PRESENCE OF THE NUMINOUS:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARCHETYPE OF THE SHEKINAH

by

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"Ultimately liberation is grounded in the feminine Divine as the enabling energy that stimulates our imagination to create new divine symbols and images, that allows for a religious symbol system and myth uniting cosmology and spirituality, that empowers us to believe:

'Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with faith in creation and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit so that we can be re-created and renew through You the face of the earth.'"

From Created in Her Image by Eleanor Rae and Bernice Marie-Daly
This manuscript is lovingly dedicated

to my mother,

who was always there

Special thanks to Carl Grundberg and Lloyd Nygaard
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Plate 34. The Moses Panel in the Dura Europos synagogue (3rd century C.E.), showing the Shekhina with the infant Moses in her arms. (From Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, Bollingen Series XXXVII, vol. 11. Copyright 1964 by Princeton University Press. Reproduced by permission.)
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

"as for the Creator, he is hidden from all and has neither measure nor likeness, and no eyes saw him..." (Eleazor of Worms)

"I am sending an angel before you..." (Ex. 23:20)

There is a Jewish legend that says that when Moses was lifted up to heaven to speak with God for 40 days and nights, he asked that the Shekinah might dwell with Israel. He also asked that he might understand the ways of God whereby suffering was sometimes caused to the just. God, it is said, granted him the first wish, but not the second (Ginzberg V.3:194). The implication of this story, perhaps, is that it is not given to us to be able to understand the mystery of suffering, but we are offered a motherly, compassionate figure to comfort us in our afflictions.

How is it that in Jewish myth and mysticism, the Shekinah is regarded as a divine entity, when one of the principle differences separating the Hebrew faith from its surrounding pagan neighbors was the insistence of a monotheistic Yahweh? This is the primary problem posed in our examination of the feminine face of God in the Judaic tradition. I hope to demonstrate that there is a distinct difference between the Shekinah, or the Dwelling of God, so frequently referred to in the Biblical and apocryphal literature, and the surrounding Near-Eastern goddesses.

I do not believe that the maternal face of God which came to be developed in the image of the Shekinah was simply the result of foreign goddesses imported from neighboring countries. Rather, she began as conceptualized divine attributes of a monotheistic God and eventually became a personification in her own right. This process we will call hypostatization, following the dictionary definition "to attribute real identity to a concept."
Let us first of all distinguish between the Near-Eastern mythical consciousness and Hebrew worldview via the following chart:

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The Divine Presence of God, as we shall see, is a thorny issue in Jewish monotheism.

On the one hand, Israelites believed God had no body and could not be seen or conversed
with. But the God of the Old Testament was obviously a God who was involved with humankind and history. So a split had to be made, which posed the problem of development as a personification.

Ernst Mueller, in his work "History of Jewish Mysticism", tells us that in the apocryphal Books of Enoch, in such beings as

Metatron, the Messiah, as also the Shekinah, we meet with the appearance of the Deity in forms which conflict with a strict monotheism...the boldness of the symbolism, which today seems not a little startling...has left its mark on Jewish mysticism.

(Mueller 1946:39)

and he quotes Alexandrian philosopher, Philo:

for God, not condescending to come down to the external senses, sends His own words or angels for the sake of giving assistance to those who have virtue.

(Mueller 1946:35)

This bears examining more closely. The first hypostatized beings in the Hebrew tradition were these angelic, or intermediary agents (e.g., Gen 3:24; Gen. 19:1; Gen. 24:7; 24:40; Gen. 31:11). Although 'graven images' were viewed by the Biblical prophets as idolatrous abominations, the exception to the rule was the Cherubim, the winged human figures who figured prominently in Temple ritual until the very end of the 2nd Jewish Commonwealth.(70 C.E.) They were enshrined, in fact, in the most sacred Holy of Holies, and the Shekinah would eventually come to dwell between them. No one seemed to express dismay or condemnation of these images until the Hellenistic Jewish authors, Philo and Joseph Flavius noticed with embarrassment that they seemed rather like the Jewish equivalent to the statues of the pagan gods and goddesses. Philo chose to ignore this fact and preferred to
treat the Cherubim as "an allegorical figure of the revolution of the whole heaven...one of the Cherubim then symbolizes the outermost sphere of the fixed stars...the other is the inner contained sphere" (Patai 1990:76). The Cherubim mentioned in Genesis with their "fiery revolving swords guarding the Tree of Life" (3:24), he perceived to be an allegory of the sovereignty and reason of God.

Midrash passages speak frequently about the Shekinah and angelic intermediaries as distinct personifications, elaborating on the Biblical texts. The midrash has the unique literary ability of fusing, in a single genre, many aspects of human creativity: history, theology, anthropology, mythology, linguistics, cosmology, and exegesis. In its ethical homilies, the midrash is characterized by its ambivalent nature. "One can hardly find an idea without a contradictory saying not far away" (Dan 1986:8).

A midrash passage of the 2nd century AD speaks of the Cherubs in the Tabernacle as representing the 2 Holy Names of God: Yahweh and Elohim. Another said they represented the world-embracing winds, reaching "from one end of the world to the other" (Patai 1990:84). The source of embarrassment for Philo, who journeyed to Jerusalem and viewed the Temple, was probably due to the fact that they were intertwined with one another in erotic embrace "which was considered obscene by the pagans when they at last had a chance to glimpse it" (ibid:67). A Babylonian Talmudic master is recorded to have said that the significance of this is that the love of Israel before God "is like the love of male and female" (ibid: 84), perhaps foreshadowing the extremely erotic nature of the relationship between the 'King' and the 'Matronit', or the Shekinah, His Bride in the later Kabbalistic literature. The medieval philosopher, Maimonides, combating the ascription of corporeality to God with particular fervor, attacking anthropomorphisms as heresy. In his analysis of the
Cherubim, however, he perceived no threat to monotheism; the reason given was that there were two images over the Ark, not one.

if there had been one image...this might have been misleading. For it might have been thought that this was the image of the Deity to be worshipped--such things were being done by the idolaters.

Rather, God had commanded that two images be made over the Ark

so that the belief of the multitude in the existence of the angels be consolidated.

(Patai 1990:92)

Maimonides, however, spoke about the Shekinah, or Presence of God as an "intermediary agency", not an intermediate being, thus excluding personality and participation in the divine nature (Moore 1922). Other Jewish scholars, who followed the metaphoric method of interpretation of intermediaries, have voiced the belief that midrash or Biblical stories that point to angels or even God as personifications were created not for scholars, but for the "unlettered masses" (ibid: 44). Literally understood, they "fortify the common man’s imagination of a God who behaved too much like himself" (ibid: 45).

The problem of the personality of a transcendent God who somehow communicates in a vividly personal way to His people is rendered more intelligible in some exegetical interpretations, however, via the word or 'memri', a Aramaic word which also means 'oracle'. For example, in Ex. 25:22, when God says, "I will cause my word (oracle) to meet thee there, and I will speak with thee from above the place of atonement, from between the two cherubs", God’s oracle, which occurs repeatedly to speak to the prophets (and which
we will examine in more detail later) is understood to be the intermediary, or hypostatization of God's Presence, the Shekinah (Moore 1922).

Schollem tells us that "in Talmudic literature the Shekinah is never a symbol of the feminine" (1962: 163), or as a presence separated from God. It was only in the aggadic or midrashic forms of discourse, often posed as questions between master and disciple, that this image emerged. However, Patai insists that in Talmudic sources as well, the Shekinah comes to be regarded "as a feminine manifestation of Deity" (1990:109). And according to Edward Hoffman:

in the Talmudic era, an alternative notion to a wholly male personified Deity began to emerge more clearly...some Talmudists endowed the Shekinah with a transcendent reality as well as a physical one (1981: 82).

and explains that the term Shekinah is from a Hebrew root- word which means 'the act of dwelling' and is of feminine gender.

The fact that the word Shekinah was of the feminine gender apparently had little or no significance to most of the early rabbinic writers, although they frequently made references to the Shekinah as an "abstract hypostasis, interpolated wherever a Biblical statement appeared too anthropomorphic " (Patai 1990:99).

The Shekinah is introduced as the Indwelling of God, thus characterizing her as a cognitive principle of God (the most basic level of self-awareness), not really transcendent, not exactly immanent, but rather as a vital mediation which is apparently beginning to emerge. How apparently feminine this was to the early Hebrew nation is debatable, but there is certainly evidence of many instances of angelic mediation in the Bible.
It is clear that, despite the debate about the occurrence of the Shekinah in traditional sources, alongside the patriarchal rabbinic discipline a sister tradition grew and flourished—the midrash stories, which were imaginative narratives and recreations that were more intuitive than rational, and which naturally embraced the feminine dimension. The Shekinah is often identified with the spirit of God, which dwells within the world or within the soul of the individual, or within the historical entity of the children of Israel. Through Moses, God put the "Holy Spirit in their midst" (Is. 63:11). She is a perfect ineffable divinity, yet at the same time very tangible and entwined with the lives of human beings. This aspect of the divine as intermediary is characterized often as the female Shekinah or sometimes as the 'angel of the Lord' or the 'spirit of the Lord,' as we shall see.

Let us examine in more detail the concept of spirit. We tend to think of 'spirit' as opposed to 'matter'. But to the ancient Hebrews, spirit was connected to breath, or motion—i.e., existent in life. In Genesis, the breathing or spirit of God is what makes life. "In the beginning the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters..." (Gen 1:1) The Hebrew word for spirit is also feminine (Ruach). The great Hebrew language scholar Fabre de'Olivet tells us that Ruach "figuratively (is) a movement toward expansion, toward dilation" and its root is related to all ideas of "exaltation, of ethereal breath, inspiration, (and)animation"(1921:32).

In much mythical as well as philosophical literature, the Holy Spirit is conceptualized in language that suggests that it is hypostatized, i.e., with capital letters. In Hebrew the Holy Spirit is called 'Ruach ha-Kodesh.' This feminine name for God occurs 378 times in the Old Testament (Rae & Marie-Daly, 1990).
After the initial emergence of this idea of Holy Spirit, or living life-force of the God-energy in Genesis, it became identified with empowering enlightenment, functional in a variety of ways: prophecy, wisdom, inspired art, prayer, architecture (e.g., the Ark). This inspired breathing of God simultaneously points to a collaborative relationship with God. Particularly after the exile (580 AD), there became more 'spirit manifestations' (e.g., Ezekiel and later prophets); but as early as Exodus many reports of spirit 'phenomena' can be biblically located. By the time we get to the Wisdom books (1st & 2nd century BCE), Spirit is linked to the attribute of Wisdom (Hokmah, also a feminine word), and is definitely imagined as feminine in all these texts.

In the New Testament, whenever Spirit acts, it represents the risen Logos, or Christos principle. Early Christians came to understand the power of the Spirit through charisms like prophecy and healing, very similar to its manifestations in the Old Testament. Simultaneously, during this time period, there was developing a gnosis and early Kabbalistic worldview which imagined the Wisdom-principle as a hypostatized figure named Sophia and a personification on the Tree of Life known both as the Shekinah and the Matronit or Matrona.

It seems quite possible that ancient Jewish mysticism did believe in a secondary divine power which assisted God in the process of creation. Scholem tells us that it was postulated that a distinct spirit was present as a demiurgic figure, alluded to in Psm. 104:31 (Scholem 1960). In the apocryphal Book of Enoch, this secondary source is identified as the angel Metatron "who (as) an aspect of the Shekinah, is indifferently male and female" (Waite 1960: 344). There is perhaps an etymological association between the words Matrona, used frequently in the classic Jewish text, the Zohar, and Metatron. There is an early midrash
speculation (1st century CE) that Metatron is the highest angel who bears the Name of God (Scholem 1960).

By the time the ancient Jewish work, the Bahir, became popular, this intermediary had clearly come to be perceived as a feminine power. Two foremost Jewish scholars of this century, Gershom Scholem and Joseph Dan have identified the Bahir as one of the earliest written Kabbalistic works. Dan's analysis is that it is the "first Jewish mystical text to introduce the idea of sexual and familial symbolism" (Dan 1960).

According to Scholem "beginning with the Bahir...the Shekinah becomes a quasi-independent feminine element" (1965:105). It was because the Kabbalah expressed itself in images, often mythical in content, that the "principle of the Shekinah as a providential guide of the Creation" grew in popularity among the Jewish masses, thus demonstrating that what had been uncovered was "one of the primordial impulses still latent in Judaism" (ibid: 105).

Modern scholars such as Dan, Scholem and Moshe Idel who study the ancient Talmudic as well as the developing midrash literature tend toward the revelation of several surrounding influences on the Bahir: Greek philosophy and ethics, and Persian, Christian and gnostic ideology. This seems true of the other mystical literature as well, particularly that springing from Hekhalot and Merkabah schools which Scholem believes are contemporary with the early Talmudic world (1st & 2nd century CE).

The Book Bahir--not edited until the 12th century--he traces to the Merkabah (chariot mysticism ) school. The other ancient Kabbalistic source, the Sepher Yetzirah, he dates to about the 3rd century and historically represents the earliest mystical text written in the Hebrew language (Scholem 1960; 1961; 1965).
Both of these texts explore the paradoxical idea, developed more in later Kabbalistic exegesis, of the feminine element of God. To the medieval Kabbalists, "as seal-bearers of the world of myth" (Scholem 1961: 36), the existence of evil in the world was a problem that occupied considerable contemplation. We will examine this problem and how it relates to the divine feminine in more detail later. For now, we note that in the Kabbalistic rendering, "what was insufficiently explained by the literal and homiletical interpretations of the Bible was profoundly elucidated through mystical symbolism" (Dan 1986: 42).

Since there is much hypostatization of a feminine being in Proverbs, Wisdom and other post-exilic Biblical books, it became natural for exegetical and Kabbalistic writers to speak freely about this dimension of God:

The Shekinah as a manifestation of God was thoroughly familiar to the medieval philosophy of Judaism; it was seen as something distinct from God Himself" (Scholem 1962: 166).

In the rabbinic tradition, however, the Shekinah was not perceived to be divine, as she became in the mystical and Kabbalistic schools (i.e., because she is part of God’s essence). Rather, she was perceived to be the first creature. This creature is associated with the Spirit of God; Scholem quotes a midrash passage:

When God conceived the idea of creating the world, he created as first of all His creations the Holy Spirit, which is also the Glory of God.

(Scholem 1962: 167)

Maimonides spoke of the Shekinah as a "created light that God causes to descend in a particular place in order to confer honor upon it in a miraculous way" (1962: 167). Later
exegetical texts, such as the Sepher ha Hokmah by Eleazor of Worms points to her as director of the created world, but nonetheless as not distinct from God.

And she directs the world and is named angel of God by virtue of this her mission, but with her no separation from God takes place. And of this the verse (Ex. 23:20) said, 'I am sending an angel before you.' This is the Shekinah.

(Scholem 1962: 185)

This identification of the angel with the Shekinah was to become a common motif in mystical and mythical literature, where it was interpreted beyond the sense of an abstract attribute. The Bahir, for instance, refers numerous times to her as daughter, princess or wife of God. Here, the Shekinah emerges as the intermediary through which one gains access to the King, a Kabbalistic reference to the unknowable Yahweh or IHVH.

The other mystical school which fleshed out the archetypal divine feminine was the Ashkenazi Chassidic movement (12th century), noted for developing the esoteric theology that the appearance of the 'angel' in numerous Old Testament passages, and particularly the angelic entity who spoke to the prophets was:

the Divine Glory, also called the Shekinah...according to them, this power is connected to God in one 'face', which is turned upward toward God, while its other 'face' is turned toward the created world....(this) face turned towards the created beings can be revealed...and indeed, this is the source of all prophecy.

(Dan 1986: 49)

This passage elaborates Ex. 33:18 from which is derived the concept of the upper and lower Shekinah, to be examined later. As immanent in creation, the Shekinah is that aspect
of God that can be related to, touched, even gazed upon. Her upper face is sometimes perceived as the Veil of God, protecting humankind from God’s awesome presence.

In myth, Shekinah is often confused with an angelic entity or is sometimes herself pictured with wings. One myth tells us that Moses was never buried, but that his body was taken from Mt. Nebo "by the pinions of the Shekinah" (Ginzberg V.3: 460). Another says that the pious will be protected before the throne of God by the wings of the Shekinah (V.3: 302). Sometimes angels are said to be borne up by the splendor of the Shekinah (V.5: 22).

The mystical treatise, the Zohar, taught that the gathering of angels amid the Shekinah on high depended on the prayers and good deeds of the righteous.

While one is deeply engaged in study of the Torah, one inevitably draws the Shekinah. It was the custom of many Kabbalistic mystics to rise at midnight and study till dawn, during which time they could cleave to Her in a special way.

(Fine 1984: 139)

The Zohar tells us that the Angel referred to by Israel (Jacob) in Gen. 48:16 (which speaks of Israel’s blessing upon Joseph’s sons) applies to the Shekinah. In this Biblical passage, she is referred to as "the Angel who has delivered me from all harm". As the liberating angel, the Shekinah has sometimes been identified with Michael, who delivers us from the enemy, and who is also the benevolent angel of death (Davidson 1967). In Jewish lore, the fire Moses saw in the burning bush had the appearance of the angel Michael, who, in this case had descended down in the function of annunciation; that is, as the forerunner of the Shekinah (Ginzberg V.2: 303). 5 Legend tells us that after Moses completed writing the Torah, he wiped his forehead with his pen still in hand and from this heavenly ink which cleaved to his hair radiated streams of light (Ginzberg V.3: 161). Upon his return, the children
of Israel were amazed to see his face shining with an unearthly light (see Ex. 141:11). This radiance, another myth tells us, also characterized the face of the mother of Moses & Miriam, Jochebed, who "owed her name Divine Splendor to the celestial light that radiated from her countenance" (Ginzberg V.2: 261) implying perhaps his mother was the source of Moses' initial impetus to draw the Shekinah, for it was through him that "she was made to descend to earth and abide among men as aforetime" (ibid: 261).

There are several myths about how the Shekinah came to dwell on the earth. In a variation on the above, while Moses was on Mt. Sinai writing the Torah, the children sinned grievously against Yahweh by worshipping the golden calf. When God became reconciled with them again, as a sign of forgiveness, he sent his Shekinah to dwell in the sanctuary. Hence it was called the Tabernacle of Testimony. God gave Moses explicit instructions on how to construct the candlestick to be placed in the tabernacle. The candlestick stood in the south and was said to symbolize the light of the Shekinah. Because of its great sacredness, legend says that it was one of the sacred objects that was hidden at the destruction of the Temple, where it had come to dwell during Solomon's reign. "There is in the south only one light, that of the Shekinah" (Ginzberg V.6: 66). In this sense, there is again a close association between Shekinah and the angel Michael, frequently identified by Kabbalists as the angel of fire, or angel of the southern quarter. One midrash tells us that Michael is the glory of the Shekinah (Davidson: 272).

Other myths point to Shekinah's identification with other angels. The angel of prophecy is sometimes taken to be the Shekinah herself or sometimes the angel Gabriel, who also seems to bring prophecies and visions (Idel 1988). Although the 'angel of the Lord' in many
Old Testament passages is sometimes interpreted as Michael, Metatron, or Gabriel, the Zohar tells us it is Shekinah, and that she rules over all in the angelic kingdom:

is then the Shekinah called the 'angel of the Lord'? Assuredly! Above them all, the Lord has appointed the Matrona to minister before Him in the Palace...their garments are woven of flames from a bright and burning fire. A sharp flaming sword is at the shoulder of each to guard Her.

(Simon & Sperling 1959: 156)

The identification of the Shekinah with the 'angel' of the Lord, or the 'Holy Spirit' as a distinct personality is reflected in the Jewish legend about Jacob and Joseph's sons. Jacob at first refused to bless Joseph's sons, until he entreated God to be merciful and "let the Shekinah descend upon my father" (Ginzberg V.2: 136). The myth in Ginzberg's Legends of the Jews is interesting in the way it differentiates Yahweh from the Holy Spirit, or Shekinah.

Then spoke God to the Holy Spirit: 'How long yet shall Joseph suffer? Reveal thyself quickly and enter into Jacob, that he may be able to bestow blessings.'

(Ginzberg V.2: 136)

Other midrash passages speak of the Holy Spirit actually admonishing or attempting to influence God not to practice retribution (Patai: 105). Other midrashim refer to the Shekinah in more abstract metaphorical terminology. The Zohar speaks about the Holy Spirit as the "cloud that covered the tabernacle" (Waite 1960:366). Images which demonstrate strong transcendental and 'animus' themes that myth has revealed to us are reflected most vividly in the metaphors of light and fire. The Shekinah or Holy Spirit presence is intimately associated with the "pillar of fire" and the "burning bush" (Ex. 14 & 33), the "flaming torch"
(Gen 15:17), the "great cloud with fire flashing" (Ez. 1:4), even the "shining cloud" of Mat. 17:5, when Jesus was transfigured with Moses and Elijah on either side (Farrar 1987).

Kabbalists have a tradition that the Torah, dictated by the voice of the Shekinah, was written in a "circle of fire" (Idel 1988b: 164). The Shekinah is defined in the Zohar as the "consuming fire, by which they are renewed at night" (Farrar: 272). As the Voice of prophecy and as Sophia, Wisdom, she is also the predecessor of the Word, the animus Logos, later associated with Christ and the Solar principle.

In her office as architect of the world, the Word was uttered to her, was by her conceived and brought or begotten into execution.

(Waite 1960: 351)

In the Kabbalistic literature, as we will see, she is identified as the 'Active Intellect'. She is identified in the medieval text The Fountain of Wisdom with ether, essence and primordial light:

Before all things (were created), there was an ether, an essence from which sprang a primordial light refined from myraids of luminaries, a light which, since it is the essence, is also called the Holy Spirit.

(Dan 1986: 50)

The Bahir tells us she must come from the 'Light' because "She illuminates the world through her deeds" (Kaplan 1979: 49). The Zohar calls her the messenger between the upper regions and the lower (Waite 1960), and that the pillar of cloud is always seen with the Shekinah. She is associated with the swords which "turn every way to keep the way of the Tree of Life" in Gen. 3:23, and as the Way itself in the Zohar, e.g., "She is the way to the great and mighty Tree of Life" (Simon & Sperling 1959: 156); and "the road that leads to
the Tree of Life is the Matrona" (Bension 1932: 127). Ginzger reports that legend tells us "the Shekinah and the Holy Spirit are the same" (Ginzberg V.5: 289).

The mystery of how the ineffable God could be the same and yet somehow distinct from this Spirit is not unique to Christian Trinitarian philosophy. Throughout Hebrew mysticism, the Holy Spirit, who eventually comes to be identified with this female aspect of God called the Shekinah, poses a problem for Jewish monotheism. Yet it clung with great tenacity to this idea, struggling against the importation of foreign goddesses and seeking to assert its unique vision in the world. Myths demonstrate to us, however, that the feminine face of God cannot be eradicated from human consciousness; as we will see in more detail in subsequent analysis, the personification of Shekinah in myth & legend endows her with distinctive human as well as goddess-like qualities.
Chapter 2

THE UPPER AND LOWER MOTHERS: KABBALISTIC HERMENEUTICS

"In Kether is the Throne, whose souls are the very stuff of God's Glory." (Epstein 1978: 68)

Talmudic and midrash literature formed the bulk of Jewish literary development from the first century to the 7th century CE and ethical writings composed a large part of that output. Between the demise of the prophets and prior to the Talmudic period (during the 1st-3rd centuries BCE), Wisdom literature was the principle source of ethics and probably influenced post-Biblical writings as well (Dan 1982).

Midrash collections were re-edited and distributed from a variety of sources up to the 14th century. We have recognized in this material a rich literary form which was largely responsible for developing the concept of the Shekinah. We have seen, however, that the seeds of this idea lie as far back as the Genesis texts, and were kept alive throughout the history of the Jewish race via the rich heritage of their oral tradition: myth and legend.

Let us examine the development of the Shekinah in the Kabbalistic tradition, as it evolved from prior aggadic and mythological literature. Kabbalistic interpretation offers a rich, fascinating theosophy of evolving concepts about the Deity. While not rejecting Biblical narratives and prophecies embodying more traditional ideas about God, creation, covenant, etc., Kabbalistic exegesis offers ingenious variations and allegorical interpretations which lend an air of charm, mystery, and vitality to Biblical texts, one which appeals to the erudite scholar as well as the lover of myth. Nor is the gnostic or mystical side of Judaism considered
heretical; most exegetical commentaries of this nature were considered part of the Jewish
tradition.

One form of this hermeneutics, called Lurianic Kabbalah, explains that in willing to
create a world, God contracted his own being in order to make room for the cosmos. This
contraction caused a powerful cataclysm, sometimes known as the breaking or bursting of
the shells or vessels—an actual rending apart of the forces which constitute God.

The vessels assigned to the upper three Sephiroth (Kether, Binah, Chokmah) managed to contain the light that flowed into them, but the light struck the six Sephiroth from Hesod to Yesod all at once and so was too strong to be held by the individual vessels; one after another, they broke, the pieces scattering and falling.

(Scholem 1974: 138)

This theme of contraction is echoed in the myth that when Moses heard God say, 'Let them make Me a Sanctuary', he was frightened by such an immense task, because he knew that

heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain God. But God reassured him that a small tabernacle would, indeed, be sufficient for Him for 'I shall descend and contract my Shekinah between the planks of the Tabernacle down below.'

(Patai 1990: 104-05)

In variations of this theme, during the contraction, the sephirotic structure, or 10 Spheres on the Tree of Life, come into being, the lowest of which is, in effect, exiled. This is Malkuth, the Kingdom, another synonym for the earth. The process of restoring the Shekinah (or the lower 'mother,' in Malkuth) to the heavenly sphere is one in which humans play a vital role (Waite 1960; Scholem 1974).
Other Kabbalistic mystical exegesis speak about the sephirotic structure as 10 emanating Spheres which proceed from the primordial God-energy, and which were thought to act as a bridge back to that unity. This idea was most popular in the neoplatonic, Jewish gnostic and Christian Kabbalistic schools in Provence in the 12th century (Scholem 1974). In answer to attempts to try an identify the sephirotic system as polytheistic, the Kabbalist’s claim would be that the Sephiroth are symbols which should not be confused with sensual or logical truth...in this way, Kabbalists are completely immune to any theological, philosophical, or logical criticism...Thus they achieve the mystical freedom that allows them to present to the...intellectual environment ruled by a Maimonidean philosophy emphasizing monotheism...ten divine powers and at the same time avoid being immediately condemned as heretics.

(Dan 1986: 9)

Shekinah, then, is the redemptive aspect of God: her mission is to restore the original harmony. When Malkuth is joined to her lost lover, exemplified by the Son Sphere of Tiphareth, the messianic or redemptive process is set in motion. To this end, many tales are told concerning the conjugal relationship between Shekinah and 'the King', or other similar metaphors to represent God and the soul, or God and the children of Israel. In the Zohar, a text quoted more frequently than perhaps any other except the Torah itself, she is united with her spouse in the supreme act of coronation:

When the Holy Ancient illumines the King, he crowns him with supernal holy crowns. Then the Matrona, participating in this celestial procession, is crowned.

(Simon & Sperling 1959: 160)
In the Kabbalah, especially as explicated in Christian and Platonic hermeneutics, e.g. "humanists in the circle of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola" (Scholem 1974: 67) of the 15th century, it is through the series of emanations of the God-energy, that we as human beings are able to relate to God in a comprehensible, even intimate way.

Therefore, the Zohar tells us that there is none "like unto the Lord, our God", who resides at the highest sphere and is crowned with the "supernal holy crown", yet who "humbleth himself to descend from crown to crown, that is, from one sphere to another" to exercise tender, providential care to the lower worlds (Simon & Sperling 1959: 116). In the lowest of these worlds, Malkuth, the Kingdom, the crowned Queen, becomes the humble Bride (kallah) and is, by mystical affinity, the "consummation of all...she is the receptive aspect of the holy nuptial of the symbols of the King and Queen" (Scholem 1974: 112). It is here in Malkuth, that the presence of God finds its dwelling (Shekinah), which characterizes its last attribute.

Scholem describes Malkuth-Shekinah as the "end of thought whose progressive unfolding demonstrates God's 'hidden life'" (1974: 112). It is from the source of thought in the 2nd sphere (Chokmah) that Wisdom "pursues its task through all the worlds" finally appearing as the Shekinah, the last Sephira which is the gate through which we can again begin to ascend "the ladder of perception of the Great Mystery" (ibid:112). This theme of descending from finer planes of being to lower or denser ones is a dominant one in the gnostic-Sophia myths as well.

The more common identification of the upper Shekinah, however, is not in Chokmah, but in Binah—the Divine Understanding. According to a medieval text, Genesis Rabbah:
From the Spirit of Wisdom, He brought forth Water...from the Spirit of Understanding He brought forth the Light of Intelligence...

(Dan 1986:105)

This Sephirah, in turn, is intimately related to the Daughter, or 'lower mother' via the holy word, the Torah. In Zoharic interpretation, the Torah is conceived as the outer garment of the Shekinah. It is the Torah-de-beriah, or Torah of creation (Scholem 1965).

The color of this outer covering of the Shekinah is black, the color of Binah on the Tree, a color symbolic of both mourning and mystery. One of her titles is Marah, which means 'bitter sea' and is the root of the word Miriam, or Mary (Fortune 1935). She is also called Virgin Mother "because She is ever 'pure and undefiled', the Cosmic mind-stuff which, like water, always remains itself no matter what form its container takes" (Compton 1989). She can be compared to the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious. As the Great Mother or 'upper Shekinah' she has also been called "The Fountain of Primordial Wisdom" (Fortune 1935:139).

Through good deeds and prolonged study of the Torah, deeper layers of meaning are ascertained which "strip her of the somber garments of literal meaning and casuistry and adorns her with radiant garments of mystical insight" (Scholem 1965: 67). When the Bahir tells us that the 'King' brings everyone to His chamber "through these paths", it is referring to the Kabbalistic study of the 32 paths of this mystical Wisdom, which flow through the lower Shekinah:

He touches the Daughter and includes all the paths in Her and in Her garments. He who wants to go inside should gaze there.

(Kaplan 1979: 23)
This passage delineates, in mystical language, how one may come to God, i.e., via the 32 paths of Wisdom, which are the cornerstone of Kabbalsitic philosophy. And it is the Shekinah who here emerges as the intermediary through which one gains access to the King. Studying scripture and good deeds also help redeem the Shekinah from exile, a theme that goes back to pre-Talmudic times, where it generally meant only that God’s Presence was always with Israel. In the Kabbalistic interpretation, however, it is taken to mean that a part of God is actually exiled from God. This concept of exile, a theme developed in Gnosticism as well, indicates the ontological predicament of the exile of the soul from its original home. Mythologically, this idea was referred to in Kabbalah as the banishment of the Queen (Patai 1990). The exile is, in this world-view, the separation of the masculine and feminine principles of God. We will explore this theme in more detail later, for now we note only that it is Malkuth, the immanent Shekinah which is in exile.

The Divine Mother aspect of Binah on the Tree is frequently referred to as the creator, the mother of all the worlds, as well as the remaining Sephiroth; and this explication of the upper and lower mother is delineated in great detail by the Christian Kabbalist Arthur Waite (1960). The Zohar explains that:

The Shekinah has come down to earth 10 times already, for creation is the work of the Shekinah, who occupies herself with it, as a mother with her children.

(Bension 1932:128.)

Although there is a confusing flow of images between the transcendent and immanent functions of the Shekinah, the Bride is typically related to the Daughter, or Malkuth. The ’King’ is generally assumed to reside in Tiphereth, the Son, implying an interesting Jungian
quaternity. The Book of Mirrors, however, written in the early 14th century, explicates a slightly different view: the 'hieros gamos' is a union, not of Tipareth and Malkuth, but Kether and Malkuth. "Kether and Malkuth are the 'upper eye' and the 'lower eye' " (Matt 1982: 26). One is the upper crown and one is the lower crown, the flow of emanation which forms their union is only mediated by Tiphareth. The text specifically says that Kether himself marries Malkuth, quoting Lev.21:13 and commenting on the passage that the "'woman in her virginity' alludes to the Matronita" (Matt 1982: 27). All the lights and colors of the upper Sephiroth are reflected in her (hence the metaphor of the Mirror).

The primal thought emanated by Kether is incommunicable in itself; it is nothing but an unspoken Aleph (the primal letter). Malkuth interprets this flowing essence as it moves toward actualization; she spells it out to the lower worlds. It is at this point that her independent quality comes into play.

(Matt 1982: 28)

As the mediator of the divine influx and as the "powerful governess" of the lower worlds (ibid:28), Malkuth has the power to "give birth to whatever she wishes to bring down" (ibid:29). She can alter the divine decree coming from on high "for good or evil, as she desires. This is the secret meaning of 'the Lord repented of the evil' (Ex. 32:14)...this refers to the quality of Malkuth, who is called the 'Secret of all Possibilities'". Matt's comment on this passage is that "the Shekinah is (therefore) the field of all possibilities. Spanning the upper and lower worlds, she translates divine thought into life on earth" (ibid: 29).

In this interpretation, the Shekinah is "pure openness" who "welcomes emanation but is vulnerable to the demonic"(ibid). The demonic, then, becomes the counterpart to the divine, the shadow element bent on overwhelming the Shekinah. The 'temurot' or demonic forces,
similar to the Lurianic 'shells', constitute a parallel emanation from Kether, who are simply "not nourished well" (ibid: 30). Since the Shekinah receives the divine flow directly, they seek to snatch her power. Thus a concept concerning the origination of evil is developed which is based on the idea of scarcity, rather than contraction.

In all cases which address this idea of the Shekinah's relationship to the negative forces, the state which leaves her unguarded is brought about by the perpetration of sin in the human dimension, an idea we will examine in more detail in the motifs of the exile and sacrifice. Thus far we have seen that the Shekinah occupies two places, for just as the Shekinah is below, she is on high, according to the Zohar (Waite 1960:351). We know that in very early apocryphal literature, such as Enoch 3, a voice emanates from the Shekinah, and speaks to the lower worlds (Dan 1982). A fine distinction is already beginning to be made here between the 'voice' and the absolute, unknowable Yahweh, or between "the hidden being of God and the figure that appears in the theophanies of his (similarly hidden) form" (Scholem 1962: 164).

By the time the Zohar became the major work of Jewish mysticism (during the Middle Ages), these ideas had been fleshed out in vivid images which frequently referred to the Shekinah as feminine hypostasis in relationship, yet still maintaining a strong sense of mystical identity. Many scholars find in the Zohar elements that are compensatory or missing in Rabbinic Judaism. In the 15th century, it was translated into Latin, and fathers of the Church, such as the famous Christian Kabbalist, Pico della Mirandola, found in it elements explicating the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation and other Christian themes. The sexual metaphor is all pervasive in the Zohar and the Christian Kabbalist, Arthur Waite, has devoted an entire chapter in his book, The Holy Kabbalah to these mysteries (1960).
On the Tree of Life, the chain of emanations begins with God the Father and God the Mother, related back to Genesis by the Zohar and characterized as the 'upper and lower' waters which were separated on the 2nd day of creation. But it is specifically the mysteries concealed in the Divine Names which Waite develops in his examination of the Zohar.

When the Holy Names were correctly pronounced, Kabbalists thought "the Holy Spirit reveals itself to him and his flesh trembles because of the strength of the Holy Spirit" (Idel 1988b: 98). Waite explains how the two Names of God used most frequently in the Bible (Elohim and IHVH) are related:

Elohim is a title of the Shekinah and so is Adoni, in which sense—but presumably for us in manifestation—she is called the 'Mirror of Jehovah' (IHVH).

(Waite 1960: 342)

In her aspect of the Mother,

she is the architect of worlds, acting in virtue of the Word uttered by God in creation. In respect of the myth of Paradise, the Shekinah is the Eden which is above, whence the river of life flows forth that waters the Garden below and this is also Shekinah as she is conceived in external things—as Bride, Daughter, Sister in the world below. (ibid: 342)

Furthermore,

there is an Elohim in transcendence—concealed and mysterious—an Elohim that judges above and one who judges below.

(ibid: 343)

Quoting the Zohar,
The sole object with which the Holy One...sends man into this world is to know that Jehovah is Elohim.

(ibid:343)

Waite explains that if we are to interpret Jehovah as the hidden (and obviously Father) side of God, and Elohim as the Mother, (Binah and Shekinah,) then the Zohar tells us they are inseparable:

Shekinah is...the mystery of man and God in the likeness of the Elohim, of the relation between things above and things below.

(ibid: 342)

He goes on to comment, however, that "union is not identity" (ibid). Rather Jehovah and Elohim are distinct, although together they form a unity. In Genesis, it is said, "And the Lord (IHVH) God (Elohim) formed (hu)man" (11:7). Humans are therefore said to be grafted onto Elohim, as the Elohim (the female principle) is grafted onto the male principle, Jehovah (IHVH).

The word 'Elohim ' itself is interesting in terms of fusing the male and female principles: Eloah is a singular noun for the Deity; with a masculine plural ending (IM), it unites a female potency to a male principle. There is also a mystical union in the sacred unutterable name IHVH, called the Tetragrammaton:

The letter Heh (H) which is above (that is, the first Heh) is the symbol of Shekinah in transcendence, while the final Heh represents the Shekinah below, or in manifestation, connected with the idea of Malkuth.

(Waite 1960: 345)
We may note, in this regard, that this half of the Tetragrammaton is feminine in gender: the Heh implies life and fruitfulness, and words ending in Heh are feminine. The Zohar says that "the letter Heh produced the heavens to give them life and to water them and the earth" (ibid: 345).

As the Heh in manifestation, she is both "repose of beings below" as well as a vehicle for the glimmerings of transcendence, that is, "especially to souls who have attained beatitude, which is defined as the vision of her" (ibid: 346). Waite agrees that the Shekinah is a hypostasis, or "that part of the Divine nature with which man is in communion (while) on earth" (ibid: 346). Although unclear about the definition of the word, except to say that in Yetzirah (or the world of Formations), she receives a body, (ibid), Waite assures us that "it is she who enables the Name to be expressed on earth, or God to be realized in the heart" (ibid: 346).

It is interesting to note in this analysis that the symbolism typically associated with the feminine--dark, mysterious, in essence, the Ground from which Being springs, is here associated with the masculine--with the unknowable Jehovah; while what emerges--the Light, the Glory, the name (Word)--typical animus images, eventually take the form of the feminine. The medieval text Fountain of Wisdom, explicating the Exodus verse 33:18, (alluded to earlier) says:

Therefore you cannot apprehend knowledge of this darkness, which was parallel to My existence. But from that point on you may know all: everything from and below the darkness...the power of My Name and My Glory.

(Dan 1986: 51)
Shekinah, then, as the Indwelling Presence, is the face of God which is perceivable:

To see the face of God or appear before his face was to share in the cult of the sanctuary (Ex 23:15; 34:20)...to see God face to face meant to experience him in intimacy and immediacy (Gen 32:31).

(Concordance NAB 1970: 183)

The word for 'face' in Hebrew means 'countenance' and also 'in the presence of' (Langenscheidt Dictionary).

From all this, it can be deduced that Shekinah is both concealed and visible, "conciliating the mysteries above and the mysteries below" (Waite: 349). In her role as upper Mother, she is identified with the pillar on the Tree known as the Pillar of Severity, associated with strength and judgement.

...these Gates are in the region of the Supreme Mother, who gives power to the mother below--a reference to the Shekinah in transcendence and in manifestation. This determines absolutely that Shekinah is in Binah and that the first Heh of the Divine Name is also therein. It is said further that the side of severity emanates from her, though she is not herself severity, and we know that the Pillar of severity is on the left side of the Tree, at the head of which is Binah...

(Waite 1960: 348)

Seen in the light of this dual nature, there is not really an inconsistency between the power, might and judgment of IHVH in Old Testament stories with these attributes on the Tree which belong to the Divine feminine.

In her gentle aspect, she is the attribute of understanding on the ...Tree of Life, the wise Mother. Spurned by her children and cut off from her Lord, she is Judgment, red with anger...

(Epstein 1978: 47)
As Binah, she is Mother of the entire Tree, whom she eventually 'raises' up. In Binah, we see the attributes of transcendent absorbing Spirit. In Malkuth, the Shekinah is the Mother at hand, immanent in creation. With one identification, she is powerful, with the other, she is in exile. With one, she is eternally united to the Ineffable Godhead, with the other, she is tragically separated. But because she is separated from the Source, she is united to us, she 'ensouls' matter by her divine Presence.

What Scholem perceives to be an entirely new element of symbolism in the Bahir is the concept of the Shekinah as soul, or the dwelling place of the soul (1965: 106). As a representation of the archetype of the woman as soul, the Shekinah is, of course, present in nature and in the individual. In her dual functions, she is also characterized with an ambivalent aspect: powers of mercy and judgement in the Hebrew Yahweh become alternately preponderant in the Shekinah (Dan 1986). Dominated by the attributes of stern judgement, which have now become the source of evil as a metaphysical reality, the powers of judgment made themselves independent and invaded the Shekinah (ibid.) She thus becomes 'demonically cut off' from the source of Life: the ambivalence of her character becomes fixed in the concept of the exile.

She has, therefore, a split function, and as we will see, she gets attacked by the devil in her function as earth Mother. Why this happens has always been one of the great mysteries of matter. It is as if the God-energy, manifesting as female, becomes split/dual when it manifests in the material plane: perhaps this is what makes her relatable. It is said that the Shekinah is the object of the mysteries relative to the works of creation (Waite 1960: 351) and that as long as the work of creation in history is unfinished--that is, until the day of
restitution—the work of the Shekinah is also unfinished. She is the architect whose ongoing work is "the history of the Shekinah herself" (ibid: 351).

The Zohar, therefore, offers us an explicit examination of the feminine dimension of God, both in Her transcendent function and in her function as intermediary:

...The intention of the Zohar has been to show in the most positive and unqualified way that the Shekinah...is female in essential aspect, whether as the Bride of god in that transcendent state wherein there is no distinction between her and the Holy One, or whether as the tutelary guide of humanity.

(Waite 1960: 344)

One legend says the Shekinah followed Adam and Eve into captivity, and she is thus said to be "the sacrifice which God has placed on His right and on His left hand" (Waite: 352). Because the final Heh has become detached from the Holy Union, i.e, the Divine Name, the source of all graces came with her. In this primal captivity and exile, she is the ongoing sacrifice. This is, however, only in her aspect as the 'lower mother', or Malkuth on the Tree. In her identification as Binah, the 'upper mother', she is eternally united to the Infinite Presence. The Kabbalah is unique in its ability to somehow hold these paradoxes: unity and hypostasis, transcendence and immanence together in one paradigm.
Chapter 3

EXILE

"She so pervades this lower world that if you search in deed, speech, thought and speculation, you will find Shekinah, for there is no beginning nor end to her." (Rabbi Joseph, 13th century)

(Epstein 1978: 47)

The Zohar tells us that the Shekinah is "that Divine Presence which walked in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the evening, (and) which went before Israel in the desert!" (Waite 1960: 343). In 'mythological time', however, much drama elapsed between these two events. The exile of a historical people had its precedent in this initial Archetypal Event, i.e., that "our prototypical parent was driven out of the Garden" (ibid: 352).

The Zohar explains that "the man was driven out and the Mother was driven out with him", (ibid: 352) basing this premise on the quote in Isaiah (50:1), "Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves and for your transgressions is your mother put away." Therefore, the Shekinah is said to have "followed him into the captivity of the senses" and thus it is "that the Shekinah suffered with mankind" (Waite: 352).

In numerous early apocryphal works, the image is evoked of a woman weeping and mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem. In the Apocalypse of Ezra, for example, a woman who is identified as 'Mother Zion' is portrayed as weeping, or in deep bereavement (Wineman 1988: 142). Many medieval mystics and prophets who had visions of the Shekinah reported her to be in deep mourning (Idel 1988a,b,c).
Some texts refer back to the Biblical story of Rachel weeping for her children as the first image later to become symbolically associated with the Shekinah, pointing specifically to the etymological association of the words themselves, e.g., a commentary on Jer. 31, says "Read not this as Rahel (Rachel) weeping for her children, but rather as Ruah-el, the Spirit of God weeping for her children." (Wineman 1988: 142). The Zohar explicitly states that this weeping figure is the Shekinah (Waite 1960).

Numerous myths seem to point to the idea that the exile of the Shekinah is simply due to the compassion of God, who always partakes in the joys and sorrows of Israel. This idea strongly suggests the development from the primitive conception that a people suffer, or evil is set loose upon the world, because of the impotence of the deity. Here, a more mystico-religious concept, the participation of God is made manifest in the history of a people. This idea furthermore came to fruition in a way that is strikingly even more personal: that the Deity also weeps, suffers, grieves. The image of the Sacred Heart or the Sorrowful Madonna is, therefore similar to the weeping Shekinah, and could represent the evolution of this archetype in the Christian tradition.

The Zohar reports that the angels wept when the sanctuary was destroyed and the Shekinah had to be exiled into a foreign land (Waite: 357). The idea of exile, of course, pre-dates Kabbalistic texts. The Talmud tells us that the Shekinah was with the children of Israel in every exile (Scholem 1965: 107). The Shekinah here is not yet identified as feminine. It was merely the Presence of God which was always with Israel. In Kabbalah, however, we saw that it signifies that "a part of God (i.e., the soul) is exiled from God" (ibid107). The purpose of the sexual symbolism in all the Kabbalistic and mythological literature, then, is to heal this cleavage: "the reunion of God and His Shekinah constitutes the meaning of
redemption" (ibid: 108), when "in uninterrupted union...the powers of generation will once again flow, unimpeded through all the worlds" (ibid).

Meanwhile, a midrash passage tells us how she grieves and beckons:

When the Shekinah left the Sanctuary, she returned to caress and kiss its walls and columns and cried and said, 'Be in peace, oh my Sanctuary, be in peace, oh my royal palace, be in peace, oh my precious house, be in peace from now on—be in peace! 

(Yusuf 1990a: 54)

This "dual epiphany", i.e., of the Shekinah mourning as well as the Shekinah offering consolation is the symbolic voice of "Divine empathy" (Wineman 1988: 143). It also points to the appropriate response of the devotee, which formed the basis of mystical practice in the Hasidic and certain Kabbalistic schools: "the quest to experience most intensely the sorrow of exile and the exile of the Shekinah also constitutes the way to annul that sorrow and exile" (ibid: 144). The ultimate meaning transcends grief itself by an act of reparation, and the legend thus serves as "paradigm of such lament and its significance" (ibid). We will examine weeping as mystical technique in a further section; for now, let us note that the most tragic of the exiles was the loss of the Sanctuary.

We recall the myth that God sent the Shekinah to dwell there (calling it the Tabernacle of Testimony) after forgiving the children of Israel for worshipping the Golden Calf. The indwelling of the Shekinah in the Sanctuary represented, in a special way, a deep abiding in conscious oneness with God's Spirit, the Ark itself being a testimony or remembrance of God's promises to the children of Israel.

There is a legend that the existence of the world depended on the construction of the Sanctuary, for only after it was constructed did the earth stand on firm ground; previously,
it had "always been swaying hither and thither" (Ginzberg V 3: 151). The tabernacle had separate parts which related to the 6 days of creation, and the two tablets carried in the Ark corresponded to heaven and earth. Likewise, the menorah candlestick with the 7 branches corresponded to the 7 planets. Perhaps we can infer that because the Shekinah dwelt in the Tabernacle, even though she was in exile with the children of Israel in the desert, not only the earth but all the worlds were held secure by her Presence.

The Ark itself was an image of the celestial Throne and was considered, of course, the most important part of the Tabernacle. It was spread over with a blue cloth, which resembled the color of the sky (Ginzberg V 3). These images suggest the famous Kabbalistic quote, "Kether (the Crown or Throne of the Tree) is in Malkuth, and Malkuth is in Kether." This doctrine points to an intimate relationship between God the Ineffable and God the Present, the 'meeting place' of which was represented by the Ark. The dwelling place of the Shekinah was characterized by a great sweetness, for the legend tells us that wherever the Ark was carried, miracles were wrought and a large column of smoke "perfumed with frankincense and myrrh" rose like a pillar out of the wilderness (Ginzberg V 3: 158).

Legends differ concerning the presence of the Shekinah in the Temple. Some say that as long as she dwelt there, the Temple could not be destroyed, but because she gradually withdrew to her original abode in heaven, it was left unprotected (Ginzberg V 6). Some say that for 13 years after withdrawing from the Temple, the Shekinah dwelt on the Mount of Olives. Others say she never left the Western wall (ibid). Still another has it that the Shekinah withdrew when Jerusalem was besieged and the prophet Zechariah's blood bespattered the sanctuary walls. In an apocryphal Christian text, the Protevangelium of James 24, this Zechariah was said to be the father of John the Baptist. A reference to this murder is made
in Mat 23:35, when Jesus essentially is cursing the scribes and the Pharisees and longing to rebuild Jerusalem. The imagery he uses here, interestingly, is very female: "How often have I yearned to gather your children as a mother bird gathers her young under her wing" (Ginzberg V 6: 396).

The myth of the Shekinah residing on the Mount of Olives says that she announced daily the proclamation of Hosea 5:15: "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face" (ibid: 393). The Mount of Olives is rich in legend itself. The Messiah is prophesied to reappear there (see Zech 14:4) with Elijah, who, at his bidding, will sound the Awakening trumpet. This is the legendary mountain where the ascension of Christ took place and was frequently visited by David, the beloved of God, as well. Olive oil is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, i.e., it is used for anointing. There is also the legend of the olive-leaf borne by the dove after the flood (Ginzberg V 5 & 6). Finally, in the purported apparitions of Mary in Egypt, witnessed by thousands of Muslims and Christians alike, she said nothing, but only held up an olive-branch, symbol of peace (Grosso: 1989).

The Shekinah, it seems, like other archetypal images of the feminine divine in the western tradition (Mary, Sophia) has a special affinity with the poor, sick and oppressed. There is a legend that says that the Western Wall will never be destroyed because the Shekinah blesses it in a special way. The reason is that, when lots were drawn at the time of the construction of the Temple, the western wall was relegated to the poor. While the rich brought precious stones, jewels, woods, etc., and hired heathens to do the work of building the other walls, the work of the poor was delayed because the men, women and children did all the work themselves with great care and attention, even though the wall was more meager. When the work was finally finished, the Divine Presence descended and rested upon the wall say-
ing, "The toil of the needy and the poor is precious in my eyes and my blessing shall be upon it." And a heavenly voice proclaimed, "Never shall the Western Wall be destroyed" (Nadich 1983: 368).

Another myth tells us that the Divine Presence stands just behind the Wall peeping through the crevices, observing the actions of humans. The Shekinah is in exile, still abiding in the Wall because, as one midrash interpretation has it, "My children, from the day I have destroyed my house below, I have not gone up to sit in my house above. I have instead been weeping, sitting amidst the dew and the rain" (ibid: 369).

The Shekinah reveals herself as one who suffers and yet consoles. One midrash states:

He whose heart is broken and whose spirit is low, and whose mouth rarely utters a word, the Shekinah walks with him every day...

(Patai 1990: 103)

It is said that since the time of Jacob, (see Gen.47:31) the Shekinah dwells at the head of the bed in a sick room. Jacob had asked God not to take him suddenly, but to let him be overcome with sickness before he died, so that he could set his house in order. When he saw the face of the Shekinah at the head of his bed, he was comforted, for he knew that he was soon to die and could tell his family his remaining wishes (Ginzberg V 3).

She also, it seems, has a special affinity for the innocent and, of course, the just. It is said she did not go into final exile until the school-children were exiled. She did not go into exile with the 12 tribes nor with the priests, but stayed behind with the children, "so beloved are the children of the Holy One: as it it written, (Lam 1:5): 'Her infants have gone into captivity before the enemy'" (Nadich 1983: 363). And, of the tribes of Israel, her favorite was Benjamin: myths give us two various reasons. One is that he was the only one truly pure
and just of all his brothers, as he took no part in the selling of his brother Joseph to the Egyptians. The other is that this tribe had such great trust in God: for when the Israelites arrived at the Red Sea, when the waters had not yet parted, they were the first to throw themselves in, with full trust that the Presence of God would protect them (Ginzberg V 3: 21).

It was because Moses was such a just man that the Shekinah came to dwell again with Israel after she had retreated to heaven because of the sins of men. When he had his vision on Mt. Sinai, he visited the 7 heavens and in the 2nd one (for the Shekinah was already drawing near to earth) he saw the Shekinah alongside myriads of angels "made of fire and water", with their faces turned toward her, offering praise (ibid V 3: 306). Another myth tells us that in this vision, Moses saw her offering herself up as food for the angels, "for the angels subsist on the glory of the Shekinah" (V 5: 263) in the same way that the children of Israel subsisted on the manna from heaven. Some say this, too, is what Moses subsisted on, during the 40 days and nights when he ate no food. He received nourishment from the radiance of the Shekinah, and when he returned from the mountain, his face shone with her glory (V 3: 142).

The famous mystic Elijah de Vidas said that the dwelling place of the Shekinah was not an external temple or the wailing wall, but only in the heart. And one can draw her Presence in the same way as the just, the long-suffering, the innocent always do: by cleaving to her alone, for "she will not bind her love to a man who is devoted to worldly matters" (Fine 1984: 142).

The Lurianic Kabbalists celebrated a rite commemorating Rachel and Leah, who are considered to be two aspects of the Shekinah: one (Rachel) exiled from God and lamenting,
and one (Leah) "in her perpetually repeated reunion with her Lord" (Scholem 1965: 149). Part of the ritual of lamentation consisted in weeping and rubbing the body with dust to imitate the Shekinah, called the "Beautiful one without eyes", who lies in the dust of the morning. This attribution came from the Zohar, which designated the Shekinah as the "virgin with no eyes" because she had lost them from weeping in exile.

One of the symbolic associations for these Kabbalists representing the exile of the Shekinah was the "lessening of the moon", when the Shekinah, sometimes called the "Holy Moon" seemed to disappear, or "be robbed of its sight and sent into exile" (Scholem 1965: 151). Until the messianic redemption, the moon would continually sink into darkness, until the Shekinah is eternally reunited with the Lord, at which time the prophecy of Isaiah 30:26 will be fulfilled. "The light of the moon will be like that of the sun." Scholem tells us that no other cosmic event seemed to the Kabbalists to be more "closely connected with the exile of all things, with the imperfection and the taint inherent in all beings, than this periodic lessening of the moon" (ibid: 152).

It is the "regeneration of the light after its total disappearance" that is "taken as a promise that all things would one day be rectified" (ibid: 152). The day preceding the new moon was set aside as a day of fasting and meditation in preparation for this symbolic event celebrating the great themes of exile and redemption. We see this theme (i.e., of participation in the unfolding of divine events in history) echoed in Waite:

"She and Israel are in exile together, in sorrow and loss together, and the path of penitence trodden by the one is the path of emancipation for both."

(Waite 1960: 358)
The Shekinah has a special fondness for the repentent sinner:

(For these) are accepted by the Shekinah as if they were righteous and pious persons who never sinned. They are carried aloft and seated next to the Shekinah...

(Patai 1990: 103)

All good actions, "even if performed by idolators" (ibid: 103) will draw down the Shekinah, who even descended on Baal’s prophets if they practiced hospitality. Waite tells us, in fact, that it is in this sense, i.e., the attraction of the Shekinah to good deeds, "that other nations have attracted the Shekinah toward them" (1960: 359). Indeed, "her benedictions are over the whole world" (ibid).

This theme, then, the "tragic mission to the impurest depths of exile" (Scholem 1965: 153) is what constituted Israel’s hope in the continued relationship with the omnipotent Yahweh. Deep in their hearts, the children of the patriarchs with their monotheistic vision knew they participated in a religious and ethical relationship via the Presence and this presence assured them that they had not been deserted.

Waite pauses to question whether this hypostasis was a "dream of the Shekinah" fabricated by the later Hebrews to prove that

she was more vitally and efficaciously with them than she had been with the patriarchs of old; that she was married to them not less closely than to Moses, prince of lawgivers; and that she was realized better as a presence (to them) than when she sat between the Cherabim... (1960: 358).

Human beings have a need, it seems, in their religious life, for this maternal aspect of the Deity, the feminine dimension of God. One modern commentator has said that:
in the midrash, the Shekinah’s voice is clearly a feminine voice
yearning for the restoration of a kind of lost wholeness.

(Yusuf 1990a: 55)

Whether through dream, myth, memory, or mystical vision, the Shekinah has somehow
made her Presence felt in the history of a people, and she has done it through her enduring
empathy and love. Rabbi Eliah de Vidas has written, "The love which the Shekinah bears
for us requires no proof" (Fine 1984: 139). As long as there is a human soul which calls out
to her, she is the willing and ongoing sacrifice.
Chapter 4

SACRIFICE

"She was driven out of the Garden of Eden with Adam, like a wife sent away by her husband, but it was for salvation of the world."

(Waite 1960: 353)

"Sacrifice" in Hebrew, (korban) is interpreted as something which brings near because, to quote the Bahir: "it brings the holy forms so near to one another that they become a single tree" (Scholem 1962: 79). To trace the evolution of sacrifice and its relationship to the Shekinah is also to examine the evolution of primitive magical practice into sophisticated theurgical concepts characteristic of a culture bent on maintaining its distinct view of Deity through covenant.

The prevalent theme associated with sacrifice in Old Testament writings is atonement. A myth is told that once a year, the demon Azazel was allowed to lurk close to the Matronit, with the hope of having sexual intercourse with her. If the sins of the children of Israel had accumulated, he succeeding in attaching himself to her, and she was destined to be a victim of his lustful design until the Day of Atonement. At that time, the scapegoat was hurled down a cliff and Azazel, attracted to the animal sacrifice, would release the Shekinah, who then "could ascend to heaven and reunite with her husband, the King" (Patai 1990: 143). This was apparently a rite practiced over a long period of time in ancient Hebrew history. Other similar accounts (e.g., Lev.16:10) simply tell of the banishment of the goat:

The high priest, after having completed the work of atonement within the tabernacle before God, then came out, and confessed over the
living goat the sins of the people; at the same time laying both hands upon its head, and thus typically transferring them to the animal; which was then sent into the wilderness, never more to return; and thus the sins reckoned to it were no more to be remembered.

(Soltau 1972:53)

In this story, the goat serves both the function of removing Israel's sins and transferring them to their 8 instigator, Azazel, and, in the case of the myth, also sidetracking him for the time necessary for the Shekinah to be freed. The drama of this practice, which was probably the foundation for the aforementioned myth, is cast in detail in Lev. 16 and 17, where God explains how to purify the altar, tabernacle, etc., with the blood of a goat. In this Biblical passage, there are two goats mentioned: one for the Lord, which was sacrificed, and one sent out to Azazel. The concept of expiation permeated Old Testament theology, but the idea was not to appease God's anger or cultivate God's favor, as in many pagan sacrifices. Rather, it was a method to remove obstacles (sins) which blocked the children of Israel's relationship with Yahweh.

The way to remove these obstacles was through the blood of the victims of sacrifice. According to Lev. 17:11, the life of the body was considered to be in the blood: 'it is the blood, as the seat of life that makes for atonement.' These rites clearly suggest that the victim and its blood were not intended to be substitutes for the sinner, in the sense that the victim was subjected to the punishment due to the sinner's sin. Rather, the life blood of the victim was considered to have the power of purifying the altar and the tabernacle, the symbol of God and his benevolent Presence (Shekinah)...with the pouring of the life-blood was removed all that impeded the flow of God's goodness to man.

(Concordance NAB 1970: 44)

It is the blood of atonement that blots out
the page of sin, and hides it from the eye of God. The secret sins, which have stood out in their glaring evil...are hidden by the blood sprinkled on the mercy-seat.

(Soltau 1972: 87)

Likewise, the blood on the door-posts at Passover served this function: to hide or protect the children of Israel from the angel-Destroyer. (see Ex.12:13) So we see here that the goat (which interestingly, later became a symbolic representation of the devil in Christian mythology), was sacrificed as a means of purifying the abode of the Shekinah.

The door of entry (to the tabernacle) was closely connected with the altar, upon which victims were constantly burning; upon which blood was sprinkled, and at the bottom of which blood was poured.

(Soltau 1972: 71)

In Lev.17, the idea is clearly delineated that blood is sacred, and should be used as peace offerings only. When animals and birds were slaughtered for food, there was a strict prohibition of the eating of blood, and the laws of Shechita (ritual slaughter) were very exacting so the killing was done cleanly and with the least infliction of pain by a trained slaughterer (Schonfield 1962).

There is apparently a great mystery connecting blood, life and spirit. 'Blood' in Hebrew is 'Dam', and is the root of the word 'Adam'(man), as well as 'Adamah', the earth. (Ben Yehuda) Blood has been used in magical ceremonies the world over to invoke spirit manifestations. In the Old Testament, it is clearly a symbol of the covenant and a necessary ingredient for the Presence of the Shekinah. The first reference, in fact, we have in the Bible which points to a 'spirit presence' was with Abraham (whose name was changed by the addition of the feminine Heh or H) when God originally formed the covenant with him. The
story told there (Gen:15) concerned a dream which Abraham had wherein God appeared to him promising him great posterity and demanding the severed carcasses of a three year old heifer, goat and ram. The next day, Abraham slaughtered these animals and as the sun set, he fell into a trance, lying between the cut-up parts. In a "deep, terrifying darkness" (Gen.15:12), Abraham heard the voice of God, along with the physical phenomenon of the Presence; i.e., smoke and a "flaming torch which passed between the (slain) pieces." (Gen. 15:17) One commentator on this passage says:

Although the text does not mention it, Abraham no doubt walked between the split carcasses.

(N.A. Bible footnote: 16)

because

as the Bible and also contemporary inscriptions make clear, agreements were sometimes ratified by walking between the divided pieces of animals while the contracting parties invoked on themselves a fate similar to that of the slaughtered beast if they should fail to keep their word.

(N. A. Bible footnote: 953)

This is apparently substantiated by the Biblical passage in Jer. 34:18, which speaks about the violation of the covenant, i.e., those "who did not observe the terms of My agreement, I will make like the calf which they cut into, between whose parts they passed." This woeful proclamation came at the same time that Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, was besieging Jerusalem. In that chapter, the reason given for the anger of Yahweh was because the citizens of Jerusalem had failed in their agreement to set free their slaves. God proclaims (through Jeremiah) "You changed your mind and profaned My Name by taking back your male and
female slaves to whom you had given their freedom....I will make you an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth." (Jer. 34:17) The pact had been broken. Jerusalem was about to fall.

What is interesting about how these passages link together is that from the time of the first sign of the presence of God and the covenant with Abraham, to the time when the pact was broken, the dominant symbols for the deep abiding relationship formed by the covenant are blood and fire, both powerful archetypal images of spirit. The Shekinah, we recall, is not a feminine image of the God-energy like her pagan counterparts, in terms of being identified solely with matter and earth. Her predominant symbolic representations, in fact, cast her as transcendent spirit, especially in these early texts which identify God as Elohim. 9

In the Biblical story just recounted (i.e., wherein Abraham walked between the split carcasses accompanied by the presence of the spirit in the form of smoke and fire), a myth is told which elaborates upon the demon theme, introducing Azazel again. He came in the disguise of a vulture to feed off the carcasses (Patai 1964: 153) but Abraham guarded them closely and he repelled him. Azazel-- according to myth and supposedly recorded by Enoch--fell from heaven in the 10th generation of Adam (Patai 1964:100).

So as early as Genesis, emerging spirit entities are beginning to become conceptualized in a way which is clearly split off from the unity of a monotheistic Yahweh. In the actual Genesis account, however, the spirit of God is not yet conceived as the Shekinah (as she is developed in subsequent literature). Later, of course, the Presence of God, or His Shekinah became intimately associated with the pillar of fire in the wilderness (Ex. 13:21), and the column of fire or cloud which hovered over the tent where Moses talked with God.
Azazel, as a distinct personality, however, is mentioned not only in midrash commentaries but as early as Lev.16:8: "Taking two male goats, and setting them before the Lord at the entrance to the meeting tent, he shall cast lots to determine which one is for the Lord and which one is for Azazel." In the idea of the covenant, a relationship is formed between an abstract Deity who has no image and cannot be conceptualized, and the children of Israel via the images of fire:

"To the Israelites, the Glory of God was seen as a consuming fire on the mountaintop." (Ex. 24:17)

and blood:

"This atonement is to be made once a year with the blood of the atoning sin offering. This altar is most sacred to the Lord." (Ex. 30:10)

Patai has pointed out (1964: 154) that covenants were, in ancient Biblical times, "cut" or "passed through", not "made". And this is verified also in one Biblical translation which interprets the Gen 15:18 passage ("the Lord made a covenant with Abraham") thus:

'made' means literally 'cut a covenant' (and)...derives from the ceremony of cutting animals in two.

(NA Bible footnote: 1)

As late as Ex. 24:5-8 (approximately 1290 BCE) this practice was still a popular cult. In the revelation at Sinai (characterized by signs and wonders of the Shekinah in the forms of "fire", the "clouds of glory" etc.) the oath-takers were sprinkled with one-half of the blood of the sacrificed animals and the other half "splashed on the altar" (Ex.24:6) as a sign of the covenant.
Idel calls these and similar practices "drawing-down theurgy" (1988a:166) and characterizes them as central to the covenant of the "indwelling". It was a combination of the "good deeds" of the children of Israel (keeping the commandments) together with ritual structures which could, through incantations, and use of sacrifices bring about the descent of celestial entities...the Temple and the service performed there were thought of as able to attract the Shekinah...the locus of revelation (of which) was between the two Cherubim. Their perfect state of union—even sexual union—is a function of performing the will of God...in order to restore the dwelling of the Shekinah, not only is a certain structure required but also certain kinds of human acts—the rituals of Judaism.

(Idel 1988a:167)

In this analysis, the calling down of the Shekinah and the subsequent indwelling may manifest in either the human body or in the structure itself (ibid:168). In either case, prophetic and phenomenal possibilities were part of the locus of revelation—i.e, the descent was understood as part of the secret revelations of the Torah.

Here, God is...compelled to appear together with the seat of glory...this practice must be compared to the Hermetic and neoplatonic techniques for obtaining revelations by causing the descent of gods into statues specifically prepared for this purpose...Like the Shekinah between the Cherubim, the hermetics heard the voice of their gods emerging from a special structure.

(Idel 1988a: 168)

This seems to corroborate Scholem’s theory that initial Jewish esoteric tradition "absorbed Hellenistic elements similar to those we actually find in Hermetic writings" (1960:34). Apart from this specific form of theurgy involving sacred place, the concept of
sacrificial theurgical activity is intimately involved, in Jewish ritual, with 'universe-maintaining' activity:

sacrifices have cosmic implications, their performance being tantamount to the creation of heaven and earth...(and) groups of Israelites who recited the account of creation (read the Torah) simultaneously with the performance of sacrifices, performed a similar function.

(Idel 1988a: 171)

The sense of communion (i.e., with the Deity) in ancient Jewish ritual is to be distinguished from the surrounding communion rites common to the sacrificial cults which made burnt offerings as food for the gods (Yerkes, 1952). The custom of burning the sacrificial animal was common to Canaanite neighbors and leaked into early Israelite practice of the holocaust; however, the Bible reacts sarcastically to the conception, common in pagan religions, that the sacrifice was a food offering to the Deity. (e.g., Deut. 32:38, Psm. 50:13) Yahweh was, rather, perceived as "spirit and not flesh, and (did) not need man's fleshly gifts" (Gray 1925: 43).

In the story of Manoah (Jgs. 13), when the "angel of the Lord" appeared and told him he was to be the father of Samson, the angel also refused food, but suggested rather a sacrifice, and when it was made, ascended back to heaven in the flames. To the Israelites, sacrifice was a "pledge of communion with the divinity" (Concordance 1970: 590) and was frequently accompanied by a banquet, "just as meals among men sealed their relationship with each other" (ibid: 590). The gifts to God called up feelings of gratitude and joy, and so, in Deuteronomy sacrifice is preeminently regarded as a joyful feast eaten before Yahweh and in remembrance of what he had done. To sacrifice, to eat before Yahweh, to rejoice before Yahweh, have all become synonymous. (Gray 1925: 47)
In addition, it went beyond the step of the "common meal of earlier men", at which the gods were the honored guests, to one which signified the meal of worship, and the "spiritual significance of the worshippers co-operation" with God, who had made a covenant with them (Yerkes 1952: 200).

When monotheism was recognized as the first premise of all true religion, the sacrifice set forth the ideal of complete co-operation with God.

(Yerkes 1952: 200)

On Sinai, Moses first sealed with a visible rite God's adhesion to the children of Israel, expressed in the covenant document, "Then he took blood and sprinkled it on the people saying,"This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you." (Ex 24:8)

From the original covenant with Abraham until the dissolution of the pact in Jeremiah, this cult had tremendous power. Let us understand these concepts clearly: an extremely important injunction throughout Jewish history was that to eat blood was strictly forbidden—it was like eating the soul; in the covenant with Noah, for instance, blood is regarded as so extremely sacred, it was what made human like the divine. (Gen.9:6) Blood must be given back to the earth "as a recognition of God's absolute dominion over life" (Concordance 1970: 68). We recall here the intimate relationship etymologically with blood (dam) and earth (adamah):"Only ye shall not eat the blood, but pour it out upon the earth like water." (Deut. 12:16)

In the time of the covenant with Moses, the blood was sprinkled on the Holy of Holies, the dwelling of the Shekinah. This seems an obvious gesture linking the presence of the ineffable Divine with the earth through the vehicle of the life-force in the blood. This should
be apparent to anyone who reads the biblical texts and the subsequent myths closely. The festival called Nisan, it is said, was celebrated after the priests had completed construction of the Tabernacle. It was the "first day on which the Shekinah came to dwell among Israel...(and) the first day on which priests performed sacrificial rites" sealing this new covenant (Ginzberg V.3: 181).

An interesting myth concerning the first sacrifice after the restoration of the Temple following the Babylonian exile and the reformation of the Jewish religious community (560 BCE) is the following: When they set about restoring the Temple, they noticed the celestial fire which had descended from heaven at the time of Moses was no longer with them. This fire had been kept burning as long as the Temple had stood but, it was said, was hidden when Jeremiah had made the prophecy about the destruction of the city. Since they did not want to bring a normal earthly fire into the Temple, they prayed to God in supplication. Then an old sage appeared who led the people to a cave where Jeremiah had apparently buried the holy fire. After rolling away the stone, they discovered a spring flowing with a black oil. The prophet Ezra ordered this fluid to be sprinkled on the Temple altar and immediately "an all-consuming flame shot up" which the priests then guarded so it would never be extinguished (Ginzberg V.4: 354).

The sacrificial cult of the Old Testament continued nearly another 600 years, until the destruction of the Temple the second time in 70 CE. The prophets, in the later stages of the development of the Hebrew faith, were spiritualizing the concept of sacrifice in the minds of the faithful, so that the communion rite was becoming more abstract.
...not the material communion of primitive thought, but communion of spirit. Thus in reaching this point, even in the realm of sacrificial thought, the religion has traveled the whole way from a prehistoric, material starting point through stages where the material still exercises its influence, particularly in maintaining a ritual of which the original meaning had been outgrown, to a completely spiritual goal.

(Gray 1925: 54)

There seems to be a deep feeling of discomfort in the minds of many today when discussing the political/social implications concerning the shedding of blood and its relationship to the religious life of a specific cult or nation. Particularly in the patriarchal traditions: the Judeo-Christian and Muslim concepts of sacrifice have aroused much negative speculation on the part of theorists who espouse a prior peace-loving goddess culture. There is not time or space to delve into the ramifications of this argument here, other than to mention that very little evidence can be garnered demonstrating that goddess cults were devoid of sacrifice themselves. The point here is rather to emphasize the underlying numinous quality this primitive rite had to the human psyche and to note the powerful charge it had in ancient theurgical rites involving the Shekinah.

It could also be argued that one of the principle ideas distinguishing Jewish cultural and religious practices from its surrounding pagan neighbors was the beginning of the development of the ego, and with it the accompanying ideas of sin and guilt. Yahweh was not appeased so much as appealed to. A relationship was sought through the covenant, and sacrificial rites, though still tinged with ideas of magic and mana, were giving way to concepts of purification and propitiation.

To the Hebrews, the idea of sacrifice was not connected to the "endless cycles of the Great Round...in sacrificial festivities in which the violence of destruction merged with
sexual ecstasy and drunken intoxication" (Whitmont 1982: 57), as characteristic of the previous goddess cults. Primitive magic was beginning to be transformed into theurgical activities which had no precedent in preceding polytheistic cultures. Fishbane (1981) explains that transcendence of the anxieties of historical existence was not achieved through attempts to coax nature to be fruitful through fertility rituals but through an inner worldly conformity to the covenant.

By the time of the destruction of the Temple, the Deuteronomic reform had given to Jewish sacrificial thought and practice the concept of the worship of one God in one place. After the destruction of the Temple the second time, sacrifices for ritual purposes, at least in terms of keeping the altar of the Shekinah purified, gave way to other ritual forms which acted as a kind of displacement, i.e., fasting and prayer. Midrash commentaries pointed out that "prayer is vastly superior to sacrifice"; (Ginzberg V 4: 215) or fasting was recommended in its place. The "theurgical operation of sacrifice was transferred to the letters of the great Name" i.e., the Tetragramaton, (Idel 1988c:54) a theme that was picked up and made of utmost importance to the Kabbalists, for whom it was tantamount to causing a unification of all of the Sephiroth.

Midrash-talmudic texts presented the idea that prayer ascended and was transferred into the crown of God by the angel Sandalfon who, in the Kabbalistic scheme, was attributed to Malkuth on the Tree of Life:

Sandalfon is the powerful fire who sits near to the secret of the Shekinah. He emits sparks of fire and flame which are all-consuming.

(Idel 1988c: 86)
The crown of God is an obvious reference here to the crown on the Tree, Kether, which is the Hebrew word for crown. One ancient treatise, called the Sepher ha Hokhmah explained that by means of the divine Name, prayer ascends and

sits on the left side of God, like a bride...and it is called 'daughter of the King', for the name of the Shekinah that is with him.

(Idel 1988c: 195)

Idel tells us that this idea eventually came to be associated also with the Shekinah because prayer was thought to be identical with the 10th Kingship (Malkuth), where the Shekinah resides, and that prayer was viewed as the female entity, the bride of God. In this new interpretation the angel/Shekinah transforms souls through sacrifice. In an ancient manuscript quoted by Scholem we read:

    And the balls of his eyes cast out and send forth
    torches of fire, and these enkindle him
    and burn him.
    For the fire which comes out
    from the man who beholds,
    this enkindles him and burns him...
    who comes crowned
    to the throne of his Glory.

    (1960: 60)

And in the 15th century, Christian Kabbalist Picodella Mirandola wrote:

    As man and the priest of inferior things sacrifices to God the souls of unreasoning animals, so Michael, the higher priest, sacrifices the souls of rational animals.

    (Waite 1960: 445)

When the Shekinah became personified to a Kabbalistic mystic, it was thought that ritual prayer and correct intonation of the Tetragrammaton caused her to dwell in the prophet, who
then became the temple or vessel, in essence "tantamount to a limb of the Shekinah" (Idel 1988a: 169). One anonymous ecstatic Kabbalist wrote:

Whoever knows it (the divine Name) and prays using it, the Shekinah dwells upon him and he prophesies like the ancient prophets.

(Idel 1988a:169)

It is this gift of prophecy we will examine next.
Chapter 5

SHEKINAH & PROPHECY

"In vision, I will make myself known to him, in a dream I will speak to him." (Num. 12:6)

"That the Shekinah can be seen is almost commonplace in the midrash." (Patai 1990:103)

Abraham Abulafia, a famous mystic of the 13th century, said that "at the time the prophet prophesies, God's abundance creates a corporeal intermediary, which is the angel" (Idel 1988b: 90). We have seen that, philosophically at least, personifications are problematic in Jewish monotheism, especially if the Deity is conceived as being incorporeal. Abulafia was specific about this point:

All the camps of the Shekinah have there neither image nor corporeal form, but spiritual emanation, and likewise on the other angelic levels. However, the 10th level (Malkuth on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life) which is closest to human beings, is visible to the prophets.

(Idel 1988b: 90)

It appears that the Shekinah is manifest as an actual hypostasis (that is, an apparition) in Malkuth to some Kabbalists; for others, she is more of an abstract personification or she is an emanation of Deity there. However, Malkuth—the earth—is most often delineated as being the place whereby the intermediary/angelic entity can be heard and envisioned. Other rabbis and sages spoke of making the heart the throne wherein can be invited "the angel of God...which is the intermediary between yourself and your Creator" (ibid: 88). Rabbi Moshe
Luzzatto, who, it was said, had the most profound understanding of Judaism that any mortal could attain, wrote that:

the revelation of God’s Glory is what initiates everything transmitted in prophetic vision. This is then transmitted to the power of the imagination in the prophet’s soul, which in turn forms images of the concepts forced upon it by the power of the highest revelation.

(Kaplan, trans. 1983:209)

Abulafia said that after certain mystical disciplines which he prescribed were performed, "I have no doubt that the Glory will be revealed to you and appear before you" (Idel 1988b: 88) or it will "bring you speech so you will feel its power" (ibid: 88). We note that, although the Shekinah is referred to here as an attribute (i.e., It), the Glory of God becomes, in certain cases, a distinct personification to devotional Kabbalists. Some of the more magical schools believed that the 'angel' or 'image' of this Glory (which is a common name for the Shekinah) would appear to the initiate if the proper words or mantras (Hebrew Names) were intoned. For Abulafia's students, if the "human form and (other) visions of prophecy" do not appear after pronouncing certain words or verses, then one should start over and do them more properly (ibid:89).

Now this intermediary is, we noted, sometimes taken to be the Shekinah herself or sometimes the angel Gabriel, who also seems to bring visions and prophecies. In Kabbalistic lore, this angel came to be associated with the Hebrew letter Shin, the symbol of the Holy Spirit (its shape resembles tongues of fire), and is known as the Holy Letter. It eventually became associated with the Judgment key of the Tarot (which is assigned to the letter Shin). We recall that the Shekinah is called the 'redeeming angel' by the Zohar because she is like
the divine agent in the world whose task is to support the children after the Judgment (Waite, 1960).

This 'angel of the Lord' made numerous appearances in the Old Testament, frequently to speak to the Hebrew prophets, as well as to work the signs and wonders so common to ancient Biblical mythical tradition. Zechariah, for example, said, "the angel spoke with me" (4:4), revealing to him many apocalyptic visions (i.e, the 4 horsemen, the New Jerusalem). The way that the Shekinah/angel made Itself known seems to have taken two basic forms. One was by means of 'transmission', predominantly characteristic of the classical prophets. The other, earlier, form was by means of ecstatic trance, and was probably characteristic of a cultural consciousness which had not yet developed a strong egoic sensitivity (Knight, 1947). ¹²

It was believed since Talmudic times that God spoke to Moses in the Voice of the Shekinah. Abulafia explains:

When it says, 'Moses spake and God answered him by a voice' it must have been a voice similar to that of Moses. How can this be? God is not human. You must know that the body is full of holes and cavities, from which you may understand how the Shekinah dwells in the body which is pierced and contains cavities which produce speech. It is known that sound is heard more loudly in a place which is hollow or pierced, as caves, mountains, ruins, whose interior is hollow. So we must become hollow to hear the voice of the Shekinah.

(Idel 1988b: 55-56)

He compares the body to a cavity or hole which is able to produce a sound when the wind blows, similar to the process whereby the Holy Spirit, i.e, the Shekinah, moves in the human being and gives rise to prophecy. ¹³ The earlier, ecstatic prophets were, in fact,
considered to be like "an instrument full of speech" (ibid 56). If a musician was considered to be a prophet (e.g., Sam 10:5; 2 Kings 3:15) he was also said to be the musical instrument.

Philo believed that Shekinah spoke through the mouth of Moses and that the revelations at Sinai were like "music of instruments sounding aloud" (Ginzberg V 6: 36). Early Israelite prophecy was characterized by inspired exaltation that was probably provoked by music and dance (see Sam 10:5-12; 19:20-24). Passages in Samuel point to the phenomenon of group prophetism, organized around well-known centers of worship. The term 'sons of the prophets', used frequently in Samuel and Kings most likely denoted these cults which exercised, as part of their ministry "manifestations of collective ecstasy" (Concordance NAB 1970: 550).

Max Weber, in his classic Ancient Judaism looks at another feature of Old Testament prophecy, warrior ecstasy:

Warrior ecstasy occurs either as collective ecstasy or as individual ecstasy of the charismatic hero. The community ecstasy is produced by the war dance and the meat or alcohol orgy of the warriors...Most distinct is ...the war orgy of the Israelites (e.g., 1 Sam. 4:5) upon the arrival of the Ark...in the war camp...What seemed weird to the Philistines...(was) presumably (a ) war dance around the Ark. Then there was the occasionally mentioned (1 Sam 14:32) eating of raw flesh and drinking of blood--hence against normal ritual-- after the victorious battle.

(Weber 1952: 94)

Weber calls this type of early warrior prophet the "ecstatic berserk" the archetype of which was Samson, who

when the spirit...seized him...destroyed lions, set fire to fields, tore down houses and...slew any number of men...(ibid: 94)
Epiphany events undoubtedly characterized the visionary spirit phenomena surrounding the Ark, and as Weber notes, is referred to numerous times in the biblical literature. By the time the Book of Judges discusses prophets, however, the divine fusion of prophet with spirit had altered somewhat:

Yahweh himself has already changed into a divine messenger

and:

the recipient of the epiphany always hears (a) corporeal voice (ibid: 107).

The noun 'minhah' is used for the 'resting' of the divine Spirit upon a prophet and essentially means the gift of prophecy, (Heschel 1962) e.g., Isa 11:2, or Num. 11:26. It is said that before the building of the Tabernacle, many nations shared the gift of prophecy with Israel, but after Moses, it was restricted to the Hebrew prophets (ibid: 1962). This is perhaps due to the fact that the nature of prophecy was radically different in the developing Israelite nation. Prophetic revelation, Heschel tells us, is "motivated by the divine pathos, which is charged with ethos and relates itself to human conduct seen in terms of good and evil" (1962: 454). This was distinct from divination, known throughout the ancient world and common to the early Hebrew prophets as well. Mantic or ecstatic prophecy, then, is characteristic of the shaman or pythoness, who was possessed or overpowered by the Deity and who served as its mouthpiece. This differs from the classical Hebrew prophet who was in posession of his or her mental capacities, "since in the basic prophetic view there can be no relation between man and God other than the spiritual-ethical relation between the I and the Thou" (Cassirer 1966: 241).
Many scholars believe that characteristic of classical Jewish prophecy is this total absence of being possessed by the divinity:

the prophet knows that he keeps his own personality. It is God who manifest some truth to him, who speaks to him and causes him to act. Revelation is through inspiration. From the psychological point of view, inspiration is experienced...when in his interior world he becomes aware of a whole ensemble of ideas...impulses and sensations had with such force and spontaneity that he knows they are not his own, nor the fruit of his own labor or reflection, but must come from elsewhere.

(Concordance NAB 1970: 552)

Heschel insists that even in early Hebrew history, prophets were not simply "tellers of fortune, giver of oracles, seers, and ecstasies" (1962: 21). Rather, they were messengers of God:

His sense of election and personal endowment is overshadowed by his sense of a history-shaping power.

(ibid: 21).

It was the prophets who, with their iconoclastic statements on the nature of sacrifice, began to change the prevailing religious practices. We see the stirrings of this even in pre-exilic times: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" (1 Sam 15:22) The understanding of God's presence, the Shekinah, was being interpreted differently than in the earlier manifestations of the Spirit in ecstatic prophecy, characterized by the music, dancing and rapture which was so Dionysian in nature. This same Spirit phenomenon would, however, make Itself known in the life of the early Christian church, again to submerge after the first two centuries.
Heschel explains that "Amos and the prophets who followed him not only stressed the primacy of morality over sacrifice, but even proclaimed that the worth of worship, far from being absolute, is contingent upon moral living" (ibid: 195). The evolution of Spirit epiphanies was becoming less concerned with theurgical activities and more with justice, compassion and the moral good. The characteristic distinguishing all Hebrew prophetic phenomena, however, is that it always "presupposes the decisive impingement of Yahweh upon history" (Napier 1962: 59). This is true whether in premonarchic times (Abraham, Aaron, Miriam, Deborah and Moses) or with the later classical prophets (Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Amos, Isaiah, etc.). The repeated themes are election (i.e., the chosen people) and covenant, rebellion and judgment, compassion and redemption (Napier 1962). Old Testament prophecy is both political and religious, because the children of Israel were seeking to assert their unique world view:

For in monotheism the fundamental revelation of the divine does not occur in the form of time which nature discloses in the transformation and periodic recurrence of its forms. This form of change can provide no image for God's imperishable being.

(Cassirer 1966: 119)

Prophets who were interested in religious reform, especially the canonical prophets of the 8th and 7th centuries, stressed foremost the necessity of understanding the character and will of God and to reflect that in the nation.

It was a matter of revitalizing the life of the people by the abolition of injustice and oppression and by the abstention from that debauchery and drunkenness which characterized so much of the religion of the day.

(Rowley 1963: 21)
Given this knowledge of the intention of the Hebrew prophets in shaping the consciousness of the people, coupled with the fact that it was the Shekinah which was supposed to have been the Voice speaking through them, it is rather far-fetched to assume that the Shekinah is a remnant of the Near-Eastern goddesses. Most rabbis since Talmudic times severely frowned upon those forms of prophecy which were characteristic of the pagan prophets, i.e., ecstasy and soothsaying, emphasizing rather the use of conscious spiritual will. Maimonides believed that in prophetic vision "the Active Intellect influences the rational faculties and through them the imaginative faculties, which become perfect and active" (Heschel 1962: 340). The Zohar tells us that Moses "received the divine message standing and with all his senses, unimpaired, and he comprehended it fully" (ibid: 340).

Early Church fathers, on the other hand, interpreted prophetic behavior to be ecstatic and inspired by the same Spirit that descended on the apostles at Pentecost. Justin Martyr, for example, maintained that the Spirit used the prophet like a "cither or lute" and that Zechariah saw the angel, not in his waking condition, but in ecstasy. (Heschel, p 34) This was probably because ecstasy was the accepted form of prophecy in the early Church. The reason many Hebrew scholars have such problems with identifying ecstatic prophecy with the classical prophets is that it would naturally lead to a depreciation of the personalistic religion which evolves in the Old Testament.

If ecstasy is understood as the well-known mental state in which the ego fully loses consciousness of itself and becomes completely absorbed in the Divine, in the so called 'unio mystica', there can be no talk of ecstasy in connection with the Israelite prophets.

(Lindblom 1967: 106)
They were rather recipients of Divine Revelations. This divine word was unique in its revelatory qualities because God was perceived, first and foremost, as transcendent, unlike the surrounding nature cults (Frankfort 1977). As the Voice of Yahweh, this concept of the Shekinah carried with it a unique perception of ego, consciousness, time and history.

The God of the psalmists and prophets was not in nature...for in the myth of the chosen people the ineffable majesty of God and the worthlessness of man are correlated in a dramatic situation that is to unfold in time and is moving toward a future where the distant yet related parallels of human and divine existence are to meet in infinity...not cosmic phenomenon, but history itself had become...a revelation of the dynamic will of God.

(Frankfort 1977: 370)

Heschel points out that this revelation frequently occurred against the will of the prophet, unlike mystical experience, which frequently results from a craving or yearning for communion with God. The standard formula was: "The word of the Lord came to me" (e.g., Jer. 1:9). This Word, we saw, became identified as the Active Intellect, in post-Talmudic times, and was identical to the Holy Spirit or Shekinah of the Lord. By the time medieval prophecy became a dominant movement in Jewish culture, there was little distinction between the experience of the Jewish mystic and the prophet who communed with the Shekinah.

Again, music was said to draw the Shekinah in some of the mystical schools, for "the art of song-making...has the effect of rousing the intellectual power which resides in the soul" (Idel 1988c: 57). Idel tells us that Gabriel and the Shekinah are both related to the Active Intellect (a phrase used frequently by Maimonides) which forms thought-forms by virtue of speech and imagination and which later became associated with the organ of mystic
perception by the Kabbalists. The sage Ibn Ezra, alluding to the Biblical quote Num. 12:6 (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) said:

The Active Intellect, which they call the Shekinah...will teach him during the time of his concentration and while he is asleep.

(Idel 1988a: 161)

So it seems that the intermediary (Gabriel, Shekinah, Holy Spirit) or attribute (Active Intellect, Glory, In-dwelling Presence) are frequently confused or used interchangeably. All are certainly associated with prophecy. The Spirit of the Lord is hypostatized in both rabbinical and mystical literature as the Holy Spirit, and in its identification as the Active Intellect was generally associated with technique e.g., it was thought that "concentration brings about the Holy Spirit" (Idel 1988c: 124) which brings one to prophecy, and that if the prophet was not properly prepared he or she would be unable to decipher the contents of the vision. The sage Abi Zimra (early 15th century) wrote:

For at times the prophet would direct his thoughts and contemplate, and with a slight arousal would understand the intentions of God, even in a mysterious metaphor or parable. And at times he would not be ready and he would (then) concentrate and see the vision and the parable.

(Idel 1988c: 126)

The prophet, it seems, was not infallible in his predictions or interpretations (which frequently was cause for arguments among Old Testament prophets) ¹⁵ and this was understood to result from the inability of the prophet to abide continually with the Active Intellect. "The operation of a prophet is different from the operation of an angel" who did not deliver false messages. However, due to the complex makeup of human nature "that
remains with the prophet" he does not cleave to the Active Intellect, which therefore "does not continually abide with the prophet" (ibid: 64). Thus we see the distinct development, in Shekinah or spirit epiphany events, of discernment. We see this same sequence of events in Spirit phenomenon in the early Church. There the question became "Is this spirit really the Holy Spirit?" Here it is rather, "Am I interpreting the message of the Holy Spirit correctly?"

If not, more concentration was required to 'abide' in the Spirit.

This 'abiding' took on distinct erotic overtones, as we shall see. The Intellect was frequently spoken of as the "crown of the princess--referring to the sphere of Malkuth" (ibid: 118); it was through concentration and withdrawal from the objects of sensation that the prophet could cleave "to the supernal ideal princess--the Shekinah--and then to God Himself" (ibid: 118).

It appears that the Shekinah, as the Active Intellect, in no way is equal to God; rather, like Mary in the Christian tradition, she is the intermediary. The Zohar says that "all those who wish their prayers to reach heaven should unite themselves to the Shekinah" (Waite 1960: 361).

We will see in the next section how important this feminine intermediation was to the patriarchs as well as sages in post-Talmudic times in the form of their wives, who represented the physical embodiment of the Shekinah to devoted rabbis. That the lives of few women who were mystics and prophetesses themselves were recorded in the patriarchal history books is a pity. It certainly doesn't mean they didn't exist. The Safed school was purported to have two major women figures who "were great in their wisdom and in the spirit of prophecy that possessed them" (Bension 932: 228) and one, in particular, called Francisca, was instrumental in shaping the Kabbalah of that time. After the exile from Spain, Safed in
Galilee became the center of Jewish mysticism, a "legendary city of signs and wonders" (ibid: 227). The Zohar became the spiritual guide for the exiles there, who read it every day along with the Bible. Here also was an "element of ecstasy, particularly appealing to women" (ibid: 92).

That this re-emergence of ecstatic mysticism makes its appearance periodically in history is, in itself, an interesting phenomenon. Whenever a new religious movement makes itself felt in a tradition, it seems to be characterized by this element of charisms, healings, miracles, prophesies, ecstasy and festive religious activity: the movement of the spirit. And when the spirit moves in ways which appear to the dominant tradition as more mystical, ecstatic, or primitive, it is frequently met with suspicion or resistance (e.g., the Montanist movement in the early Church, or the rise of Hasidism in the 17th century), and after a time, becomes submerged, or its form changes.

Although it would be interesting to do a cross-cultural study investigating the implications and ramifications of why this happens, I would venture to guess that more primitive representations of spirit are too much of a threat to the status quo. Such phenomena tend to be removed from the binding elements which have evolved to hold the tradition itself together. Simeon ben Jochai, the central mystical Jewish figure of the 1st century, is reputed to have said:

They who study the Zohar shall taste of the Tree of Life and will no longer be subjected to trials. Then shall Israel no longer have to depend upon the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and no longer have to submit to the laws of 'Thou shalt' and 'Thou shalt not'.

(Bension 1932: 91)
He also encouraged the use of music as a means of attaining to that higher state: the music of the spheres.

There are choirs of angels intoning the music and the harmony of the spheres. The prophets, the singers, the seers and the mystics, when they feel themselves possessed of the Divine Spirit, and when their spiritual eyes see naught but the whiteness of a mirror, are able to disengage themselves from this material world and to vision themselves climbing to the heights to the music of this divine melody.

(Bension 1932: 162)

The Kabbalistic mystic Hayyim Vital—who, together with his foremost disciple, R. Levi Isaac, experienced an apparition of the Shekinah—saw an obvious precedent in ecstatic music and dance in the ancient prophets, who:

had before them drum and pipe...for by the sweetness of the sound of the music...they cast off their souls. And then the musician ceases his playing, but the prophetic disciples remain in the same supernal state (of communion) and they prophesy.

(Idel 1988c: 128)

This re-emergence of the 'participation mystique' with the revelations of the Shekinah were obvious in some of the most famous of the Safed mystics: Joseph Karo, a contemporary of Vital, was said to 'channel' the Shekinah, i.e., he did not converse with her; rather "the Shekinah spoke from the throat of Karo" (Idel 1988a: 85). Noted more for his contributions to Jewish law than his mystical adventures, Karo remains something of a mystery in Kabbalistic history, since

the reduction of Joseph Karo's revelations to one-fiftieth of the original are sufficient examples of the tendency to suppress certain aspects of Jewish mysticism (Idel 1988a: 20).
Nonetheless, mystical Judaism experienced a revival in the Middle Ages with the typical signs and wonders that had come to be associated with the Shekinah or Holy Spirit. Once again, the Presence was experienced, as in Biblical stories, with light as well as sound. The ecstatic mystic Rabbi Azikri spoke of the Presence to his disciples as a brilliant flame" which one should "make always into your teacher."

Referring to the early Chassidim, who meditated with "the light of the Shekinah above their heads as it spread around them," (Idel 1988c: 165) he advocated ecstatic devotional techniques for fostering this kind of experience. A common feature of both the classical prophet and the medieval mystic in the epiphany events of the Shekinah was this profound visionary experience of light (e.g., see the mystical revelations of Ezekiel and Isaiah). Abulafia believed that the Kabbalist consciously rose through meditation "from light to light, clearly and deliberately impelling his thoughts through the primordial medium of the word" (Epstein 1978: 84).

Before looking at some of the examples of light phenomena in the Kabbalists of the Middle Ages, let us examine its precedents in the myth and midrash material. Many legends are told about Rabbi Simeon Jochai, the heroic figure of the Zohar, that describe his numerous mystical adventures. The Talmud tells us that "the performance of miracles was to him the ordinary procedure of life" (Bension 1932: 93). His disciples compared him to Moses; legends report that the power of his teaching was such that all the angels of the celestial dwelling came down to hear him. One disciple told the story that when he was revealing the mysteries of the Torah "I saw a column of fire descending from heaven to earth, giving forth a dazzling light" (ibid: 95).
Israel, we recall, was graced by the electrifying divine Presence manifest in the Tabernacle wherever she went with it: as long as the covenant was intact. One of the mysteries Simeon revealed concerned the revelation at Mt. Sinai, when the Shekinah manifested as Glory. Each word of the 10 commandments, he reported to his disciples, "divided itself into 70 sounds and each sound appeared before their eyes in the form of a sparkling light. Then Israel saw with its own eyes the Glory of God" (ibid: 163).

This seems like a remarkable kind of revelation: i.e., that vision and sound should somehow fuse so that "the words, as they came from the mouth of God, imprinted themselves on the shadows and there took form, so that Israel heard them and saw them at the same time" (ibid: 163). A similar myth reports that over the Ark, God let a pillar of cloud rest, "and in this were visible the letters Yod and Heh, spelling the name Jah, by means of which God had created the world" (Ginzberg V 3: 235). The letters themselves were considered to be radiations of the Shekinah.

Such myths must have been exceedingly inspiring to the Kabbalists of the Middle Ages, whose favorite pastimes included contemplation on the Hebrew Letters or on the Holy Names of God. One of Abulafia's students, Isaac of Acre, reported that during Torah study, his house lit up with a light "very sweet and pleasant", but not like "the light which emanates from the sun," when suddenly, "I saw a secret of the letter Aleph" (Idel 1988b: 81). A similar account is reported by a Kabbalist group copying manuscripts:

when we would articulate the Ineffable name, things came into our eyes from verses in the image of red fire towards evening, until we were astonished by them and we left them. And this happened to us several times while we were writing.

(Idel 1988b: 81)
Idel tells us that, according to Abulafia, the revelation of light is a characteristic of prophetic experience among Kabbalists of the Sephirotic system. One of his anonymous students writes:

The third night, after midnight, I nodded off a little, quill in hand and paper on my knees. Then I noticed that the candle was about to go out. I rose to put it right...then I saw that the light continued. I was greatly astonished, as though, after closer examination, I saw that it issued from myself. I said, 'I do not believe it.' I walked to and fro all through the house and, behold, the light is with me; I lay on a couch and covered myself up, and behold, the light is with me all the while.

(Idel 1988b: 79)

A 14th century Safed Kabbalist who wrote about the relationship between study of the Hebrew letters and the divine light relates that:

if he will understand the things I have written concerning the 32 paths and the letters, one above the other, at once visible and invisible, and imagine them in his mind after receiving them verbally...the light appears above him...from fire, 'for it is a spirit in man' (Job 32:9) that he shall know the hidden letters.

(Idel 1988c: 121)

We see dominant themes in these mystical experiences of some kind of light and sound phenomena, characteristic of the ancient as well as the medieval mystic or seer. To the ancient rabbi or the Kabbalist of the Middle Ages, a key element to drawing down the power and influence of the Shekinah was study of the Torah, which was considered to be her outer garment.

However, the Baal Shem Tov, who popularized Hasidism, also saw music and dance as a direct experience of the divine available to the uneducated masses who could not spend
time in deep concentration or in study of the Torah. Music, it was believed, could inspire one to prophetic revelation, and song could open the gates of heaven to the aspiring mystic. Hoffman relates that the Baal Shem Tov repeatedly described our ordinary experience as in a state of "tragic exile from the divine Source" (1981: 121). He felt that most any event, however, could serve to awaken us to the higher dimensions of existence around us, frequently referred to by the Hasidic masters as "lights", "reflections of higher colors" etc. (ibid: 121).

Hasidism made mysticism available to the masses through the highly venerated Baal Shem; it has now become popularized through the writings of Martin Buber and other 20th century Jewish philosophers. The principle tenet of the hasid or 'devout one' is that each person, no matter how common, aids in the liberation of the cosmos from darkness and confusion by his or her actions in the world. The Baal Shem Tov believed that:

"ecstasy occurred not as a result of arduous contemplation of the worlds within worlds, but as spontaneous outflow of energy in response to this world and the God that lives in its every stone, crawling insect and child."

(Epstein 1978: 109)

Hoffman relates that the Baal Shem was an acclaimed healer and miracle worker "with talents in virtually every aspect of paranormal ability" (1981: 179). Like the Baal Shem, many Hasidic masters were said to have visions and dialogues with the Shekinah. Sometimes these visionary experiences were connected with other psychic phenomenon as well (e.g., telepathy, other kinds of extra-sensory perception). For example, the Shekinah appeared to the Rabbi Jacob Samson of Spitovka, weeping bitterly. He was immediately seized with
grief over a close friend, and weeks later, news came that this colleague had died at that exact moment. (ibid.)

Idel describes the visionary experiences of numerous famous Kabbalistic and Hasidic rabbis. One disciple of the famous Isaac Luria of 16th century Safed saw the Shekinah at the Wailing Wall, an empathic vision which caused him to weep bitterly over her exile. Joseph Karo, already mentioned, is another example. When 'channeling' the Voice, the Spirit identified Itself specifically as "Mother", "Matrona", the "redeeming angel", the "emissary of the Holy One", and the "Shekinah" (Epstein 1978: 151). Vital saw her as a consoling mother figure who appeared to him toward the end of his life (Idel 1988a: 80-81).

It must be noted that the Zohar's advice, which explicitly states that miracles should be viewed dispassionately, was highly respected among most Kabbalistic and Hasidic masters. The paranormal aspects of their lives were therefore frequently downplayed, as is the custom in most religious traditions. Nonetheless, it is important to understand that at a time when the archetype of the Shekinah had developed to such an extent that she was characterized as a full-fledged personification of the sacred and numinous in the minds of many Jews, visions of her--as her relationship with her devotees was evolving--were becoming common.

One of the important contributions of the Baal Shem was to propagate the custom reciting 'yihudim'. From the Hebrew word YChD meaning "union" or "communion", the yihudim essentially involves a prayer-ritual performed with the intention of bringing about the unification of God and the Shekinah. The Rabbi Isaac ben Samuel of Acre wrote, "He who merits the secret of communion will merit the secret of equanimity and if he receives this secret...he will receive the Holy Spirit ...and from that prophecy" (Idel 1988c: 112).
What does the concept of equanimity imply here? Idel (1988) tells us that it is an experience of communion with the divine which does not interfere with the normal life of the devotee—that is, the aspiring mystic does not shut him or herself off from the world to concentrate solely on God; rather, it is a focused kind of concentration within the context of one's everyday life which then brings one the experience of perceiving God in all that exists, i.e., "he understands the equality of all things within the hidden Godhead" (Idel 1988c: 157). This kind of divine perception is reminiscent, again, of the classical prophets, who maintained communion while keeping the senses intact, thus preserving the development of the spiritual will.  

It must be noted, however, that the specific techniques used to invoke the presence of the Shekinah,—the mystical disciplines practiced by Kabbalists or the masses who flocked to Hasidism, i.e., devotional music and dancing, meditation on or chanting of the Divine Names, Torah study, yihudim, etc.—were specifically designed and carried out with the intention of getting the attention, as it were, of God. The last technique we will explore, used by numerous mystics and prophets during the period of the Middle Ages, was 'mystical weeping'.

The weeping of the Shekinah, we have seen, is an infinitely compassionate and motherly gesture of participation in the sufferings of the world. 'Mystical weeping' was an important part of both Kabbalistic and Hasidic practice, performed with the intention of uniting with her sufferings. Idel explains that the effort to receive visions was often the direct result of self-induced weeping, wherein the mystic was encouraged to participate with the Shekinah in weeping over the destruction of the Temple. In the words of the sage Rabbi Safrin:

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The revelation of the Shekinah happens by means of and following the suffering that one is caused to suffer, by means of which he feels the suffering of the Shekinah, and the fact that this revelation has a form and an image is on account of his being corporal. (Idel 1988a: 84)

As far back as the 2nd century, the practice of imitating the posture of Elijah—weeping with one’s head between the knees (1 Kings 18:42)—was encouraged in connection with mystical experience. The sage Simeon bar Jochai is said to have remained praying in this posture the whole night and in the morning he lifted his eyes to a vision of light representing the restored Temple (Idel 1988a).

In the study of the Torah, Kabbalistic mystics saw the eyes as an extremely important organ for achieving enlightenment. Weeping was seen as a aid in overcoming intellectual difficulties and opening to revelatory experience. Safrin wrote:

By much weeping...and suffering I became worthy to be transformed into a 'flowing stream, a fountain of wisdom.

(Idel 1988a: 86)

When Abraham Berukim, a disciple of Luria, was told by his master that he would die unless he wept and prayed before the Wailing Wall, he did so for three days and nights before beholding a vision of the Shekinah. Likewise, Hayyim Vital wept in order to obtain his vision. The prophet Nathan of Gaza was advised by angels to fast and weep, whereupon "after many tears, the spirit came over me, my hair stood on end and my knees shook and I beheld the Merkabah" (ibid: 82).

On another occasion, Safrin wept over the plight of the Shekinah in exile, and she appeared to him in a vision of glory and splendor, adorned with 24 ornaments.19 Idel notes that she is identified as a "virgin of light", a denotation similar to the apparitions of Mary at
a later date (1988a). In this vision, as well as in numerous others, the Shekinah addresses
the mystic like a concerned Mother, calling him, "My son" and assuring him of her presence
and assistance in his own trials. To sum up: what the classical prophets inherited from the
Hebrew tradition was the primary belief that history was the theater for God’s revelation.
Through belief in the revealed word, the Israelites would be led along this historical track
to the place of their destiny. The prophets had learned that God’s moral standards were
higher than those of humans: the divine cared deeply for the poor, the widow, the outcast,
"and it behoved his people to reveal his character in their own dealings.’ You shall be holy,
for I, IHVH, am holy.’ (Lev 19:2) implied not just ritual purity, but moral fervor and strong
compassion” (Southwell 1982: 65).

However, classical prophets of the Old Testament, although not part of the ‘participation
mystique’ common to other surrounding cults, were remembered for their miracle working
powers, their predictions and their intercession, all traits which accompany the appearance
of the Shekinah.

Prophecy came to an end in Israel for several hundred years, in the same way that the
original charisms of the earlier prophets died out before the emergence of the classical form.
Theurgic activities of both Kabbalism of the Middle Ages and Hasidism of the 18th century
also died out to be replaced by more conservative kinds of prayer, meditation and study.
Prophets, it seems, have their day. They come 'en masse' and disappear just as mysteriously.
Zechariah saw the end of his prophetic era when he predicted that in the day of Yahweh the
prophets would be erased from the land (13:1-6). The prophetic tradition was replaced by
the Wisdom tradition (2nd cent. BCE) which was inspired by the Word in a different kind
of way—through prudent Wisdom/Sophia, a variation of the Sacred Feminine archetype
distinct, in my opinion, from the Shekinah. The prophets were, interestingly, frequently at odds with the sages. Southwell explains that their faith was "admirable for its intellectual and spiritual courage" although "it remains true (that) their prudence and worldly wisdom got them into trouble with the prophets" (1982: 55). It mattered little because the Spirit of prophecy was submerging and the Spirit of Wisdom was making her appearance in both the rabbinic and apocrypha/agnostic texts of the time.

As for the face of the Shekinah, she would continue to live and thrive in myth and legend, and ritual would continue to re-enact her story, particularly her mystical marriage with the Godhead from which she originally emerged: the Ineffable Glory.
Chapter 6

THE MYSTICAL MARRIAGE

"When you and your wife are engaged in sexual union, do not behave
lightheartedly...first introduce her into the mood with gentle
words...thus you unite your mind and intention with hers. Say to her
words which ...arouse her passions, closeness, love and erotic de-
sire....Never impose yourself upon her or force her. For any sexual
union without an abundance of passion, love and will is without the
Divine Presence, the Shekinah."

Nahmanides, 12th century Kabbalist

There is a myth that during his visions on Mt. Sinai, Moses was told by the angel Michael
to remove his shoes so that he may understand that he was to cut asunder every bond uniting
him to earthly concerns and completely dedicate himself to drawing down the Shekinah.
Oddly enough--and this was in direct contrast to the ethical concerns of every other Hebrew
patriarch--he was even told to give up his conjugal life. The angel Michael, on hearing this,
became alarmed, and protested, saying, "Lord, will you not destroy mankind by separating
Moses and his wife?" (meaning propagation of the Hebrew line would not go on.) But God
answered that Moses had already begot children and "I desire him to unite himself now with
my Shekinah, that she may descend upon the earth" (Ginzberg V. 2: 316).

Raphael Patai (1990) believes that the Shekinah/Matrona figure is a re-incarnation, as it
were, of the ancient pagan goddesses (Inanna of Sumer, Anath of Canaan, Anahita of Persia
etc.) that Hebrew monotheism was unable to exorcise. In slumber for several centuries, she
awoke to reclaim some of her old power and prestige in the dimension of the Jewish goddess
of Talmudic and Kabbalistic Judaism. Others, however, have challenged this view. Ya’qub ibn Yusuf, who sees her full development in the Kabbalah of the Middle Ages, explains:

The tradition of the Shekinah is less a resurrection of the worship of the Goddess than a foreshadowing of the idea of romantic love which blossomed in 13th century Europe (when Kabbalah became the popular mystical tradition)...In the quest of a man for the woman he loves, and in her response to him a reflection of God’s yearning...is revealed in the human soul.

(Yusuf 1990a: 55)

I believe that the motif of love and intercourse between Yahweh and the Shekinah, or God and the soul, or God and Israel, has distinct differences from its pagan ’hieros gamos’ counterparts. The use of the metaphor of marriage points primarily to the belief that Israel, as the bride of Yahweh, must be faithful to him, despite the presence of other gods and goddesses. The covenant implied a monogamous relationship between God and God’s people, between a monotheistic divinity and humanity. It in no way resembled a yearly celebration to maintain fertility of the land through the ’sacred marriage’ and then the (real or symbolic) death of the king.

There is a Kabbalistic legend that when Adam ate of the fruit of the tree, God split the feminine and masculine halves of divinity, Shekinah and Tiphareth (Ginzberg 1922). Rituals of unification are an invitation to realign the human and divine wills and a mystical means to restore the harmony between the God and His Shekinah. The human being thus has an opportunity to aid God by restoration of the Shekinah; in a sense, we participate in releasing her from exile.

This pertains to a variety of religious practices; for example, we have seen that reading the Torah, good deeds, recitation of prayers, fasting, etc, all aid in the redemption of the
Shekinah and her reunification with her Divine Lord. But in a special sense, it applies to the act of conjugal love, which is given particular attention in Judaic thought. Jewish rabbis and sages, it seems, have never had any fascination with ascetic practices that included celibacy, and this is true in the mystical traditions as well. The Zohar bluntly states that "the Shekinah is always present whenever marital intercourse is performed" (Simon & Sperling 1959: 176).

Another aggadic saying from Talmudic times relates a similar story: "she hovers over all conjugal unions between Jewish husbands and wives and blesses such unions with Her presence" (Davidson 1967: 272). The Shekinah, it appears, is not shy when it comes to erotic aspects of human nature. The esoteric literature in mystical Judaism has a rich element of eroticism is its metaphoric analysis of the sacred marriage.

To quote a passage from the midrash Zohar Hadash:

> Alone, the King and the Matronit embraced and kissed and then he led her to the couch. He placed his left arm under her head, his right arm embraced her, and he let her enjoy his strength. The pleasure of the King and the Matronit in each other was indescribable. They lay in tight embrace, she impressing her image into his body like a seal that leaves its imprint upon a page of writing, he playing betwixt her breasts and vowing in his great love that he would never leave her. (Patai 1990:142).

The sage Simeon ben Jochai explained to his pupils that the world "rests upon the union of the male with the female principle," (Bension 1932: 159) and therefore the "Holy One" only establishes residence when these 'principles' are embodied in the flesh, that is, when the heavenly marriage is replicated on earth, an echo of the old Hermetic maxim 'As above, so below.' That is why the name "Adam" was given to a man and a woman united as one sole being," (ibid: 159) i.e., the soul "seeks its own mate" on earth, so that they once more
"become one soul and one body" (ibid: 160). The name Adam, we recall, has, as its root, the Hebrew word for blood (dam), and together with the letter Aleph (A) signifies the joining of the human with the first principle, or life force signified by the first letter, Aleph (Case: 1985).

The common motif, of course, in the mystical marriage of the King and the Shekinah is this uniting of the creative masculine spirit of God "which is positive", and the Shekinah, "the spirit which receives" (Bension 1932:160). What is more distinct about their wedlock is, once again, this tremendous responsibility on the part of the children who have received the Torah to aid in the process of their reunion.

Even as the sun seeks the moon, so does the Holy One seek for the Shekinah and finds her not, for the sins of man separate them.

(Bension 1932:128)

Simeon ben Jochai explains the mysteries of the upper and lower Mothers in the Zohar, a story which touches upon the age-old problem of evil:

The worlds of emanation...lie above the Throne of God. There, it is impossible to distinguish between the Holy One and the Shekinah, because there all things are one. But below the throne, in the worlds of formation and of action, the distinction begins. As each sin which man commits brings a demon to life, these demons are the barrier that stands between the Holy One and the Shekinah...the Shekinah prefers to suffer the pains of the invasion of demons, rather than to weaken the chances for eternal happiness given to man...(who can through) free will...elevate the lower worlds to the status of the upper.

(Bension 1932: 128)

According to Arthur Waite (1960), the mystery of the Shekinah is the mystery of the human and God, of "the relation between things above and ...below, of intercourse for union
on earth" which is performed in the spirit of "celestial union", and the "transmutation of one by the other for the work of God in the world" (ibid:342). Therefore, one important element of the Kabbalists of the Middle Ages was this idea of spiritualized sexuality, where the image of Shekinah as Sabbath Queen was highly respected. On the Friday evening of the Shabbat (which means "to receive the Sabbath") the Sabbath Bride or Queen was invoked for the 'marriage rite'. Scholem tells us that the rituals of the great festivals and particularly the Sabbath are related to the sacred marriage (Scholem 1965: 130). The holiday which appropriately celebrates this idea is the Feast of Weeks, which occurs on the 50th day after the Passover. This is traditionally the celebration commemorating the Revelation on Mt. Sinai and the covenant between God and Israel. However, "from covenant to marriage was only a short step for the Kabbalists" (ibid: 138). The Zohar describes this night as being of particular importance for mystics and students of the Torah, one wherein "the adept becomes the best man of the Shekinah." (ibid: 139). The whole night was devoted to vigil in preparation for this mystical marriage.

Those participating in the rite went out into the open field, since a common metaphor for the Shekinah was the apple field, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden:

During the night before the Sabbath, the King is joined to the Sabbath Bride, the holy field is fertilized and from this sacred union the souls of the righteous are produced.

(Scholem 1965:140).

The ritual was performed with everyone dressed in white, which was also the color of the apple blossoms, to commemorate her and her virginal readiness for the Lord. Patai has noted (1990) that this image of Shekinah as virginal essence is similar to that of the Virgin
Mary, evoking that aspect of the feminine that is "a cup full of blessing of which nobody has yet tasted" (ibid:140). In this metaphor of the apple field, the Shekinah is also defined as the feminine principle of the cosmos which exerts her influence upon the 10 Sephirot (the apple trees).

The Lurianic Kabbalists completed their ritual of the bride and bridegroom by recitation of Prov. 31, which was interpreted to be a hymn to the Shekinah and which through mystical reinterpretation became a Sabbath rite in praise of the Jewish wife (Scholem 1965). On the Sabbath ritual, the Shekinah is invited to partake of the meal with her Bridegroom, the King. Isaac Luria wrote a beautiful hymn to her, still read in some places on Friday night, the Sabbath eve.

A new table we lay for Her
A beautiful candelabrum sheds its light upon us.
Between right and left the Bride approaches in holy jewels and festive garments.
Her husband embraces Her in her foundation, gives Her fulfillment, squeezes out his strength.

(Scholem 1965: 143)

As already mentioned, this rite consisted of two parts, one commemorating Rachel, the exiled Shekinah, (with the weeping eyes) and one commemorating Leah, in union with God. When the rite for Leah was performed, the emphasis shifted from one of lamentation and mourning to reunion and redemption. This was followed by the 'rite of the soul', in which the mystical aspirant concentrated on the unification of God and the Shekinah "with every single organ of his body" (Scholem 1965: 150) so that the body itself may become the chariot or Merkabah for the Shekinah.
Lest any comparison be drawn between this event and 'field fertilization', Scholem tells us that 'the conception of the Shekinah's marriage with her Lord is a mystical symbol expressing something that transcends all images' (1965: 138). In symbolic terms, the union of the Jewish husband and wife, also celebrated on the Sabbath Eve, is a re-creation of the union of God and the Shekinah.

In the Friday evening service...the mystical/erotic dimension of Kabbalah has been integrated into the Jewish liturgy which is shared by orthodox and non-orthodox alike... This is one place in which romantic feeling has very much become a part of Jewish prayer.

(Yusuf 1990b: 45)

Thus married couples co-operate sexually in achieving unification of the higher worlds. The normal sexual act then has an added dimension--it is performed in a sacred time and a sacred place, which makes it ever more incomprehensible and holy and transformative. In Kabbalistic terminology, human sexual union causes harmony in the Divine world by strengthening the connection between Tiphareth and Malkuth:

Kabbalism...was tempted to discover the mystery of sex within God himself...it rejected asceticism and continued to regard marriage not as a concession to the frailty of the flesh but as one of the most sacred mysteries...the Kabbalists deduced from Gen 4:1, 'And Adam knew Eve his wife' that 'knowledge' always means the realization of a union, be it that of wisdom (or reason) and intelligence, or that of the King and the Shekinah. Thus knowledge itself received a sublime erotic quality in this new Gnostical system, and this point is often stressed in the Kabbalistic writings.

(Scholem 1961:235)

The union of God and Shekinah is said by Abulafia to represent the Holy One and the community of Israel, He "like a Bridegroom...and she to Him like a Bride, perfect in every
respect...and the love between them is shared via ascents and descents; she ascends and He descends" (Idel 1988b: 187). This is typical imagery in the Song of Songs (3:6). Maimonides also talks about the mystical union as linking via ascents and descents:

and the lower part will ascend and cleave to the higher and the higher will descend and kiss the entity ascending toward it.

(Idel 1988b: 187)

In Jewish mysticism, the image of the kiss is a common metaphor expressing the connection between the human soul and the Active Intellect. Here we see the aspirant being represented by the soul and the Active Intellect, or the Shekinah, as that which the soul cleaves to. Maimonides tells us that the death of Moses, Aaron and Miriam was caused by 'the angel’s kiss'; and that the metaphor of Solomon and his bride is used to describe the union of spirit (the Intellect) and soul (Idel 1988b).

Abulafia used sexual metaphors quite vividly in relationship to prophecy:

And you shall feel in yourself a...spirit arousing you and passing over your entire body and causing you pleasure...like one who rides rapidly on a horse...while the horse trembles beneath him.

(Idel 1988b:188)

For Abulafia, the "pure reflective soul" is the container which will hold the Active Intellect, which will be "glad to come and dwell" there, for, "more than a calf wishes to suck, the cow wishes to give suck" (Idel 1988b: 190). And Isaiah Joseph, a Byzantine Kabbalist in the 14th century wrote:

Know that the pleasure of the indwelling of prophecy, which is the influx of the Active Intellect, is similar to the pleasure derived from intercourse. (Idel 1988b: 213)
It is interesting to note, in this regard, that the word for 'matchmaker' (i.e., the intermediary) is the same as the word for 'prophecy' in Aramaic. It is the Active Intellect, as the mediation of the soul and the supreme source of Knowledge, which acts as the fertilizing principle, which is, we note again, another animus image of the Shekinah as Active Intellect. Abulafia writes:

When your soul becomes wise it is impregnated with knowledge (ibid: 192).

This fertilizing agent is also the one which gives birth:

the effect of the influx, which is our Active Intellect, is to give birth...and through this it shall constantly be renewed.

(Idel 1988b: 197)

Indeed, we see both masculine and feminine concepts associated with the Active Intellect in a juxtaposition of images in poetic dance: "the Active Intellect emits seed" (ibid: 194) and the soul "sucks from its mothers breast--the Active Intellect" (ibid: 196). Perhaps the most poetic picture portrayed by Abulafia is one in which the images are identified with each other:

and when the lower matter comes to him and is connected with him, and embraces and kisses him and is attached and united with him, warp and woof, like the image of a torch within a torch, or of thunder within thunder, or lightning within lightning...

(Idel 1988b: 193)

Since we have seen that certain mystics in this time period were particularly prone to the 'unio mystica' via their ecstatic visionary experiences, it is not surprising that their ideas of 'cleaving' to the Active Intellect or the Shekinah involve not only a state of intense
identification but also one of disassociation from the body. The kiss of death alluded to earlier in the legend of Moses, Aaron and Miriam is, in the Kabbalistic interpretation, a metaphor for the ecstatic experience of the mystical cleaving to God. When mystics entered into such deep communion, they would often apparently enter into a cataleptic state, wherein the soul was completely divorced from the body. Idel relates that "the cleaving of the soul is presented here as a state wherein the body undergoes a temporary death" (Idel 1988a:44) while the soul ascends to higher spheres. One 13th century Kabbalist wrote:

Just as the ripe fruit falls from the tree...so is the link between the soul and the body. When the soul has attained to whatever she is able to attain...she cleaves to the Supernal Soul...the Shekinah, and this is the meaning of death by the kiss.

(Idel 1988a: 44)

The image, then, represented allegorically, is one of ontological union culminating in a simulated kind of ecstatic death. To the mystical Kabbalists of the Middle Ages, the main organ of this experience is the purified intellect, which eventually transcends itself through its ascension through the spheres toward the 'crown' of thought itself in Kether.

This, to me, demonstrates a high level of egoic development in the archetype of the Shekinah as manifested in these early Kabbalistic mystics and prophets as opposed to the ecstatic forms found in the more primitive origination of the cult in the Old Testament. It represents an achievement of "stupendous abstracting power of the religious spirit, which must negate and destroy the being of things in order to arrive at the being of pure will and pure action" which Ernst Cassirer perceives to the the hallmark of pure monotheism (Cassirer 1966: 212).
We have seen that only in the Kabbalistic concept of the Glory of God envisioned as the Shekinah exists the possibility of holding in one container both the unity and the diversity of the God-energy. In myth and legend, she becomes personified as a separate entity. It was this idea of "concentrating all of (one's) attention on the Shekinah and cleaving to Her" (Fine 1984: 89) which led inevitably to the place of destiny for the aspiring mystic, and possibly to the classical prophet.

In describing the necessity of one-pointed concentration on her the Rabbi Elijah de Vidas used the sacredness of monogamy as a metaphor:

In the case of an individual who loves two women, we find that their love for him is not whole inasmuch as they are envious of one another. In order for a wife's love for her husband to be perfect, it is important that she see that he loves no other woman in the world besides her. She will then bind herself to him in a covenant of unrestricted love.

(Fine 1984: 142)

That ethical monogamy should accompany the development of ethical monotheism in a religious culture is not surprising. The unfortunate side-effect in Judaism is, of course, the patriarchal and even misogynistic attitudes that developed alongside it. However, it appears that wherever the figure of the Shekinah is revered, this posture is somewhat softened. In particular, the Hasidic mystics were very egalitarian in their sexual relationships and extremely respectful of the human female form as being representative of the Shekinah. The Baal Shem thought that prayers of women "ascended directly to God" and felt that in the person of his daughter, the Shekinah "rested on her face" (Novak 1989). An abundance of women, many of them prophetesses also, surrounded him during his life, believing with him in the power of the individual's personal actions to summon the Shekinah back to earth.
In describing the Divine Names, we said earlier that the female part of the Name (the Heh) represents the female, and the Shekinah, in the Heh final descends to earth, and in doing so, detaches itself from the rest of the Name; that is, the Heh final is her manifestation in creation:

the world could not exist until the final Heh detached itself from the other three letters of the Divine Name and descended on earth.

(Waite 1960: 352)

In her role as mediatrix of divine graces in the Old Testament, she is said to have a special relationship with the patriarchs, and in some cases directly through the matriarchs, i.e., their wives. But in no sense is the Shekinah a matriarchal goddess, according to most Kabbalists, although Patai, as we have noted, attempts to build the case that she is a remnant of the more ancient pagan traditions. Whether this is true or not, her uniquely Judaic characteristics connect her "in a particular sense with the patriarchal age" (Waite 1960: 354).

Her first manifestation is to Abraham, who then had his name changed (from Abram.) "It was after the circumcision that the letter Heh was added to the name of Abraham" (ibid: 354). According to the Zohar, she always dwelt in the tent of Sarah. This was presumably the reason that Abraham introduced Sarah as his sister when appearing in the presence of the Pharaoh--the reference being that Shekinah was his betrothed, as she was to Moses. This may or may not have displaced the normal marital functions in their relationship; most texts (e.g., the Zohar and midrash material) indicate that this peculiarity was relegated solely to Moses. Waite explains it is because "the Shekinah united with Moses in a ...new and more intimate manner, just as God revealed Himself...in a new Name." (1960: 356)\textsuperscript{20}
Moreover, the exodus in the time of Moses was the occasion for a more dramatic manifestation of the Shekinah to the whole people of Israel, manifesting signs and wonders in the Ark of the Covenant. Because the Shekinah was present with all the major patriarchs, she was considered to bless them in a very special way. Legend tells us that Abraham beheld the Shekinah lighting his way before him, encompassed by celestial legions as he went to the rescue of Lot (Waite 1960). The Zohar relates that it was the Shekinah who also conferred the name change to Jacob (i.e, Israel). When Jacob united his intention to the Shekinah while seeking a wife, he was rewarded with Rachel, a union so holy that, at the marriage, heaven and earth were united (ibid: 354). Jacob was so much in love with Rachel that he labored for 7 years to win her and when he was deceived and given Leah instead, labored another 7 until he was joined to the one who held his heart in captivity.

Clearly it was the presence of the matriarchs (i.e, the wives) that caused the special relationship to surface between the patriarchs and the Shekinah which gave it the unique characteristic of a truly divine hieros-gamos. She was supposed to have exhibited a dense cloud of smoke while leading the children of Israel through the desert and the Zohar explains that she is the smoke which hovers close by the patriarchs whose hearts burn for her (Waite 1960).

We have seen that Yusuf (1990a) suggests that this special way of relating romantically is the prototype for the later 'cult of the troubadour' which blossomed in the Middle Ages. He furthermore distinguishes this type of personal relationship from the "sexual arena" common to the prior goddess/pagan traditions.

Unlike the Canaanite deities, the God of Abraham called for no rites of fertility. (Yusuf 1990a: 42)
For the early patriarchs, e.g., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this may have posed something of a problem, since Genesis relates in numerous ways that marriage and fertility were central concerns, and because of the new covenant which Abraham had made with God, fertility rites were now out of the question. Yusuf perceives that it is precisely this reason why romantic love began to develop—the biblical writer asserts 'Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel' (Gen 29:18), unlike his father Isaac or Abraham, a wife was not chosen for him—he found her himself. We see the concept of sacred marriage as clearly being based here on romance, not on 'pageantry.'

What allowed for the development of romantic love in the Bible was the separation of sexual love between a man and a woman from organized religious ritual.

(Yusuf 1990b: 43)

The love of the patriarchs for their wives—which made possible the presence of the Shekinah—must have implied both a very sacred way of relating to them, as well as a new and different method of magical invocation through them than was present in the hieros gamos celebrated earlier. There "the sexual union between the High Priestess and the King....was a much more impersonal affair, announced and celebrated as a public spectacle" (Yusuf 1990b: 43). Thus, by taking sex out of the ceremonies, it made it a private encounter.

We may sum up by saying that there are distinct differences between the 'sacred marriage' in the evolving Shekinah/Yahweh relationship and its comparable Near-Eastern counterparts, both in meaning and content, just as there are in the other areas which we have thus far examined: sacrifice and prophecy. Although in early Israelite history these ceremonies must have had many commonalities, the development of the Hebrew nation was such
that it clearly sought to separate itself from the practices of its neighbors, and the evolution of the Shekinah took on its distinct Jewish character.
Chapter 7

CONCLUSIONS

"The Shekinah did not present herself as a goal that had to be reached but as a profound reminder of the unfinished task of the revelation of God in this world." (Yusuf 1990: 57)

Jungian analyst Aniela Jaffe has written that when we question the meaning of life, our answers are philosophical "interpretations of a world thick with enigmas...each and every formulation is a myth that man creates in order to answer the unanswerable." (1975: 1) The vital lesson which Jung has given us is that myths are essential to our psychological health, perhaps to our very being. The collapse of myth in an individual or a culture can lead to a profound sense of loss, a lack of moral orientation, and a despairing sense of anomie.

As Jung noted in Memories, Dreams, Reflections:

The need for mythic statements is satisfied when we frame a view of the world which adequately explains the meaning of psychic whole-ness, from the co-operation between conscious and unconscious....it is not that 'God' is a myth, but that myth is the revelation of a divine life in man. It is not we who invent myth, rather it speaks to us as the Word of God. The Word of God comes to us, and we have no way of distinguishing whether and to what extent it is different from God. There is nothing about this Word that could not be considered known and human, except for the manner in which it confronts us spontaneously and places obligations upon us...It is not affected by the...operation of our will...Our chief feeling about it is that...it came to us from elsewhere.

(1963: 340)
Myths are expressions of Archetypes and the myth of the Shekinah is a profound metaphor for the Divine Feminine, which, in the course of our journey, has sometimes caught us off guard. Like all archetypes, it "possesses the power of spontaneous motion" (von Franz 1975:82) and acquires a life of its own. Infused with various kinds of symbolic activity, she somehow hovers over us—a luring, evocative, haunting presence. We have seen that as an expression of the feminine/anima archetype, she does not embody the traditional associations relegated to this dimension in much myth and literature, e.g., matter, darkness, water, womb, nature, etc; rather she projects images of spirit, light, fire, fertilization, and the vast unknown. Nowhere in our explorations have we seen the Shekinah identified with matter, except as the victim of it, i.e., in exile, and in this role her mission is to participate in our redemption. Even in her aspect as immanent mother (Malkuth), she is beckoning us to transcend it, to be drawn into spirit. Indeed, we could say that the Shekinah is the Holy Spirit—they are certainly used interchangably throughout the myth and mystical literature that pervades the Jewish tradition.

The Shekinah, it seems, is principally that aspect of a transcendent Deity that can be related to because she is trapped in matter. Yet, simulataneously, she beckons us, not to denigrate it, (there is no abhorrence of the body, as in the dualistic Christian gnostic traditions), but to renew it, to redeem it. Because the vision of the ancient Israelite nation was a unique one—and certainly, in my opinion, shows ego development far surpassing the surrounding nature cults and their endless cycles—it nonetheless needed a vehicle or intermediary which could simultaneously carry this monotheistic ideal into the heart of its people through some kind of relationship. Jung realized that archetypes are unconscious dynamisms which express themselves in relatable patterns (1969). The psyche needs symbols, and thus
the archetypal realm imposes itself through images and other effects of consciousness regardless of whether they are invited by the individual or culture or not. This is the principal problem posed in our investigations: how can a transcendent, formless, in essence, unknowable God, reveal Itself? How can It push through the cloud of our Unknowing? In examining the evolution of thought from mythical to religious consciousness, Cassirer says,

the particularity of the religious form is disclosed in the changed attitude which consciousness here assumes toward the mythical image world...religion takes the decisive step that is essentially alien to myth: in its use of sensuous images and signs it recognizes them as such--a means of expression which, though they reveal a determinate meaning, must necessarily remain inadequate to it, which 'point' to this meaning but never wholly exhaust it.

(Cassirer 1966: 239)

The heart of the matter lies in the examination of the principal enigma posed in Ex. 33.21 When Moses asked God, 'show me your ways', (33:13) he was told, 'You cannot see my face' (33:20). What this means, the medieval text, the Fountain of Wisdom tells us (putting words in God's mouth) is that "the darkness is...all from Me alone and is My own source and you cannot comprehend it" (Dan 1986: 51). This is because all that preceded the existence of the universe "you cannot apprehend, so you will be unable to say that I (God) am like all the other entities, having a particular origin or place " (ibid). This is, of course, a factor distinguishing Yahweh from the surrounding deities. But if God were so removed from creation, how were the Jewish people to have a relationship with him? In the Old Testament, the Shekinah became the 'Spirit' of Yahweh; It is nowhere identified as feminine in the biblical texts except by implication (e.g., the 'spirit' (Ruach) which brooded over the waters in Genesis). Whether she was personified as a separate myth before Talmudic times, we
have no way of knowing. We do know that Shekinah was not Asherah or the other nature goddesses. She always supported the evolving religious sensitivity which sought to stamp out the images.

The Old Testament consistently associated the activity of the divine Spirit with the dawning of human religious consciousness.

(Gelpi 1988: 13)

On the other hand, we have seen in the development of the rich mystical side of Judaism an element of human empathy growing from an original abstract concept of Deity and personified in the feminine Shekinah. That she was alive as a personification in the minds of the masses since Talmudic times there can be no doubt. As early as the 3rd century, a picture of a nude Shekinah holding the baby Moses surfaced among the Hellenized Jews in the Dura- Europos synagogue (Patai 1990).22

When she resurfaces as feminine Spirit she not only has powerful goddess-like qualities (e. g., Mother of creation, perpetual intercessor, the divine sacrifice, the worker of miracles, the sacred oracle, etc.) but she is distinctly human: she suffers, grieves, is angered, is joyful, is the initiator and recipient of conjugal bliss.

The Shekinah is the reflection of a people. As the archetype matures in the history of a nation, so it necessarily follows that it evolves with the ego. In the beginning of both the Israelite and Christian tradition, the Spirit was characterized by ecstasy, charisms, miracles, and sometimes orgiastic worship. Then discernment became a key factor. (One has to question what kind of 'spirit' was moving through the war orgy of the Israelites in 1 Sam.4:5, and 14:32, when they were dancing wildly around the Ark and avenging themselves by
eating blood). With development of the ego comes discrimination: not all spirits are the Holy Spirit.

Certainly we see this idea embodied in Paul in the early Church and in the later Jewish mystics. In the classical prophets we see a pronounced attentiveness to a covenantal relationship that had evolved from magical practices to ethical concerns (although most of these sacrificial cultic practices were also a step beyond the prevailing Near-Eastern practices of sacrifice, in terms of the development of the concepts of sin/guilt/repentence, etc.) Ethics/judgment/morality replaced the more primitive tradition.

This was a step toward abstract thinking. The Tent of meeting, and later the Temple became the place where, not the Godhead resided, but rather its Name. It was the development of the concept of the power of the Word through the more abstract association of prayer—a relationship through thought that became prevalent; and ceremony, thereafter, took on a different character.

Although the Shekinah poses problems for Jewish monotheism, it is an amazing feat that the Hebrew people, despite many lapses into 'idol worship', managed to maintain its monotheistic vision. How can we understand this? How are we to interpret the 'marriage' of God with His Shekinah, if not in the light of a traditional polytheistic union of two separate entities? All of the mystics tell us that the answer is simple: while the unity of the archetype of the Deity is emphatically proclaimed, the interpretation of its contents remains flexible. The Tree of Life remains, despite modern attempts to prove otherwise, One Tree with many lights, not many gods cohabiting in a complex world tree. Both the Jewish and the Christian interpretation affirms this, although there is much room 'to play' with mythological motifs within this paradigm, once it is established that these follow by way of attribution.
We see, therefore, that the presence of the Shekinah is the Voice of Yahweh. Through her, the prophets gave an active voice to what may be characterized as a committed divine immanence. Therefore, a transcendent creator-God was present in an immanent, involved way in Israel’s historical existence. At first this was only an abstract concept of an otherworldly God, which had led the Hebrew people to the 'deep abyss' which was the heart of Israel's rupture with mythic consciousness (Cassirer 1966). She nonetheless regained her status as a personification through the development of her own mythos without sacrificing the deep importance of the vision of Unity: thus she distinctly reflects her tradition, e.g., she is the Voice of Yahweh (i.e., the Revelation); she is the face of Yahweh (the Presence); and she is the Glory of Yahweh (the Transcendent Function.) The divine Name IHVH (Yahweh and Jehovah are linguistic perversions of this) defines not so much a person as a process or way of being. The Hebrew letters of the Name combine the future particle Yod (י) with the verb HVH, which means 'to be'. The Name is not meant to imply a personality so much as a concept and in this sense, the Name means something like 'Amness' or 'Being unfolding' or 'to cause to be' (de'Olivet 1921). The God of the ancient patriarchs did not have this Name, as we noted (see Ex 6:3); the name Yahweh was edited into early Biblical books later on, probably in the time of Ezra (440 BCE) when the different cycles of the tradition (J,E,D,P) were fused.23

It is important to understand this—as the tradition evolved, so did the consciousness of its Spirit. Later on, in the midrashim, and possibly before, this Spirit is distinctly feminine. When the rabbis of the Talmudic period put well-known proclamations of the classical prophets into the mouth of the Shekinah, they took on a particular feminine character (e.g.,
in the midrash where she cries from the Mount of Olives, reciting Hosea 5:15, mentioned in Chapter 3.)

If it is true that this maternal face of God was repressed in the Old Testament, it did not cease to be an active force in the unconscious of a people. As Jung notes, what is rejected is still a part of the psychic life and will find ways to manifest. There are two reasons I perceive that the Shekinah came to be understood as a feminine divine being; one was the obvious need on the part of the human psyche for wholeness—since the abstract Yahweh was obviously not perceived as an energy but as a masculine God. The other reason why the attribute of Glory or Presence should have become hypostatized in the later Jewish literature is because human consciousness was still grappling with the notion of how to understand evil. (There are distinct differences in how this problem is perceived as the Hebrew tradition evolved, and particularly show up in the Wisdom books, which are much more existential in nature.)

Two opposing perceptions emerge concerning the varying roles of the Shekinah, one: that God created both good and evil, as Is. 45:7 said, and uses them as instruments of reward and punishment. In this case, Shekinah becomes God's avenger. There are references to "the Matronit as the chieftain of the divine armies," (Patai 1990:147) who deals out divine justice. She is thus the Severity represented by the left hand pole of the Tree of Life. The second is the gnostic idea that the forces of good and evil are raging against each other for control of the cosmos. As Dan Matt notes, "In one scenario, Malkuth plays the role of judge dispensing reward and punishment; in the other She is the kingdom for which the forces of good and evil contend" (1982: 31). In the latter rendition, she is attacked by demons; and humans aid in her redemption by their good deeds.
The primary purpose of this investigation has not been to definitively explore this question, but rather to understand the problem posed by the model of Jewish monotheism in the presence of this feminine aspect of God. This last dilemma, however, leads us back to the original myth with which we started our inquiry: we stand (with Moses), in awe before the Presence and are refused an answer as to the nature of evil and suffering, but are given Hope in the form of emerging Glory known as Shekinah. Perhaps we must be content to conclude with an eschatological vision that also lives and breathes in the psyche, the Transcendent Function in its act of consummation:

In Kabbalistic lore, each Sephira rules a seven thousand year cycle, and we are now in a cycle dominated by Geburah, the Sphere of Judgment and Severity. Prior to its reign was the 'golden age' of Chesed. Forthcoming is the new age of Tiphareth, the age of the Sun (Son). The present age has been characterized by many severe judgments, persecutions and the harshness of exile. But when the age of Tiphareth dawns, the Messiah will reappear. At that time, Elijah will blow his horn and the first primal light which shone before the week of creation will re-emerge. When the trumpet is blown again, the dead will rise and will gather around the Messiah from all the corners of the world. And at the third sound, the Shekinah will become visible to all (Ginzberg 1938; Matt 1982).
NOTES


2. For a fuller development of the comparison of matriarchal vs. patriarchal and/or polytheistic vs. monotheistic world-views in the evolution of egocentric consciousness, see Ken Wilbur (1983), Julian Jaynes (1976), E.O. James (1963), Ernst Cassirer (1966), Henri Frankfort (1946), Edward Whitmont (1982) and Erich Neumann (1955). I want to express gratitude to Bruce Lerro for helping me develop this chart.

3. A midrash is a traditional commentary on a biblical text, usually of a homiletical nature. This may take the form of an 'aggadah' or Jewish legend. The aggadah is often used to indicate any of the non-legal (or Halakhah) elements of Talmudic literature and consists of illustrative stories, fables, or proverbs which have a oral tradition much older than any of the recorded midrashim.

4. The Merkabah was the vision of Ezekiel's Celestial Chariot, the revelation of the beasts around the throne, a common vision, it seems, in much apocalyptic literature and the root of an entire school of Jewish mysticism called Merkabah. The 4 images of Ezekiel's vision (lion, eagle, ox, human) are encoded in the archetypal glyph called THE WHEEL in the Tarot.

5. "Then Moses said, 'Do let me see your Glory!' And God said, 'I will make all My beauty pass before you, and in your presence, I will pronounce My Name...but My Face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives.' And the Lord said, 'Behold there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock, and it shall come to pass that while My Glory passes by, I will put you in the hollow of the rock and I will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then will I remove my hand, so that you may see My back parts, but My Face is not to be seen." (Ex. 33:18, New Americal Bible.)

6. Sociologist Michael Grosso has noted that in many modern paranormal events, such as the apparitions of Mary, there is an 'annunciation' event proceeding it--usually in the form of some kind of light phenomenon. See Grosso (1989) or Compton (1990) for more on the relationship between modern apparitions and consciousness transformation.

7. Traces of God (Elohim) meaning a plural deity (apart from the etymological implications) can be found in Ex. 22:28 and Gen 18.

8. The Hebrew word 'azazel' means, interestingly, "removed" or "separated"--in essence, scapegoated. (Ben-Yehuda Dictionary)

9. The Divine name IHVH, of which Yahweh and Jehovah are derivatives, was not revealed to any of the patriarchs until Moses. See Ex 6:3, "I Am IHVH, and I appeared unto
Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the Name of God Almighty (El Shaddai), but My Name, IHVH, I did not make known to them."

10. Holocaust, in this context, means simply 'burnt offering' or 'burnt whole'. A holocaust is a burnt sacrifice, the whole of which was consumed by fire. For an extensive review of the different kinds of Hebrew sacrifices, see George Gray (1925).

11. See works quoted above (# 2) on the relationship between egoic development in the evolution of human consciousness.


13. When Abulafia is referring to this power of Moses to 'produce the speech' of the Shekinah by being a 'hollow cavity' he is most likely referring to the phenomenon we now know as 'channeling'. This is debated, however; some scholars prefer to see Moses, like the classical prophets, encountering the Presence of God in a way much less reminiscent of possession. See, in particular, A. Heschel (1962).

14. This prevailed, at least, until the emergence of the Montanist movement soon after the middle of the 2nd century C.E., which was bitterly opposed by the Church, because Montanists proclaimed ecstasy to be the sign of the highest state of revelation. "Disgusted with the character of ecstasy as presented by the Montanist prophets, the Church Fathers declared that ecstasy is incompatible with true prophecy... Basil wrote, 'How can the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge deprive anyone of his senses?'" (Heschel 1962:342)

15. During periods of crisis, the problem of discerning among contradictory divine communications was sometimes acute and frequently led to much confusion about the will of God for a given historical period. See, for example, Ez. 12 & 13, or Jer. 23:15-16. On this, Lindblom (1967: 218) says, "Prophetic charlatans appeared who made themselves despised so that prophecy became utterly disreputable everywhere the history of prophecy shows periods of vitality and periods of decline."

16. Baal Shem is a name which means 'Master of the Name'; persons so called have been credited with working miracles through correct pronunciation of the sacred name-IHVH. See M. Idel, (1988a) and E. Hoffman (1981).

17. Hasidism was a charismatic movement which gained great popularity in the 1700's among Eastern European Jews. 'Hasid' is a Hebrew word which means 'devout, pious or benevolent' and is from the root HS which the Hebrew scholar de 'Olivet says means "secret or silent action." (1921:353) Like all mystical traditions, it was primarily an oral tradition, and its adherents were strongly resisted by the orthodox Jews of the age, particularly the Mittnagadim, who went to great lengths to bitterly oppose the spread of Hasidism in eastern Europe, where it was growing like wildfire (a small Shekinah pun, here.) See E. Hoffman (1981).
18. "By the time of the exile, it is probable that the wave of charismatic enthusiasm which swept over Syria had subsided somewhat, and the higher activities of the spirit are now acclimatized to the soil of humanity. **Ruach** is now...broadened in meaning...since it can denote the breath of life in man...the interior moral and spiritual dispositions...and the mental consciousness generally" (Knight 1947: 9). See also works by authors quoted above (Note 11); and J.M. Lewis (1971) on different kinds of posession in ecstatic states.

19. This perhaps implies that the complete bridal chamber in Talmudic times consisted of 24 items; this, in turn taken from the idea the the Hebrew Bible consisted of 24 books. (Idel, 1988c)

20. The new Name was, of course, IHVH, which is the root of the Hebrew name Jesus (Yeheshua). Waite compares her to the Agnus Dei, or Lamb of God, who obtains remission of sins for Israel. (1960)

21. See note #5, above.

22. See picture on front page.

23. Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomy, Priestly.
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