph Gikatilla's Introduction to Sefer Ginat Egoz," J*erusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* (1981), pp. 159-161, n. 5 [Hebrew].

[99] On the medieval understanding of the intelligences in Islamic Peripatetic thought, an influence on Gikatilla mediated mainly through Maimonides' writings, but possibly through others as well, see Alexander Altmann, "Ibn Båjja on Man's Ultimate Felicity," in *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 74: "the [Aristotelian] denial of self-subsistent Forms (even though assumed to reside in some supernal hypostasis) enforces a shift of the object of ultimate knowledge to a different plane. Instead of the supernal Forms it is now the separate intellects to which the quest for ultimate felicity is directed. These separate intellects or intelligences are not the essences of the sensible things, as the Platonists maintained, but conceived as simple, i.e., immaterial substances of an ontological order."

[100] See Adam Afterman, "The Language of Creation in the Early Writings of R. Joseph Gikatilla," *Da'at* No.82 (2016), pp. 125-149 [Hebrew].

[101] See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 193; and, more recently, Nathan Wolski, "Moses de León and *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* – On the Beginnings of the Zohar," *Kabbalah* 34 (2016), pp. 27-116.

[102] See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 194-196; Alexander Altmann, "Moses de Leon's *Or Zarua*," pp. 240-244 [Hebrew]; and Avishai Bar-Asher, "*Sefer ha-Ne'lam*, New Fragments from *Sefer Or Zarua*, and Investigations into the Early Writings of Moses de Leon: Analysis and a Critical Edition," *Tarbiz* 83:1-2 (2015), pp 216-221[Hebrew].

> Here is the complete, precise mystery regarding the intellect: the beginning of the emanation of all the existents was the form of the intelligences termed Elohim, and afterwards the heavens was drawn–forth, and afterwards the land...this is the explanation of *bereshit*, at the beginning of all the existents, *bara*, He, may He be blessed, created the form called Elohim and afterwards the heavens and afterwards the land, because the three worlds were drawn-forth this one after that one...According to the wisdom of Kabbalah, the matter of the light of the intellect that flows at first from the supernal degree is the one called by his Master's name, he who stands before his Master to minister to Him always, and he is called, the Prince of the Countenance....and in order that he will be able to move [the other existents], He placed the Name of the Omnipresent, may He be blessed, within him, so that the other [existents] will move at his hand, when they see the seal of the King....Bereshit bara Elohim – In the beginning, He, may He be blessed, created the prince called Elohim through whom all the other existents are infused because he is light, drawn-forth from the luminescence of the highest rung, and afterwards the rest of heavens were drawn-forth, and afterwards the earth...therefore he is called the Active Intelligence for he is the seal of the name Yah and through him all other existents act.[103]

Weaving together diverse medieval cosmologies, De Leon generates a wide-ranging chain of resemblance: Elohim = the beginning of emanation = the form of the intelligences = the Active Intelligence = Metatron = the entity from which the heavens were emanated. These associations testify to both the vibrancy and eccentricity of Castilian cosmological and cosmogonic speculation even before Geronese Kabbalah rose to popularity among the kabbalists of central Spain.[104] As Asi Farber-Ginat highlights, "the identification of the active intelligence with the angel Metatron, was accepted in various circles in the thirteenth century, such as the circle of the Cohen brothers and the circle of R. Abraham Abulafia. The combination of these two concepts, which are taken from different conceptual schema, with the variety of meanings and associations that are linked to each (concept), created one of the richest and most interesting concepts in early

---

[103] Moses de León, *Or Zarua*, ed. A. Altmann, pp. 259-260:

הנה לך הסוד שלם ומדוקדק בעיניך בענין השכל כי תחלת המשכת כל הנמצאים היה צורת השכלים הנקראים אלהים ואח'כ השמים שנמשכו אחריהם ואח'כ הארץ שנמשכת אחריהם וזהו הענין בראשית הנמצאים ברא הוא ית' הצורה הנקראת אלהים ולאח'כ השמים ואח'כ הארץ כי שלשת העולמו' נמשכו זה אחר זה וזה אחר זה...ואמנם כי בחכמת הקבלה העין הוא בענין אחר על ענין אור השכל הנשפע בתחלה מעם מעלת העליונה והוא הנקרא שמו כשם רבו. והוא העומד לשרת לפני רבו תמיד והוא הנקרא שר הפנים והוא סוד לחם הפנים לפני תמיד. ואמנם בהיות זה תחלה מכל השאר. והוא המניע בתנועת יה שהוא חותם המלך לא מפני שהוא שם של שר זה הפנים אלא שמו של מקום הוא. וכדי שיוכל להניע נתן שמו ית' בקרבו כדי שיתנועעו אחרים על ידו בראותם חותם המלך...ועל מה שהיינו בביאורו בראשית ברא אלהים ר'ל בראשית ברא הוא ית' השר הנקרא אלהים אשר ממנו השפעו כל הנמצאי' בהיותו אור נמשך מזיו הדר מעלת העליונה ואחר נמשכו כל שאר השמים ואח'כ הארץ. ולפי' נקרא שכל הפועל כי הוא פועל בחותם שם יה פעולות שאר הנמצאים.

On *elohim* as metatron in the writings of Moses de León, see Nathan Wolski, "Metatron and the Mysteries of the Night in *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam*: Jacob ha-Kohen's *Sefer Ha-Orah* and the Transformation of a Motif in the Early Writings of Moses de León," *Kabbalah* 23 (2010), pp. 78-81; my translation is a modification of Wolski's translation.

[104] On the proto-kabbalistic cosmologies of early thirteenth-century Castile, see Mark Vermon, *The Books of Contemplation: Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources* (Albany: State University Press, 1992); and Asi Farber-Ginat, "On the Sources."

Kabbalah."[105] De Leon furthers this hybridization by assigning a cosmogonic function to Elohim/Metatron/the Active intelligence.[106] The thesis that the Active Intelligence is not solely an epistemological functionary (which guides the human intellect to actuality), had already been made popular by Alfarabi and Averroes, who asserted that the Active Intellect also emanates the sublunar forms.[107] De Leon bundles these motifs together in order to assert that Elohim/ Metatron/Active Intelligence was the initial emanation, while the heavens, an effulgence from the first emanated hypostasis, were the second emanation.[108] Does this cosmogonic schema stand behind *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s theory that the heavens emerge from the form of the angels known as Elohim? In other words, is there evidence within *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* to prove that R. Yehudah's "form of the angels," which he equates with Elohim and the generative substratum of the heavens, is a synonym for Metatron and the Active Intelligence? If we can answer in the affirmative, we will be able to establish Moses de Leon as the author of R. Yehudah's homily and refine our understanding of this theory of inferential cosmogenesis.

Late in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, Metatron is indeed referred to as the "first of God's creations,"[109]but no mention is made of Metatron as an active participant in the creation of the cosmos. Metatron's place in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s cosmogony is more fully spelled out

---

[105] Asi Farber-Ginat, "On the Sources," p. 85. Gikatilla's approach to this association in *Ginat Egoz* differs in small but substantial ways; see *Ginat Egoz* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 315, 365-368. Farber-Ginat, "On the Sources," pp. 84-86, stipulates that Gikatilla identifies Metatron with the last of ten intelligences, while de Leon identifies Metatron with the first of the ten intelligences. Cf. Elliot Wolfson, "Letter Symbolism and Merkavah Imagery in the Zohar," in '*Alei Sefer, Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought*, ed. Mosheh Halamish (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1990), pp. 196-197, n. 5. As Altmann points out ("Moses de Leon's *Or Zarua*," p. 226), already in the fourteenth century, R. Yehudah Binyamin Roqesh criticizes de Leon for equating the Active Intelligence with the First Intelligence, for, in the words of Roqesh, "he did not know that the theologizing philosophers agree that he is the tenth of the separate intelligences." However, this seems to be a mistaken reading of *Or Zarua* (or, perhaps Roqesh had a different version of *Or Zarua*), for de Leon's consistent opinion therein is that the Active Intelligence is the last of the intelligences. See Altmann, "Moses de Leon's *Or Zarua*," p. 284, n. 253. Further evidence supporting this claim is found in *Sefer ha-Ne'lam*, another early treatise of de Leon, where the "prince of intelligence" is equivalent to the letter *yud* (the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet); see Bar-Asher, "*Sefer ha-Ne'lam*," pp. 235-236 [Hebrew].

[106] Cf. Elliot R. Wolfson, "God, the Demiurge and the Intellect: On the Usage of the Word *Kol* in Abraham Ibn Ezra," *Reveu des Etudes juives,* CXLIX (1990), P. 83, n. 28. On allusions to Metatron as a demiurge in Late Antique sources, see Joseph Dan, "Anafiel, Metatron, and the Creator, *Tarbiz* 52 (1983), pp. 447-457 [Hebrew].

[107] See, Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 29-30. As Davidson points out (p. 14), Alexander of Aphrodisias (*De Anima* 89) already linked Aristotle's Active Intelligence (Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3.4.429a) to Aristotle's ever-thinking cause of the universe (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12). The emanatory schema attributed to the Active Intelligence, however, originates with the Islamic Peripatetics.

[108] On the identification of Elohim and Metatron, see Elliot Wolfson, "Metatron and Shiur Qomah in the Writings of Haside Ashkenaz," in eds. Karl E. Grozinger and Joseph Dan, *Mysticism, Magic, and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1995), pp. 74-75, n. 73.

[109] Zohar 1:126b:

ויאמר אברהם אל עבדו, זה מטטרון עבדו של מקום, זקן ביתו, שהוא תחלת בריותיו של מקום, המושל בכל אשר לו, שנתן לו קודשא בריך הוא ממשלה על כל צבאותיו.

elsewhere, in one of the work's first rabbinic narratives. There, the arch-angel Metatron is equated with both the primal light and the Active Intelligence.

> Rabbi Hizkiyah said, "I was in the regions of the Arabs and I saw men who used to conceal themselves among cliffs—in caves among the mountains—but every Shabbat eve they would return to their homes. I inquired of them, 'What is it that you do?' They replied, 'We are hermits and we engage in Torah every single day'...I said to them, "My children, by your life, what new insight did you innovate today?' They replied, 'Concerning this verse: 'God said, "Let there be light." And there was light' (Gen. 1:3). Rabbi Kruspedai taught, "Greater is the addition than the light, unlike any other, a light without peer. This is the light of the Great Intellect, formed from the light of His resplendent splendor; and this is who resides behind the curtain.[110] As we have learned: What is the meaning of the verse "He wraps in light as in a garment" (Psalms 104:2)? It teaches that the blessed Holy One made the other angels with that primordial light, from

---

[110] A reference to the arch-angel, Metatron. This unprecedented locution depends upon the talmudic phrase, "one who hears behind the curtain" (BT Ber, 18b; Yoma 77a; Hag. 15a), which refers to the angels or ghosts who hear the goings-on in heaven that pertain to the future. Cf. *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer,* 4: "seven angels created in the beginning serve Him before the veil which is called *pargod*." In 3 Enoch, Metatron has a special relationship to the celestial curtain (*pargod*). See Peter Schafer et al., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981) §672, where, after Elisha ben Abuyah declares that Metatron is an independent Godhead, the text states, "immediately they brought out Metatron to outside the Curtain (*paragod*)..." Also see *Synopse* §64-65, (*3 Enoch* 45), where Metatron reveals to R. Ishmael the secrets of the curtain (*pargod*); and Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928; repr., New York: Ktav, 1973), p. 141. Andrei Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 115-116, also notes that "Metatron's service behind the heavenly Curtain, *Pargod*, recalls the unique function of the earthly high priest, who alone was allowed to enter behind the veil of the terrestrial sanctuary." On the *pargod*, see David J. Haperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1983), p. 169, n. 99; and Moshe Weinfeld, "'Partition, Partition; Wall, Wall, Listen' 'Leaking' the Divine Secret to Someone Behind the Curtain," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 44/45 (1997/1998), pp. 222-225. *Sefer Ha-Iyun*, a 13th century Spanish text that slightly predates *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, depicts Metatron as standing on the outside of the *pargod*:

> ומטטרון שר הפנים עומד לפני הפרגוד, וזהו שהזכיר ר' עקיבא באלפא ביתא שלו שאמר הקב"ה בשביל מטטרון שמתיו משרת לפתח היכלי מבחוץ, וכל זה הענין מורה שהוא סוף למעשה העליונים ותחלה ליסוד התחתונים, שנאמר והוא מהשנא עידנייא וזימנייא. ולחכימא ברמיזא.

"Metatron, the Prince of Countenance, stands before the Celestial Curtain. So it was mentioned by R. Akiva in his '*Alpha' Beta'*: 'For the Holy One, blessed be He, said concerning Metatron, 'I have positioned Metatron outside, as an attendant at the door of my palace'"; cf. Mark Vermon, *The Books of Contemplation: Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources* (Albany: State University Press, 1992), p. 48. For medieval Islamic sources on Metatron and the *pargod*, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 192-206, esp. 192; and Nathaniel Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 158-163.

that very light itself.[111]

It is impossible to determine whether the Arabic setting of this narrative is meant to foreground the Arabic origins of its claim that the "Great Intellect," an almost certain appellation for the Active Intelligence, is both the first entity to emerge from God's splendor and the source of all other angels.[112] We can be certain, however, that De Leon's description of Metatron as a creative intelligence is substantiated by R. Kruspedai's depiction of "the Great Intellect."[113]

Additionally, there are further affinities between De Leon's cosmogony and *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s model of the creation of the heavens. At one point in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, R. Yehudah claims that "the Holy One, blessed be He, made one *raqiyah* and from it the heavens were formed."[114] A few lines later, R. Yehudah identifies this cosmogonic *raqiyah* with the *raqiyah* that appears above the celestial chariot in Ezekiel's vision. That the *raqiyah* (of Genesis and Ezekiel) is Metatron is then spelled out in a third text: "R. Eliezer inquired of Rabban Yo<u>h</u>anan son of Zakkai. He asked him, 'The *raqiyah* created on the second day, what is it?' He replied, 'It is a supernal mystery. The blessed Holy One created an archon beneath him, and chose him—

---

[111] *Zohar <u>H</u>adash*, 8d, (trans. Nathan Wolski, with modifications, pp. 47-48):
רבי חזקיה אמר, אנא הוית באתריהון דערביא וחמית גוברין דהוו מתטמרין ביני טוריא, במערתא ואתו מערב שבת לערב שבת לבתיהון אמרית להון, מה דין דאתון עבדין אמרו לי, פרישי עלמא אנן ומתעסקן באורייתא כל יומא ויומא וזמנין לית אנן אכלין בר מעשבי ברא...אמרית להון, בני חייכון, יומא דא מה חידוש אתחדש לכון אמרו לי, האי פסוקא ויאמר אלקים יהי אור ויהי אור ותאני רבי כרוספדאי - גדול התוספת מהאור שהיה אור שלא היה כמוהו זה הוא אור השכל הגדול שנתהוה מאור זיו הודו וזהו העומד מאחורי הפרגוד דתנינן, מאי דכתיב עוטה אור כשלמה מלמד שעשה הקב"ה שאר המלאכים, באותו האור הראשון מאותו האור ממש.

[112] The Arabic *Theology of Aristotle* and Al-Ghazali's *The Niche of Lights* offer the closest parallel to the range of motifs employed here: divine light, angels, the incorporeal intellect as a cosmogenic mediator. See Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, pp. 131-137. It is also possible that the narrative's setting provides an alternative, apologetic history wherein the theological schemas of Islamic Arabs actually derive from Jewish hermits who live in Arab provinces. That aim would also explain the emphasis on the hermits' innovation: R. Kruspedai (one of the hermits) offers his cosmogonic teaching in response to to the query, "what new insight did you innovate today?" On the Zohar's relation to Arabic and Islam, see Gil Anidjar, "Jewish Mysticism Alterable and Unalterable: On Orienting Kabbalah Studies and the Zohar of Christian Spain," *Jewish Social Studies* 3:1 (1996), pp. 89–157; and Moshe Idel, "Orienting, Orientalizing or Disorienting the Study of Kabbalah: 'An Almost Absolutely Unique' Case of Occidentalism," *Kabbalah* 2 (1997), pp. 13-48.

[113] Cf. Farber-Ginat, "On the Sources," p. 87, n. 45.

[114] *Zohar <u>H</u>adash* 10a:
א"ר יהודה רקיע אחד עשה הקב"ה וממנו נתהוו השמים שנאמר ויקרא אלקים לרקיע שמים א"ר יהודה, ולא זו בלבד אלא כל מה שעשה הקב"ה במעשה בראשית לא עשה אלא דבר א' מהכל ואותו דבר הוציא כל פעולותיו למינו כגון השמים, עשה ממנו אחד, אותו המשובח מכלם וארץ עשה אחד ת"ש, א"ר יהודה, מהכל עשה אחד, אותו המשובח מכולם וזהו הרקיע כעין הקרח הנורא, שממנו נתהוו השמים הה"ד ויקרא אלקים לרקיע שמים.

granting him dominion over all the hosts of heaven."[115] Put together, these traditions in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* on the creation of the heavens from the *raqiyah/metatron/Elohim* closely parallel Moses de Leon's cosmogony in *Or Zaruah*. In this instance, then, the evidence is strong enough to corroborate that the author of R. Yehudah's homily on the role of *tevunah* in the creative process is either Moses de Leon or someone deeply familiar with his early treatises.

At the heart of these thirteenth-century theories of inferential cosmogenesis is a new philosophical approach to the modalities of divine creativity. Earlier Judeo-Arabic authors, such as Isaac Israeli and Maimonides, contrast two types of creativity: innovation (*ibdā*; *davar mi-lo davar*) and coming-to-be (*davar mi-davar*).[116] The former is exclusive to God, while the latter defines the causal processes of nature and the artifice of man. Hebrew sources from the thirteenth century, however, differentiate between three modes of creativity: creation (*beriyah*), formation (*yetzirah*), and making (*asiyah*). Earlier medieval Hebrew writers (such as Ibn Ezra, Abraham bar Hiyya, and David Kimhi) employ the first two terms to differentiate between *creatio ex nihilo* and giving new form to a preexisting entity.[117] When *making* is then added as a third mode of creativity, acts of fixing, completing, and reshaping, which once seemed accidental to creation, are given a more exalted place in the hierarchy of divine creativity. To close this section, I will contend that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* and the early writings of Moses de Leon thematize *binah/tevunah*/*meivin davar mi-tokh davar* as a practice of *making*, a mode of modifying and completing the formal properties of an antecedent creation.

Medieval Jewish theologies of *making* emerge from an exegetical quandary. Why in Genesis does Elohim first speak the *raqiyah* into existence ("*va-yomer Elohim, yehi raqiyah*;" Gen. 1:6) and then make the *raqiyah* ("*va-yas Elohim et ha-raqiyah*;" Gen. 1:7)? What type of creative action is *making*, and why is it necessitated after the *raqiyah* has already been spoken into being? Medieval scriptural commentators such as Rashi contend that "making" means modifying, "*tiqno al omdo*," i.e., the *raqiyah* required a second round of alterations after it was first created. Nahmanides uses the occasion to propose a more global thesis: "the term *making* always means the fixing (*tiqqun*) of something."[118]

---

[115] *Zohar Hadash*, 9d, (trans. Nathan Wolski, p. 56):
רבי אליעזר שאל לרבן יוחנן בן זכאי א"ל, האי רקיע דאתברי בשני, מאי הוא א"ל, רזא עילאה הוא דברא קב"ה ממונה תחות ידיה ובחר ביה, ושלטיה על כל חילי שמיא.
The fact that this exchange is in Aramaic (all other citations from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* in this section are in Hebrew) may suggest that the identification of the cosmogonic *raqiyah* with Metatron only becomes explicit in a late stratum of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. On the Aramaic of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* as a subsequent literary stratum, with its own theological project, see Shifra Asulin, "Midrash ha-Ne'lam to Genesis—Hebrew and Aramaic," in eds. Maren R. Niehoff, Ronit Meroz and Jonathan Garb, *Ve-Zot le-Yehudah: Qovetz Ma'amarim ha-Muqdash le-Haverenu Prof. Yehuda Liebes* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 2012), pp. 222-253 [Hebrew].

[116] See Alexander Altmann and Samuel Mikos Stern, *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 66-74; and Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:26.

[117] See R. J. Z. Werblowsky, "Philo and the Zohar: a note on the methods of the 'scienza nuova' in Jewish studies," *JJS* 10 (1959), p. 115.

[118] Nahmanides, Gen. 1:7:
לשון עשייה בכל מקום תקון הדבר על מתכונתו.
Cf. Abraham ibn Ezra, alternative commentary on Genesis, 1:1.

The equation of *making* with *tiqqun* informs *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s fascinating dramatization of thirteenth-century critiques of Maimonides' cosmogony:

> Rabbi Tanhum opened, "Thus says God, YHVH, who creates the heavens and stretches them out…(Isaiah 42:5). When the blessed Holy One created His world, He created them from nothing, bringing them into actuality, imbuing them with substance. Wherever you find בורא (*bore*), *create*, it refers to something He created from nothing and brought into actuality." Rav Hisda asked, "But were the heavens really created from nothing? Weren't they created from the light above?" Rabbi Tanhum replied, "It is so—the matter of the heavens came from nothing, but their form from an entity of substance; similarly with the human being. Concerning the heavens you find בריאה (*beriyah*), *creating*, and afterwards עשיה (*asiyah*), *making*. *Creating*—"who creates the heavens" (Isaiah 42:5); in other words, from nothing. *Making*—"who makes the heavens with understanding (בתבונה)" (Psalms 136:5), from an entity of substance, from the light above." Rabbi Tanhum also said, "*Asiyah*, *making*, refers to the enhancement (תיקון) of something in terms of its value and stature—compared to how it was before—as it is said: 'David ויעש (*va-ya'as*), *enhanced*, [his] name' (2 Samuel 8:13)."[119]

R. Tanhum's position advances Maimonides' theory of *creatio ex nihilo*. And like the medieval kabbalists who criticize Maimonides' model of cosmogenesis, R. Hisda challenges R. Tanhum and adduces the opposing tradition (as presented first in *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*): the heavens were created not *ex nihilo* but from a supernal luminous form. R. Tanhum respondes to this critique by introducing a modified Maimonidean position: "the matter of the heavens came from nothing, but their form from an entity of substance." In principle, this modified position is aligned with R. Yehudah, who emphasizes that the heavens were formed from the *form* of the angels. This debate thus demonstrates that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* does not reject Maimonides' orientation to cosmogenesis but merely limit his claims for *creatio ex nihilo* to the realm of materiality. The world of forms, however, does not emerge from nothingness but from other, loftier, forms.

R. Tanhum then maps these two modes of cosmogenesis onto a distinction between two modes of creativity: *creating* and *making*. The material substance of heaven is created (from nothing), while its form is made (from other forms). To prove that the heavens were *made* "from the light above," R. Tanhum adduces Psalms 136:5, "who makes the heavens with understanding (בתבונה)." I would argue that this exegesis is also aligned with R. Yehudah's equation of *tevunah*

---

[119] *Zohar Hadash*, 17b, (trans. Nathan Wolski, with modifications, pp. 171-172):
וייצר ה' אלקים ר' תנחום פתח, כה אמר הא -ל ה' בורא השמים ונוטיהם וגו כשברא הקב"ה את עולמו, ברא אותם מאין והוציאם אל הפועל ועשה מהם ממשות ובכל מקום אתה מוצא בורא - על דבר שבראו מאין, והוציאו לפועל אמר רב חסדא, וכי השמים מאי"ן נבראו והלא מאותו האור של מעלה נבראו א"ר תנחום, כך הוא אלא גוף השמים מאין היה וצורתם מדבר ממשות וכן הוא האדם ותמצא בשמים בריאה, ואחר כך עשיה בריאה – בורא השמים, כלומר מאין עשיה, לעשוה השמים בתבונה – מדבר ממשות, מהאור של מעלה וא"ר תנחום, עשייה הוא תיקון הדבר בגודל ומעלה מכמות שהיה כמא דאת אמר, ויעש דוד שם.

with how the heavens were fashioned from the first angelic form.[120] The psalmists' linkage of *making* (*oseh*) to *understanding* (*tevunah*) encapsulates R. Yehudah's model of cosmogenesis, wherein the heavens are forged from other entities in a celestial process that mirrors talmudic inference-making (*binah*). If these two texts may be read in tandem, then *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is proposing that talmudic reasoning is a mode of *making*, rather than one of *creating*. And making, as per the closing words of R. Tanhum, is "an enhancement (תיקון) of something in terms of its value and stature—compared to how it was before." According to this logic of *making* (in which cosmogenesis and cognition are parallel processes), to infer one idea from another idea is a creative act of enhancement, a practice of *tiqun* that augments an antecedent tradition into an unprecedented configuration, "compared to how it was before." *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* would then be introducing not only a theory of divine creativity modeled after rabbinic creativity (*meivin davar mi-davar*) but a theory of rabbinic creativity modeled after divine creativity (*tiqun/ making*). If there be no proof of the matter, certainly the texts adduced provide a hint in that direction, or as the tannaitic rabbis were wont to say, "even though there is no decisive proof, there is a least an indication of it."

Conclusion: The Logic of *Binah*

Practices of inferential reasoning—analogizing, deducing, inferring—comprise a unique mode of cognitive creativity as they entail generating new relationships between multiple concepts, objects, or laws. Rather than interpret the meaning of one datum, these complex forms of reasoning advance arguments through relational thinking: they generate knowledge about one datum *from* or *as* another datum.[121] The ablative syntax of "*davar mi-davar*" underscores the generativity of rabbinic relational thinking. When a rabbinic scholar learns *one thing from another*, they generate a new affinity between two data-points that has conceptual or legal consequences.

As the opening section of this chapter (as well as the whole second chapter) demonstrated, the claims generated by inferential reasoning are epistemologically tenuous. Despite enabling a high-level of analytical creativity, analogizing and inference-making depend upon forms of argumentation that are inconclusive. This logical weakness is stressed by a passage from a late stratum of zoharic literature:

---

[120] Further evidence of an equation of *tevunah/binah* with *making* can be adduced from *Or Zarua* (ed. Bar-Asher, p. 284), where de Leon states that man is exalted above all other creatures because he is endowed with *creating, forming,* and *making*, which are aligned with *da'at*, *sekhel*, and *binah*, respectively; cf. Bar-Asher, "*Sefer ha-Ne'lam*," pp. 211-212. On De Leon's unique theory that *making* is of a higher divine status than *creating*, see Gershom Scholem, "An Inquiry in the Kabbalah of R. Isaac ben Jacob Hacohen, II. The Evolution of the Doctrine of the Worlds in the Early Kabbalah," *Tarbiz* 3 (1931), pp. 54-55 [Hebrew].

[121] On the relational properties of analogical thinking, see *The Analogical Mind: Perspectives from Cognitive Science*, eds. Dedre Gentner, Keith J. Holyoak, and Boicho N. Kokinov (Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, 2001), pp. 1-20.

> A prophetic vision (*hezyon*) is like a nighttime vision, (full of) imaginings and apparitions, like one who infers one matter from another matter and one who compares a matter to another matter.[122]

Within the epistemological economy of this passage, the dimness of prophetic insight is comparable to dreams, inferences, and analogies. Like "a nighttime vision," inferences and analogies are less forms of logic than forms of "imagination and apparition." Employing an analogy of its own making, this Zohar passage compares the analytical innovator—the "*meivin davar mi-tokh davar*"—to a dream interpreter, one who makes meaning through hermeneutical principles that cannot provide absolute clarity. This zoharic claim as to the imaginative underpinnings of inferential reasoning also makes explicit that its author believes that inferences and analogies are forms of cognitive creativity because they integrate the imagination into analytical and interpretive practices. While this Zohar passage denigrates that creativity as lackadaisical, most of the sources explored above celebrate inferential creativity as a necessary component of talmudic and esoteric reasoning.

The legitimacy of the logic of *binah*—a mode of creative reasoning that is "*meivin davar mi-tokh davar*"—is addressed by another late zoharic homily. The relevant pericope draws on the theosophical schema of the sefirot, wherein *binah*, the third and maternal divine power ("*sefira*"), births the lower seven powers by extending the influence of *hokhmah*, the second and paternal power:

> The commandment, "thou shalt not steal," corresponds to the supernal mother, *binah*, who nurses from *hokhmah*. And one who has (*binah*) is called *meivin davar mi-tokh davar*, like one who steals and takes what is in the heart of a *hakham*...and even though it is permitted for *binah* to nurse from *hokhmah*, when the other side (*sitra ahrah*) (nurses from *hokhmah*) there is stealing, which is forbidden. And scripture wrote, "thou shalt not steal," without specification.[123]

One thing is clear from this recondite passage: the capacity of *binah* to deduce new knowledge from the repositories of wisdom is either thievery or God-like. Because *binah* derives its powers from *hokhmah* through inferential processes (*meivin davar mi-tokh davar*), this passage insists that *binah* often "steals" from *hokhmah*. Drawing on the notion that there exist two sets of *sefirot*, one belonging to the demonic *sitra ahrah* and one belonging to the face of divinity that is worthy of worship, our passage argues that when the demonic *binah* "infers" its divine influx from *hokhmah* it is guilty of theft. However, when the non-demonic *binah* "infers" its power

---

[122] *Zohar* 2:280b, *Rayah Mehemnya*:
חזיון דנבואה איהו כחזיון לילה, דמיונות וחזיונות כגון המבין דבר מתוך דבר והמדמה דבר לדבר (אבל מראה דאיהי בעין השכל איהי כאור דנהיר בבת עינא).

[123] *Zohar Hadash*, 44d:
לא תגנוב לקבל אמא עלאה בינה דינקא מחכמה ומאן דאית ביה אקרי מבין דבר מתוך דבר כמאן דגניב ונסיב מה דאית בלבא דחכם דאוליף ליה חכמתא ואורייתא דאף על גב דאשתרי לגבי' בינה לינקא מחכמה גניבה אית מסטרא אחרא דאסיר ואמר לא תגנוב סתם.

from *hokhmah*, "it is permitted." By deifying the epistemological tenuousness of *binah*—a cognitive process that teeters between fabrication and faithful deduction—this passage emphasizes that inferential creativity is methodologically delicate. Even among the divine powers, an inference is sometimes illegitimate. At other times, it is a method of creativity that is definitive of the godhead.

How did *binah* come to be canonized (as a core practice of rabbinic learning), apotheosized (as a core mode of divine creativity), and criticized (as logically dubious)? This chapter's excavation of the logic of *binah* in pre-kabbalistic sources points to a possible answer. As *binah* came to be identified with "*davar mi-davar*" formulations and the inferential practices of talmudic reasoning, it also absorbed the epistemological weakness of inferential reasoning. Even when *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* associates *binah* with a mode of divine creativity, it associates it with cosmogonic derivation—fashioning the heavens from angelic light—rather than with the sublimity of *creatio ex nihilo*. This ability to derive newness from older things, which may be ontologically inferior to creating newness out of nothing and epistemologically inferior to demonstrable logic, is also the pedagogical upside of *binah*. By modeling a mode of generativity that is closer to building (*binyan*), making (*asiyah*), adding (*hosafa*), and completing (*binyan*) than to innovating (*yesh mi-ayin/davar mi-lo davar*) or creating (*briyah*), *binah* provides an exemplar for the modes of creativity that are encouraged by textual communities.[124] Even when talmudic study does not begin by reading a page of Talmud, it begins by cogitating on a *davar*, an older tradition that the student develops through deductive reasoning. Hence Jewish texts that adapt this model of rabbinic creativity, either as a technique for expanding esoteric knowledge or as a paradigm of divine cosmogenesis, are enacting the very ethos of the phrase, "*meivin davar mi-tokh davar*."

---

[124] On "textual communities," see Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

Chapter Four

The Temporalities of Sevara:
Talmudic Models of Innovation in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*

I: The Talmudic Elements of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* fashions an analogy between divine creativity and talmudic creativity. This chapter shifts from the celestial to terrestrial realms to analyze *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s representation of the human search for secrets and the role that talmudic reasoning plays in that process. I will thereby expand on the data gathered in the third section of the last chapter, on inferential esotericism ("*meivin sod mitokh sod*"), to examine whether *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* also claims that one should apply inferential reasoning to esoteric knowledge. But, rather than focus on *binah*, as per the last chapter, our inquiry will revolve around *sevara*, an Aramaic term that, much like *binah,* became associated with a talmudic mode of "creative reasoning." I will argue that not only does *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* advocate for using *sevara* to learn secrets (*sod*), but, in one instance, *sevara* also operates as a compositional style modeled after the Babylonian Talmud.

Not all thirteenth-century Jewish esoterics were enthusiastic about applying the creative powers of *sevara* to expand upon learnt secrets. Nahmanides, a prominent voice in thirteenth-century Spain, actively differentiates between talmudic and esoteric reasoning, based on a distinction between "open" and "closed" knowledge, to borrow Moshe Halbertal's terminology. Halbertal argues that Nahmanides views only the discipline of Talmud/halakhah as open knowledge, in which "innovations arise through the power of reasoning."[125] In esoteric matters, however, Nahmanides warns against the application of *sevara,*[126] thus ensuring that esoteric knowledge remain "closed knowledge."[127] However, if we do not extrapolate from Nahmanides to all other forms of medieval Jewish esotericism, is there evidence of others who resist Nahmanides' project of disciplinary division and develop a more intimate relationship between the study of secrets and the study of rabbinics? Were there those who chose not to uphold a distinction between a talmudic relationship to rabbinic knowledge, which encourages inference-making and other practices of talmudic logic, and a more mimetic relationship to esoteric knowledge, which only permits faithful transmission of received secrets?

Maimonides provides a starting-point for answering these historical queries. As chapter two demonstrated, not only did Maimonides transform the practices of talmud study, he also constructed a scholastic relationship between esoterica and talmud at odds with the one Nahmanides would come to formulate seventy years later. This chapter claims that core literary elements of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* are best understood as expansions of the Maimonidean model.

---

[125] Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and its Philosophical Implications*, trans. Jackie Feldman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 84.
[126] Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, introduction
[127] Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*, p. 84. Cf. Yair Lorberbaum, "Did Nahmanides Perceive the Kabbalah as 'Closed Knowledge'? *Zion*, Vol. 82:2-3 (2017), pp. 309-354 [Hebrew].

Those elements expand upon Maimonides, because, for reasons well explored, Maimonides did not use rabbinic rhetoric in his writing.[128] He sought to revive a practice of rabbinic thought and not a practice of rabbinic writing. While Maimonides did resist the medieval textualization of Talmud by transforming Talmud back into a project of thought that everybody should practice, he did not view talmudic rhetoric as part of that project.[129] What makes *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* such a unique medieval text is that it exhibits not only talmudic forms of thinking (*sevara*) but also talmudic forms of rhetoric and composition.

In *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism,* Scholem underscores *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s unique relationship to rabbinic rhetoric: "In *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, his (de Leon's) literary method is more dependent on the genuine older Midrashic literature than in the later parts (of Zohar)...In the *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, the use of direct quotations from Talmudic sources is much more open than in later writings."[130] Offering an insight that he would, unfortunately, not develop, Scholem stresses that a literary historiography of Zohar would do well to notice the shifts in rabbinic rhetoric and practices of intertextuality that occur between different sections of Zohar. Similarly, Daniel Matt has identified the rhetorical phenomenon of "*tnan*" as a symptom of how *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* conceptualizes tradition. *Tnan*, "we have taught in a Mishna," is a talmudic term, which serves to signal a temporal shift, as well as authoritative status: What will be cited belongs to the past, even as it is brought into new usage and effect. Matt concludes that the term functions differently in early and late Zohar. In *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* the term often signals the citation of an actual rabbinic source, whereas in later Zohar what is cited tends to be fictive or come from a contemporary medieval source.[131] The difference in the term's function highlights that, unlike the Zohar, which is willing to fabricate the sources it cites as tradition, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is, if creative in its handling of sources, nonetheless more dialectically tethered to rabbinic texts. Scholem and Matt, thus, encourage us to place the peculiarities of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s talmudic rhetoric at the core of its rabbinic renaissance.

Daniel Matt also highlights a broader literary relationship between the Babylonian Talmud and the Zohar at large. He suggests that, "in effect, the composer of the Zohar has assembled an alternative rabbinic literature, including *Midrash ha-N'elam, Matnitin* and *Tosefta*. In a certain sense, the main body of the Zohar is like a Talmud to the brief and cryptic passages of the *Matnitin*." For Matt it is specifically the Talmud's style of commentary that is imitated, a literary technique where historical differences between the texts in play are highlighted by rhetorical or compositional features (the Babylonian Talmud has many ways of signaling the differences between "texts" that derive from tannaitic times from "texts" that derive from amoraic times, and between both of those and later, anonymous textual layers[132]). Alongside this

---

[128] For one exploration of this topic, see Jacob Elbaum, *To Understand the Words of the Sages: Medieval Perspectives on Aggadah and Midrash* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2000) pp. 146-168 [Hebrew].

[129] On the medieval history of Talmudic textualization, see Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud*.

[130] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schoken, 1946), p.183.

[131] Daniel Matt, "*Matnita di-Lan*: A Technique of Innovation in the Zohar," in ed. Joseph Dan, *The Zohar and Its Generation* [*Meḥqerei Yerushlayim be-Maḥshevet Yisrael* 8] (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1989), pp. 123-145 [Hebrew].

[132] See David Weiss Halivni, *The Formation of the Babylonian Talmud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

commentarial feature, five other formal elements familiar to the Babylonian Talmud appear throughout *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*: (1) a pervasive rhetoric of attribution (*d'amar x, azlah ha miltah k'ha d'amar x*, ect.); (2) advanced forms of argumentation; (3) anonymous glosses (*mai ka mashmah lan, v'ha taninan,* ect.);[133] (4) narratives whose heroes are the "*marei d'matnitin*," masters of the Mishnah (and point to a whole other ensemble of Rabbis who come after these masters of Mishnah, i.e., amoraim or something analogous); (5) the usage of Hebrew and Aramaic to create a temporally stratified text. (The concluding chapter of this dissertation analyzes the first three of these talmudic forms.)

One hypothetical approach to *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s dependence on talmudic discourse would claim that these features are mere "talmudisms," since, after all, by thirteenth century Spain, the Talmud had become *the* book through which others were read and written.[134] Given that cultural context, it is plausible that a revival of a weaker form of rabbinic literature—Midrash (the explicit genre of zoharic literature)—would look to the stronger cultural capital of Talmud for support.[135]Under this model, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is uninterested in how talmudic forms of thinking and composition actually work; the Talmud is only an external resource, brought in to add literary authority to a project of midrashic revivalism. I do not think, however, that this model is capable of explaining the variety and ingenuity of the talmudic features of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. This chapter will therefore demonstrate that the author(s) of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* locate(s) in the Babylonian Talmud formal literary features that are worth recuperating and reviving. The specific intertextual feature that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* borrows from the Babylonian Talmud is one I call "asynchronous intertextuality," the use of and dependence on other texts in ways that explicitly foreground the multiple temporalities at work. Just like the Babylonian Talmud makes explicit the temporal disjunctions between its various literary strata, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* also often brings to the fore the belatedness of some traditions and the newness of other traditions that grow out of those older traditions. At the conclusion of this chapter, I will suggest that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s renewal of talmudic models of temporal intertextuality complicates how we theorize the "renaissance" of zoharic literature.

II. Sevara and Esoteric Creativity

Nowhere in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* are talmudic modes of composition more explicit than in the passages woven together in *Zohar Hadash* 25c-26a (ed. Margaliot). Structured like a page of Talmud, this microform is composed of an expansive, Aramaic narrative surrounded by a terse, Hebrew homily. This intriguingly layered text has already received attention in recent articles by

---

[133] Cf. Asulin, "Midrash ha-Ne'lam to Genesis," p. 250.

[134] On the rise of Talmud to cultural hegemony (pedagogic and normative) in the medieval period, see Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud*; and Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book*, pp. 90-128.

[135] See Elbaum, *To Understand the Words of the Sages*.

Wolski and Asulin.[136] Building upon their contributions, I will excavate a still undiscussed trope in the narrative, *sevara*—a term that functions similarly to *binah* and can be defined roughly as deductive reasoning—and argue that the narrative and homily interact in a literary act of deduction that is best described as talmudic. I will suggest that the Hebrew and Aramaic of this composition are less historically distinct strata than the artifice of a literary strategy, one that underscores that the Aramaic is less a fabrication than an adaptation of an "earlier" esoteric tradition. This compositional method exemplifies how *sevara* operates in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*—less as a method of creative innovation than as a method of extrapolating new esoteric insights from antecedent traditions.

Among the many literary features of the long narrative-homily, found on folios 25c-26a,[137] one of the most unexpected is the role of *sevara* in the narrative section. The significance of *sevara* is notable already in the inauguration of the Aramaic narrative, where it serves as the sole criteria for who may visit an esoteric master:

> Our Rabbis have taught:
> One time, Rabbi Dostai went to see Rabbi El'azar ben Arakh and he encountered Rabbi Hagai.
> He said to him, "May the master tell us: the way that is arrayed before him, to whom is he going?"
> He answered him, "To behold the countenance of the face of days (*savar apei yomin*)."
> He asked him, "Who is that?"
> He answered him, "The one before whom the supernal mighty ministers of the blessed King descend."
> He asked him, "Does it please the master that I will go with him on the way?"
> He answered him, "If you will be able to comprehend and deduce from what you will hear (*iy tikhol l'misbar sevara l'mai d'tishma*), come. If not, turn back that you will not be punished."
> He said to him, "Let the master be not concerned about this, for I have heard a word of the supernal mystery, and have contemplated and comprehended (*v'istaklit beh, v'savrit*

---

[136] See Nathan Wolski, "Metatron and the Mysteries of the Night in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*: Jacob ha-Kohen's *Sefer ha-Orah* and the Transformation of a Motif in the Early Writings of Moses de León (*Zohar* H*adash*, *Lekh Lekha*, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* 25c-26a)," *Kabbalah*, Vol. 23 (2010); and Shifra Asulin, "Midrash ha-Ne'lam to Genesis: Between Hebrew and Aramaic," in eds. R. Neihof, R. Meroz, and J. Garb, *And This For Yehudah: A Collection of Essays Dedicated to our Friend, Prof. Yehuda Liebes, Upon His Sixty Fifth Birthday* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2012), pp. 222-253 [Hebrew].

[137] Two other recensions exist of this composition: *Perush Shir Ha-Shirim le-R. Yizhak ibn Sahula*, ed. Arthur Green, in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 1987, 5:3-4, pp. 413 and 439-440 and Zohar 1:89a-90a (*Sitrei Torah*). Manuscript witnesses to this narrative include Oxford, Merton 1(77.H.22); Oxford, Bodleian 1564; Vatican 68; Vatican 186; Paris 780; Munich 217; Vatican 504; and London Gas. 773. I am indebted to Yonatan Benarroch and the Pritzker Project for making these manuscripts easily available to me.

sevara)."[138]

R. Hagai is a minor figure in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*; this is, by far, his largest narrative role. The reason he is cast for this narrative is rooted in a text from the Jerusalem Talmud—one of the very few rabbinic texts to attribute any character traits to R. Hagai. In that talmudic text, R. Hagai and R. Haninah argue about the legal validity of a marriage in a case where the husband claims that the given marriage document was a conditional contract (a *simpon*) and the wife claims it was a marriage contract without conditions:

> R. Haninah said: "It is only a conditional contract." R. Hagai said in the name of R. Zeira: "It is a valid betrothal (free of conditional fulfilments)." R. Haninah argued vehemently against R. Hagai. R. Hila said to him: "Accept Hagai, for Hagai is a man of *sevara* [*inshi sevorah*].[139]

In *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* the very first criteria for R. Hagai's admission into the narrative drama is whether he is capable of *sevara*: "He asked him, 'Does it please the master that I will go with him on the way?' He answered him, "If you will be able to comprehend and deduce from what you will hear (*iy tikhol l'misbar sevara l'mai d'tishma*), come. If not, turn back that you will not be punished." As intertextual readers of rabbinic literature, we know that R. Hagai is indeed renowned for his capacities of *sevara* and hence is well chosen for our narrative of rabbinic pilgrimage. An additional early allusion to the importance of *sevara* may be found in the set-up of the narrative, where R. Dostai uses the odd locution, "*l'mehmei savar apei yamin*," "to behold the countenance of the face of days," to explain his destination. The locution does have a rabbinic precedent, as in Genesis Rabbah 35, but is still an odd choice of language that plays with the semantic range of *savar* and possibly hints to the narrative's preoccupation with the meanings and functions of *sevara*.

What exactly does it mean to create inferences, "*l'misbar sevara*," in a context of esoteric theology? To answer this philological question, a brief genealogy of the term, sevara, needs to be mapped. The verbal form—*savar*—already appears in Palestinian Aramaic, while the noun form —*sevara*—is a Babylonian locution.[140] As a noun, *sevara* simply means "a new idea," and stands in semantic tension with *gemara*, with a lowercase "g," which denotes "a memorized tradition-idea." A short narrative from the Babylonian Talmud exemplifies this usage:

---

[138] This is primarily Nathan Wolski's translation (from his 2010 essay), with my own modifications to translations of "*sevara*," which are substantiated in the body of the chapter. *Zohar Hadash* 25c:
ת"ר, זמנא חד, אזל רבי דוסתאי למחמי לר' אלעזר בן ערך, אזדמן ליה רבי חגי, א"ל, לימא לן אורחא דתקנא קמיה למאן אזל. א"ל למחמי סבר אפי יומין, א"ל מאן הוא. א"ל, מאן דנחתין קמיה רברבי עילאי דמלכא בריך הוא: א"ל, ניחא ליה למר דאיזיל עמיה לאורחיה. א"ל, אי תיכול למסבר סברא למאי דתשמע, זיל, ואי לא, סטי אבתרך, כי היכי דלא בענש. א"ל לא ליחוש מר להאי, דהא שמעית מילהא דרזא עילאה, ואסתכלית ביה, וסברית סברא.

[139] JT, *Kidushin* 3:2, as per MS Leiden:
רבי חנינה אמר סימפון. רבי חגיי בשם רבי זעירא אמר קידושין. והוה רבי חנינה מתרם כליו קבל רבי חגיי. א"ל רבי הילא קבל חגיי דחגיי אינשי סבורה הוא.

[140] See entries for "*savar*" and "*sevara*" in Sokoloff's dictionaries to Jewish Palestinian and Babylonian Aramaic (Ramat-Gan and Baltimore: Bar Ilan University Press and The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

> Rav Hisda said to them, to the Rabbis: "I wish to tell you something but I am afraid of you that you will leave me and go." He told them, "Anyone who learns Torah from one master will never see blessing." They left him and went to Rava. Rav Hisda took offense. He said to them, "What was stated refers to reasoning [*sevara*], but concerning received traditions [*gemara*] from one master is preferable, so that the formulations will not diverge.[141]

Rav Hisda fears that his students will abandon him if he tells them the truth—that "anyone who learns Torah from one master will never see blessing." Despite his premonition, he teaches them this tradition, and, unsurprisingly, they leave to study with another rabbinic sage. Only then does he clarify the precise meaning of his teaching: while a student's cognitive skills (*sevara*) are best sharpened by studying with multiple masters,[142] a student's memorization of oral tradition (*gemara*) is best facilitated via a single teacher so that competing oral versions don't overcomplicate a student's memory. *Sevara* is presented here as a technique of reasoning that is applied to a *gemara*, once the latter has been established via oral transmission. Rav Hisda seems to affirm that, by studying with different masters, a student will develop multiple styles of reasoning (*sevara*) and bring renewed blessing to his Torah studies.

A millennium later, *sevara* emerged as its own rabbinic discipline in some regions of Aragon, taught as a method for sharpening a student's intellect and for proliferating novel talmudic interpretations. Yonah of Gerondi (1200-1263), a Spanish sage who spent time studying in the French schools of the *tosafot* and whose involvement in the composition of the Zohar has been argued for by Israel Ta-Shma,[143] testifies to this trend in a fascinating interpretation of an aphorism from the *Ethics of the Fathers*:

> "One who increases wisdom increases *yeshiva* (lit. "sitting," and a metonym for study)": This refers to the wisdom of *sevara* and *pilpul*, for through it he increases *yeshiva*. For the students will come to hear his [i.e., the teacher's] new insights, to become sharpened with him, and to learn the mode of *sevara* that is innovative, for it is its own form of wisdom.[144]

---

[141] BT *Avodah Zara*, 19a-b:

אמר להו רב חסדא לרבנן בעינא דאימא לכו מלתא ומסתפינא דשבקיתו לי ואזליתו כל הלומד תורה מרב אחד אינו רואה סימן ברכה לעולם שבקוהו ואזול קמיה דרבא אמר להו הני מילי סברא אבל גמרא מרב אחד עדיף כי היכי דלא ליפלוג לישני.

Translation by Marc G. Hirshman, *The Stabilization of Rabbinic Culture* 100 C.E - 350 C.E.: *Texts on Education and their Late Antique Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 70.

[142] Rashi, *ad locum*:

סברא - ללמוד חריפות וחידוד הלב לאחר שלמד ושגורה בפיו גירסת התלמוד.

[143] See Israel Ta-Shma, *The Revealed in the Concealed: The Halachic Residue in the Zohar* (Tel-Aviv, 1995) [Hebrew]. See also, Israel Ta-Shma, "Rabbi Jonah Gerondi: Spirituality and Leadership," in ibid., *Creativity and Tradition: Studies in Medieval Rabbinic Scholarship, Literature and Thought* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2006), pp. 212–227.

[144] Rabbeinu Yona, *Commentary to Mishnah Avot* 2:7:

מרבה חכמה מרבה ישיבה: ר׳ל חכמת הסברא והפלפול שעל ידי זה הוא מרבה ישיבה כי יבאו התלמידים לשמוע דבריהם חדשים ולהתחדד עמו וללמוד ענין הסברא המתחדשת כי היא חכמה בפני עצמה.

The development of *sevara* and *pilpul* as primary methodologies for teaching and studying Talmud is a defining feature of late-medieval rabbinic culture in Spain (primarily in Castile).[145] But even by the mid thirteenth century, Rabbeinu Yona attests that *sevara,* as "its own form of wisdom," was popular among students and could serve as a means to draw more students to a *yeshiva*. While Rabbeinu Yona does not offer too many details about the practices of *sevara* that form this emerging discipline, he does stress their creative nature (*sevara ha-mithadeshet*): *sevara* seems to have operated as an analytical method through which students would innovate insights on classical rabbinic subjects.

I cite this intellectual background to demonstrate that when R. Dostai asks R. Hagai if he is capable of *sevara* he is not simply asking about his ability to understand secrets, but about his logical capacities to generate new meanings from the secrets that are shared with him. The point of this scene, then, is to stress that citation and transmission are not the principal craft of

---

[145] See Yoel Marciano, "From Aragon to Castile — The Origins of Sephardi Talmudic Speculation in Fifteenth-Century Spain," *Tarbiz* 77 (2009), pp. 573-600 [Hebrew]. Marciano argues (p. 587) that "the main learning stylistics of the Spanish sages of *iyun* in Castile in the late 15th century already existed among the enlightened-rabbis of Aragon in the middle of the 14th century, especially within the *batei midrash* of Nissim of Gerona and Hasdai Crescas and his students." On later trends of *iyun* scholarship in Spain, see Daniel Boyarin, *Ha-Iyun ha-Sefaradi: Le-farshanut ha-Talmud shel Megorashe Sefarad* (Jerusalem: Makhon Ben Zvi, 1989) [Hebrew].

esotericism; rather, these are practices that unaccompanied by *sevara* are looked down upon and may even lead to sin.[146]

The subsequent section allows us to see *sevara* in exegetical action. After R. Hagai declares that he is capable to do more than merely listen to esoterica, he is asked to share the supernal secret he heard:

> He [Rabbi Dostai] said to him, "What is it?"
> He replied, "I have heard the mystery of this verse, "Behold the bed of Solomon" (Song of Songs 4:7). This is the Throne of Glory of the King who possess all peace (*shalom*).
> "Sixty warriors surrounding her"—these are the sixty princes, supernal holy ministers, ministering before the Throne of Glory of the supernal King;
> "Of the warriors of Israel"—for they are appointed under the authority of the holy prince Michael, guardian of Israel. Since they are beneath him, they are all guardian-princes of Israel, as is written, "of the warriors of Israel."
> Rabbi Dostai said to him, "You are more worthy than I to go and behold the Countenance of Days!"[147]

---

[146] For a revealing text (from a few decades after the composition of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*) on the importance of *sevara* to esotericism, see Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*:

[ואני יה"כ שנ"ד דעת"ו הואיל וראיתי שזה החכם כתב בספרו הנקרא כתר שם טוב צורת העשר ספירות בקבלה, ראיתי בעניין זה לדבר ומלין לחבר, ולצייר צורת עיני השכל מאירות מתוך התעוררות סברתי אשר חנן ה' יתי אותי] וע"פ שאין לעשות סברא בדרך האמת, דוקא לכתוב אות' סתם כאילו קבל אות' אבל בשם עצמו מותר, וחייב הוא בכך. הלא ידעת אם לא שמעת מאמר הגאון ז"ל דאמר ווי על מאן דסביר ולא קביל וקביל ולא סביר, אבל תרויהון כמילף חכמתא מפומי' דרבא, ועיינין וליכא הא בלא הני לא סגי', הרי למדת שמי שלא קבל לא תועיל לו סברא, ומי שקבל אם אין לא סברא או פלפול להבין דבר מתוך דבר, ולעשות סייג לחכמה וגדר לבינה ומשלים וצורות להבין מה שקבל הבנה שלימה, מה טובו ומה לו ולקבלתו, הרי קבלתו במוחו כזהב וכפנינים המונחים בקופסא והמפתח סגור בעדם, שלא יגדלו ולא יוסיפו ומי יתן שלא יחסרו, אבל קביל וסביר דומה לאילן מבורך שמוציא פירותיו מהכח אל הפועל, וזה אחד מעיקרי המבוקש מעם ה' יתברך ית' אל הנפש בהכנסה אל החומר. והואיל וזיכני השם ברחמיו לקבל מפי אנשי אמת, ראוי ומחויב אני להוציא העניין מהכח אל הפועל, למען יובן אל המורגש המושכל כדכתי' (איוב י"ט) ומבשרי אחזה אלוה, זו היא דרך אחד מדרכי היחוד שכל אחת מי' ספירות כלולה מכולם ומיוחדת בכולם.

"While one should not apply *sevara* to the path of truth [i.e., esoteric subjects], that only pertains to writing it anonymously, as though it was something he received. But in his own name, it [i.e., applying sevara to esoteric matters] is permitted, and he is required to do so. Do you not know, if you have not heard, the saying of the Gaon, may his memory be blessed: "Woe [both] to one who is *savir* but did not receive (*kabil*) and to one who received but did not *savir*. But through both it is like he is learning wisdom from the mouth of the teacher…" You learn through this that for one who did not receive, *sevara* will not help, and for one who received, if he does not apply *sevara* or *pilpul* to deduce one matter from other matter (*l'havin davar mitokh davar*), and create...parables and figures to understand what he received with a full understanding, what good is he, and what does it matter what he received?! For what he received is in his head like gold and pearls that are stored in a container, and the key is enclosed with them, and they will not grow and expand...but one who receives and is *savir* is like a blessed tree that brings its fruit forth from potential into actuality, and this is one of the essentials that God, may He be blessed and exalted, asks from the soul when it enters the material realm." On the role of *sevara* Isaac's hermeneutics, see Eitan Fishbane, *As Light Before Dawn: The Inner World of a Medieval Kabbalist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 96-100.

[147] *Zohar Hadash*, 25c (translation, Wolski, p. 301):

א"ל ומאי היא. א"ל שמעית האי רזא דהאי פסוקא, הנה מטתו שלשלמה, היא כורסייא יקרא דמלכא דשלמא כולא דיליה. ששים גבורים סביב לה, אלין שתין רברביא משמשין עילאין קדישין, דאינון משמשין גבי כורסא יקרא דמלכא עילאה. מגבורי ישראל, דאנון ממנן תחות ידיה, כלהו רברבין אפוטרופין דישראל, הה"ד מגבורי ישראל: א"ל ר' דוסתאי, יאות אנת יתיר מני, למיזל למחמי סבר אפי יומין.

The crucial question here is the status of R. Hagai's transmission: Is this a verbatim recitation of the secret he heard, or a performance of his ability to contemplate and recompose the secrets he receives into new forms? R. Dostai's jubilant response indicates that the latter is the case, for it would make little sense for R. Dostai to warn against the mere listening to and memorization of esoterica and then immediately praise R. Hagai for being capable of only those limited capacities.

Is it possible to locate formal features in R. Hagai's homily that would allow us to divide between a cited layer and a creatively composed layer? This is not a question of source-history, but one of rhetorical representation, i.e., does the text construe sections of the homily as though they were the product of deduction (*sevara*) and not mere mnemonics (*shemua*). One possibility is that the final line exhibits R. Hagai's powers of *sevara*: "Since they are beneath him, they are all mighty guardians of Israel, as is written, *of the warriors of Israel*."[148] Formally, this line juts out. The operant style in this homily is to quote a section of the verse and then add a gloss. But in this line, the gloss concludes with a reference back to the verse, "as is written, *of the warriors of Israel*." This line serves to rationally explain a real problem in the previous gloss on those words —"*Of the warriors of Israel"* —which link these words to the archangel Michael. The key word here, "warriors," is in the plural and thus cannot refer to the angel Michael. But if "warriors" refers to the sixty princes, how is it that they are "of Israel?" R. Hagai's gloss on the gloss neatly dissolves this problem by proposing that since the angels are under Michael's sovereignty and he is the guardian of Israel, all the princes have become supernal politicians of the Jews. If this suggestion has legs to stand on, then an added lens is given onto *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s concept of the cogitation and contemplation of esoterica. These techniques denote a form of textual reason that uses the very verse to which a secret is linked to exegetically renew it into fuller form.

III. Contesting Sevara

The application of *sevara* to matters of Jewish esoterica was a fiercely debated matter in thirteenth century Spain.[149] At the beginning of rabbinic reflection on esotericism, a millennium earlier, a high level of cognitive capacity (*binah*) was posed as the precondition for receiving certain scriptural secrets. Such a precondition is established in the famous Mishnah (*Haggiga* 2:1), which declares that Ezekiel 1 (*ma'aseh merkavah*) may only be interpreted before a single student who is already able to understand on his own what he is taught (*meivin mitokh da'ato*).[150] The main shift in medieval esotericism is the emergence of esoteric literature, which shifts the regulatory norms of transmission. Literary circulation of esoterica in the thirteenth century thus posed new problems and questions, as different esoteric authors debated how to regulate this new

---

[148] This sentence is present in all manuscripts, as far as I can tell.

[149] For a more detailed history of Jewish esotericism, see Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*.

[150] "In the Kaufmann and Parma manuscripts the text reads *hakham vehevin mida'ato* ("wise and understood of his own knowledge"). The reading *mevin mida'ato* ("wise and understands of his own knowledge") refers to the student's capabilities, whereas the reading *vehevin mida'ato* is a statement of fact. One may only transmit to one who knows the secret on his own, who already understood of his own knowledge" (Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*, p. 101).

literature of secrets and hints.[151]

As our last chapter explored, Moshe Idel proposes that a deep social schism existed in thirteenth century Spain with regards to these new questions of esotericism.[152]The rabbinic elite of Barcelona (Nahmanides, Rashba, and Isaac ben Todros) advanced a conservative theory of exclusive oral transmission: Kabbalistic secrets could be circulated in written form only via hints [*remez*] that require a student to find an expert teacher to unpack their tantalizing contents in an intimate face-to-face encounter. Afraid that human creativity might taint the traditions of Kabbalah, the elite Rabbis argued that the primary social role of the Kabbalist was to curate Judaism's esoteric lore, not to innovate.[153] Simultaneous to this conservative culture of esotericism, there arose a secondary rabbinic elite throughout Spain comprised of educated Jews who did not hold positions of pastoral power. These rabbis propagated new hermeneutical systems (techniques and examples) by which anyone could extract secrets from scripture without the mediation of an oral transmission. These were "educated individuals who were in search of new types of thought and often uneasy with their intellectual starting point."[154]

Nahmanides definitively set out the conservative position in the introduction to his *Commentary to the Torah*, one of the first literary works intended for a wide audience to include kabbalistic allusions.

> I bring into a faithful covenant and give counsel to all who look into this book not to reason [*l'misbar svara*] or entertain any thought concerning any of the mystical hints which I write regarding the hidden matters of Torah, for…my words will not be comprehended nor known at all by any reasoning [*sekhel*] or contemplation [*binah*], except from the mouth of a wise kabbalist speaking into the ear of an understanding recipient.[155]

Nahmanides is willing to collate and allude to secrets in his groundbreaking commentary, but he also wishes to emphasize that his method of presentation is intended to exclude the creative uptake and cognitive expansion of these traditions; his esoteric hints are designed less as

---

[151] See Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation,* pp. 69-76.

[152] See Moshe Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition On This," in ed. Isadore Twersky, *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 51-74; "Kabbalah and Elites in Thirteenth Century Spain," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 9 (1994), pp. 5-19; and "The Kabbalah's 'Window of Opportunity,' 1270-1290," in eds. E. Fleischer, G. Bildstein, et al., *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky* (Jerusalem, 2001), pp. 171-208.

[153] See Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 402.

[154] Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, p. 397.

[155] Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, introduction:
ואני הנני מביא בברית נאמנה, והיא הנותנת עצה הוגנת לכל מסתכל בספר הזה, לבל יסבור סברה ואל יחשוב מחשבות בדבר מכל הרמזים אשר אני כותב בסתרי התורה, כי אני מודיעו נאמנה שלא יושגו דברי ולא יודעו כלל בשום שכל ובינה, זולתי מפי מקובל חכם לאוזן מקובל מבין. והסברא בהן אולת, מחשבה מועלת, רבת הנזקין מנועת התועלת. אל יאמן בשוא נתעה, כי לא תבואהו בסברותיו רק רעה, כי ידברו אל ה' סרה, אשר לא יכלו כפרה, שנאמר: "אדם תועה מדרך השכל, בקהל רפאים ינוח", אל יהרסו אל ה' לראות (שמות יט כד), כי ה' אלוהינו אש אוכלה הוא אל קנאות. והוא יראה את רצוייו מתורתו נפלאות.

information than as an invitation to enter the social intimacy of pedagogy.

To overcome the Nahmanidean critique of esoteric deduction, the innovative Kabbalists had Maimonides to lean on.[156] In the introduction to the third section of *The Guide of the Perplexed,* Maimonides confesses that he received no tradition on *ma'aseh berieshit* and *ma'aseh merkavah*, but, rather, he explicated these esoteric realms based on rational sensitivity to scripture. Ibn Tibon's translation, which these kabbalists would have used, marks the key phrase, "that which has occurred to me with regard to these (esoteric) matters, I followed conjecture and supposition"[157] as *ba'al sevarah b'mah sheh noda' li*,[158] thus providing a semantic and theoretical antipode to Nahmanides' refusal to allow reason [*l'misbar svara*] to cultivate an interpretive reading practice of scripture's secrets. Of course, the very reading practice that Nahmanides critiques, "*l'misbar svara*," is the exact one we find in our narrative, although here it is less a matter of reading than a condition of entrance into esoteric circles. If our narrative's representation of *sevara* is not Nahmanidean, it is not a strictly Maimonidean one either: *sevara* is presented as a technique not for reinventing old secrets that have been lost but for amplifying old secrets that have been received (i.e., *sevara* is applied to an esoteric *shemua*).[159]

Taken as a whole, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* to Genesis does not contain a single model of esotericism. Rather it incorporates multiple theories of esotericism and mentions multiple techniques for acquiring esoteric knowledge: oral transmission, esoteric books,[160] pneumatic exegesis,[161] sleep,[162] vision,[163] contemplation/*histaklut*.[164] Indeed, it is especially hard to argue that a single theory of esotericism reigns throughout *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, since several of its pericopes record dissenting opinions over the politics of esotericism, and perform that dissent in

---

[156] Nahmanides' position also stands in opposition to "Rabbi Ya'akov bar Sheshet('s) understand(ing of) kabbalistic knowledge as knowledge of an open nature, paralleling that found in the Oral Law in general" (Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*, p.81). For further research on the creative approach of Ya'akov bar Sheshet and the other early-thirteenth century kabbalists of Gerona, see Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 27-60. Dauber, however, links the creative approach in early Kabbalah to a broader philosophical ethos and not to a similar approach in matters of Halakhah and Talmud, as per Halbertal. In a future expansion of this chapter, I hope to integrate more of Dauber's historiography of early kabbalah, so to better understand the complex relation between philosophical creativity and talmudic creativity in thirteenth-century Spain. I imagine that the relation revolves around how post-maimonideans understood the practical relationship between Maimonides' two great projects – *Mishnah Torah* and *The Guide for the Perplexed*.

[157] *The Guide of the Perplexed,* trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), v. 2, p. 416.

[158] In the original Arabic: "*hads.*"

[159] Later on in the narrative, though, R. Dostai does produce secrets from his own self—"Rabbi Dostai heard, pondered the matter within himself (*istakel b'nafsheh miltah*)"—without reference to any previous tradition. While the text never explicitly claims that El'azar ben Arakh's riddles are of an esoteric nature, the general context suggests as much. Nevertheless, the verb *sevara* is not used in this context.

[160] *Zohar Hadash* 18c.

[161] *Zohar Hadash* 28b.

[162] *Zohar Hadash* 28b.

[163] *Zohar Hadash* 28b.

[164] *Zohar Hadash* 12c.

good talmudic fashion.[165]Instead of resolving dialectical oppositions, these sections impute different cultural positions to different rabbis. But to a historian's chagrin, there is no means to determine whether these disputes reflect actual tensions within a circle of authors responsible for *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, or whether this is an author's rhetorical strategy to defer from resolving a tension he is still struggling over (and is perhaps only resolved with the shift to later styles of Zohar). With regards to our local concern—*Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s position on *sevara* and its relationship to Nahmanides' conservative concept of esotericism—some insight can be gleaned from an earlier section of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, one which perhaps most fully develops *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s reflections on esotericism.

I refer to two interconnected homilies on Adam's sin. While the two homilies deserve broad analysis, especially for the ways that these excerpts engage with the surrounding exegesis, four interconnected moments stand out as particularly relevant to our context:

> Rabbi Beroka said, "He [Adam] was commanded about the Name—and he sinned with the Name. He was commanded about the Name—the unique name [YHVH], as it is written: "the tree of life…" (Gen. 2:9). He sinned with the Name—the polysemous Name [YHVH ELOHIM], as it is written: "the tree of knowledge, good and evil" (ibid.)… Rabbi Yitzhak [Rabbi Yehudah][166] said, "We see that three [four] of the Companions were punished for this! Rabbi Yehudah said, "Concerning what Rabbi Beroka said—one must not ponder this portion further. For I have heard something similar from my father and now recall. From here on, conventional interpretation (*drashah)* is required!…[167]
>
> Rabbi Yohai said, "Look, our companion R. Yehudah said that conventional interpretation (*drasha*) is required here, yet you are expounding the Account of the Chariot (*ma'aseh merkavah)*! Rabbi Alexandri replied, "It is even greater than the Account of Chariot (*ma'aseh merkavah)*, for I see that supernal secrets [*razin ila'in*] were revealed here…[168] Rabbi Yehudah said, "For how long will the Companions amble among the supernal mysteries of the King? Rabbi Alexandri said, "We have learned: Secrets of Torah are divulged to the disciples who are worthy—like us and the Companions like us!"[169]

These fascinating passages construct and rhetorically perform a four-tiered hierarchy of esoteric

---

[165] See especially Zohar 1:134a-136a.

[166] As per MS Munich 217.

[167] *Zohar Hadash*, 18c-d (translation, Wolski, pp. 190-192):
רבי ברוקא אמר, הוא נצטווה על השם, וחטא בשם. נצטוה השם, זהו השם המיוחד, דכתיב ועץ החיים וגו'. והוא חטא בשם, זהו שם המשותף, דכתיב ועץ הדעת טוב ורע...א"ר יצחק [ר' יהודה], חזינן דהא תלת מן חברייא, ע"ד אתענשו. א"ר יהודה, הא דא"ר ברוקא אין להרהר עוד בפרשה, דאנא כהאי גוונא שמענא מאבוי, וכען אדכרנא, ומכאן צריך דרשה...א"ר יהודה, ולא אמינא דלית להרהר עוד בפרשה די בהא דא"ר ברוקא בריש פרשתא, ולא אצטריך יתיר אלא דרשא.

[168] *Zohar Hadash*, 18d (translation, Wolski, pp. 303-304):
א"ר יוחאי, והא ר' יהודה חברינו אמר, דכאן צריך דרשא, ואתם אומרים מעשה מרכבה. א"ר אלכסנדרי, יתיר מעובדא דמרכבה הוא, דהא רזין עילאין אנן חזינן דאתגליין הכא.

[169] *Zohar Hadash*, 19c (translation, Wolski, p. 208):
א"ר יהודה, עד אימתי יטיילון חברייא ברזין עילאין דמלכא אמר רבי אלכסנדראי תנינן, מוסרין סתרי תורה לחברים הראויים לכך כגון אנן וחברייא כגוונן.

engagement with scripture: *drasha* (exegesis)*, hirhur* (contemplation)*, ma'aseh merkavah* (speculation on Ezekiel 1)*,* and *razin ila'in* (supreme secrets). Within this hermeneutical economy, R. Yehudah functions as the text's internalized critic, persistently silencing the other fellows' exegetical escapades that push past the borders of *drasha*. It is unclear, though, if *drasha* means a formal method of interpreting scripture or a realm of reference, limited to human history and natural events. The latter seems more likely, both because one would be hard pressed not to call what R. Yehudah critiques midrash, and because drasha's opposition, *ma'aseh merkavah* and *razin ila'in*, are less hermeneutical methods than celestial referents. R. Dostai's comment in our narrative, "not for a *derashah* have I come here, for I have already heard the incident of Jesse and his sons. But, if you have heard the essence of the matter, speak," reinforce this reading of *drasha* as a realm of reference and not as an exegetical practice.

R. Yehudah's critique makes a clear and familiar claim about esotericism. Because he has now remembered the tradition that R. Broka alludes to (transmitted to him by his father), he warns against any further engagement in esoteric explication. D*rasha* and no further, R. Yehudah tells, once a deeper point of reference has been reconstructed through the memory of previous transmission. This position is remarkably close to that of Nahmanides.

The premises of R. Yehudah's critique are limned a few lines later, when the narrator chooses to testify on the nature of R. Broka's tradition:

> We have learned there: Rabbi Yehudah son of Rabbi Simon said, "I have pondered the word that Rabbi Beroka spoke and inquired of him; and I found that he possessed the essence of the tradition (*ikar kabbalah*) in his hand, and that thus was decreed in the first book of the Mishnah of Rabbi El'azar ben Arakh (*b'sifra kadmah d'matnita d'r' Eliezer ben Arakh)*.[170]

This text wants the reader to know that the esoteric teaching of Adam's onomastic sin has three sources: the ancient book of R. El'azar, R. Broka, and R. Yehudah's father. The text also posits three different media through which this tradition circulated: a book, a father-son transmission, and a homily by R. Broka. Given this excess of citation, we need to ask a basic critical question. If this is all a fabricated source-history, woven together by the author(s) of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, what rhetorical aim is achieved by underscoring the plural transmisions and mediations of this tradition? I believe that it works to enforce the Nahmanidean position voiced by R. Yehuda's critique. Since the Rabbis have already received an *ikar kabbalah*, a quality verified both by an ancient book and a memory of R. Yehuda's father, they surely don't need to further use their own imaginative prowess. Even so, the rhetorical flow of the composition works against R. Yehudah, since both times that R. Alexanderai speaks he is given the final and uncontested stance, an unsurprising fact since he supports what *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is—a refusal to halt productive engagement with scripture after the reception of an *ikar kabbalah*. Taken as a whole, then, various compositional strategies work against each other to provide the sense that the author(s)

---

[170] *Zohar Hadash*, 18c (translation, Wolski, p. 192):
תנן התם, אמר ר"י ב"ר סימון, אשגחנא בהאי מלה דא"ר ברוקא, ושאיל ליה, ואשכחנא דעיקר קבלה הוה בידוי. והי אתגזר בספרא קדמאה, דמתניתא דר' אלעזר בן ערך.

of this pericope equivocate(s) over the relation between interpretation and esotericism. But with beautiful poise, that theoretical equivocation is raised to the level of composition and is almost allowed to settle into a position of pluralism.

Midrash ha-Ne'lam's nuanced and non-singular approach to esoteric innovation reinforces Elliot Wolfson's claims about thirteenth-century Jewish esotericism. In several articles, Wolfson pushes back against Idel's thesis that a social binary was regnant in late thirteenth century Spanish theories of Jewish secrets. He proposes, instead, that it would be more appropriate to theorize the tension between the conservation and poetic innovation of esoterica as a dialectic, present in every kabbalist to different degrees.[171]More recently, Wolfson published an anonymous text, previously only found in manuscripts, which he titled, "Gates of the Elder." In his introduction, he adduces this text as further evidence of his esoteric model. In that context, Wolfson offers two theses, each significant for this essay.[172]His first argument situates this text within the same literary circle that produced *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* in the late 1270's, both because the anonymous text dramatizes an esoteric fellowship between a teacher and his students, like much of the *Zohar*, and because each of the five times the text cites the Zohar, that passage can be located in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. His second argument stresses that this text's position on esotericism embodies an intermediate platform within the Idelian antitheses of conservation and innovation. While the master repeatedly warns against the loose dissemination of his secrets and even performs elaborate dramas to resist their diffuse transmission, he also invites the students to elucidate and augment his teachings through their exegetical prowess. Though it is not acceptable for the students in the master's circle to invent secrets *ex nihilo*, it is expected that they will cultivate his secrets into new adaptations. This distinction is alluded to in the following passage:

> And take this principle in your hand, that all the hints that are hinted to in this book did not emerge by happenstance but only after research (*diyuk*). And we already hinted to you that *sevara* in these realms will cause great damage and will not help until you have received an oral tradition.[173]

This passage differs from Nahmanides because it does not refuse applying *sevara* to esoteric hints; it only warns against *sevara* as a mode of generating new secrets. A similar model seems active in our pericope from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. *Sevara* is used there not to fabricate new secrets but to expand received secrets. Hence the emphasis that R. Dustai and R. Hagai place on

---

[171] See Elliot Wolfson, "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic," *AJS Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 103-178; and ibid., "Beyond the Spoken Word: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Medieval Jewish Mysticism," in eds. Yaakov Elman and Israel Gershoni, *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 166-224.

[172] See Elliot Wolfson, "The Anonymous Chapters of the Elderly Master of Secrets – New Evidence for the Early Activity of the Zoharic Circle," *Kabbalah* 19 (2009), pp. 143-278.

[173] Section 15, p. 204:
ונקוט האי כללא בידך שכל הרמזים הנרמזים בספר הזה לא נפלו במקרה אלא אחר דיוק. וכבר נרמז בו במקומות ידועים שהסברא במקומות האלה תזיק מאד ולא תועיל עד שיקובל מפה אל פה.

applying *sevara* to a *shemua*, a received tradition. When R. Dustai asks R. Hagai if he can perform acts of *sevara,* he states: "(only) if you will be able to comprehend and deduce from what you will hear (*iy tikhol l'misbar sevara l'mai d'tishma*), come." Similarly, R. Hagai answers with a similar sequence of verbs: "I have heard a word of the supernal mystery, and have contemplated and comprehended it (*shamit milah d'raza ila'ah v'istaklit beh, v'savrit sevara*)." Both rabbis emphasize the importance of inferential esotericism, of adding *sevara* to secret traditions, an esoteric position that mediates between the conservatism of Nahmanides and the innovativeness of Maimonides.

IV. Sevara as a Literary Form

In the context of our original narrative-homily, inferential esotericism functions not just as a cognitive practice but as a form of literature, as the compositional structure of our text. That structure is built of a Hebrew homily encapsulating an Aramaic narrative. What exactly is the interaction between these two literary modes? To provide a local answer to a question that pertains to the crafty mingling of narrative and homily found throughout much of zoharic literature, it will helpful to first return to the narrative as a whole.

Once the two rabbinic pilgrims arrive at the precipice of their destination, R. El'azar sends his servant out to first test their theological acumen with two riddles. Only after they have figured out the correct answer (and proven themselves worthy of receiving further esoteric instruction) does R. El'azar formally welcome them into his home:

> Rabbi El'azar...went out to them.
> He said, "You are heads of the supernal academy, discord and harmony. Come to me and you will see and live—what has never been revealed, as is written, *for a person may not see Me and live* (Exod. 33:20), but you will see and live!"
> They sat before him. He was silent and they were silent. He went up into a chamber and heard a voice saying, "Tell them all that they desire, for they are righteous."
> Before he descended, night dusked. They ate. While they were eating, he was silent and they were silent. After they ate, they arose to lie down.
> He said to them, "If one of you has heard a word, tell me."
> Rabbi Dostai opened, saying, "We shall comprehend and deduce (*anan sevarah nisbor*), and what is good to know, you will tell us."[174]

The narration builds to a climax. After R. El'azar welcomes his tested guests into his home with encomium and spiritual promises, the narrative performs a series of deferrals via a rapid succession of verbs, which give the reader a rising expectation of a climatic event: they sit; they

---

[174] *Zohar Hadash*, 25d (translation, Wolski, pp. 303-304):
שמע רבי אלעזר, ונפק לגביהון, אמר אתון מאריהון דמתיבתא עילאה, פלגותא ושלימתא אייתו גבאי, ותחמון ותיחון. מה דלא הוה גלי לעלמין דכתיב כי לא יראני האדם וחי. ואתון תחזון ותיחון: יתבון קמיה, אשתיק, ואינון אשתיקו. עאל לאדרונא, שמע ההוא קלא דהוה אמר, אימא לון מה דאינון בעאן, דזכאין אינון. עד דנחית, רמש ליליא. אכלו. עד דהוו אכלי, אשתיק, ואינון אשתיקו. כד אכלו, קמו למשכב, אמר לון אי אית מנכון, דשמע מילתא לימא לי: פתח רבי דוסתאי ואמר, אנן סברא נסבור, וטיבו למינדע, את אימא לן.

are silent; R. El'azar ascends to his room; he hears a voice directing him to tell the rabbis what they have come for (this emphasis on oral teaching stands in opposition to R. El'azar's promise to provide a visionary experience); he descends; they eat; they get up to go to sleep; R. El'azar asks his guests if they have any traditions to tell him; R. Dostai retorts that, instead, R. El'azar should teach them and they will use *sevara* and try to understand. Finally, after all of this dramatic build-up, R. El'azar begins to teach them a tradition that, as his guests profess, they have not heard before. This moment of esoteric education functions as the climax of the Aramaic narrative.

The centrality of R. El'azar's teaching is reinforced by the text's compositional form. The very tradition that R. El'azar transmits serves as the Hebrew header to our whole text. But the two recitations are not identical. The following chart displays the difference (Hebrew in bold; Aramaic in regular font):

Rabbi Yitzhak said, "Whoever recites the Shema upon his bed fittingly (*k'tiquna*), his soul ascends, soaring through the Land of Life." **Rabbi Aybo said**, "What is fittingly (*mai k'tiquna*)? **Come and listen: There are sixty known letters in the night-time Shema, and through them one must focus to contemplate those surrounding the Throne of Glory, who are sixty, as is written, *Encircled by sixty warriors of the warriors of Israel* (Song of Songs 3:7).**	He said to them, "Have you heard the word that Rabbi Yitzhak said: 'Whoever recites the Shema upon his bed fittingly, his soul ascends, soaring through the Land of Life, as is written, *Encircled by sixty warriors of the warriors of Israel* (Song of Songs 3:7)?'" They answered him, "Let the master say." He said to them, "In the recitation of the Shema there are sixty known letters until *and in your gates* (Deut. 6:9). On each and every letter there is a precious mystery of holy kingship, of the supernal ruler. The worship of a human being before Him must be that he draw his mind near to the Throne of Glory of holy kingship. At that time, the Prince of the Countenance, whose name is like his Master's, takes them from his mouth and raises them aloft, along with the souls of the righteous, before the precious altar above. There, sixty angels surrounding the Throne of Glory receive them, each and every one a single letter and they sing with them the entire night. This is what is written, *The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of YHVH your God* (Deut. 26:4). *"The priest shall take* – Metatron. *"The basket*, *ha-tene* – the sixty letters of the night-time recitation of the Shema."

In the initial Hebrew presentation, the tradition's connection to Song of Songs 3:7 is constructed in response to a definitional question posed (in Aramaic) by R. Aybo—"What is fittingly (*mai k'taqana*)?" R. El'azar, however, skips the whole rhetoric of question and answer (*mai…ta shma*) and simply cites the verse from the canticles as a prooftext: "…as is written, 'Encircled by sixty warriors of the warriors of Israel' (Song of Songs 3:7)." In her groundbreaking article, "Midrash ha-Ne'lam to Genesis: Between Hebrew and Aramaic," Shifra Asulin highlights a more fundamental difference between the two recitations.[175] R. El'azar's Aramaic homily does away with sleep as the sole context for human ascent. He proposes, instead, that meditation on the

[175] Asulin, "*Midrash ha-Ne'lam* to Genesis," pp. 232-233.

letters of the nocturnal prayer (*kriyat shemah*) engenders a heavenly drama, wherein Metatron plucks these liturgical letters from the meditator's mouth and shuttles them to the sixty throne angels, who then sing those letters all night long. Asulin cites this narrative as evidence of her larger thesis on *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s compositional history: the Hebrew stratum—which often has an anti-mystical, anti-heavenly-ascent agenda—precedes the Aramaic stratum—which often proposes a less divisive distinction between humans and angels, earth and heaven.

In our local context, I tend to side with Nathan Wolski's claim that there exists a deliberate literary strategy to fashion a layered text via Hebrew and English, and not two historically distinct texts. Wolski writes:

> Here, the Hebrew portion of the unit serves as a kind of Mishnah (though this word is not used), with the Aramaic story functioning as kind of aggadic Gemarah to the opening teaching. Assuming one didn't know anything about the authorship of this work, one could easily reach the conclusion that this unit is composite, comprised of an earlier Hebrew layer, and a later Aramaic addition. While current trends in Zohar scholarship favor multiple authors across numerous generations, and even *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* itself may well turn out to be the product of numerous hands, this unit requires no such conclusion. *In my view, we have here a deliberate strategy on the part of the author to create a new Talmud, so to speak, that is, a thickly textured work with its own internal layers*.[176]

Nevertheless, Asulin's claim that there exist ideational differences between the linguistically distinct sections is an important and productive thesis. For the purposes of this chapter, Asulin's reading makes visible that the Aramaic version of R. Yitzhak is represented as a later modification of the Hebrew version. R. El'azar does not simply transmit the Hebrew "Mishnah." He augments its meaning toward new theological directions by incorporating Metatron as an active agent in the nocturnal *shema* ritual. By temporally marking the first R. Yitzhak tradition as older—both via choice of language and compositional structure, which resembles the Talmud's relationship to a Mishnah—our text brings to the fore its project of reviving older traditions into new form.[177] As we have been arguing, that renaissance project looks to the Babylonian Talmud for a model of creative interaction with older sources, one which hides neither the creativity nor the interaction. There exist no better Jewish term to describe this creative practice than "*sevara*."

V. *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* and the Zoharic Renaissance

Yehuda Liebes, one of the most important scholars to transform Zohar studies after the passing of Scholem in the early 1980s, has proposed that zoharic literature is best read as a literature of renaissance. Liebes' wide-ranging corrective to Scholem's historiography of the Zohar centers

---

[176] Wolski, "Metatron and the Mysteries of the Night."

[177] R. Yitzchak's tradition does not have a known rabbinic correlate. The closest allusion is to *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah*, 3:7, where R. El'azar b. Yosi interprets the verse of "*shishim giborim*" as referring to the sixty letters of the priestly blessing.

around the claim that the time of the Zohar is neither rabbinic nor medieval, but is rather the time of the Renaissance.[178]Liebes proposes not a new dating of Zohar, but rather a new periodization that links the literary sensibilities of late thirteenth century Castile—as exemplified by the Zohar—with early fourteenth century Italy—as exemplified by Dante and Petrarch. Liebes uses this model to forge a more nuanced literary history of the Zohar.[179] He views *Tikkunei Zohar*'s dissimilarity to *Guf Ha-Zohar* (the main body of zoharic texts published in Mantua and Cremona in 1558-1560) in terms of their relationship to rabbinic revivalism. Only the latter is a true rabbinic renaissance, while the former abandons the zoharic passion for the rabbinic past and advocates for a more messianic cultural revolution (akin, Liebes argues, to mid-twentieth century Communism).[180]

I would like to extend Liebes's historiography of zoharic renaissance backwards, to the literary time(s) right before *Guf Ha-Zohar*, namely, the time of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. Although the literary unit found in 25c-26a (ed. Margaliot) exhibits few of the renaissance virtues that Liebes identifies in *Guf Ha-Zohar*, it exemplifies *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s engagement with a different set of renaissance-like questions: queries into the nature of tradition, literary creativity, historical consciousness, and the techniques of knowledge transmission. This Spanish text therefore offers literary responses to the emerging problematics of the late-medieval period in ways that differ, crucially, from the later, more Christian, Renaissance of Italy.

To provide a theoretical framework for thinking through the rhetorical strategies of rabbinic renaissance found in zoharic literature, it will prove helpful to introduce a strand of contemporary scholarship on the role of rhetoric and time in the Renaissance.

Thomas Greene's *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* has reoriented how scholars talk about the emergence of a renaissance sensibility in the early fourteenth century.[181] For Greene, and many of his readers, "Renaissance" names the emergence of new structures of intertextuality, meant to overcome new problems of temporality, anachronism, and historical consciousness. Renaissance literature, in other words, was initially a new strategy of writing, which grappled with new problems of time. For Greene, it was specifically new strategies of *imitatio* that enabled the emergence of the Renaissance: "*Imitatio* produced a vast effort to deal with the newly perceived problem of anachronism; it determined for two or three centuries the character of most poetic intertexuality; it assigned the Renaissance creator a convenient and flexible stance toward a past that threatened to overwhelm

---

[178] Yehuda Liebes, "Zohar as Renaissance," *Da'at*, Vol. 46 (2001), pp. 5-11 [Hebrew].

[179] Yehuda Liebes, "Zohar and Tiqqunei Zohar: From Renaissance to Revolution," in ed. Ronit Meroz, *New Developments in Zohar Studies* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2007), pp. 251-301 [Hebrew].

[180] Liebes, "Zohar and Tiqqunei Zohar," p. 291.

[181] Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982). For important subsequent works that develop Greene's model, see Donna B. Hamilton, *Virgil and the Tempest: The Politics of Imitation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990); Ignacio Navarrete, *Orphans of Petrarch:Poetry and Theory in the Spanish Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and Alexander Nagel and Christpher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (Zone Books: New York, 2010). Also see G. W. Pigman III, "Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (1980), pp, 1-32.

him."[182]Renaissance imitation, then, was not a form of citation or reproduction, but a complex technique of rhetoric that authors used to achieve an intimacy with their textual past at the same time as they submitted to the divisive mediations of time. This dialectical model of imitation (which Greene differentiates from "reproductive," "eclectic," and "heuristic," models of imitation) highlights and dramatizes a text's "intertextual makeup as a constitutive structural element" and thereby allows language to "reflect an awareness of (its) historicity and build upon it." Unlike Medieval authors, Greene tells us, Petrarch and others around him created new dialectical models of imitation, models of literature that create intimacy between two times of language (the imitated and the imitation), even as they highlight and reflect upon the historical distance between the two. Greene describes this shift from medieval literary culture to that of the Renaissance as a shift from a "metonymic intertextuality" to a "metaphoric intertextuality," metaphoric because the latter usage of texts underscores and builds upon the disjunctures of literary history, gaps that metonymy always ignores.

Do zoharic texts present themselves as naive metonymic extensions of rabbinic literature or as more dialectically self-conscious imitations of rabbinic literature? To a degree, this question has already been broached. In his article on the Zohar as a renaissance literature, Liebes highlights the Zohar's heightened self-awareness as one of the many features that makes it a renaissance text: "(While) the Zohar is no less daring than the Talmud, its method is no longer primitive (in other words, originary) and self-evident in the eyes of its creators, as is the case in the Talmud and Midrashim. The method of the Zohar is more reflexive, in other words, self-aware as to its path and its daringness."[183]According to Liebes, the Zohar exhibits a new historical consciousness that is absent from rabbinic literature. Given that the Zohar's midrashic method was no longer self-evident in the medieval period as a genre of creativity, its authors must have been highly self-conscious of their creative endeavors.

Instead of explicating the Zohar's reflexive poetic in opposition to a more "originary-primitive" poetic of talmud and midrash, this chapter highlighted the ways that the former is dependent on the latter, at the least, in certain sections of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.[184] More specifically, this chapter argued that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* uses the Babylonian Talmud as a rhetorical template for its medieval revival of rabbinic literature. My reading, therefore, extends the claims of previous scholars who note *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s close rhetorical relationship with earlier rabbinic literature, to formulate a hypothesis about *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s rhetorical reliance on the Babylonian Talmud to negotiate new problematics of time, tradition, and creativity.

Long before the European Renaissance, the Babylonian Talmud offered Jews a complex

---

[182] Greene, *The Light in Troy,* p. 2.

[183] Liebes, "Zohar as Renaissance," p. 9.

[184] Throughout his "Zohar as Renaissance" essay, Liebes equivocates over the nature of amoraic culture. At times he explicitly claims, "from the tannaitic period, Judaism has been characterized by legalism, via literalism and rationalism, cold and sterile, which murders the life of religion, which is to say the mythos." But at other times he parenthetically includes the amoraim as a continuation of tannaitic culture - "According to the Zohar, the innovation which characterizes it, which is to say the original mythic-exegetical creativity, which was born from a live discourse, from intense dialogue within a cohort surrounding a teacher, this is the way of the Tannaim (and perhaps also the Amoraim)."

model of intertextuality capable of integrating cultural change within its compositional structure. By fashioning an apparatus that allowed generations of Jews to argue with and rewrite past traditions at the same time as they partook in those traditions, the Talmud became a central media of Jewish intergenerational creativity. As recent scholarship has reminded us, one fundamental feature of the Talmud is memory, so much so that it may be best to approach the Talmud as a comprehensive praxis for cultivating rabbinic cultural memory.[185] Sergey Dolgopolski's recent monograph, *The Open Past: Subjectivity and Remembering in the Talmud*, strikingly describes the mnemonic practices of the Talmud as "thinking in the service of remembering"—in other words, Talmud is the site where Jews think and debate how to best remember the past.[186] For Dolgopolski, this is precisely how talmudic thinking differs from ancient rhetoric and philosophy, which either use memory in the service of thinking (philosophy) or in the service of persuasion (rhetoric). The talmudic past is, in Dolgopolski's locution, "an open past," because Talmud constructs a rabbinic past that calls for a persistent inquiry into how it should be properly remembered. By constantly issuing its own reexamination, the past retains some openness, some withdrawal from its determinants.

This unique mnemonic structure of talmudic intertextuality evades Greene's historiographical binary of metonymic and metaphoric intertextualities. *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s relationship to the Renaissance—in Greene's sense of the term as a new structure of intertextuality—is therefore a complex one that invites further research and scholarly conversation. When we talk of a medieval Jewish renaissance, we have to remember that late thirteenth century Jews had, for the most part, a very different canon, library, and literary praxis than coeval Christians. In the Talmud, Jews already had access to models of intertextuality that cope with the cultural and literary distances that accrue with the passage of time. *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s reliance on the Talmud to fashion its relationship to the rabbinic past eschews, then, any straightforward sense of literary continuity or discontinuity, but rather points toward a concept of tradition and time that is still in need of a name. Not exactly "*milin haditin atiqin*," "new ancient words"—a phrase that (only) later sections of Zohar use to describe their renaissance poetic[187]—*Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is perhaps better portrayed as *milin hadatin v'atiqin*, "new and ancient

---

[185] For evidence that aesthetic and mnemonic concerns often trump legal concerns in the formation of the Babylonian Talmud, see Ethan Tucker, *Literary Agendas and Legal Conclusions: The Contributions of Rabbinic Editors to the Laws of Forbidden Mixtures*, PhD, The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2006. On the complex relationship of the stammaim to practices of memory, see Moulie Vidas, *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). On the importance of memory to earlier Palestinian rabbinic literature, see Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE – 400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). On the relevance of contemporary theories of memory for talmud scholarship and the continuing relevance of orality and memory to Talmud study in the early medieval period, see Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud*, pp. 1-90.

[186] See Sergey Dolgopolski, *The Open Past: Subjectivity and Remembering in the Talmud* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

[187] See Daniel Matt, "New-Ancient Words': The Aura of Secrecy in the Zohar," in eds. Peter Schäfer and Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism 50 Years After* [Proceedings Of The Sixth International Conference On the History of Jewish Mysticism] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993), pp. 181-207.

words," where the *and* does not create an addition, but diagrams a talmudic tension between new and old words, Aramaic and Hebrew, innovation and imitation.

In the subsequent and final chapter of this dissertation, I analyze an additional function of talmudic textuality within *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, namely, the importance of talmudic rhetoric to *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s representation of rabbinic community. While this chapter concluded by demonstrating that the author(s) of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* occasionally adopt(s) the compositional form of the Babylonian Talmud, the next chapter argues that the social rhetoric of the Babylonian Talmud is pervasive throughout much of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. What follows seeks to determine the literary and cultural importance of that talmudic rhetoric.

Chapter Five

Scholastic Sociality:
The Talmudic Rhetoric of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*

Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.

--Benedict Anderson[1]

I: Jewish Collectivities and Zoharic Literature

Commencing in the early thirteenth century, rabbis in Christian Spain, France, and Germany began to study, create, and circulate esoteric knowledge in communal hubs. Centers of rabbinic learning (the *beit midrash*) and informal confraternities (the *havura*) became places where educated Jews could go to share and discover Jewish secrets.[2] The emergence of these social enclaves of esotericism was a seismic shift from the models of Jewish esotericism active in the Islamicate. Jewish philosophers active in Islamic regions during the eleventh and twelfth centuries tended to produce and uncover Jewish esoterica through practices of seclusion and introspection. Maimonides, Bahya ibn Paquda, Abraham Ibn Ezra, and Yehudah Halevi—all exemplars of Jews who primarily lived in Islamic societies—pursued their affection for Jewish esotericism as a solitary enterprise (in large part because they did not believe that other Jews were stewards of oral esoteric traditions).[3] The subsequent social turn in Jewish esotericism participates in what Susan Reynolds calls "the communal movement" of twelfth and thirteenth-century Christian Europe, during which laypersons, scholars, and devotees established

---

[1] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 6.

[2] See Joseph Dan, "A Re-Evaluation of Ashkenazi Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6:3-4 (1987), pp. 129-130 [Hebrew]; and Haviva Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), pp. 1-21 [Hebrew]. Cf. Mark Verman, *Books of Contemplation: The Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 177, n. 32.

[3] This regional contrast is made by Dan, "A Re-Evaluation." Dan claims that Maimonides inaugurates the social trend of thirteenth century esotericism. However, while Maimonides is known to have tutored individual students in medicine, logic, and astronomy, he only provided esoteric instruction within the confines of the written medium. Cf. Moshe Idel, "Leadership and Charisma: Maimonides, Nahmanides and Abraham Abulafia," *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry* 1 (2008), pp. 10-11. On documents from the Cairo genizah that refer to Maimonides' *beit midrash*, see Mordechai A. Friedman, "Notes by a Disciple in Maimonides' Academy Pertaining to Beliefs and Concepts and Halakhah," *Tarbiz* Vol. 62 (1992/3), pp. 523-583 [Hebrew]. Based on these and other primary documents, Herbert Davidson concludes that, "while it is certain that Maimonides taught rabbinic texts in one format or another, the meager information does not justify conclusions about the venue in which he did so'; see his *Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 64-66. On the role of spiritual isolationism in the writings of twelfth-century Jewish philosophers, see Howard Kreisel, "Asceticism in the Thought of R. Bahya Ibn Paquda and Maimonides," *Da'at* 21 (1988), pp. Vii-xiii; and Paul Fenton, "Solitary Meditation in Jewish and Islamic Mysticism in the Light of a Recent Archeological Discovery," *Medieval Encounters* 1 (1995), pp. 271-279.

'collectivities' in unprecedented numbers.[4] Reynolds defines a collectivity as a community of voluntary, reciprocal, and unmediated relationships. Despite the stronghold of Christian monarchies in medieval Europe, "medieval society seems to have been full of groups of laypeople who acted together, or thought of themselves as acting together, sometimes over long periods, and who appear to have done so —as far as the records show—at least partly on their own initiative and with a relatively small amount of formal regulation and physical coercion."[5]

The narratives of *Guf ha-Zohar* evoke a similar sense of community, of a group of Rabbis whose singular passion is to discover and teach the secrets of scripture to each other. Page after page, *Guf ha-Zohar* recounts stories of ten rabbinic friends who amble across the Palestinian countryside together, teach one another scripture's kabbalistic mysteries, and experience epiphanies in the luminous faces of the fellowship.[6] Woven together, these narratives make for a strong argument against the notion that a spiritual experience could be an asocial experience; zoharic spirituality is zoharic sociality.[7] To be sure, *Guf ha-Zohar*'s fiction of spiritual community was not made from whole cloth, as earlier strata of *Sefer ha-Zohar* preserve cognate models of rabbinic sociality. To trace the emergence and evolution of these zoharic imaginings of rabbinic community, this chapter turns to representations of the social in *Sefer ha-Zohar*'s earliest section, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* to Genesis.

While the rabbis of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* also search for scripture's secrets together,[8] their interactions are more scholastic than mystical. In place of an intimate community (*hevraya*) emotionally bound to a single master teacher, an amorphous network of rabbis debate each other's esoterica, often in non-narrative settings that carry the tone and rhetoric of a talmudic composition. Compared to the affirmations offered by zoharic sages to their friends' exegetical performances, "*shapir ka'amart*" ("you have spoken beautifully"), common throughout later strata of Zohar, the homilies of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* sustain a more disputatious tone and contain a higher percentage of rabbinic argumentation. Motivated by a new theosophical understanding of communal disagreement as a slippage from divine harmony, later strata of Zohar become more averse to a culture of *mahloket* (dissensus).[9]

To historically situate *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s model of sociality—how it represents social life—this chapter begins with a survey of previous Jewish representations of social esotericism.

---

[4] See Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300* (second edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Cf. Caroline Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" in ibid., *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Medieval Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 82, 104-105.

[5] Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, p. 2.

[6] See Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows From Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar*, trans. Nathan Wolski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 105-154.

[7] Hellner-Eshed (*A River Flows From Eden*, p. 110), writes, that in the Zohar, "the presence of the other person is not an obstacle to mystical life, but rather a necessary precondition for it." Cf. Mortimer Ostow, *Ultimate Intimacy: The Psychodynamics of Jewish Mysticism* (London: Karnac Books, 1995), pp. 11-12, 31-39.

[8] See David Greenstein, *Roads to Utopia: The Walking Stories of the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 6.

[9] See Zohar 1:17a-b; and 3:186b.

Against that backdrop, the chapter's central section argues that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s representations of esoteric community depend upon amoraic and stammaitic rhetoric, i.e., rabbinic discourses developed by post-mishnaic sages referred to as amoraim and the anonymous redactors of the Babylonian Talmud referred to by many modern scholers as stammaim. It has long been noticed that many of the Rabbis that populate the imagined world of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* are amoraic rabbis who lived long after R. Shimon bar Yohai, the reputed author of the Zohar. In what follows, I will demonstrate that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s anachronism runs deeper than previously detected—namely, that its social rhetoric derives from amoraic and stammaitic discourse. If talmudic rhetoric formalizes its style of sociality, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s talmudic anachronisms can be appreciated as constitutive of its literary project rather than as ahistorical gaffes.

II: Social Esotericism: A History of the *Hevraya*

At the heart of the semantic range of "*sod*," the Hebrew term for a secret, is a correlation between secrecy and the social sphere. Throughout the Bible, *sod* primarily means a council, a fellowship of men or angels.[10] For instance, in the term's sole appearance in the Pentateuch, Jacob laments the violent tendencies of his sons, Levi and Simeon, by swearing, "let not my person be included in their council (*b'sodam*) / let not my being be counted in their assembly (*b'kehillatam*)" (Gen. 49:6). Jacob equates "*sod*" with "*kehillah*," creating a parallelism that only underscores the communal connotations of "*sod*." The Septuagint captures this social sense by translating "*sod*" (on three occasions) as *synhedrion* (the Hellenistic origin of the Jewish term "*sanhedrin*") and (one time) *synagoge*. In the prophetic books of the Bible, "*sod*" refers to the divine council—"*sod YHVH*"—to which only prophets have privy.[11] When the term is then employed in Proverbs to designate a secular secret (Proverbs 11:13, 15:22, 20:19), this meaning still participates in the term's broader sense of social intimacy. A "*sod*" is both a fellowship and the knowledge engendered by that fellowship. By extension, the term also came to denote any knowledge that is not public. These two meanings ("an exclusive council" and "private knowledge") collide in Amos 3:7, where the prophet declares, "My Lord *YHVH* does nothing without having revealed His *sod* to His servants the prophets." Here, *sod* connotes both esoteric knowledge, something which must be "revealed," as well as a social formation in which God only reveals His *sod,* the propositional outcomes of His celestial council, to His chosen prophets. These linguistic origins of *sod* underscore the social powers of secrecy. A shared secret both

---

[10] On "*sod*" in the Hebrew Bible, see *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, *Vol. X*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Farby (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 171-176; Abraham Malamat, "The Secret Council and Prophetic Involvement in Mari and Israel," in eds. R. Liwak and S. Wagner, *Prophetie und geschichtliche Wirklichkeit im alten Israel: Festrschrift fur Siegfried Herrmann zum 65 Geburstag* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1991), pp. 231-236; Israel Belfer, "The Secret of the Individual and the Community," *Da'at*, Vol. 72 (2012), pp. 143-173; and Samuel I. Thomas, *The "Mysteries" of Qumran: Mystery, Secrecy, and Esotericism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), pp. 82-94.

[11] See Jeremiah 23:18, 22. Cf. Ellen White, *Yahweh's Council: Its Structure and Membership* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), pp. 56-57.

solidifies the bonds of fellowship and divides the social sphere into those who do and do not have access to privileged knowledge.

The relational implications of secrecy are, of course, not exclusive to ancient Israelite society. Michel de Certeau, in his monograph on early-modern mysticism/esotericism, speaks of a comparable dynamic.

> Secrecy is not only the state of a thing that escapes from or reveals itself to knowledge. It designates a play between actors. It circumscribes the terrain of strategic relations between the one trying to discover the secret and the one keeping it, or between the one who is supposed to know it and the one who is assumed not to know it...(The secret) is the center of the spider web spun around it by lovers, traitors, jealous protagonists, pretenders, or exhibitionists. The hidden organizes a social network.[12]

A secret is not a static fact that eludes accessibility. As de Certeu emphasizes, secrets also generate new social relationships. Both the withholding of knowledge and its disclosure act as fulcrums around which a social network coheres into a stable set of power-relations, affects, and encounters.

The ability of secrets to constitute and strengthen social bonds plays a central role in one of the more queer depictions of rabbinic friendship. Offering an embellished explanation of Yehoshua ben Perahiah's ambiguous mandate to "acquire for yourself a friend" (*Ethics of the Fathers,* 1:6), *Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, a late rabbinic treatise, outlines its own vision of friendship:

> 'Acquire for yourself a friend,' how so? It teaches that a person should acquire a friend for themselves—that he should eat with him, drink with, read scripture with him, recite oral traditions with him, sleep with him, and reveal to him all his secrets, the secrets of Torah, and the secrets of *derekh erez* ("the ways of the land").[13]

To elucidate the mishnaic advice to acquire a friend, *Avot De-Rabbi Natan* proposes concrete strategies for building a rabbinic friendship. Its model of friendship is expansive: it integrates daytime and nighttime togetherness, culinary, and scholarly activities. Yet the queer crux of this rabbinic friendship is not its capacious vision of homoscholasticism, but its call for comprehensive self-revelation, for revealing all of one's secrets to one's close-friend. *Avot De-Rabbi Natan* specifies the genres of esoteric knowledge divulged to one's friend as secrets of the Torah and secrets of the "ways of the land," an ambiguous rabbinic locution that, in this context, can be a euphemism for erotic practices or a reference to practical wisdom.[14] In the first rabbinic

---

[12] Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,* Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1995), pp 97-98. For a similar perspective, see Edward Tiryakian, "Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture," *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1972): 491–512.

[13] *Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, Version A, Chapter 8 (ed. Schechter, New York, 1966):
'וקנה לך חבר' כיצד מלמד שיקנה אדם חבר לעצמו - שיאכל עמו וישתה עמו ויקרא עמו וישנה עמו וייסן עמו ויגלה לו כל סתריו סתרי תורה וסתרי דרך ארץ.

[14] On the meaning of "*derekh erez"* in this context, see Shmuel Safrai, "The Term Derekh Erez," *Tarbiz* 60 (1990), p. 155 [Hebrew].

text to link secrecy (*setarim*) and friendship (*haver*), *Avot De-Rabbi Natan* frames the sharing of secrets as a friend-building practice, a way for Rabbis to develop brotherly bonds that transcend the space and practices of the *beit midrash*.

The esotericism depicted in *Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, however, is exclusive and non-communal. One does not share one's secrets among a cohort of friends but with a specific, singular rabbinic friend. The first Jewish sources emphasizing the importance of secrecy for group-solidarity are pre-rabbinic and testify to a sectarian notion of community. The late-second-temple community living at Qumran fashioned their sense of social identity and hierarchy around secrets dealing with nature, law, and history. Among the fragments of their many scrolls, a "*sod ha-yahad*" is frequently mentioned, a phrase which likely means "the secrets of our community," as "*ha-yahad*" was a common self-designating name used by the ascetics living at Qumran.[15] Similarly, Josephus reports that the Essenes swear oaths "to conceal nothing from the members of the sect and to report none of their secrets to others, even though tortured to death."[16]

The earliest depiction of a Rabbi revealing secrets to a fellowship is found in *Heikhalot Rabbati*, an enigmatic text written in the late talmudic period.[17] In a narrative that almost certainly served as a model for zoharic representations of similar assemblies (in the *Idrot*),[18] R. Nehunia ben HaQanah calls together a cohort of rabbis and discloses to them the secrets of celestial ascent and descent—the mysteries of *ma'aseh merqavah*:

> R. Ishmael said: When R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah saw that wicked Rome was holding a council against the eminent ones of Israel in order to destroy them, he stood and revealed a secret counsel of eternity...He said to me: Son of majestic ones...stand and bring before me all the mighty men of the association (*havurah*) and all the magnificent ones of the academy and I will recite before them the mysteries, the things made secret and preserved...R. Ishmael said: At once I stood and I assembled the whole great Sanhedrin...and there came Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel, R. Eliezer the Great, R. Elazar d ben Dama, R. Elazar ben Shammua, Johanan ben Dahavai, Hananiah ben Hakhinai, Jonathan ben Uzziel, R. Akiva, and R. Judah ben Baba. We came and we sat before him,

---

[15] See Meir Bar-Ilan, "The Secret World of the People of Qumran and the Sages," *Shnaton – An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, 11 (1997), pp. 285-301 [Hebrew]; Samuel I. Thomas, *The "Mysteries" of Qumran: Mystery, Secrecy, and Esotericism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

[16] *The Jewish War* 2.141.

[17] On the dating of *Heikhalot Rabbati*, see James Davila, S*upplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy Series: Hekhalot Literature in Translation: Major Texts of Merkavah Mysticism* (1) (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 16-18.

[18] On the significance of this passage for the Zohar and later Jewish mystics, see Joseph Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain: An Anthology of Jewish Mystical Experiences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 51, and 150; and ibid., "Sectarian Elements in Early Jewish Mysticism," *Da'at*, Vol. 50/52 (2003), pp. 20-21, n. 16. Cf. Moshe Idel, "On Mobility, Individuals and Groups: Prolegomenon for a Sociological Approach to Sixteenth Century Kabbalah," *Kabbalah* 3 (1998): "The importance of the group is evident in the Hekhalot literature; the individual mystic is described as entering his trance-experience, while in the companion of others, designated by the term "*lo yordei merkavah*," those who did not descend to the chariot, but remained in the mystic's vicinity in order to care for him."

> and they were a whole crowd of associates standing on their feet, because they were seeing to the pans of fire and torches of light that they had set as a barrier between us and them. And R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah sat and set out in order all the matters of the chariot: descent and ascent, how one who descends descends, and one who ascends ascends.[19]

At a moment of escalating tension between Roman forces and the rabbis of Palestine,[20] R. Nehunia chooses to bypass the rabbinic prohibition against teaching the secrets of *ma'aseh merqavah* ("all the matters of the chariot") to more than one student at a time, which was a norm that likely inhibited the exact sort of social esotericism we are currently investigating.[21] R. Nehunia directs R. Ishmael to gather "all the mighty men of the association (*ḥavurah*) and all the magnificent ones of the academy" so that he may share with them "the mysteries, the things made secret and preserved." Two sub-groups comprise this climactical assembly: the *ḥavurah*, made of ten rabbis, and "the magnificent ones of the academy," a more inchoate rabbinic association. R. Nehuniah's semi-public divulgence of secrets to these rabbis inaugurates the first, but by no means the last time that a rabbinic confraternity—a *ḥavura*—became the site of esoteric disclosure.

The social structures of rabbinic collectivities (*ḥavurot*) changed dramatically throughout Late Antique and Medieval Jewish history. In tannaitic sources a "*ḥavura*" describes a rabbinic cohort gathered for cultic purposes. The Mekhilta, a tannaitic midrash on Exodus, refers to a "*ḥavura shel ḥakhamim oh shel talmidim*," "an assembly of sages or students" who must converse about Passover until midnight because they have congregated together to consume the paschal sacrifice.[22] Only in Palestinian amoraic sources does "*ḥavura*" begin to denote a rabbinic

---

[19] *Hekhalot Rabbati* §98-103 [translation by James Davila, *Hekhalot Literature in Translation*, pp. 97-102]:

אמר רבי ישמעאל כיון שראה ר' נחוניא בן הקנה את רומי הרשעה שנטל עצה על אבירי ישראל לאבד אותם עמד וגילה סודו של עולם...אמר לי בן גאים...עמוד והביא לפני כל גבורי חבורה וכל אדירי ישיבה ואומר לפניהם הרזים הסתורין הכבושין...אמר רבי ישמעאל מיד עמדתי והקהלתי את כל סנהדרין הגדולה וקטנה למבוי הגדול השלישי אשר בבית ה' ואני יושב על ספסל של שיש טהור שנתן לי אלישע אבי מחפץ יולדתי שהכניסה לו בכתובתה. ובא רבן שמעון בן גמליאל ורבי אליעזר הגדול ורבי אלעזר בן דמה ור' אליעזר בן שמוע ור' יוחנן בן דהבאי וחנניה בן חכינאי ויונתן בן עוזיאל ור' עקיבא ור' יהודה בן בבא באנו וישבנו לפניו והיו כל המון חבירים עומדין על רגליהן כי היו רואין כוביות של אש ולפידי אור שמפסיקין ביניהם ובינינו ור' נחוניא בן הקנה יושב ומסדר לפניהם את כל דברי מרכבה ירידה ועליה היאך יורד מי שיורד והיאך יעלה מי שיעלה.

[20] On the importance of this narrative framing for the *havura*-account, see Ra'anan S. Boustan, *From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 248-251.

[21] See Mishnah *Haggiga* 2:1.

[22] *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Nezikin* 8.

study circle that gathers for the primary purpose of studying Torah together.[23] Catherine Heszner convincingly argues that these were informal associations, devoid of any institutional or spatial structure, and typically made up of no more than two-to-five rabbis who had formed a scholarly alliance.[24] At a time when the rabbinic movement did not have an internal social organization, the "*ḥavura*" was emblematic of the rabbinic affiliations that emerged within a fragmented rabbinic network. A passage from the Sifre that is likely of amoraic origins,[25] highlights the variety and specificity of rabbinic study-circles: "the *ḥavura* of those who study scripture...the *ḥavura* of those who study Mishnah[26]...the *ḥavura* of those who study the Talmud."[27] Each of these cohorts formed a "social cluster"[28] based on ties of friendship, comparable to contemporaneous Roman associations of philosophers.[29]

As institutions of rabbinic higher learning rose to hegemony in the geonic period, they began to be referred to as *ḥavurot*. [30] Soon after, *yeshivot* in Palestine, Egypt, and Italy also began to be called *ḥavurot*, and the *yeshiva*'s students *ḥaverim*.[31] This trend is prominent throughout "The Chronicle of Ahima'az" (1054), where the fellows of the *yeshivot* of southern Italy are consistently referred to as *haverim*.[32] Similarly, Rabbenu Hananel's Yeshiva in Kairouan, active in the early eleventh century, was known as the Yeshiva of "Rabbeinu Hananel and all his *ḥaverim*."[33] While it is less common for a yeshiva to be called a *ḥavura* in Medieval Spain, Mordechai Breuer claims that it was not uncommon for Spanish Jews to study Torah in

---

[23] See Moshe Beer, "On the *Havurah* in Israel in the Amoraic Period," *Zion,* Vol. 47, (1982), pp. 178- 185 [Hebrew]; ibid., "About the 'Hevraya' in the Talmudim," *Bar-Ilan University Annual,* Vol. 20–21 (1983), pp.76-95 [Hebrew]; Jacob Neusner, *Contemporary Judaic Fellowship in Theory and Practice* (New York: Ktav, 1972), esp. part 1; Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), pp. 315-327; and ibid., Catherine Hezser, "Rabbis and Other Friends: Friendship in the Talmud Yerushalmi and in Graeco-Roman Literature," in eds, Peter Schafer and Catherine Hezser, *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, Volume 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), pp. 189-254.

[24] Cf. Beer, 1982, who concludes that the *havura* in Palestinian amoraic texts refers to a *yeshivah* or *beit midrash*. Beer (1982 and 1983) also points out that the term "*ḥevraya*" is much more common in the Jerusalem Talmud than in the Babylonian Talmud. When the latter reworks a source from the former, it often substitutes "*talmidim*" for "*ḥevraya*." Cf. A. Buchler, "Learning and Teaching in the Open Air in Palestine," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 4 (1913-1914), pp. 485-491.

[25] See Heszner, 1997, p. 318, n. 76.

[26] Cf. "Reish Laqish said: We do not rely on any mishnah that did not enter a *ḥavura*" (JT Eiruvin 1:6).

[27] *Sifre,* Deuteronomy 355:5.

[28] See Hezser, *The Social Structure*, pp. 321-322.

[29] Hezser, *The Social Structure*, p. 320.

[30] See Mordechai Breuer, *Oholei Torah: The Yeshiva, Its Structure and History* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2003), pp. 15-16.

[31] See Breuer, *Oholei Torah*, p. 16.

[32] See Robert Bronfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle: The Family Chronicle of Ahima'az ben Paltiel* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 259, 309, and 308, n. 410.

[33] Breuer, *Oholei Torah*, p. 16.

ḥavurot. He suggests that the eventual surge of rabbinic *ḥavurot* in early-modern Tzfat was stimulated by the influx of Spanish Jews after the Spanish expulsion.[34]

Rabbis were not the only Jews to form collectivities in the medieval period. By the mid-thirteenth century, lay Jews in Spain began to create their own confraternities. Often referred to as *ḥavurot*, these groups focused on pressing issues of community welfare, class tension, educational instruction, and professional guilds.[35] The popularity of these informal social associations attests to a surge in lay Jewish collectivities that thrived alongside the rabbinic class and institutions of synagogues. At the same time as these confraternities gained eminence and power, Spanish kabbalists in Gerona also began to form *ḥavurot*.[36] Nahmanides and Ezra of Gerona reference a "*kat ha-ḥaverim*," "a cohort of fellows," centered around the transmission of esoteric knowledge.[37] Rabbi Shlomo Montpellier, a noted critic of Maimonides, writes to the kabbalists of Gerona, "And therefore my lord and his holy fellowship (*ḥavura*), take care to…"[38] And slightly later, David ben Yehudah ha-Hasid, a collector and translator of zoharic texts, will also make mention of *ḥaverim* and a *rosh ḥavurah*.[39]

These fragments of Spanish social realia offer a tantalizing context for reading representations of the zoharic *ḥevraya* as dramatizations of an actual kabbalistic confraternity

---

[34] Breuer, *Oholei Torah*, pp. 24-25. On the social and institutional differences between *yeshivot* in medieval Spain and Ashkenaz, see Mordechai Breuer, "Toward the Investigation of the Typology of Western *Yeshivot* in the Middle Ages," in eds. E. Etkes and Y. Salmon, *Studies in the History of Jewish Society in the Middle Ages and the Modern Period, Presented to Professor Jacob Katz on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday by his Students and Friends* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1980*),* pp. 45-55 [Hebrew]. On fourteenth and fifteenth-century *yeshivot* of Spain, see Michael Rigler, "Were the Yeshivot in Spain a Centre for the Copying of Books?" *Annual of the Institute for Research in Jewish Law* Vol. 18/19 (1992), pp. 411-426.

[35] For a broad social-history of Jewish confraternities, see Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crises: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), pp. 132-140. On medieval Jewish confraternities in Spain, see Mark Wischnitzer, *A Jewish History of Jewish Crafts and Guilds* (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1965), pp. 107-113; R. Ben-Shalom, "The Jewish Community in Arles and its Institutions: Ben-Sheshet's *Responsum* 266 as an Historical Source," *Michael 12* (1991), pp. 9-42 [Hebrew]; Yom Tov Assis, "Welfare and Mutual Aid in the Spanish Jewish Community," in ed. H. Beinarted, *The Sephardi Legacy* (Jerusalem 1992), pp. 318-345. On the monarchical politics of a Jewish collective (*kat ha-ḥavurah*) in thirteenth-century Zaragoza, see Elka Klein, "Good Servants, Bad Lords: The Abuse of Authority by Jewish Bailiffs in the Medieval Crown of Aragon," in eds. Robert F. Berkhofer III, Alan Cooper, and Adam J. Kosto, *The Experience of Power in Medieval Europe, 950–1350* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 59-72; cf. Yom Tov Assis, *Jewish Economy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327: Money and Power* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 114-120. On Christian confraternities in thirteenth-century Castile, see Katherine A. Lynch, *Individuals, Families, and Communities in Europe, 1200-1800: The Urban Foundations of Western Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 91-92.

[36] For an overview of this trend, see Roni Weinstein, *Kabbalah and Jewish Modernity* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016), pp. 83-101.

[37] See Moshe Halamish, *An Introduction to the Kabbalah,* trans. Ruth Bar-Ilan and Ora Wiskind-Elper (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) pp. 60-61.

[38] See Ronit Meroz, "Zoharic Narratives and their Adaptations," *Hispania Judaica* 3 (2001), pp. 15-16.

[39] See Meroz, "Zoharic Narratives," p. 16.

active in late-thirteenth-century Castile.[40] Yet the current lack of evidence of castilian confraternities of kabbalists inhibits the construction of direct correlations between these Geronese social trends and the confraternity described in zoharic texts, written in Castile. More importantly, it would be a misnomer to speak of "the zoharic *hevraya*" in the singular; the different strata of zoharic literature imagine rabbinic sociality differently. For instance, as Gershom Scholem points out, in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* "the author likes to scatter his opinions and sayings in the mouths of numerous sages, and does not delimit their count to the smallness of the *hevraya*."[41] This chapter's next section adds further evidence of the specificity of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s sociality. I will argue that the model of community portrayed by the non-narrative sections of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* depends upon talmudic rhetoric and is more akin to the informal cohorts of amoraic rabbis than to the intimate *havurot* of medieval kabbalists.

III: The Amoraic Anachronism: Amoraic Rabbis and Rhetoric in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*

Midrash-ha-Ne'lam does little to masquerade as a second-century Palestinian midrash. Of the eighteen rabbis that appear on its pages most frequently, exactly half are amoraim, and half of those are Babylonian amoraim.[42] Given this high distribution of amoraim in its rabbinic cast, it's not surprising that questions about *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s authorship and authenticity began to be voiced immediately after it was published as part of *Sefer ha-Zohar* (1558-60), a book whose title page claims it to be the work of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, a second-century Palestinian rabbi of the tannaitic period. Azaria de Rossi's *Meor Eynayim*, published in Mantua in the 1570's, just ten years after *Sefer ha-Zohar* was printed in the same Italian city, recounts his bewilderment at encountering amoraim in a midrash that is allegedly authored by a tanna.[43]

> Know that your eyes will see oddities...in the books of the kabbalists and in their attribution (of those books) to the holy R. Shimon bar Yohai. For anybody who has a palate will taste for himself the places where the language is not of the flavor and style of the (alleged) author. And I was amazed to find that the *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* in the *Zohar*, on the pericope *Toledot Yitzhak*, on the verse, 'Once when Jacob was cooking a stew,'

---

[40] See Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. A. Schwartz (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), pp. 5-25; Cf. Ronit Meroz's discussion of this problem in "Zoharic Narratives," pp. 11-12.

[41] See Gershom Scholem, "A New Chapter from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* in the *Zohar*," in eds. S. Lieberman, S. Spiegel, S. Zeitlin, and A. Marx, *Sefer ha-Yovel li-Khvod Levi Ginzberg* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945) pp. 425-46 [Hebrew].

[42] Tannaim = R. Yehudah, R. Yitzhak, R. Yosi, R. Elazar, R. Shimon, R. Yohanan, R. Aqiva, R. Broka, R. Elazar ben Arukh. Amoraim = R. Aba, R. Abahu, R. Zeira, Rav (almost always cited by Rav Yehudah), Rav Nahman, Rav Huna, Rav Yosef, R. Aha bar Yaakov. Roughly forty percent of all references to these eighteen rabbis in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* are of the amoraim.

[43] The Rabbinic period divides into two periods: tannaitic (70-210) and amoraic (210-500). The two periods are separated by the composition of the Mishnah in the early 3rd century. Another way, therefore, to configure the two periods is that a tanna is a Rabbi who appears in the Mishnah or lived before its completion, while an amora is a rabbi who taught anytime between the completion of the Mishnah and the beginning of the completion of the Talmud (in Palestine, in the early 4th century; in Babylonia, in the early sixth century).

> contained quotations from Rav Nahman, Rabbah, and Rav Yosef. And it is not ancient as we thought. [44]

De Rossi does not specify the stylistic anachronisms that expose the inauthenticity of the Zohar, only because he believes them to be too obvious to an experienced reader of rabbinic literature. Instead, he expresses his astonishment that the Zohar's author could be so careless as to commit anachronisms of names (Rav Nahman, Rabbah, and Rav Yosef all lived centuries after R. Shimon bar Yohai). This inexcusable error in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* forces him to conclude that the Zohar cannot be as ancient as its alleged author.

An identical critique was voiced a century earlier by another Italian-Jewish humanist, Elijah Del-Medigo (1458-1493). Del-Medigo writes in his *Behinat ha-Da'at* (Crete, 1491):

> (It is obvious that R. Shimon did not write the Zohar because) the people mentioned in this book lived many years after R. Shimon ben Yohai, as is clear to anyone who knows their names from the Talmud.[45]

Del-Medigo does not specify *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* as the target of his critique only because it was still uncommon in the fifteenth century to differentiate between *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* and other sections of the Zohar. Christian humanists like Julius Scaliger, who also believed the Zohar postdates the Talmud,[46] provide inspiration to Del-Medigo and de Rossi. In humanist style, they foreground the amoraic anachronism of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* as the philological crux around which they conclude the Zohar is a rabbinic forgery.[47]

Two centuries later, in the aftermath of the Sabbatian crisis, Jacob Emden (1697-1776) excludes *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* from the authentic core of the Zohar, primarily because it indiscriminately references amoraim and tannaim. By redefining the authentic corpus of the Zohar he sought to repress the cultural preeminence of the Zohar among sabbateans.[48] As a response to these criticisms of the Zohar voiced by Emden (as well as the critiques of several other rabbis), David Luria (1798-1855) circulated a point-by-point defense of the Late Antique, rabbinic origins of the Zohar, entitled *The Antiquity of the Zohar*. Luria argues that most of the

---

[44] Azaria de Rossi, *Meor Eynayim* (Mantua, 1573), 86b.

[45] *Behinat ha-Da'at*, ed. Ross, p. 91.

[46] See Stephen G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564-1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 210-212.

[47] See Boaz Huss, *The Zohar: Reception and Impact*, trans. Yudith Nave (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016), p. 251. In the mid-seventeenth century, Leon Modena reiterated this criticism in his *Ari Nohem* (ed. Libowitz, 1929, p. 67), as part of his effort to weaken the cultural hegemony of Zohar in early-modern Italy. See Yaacob Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah: Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 87-94. Modena's colleague, Joseph Solomon Delmedigo, offers a comparable critique in his letter, *Mikhtav Ahuz*: "Ignorant of how to conceal their machinations, they say that the Zohar was written by Rabbi Shimeon ben Yohai. But traditions are mentioned there in the name of *amoraim* who came several centuries after him. Who is foolish enough to come this way, without his eyes growing dim!...And there is no wisdom, insight, or understanding in upholding these falsities;" published in *Ari Nohem* (ed. Libowitz, 1929), p. 142.

[48] See Huss, *The Zohar*, p. 262.

Zohar was in fact written in the tannaic period by the students of R. Shimon bar Yohai (*beit midrasha d'rashbi*). However, he adds,

> I also found passages in the midrash of R. Shimon bar Yohai that were arranged by the students of his students, who lived during the amoraic period. They would recite traditions in the name of R. Shimon and add to his words...as is common in all the tannaitic works that are in our hands. And (this is) especially (true regarding) *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, where the majority of those who speak are amoraim. Surely most of it was arranged (*nisdar*) during the time of the amoraim.[49]

The amoraic characters that populate *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* are not anachronisms, according to Luria. Their presence, rather, testifies to the belated production of all tannaitic treatises. Witnessing amoraic agency—noticing evidence of amoraic rearrangement of and addition to tannaitic traditions—in tannaitic texts is the norm, not the exception.[50]

A similar apologia for *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s amoraic anachronism is offered by David Neumark (1866-1924) in his idiosyncratic treatise on the history of Jewish philosophy and Kabbalah.[51] "My heart tells me," he asserts, "that the editors of the earliest sections of Zohar intended to only refer to the confraternity during the generation of Rashbi. The truth is, most of the late names (i.e., amoraim) are found in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* and in the other late sections of Zohar."[52] However, he believes that these late names attest to a range of belated additions that do not change the literary authenticity of the Zohar. Generational accretion is also common to the Talmud; each generation of later Amoraim added new language to the Talmud's discourse. "And this was the intention of the later, contributing editors (of the Zohar): the tradition of Kabbalah was not sealed in the generation of the *hevraya*, rather it continued and widened through each generation of the sages of the Talmud."[53] The Zohar's authors (Neumark is an early proponent of

---

[49] David Luria, *Kadmut Sefer ha-Zohar* (Königsberg, 1855), 26b.

[50] Several centuries earlier, Abraham Zacuto (1452-1515) outlined a similar compositional theory in his *Sefer Yuhasin* (Constantinople, 1566), 41B-42A: "*Sefer ha-Zohar*, which illumines the whole world and is called *Midrash Yehi Ohr*...was called by his name (R. Shimon Bar Yohai) even though he did not make it, since his students, and his son, and his students' students made it from what they received from him, just as they say that the Mishnah, Sifra, Sifrei, and Tosefta are all according to R. Aqiva, even though these books were made many hundreds of years later."

[51] David Neumark, *The History of Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Stybel Publishing House, 1921), p. 209 [Hebrew]. On the "apologetic" nature of Neumark's scholarship, see Jonathan Cohen, *Philosophers and Scholars: Wolfson, Guttmann and Strauss on the History of Jewish Philosophy*, trans. Rachel Yarden (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), pp. 19-22. Cf. Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. Allan Arkush (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), p. 8, n. 7: "(In Neumark's work) a playful but truly uncommon perspicacity proceeding on the basis of fanciful assumptions combines with an astonishing lack of historical sense and sound judgment. Nevertheless, here and there, one encounters profound views, which is doubly surprising, as the method is completely untenable."

[52] David Neumark, *The History of Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Stybel Publishing House, 1921), p. 209 [Hebrew].

[53] Neumark, *The History of Jewish Philosophy*, p. 209.

the multiple-author hypothesis[54]) wished to suggest that there are two Jerusalem Talmuds: one exoteric, which was revealed many years ago, and one esoteric Talmud—the Zohar—which was only revealed in the Middle Ages. The Zohar too would be composed slowly over several generations, just as the amoraim added material to their tannaitic tradents. The desire of the Zohar's authors to present the Zohar as a new Talmud, Neumark concludes, motivated their choice of Aramaic as their language of craft.

My own research on *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* revealed that the amoraic condition of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* runs deeper than these amoraic attributions. Not only are many of its rabbinic characters amoraim but even its midrashic discourse is frequently amoraic. Historically speaking, this does not mean that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is amoraic, any more than the presence of tannaitic rhetoric in *Guf ha-Zohar* means it is tannaitic. Evidence of amoraic rhetoric, rather, urges us to ask a literary question: why are the author(s) of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* so invested in amoraic discourse?

To address this question and to better understand *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s medieval revival of amoraic rhetoric, I will survey each of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s two most prevalent forms of amoraic discourse: disputational [*masah u'matan*] and connective [*d'amar*] rhetoric.

Masah u'matan names the characteristic give-and-take of rabbinic debate, a literary form that doesn't quite generate narrative progression, but propels dialogue forward through dialectic, negotiative, and argumentative rhetoric. As it is more generally studied as a feature of the legal discourse of the talmuds, the exact role of *masah u'matan* in midrashic literature is a topic that has only recently begun to be studied. The few studies on the issue that do exist highlight a range of discursive differences between the argumentative styles of tannaitic and amoraic midrash: each performs *masah u'matan* in a rhetorically distinct manner.[55] When early, tannaitic midrashim represent rabbinic disputes, they tend to be short and non-dialogic. Two dissenting opinions are placed beside each other without any argument or negotiation, much like how the Mishnah records legal dissensus (x says a, y says b, z says c). The brunt of *masah u'matan* in tannaitic midrash is therefore orchestrated by an anonymous editorial voice, who generates and deflates possible scriptural interpretations with terms like יכול ("you might claim"), אתה אומר ("you would say"), and והלא ("is it not the case"). While this rhetoric of debate does create an atmosphere of intellectual discussion, these dialectical terms are anonymous and tentative, phrased as an "if" or an "I might have thought."[56] They do not fashion a scene of exegetical conversation or a sense of scholastic sociality. It is only in later amoraic midrashim that we find frequent and robust disputation, often carried out in multiple steps of back-and-forth

---

[54] See Neumark, *The History of Jewish Philosophy*, p. 204.

[55] See Rachel A. Anisfeld, *Sustain Me with Raisin-Cakes: Peseikta deRav Kahana and the Popularization of Rabbinic Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 97-119; and sources cited below.

[56] See Natalie B. Dohrmann, "Reading as Rhetoric in Halakhic Texts," in ed. Craig A. Evans, *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture*, Vol. 2 (London: T & T Clarck, 2004), pp. 90-114.

argumentation. This feature characterizes Talmud, that other genre of the amoraim, but is also widely present in *Genesis Rabbah*, the authentically amoraic midrash to Genesis.[57]

Like *Genesis Rabbah*, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* contains very few legal discussions. Rather, its rhetoric of disputation structures *aggadic* deliberations on topics of cosmology, eschatology, and the nature of the soul. Yet unlike *Genesis Rabbah*, its *masa u'matan* frequently uses dialectical rhetoric that is specific to the Babylonian Talmud.[58] Furthermore, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s homilies often employ the editorial rhetoric of the Babylonian stammaim.[59] How then, may we interpret *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s discursive dependency on the Babylonian Talmud?

Gershom Scholem was the first to point out a connection between *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* and Babylonia. In his 1945 article, "A New Chapter from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* in the *Zohar*," Scholem published an important fragment from MS Cambridge 1023 that is stylistically akin to other sections of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* but was never printed as part of the Zohar.[60] Toward the end of the fragment, a narrative about the mishaps of rabbinic, geo-cultural migration is introduced as follows: "when Rav Safra traveled to there (*kad salik l'hatam*), they did not know who he was." Scholem rightly notes that the Aramaic phrase, *kad salik l'hatam*, can only mean, "when Rav Safra traveled from Babylonia to Palestine."[61] The odd phrase signals to the reader that Babylonia and not Palestine is the context for its world of midrash, or, at least, that its imagined rabbinic culture exists at the intersection of Babylonia and Palestine.

To assess the literary relationship the author(s) of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* forge with the Babylonian Talmud, it is important to address a complicated but pertinent question. Does *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* transplant the dialectical rhetoric of the Babylonian Talmud's legal discussions into the realm of Aggadah*,* or is *masa u'matan* (amoraic or stammaic) already prevalent in the *aggadic* portions of the Babylonian Talmud? In other words, is *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* imitating a talmudic form of discourse (dialectical Aggadah) or transforming its original scope by applying it to Aggadah?

Joseph Heinemann's thesis on the topic can help clarify the nature of this literary

---

[57] On the argumentative and dialogic styles of *Genesis Rabbah*, see Ophra Meir, "Answerers or Questioners: On the Development of Argumentative Rhetoric in Palestinian Rabbinic Literature (in two parts)," *Dapim l'Mehkar b'Sifrut,* Vol. 8 (1992), pp. 159-186, and Vol. 9 (1993), pp.155-174 [Hebrew]; and Marc Hirschman, "What is the Place of Midrashei Aggadah and Who Are the *Ba'alei Agadah*?," *Mekhkarei Talmud,* Vol. 3, pp. 190-208 [Hebrew]. On the specific stylistic traits of Bavli argumentation, see David Kraemer, *The Mind of the Talmud: An Intellectual History of the Bavli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Jack N. Lightstone, *The Rhetoric of the Babylonian Talmud, its Social Meaning and Context,* Studies in Christianity and Judaism 3 (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier Univ. Press, 1994).

[58] Representative examples include:
א"ל, לאו האי, אלא; אר" לאו מהכא משמע, אלא מהכא; א"ר יצחק, ושפיר קאמר ר' עקיבא דאתחזר עניינא על מה דא"ר אבהו; א"ר יודאי, לאו הכי....א"ר אלעזר, ושפיר קאמר רבי יצחק ולא קשיא, במאי דא"ר יודאי.

[59] Representative examples include:
ואיזהו; ובמאי נוקים; מאי משמע; מ"ט; ומנ"ל; מאי קא משמע לן; מאי טעמא א"ר יוסי הכי; ומנא לן הא; ומי א"ר תנחום הכי; והא תנן; התם במאי קאמרי; והא תנינן; וכבר שנינו.

[60] Gershom Scholem, "A New Chapter from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* in the *Zohar*," in *Sefer ha-Yovel li-Khvod Levi Ginzberg*, eds. S. Lieberman, S. Spiegel, S. Zeitlin, and A. Marx (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945) pp. 425-46 [Hebrew].

[61] Scholem, "A New Chapter," p. 442, n. 169.

relationship. He claims that the Babylonian Talmud engages with Halakhah and Aggadah with equal epistemic seriousness and therefore employs similar rhetorical techniques to compose legal and extralegal sections:

> Babylonian amoraim and the editors of the Talmud Bavli ask questions in matters of Aggadah, bring proof from Aggadah, deduce from Aggadah, make distinctions in Aggadah, and rely (*somḥin)* on Aggadah—in complete opposition to the rules and theories that the Geonim established. For the Geonim declared that the words of Aggadah and Midrash are merely approximations ("*umdinah ninhu*"), that "each person interprets as it arises in his heart," and that "we may learn from whatever is reasonable in these interpretations, but the rest we do not rely upon."[62]

In contradistinction to the early-medieval disdain of Aggadah engendered by the geonim, the Babylonian Talmud treats *aggadic* discussions as they treat legal discussions—with analytical rigor, creativity, and debate. Heinemann notes that these forms of *aggadic masa u'matan* are exclusive to the Babylonian Talmud; in the Jerusalem Talmud, it is rare to find a debate on matters of Aggadah. Only Babylonian sages approached *aggadic* traditions as empirical truths and were therefore compelled to reconcile contradictory aggadot. Palestinian sages, on the other hand, approached Aggadah as a purely creative endeavor ("*yitzira ḥophshit*") in which making distinctions or deductions would be misplaced.[63]

Heinemann's claims lead to two conclusions. First, the Jerusalem Talmud could not have served as a helpful literary model for *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, given its paucity of *aggadic* dialectics. And second, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s use of amoraic and stammaic rhetoric from the Babylonian Talmud extends the original character, function, and scope of that talmudic rhetoric toward the midrashic genre. Yet, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* is not merely a midrash on *aggadic* topics. It is a midrash dedicated to explicating esoteric doctrines of cosmogony, angelology, psychology, and linguistic magic. To assess the triangulated relationship between *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, the

---

[62] Joseph Heinemann, *Aggadah and its Development* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), pp. 168 [Hebrew]. A similar argument is adduced by Louis Jacobs in his *Studies in Aggadah, Targum and Jewish Liturgy in Memory of Joseph Heinemann* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), p. 43: "Although the sugya is aggadic, it consistently utilises halakhic argumentation. . . . I would maintain that a careful examination of other aggadic passages in the Babylonian Talmud exhibit similar forms, so that the style of presentation of Aggadah, as distinct from its content, differs little from that which is to be seen in the purely halakhic sugyot."

[63] For a more recent engagement with this question, which arrives at similar conclusions, see Jeffrey Rubenstein, "Criteria of Stammaitic Intervention in Aggadah," in ed. Jeffrey Rubenstein, *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggadah, J. Rubenstein* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 417- 440. For opposing claims that Babylonian Aggadah is exegetical and declarative rather than dialectical, see David Weiss Halivni, *The Formation of the Babylonian Talmud*, trans. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 195; Judah Goldin, "Freedom and Restraint of Haggadah" in eds. G. Hartman and S. Budick, *Midrash and Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 63; and Reuven Hammer, "Complex Forms of Aggadah and Their Influence on Content," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. 48 (1981), pp. 183-206.

Babylonian Talmud, and medieval Jewish esoterica, therefore, we must first examine the function of *masa u'matan* in medieval Jewish esotericism.

Sefer ha-Bahir is the earliest Jewish source to integrate debate and dialectics into its presentation of esoterica. According to Ronit Meroz, *Sefer ha-Bahir* includes a tenth-century Babylonian layer that situates its secrets within an atmosphere of confrontation between teacher and disciple: "At times this dialogue becomes a form of mild intellectual dueling, in which the disciples turn and challenge their teacher's answers, by either citing a biblical verse that contradicts his words or by noting contradictions between his present words and earlier ones."[64] These duels act as initiations, opportunities for a student to prove worthy of receiving his teacher's secrets. While the debates tend to be short and rarely exceed a single step of *masa u'matan*,[65] they establish a generic precedent that a later author could imitate and amplify.[66]

By the late thirteenth century, it is not uncommon to find the term "*masa u'matan*" in kabbalistic discourse, though it has lost its original meaning. The term now denotes an internal cognitive process rather than a dialogical exchange.[67] In an epistle to R. Yehudah Salmon of Barcelona, Abraham Abulafia references kabbalists who would "give-and-take only with themselves," ("נושאים ונותנים בינם לבין עצמם בלבד").[68] The nature of this spiritual practice is clarified a few lines later: "they begin to illumine with the light of life and from there they ascend from light to light through the give and take of their minds" ("משא ומתן של מחשבותיהם").[69] Moshe Idel describes these Abulafian forms of *masa u'matan* as autoscopic experiences in which one speaks to oneself as though they were an other.[70] Concurrent with the composition of *Midrash ha-Nelam*, Abulafia's transformation of *masa u'matan* into a solitary, spiritual practice moves in the opposite direction of the interpersonal debates of esoterica depicted in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.

To my knowledge, the one thirteenth-century application of the term *masa u'matan* to refer to actual esoteric debate occurs in an early treatise by Joseph Gikatilla, entitled *Sefer Ha-*

---

[64] Ronit Meroz, "A Journey of Initiation in the Babylonian Layer of *Sefer Ha-Bahir*," *Studia Hebraica* 7 (2007), p. 20.

[65] See the examples given in Meroz, "A Journey," pp. 20-21.

[66] To be sure, there is no evidence that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* was familiar with *Sefer ha-Bahir*.

[67] See, for instance, Bahya ben Asher's comments on Exodus 38:

"כל המתעסק בלמוד פרשיות וישא ויתן בלבו ענייניהם כאלו הקריבה קרבן עצמו."

[68] See Abraham Abulafia, *Ve-Zot Li-Yehudah*, printed by A. Jellinek, *Auswahl Kabbalistischen Mystik* (Leipzig, 1853), p. 13.

[69] Ibid.

[70] See Hahar Arzy, Moshe Idel, Theodor Landis, and Olaf Blanke, "Speaking With One's Self: Autoscopic Phenomena in Writings from the Ecstatic Kabbalah," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Volume 12, Number 11 (2005), pp. 4-29. The transformation of debate into a form of personal creativity evokes Augustine's notion of *Soliloquia*, which operates via "*interrogando et respondendo*" but in the silence of the self. Augustine "invented a genre whose achievement was to internalize the process of dialogue by writing fictions of the mind in conversation with itself." See Seth Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in the "Consolation of Philosophy"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 51. On the broader genre of philosophical soliloquy, see Brian Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Meshalim. Given Gikatilla's close connection to *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*,[71] this source provides a fascinating window onto the values that may motivate the dialectical rhetoric of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*.

> To what does a teacher-student relationship compare? To a candle. Just as the candle illumines a man in the realm of the senses, so does the teacher illumine a man in the realm of the intellect. And just as a candle can light many candles without diminishing its flame, and actually increases when it lights another, so does the wise one learn a lot from his students, and he does not lack anything. Instead, his wisdom increases because he is involved in *masah u-matan* with them, with questions they ask him, and he must answer them, and he innovates through their questions a large amount of wisdom.
> To what does an individual who studies wisdom resemble? To a single lit branch. Meaning, just as a fire does not ignite a sole branch except through hard work, and movement, and turning it from side-to-side, so is wisdom not held by an individual who engages with it by himself, except through hardship, and great movement, because wisdom is not understood except through *masah u-matan* between many friends, and through many types of question and answer, and specifications, and rebuttals and solutions that the students create with each other, which the individual is unable to do.[72]

Contrary to those who may prefer the purity of personal cogitation when deciphering Jewish secrets, Gikatilla claims that it takes friendship and dialogue to understand esoteric wisdom (references to "wisdom" in this passage denote esoterica[73]). Just as the multiplication of wicks increases the strength of a flame, scholastic companionship increases one's comprehension of esoterica. The practices of rabbinic scholarship do not only help clarify the meaning of secrets, but also engender esoteric innovation, as Gikatilla states, "he innovates through their questions a large amount of wisdom."

Yehuda Liebes cites this excerpt as exemplary of the eros of communal learning performed by the *hevraya* in *Guf ha-Zohar*.[74] But in light of our investigation into the social scholasticism of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, I would suggest that this passage points to the

---

[71] See Alexander Altmann, "Moses de Leon's *Or Zarua*: Introduction, Critical Text, and Notes," *Kovez al Yad* 9 (1979), pp. 235-240.

[72] Joseph Gikatilla, *Sefer ha-Meshalim* (Tzfat, 1991), pp. 16-18:
למה דומה הרב אצל התלמיד - לנר. פירוש: כמו שהנר מאיר עיני בני אדם במורגשות, כך הרב מאיר עיני התלמידים במושכלות, וכמו הנר שמדליקין ממנה נרות הרבה ואינה חסרה שלהבתה, ומתרבה בעוד שמדליקין ממנה, כן החכם מלמד תלמידים הרבה והוא אינו חסר כלום אלא חכמתו מתרבה בעוד שהוא נושא ונותן עמהם בשאלות ששואלים ממנו והוא צריך להשיב להם תשובה ומחדש על ידי שאלותם הרבה חכמה. למה תלמידים דומים אצל הרב - לעץ קטן מדליק את הגדול. … למה דומה יחיד העוסק בחכמה -לעץ יחידי דולק. פירוש כמו שאש אינה דולקת בעץ יחידי אלא בקושי ובטלטול ובהיפוך שמהפכין אותו לכל צד, כך אין החכמה מתאחזת ביחיד העוסק בה לבדו אלא בקושי ובטלטול הרבה לפי שאין החכמה מושגת אלא מתוך המשא ומתן בין רוב החברים ובכמה מיני שאלות ותשובות ודקדוקים וקושיות ופירוקים שעושים החכמים זה לזה מה שאין היחיד יכול לעשות כן. למה דומים הרבה חברים העוסקים בחכמה למדורה של עצים הרבה פירוש; כמו שהמדורה של עצים הרבה דולקת והולכת ומתגברת לפי שעץ זה מדליק את זה וזה מדליק את זה כך החברים העוסקים בחכמה זה שואל את זה וזה משיב את זה זה מקשה וזה מפרק עד שנמצאים כל החברים כולם כמדורת האש שכל העצים שבה מדליקין זה לזה ונמצאו משיגים הרבה חכמה.

[73] See Yehuda Liebes, "Zohar and Eros," *Alpayyim* 9 (1994), n. 288 [Hebrew].

[74] Liebes, "Zohar and Eros."

representations of community in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, where it is more common to find *masah u-matan, qushiot, pirukim,* and *she'elot*. Furthermore, this passage appears in *Sefer ha-Meshalim*, a work that, as Hartley Lachter has highlighted, is an early Gikatilla treatise.[75] Hence this text was likely composed closer in time to the composition of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* than the composition of later sections of Zohar. Therefore, we may surmise that *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* adopts the rhetoric of the Babylonian Talmud to dramatize a communal engagement in esoteric *masa u'matan,* a communal discourse that looks a lot like Gikatilla's imagined collectivity of teachers and students. After all, Gikatilla's words—"wisdom not held by an individual who engages with it by himself, except through hardship, and great movement, because wisdom is not understood except through *masah u-matan* between many friends"—beautifully capture the ethos and literary commitments of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*. *Midrash ha-Ne'lam's* innovation, then, is more in using the rhetoric of *masa u'matan* to represent a dialectical and communal engagement with secrets than in applying such rhetoric to aggadic contexts.

Turning from the history of *masa u'matan* to that of rabbinic connection-making, we find a similar phenomenon. "*D'amar*" is a decisively amoraic term with no exact Hebrew, tannaitic parallel.[76] In its amoraic context, it is an editorial term that highlights an affinity between two rabbinic traditions, such as "what Rabbi x said is aligned with what Rabbi y said." The only term close to it in tannaitic literature is "שהרי אמרו" ("for they said"), but the differences are telling. "שהרי אמרו" is anonymous and collective, and functions less to connect the particularities of two separate traditions than to validate an individual opinion by indicating that it aligns with a single, conglomerate "rabbinic tradition." *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* uses two modes of connective rhetoric:

1. An anonymous voice connects two named speakers:

וכן א"ר; כמא דא"ר; דא"ר; דתנינן; והיינו דתנן ;ותני הכא

2. A third speaker connects two named traditions:

א"ר שמעון בן פזי, אזלא הא, כי הא דא"ר יעקב בן אידי; א"ר יוסי, איתא הא, כהא דא"ר פנחס

While the former is common in aggadic midrashim, the latter discursive forms are specific to the Babylonian Talmud. Additionally, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* makes frequent use of specific talmudic formulae of connection, such as "ואתיא כמאן דאמר," and "ת"ש דהכי אנן אוקימנא במתניתא."

The prevalence of these two rhetorical forms in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* (*masa u'matan* and *d'amar*) captures one of the more significant ways that it differs stylistically from *Guf ha-Zohar*. While both contain homilies and narratives, the homilies in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* are often structured around arguments and affinities, while homilies in other parts of Zohar tend not to foreground the ways its homiletical traditions relate to each other. To get a more precise sense of this stylistic disparity, it is helpful to quantify the difference. In my count, there are twenty-five scenes of *masah u'matan*, dialogical disagreements, in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* to Genesis, compared to seven in *Guf ha-Zohar* (to the equivalent chapters of Genesis, 1-28). Given that the latter has close to double the amount of words, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* carries an almost seven times higher density of argumentation than *Guf ha-Zohar*. The difference is not only a factor of the number of

---

[75] See Hartley Lachter, "Kabbalah, Philosophy, and the Jewish-Christian Debate: Reconsidering the Early Works of Joseph Gikatilla," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* Vol. 16:1 (2008), pp. 43-49.

[76] On the rabbinic history of conceptual associations, see Leib Moscovitz, *Talmudic Reasoning: From Casuistics to Conceptualization* (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), pp. 274-292.

arguments in each text. Few arguments in *Guf ha-Zohar* rarely go past a single question and response, while over half the arguments in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* contain multiple steps of *masah u'matan*. The statistics for "*d'amar*" are even starker. *Guf ha-Zohar* only uses formulae of *"d'amar rabbi x*" four times throughout its commentary on Genesis 1-28, while *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* uses such phrases thirty-six times*,* in a text sample half the size.

Given that the majority of *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s amoraic rhetoric appears in its non-narrative sections, it produces a sense of the social outside of narrative, a sense of community that is not bound to the conventions of plot. The sociality that emerges from these non-narrative contexts is sporadic, confrontational, collaborative, and in flux. Rabbis are cast more as nodes of dissensus and correlation—*masa u'matan* stresses the differences between tradents, while connective rhetoric stresses their affinities—than as members of a spiritual community. Unlike *Guf ha-Zohar*, where the emotional and mystical intensity of the *hevraya* can only be captured through narratological tools, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* experiments with more scholastic forms of community. To represent that scholastic sociality, its medieval authors turned to the rhetorical devices of the amoraim and the stammaim, familiar to all students of the Babylonian Talmud, rather than to the emergent medieval models of Jewish confraternities.

The style through which *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* imagines rabbinic community—a scholastic sociality engaged in esoteric discourse—combines formal elements from talmudic scholasticism with ideological elements from medieval esotericism. Because only the latter elements were adopted by later strata of Zohar, its literary experiment was short-lived. Not only do later parts of the Zohar invent a radically different style of rabbinic community, but actual Jewish spiritual confraternities that arose in the early-modern and modern period were specifically modeled after the intimate sociality of *Guf ha-Zohar*.[77] As Jonathan Garb writes about these subsequent spiritual communities, "in many cases the charismatic individual was the focal point of the group. This was clearly the case for the zoharic fellowship, and it was this fraternity, whether real or imagined, which the Safed kabbalists fervently emulated."[78]

This chapter has shown that a different style of sociality is introduced in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*, a fellowship that is not centered around a charismatic sage but, rather, is bonded together through debate over the secrets of scripture. To fashion that sense of scholastic sociality, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* adopts the rhetoric of the Babylonian Talmud, which discursively animates rabbinic debate and collaboration. *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*'s literary dependence on the Babylonian Talmud can therefore be theorized of as an instance of "formal intertextuality," wherein "a work takes up and re-uses a device or structure which is a recognisable feature of another work, or of a

---

[77] See Joseph G. Weiss, "A Circle of Pneumatics in Pre-Hasidism," *JSS* 8 (1957), pp. 1-71; Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken, 1976), pp. 199–202; Haviva Pedaya, "On the Development of the Social-Religious-Economic Model in Hasidism: The "Pidyon," the "Havura," and the Pilgrimage," in ed. Menahem Ben-Sasson, *Religion and Economy: Interactions* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1995), pp. 324-328 [Hebrew]; Lawrence Fine, "A Mystical Fellowship in Jerusalem," in ed. Lawrence Fine, *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 210-214 Smadar Cherlow, "The Circle of Rav Kook as a Mystical Confraternity," *Tarbiz* 74:2 (2005), pp. 261-303; and Pinchas Giller, *Shalom Shar'abi and the Kabbalists of Beit El* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 8.

[78] Jonathan Garb, "The Cult of the Saints in Lurianic Kabbalah," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* Vol. 98:2 (2008), p. 206.

particular type of literature or genre."[79] But in this instance, those forms are not merely literary devices. Talmudic rhetoric enables *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* to imagine and represent a social world where rabbinic sages discover, share, and argue over the esoteric stratum of scripture.

[79] Jean H. Duffy, *Structuralism: Theory and Practice* (University of Glasgow, 1992), p. 25

Bibliography

Abrams, Daniel. *The Book of the Bahir: An Edition Based on the Earliest Manuscripts*. Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 1994 [Hebrew].
---. "Presenting and Representing Gershom Scholem: A Review Essay," *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 20:2 (May, 2000): 226-243.
---. *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory: Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism.* Jerusalem and Los Angeles: Cherub Press and Magnes Press, 2010.
---. "The Earliest Manuscript of the Zohar - Ms. Vatican 202, Circa 1300: A Quote in Aramaic in the Name of R. Shimon bar Yohai in the 'Secret of Leverite Marriage' and the Various Copyings of Zoharic Texts in the Manuscript," *Kabbalah*, Vol. 34 (2016): 315-320 [Hebrew]

Abulafia, Abraham. *Ve-Zot Li-Yehudah*, in ed. A. Jellinek, *Auswahl Kabbalistischen Mystik*. Leipzig, 1853.

Adriaansen, Robbert-Jan. *The Rhythm of Eternity: The German Youth Movement and the Experience of the Past, 1900-1933*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015.

Afterman, Adam. "'Glorified with Embroideries of Songs': A Chapter in the History of Mystical Prayer in Judaism," *Da'at*, Vol. 81 (2016): 38-68 [Hebrew].
---. "The Language of Creation in the Early Writings of R. Joseph Gikatilla," *Da'at,* Vol.82 (2016): 125-149 [Hebrew].

Alexander, Elizabeth Shanks. "Ritual on the Threshold: Mezuzah and the Crafting of Domestic and Civic Space," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 20:3 (Spring/ Summer 2014): 100-130.

Al-Karim, Balil Abd. *Qur'anic Terminology: A Linguistic and Semantic Analysis.* London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Poetry.* New York: Basic Books, 2011.

Altmann, Alexander. "A Note on the Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation," JJS, Vol. 7 (1956): 195-206.
---. *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.
---. *Von der Mittelalterlichen zur Modernedn Aufklarung: Studien zur Judischen Geistesgechichte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987).
---. "Moses de Leon's *Or Zarua*: Introduction, Critical Text, and Notes," *Kovez al Yad* 9 (1979): 219-293.

Altmann, Alexander and Samuel Mikos Stern. *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.

Anidjar, Gil. "Jewish Mysticism Alterable and Unalterable: On Orienting Kabbalah Studies and the Zohar of Christian Spain," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 3:1 (1996): 89–157.

Anisfeld, Rachel A. *Sustain Me with Raisin-Cakes: Peseikta deRav Kahana and the Popularization of Rabbinic Judaism*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Arzy, Hahar, Moshe Idel, Theodor Landis, and Olaf Blanke. "Speaking With One's Self: Autoscopic Phenomena in Writings from the Ecstatic Kabbalah," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 12:11 (2005): 4-29.

Aschheim, Steven E. "The Metaphysical Psychologist: On the Life and Letters of Gershom Scholem," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 76 (2004): 903–933.

Assis, Yom Tov. *Jewish Economy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327: Money and Power.* Leiden: Brill, 1997.
---. "Welfare and Mutual Aid in the Spanish Jewish Community," in ed. H. Beinart, *The Sephardi Legacy*, 318-345. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992.

Asulin, Shifra. "Midrash ha-Ne'lam to Genesis: Between Hebrew and Aramaic," in eds. R. Neihof, R. Meroz, and J. Garb, *And This For Yehudah: A Collection of Essays Dedicated to our Friend, Prof. Yehuda Liebes, Upon His Sixty Fifth Birthday*, 222-253. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2012 [Hebrew].

Azriel of Gerona. *Commentary on Aggadot*, ed. I. Tishby. Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1945 [Hebrew].

Bacher, Wilhelm. *`Erkhe Midrash*. Jerusalem: Carmiel, 1970.

Baillet, M., J. T. Milik, and R. de-Vaux, "*Les 'Petites Grottes' de Qumran*," *DJD* 3, 1962.

Bar-Asher, Avishai. "Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Secret of the Garment in the Sixteenth Century," *Da'at*, Vol. 76 (2013): 191-213 [Hebrew].
---. "*Sefer ha-Ne'lam*, New Fragments from *Sefer Or Zarua*, and Investigations into the Early Writings of Moses de Leon: Analysis and a Critical Edition," *Tarbiz,* Vol. 83:1-2 (2015): 216-221 [Hebrew].
---. "The Earliest Citation from Sefer ha-Zohar and from Whence Had the Book of Zohar Received its Name," *Kabbalah*, Vol. 39 (2017): 79-156 [Hebrew].

Bar-Ilan, Meir. "The Secret World of the People of Qumran and the Sages," *Shnaton – An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 11 (1997): 285-301 [Hebrew].

Beer, Moshe. "On the *Havurah* in Israel in the Amoraic Period," *Zion,* Vol. 47, (1982): 178-185 [Hebrew]
---. "About the 'Hevraya' in the Talmudim," *Bar-Ilan University Annual,* Vol. 20–21 (1983): 76-95 [Hebrew].

Belfer, Israel. "The Secret of the Individual and the Community," *Da'at*, Vol. 72 (2012): 143-173 [Hebrew].

Belkin, Shmuel. "*Midrash ha-Ne'lam* and its Sources in Early Alexandrian Midrashim," *Sura* 3 (1958): 25–92 [Hebrew].

Benarroch, Jonathan. *Sabbah and Yenuqa: "Two that are One"—Allegory, Symbol, and Myth in Zoharic Literature*, PhD, Hebrew University, 2011 [Hebrew].
---. "An Edition of Early Versions of Idra Zuta and An Unknown Hebrew Translation from Ms. Vatican 226, Copied in 1311," *Kabbalah*, Vol. 39 (2017): 157-248 [Hebrew].

Ben-Shalom, R. "The Jewish Community in Arles and its Institutions: Ben-Sheshet's *Responsum* 266 as an Historical Source," *Michael*, Vol. 12 (1991): 9-42 [Hebrew].

Biale, David. *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Biemann, Asher D. "The Problem of Tradition and Reform in Jewish Renaissance and Renaissancism," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 8 (2001): 58-87.

Black, Deborah L. *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy.* Leiden: Brill, 1990.

Blumenthal, David. "The Rationalistic Commentary of R. Hoter Ben Shelomo to *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*," *Tarbiz*, Vol. 48 (1978): 99-106 [Hebrew].

Botwinick, Aryeh. "Skeptical Motifs Linking Together Maimonides' *Guide* and his *Mishneh Torah*" in ed. Georges Tamer, *The Trials Of Maimonides: Jewish, Arabic, and Ancient Cultures of Knowledge*, 151-174. Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2005.

Boustan, Ra'anan S. *From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.
---. "The Emergence of Pseudonymous Attribution in Heikhalot Literature: Empirical Evidence from the Jewish "Magical" Corpora," *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14:1 (2007): 18-38.
---. "Rabbinization and the Making of Early Jewish Mysticism," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 101:4 (2011): 482-501.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Ha-Iyun ha-Sefaradi: Le-farshanut ha-Talmud shel Megorashe Sefarad.* Jerusalem: Makhon Ben Zvi, 1989 [Hebrew].

Brenner, Michael. "From Self-Declared Messiah to Scholar of Messianism: The Recently Published Diaries Present Young Gerhard Scholem in a New Light," *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 3:1 (Autumn, 1996): 177-182.

Breuer, Mordechai. "Toward the Investigation of the Typology of Western *Yeshivot* in the Middle Ages," in eds. E. Etkes and Y. Salmon, *Studies in the History of Jewish Society in the Middle Ages and the Modern Period, Presented to Professor Jacob Katz on his Seventy- Fifth Birthday by his Students and Friends*, 45-55. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1980 [Hebrew].
---. *Oholei Torah: The Yeshiva, Its Structure and History*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2003 [Hebrew].

Brodsky, David. *A Bride Without a Blessing: A Study in the Redaction and Content of Massekhet Kallah and Its Gemara.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006.

Bronfil, Robert. *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle: The Family Chronicle of Ahima'az ben Paltiel.* Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Buchler, A. "Learning and Teaching in the Open Air in Palestine," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 4 (1913-1914): 485-491.

Burnett, Stephen G. *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564-1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.

Bynum, Caroline. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Medieval Ages*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Certeau, Michel de. *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,* Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Cherlow, Smadar. "The Circle of Rav Kook as a Mystical Confraternity," *Tarbiz*, Vol. 74:2 (2005): 261-303 [Hebrew].

Chernick, Michael. *The "Gezerah Shavah" Principle: Its Forms in the Midrashim and the Talmuds.* Lod: Habermann Institute, 1994 [Hebrew].

Clifford, Richard J. *Proverbs: A Commentary.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

Cohen, Jonathan. *Philosophers and Scholars: Wolfson, Guttmann and Strauss on the History of Jewish Philosophy*, trans. Rachel Yarden. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007.

Cohen, Moran Gam. *Trends in Kabbalah Research in Israel, 1929–2010*, PhD Dissertation, Ben-Gurion University, 2010 [Hebrew].

Cohen, Mordechai Z. *Opening the Gates of Interpretation: Maimonides' Biblical Hermeneutics in Light of His Geonic-Andalusian Heritage and Muslim Milieu*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Cohen-Alloro, Dorit. *The Secret of the Garment in the Book of the Zohar*. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1987 [Hebrew].

Collins, J.J. "Cosmos and Salvation: Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Age," *History of Religions*, Vol. 17 (1977): 121-142.

Cox, Dermot. *Proverbs, with an Introduction to Sapiential Books.* Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982.

Cox, Ronald. *By the Same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007.

Dabars, William B. *Disciplinarity and Interdisciplinarity: Rhetoric and Context in the American Research University*, PhD, University of California, Los Angeles, 2008.

Dan, Joseph. "Anafiel, Metatron, and the Creator," *Tarbiz,* Vol. 52 (1983): 447-457 [Hebrew].
---. "Periodization of the History of Jewish Mysticism," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 9, Division C: Jewish Thought and Literature (1985): 93-100 [Hebrew].
---. *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History.* New York: New York University Press, 1987.
---. "A Re-Evaluation of Ashkenazi Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Vol. 6:3-4 (1987): 125-140 [Hebrew].
---. *The Heart and the Fountain: An Anthology of Jewish Mystical Experiences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
---. "The Beginning of Gershom Scholem's Time in the Hebrew University: Two Enigmas," *Ha'aretz*, March, 31, 2002, http:// www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.783870 [Hebrew].
---. "Sectarian Elements in Early Jewish Mysticism," *Da'at*, Vol. 50/52 (2003): 13–34 [Hebrew].

Danzig, Nahum: "The Collection of Geonic Responsa *Sha'are Teshuvah* and the Responsa from Heaven," *Tarbiz*, Vol. 58 (1989): 42-48 [Hebrew].

Daube, David. "Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric," *Hebrew Union College Annual,* Vol. 22 (1949): 239-64.

Dauber, Jonathan. *Standing on the Heads of Philosophers: Myth and Philosophy in Early Kabbalah*, PhD Dissertation, NYU, 2004
---. *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Davidson, Herbert A. *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
---. *Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Davies, Daniel. *Method and Metaphysics in Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Davila, James. S*upplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy Series: Hekhalot Literature in Translation: Major Texts of Merkavah Mysticism* (1). Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Deutsch, Nathaniel. *Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity*. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

Dohrmann, Natalie B. *Law and Narrative in the Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael: The Problem of Midrashic Coherence*, PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1999.
---. "Analogy, Empire and Political Conflict in a Rabbinic Midrash," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 53: 2 (2002): 273-297.
---. "Reading as Rhetoric in Halakhic Texts," in ed. Craig A. Evans. *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture*, Vol. 2, 90-114. London: T&T Clark, 2004.

Dolgopolski, Sergey. *The Open Past: Subjectivity and Remembering in the Talmud*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.

Duffy, Jean H. *Structuralism: Theory and Practice*. Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1992.

Duncan, Julie A. "Excerpted Texts of 'Deuteronomy' at Qumran," *Revue de Qumran,* Vol. 18:1 (1997): 43-62.

Dweck, Yaacob. *The Scandal of Kabbalah: Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Efros, Israel. "More about Abraham B. Hiyyas Philosophical Terminology," *JQR,* Vol. 20:2 (1929): 113-138.

Elbaum, Yaakov. *To Understand the Words of the Sages: Medieval Perspectives on Aggadah and Midrash*. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2000 [Hebrew].

Elman, Yaakov. "The Order of Arguments in *Kalekh*-Braitot in Relation to the Conclusion," *The Jewish Quarterly Review,* Vol. 79:4 (1989): 295-304.

Emon, Avner M. *Islamic Natural Law Theories.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Engel, Amir. *Gershom Scholem: An Intellectual Biography.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Farber, Asi. "A New Section from the R. Joseph Gikatilla's Introduction to Sefer Ginat Egoz," J*erusalem Studies in Jewish Thought,* Vol. 1 (1981): 158-176 [Hebrew].
---. "On the Sources of Moses de Leon's Early Kabbalistic System," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought,* Vol. 3 (1984): 67-96 [Hebrew].

Faur, Jose. *Golden Doves With Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition.* Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986.

Fenton, Paul. "Solitary Meditation in Jewish and Islamic Mysticism in the Light of a Recent Archeological Discovery," *Medieval Encounters,* Vol. 1 (1995): 271-279.

Fine, Lawrence. "A Mystical Fellowship in Jerusalem," in ed. Lawrence Fine, *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period*, 210-214. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Fishbane, Eitan. *As Light Before Dawn: The Inner World of a Medieval Kabbalist.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Fishman, Talya. *Becoming the People of the Talmud: Oral Torah as Written Tradition in Medieval Jewish Cultures*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

Fox, Michael V. "'Amon Again," *Journal of Biblical Literature,* Vol. 115:4 (1996): 699-702.
---. *Proverbs 1-9* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries). New York: Doubleday, 2000.

Fraade, Steven. *From Tradition to Commentary: Tradition and its Interpretation in the Midrash to Deuteronomy.* Albany: SUNY Press, 1991.

Friedman, Mordechai A. "Notes by a Disciple in Maimonides' Academy Pertaining to Beliefs and Concepts and Halakhah," *Tarbiz,* Vol. 62 (1992/3): 523-583 [Hebrew].

Friedman, Shamma. "'Or Perhaps Pursue the Argument in this Direction': The Term and its Usage in the Tannaitic Midrashim," *Sidra: A Journal for the Study of Rabbinic Literature,* Vol. 9 (1993): 61–74 [Hebrew].
---. "Maimonides and the Talmud," *Dinei Yisrael,* Vol. 26-27 (2008/9-2009/10): 221-239 [Hebrew].

Garb, Jonathan. “The Cult of the Saints in Lurianic Kabbalah,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review,* Vol. 98:2 (2008): 203-229.

Geller, Jay Howard. “The Scholem Brothers and the Paths of German Jewry, 1914–1939,” *Shofar,* Vol. 30:2 (Winter 2012): 52-73.

Gikatilla, Joseph. *Ginat Egoz*. Jerusalem, 1988.
---. *Sefer ha-Meshalim*. Tzfat, 1991.

Giladi, Avner. “A Short Note on the Possible Origins of the Title *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*,” *Tarbiz,* Vol. 48 (1979): 346-347 [Hebrew].

Giller, Pinchas. *Shalom Shar'abi and the Kabbalists of Beit El*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Goetschel, Willi. “Scholem's Diaries, Letters, and New Literature on His Work: Review Essay,” *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, Vol. 72:1 (1997): 77-92.

Goldin, Judah. “Freedom and Restraint of Haggadah” in eds. G. Hartman and S. Budick, *Midrash and Literature*, 57-76. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

Goldziher, Ignaz. *The Zahiris: Their Doctrine and their History a Contribution to the History of Islamic Theology*, trans. and ed. Wolfgang Behn. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Gottlieb, Efraim. “The Significance of the Story of Creation in the Interpretations of the Early Kabbalists,” *Tarbiz*, Vol. 37 (1968), pp. 294-317 [Hebrew].
---. *Studies in Kabbalistic Literature*. Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 1976.

Green, Arthur. *A Guide to the Zohar.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

Greene, Thomas M. *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982.

Greenstein, David. *Roads to Utopia: The Walking Stories of the Zohar*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014.

Gross, Abraham. *Iberian Jewry from Twilight to Dawn: The World of Rabbi Abraham Saba.* Leiden: Brill, 1995.

Gurfinkel, Eli. “An Annotated Bibliography on the Linkage between Maimonides, the Kabbalists, and the Kabbalah,” *Da’at*, Vol. 64/66 (2009): 417-485 [Hebrew].

Gwynne, Rosalind Ward. *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an: God's Arguments.* London: Routledge, 2004.

Halbertal, Moshe. *Interpretive Revolutions in the Making: Values as Interpretive Considerations in Midrashei Halakhah*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997 [Hebrew].
---. *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
---. *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and its Philosophical Implications*, trans. Jackie Feldman. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
---. *Maimonides: Life and Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Halivni, David Weiss. *The Formation of the Babylonian Talmud*, trans. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Hallamish, Moshe. *An Introduction to the Kabbalah,* trans. Ruth Bar-Ilan and Ora Wiskind-Elper. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.

Hallaq, Wael B. "A Tenth-Eleventh Century Treatise on Juridical Dialectic," *Muslim World*, Vol. 77:2-3 (1987): 198-227.
---. T*he Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Halperin, David J. *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1983.

Hammer, Reuven. "Complex Forms of Aggadah and Their Influence on Content," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. 48 (1981): 183-206.

Hanssen, Beatrice. *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels*. Berkeley: University of California, 1998.

Hartman, David. *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1976.

Harvey, Steven. "Did Maimonides' Letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon Determine Which Philosophers Would Be Studied by Later Jewish Thinkers?" *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 83:1/2 (1992): 51-70.

Harvey, Warren Zev. "How Leo Strauss Paralyzed Scholarship of the *Guide of the Perplexed* in the 20th Century," *Iyyun*, Vol. 50 (2001): 387-396 [Hebrew].
---. "Shlomo Pines on Maimonides, Spinoza, and Kant," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, Vol. 20:2 (2012): 173-182.

Heinemann, Joseph. *Aggadah and its Development*. Jerusalem: Keter, 1974 [Hebrew].

Hellner-Eshed, Melila. *A River Flows From Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar*, trans. Nathan Wolski. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Heller-Wilensky, S. O. "The Problem of the Authorship of the Treatise *Sha'ar Ha-Shamayim*, Ascribed to Abraham Ibn Ezra," *Tarbiz,* Vol. 32:3 (1963): 277-295 [Hebrew].

Hertzberg, Arthur. "Gershom Scholem as Zionist and Believer," *Modern Judaism* Vol. 5:1, Gershom Scholem Memorial Issue (1985): 3-19.

Hezser, Catherine. *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997.
---. "Rabbis and Other Friends: Friendship in the Talmud Yerushalmi and in Graeco-Roman Literature," in eds, Peter Schafer and Catherine Hezser, *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, Vol. 2, 189-254. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.

Hidary, Richard. "Talmudic Topoi: The Hermeneutical Methods of Midrash and Greco- Roman Rhetoric," Paper presented at the 17th International Conference of the Jewish Law Association. New Haven, Connecticut. July 31, 2012.

Hirshman, Marc. "What is the Place of the Aggadic Midrashim and Who Are the 'Masters of Aggadah'?" in eds. Yaakov Sussman and David Rosenthal *Mehqere Talmud III*, 2 vols., 1:190-208 [Hebrew].
---. *The Stabilization of Rabbinic Culture* 100 C.E - 350 C.E.: *Texts on Education and their Late Antique Context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Huss, Boaz. "Ask No Question: Gershom Scholem and the Study of Contemporary Jewish Mysticism," *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 25 (2005): 141-158.
---. *The Question about the Existence of Jewish Mysticism: The Genealogy of Jewish Mysticism and the Theologies of Kabbalah Research.* Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press, 2016 [Hebrew].
---. "'Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews': Jewish Theosophists and their Perceptions of Kabbalah," in eds. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss, *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah, and the Transformation of Tradition,* 137-166 (Beer Sheva: Ben- Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016).
---. *The Zohar: Reception and Impact*, trans. Yudith Nave. Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016.

Husseini, Sara Leila. *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Huston, Phil. *Martin Buber's Journey to Presence.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

Hyman, Arthur "Demonstrative, Dialectical, and Sophistic Arguments in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides," in ed. Eric L. Ormsby, *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, 35-52. Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989.

Ibn Sahula, Isaac ben Solomon. "*Peirush Shir Ha-Shirim*." Edited by Arthur Green, in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Vol. 6:3-4 (1987): 393-491.

Idel, Moshe. "The Sefirot Above the Sefirot," *Tarbiz*, Vol. 51 (1982): 239-277 [Hebrew].
---. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
---. "An Unknown Text from Midrash ha-Ne'lam," in ed. Joseph Dan, *The Age of the Zohar*, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Vol. 8: 73–87. Jerusalem, 1989 [Hebrew].
---. "Maimonides and Kabbalah," in ed. I. Twersky, *Studies in Maimonides*, 31-81. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990.
---. "Rabbinism versus Kabbalism: On G. Scholem's Phenomenology of Judaism," *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 11:3 (1991): 281-296.
---. "Kabbalah and Elites in Thirteenth-Century Spain," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 9 (1994): 5–19.
---. "Orienting, Orientalizing or Disorienting the Study of Kabbalah: 'An Almost Absolutely Unique' Case of Occidentalism," *Kabbalah*, Vol. 2 (1997): 13-48.
---. "On Mobility, Individuals and Groups: Prolegomenon for a Sociological Approach to Sixteenth Century Kabbalah," *Kabbalah*, Vol. 3 (1998): 145-173.
---. "Transmission in Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in eds. Yaakov Elman and Israel Gershoni, *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality and Cultural Diffusion*, 138-165. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
---. "The Kabbalah's 'Window of Opportunities,' 1270–1290," in eds. Ezra Fleisher, Gerald Blidstein, Carmi Horowitz, and Bernard Septimus, *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, 171-208. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001.
---. *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
---. "Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and the Kabbalah," *Jewish History*, Vol. 18:2/3 (2004): 197-226.
---. "Nahmanides: Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Spiritual Leadership," in eds. Moshe Idel and Mortimer Ostow, *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the Thirteenth Century*, 15-96. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.
---. "Leadership and Charisma: Maimonides, Nahmanides and Abraham Abulafia," *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry*, Vol. 1 (2008): 2-34.
---. *Old Worlds, New Mirrors: On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth-Century Thought.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.
---. "In a Whisper: On Transmission Of Shiur Qomah and Kabbalistic Secrets In Jewish Mysticism," *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, Vol. 47:3 (2011): 477-522.
---. "Messianic Scholars: On Early Israeli Scholarship, Politics and Messianism," *Modern Judaism* Vol. 32:1 (2012): 22-36.

Ivry, Alfred L. “The Logical and Scientific Premises of Maimonides’ Thought,” in eds. Alfred L. Ivry, Elliot R. Wolfson, and Allian Arkush, *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, 63-97. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998.

Jackson, B. S. “On the Nature of Analogical Argument in Early Jewish Law,” in ibid. (ed.), *The Jewish Law Annual*, Vol. 11, 137-168. Boston: Institute of Jewish Law, 1994.

Jacobs, Louis. *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*. New York: Schocken, 1976.
---. *Studies in Aggadah, Targum and Jewish Liturgy in Memory of Joseph Heinemann*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981 [Hebrew].

Jacoby, Russell. *The Repression of Psychoanalysis: Otto Fenichel and the Freudians.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Jaffee, Martin. *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE – 400 CE*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Jardim, Georgina L. *Recovering the Female Voice in Islamic Scripture: Women and Silence.* London: Routledge, 2016.

Jay, Martin. *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Kahana, Menahem. *Sifrei Zuta on Deuteronomy: Citations from a New Tannaitic Midrash*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2002 [Hebrew].

Kanarfogel, Ephraim. “Progress and Tradition in Medieval Ashkenaz,” *Jewish History*, Vol. 14 (2000): 287-315.
---. “Dreams as a Determinant of Jewish Law and Practice in Northern Europe During the High Middle Ages,” in eds. D. Engel and E. Wolfson, *Supplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy Series: Studies in Medieval Jewish Intellectual and Social History, Volume 15: Festschrift in Honor of Robert Chazan*, 111-143. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Kasher, Hannah. “Talmud Torah as a Means of Apprehending God in Maimonides' Teachings,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Vol. 5 (1986): 71-82 [Hebrew].

Katz, Jacob.“Halakhah and Kabbalah - First Contacts,” *Zion,* Vol. 44 (1979): 148-172 [Hebrew].
---. *Halakhah and Kabbalah: Studies in the History of Jewish religion, its Various Faces and Social Relevance*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984 [Hebrew].
---. “Halakhah and Kabbalah as Competing Disciplines of Study,” in ed. Arthur Green, *Jewish Spirituality*, *Vol. 2: From the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present*, 34-63. New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1987. Originally published as “Halakhah and Kabbalah as Competing Subjects of Study,” *Da’at*, Vol. 7 (1981): 36-68 [Hebrew].

---. *Tradition and Crises: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. Bernard Dov Cooperman. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.

Katz, Jacob and Chava Weissler, "On Law, Spirituality, and Society in Judaism: An Exchange between Jacob Katz and Chava Weissler," *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 2:2 (Winter, 1996): 87-115.

Katz, Shaul. "Gershom Scholem and the Beginning of his Time at the Hebrew University," *Katharsis*, Vol. 3 (2005): 144-163 [Hebrew].

Keller, Catherine. *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Kellner, Menachem. "Maimonides' Disputed Legacy" in ed. Carlos Fraenkel, *Traditions of Maimonideanism*, 245-276. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Kister, Menachem. "Hellenistic Jewish Writers and Palestinian Traditions: Early and Late," in eds. M. Kister, H. Newman, M. Segal, and R. Clements, *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity*, 150-178. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Klein, Elka. "Good Servants, Bad Lords: The Abuse of Authority by Jewish Bailiffs in the Medieval Crown of Aragon," in eds. Robert F. Berkhofer III, Alan Cooper, and Adam J. Kosto, *The Experience of Power in Medieval Europe, 950–1350*, 59-72. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Kogan, Barry. "What Can We Know and When Can We Know It? Maimonides on the Active Intelligence and Human Cognition," in ed. Eric L. Ormsby, *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, 121-137. Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989.

Kraemer, David. *The Mind of the Talmud: An Intellectual History of the Bavli*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Kraemer, Joel L. "Maimonides on Aristotle and Scientific Method," in ed. Eric L. Ormsby, *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, 76-84. Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989.
---. "Maimonides' Use of (Aristotelian) Dialectic," in eds. Robert S. Cohen and Hillel Levine, *Maimonides and the Sciences*, 111-130. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press, 2000.
---. "Is There a Text in this Class?" *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism*, Vol. 8 (2008): 288-293.
---. "Maimonides, the Great Healer," in eds. Arthur Hyman and Alfred Irvy, *Maimonides Studies* Vol. 5. *Maimonides: The Life of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds*, 1-30. New York: Doubleday, 2010.

Kreisel, Howard. “Asceticism in the Thought of R. Bahya Ibn Paquda and Maimonides,” *Da’at*, Vol. 21 (1988): vii-xiii.

Kromchal, Nahman. *Moreh Nevuchai ha-Zman*, ed. L. Zunz. Leopoli, 1863.

Lachter, Hartley. “Kabbalah, Philosophy, and the Jewish-Christian Debate: Reconsidering the Early Works of Joseph Gikatilla,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy,* Vol. 16:1 (2008): 1-58.

Lameer, Joep. *Al-Farabi and Aristotelian Syllogistics: Greek Theory and Islamic Practice.* Leiden: Brill, 1994.

Langermann, Y. Tzvi. “Cosmology and Cosmogony in *Doresh Reshumoth*, a Thirteenth-Century Commentary on the Torah,” *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 97:2 (2004): 209-215.

Laor, Dai. “Agnon in Germany, 1912-1924: A Chapter of a Biography,” *AJS Review*, Vol. 18:1 (1993): 75-93.

Lazier, Benjamin. “Writing the Judenzarathustra: Geshom Scholem’s Response to Modernity, 1913-1917,” *New German Critique,* Vol. 85 (2002): 33-65.

Lehmann, James H. “Polemic and Satire in the Poetry of the Maimonidean Controversy,” *Prooftexts*, Vol. 1:2 (1981): 133-151.

Lerer, Seth. *Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in the "Consolation of Philosophy."* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Lieberman, Saul. *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine.* New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962.

Liebes, Yehuda. *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, trans. Batya Stein. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
---. *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. A. Schwartz. Albany: SUNY Press, 1993.
---. “Zohar and Eros,” *Alpayyim*, Vol. 9 (1994): 67-115 [Hebrew].
---. “Zohar as Renaissance,” *Da’at*, Vol. 46 (2001): 5-11 [Hebrew].
---. “Zohar and Tiqqunei Zohar: From Renaissance to Revolution,” in ed. Ronit Meroz, *New Developments in Zohar Studies*, 251-301. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2007 [Hebrew].

Lightstone, Jack N. *The Rhetoric of the Babylonian Talmud, its Social Meaning and Context,* Studies in Christianity and Judaism 3. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier Univ. Press, 1994.

Lobel, Diana. *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's Kuzari.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.

Lorberbaum, Yair. "On Contradictions, Rationality, Dialectics, and Esotericism in Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*," *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 55:4 (Jun., 2002): 711-750.
---. *In God's Image: Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
--. Yair Lorberbaum, "Did Nahmanides Perceive the Kabbalah as 'Closed Knowledge'? *Zion*, Vol. 82:2-3 (2017), pp. 309-354 [Hebrew].

Lowe, Raphael. *Meshal Haqadmoni: Fables from the Distant Past.* Portland and Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004.

Löwy, Michael. "Messianism in the Early Work of Gershom Scholem," *New German Critique*, Vol. 83, Special Issue on Walter Benjamin (2001): 177-191.

Luria, David. *Commentary to Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer.* Warsaw, 1851.

Lynch, Katherine A. *Individuals, Families, and Communities in Europe, 1200-1800: The Urban Foundations of Western Society.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Magid, Shaul. "'The King is Dead [and has been for three decades], Long Live the King': Contemporary Kabbalah and Scholem's Shadow," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 102:1 (2012): 131-153.

Maimonides, Moses. *Treatise on Logic*, trans. I. Efros. New York, 1938.
---. *The Guide of the Perplexed,* trans. Shlomo Pines. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963.
---. *Epistle of Resurrection,* in *Epistles of Maimonides: Crisis and Leadership*, trans. Abraham Halkin. New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985.
---. *Treatise on Asthma*, in *Maimonides' Medical Writings*, Vol. 6, trans. Fred Rosner. Haifa: The Maimonidean Research Institute, 1994.

Makdisi, George. *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981.

Malamat, Abraham. "The Secret Council and Prophetic Involvement in Mari and Israel," in eds. R. Liwak and S. Wagner, *Prophetie und geschichtliche Wirklichkeit im alten Israel: Festrschrift fur Siegfried Herrmann zum 65 Geburstag*, 231-236. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1991.

Marciano, Yoel. "From Aragon to Castile — The Origins of Sephardi Talmudic Speculation in Fifteenth-Century Spain," *Tarbiz*, Vol. 77 (2009): 573-600 [Hebrew].

Marcus, Ivan. “Review of *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*,” *Speculum*, Vol. 67:1 (1992): 159-162.

Marx, Alexander. "Texts by and about Maimonides," *JQR*, Vol. 25 (1935): 374-381.

Matt, Daniel. “*Matnita di-Lan*: A Technique of Innovation in the Zohar,” in ed. Joseph Dan, *The Zohar and Its Generation* [*Mehqerei Yerushlayim be-Mahshevet Yisrael* 8], 123-145. Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1989 [Hebrew].
---. “New-Ancient Words’: The Aura of Secrecy in the Zohar,” in eds. Peter Schäfer and Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem’s Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism 50 Years After* [Proceedings Of The Sixth International Conference On the History of Jewish Mysticism], 181-207. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993.
---. “*Ayin*: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism,” in ed. Lawrence Fine, *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, 67-108. New York: New York University Press, 1995.

McAuliffe, Jane Dammen. “Debate with them in a Better Way: The Construction of a Qur’anic Commonplace,” in eds. A. Neuwirth, B. Embalo, S. Gunther, and M. Jarrar, *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Toward a New Hermeneutic Approach*, 163-188. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1999.
---. “The Genre Boundaries of Qur’ānic Commentary” in eds. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, Joseph W. Goering, *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 445-461. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Meir, Ophra. “Answerers or Questioners: On the Development of Argumentative Rhetoric in Palestinian Rabbinic Literature (in two parts),” *Dapim l’Mehkar b’Sifrut,* Vol. 8 (1992): 159-186, and Vol. 9 (1993): 155-174 [Hebrew].

Mendes-Flohr, Paul. “The Spiritual Quest of the Philologist,” in ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Gershom Scholem: The Man and His Work*, 1-28. New York: State University of New York, 1994.

Meroz, Ronit. ‘Zoharic Narratives and Their Adaptations’, *Hispania Judaica Bulletin,* Vol. 3 (2000): 3-63.
---. ““And I Was Not There’: The Complaints of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai According to an Unknown Zoharic Story,” *Tarbiz*, Vol. 71 (2002): 163-193 [Hebrew].
---. “A Journey of Initiation in the Babylonian Layer of *Sefer Ha-Bahir*," *Studia Hebraica*, Vol. 7 (2007): 17-33.
---. “The Middle Eastern Origins of the Kabbalah,” *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry*, Vol. 1:1 (2007): 39-56.
---. “Kabbalah, Science and Pseudo-Science in Ramdal’s *Commentary on the Thirteen Attributes*,” in eds. Maren R. Niehoff, Ronit Meroz, and Jonathan Garb, *And This is for Yehudah: Studies Presented to Our Friend Yehuda Liebes, on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday,* 123-143. Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2012 [Hebrew].

---. "'Rashbi's Biography' as a Zoharic Unit and the Epic Layer of the Zohar," in eds. Yehuda Liebes, Jonathan M. Benarroch, and Melila Hellner-Eshed, *The Zoharic Story*, 63-97. Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2017 [Hebrew].

Milik, J. T. "Qumran Grotte 4.II: Tefillin, Mezuzot et Targums (4Q128-4Q157)," *DJD* 6 (1977): 35-39.

Miller, Larry Benjamin. *Islamic Disputation Theory: A Study of the Development of Dialectic in Islam from the Tenth through Fourteenth Centuries*, PhD, Princeton University, 1984.

Modena, Leon. *Ari Nohem*, ed. Libowitz, 1929.

Moscato, Judah. *Judah Moscato Sermons*, *Edition and Translation, Volume One*, ed. G. Mileto and G. Veltri. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Moscovitz, Leib. *Talmudic Reasoning: From Casuistics to Conceptualization*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002.

Mosse, George L. "Gershom Scholem as a German Jew," *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 10:2 (1990): 117-133.

Myers, David N. "A New Scholarly Colony in Jerusalem: The Early History of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University," *Judaism*, Vol. 45:2 (1996): 142-159.

Neumark, David. *The History of Jewish Philosophy*. New York: Stybel Publishing House, 1921 [Hebrew].

Neusner, Jacob. *Contemporary Judaic Fellowship in Theory and Practice*. New York: Ktav, 1972.

Novak, David. "Jurisprudence," in ed. K. Seeskin, *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, 221-244. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Novick, Tzvi. "Din and Debate: Some Dialectical Patterns in Tannaitic Texts," *JSIJ*, Vol. 11 (2012): 187-215.

O'Neill, J. C. "How Early is the Doctrine of 'Creatio ex Nihilo'?" *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 53:2 (2002): 449-465.

Orlov, Andrei. *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.

Oron, Michal. "*Midrash ha-Ne'elam*—Old and New," *Kabbalah* 22 (2010): 109-148 [Hebrew].

Ostow, Mortimer. *Ultimate Intimacy: The Psychodynamics of Jewish Mysticism*. London: Karnac Books, 1995.

Pedaya, Haviva. “On the Development of the Social-Religious-Economic Model in Hasidism: The “Pidyon,” the “Havura,” and the Pilgrimage,” in ed. Menahem Ben-Sasson, *Religion and Economy: Interactions*, 311-373. Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1995 [Hebrew].
---. *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001 [Hebrew].

Pines, Shlomo. “The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, ibn Bija, and Maimonides,” in ed. Isadore Twersky, *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, 82-109. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.
---. “The Relation between Maimonides’ Halakhic and non-Halakhic Works,” in eds., S. Pines and Y. Yovel, *Maimonides and Philosophy*, 1-14. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987.

Ravitsky, Aviram. “Halakhic Arguments as Dialectical Arguments and Exegetical Principles as Aristotelian Topoi in Maimonides' Philosophy,” *Tarbiz* Vol. 73:2 (2004): 197-224 [Hebrew].
---. "Aristotelian Logic and Talmudic Methodology: The Commentaries on the 13 Hermeneutic Principles and Their Application of Logic," in ed. Andrew Schumann, *Judaic Logic*. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010.
---. “Saadya Gaon and Maimonides on the Logic and Limits of Legal Inference in Context of the Karaite-Rabbanite Controversy,” *History and Philosophy of Logic,* Vol. 32:1 (2011): 29-36.

Rescher, Nicholas. *Dialectics: A Classical Approach to Inquiry.* Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2007.

Reynolds, Susan. *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300*, second edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Rigler, Michael. “Were the Yeshivot in Spain a Centre for the Copying of Books?” *Annual of the Institute for Research in Jewish Law* Vol. 18/19 (1992): 411-426.

Rinott, Chanoch. “Major Trends in Jewish Youth Movements in Germany,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, Vol. XIX (1974): 87-90.

Roemer, Nils. “Breaching the ‘Walls of Captivity’: Gershom Scholem’s Studies of Jewish Mysticism,” *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, Vol. 72:1 (1997): 23-41.

Rokeach, Elazar. *Maaseh Rokeach.* Venice, 1742/3.

Rosen-Zvi, Assaf. "'Even Though there is no Decisive Proof, There is at Least an Indication of It': The Meaning, Character and Significance of the Phrase in the Tannaitic Literature," *Tarbiz* Vol. 78:3 (2009): 323-344 [Hebrew].

Rosen-Zvi, Ishay. “Structure and Reflectivity in Tannaitic Legal Homilies, Or: How to Read Midrashic Terminology,” *Prooftexts*, Vol. 34 (2014): 271-301.

Rossi, Azaria de. *Meor Eynayim.* Mantua, 1573.

Roth, Pinchas. “Responsa From Heaven: Fragments of a New Manuscript of *She’lot U-Teshuvot Min Ha- Shamayim* from Gerona,” *Materia Guidaica*, Vol. 15-16 (2010-2011): 555-564.

Rubenstein, Jeffrey L. *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003.
---. “Criteria of Stammaitic Intervention in Aggadah,” in ed. Jeffrey Rubenstein, *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggadah*, 417- 440. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.

Safrai, Shmuel “The Term Derekh Erez,” *Tarbiz*, Vol. 60 (1990): 147-162 [Hebrew].

Salaymeh, Lena. “‘Comparing’ Jewish and Islamic Legal Traditions: Between Disciplinarity and Critical Historical Jurisprudence,” *Critical Analysis of Law*, Vol. 2:1 (2015): 153-173.

Saperstein, Marc. *Decoding the Rabbis: A Thirteenth-Century Commentary on the Aggadah.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Schafer, Peter et al., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981.

Schatzker, Chaim. “Martin Buber’s Influence on the Jewish Youth Movement in Germany,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, Vol. XXIII (1978): 151-171.

Scheiber, Alexander. “The Mezuzah of the Egyptological Collection of the Hungarian Museum of Fine Arts,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 48:1 (1957): 6-12.

Scholem, Gershom. “Kabbalah at the Hebrew University,” *The Reconstructionist*, Vol. 3 (1937).---. “Chapters from the History of Kabbalistic Literature, 6: The Kabbalah of R. Isaac ben Shlomo ben Abi Sahula and *Sefer Ha-Zohar*,” *Kirjath Sepher*, Vol. 6 (1929): 109-119 [Hebrew].
---. “An Inquiry in the Kabbalah of R. Isaac ben Jacob Hacohen, II. The Evolution of the Doctrine of the Worlds in the Early Kabbalah,” *Tarbiz*, Vol. 3 (1931): 54-55 [Hebrew].
---. “The First Quotation from the Zohar’s *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*,” *Tarbiz,* Vol. 3 (1931): 181-183 [Hebrew].
---. “The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moses of Burgos: The Disciple of Rabbi Isaac,” *Tarbiz*, Vol. 5 (1934): 258-286 [Hebrew].

---. “A New Chapter from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* in the *Zohar*,” in eds. S. Lieberman, S. Spiegel, S. Zeitlin, and A. Marx. *Louis Ginzberg Jubille Volume on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, 465-546.New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945 [Hebrew].
---. *Jewish Gnosticism: Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960.
---. *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism.* New York: Schocken Books, 1965.
---. *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*. New York: New York Review of Books, 1981.
---*Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R. Z. J. Werblowsky, trans. A. Arkush. Philadelphia: Jewish Publishing Society and Princeton University Press,
1987. ---. *Continuity and Rebellion: Gershom Scholem in Speech and Dialogue*, ed. Abraham Shapira. Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1994 [Hebrew].
---. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Schocken, 1995.
---. *Studies in Kabbalah* (1). Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1998 [Hebrew].
---. *A Life in Letters, 1914-1982*, trans. Anthony D. Skinner. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
---. *Lamentations of Youth: The Diaries of Gershom Scholem, 1913-1919*, ed. and trans. by Anthony D. Skinner. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.
---. *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, ed. Werner J. Dannhauser. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2012.
---. *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, trans. Harry Zohn. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2012.

Shwartz, Aldoph. *Die hermeneutische Analogie in der talmudischen Litteratur*. Karlsruhe: J. Bielefeld, 1897.

Schwartz, Daniel R. “From Rabbinical Seminaries to the Institute of Jewish Studies,” in eds. Shaul Katz and Michael Heyd, *The History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: Origins and Beginnings,* 457-475. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1997 [Hebrew].

Schwebel, Paula. “The Tradition in Ruins: Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem on Language and Lament,” in eds. Ilit Ferber and Paula Schwebel, *Lament in Jewish Thought: Philosophical, Theological, and Literary Perspectives*, 277-304. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014.

Schweid, Eliezer. *Judaism and Mysticism According to Gershom Scholem: A Critical Analysis and Programmatic Discussion.* Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985.

Selzer, Assad. *The History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: Who's Who Prior to Statehood: Founders, Designers, Pioneers.* Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2013 [Hebrew].

Sharfman, Glenn R. “Whoever Has the Youth, Has the Future: The Jewish Youth Movement in Germany, 1900-1936: A Study in Ideology and Organization,” PhD dissertation, The University of North Carolina, 1989.

Speiser, E. A. “The Stem PLL in Hebrew,” *Journal of Biblical Literature,* Vol. 82:3 (1963): 305-306.

Spranzi, Marta. *The Art of Dialectic between Dialogue and Rhetoric: The Aristotelian Tradition.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011.

Stead, Naomi. “The Value of Ruins: Allegories of Destruction in Benjamin and Speer,” *Form/ Work: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Built Environment*, Vol. 6 (October 2003) 51-64.

Stern, Eliyahu. *The Genius: Elijah of Vilna and the Making of Modern Judaism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

Stern, Josef. “Maimonides’ Demonstrations: Principles and Practice,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, Vol. 10 (2001): 47–84.
---. “Maimonides’ Demonstrations: Principles and Practice,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, Vol. 10 (2001): 47–84.
---. “Maimonides’ Epistemology,” in ed. Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, 105-133. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
---. *The Matter and Form of Maimonides Guide*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Stock, Brian. *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
---. *Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Strauss, Leo. “How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” an introduction to Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines, xi-lvi. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.
---. *Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012.

Stroumsa, Sarah, “Elisha Ben Abuya and Muslim Heretics in Maimonides’ Writings,” *Maimonidean Studies,* Vol. 3 (1995): 173–93.
---. *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Ta-Shma, Israel. “Responsa from Heaven,” *Tarbiz,* Vol. 57 (1987): 51-66 [Hebrew].
---. “Rabbi Joseph Karo: Between Spain and Germany,” *Tarbiz,* Vol. 59 (1990): 153-170 [Hebrew].
---. *The Revealed in the Concealed: The Halachic Residue in the Zohar*. Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995 [Hebrew].

---. *Studies in Medieval Rabbinic Literature*, Vol. 2. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2004 [Hebrew].
---. *Creativity and Tradition: Studies in Medieval Rabbinic Scholarship, Literature and Thought*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2006.

Talbot, Karmen E. *Arguments Against the Sunni Legal Methodology: Ibn Hazm and his Refutation of Qiyas*, MA Thesis, McGill University, 1987.

Talmage, Frank. *Apples of Gold in Settings of Silver: Studies in Medieval Jewish Exegesis and Polemics*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999.

Thomas, Samuel I. *The "Mysteries" of Qumran: Mystery, Secrecy, and Esotericism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009.

Tiryakian, Edward. "Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78 (1972): 491–512.

Tishby, Isaiah. *Mishnat ha-Zohar*. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1961 [Hebrew].

Tucker, Ethan. *Literary Agendas and Legal Conclusions: The Contributions of Rabbinic Editors to the Laws of Forbidden Mixtures*, PhD, The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2006.

Twersky, Isadore. *A Maimonides Reader*, *Edited, with Introductions and Notes.* Springfield, NJ: Berhman House, 1972.
---. *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

Van Ess, Joseph. "The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology," in ed. G. E. von Grunebaum, *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, 21-50. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970.

Verman, Mark. *Books of Contemplation: The Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Vidas, Moulie. *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Visotzky, Burton. "Midrash, Christian Exegesis, and Hellenistic Hermeneutics," in ed. Carol Bakhos, *Current Trends in Study of Midrash,* 111-132. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Volkov, Shulamit. *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Von Rad, Gerhard. *Wisdom in Israel.* Nashville: Abingdon, 1972.

Vries, B. de. “The Date of Compilation of the Tractate Kallah Rabbati,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 1 (1965): 131-132 [Hebrew].

Wasserstrom, Steven M. *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Weiss, Bernard G. *The Search for God’s Law: Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf al-Din al-Amidi*, Revised Edition. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010.

Weiss, Dov. “The Rabbinic God and Medieval Judaism,” *Currents in Biblical Research,* Vol. 15:3 (2017): 369-390.

Weiler, Moses Cyrus. “Studies in the Kabbalistic Terminology of Joseph Gikatilla and his Relation to Maimonides,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 37 (1966): 13-44.

Weinfeld, Moshe. “‘Partition, Partition; Wall, Wall, Listen’ ‘Leaking’ the Divine Secret to Someone Behind the Curtain,” *Archiv für Orientforschung,* Vol. 44/45 (1997/1998): 222-225.

Weinstein, Roni. *Kabbalah and Jewish Modernity.* Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016.

Weiss, Joseph G. “A Circle of Pneumatics in Pre-Hasidism.” *JSS*, Vol. 8 (1957): 1-71.

Werblowsky, R. J. Z. “Philo and the Zohar: a note on the methods of the 'scienza nuova' in Jewish studies,” *JJS,* Vol. 10 (1959): 25-44, 113-135.

White, Ellen. *Yahweh’s Council: Its Structure and Membership*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014.

Widigo, Mohammad Syifa Amin. *Imam Al-Haramayn Al-Juwayni on Jadal: Juridical and Theological Dialectic in the Fifth/Eleventh Century*, PhD, Indiana University, 2016.

Wilson, Gerald H. “Wisdom in Daniel and the Origin of Apocalyptic,” *Hebrew Annual Review*, Vol. 9 (1985): 373-380.

Wischnitzer, Mark. *A Jewish History of Jewish Crafts and Guilds*. New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1965.

Wolfson, Elliot. *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses De Leon’s Sefer ha-Rimmon*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.
---. “By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides’ Kabbalistic Hermeneutic,” *AJS Review*, Vol. 14:2 (Autumn, 1989): 103-178
---. “The Secret of the Garment in Nahmanides,” *Da’at*, Vol. 24 (1989): xxv-xlix.

---. Elliot R. Wolfson, “God, the Demiurge and the Intellect: On the Usage of the Word *Kol* in Abraham Ibn Ezra,” *Reveu des Etudes juives,* Vol. CXLIX (1990): 77-111.
---. “Letter Symbolism and Merkavah Imagery in the Zohar,” in ed. Moshe Halamish, '*Alei Sefer, Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought*, 195-236. Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1990.
---. “Hai Gaon’s Letter and Commentary on ‘Aleynu’: Further Evidence of Moses de Leon’s Pseudepigraphic Activity,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review,* Vol. 81:3-4 (1991): 265-309.
---. *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism.* Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995.
---. “Metatron and Shiur Qomah in the Writings of Haside Ashkenaz,” in eds. Karl E. Grozinger and Joseph Dan, *Mysticism, Magic, and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*, 60-92. Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1995.
---. “Beyond the Spoken Word: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Medieval Jewish Mysticism,” in eds. Yaakov Elman and Israel Gershoni, *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion*, 166-224. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
---. “Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah,” in eds. Gorge K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse, *Moses Maimonides (1138-1204): His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical “Wirkungsgeschichte” in Different Cultural Contexts*, 209-237. Wurzberg: Ergon Verlag, 2004.
---. “Murmuring Secrets: Eroticism and Esotericism in Medieval Kabbalah,” in eds. J. Kripal and W. Hanegraff, *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, 65-110. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
---. “The Anonymous Chapters of the Elderly Master of Secrets – New Evidence for the Early Activity of the Zoharic Circle,” *Kabbalah*, Vol. 19 (2009): 143-278.

Wolski, Nathan. “Metatron and the Mysteries of the Night in *Midrash ha-Ne'lam*: Jacob ha-Kohen’s *Sefer ha-Orah* and the Transformation of a Motif in the Early Writings of Moses de León (*Zohar* H*adash*, *Lekh Lekha*, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* 25c-26a),” *Kabbalah*, Vol. 23 (2010): 69-94.
---. “Moses de León and *Midrash ha-Ne‘elam* – On the Beginnings of the Zohar,” *Kabbalah*, Vol. 34 (2016): 27-116.
---. *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, Vol. X (translation and commentary). Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016.

Yadin-Israel, Azzan. *Scripture as Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and the Origins of Midrash.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
---. *Scripture and Tradition Rabbi Akiva and the Triumph of Midrash*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

Yalon, H. "PLL, PLPL in Hebrew and Aramaic," *Tarbiz*, Vol. 6 (1935): 223-24 [Hebrew].

Yisraeli, Oded. “Jewish Medieval Traditions Concerning the Origins of the Kabbalah,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 106:1 (2016): 21-41.

---. *Temple Portals: Studies in Aggadah and Midrash in the Zohar.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016.

Young, Edward W. *The Dialectical Forge: Juridical Disputation and the Evolution of Islamic Law*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017.

Zacuto, Abraham. *Sefer Yuhasin*. Constantinople, 1566.

Zeitlin, S. "Hillel and the Hermeneutic Rules," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 54: 2 (Oct., 1963): 161-173