

ABSTRACTS

David Banon

DESPITE THE RISK OF TRADITION

The question discussed in this article is a personal perspective on the structure of Israeli academia and what Kant defined as “conflict of faculties.” This point is amplified by a penetrating question: How is it that the Jewish people, which produced so many philosophers of universal stature, has yet to produce from the Israeli branch a single philosopher of world renown?

The analysis of this question is based on Max Weber’s article, “Science as a Vocation” (*Wissenschaft als Beruf*), where he contrasts the scientist with the prophet. Presented also is Levinas’s response in *Totality and Infinity*, emphasizing heteronomy, rejecting the autonomy of the Socratic maieutic method in favor of the teacher, and seeking to approach tradition and the writings of the Hazal. As a result, what becomes revealed before our eyes in these old dusty books is a world of ideas and messages that help to read and understand modernity and even go beyond modernity.

Y. Tzvi Langermann

A MISTAKEN ANTICIPATION IN SAMUEL IBN TIBBON’S TRANSLATION OF MAIMONIDES’ *GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED*

In a critical passage near the end of Guide II:30, where Maimonides cites Rabbi Aqiva’s famous exclamation when returning safely from “the *pardes*,” we read: “Consider this ... how he explained everything with that

statement ... if you have contemplated and understood everything that was shown in *al-athār* and you have looked closely at all that people have said about everything in them.” *Al-athār* is a very common Arabic expression for “traditions”; it is employed elsewhere by Maimonides and understood correctly by his translators. Samuel Ibn Tibbon, however, came to his translation of the Guide after translating Aristotle’s *Meteorology* and deciding that that book contains the secrets of creation. This led him to mistakenly anticipate that in the passage in question Maimonides was alluding to the *Meteorology*. This is incorrect; in Arabic, the atmospheric phenomena from which Aristotle’s book takes its title are invariably called *al-athār al-’ulwiyya*. Nonetheless, Ibn Tibbon’s mistake has endured, even to our own day, because in the academy as well, Maimonides is pegged as an Aristotelian, and it is expected that he would be referring to the *Meteorology* when discussing the Genesis creation narrative.

Eli Gurfinkel

THE THIRTEEN PRINCIPLES OF FAITH AND THE
THIRTEEN ATTRIBUTES OF MERCY

Many philosophers and theologians have discussed the number of the Maimonidean principles of faith, including the question of why Maimonides listed thirteen principles, no more nor less: Is this the total number of principles that he formulated, or did Maimonides seek to establish the count of principles to attain the typological number of thirteen? Some of these scholars favored the latter possibility. Among them, some proposed drawing a parallel between the thirteen principles of faith and the thirteen Biblical attributes of mercy, and even indicated the connection between each of the principles and one of the attributes of mercy. Such a connection is not self-understood. These are two different conceptual systems: one is based on philosophical and theological principles that were fashioned in the twelfth century, in Maimonides’s Commentary on the Mishnah, and the other, on Biblical concepts. Each of these systems includes thirteen items, and the division of one (the attributes of mercy) is open to interpretation and is not unequivocal, thus facilitating many possible theoretical parallels.

The most important authorities on the principles of faith, namely, philosophers and theologians from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries in Spain, Italy, and the Ottoman empire, rejected this parallelism, which they viewed as homiletics not directed to the underlying reasons and aims that led Maimonides to constitute these principles. Due to their opposition, they did not detail these parallels, nor did they describe any linkage between specific principles and the attributes. The rich scholarly literature that has been written on the principles of faith similarly omitted any description of these parallels.

The current article examines various genres of the literature on the principles, mainly those written from a different cultural and intellectual background: Ashkenaz and France in this period, and the later rabbinic tradition. My study teaches that many rabbinic authorities viewed this parallelism positively, and intensively engaged in attempts to describe the nature of these parallels. The current research seeks to shed light on this intellectual direction, to survey the ways in which the different rabbinic authorities compared the two systems, and to examine the significance of the parallels for understanding the main conceptions of these authorities.

Merav Carmeli

UPPER AND LOWER WATERS:
A NEW APPRAISAL OF SEXUAL FLUIDS AND CONCEPTION IN
THE ZOHAR IN LIGHT OF MEDIEVAL MEDICAL TEXTS

In the Zohar, we frequently encounter the terms “lower waters” and “upper waters.” These terms designate the sexual fluids of the divine female and divine male respectively. This article explores the influence of ancient texts that made their way to medieval Europe on the Zohar’s conception of these fluids, and in particular on the nature of the fluids of the female. The sexual pleasure of the Shekhinah (and the earthly woman) is presented in the Zohar as the key to personal and cosmic redemption, and the roots of this idea can be better understood by uncovering its sources. Although some scholars have noted the influence of these texts from antiquity on the Zohar’s understanding of sexual fluids, this study deepens their brief observations, revealing aspects previously unnoticed.

An understanding of the significance of female waters is important not only for the Zohar (the focus of this study), but also for a correct understanding of many other later kabbalistic texts, for example, the Tiqqunim of the Zohar, various writings by Moses Cordovero, and the teachings of Isaac Luria. The source of the two main models analyzed here lies in the writings of Aristotle, on the one hand, and in the corpus of medical writings attributed to Hippocrates, on the other. Among the figures mentioned in this study, each of whom extended these models, are Galen, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Constantine the African, and Gilbert of England.

Israel Netanel Rubin

RABBI VIDAL DE TOLOSA, AUTHOR OF *MAGID MISHNE*,
AND HIS ATTITUDE TO PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

Very little is known about Rabbi Vidal de Tolosa, the mysterious Talmudist of the fourteenth century whose commentary on Maimonides' *Mishne Torah* became a classic of Talmudic literature. The *Magid Mishne* was in fact the foundation of a new field of Talmudic literature – the field devoted to deliberation on this halachic book of Maimonides, a field which in the wake of the pioneering work of Rabbi Vidal has become an independent genre that includes hundreds of books today.

In this article, I examine the attitude of Rabbi Vidal to philosophy, mainly as it is seen from the viewpoint of *Magid Mishne*. I conclude that the friendly attitude of Rabbi Vidal to philosophy, and more generally to secular studies, the result perhaps of his Provençal origins, led Rabbi Vidal to feel a close mental affinity with Maimonides, viewed as a symbolic figure combining Torah and philosophy, and so led to Rabbi Vidal's decision to dedicate his talents to writing an apology – the first of its kind – defending Maimonides' halachic work.

Adam Afterman

*AS IN WATER, FACE REFLECTS FACE:
MYSTICAL UNION IN SEFER RESHIT CHOCHMAH*

This study analyzes the elaborate language of mystical union in the kabbalistic masterpiece *Reshit Chochmah* by the sixteenth century Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas (1518-1592). Drawing on three major sources for his integrative mystical system – the Zohar, Ecstatic Kabbalah and a Neoplatonic theory of the soul – the sixteenth-century kabbalist developed a powerful and unique language of mystical union. This mystical system is based upon the idea that the human agent can transform his being both mentally and physically, and integrate himself on both levels with the divine. Assuming that the higher faculties of the human soul have never descended from the divine realm, the human may unite the lower part of his soul with its higher divine double or twin, and thereby fuse his soul with the divine.

In an elaborate discussion, de Vidas describes how such union is manifested both in the human spirit and in the divine spirit. Based upon a monopsychism that includes the divine and all humanity that practically share one soul, the human agent may unite not only with God, but also with his companions and teacher. The monopsychism of the human and God is realized and experienced at the moment of union, described as a mystical kiss. The mystical integration is realized both in the divine realm with a total fusion of the divine and human soul, and in the human realm, in the body, in the mystical fraternity and ultimately in the moment of sexual union. While the members of the mystical fraternity may fuse their soul with their master and with God, husband and wife fuse both soul and body in the moment of sexual union. They experience the fullest form of union both in spirit and in body – their soul fuses together with God, and at the same time God dwells in their unified body.

Avi Elqayam

STUDIES IN A LITURGICAL HYMN FOR THE PASSOVER
SEDER BY THE SABBATEAN PROPHET RABBI AVRAHAM
NATHAN BINYAMIN ASHKENAZI

The Sabbatean prophet Rabbi Avraham Nathan Binyamin Ashkenazi (1643-1680) was also a distinctive and unusual poet among Sabbatean poets. His was a rich and complex mystical poetry, a polyphonic liturgy, concealing and revealing itself simultaneously. His liturgical hymns for the first night of Passover, the last night of Passover, and the night of Shavuot have been particularly favored among Jewish communities.

In this article, I will focus in particular on the “sacred and wondrous hymn,” as labelled by the author of *Hemdat Yamim*, which the prophet Nathan of Gaza penned for the Night of the Haggada, the first night of Passover, which starts with the couplet *Arranging Praise* ♦ *On this Night of Passover*. This hymn has been immensely successful in the Jewish community, having been chanted on the first night of Passover since its inception and to present times. This success is mostly due to the book *Hemdat Yamim*, which placed it at the start of the Haggada.

Nevertheless, the author of *Hemdat Yamim* himself self-censored severely, refraining from interpreting this hymn in his book. Nor has contemporary research offered any interpretation of this hymn. It seems extraordinary to me that Gershom Scholem (1897-1982), the greatest researcher of Kabbalah, Sabbateanism and Hassidism of the previous generation, usually so skillful in interpreting such mysteries, in his great book *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* never addressed these important liturgical hymns in the context of his analysis of the prophet Nathan of Gaza’s messianic ideology, theology and mythology.

I have therefore undertaken the hard task of translating, interpreting, and analyzing this hymn for the night of the Haggada, with an additional aim to counter apologetic attempts of new research to deny that *Hemdat Yamim* is a Sabbatean work.

In this article, I aim to study the history of interpretation of the Haggada Night Hymn, analyze its Sabbatean themes, explore the way it shapes the holidays in light of Sabbatean Messianism, portray the Halakhic attitudes towards this hymn in modern orthodoxy, propose a critical version of the hymn based on cross-comparisons of printed and

manuscript versions, and translate it from Aramaic to contemporary Hebrew. There is no better way to understand a poem than to translate it, adding diacritic signs, analyzing its embedding in Passover Haggadas, the melodies it was sung in, and how it both spread through Jewish communities and was excluded from them, from its inception to these very days.

Osnat Balsam-Geld

ATTICISM, JUDAISM, AND LUZZATTO'S RELATIONSHIP TO PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHERS

This article studies the very complex relationship of the famous Jewish intellectual, Samuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865), to philosophy and philosophers. The research literature on Luzzatto is confusing on this subject. Some write that Luzzatto was a clear rationalist, others write that he was a clear anti-rationalist, while others come to the conclusion that his relationship to rationalism was inconsistent and illogical.

This article studies Luzzatto's relationship to nine philosophers:

- (1) Yehuda Halevi (1075-circ.1141)
- (2) Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1167)
- (3) Moses Maimonides (1138-1204)
- (5) Hasdai Crescas (1340-c. 1410/1411)
- (6) Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677)
- (7) Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)
- (8) Moses Mendelsohn (1729-1786)
- (8) Nahman Krochmal (1785-1840)
- (9) Eliyahu Benamozegh (1822-1900)

From this examination, the following pictures emerges: Luzzatto identified strongly with the thought of Halevi and writes about his love for him. This was because Halevi could engage in philosophy without relinquishing his national feelings and without abandoning his pure faith.

Luzzatto attacked Ibn Ezra and Maimonides because he saw them as extreme intellectuals who believed in the supremacy of intellect and to one degree or another ignored human and national feelings.

He admired Crescas and assisted in the publication of his book, *Or Ha-Shem* (Vienna, 1860). Crescas, similar to Halevi, criticized extreme Aristotelean rationalism. He viewed Spinoza as an extreme rationalist, like Ibn Ezra and Maimonides only worse, because his commitment to radical rationalism brought him to sever his connection with his people. Luzzatto praised Kant's philosophy because Kant set limits to human knowledge and left room for faith beyond those limits. He demurred to Kant's concept of "pure reason," and punned that he preferred the Tanak over Kant. After Halevi, Luzzatto's favorite philosopher was Mendelsohn, because the latter did not give absolute authority to the intellect, and gave priority to ethics and aesthetics. His older contemporary Krochmal sought to collaborate with Luzzatto in various cultural enterprises, but was rebuffed because Luzzatto considered him a radical rationalist, in the mode of Ibn Ezra and Maimonides. His younger contemporary, Benamozegh, sought to collaborate with Luzzatto, but the latter rejected the overtures because Benamozegh's conception of Judaism was too influenced by Kabbalah and was not sufficiently rational.

The study of his attitude towards these nine thinkers leads to the conclusion that Luzzatto was consistent and logical in his relationship to the various philosophers and philosophies. On the one hand, he identified with moderate rationalism and prized Jewish philosophers who engaged in philosophy deeply, while remaining loyal to the ancient Jewish faith and *Judaismus*. On the other hand, he criticized extreme rationalism and anti-rationalism and mysticism. He argued that radical philosophy and the Kabbalah made the same mistake regarding faith: they placed a distance between God and the world and between God and man.

Yoav Wechsler

RABBI ELIJAH BENAMOZEGH:
THE IDEA OF UNIVERSAL RELIGION

Rabbi Elijah Benamozegh (RABA, 1823-1900) served as rabbi of the city of Livorno for about 50 years. As part of nineteenth century discussions, following the French Revolution, about the relationship between religion and state, Benamozegh presented his idea of universal religion. He promulgated his idea of universal religion both for the people of Israel

and for all humankind, both for the present and for the time of the complete redemption when the world will return to its perfect state before the sin of Adam.

Benamozegh spread the idea of universal religion in two ways, one for Jews and the other for the rest of humanity. For Jews, he wrote a commentary on the Bible. For others, he wrote the book *Israel et L'Humanité*. In his commentary on the Bible, *Em Lamikra*, Benamozegh presents the *Torah Shebe'al Peh* as preceding the written Torah, as a primordial Torah with universal elements that form the basis of a universal religion. *Israel et L'Humanité*, which was written in French to be understood by all, was printed by one of Benamozegh's students, Aimé Pallie, and translated into English and Hebrew. In it, Benamozegh analyzes theological concepts and their ramifications for the Jewish people and the other nations as expressed in the Bible, and describes a future ideal relationship between Jews and non-Jews, in which Judaism is not only a national religion, but is a universal religion for all the nations of the world.

This article presents and compares the doctrine of Universal Religion as it is presented in *Israel et L'Humanité* for all people, to its presentation in Benamozegh's Hebrew writings meant to be read by Jews. I will show that the universal religion expressed in *Israel et L'Humanité* claims that revelation is an ongoing process based on an equal divine truth for all humanity, and requiring the observance of the laws of the Torah from all people in order to approach God. In this conception, the Jewish people are to fulfill this role until the time of redemption, upon which all humanity will return to God's original plan from before Adam's first sin, and the Jewish people will end their special status and will rejoin the rest of mankind.

In contrast, *Em Lamikra* and Benamozegh's other Hebrew works present universal religion according to particular kabbalistic and philosophical concepts that see the Jewish people as having a hereditary distinction. According to this view, God irrevocably chose the Jewish people, gave them the 613 commandments, and charged them with being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The rest of humankind is only required to believe in God and observe the seven Noahide laws, and will not be obligated by the other commandments of the Torah even at the time of redemption.

In this article, I will show that *Israel et L'Humanité* presents Benamozegh as a philosopher attempting to join the philosophic discourse of his time dealing with the relationship between religion and state and the role of religion in human affairs. In its worldview, the Jewish people keep the Torah now, but in the future, all humanity will believe in God and observe the Torah's commandments. God's choice of the people of Israel as His special nation will only hold true until the redemption. However, the picture of Benamozegh that emerges from his Hebrew writings is that of a traditional rabbi who sees the Jewish people as God's special nation forever, even after the redemption. There, Benamozegh seeks to attract the Jewish people to his idea of universal religion in a way that does not contradict tradition, as he claimed in his article "Tzari Gilad."

In conclusion, I will try to prove that the true picture of Benamozegh is the one that emerges from his Hebrew writings and from his introduction to *Israel et L'Humanité*, rather than that emerging from the body of *Israel et L'Humanité*.

Motti 'Inbari

ZIONISM, MESSIANISM AND HASIDISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO ORTHODOX RABBIS AMIDST THE HOLOCAUST IN HUNGARY

In this essay, I discuss a disagreement between two rabbis associated with Hungarian Orthodoxy, in the interwar period and during the Holocaust, regarding the theological role of Zionism in the messianic drama. The two rabbis are Chaim Elazar Shapira ("the Munkacser Rebbe," 1871-1937) and Yissachar Shlomo Teichtel (1885-1945), the chief justice of the rabbinical court (*av bet din*) and chief rabbi of Pishtian (Piešťany), a renowned spa city in Slovakia.

The Munkacser Rebbe was one of the most influential leaders of extreme Orthodoxy in the interwar period. He opposed any changes in the traditional Jewish lifestyle and became one of the fiercest opponents of Zionism in the Orthodox world. Yissachar Shlomo Teichtel was a follower of the Munkacser Rebbe and initially supported his anti-Zionist approach. However, he changed his position following the rise of the

pro-Nazi state in Slovakia and its persecution of the Jews. In 1943, he published *Em Ha-banim Semekbah (A Happy Mother of Children)*, in which he refuted his rebbe's position and offered a justification for Zionism.

In this essay, I will present the rabbis' arguments for and against Zionism and show that the two apparently polarized opinions are rooted in the same assumption that the end times are drawing near, and that the Jews must prepare accordingly.

Zohar Mihaely

RETHINKING MARTIN BUBER AND PAUL TILLICH'S THEOLOGY

In recent decades, we have witnessed a return to the center of cultural-political discourse of topics like religious identity, the relationship between state and religion, the place of religion in modern life and the meaning of life in general. Accordingly, I present the ideas of the Jewish-Israeli thinker Martin Buber and the German-American theologian Paul Tillich, who were active in the first half and the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, because the answers they offered to the existential tensions of modern man as well as the nature of their discussion are in my opinion highly relevant to contemporary discourse in large. Moreover, they are especially important in Israel, for unlike their status in the rest of the world, Buber has yet to receive in Israel the proper treatment he deserves, and his ties with Tillich, who is considered one of the most important religious thinkers of the 20th century, are nearly unknown. From the analysis of the existential religious language they developed in response to modern fundamentalism on the one hand and radical atheism on the other, I will clarify why they chose precisely religion as a source for rehabilitation of modern man's mental problems, knowing that their target audience is in most part Godless, almost a century after Nietzsche's proclamation that God is dead. And in dealing with the criticism of their thought, which exposed few interesting weaknesses, mainly their concept of the divinity, I wish to prove their fascinating potential precisely today.

Gedalia Haber

NO OPINION IS AN ISLAND:
PLURALISM, POLARITY AND HIERARCHICAL OPPOSITION IN
ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL'S THEOLOGY

How should one understand Heschel's pluralism? On the one hand, Heschel was committed to religious pluralism, yet on the other hand, in his writings and lectures, Heschel often expresses a conservative, particularistic and decisive philosophical and religious outlook. Is there an unbridgeable gap between the "two Heschels" – the one, a pluralist, universalist and skeptic, and the other, a monist, particularist and adjudicator? This essay claims that there is room in Heschel's theology for pluralism, decisiveness and combination of opposites.

In order to ground this claim, I will use distinctions regarding first and second order moral claims and the encompassing of the opposite, taken from the fields of ethics and anthropology, respectively. I will claim that these concepts clarify Heschel's pluralism, his attitude towards interreligious pluralism, and his position towards the plurality of opinions within religion itself. Heschel is a meta-religious pluralist who, on the normative level, distinguishes between what is good for us and what is good for other religions. Meta-religiously speaking, Heschel agrees that some religions possess valid values; however, from a normative-religious viewpoint for us as Jews, certain beliefs are heresy. When Heschel grapples with a plurality of opinions in his *Torah min HaShamayim*, it is difficult to dub his method pluralistic, since Heschel believes there is no room in Judaism for a plurality of theological viewpoints of which some are good for me and others are good for you. The correct viewpoint, according to Heschel, is to forge a clear synthesis between the opposites and contradictions and reach a clear theological ruling. Heschel terms his adjudication between opposites "polarity."

In my essay, I will suggest a novel term to explain Heschel's polarity, taken from the study of anthropology: the encompassing of the opposite. According to this term, one opposite is more valuable than its counterpart and also contains its counterpart. I will claim that this anthropological model clarifies Heschel's view on opposites in his last Yiddish essay on Kotzk, and that the model can explain Heschel's somewhat inconsistent attitude toward the blessing "*shelo asani isha*" (recited during morning prayers). According

to the model of encompassing the opposite, Heschel decisively affirms an opinion, a dogma or a moral viewpoint, and forms a clear hierarchy between it and its opposite, while still granting the opposite some value.

Hanoch Ben Pazi

‘MESSIANIC HUMANISM’ – THE JEWISH HUMANISM OF ANDRÉ NEHER: ANDRÉ NEHER IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MARTIN BUBER AND ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

This essay attempts to identify the term “humanistic messianism,” and as a result “messianic humanism,” as foundational terms in the thought of André Neher.

Neher’s accomplishments as an educator and leader of French Jewry included wide-ranging critical studies of the Bible and all periods of Jewish thought, studies on the Maharal of Prague in the context of the intellectual milieu of the Renaissance, as well as his own original philosophical thought. Neher spoke out with a clear voice on the side of humanism, and against the anti-humanistic intellectual trends and cultural fads that were going on in Paris in the 1950s and 1960s. The essay will distinguish Neher as one of the three Jewish dialogic thinkers – Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and André Neher – who partnered a return to the Bible, dialogic thinking, and engagement with humanism.

Out of an assortment of European traditions that combined humanistic and religious worldviews, Neher proposed a unique term that integrated Judaism and humanism by using the term “messianism.” The composition of this term emerges out of Neher’s ongoing involvement with the study of the Bible and the prophets, and as a humanistic gloss on the Maharal’s thought. According to Neher, the principles of truth, tolerance, and universalism received a comprehensive reassessment and redefinition at the hands of the Maharal, all of which factored into the historical significance of the development of humanism during the Renaissance, and the transition to modern times. In so doing, the significance of this revolutionary philosophical project comes into view: the endowing of messianic significance to the ideas of humanism, and the creation of a humanistic interpretation of the messianic idea.

Na'ama Bindiger

MIRAGE AND THE ELEVATION OF MANKIND:
RAV KOOK'S APPROACH TO CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE
TORAH'S MORALITY AND NATURAL MORALITY

Rav Kook's writings contain extensive discussion of sections and commandments in the Torah which contradict natural human morality, with the aim of reconciling the two extremes.

Rav Kook stated that one must address conflicts between the Torah's morality and natural morality with a general outlook, and not specific explanations. We would therefore expect him to present one general approach reconciling the various contradictions he discusses; however, this is not the case. A study of a range of Rav Kook's works reveals four different models of how to philosophically confront cases of conflict between the Torah's morality and natural morality, which are as follows: a. Presentation of the contradiction as an epistemological error; b. Explaining the Torah according to natural morality; c. Justification of the Torah morality and dismissal of natural morality as secondary; d. Justification of both types of morality by differentiating between their status and roles.

After identifying and explaining the above models, we must hypothesize why Rav Kook developed four models instead of coining one uniform approach to the issue, as he himself declared should be done. It seems that Rav Kook presented these four models due to several of his principles: the importance he attributed to providing a realistic, concrete response (in the second, third and fourth models) alongside a speculative-theoretical response (in the first model); his view that the fourth, innovative model justifying both types of morality is preferable, but must be based on the words of the Sages, and does not apply to all the commandments; his tendency to use Rabbi Menachem Meiri's response to solve several specific conflicts (in the second model); his preference for models with propaganda potential for "bringing those far away close to the Torah" – the third and fourth models.

It seems that the first and fourth models best represent Rav Kook's approach to the topic in question, namely that there is no contradiction between the two types of morality, the difference between them reflecting action along different axes: the optimal, future axis, and the realistic

present-day axis which leads to this future. It appears that in his view, the existence of the two types of morality constitutes a complementary and fruitful force in world development.

Ronen Pinkas

BETWEEN THE JORDAN RIVER AND THE GANGES:
ON KARMA AND THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE *MEASURE*
FOR MEASURE: A DISCUSSION ON THE PREMISES OF A
COMPARATIVE THEOLOGICAL ENCOUNTER

This article invites an encounter between the Near and the Far East. The study phenomenologically analyzes two differing approaches to the notion of “cosmic justice.” Both approaches, “measure for measure” / the Biblical principle of reward and punishment and the karma principle in ancient Hindu literature (as represented in the Bhagavad Gita and Yoga Sutras of Patanjali), express the human need and desire to achieve a wider understanding of man’s place in the world. They both illustrate that there is an essential connection between what happens in man’s life and his previous actions.

The aim of this study is not to combine the approaches, but to present their similarities and differences, based on their meanings within the contextual and cultural moment in which they appear. Key questions discussed in this research are:

1. What are the similarities and differences between Karma and the principle of “measure for measure,” given the situation of man in the world, human relationships, and the relationship between man and God?
2. To what extent is it possible to clarify the differences between the two approaches on the basis of their conceptual backgrounds?

Jacob’s story in Genesis (chapters 25-50) serves as a textual point of departure for this comparative theological research. The study concludes that the different approaches share an essential ethical connection based upon events of the past, present and future. Both imply an educational lesson, teaching that the individual is responsible for the consequences of his actions. The Hindu-Yogic approach offers a way to release the

individual from the shackles of karma and the cycle of birth and death. In contrast, the Biblical approach, the principle of “measure for measure,” does not involve the afterlife, hence punishments and rewards are limited to one’s lifetime, even when it spans generations. Furthermore, the Biblical “measure for measure” is not considered a general commandment given by Revelation, but rather can be learned through the semantic language of the Bible and its particular narratives.

Meir Bar-Ilan

G. SCHOLEM, *MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM*, HEBREW TRANSLATION, TEL AVIV, YEDIOT AHRONOT, 2016, 502 PP.

Scholem’s well-acclaimed book *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* appeared in 1941 and has had a lot of impact ever since. Scholem forbade translating the book into Hebrew, but shortly before his death he agreed to a Hebrew translation under certain conditions. Only recently, 75 years after the original English book appeared, has the Hebrew translation come out.

This review is dedicated to only three aspects of the book: two of them relate to Scholem’s arguments, historiography and criticism, while the third aspect discusses the Hebrew version of the book, concentrating on the hundred-odd errata that stain it.

The first issue is Abulafia and the way he is presented by Scholem, who ignored the fact that Abulafia was a false messiah and that his writings were banned and “disappeared,” and that therefore there was no need for Scholem to make groundless assumptions. Scholem also misrepresented Ginzig’s opinion.

The second issue shows the reader that Scholem gave inappropriate criticism of a book, which does not exist. Scholem ridiculed Neuhausen, implying he was a non-scholar who had not understood the forger aspect of the Zohar. Looking at the scholar’s contribution shows that Scholem criticized him arrogantly without any basis.

The third issue discusses the countless mistakes that appear in the Hebrew translation. Never before has any Hebrew book appeared with so many errata, to the extent that the Hebrew version blackens Scholem’s name; it was translated into excellent Hebrew, but the bibliography is sloppy with all sort of mistakes.