

The Sinaitic Theophany According to the Jewish Tradition (Part 1)

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The Theophany

In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed for Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up to God, and YHVH¹ called unto him out of the mountain, saying: ‘Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My Covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people, for all the earth is Mine; and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.’ And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these which YHVH commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said ‘All that YHVH hath spoken we will do.’ And Moses returned the words of the people unto YHVH. And YHVH said to Moses: ‘Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee forever.’ And Moses told the words of the people unto YHVH. And YHVH said unto Moses: ‘Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And be ready against the third day, for the third day YHVH will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai...’ (Exod. 19:1-11)

1. The Tetragram YHVH is often transcribed in the vocalized forms YeHoVaH or YaHVeh, implying variants each of which has a particular spiritual meaning. But for more than two thousand years the pronouncing of this Name has been forbidden to the Jews, except for an elite of initiates who, through all time, represent the (uninterrupted) “chain” of the (esoteric) Tradition (*shelsheth ha-qabbalah*), and who are the only ones to know how the Tetragram is pronounced according to the sacred rules of the incantatory science which has been orally transmitted from the time of Moses up to the present.

YHVH Himself would come down upon Mount Sinai, and He “rejoiced more than any other day since the creation of the world”², for “on that day, the words: ‘The Lord doth reign, and cloth’d is He with majesty most bright; His works do show him cloth’d to be, and girt about with might’ (Ps. 93:1) were explained”³. He wished to reveal Himself through His Ten Supreme aspects, the ten *Sefirot* or “Enumerations” which synthesize His Infinite Attributes, investing them with the “ten Words” or Commandments which “contain the essence of all the Commandments, the essence of all the mysteries of heaven and earth, the essence of the ten Words of the creation (which can be found in the first chapter of Genesis.)”⁴ It was as if God were recreating the world spiritually by revealing the purpose of its existence, the One and Universal Being, the aspects of which are the archetypes of all things; archetypes which are crystallized in the Torah; as if “Creation had no proper foundation before Israel received the Torah” and as if only on that day “was the world fully completely established, heaven and earth received their proper foundation, and the Holy One was known everywhere and exalted above everything.”

In the beginning, His ten Words of creation were at first impressed into pure and universal substance, the “primordial Ether” (*Avir Qadmon*) and then into the subtle substance of heaven and the solidified matter of earth, from which all that was created was brought forth. On Mount Sinai, His ten revealing Words “were (at first) engraved in the (first) stone Tablets (which were still completely transparent, as they issued directly from the ‘primordial Ether’, the substance of the “tree of Life,”) and all that was hidden became visible to the eyes and perceived by the minds of all Israel: everything became clear to them. At that moment, all the mysteries of the Torah and all the hidden things of heaven and earth were opened up to them and revealed, for they lived face to face with the Splendor of the Glory of their Lord. Never before, since the Holy One created the world, had such a revelation of Divine Glory taken place. Even the crossing of the Red Sea was not comparable. On that day the Israelites were discharged and purified from all earthly imperfections, and their bodies became as bright-shining as the radiant garments which clothe the angels (formless spirits) on high in order that they may carry out the mission entrusted to them by their (Divine) Master. In these raiments (which, being subtle, clothe the angels and which correspond here on earth to bodies that clothe souls) they entered the (heavenly or earthly) fire without fear, as is written of the angel who appeared to Manoah (Judg. 13:20): “When the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar.” Thus, as we said, when the Israelites were freed from all carnal impurity, their bodies became luminous like stars and their souls resplendent like heaven: they were made fit to receive the (Supreme) Light. In that state (of primordial and angelic purity) the Israelites saw the Glory

2. *Zohar* 2:94a.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.* — The first of the creating Words is the first of Genesis: *Bereshith* (“In the beginning”); the nine others are the words that are repeated nine times in Gen. 1:3-29: “and God said...”

of their Lord... ”⁵, “...and amongst them, there were no more blind, or crippled, or deaf: all the people saw (cf. Exod. 20:18); all the people stood (cf. Ibid. 19:17); all the people heard (cf. Ibid. 24:7: ‘...all that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient’).”⁶ Israel had regained the primordial and paradisiacal state, when “It came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because YHVH descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. And YHVH came down upon Mount Sinai, and YHVH called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up” (Exod. 19:16-20).

And “Moses received the Torah from the top of Mount Sinai” (*Mosheh qibbel Torah mi-Sinai*) says the Talmud in the “Sentences of the Fathers” (*Pirkei Avot* 1:1); this lapidary phrase summarizes the most important idea in Judaism: the direct reception of the revelation of the One, destined for Israel and, in certain measure, for the entire spiritual posterity of Abraham. The word *qibbel*, “he received”—as in the term *qabbalah*—, is derived from *qabbal*, which means “to receive,” but also “to welcome” and “to accept,” and implies also the idea of being “face to face with” or “in the presence of” (*haqbel, qabbal*); here, it indicates direct reception of divine revelation by the man who is ready to accept it, to welcome it, standing before the Revelation’s very source, in His very Presence, which brings enlightenment and redemption. This perfect human receptacle appears above all in Judaism in the person of Moses, whom the Talmud, in the above-mentioned passage, connects forever with the Kabbalah, the direct “reception” of divine revelation. This revelation, though taking place at a certain moment in history and leaving its traces “drawn by the finger of God” on the Tablets of Testimony and later in the Book of the Torah, surpasses time and space, the commandments, the teachings and narratives of the Bible, letters, language and human reason; it grants man direct knowledge of Him who reveals Himself. This immediate and unifying knowledge exists in the eternal present; it is the permanent and universal knowledge of the only True and the only Real, of which Moses was a perfect receptacle, not in order to possess it for himself alone, but in order to make it accessible to the whole of Israel.

“All the Israelites saw the Glory (or the real Presence) of their Lord face to face on Mount Sinai,” says the *Sefer ha-Bahir*;⁷ and it specifies that “the souls of all the past, present and future generations of Israel—whether incarnate or not—were present there...as is written (concerning the renewal of the Covenant in Moab, after forty years in the desert, at the end of Moses’

5. *Zohar* 2:94a.

6. *Zohar* 2:82b.

7. The “Book of Light”, part of the *Sefer ha-Zohar (Book of Splendor)* 2:82b.

mission, which the Kabbalah associates with what took place earlier on Mount Sinai): ‘Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before YHVH our God, and also with him that is not here with us today’ (Deut. 29:14, 15). And each (of the souls of Israel) saw (the Divine Presence on Mount Sinai) and received the Words (the Torah) according to his degree (of spiritual receptiveness).”⁸ Thus, the Israelite generations of Sinai were united with those of the past and the future, by a spiritual uplifting which—as we have said—transcended time, space and all that is corporeal, so that the “entire people,” with Moses as guide, were united in a heavenly union with the One. “When the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself and began to speak, all beings everywhere were moved with great fear and the souls of the Israelites left their bodies...and ascended to the Throne of the (divine) Glory, there to remain forever. Then the Torah addressed the Holy One, blessed be He, and said: ‘Is it for naught that Thou didst create me two thousand years before the world? Is it for naught that I contain words such as: “Each of the children of Israel...” (etc. meaning that the Torah contains laws which concern only Israel)? Where, then, are the children of Israel?’ Immediately (after this plea by the Torah) the bodies of the children of Israel received back their souls, which had fled to the Divine Splendor, for the Torah (itself) brought each soul back to its place; it took each soul and gave it back to the body to which it belonged and which was its proper dwelling. This is what is meant by the words (Ps. 19:8): ‘The statutes of the Lord are right, and do rejoice the heart (or make the soul return) (*meshiboth*)’.”⁹

It was through the Torah that the souls of the Sinaitic generations returned to earth and the souls of past and future generations accompanied them as far as the “Heavenly Land” where they remained to attend the revelation of the Decalogue. This “Heavenly Land” was none other than the true Presence of God Himself, His *Shekhinah*, which “stood over Mount Sinai.”¹⁰ Then the words that came from the mouth of God, His (luminous) voices, took shape and form in the threefold darkness (which reigned at that moment according to the Scripture, where three different terms are used to describe it: “gloom”, “clouds” and “darkness”, symbols of threefold substance: the “primordial Ether” and the heavenly and earthly substances which are derived from it and which veil the Divine Being who is truly present; His sounding lights or “voices,” in order to become “words,” detached themselves from the “inner darkness” or “primordial Ether”), so that they became visible,¹¹ as is written: “and all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking” (Exod. 20:18). But at what exact moment in the scriptural account did the souls of the children of Israel leave their bodies to be united with God, and at what moment did they descend to earth to receive all the words of the Decalogue? In fact, this revelation consisted of two phases, the first summarizing “all the words”

8. Ibid. 2:83b.

9. *Zohar* 2:82b; 84-85b.

10. Ibid. 2:81 a.

11. *Zohar* 2:81a.

into one word, the second expanding them beyond that initial summarizing word. The first word of the Decalogue, which summarizes all the others, is *Anokhi*, as it is written in the text which can be read as follows: “And God spake all these words, saying: ‘I...(*Anokhi*)’ (Exod. 20:1-2). It was this first word introducing the ten commandments—the Divine Name that had already been revealed to Moses at the burning bush—which, when the Israelites “heard and saw it at the same time” in a vision of its Divine Contents, called forth the separation of their souls from their bodies and their re-absorption into *Anokhi* Himself, into the “I” or “Self” that is Supreme and alone Real. At that moment, Israel penetrated the Mystery of supreme Wisdom; for “*Anokhi* embraces all the sacred names, and all the commandments of the Torah....*Anokhi* is the Mystery of everything, the Synthesis of all the (sacred) letters (which, in their turn, symbolically synthesize the infinity of the Eternal Archetypes) and (out of the Synthesis) all the mysteries in heaven and on earth. It is *Anokhi* which contains the mystery of the reward of the Just,...*Anokhi* which contains the hidden, most recondite Mystery of all (the Supreme Identity of the human essence—the essence of all beings, all things, all the words of Scripture—and the Divine Essence)...”¹²

When the souls of Israel left their bodies, they resumed their heavenly and spiritual existence in order to be reunited with the formless and ontological “Body” of Him who revealed Himself: *Anokhi*. Each “part” or “limb” of His “Body” is one of His fundamental Aspects: but in reality, His “Body” is infinite, without parts, and His aspects are indivisible, eternally fused without confusion of their respective roles. These are eternal archetypes of His words and commandments, as well as their receptacles, which are human souls. “When (the word) *Anokhi* (and, thereby the Divine Self) was uttered, it comprised all the commandments of the Torah, which (long before) had been united in the ‘Body’ of the sacred and supreme King. Indeed, all the commandments are united in the one ‘Body’ of the King, some in His ‘Head,’ others in His ‘Trunk,’ others in His ‘Arms’ or His ‘Feet,’ and none of them ever actually leave the ‘Body’ of the King to be separated from it or lose touch with it. That is why one who disobeys even one of the commandments of the Torah, sins against the ‘Body’ of the King Himself (and, thus, against his real divine essence).”¹³

The “Body of the King” is none other than the eternal human archetype, “transcendent Man” (*Adam ilaah*) or “principal Man” (*Adam qadmon*) through whom the One reveals Himself to humanity and each principal member or organ of whom is a fundamental divine aspect, a *Sefirah*, a “Numeration” or ontological Determination of God. Let us recall that there are ten *Sefirot*; the three highest, namely, *Keter*, *Hokhmah*, *Binah* (Crown, Wisdom, Intelligence) symbolically form the “threefold Head” of the “King”; the following two, *Hesed* and *Din* (Grace and Judgment), are His “Right Arm” and His “Left Arm”; *Tif’eret* (Beauty) His “Trunk” or His “Heart”; *Netsah* and *Hod* (Victory and Majesty) form His “Right Thigh” and His “Left Thigh”;

12. *Zohar* 2:90b, 91a (*Sithré Torah*).

13. *Zohar* 2:85b.

Yesod (Foundation), His “Reproductive Organ”; and *Malkhuth* (Kingdom), His “Feet” or His “feminine Aspect,” His *Shekhinah*, His Immanence or His real Presence. This divine “Body” with its ten aspects was revealed on Mount Sinai, as the archetype of the human being, who contains them in a latent state and is called upon to realize them. But apart from that, each human being has a particular archetype, which is a “unique” mode of one *Sefirah* which reflects, however, all the other *Sefirot*, so that all the divine aspects are assembled in one particular way in each human soul. And this applies to each living being and each existent thing, to each divine word and each commandment; in reality, all of these are the inseparable members of the one Divine “Body”; in fact, all of them have only one common Essence: *Anokhi*.

The revelation of *Anokhi* was the revelation of the one and only Essence of all things, the divine Unity in all that is. That is why every soul present had to be united with the One, without wishing, or being able, to be separate from Him. And that is why it was necessary that God should pronounce a second word in order that Israel should descend again to the earth and receive His revelation “from outside” and “from below.” But God Himself needed to “descend” with His Torah and with Israel, since otherwise neither His words, nor the souls destined to receive them, would have been able to descend and be separated outwardly from Him. This is clearly confirmed by Scripture: “And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai...” (Exod. 29:20). “He came down from one level to another, from one crown (or second cause) to another, until he was attached to that (heavenly) earth (which hung over Mount Sinai and which was his very *Shekhinah*).”¹⁴ This is the mystery of the second Sinaitic word: YHVH (which comes after *Anokhi*: ‘*Anokhi* YHVH, I am YHVH...’), this word, this Divine Name, being the supreme means of grace for the terrestrial union of Israel with God, having been already revealed to Moses at the burning bush (cf. Exod. 3:15). Indeed, as *Anokhi* is the Name of the Divine Essence which “raises” all that is up to itself, and which integrates everything with supreme and universal Self, YHVH is the Name of the Essence which reveals all that is, by “lowering” Itself into all existence, thus enabling the human being to find It and to realize It in his innermost being, here on earth: “YHVH descended from one level to another...”

Each of the four letters of His Name summarizes a fundamental world of His Infinite Reality, and each of those hierarchically superimposed worlds comprises, in its turn, innumerable degrees of reality. The first letter, *Y*, which has the numerical value of ten, represents the ontological world of the ten *Sefirot*, *Olam ha-Atsiluth*, the “World of divine and transcendent Emanation”; the second letter, *H*, designates the Immanence of the ten *Sefirot* in *Olam ha-Beriyah*, the purely spiritual and prototypical “World of Creation,” which is situated between divine Transcendence and the actual creation; the third letter, *V*, designates the divine Immanence in *Olam ha-Yetsirah*, the celestial “World of Formation”—of which hell is the shadow—; and the fourth letter, *H*, symbolizes the Presence of God in *Olam ha-Asiyah*, the earthly “World of Fact.” Thus, the four letters of the name YHVH represent the descent of

14. *Zohar* 2:86a.

YHVH Himself, from the supreme level of His Reality to the level of His Immanence here on earth. At the same time, they indicate the archetype of that descent within the supreme World, which means that they summarize the ontological degrees of the ten *Sefirot* themselves: *Y* (Hebrew letter *Yod*: י) summarizes *Keter-Hokhmah*; *H* (Hebrew letter *He*: ה) summarizes *Binah*; *V* (Hebrew letter *Vav*: ו) has the numerical value of six and represents the six following *Sefirot*: *Hesed-Din-Tiferet-Netsah-Hod-Yesod*, and the last *H* (Hebrew letter *He*: ה) designates the last *Sefirah*, *Malkuth*. The revelation *in divinis*, or the purely ontological descent of these four “letters,” letters which summarize the ten Sefirotical degrees that are the archetypes of the ten commandments, is also the descent of “transcendent Man”: he descends from the Absolute or from “Non-Being,” *Ayin*, and is identified with Divine “Being,” *Ehyeh*. This becomes clear when we write the four letters of the name YHVH (יהוה) vertically. This is the image of the “descent of YHVH,” of the ten *Sefirot* which are His aspects, and also of “Man above”; it is the descent of the common Archetype of the four worlds, of man and of the Ten Commandments which summarize the Law in its entirety.



At the moment when God pronounced His Name YHVH, the souls of the Israelites—which were united with Him—returned to earth with Him and His Torah in order to “hear and see” all His words and to fulfill them on earth. It is in this descent from the supreme state of “holy union”—a state in which the One reveals Himself to Himself and to all that is in Him, and in which “the Holy One, blessed be He, manifests Himself in all His Glory”—that His Revelation branched out into: the “One who revealed Himself”; the people who “received” and “accepted” His Revelation; and the manifold revelatory degrees and symbols, thus all the words and illuminations of the Torah and “all the mysteries contained in Scripture and entered into by Israel.” But before going through the manifold aspects of the One in their varied “colors” or “qualities,” Israel, emerging from the One, saw only the One, His real Presence alone, His unique Glory in all the worlds that He held together, from above to below. The great Kabbalistic Master Moses de Leon describes this in the *Sefer ha-Rimmon*:

Every single thing is linked to another, down to the last link in the chain, and the veritable Essence of God is both above and below, in both heaven and earth, and nothing exists outside Him. That is what the wise mean when they say: “When God gave the Torah to the Israelites, He opened the seven heavens for them, and they saw that there was nothing there but His Glory [or Presence]; He opened the seven worlds [‘or earths’] for them and they saw that there was nothing there but His Glory; He opened the seven abysses [or ‘hells’] for them and they saw that there was nothing there but His Glory. Meditate upon these things and you will understand that the Essence of God is tied to these worlds and that all forms of existence are tied to one another, but that they are all received from the Existence and Essence of God.

The Ten Commandments

Just as in the beginning, the One came down Himself with all things proceeding out of Him, so that He would exist through all levels of creation. He then “came down upon Mount Sinai... He descended from one level to another...” He descended with Israel in His Name YHVH, which comprises His whole Revelation and the Revelation of all things; in His Revelation, His Torah, lies His All-Reality: “The Torah is the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He,” and “God and His Name are one.”¹⁵ God took the form of His Name and, from the beginning, His Name took the form of all the world, beings, revelations, the words of the Torah and all the souls that were destined to receive and fulfill those words; He took the form of all Israel, which is the “portion of the Lord himself”¹⁶: the “sacred Community of Israel,” his *corpus mysticum*, is one with the *Shekhinah* on earth, which is the “last H” of YHVH.

Thus, when they heard the second divine word, “YHVH,” the children of Israel saw not only the One in all the worlds, but also the One shining in all His revelatory clarity in their own hearts; that is why the One could say to Israel: “For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, ‘Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, ‘Who shall go over the sea and bring it to us, that we may hear it, and do it?’ But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it” (Deut. 30:11-14). Israel, the “portion of YHVH,” is the same essence as He, which is the same essence as His Word, His Name, His Revelation; by fulfilling His Words, and by realizing them to their very essence, the children of Israel fulfill their destiny and realize their own divine essence. When they “apply His Truth perfectly, they bring about holy union” here below, and through that they regain “the eternal union above” with the One, Who is absolute and Who revealed Himself to them as their own supreme “I,” *Anokhi*, their own Divine Reality, YHVH, Whom they must serve and adore as “their God,” according to the third of His first three Sinaitic words: “I am (*Anokhi*) YHVH, your God (*Elohekha*)...”

The Lord no longer says, as He said to Moses at the burning bush: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob,” but “I am YHVH, *your* God...,” Whom you know now as your own Essence (*Anokhi*) and of Whom you are an integral part (YHVH) whilst at the same time you are face to face with Him in order to serve Him as your God (*Elohekha*). Indeed, *Anokhi* designates the transcendent identity of Israel with the Absolute and YHVH designates Israel’s transcendent immanent identity with Him, while *Elohekha* (“your God” or *Elohemu*, “our God”) is God face-to-face with Israel, who are a people who must accomplish His Will in order to experience union with Him again and again in order to realize His Kingdom on earth. His Will is thus crystallized in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:2-17): “I

15. *Zohar* 2:90b.

16. Deut. 32:9.

am YHVH thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage..." "I am" (*Anokhi*, literally "I") designates the Supreme *Sefirah*, *Keter*, the "Crown," Being itself and Beyond-Being, the Absolute—for in the letters of *Anokhi* is concealed *AYIN*, "Non-Being" or "Beyond-Being", and *K*, the first letter of *Keter*. YHVH also means *Keter*, but in the sense that He reveals Himself by degrees, from his first Emanation, *Hokhmah*, "Wisdom," from which all the other Sefirotic Emanations stream forth, to the last, *Malkhuth*, the "Kingdom," or Divine Immanence. "Your God" (*Elohekha*) is *Malkhuth* itself, the *Shekhinah*, the Immanence of all the *Sefirot* which have come down to the here-below, the Divinity which is truly present in Israel, His *corpus mysticum*, the "Mother below" who concerns herself with the children of Israel on earth. "She Who brought you forth" designates the "Mother above," *Binah*, the divine "Intelligence," which originates from *Hokhmah*, the supreme "Wisdom," in the form of *Yobel* or eternal Deliverance: She delivers all Her children "from the land of Egypt," that is from created existence, to lead them back "out of the house of bondage" to Pure and Divine Being, the only True and Real, the One without a second. Therefore, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" for I am One and All, the sole Reality, the All-Reality, the unique Divine Essence revealing Himself in all His aspects, in all His *Sefirot*, which supplant all "gods," all secondary causes, all illusory existences outside "Him, the One with Whom nothing can be compared or associated" (*Hu ehad we-en shenī lehamshil lō lehahbirah*). "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I, YHVH thy God, am a jealous God..."

The first two commandments concern respectively union with the One and His pure affirmation, but the third insists on the purity of this affirmation by warning against the profanation of His worship and of His very Presence which abides in His sacrosanct Name. His Name is His Affirmation proper and complete, His Worship, Revelation and the whole Torah; His Name is Himself. "God and His Name are one." He is truly present in His Name, and He comes down from His Name to the man who invokes It in truth. To keep the Name of God holy is to unite oneself with God, whereas to profane His Name has the opposite result: to be utterly distant from Him, to fall into the darkness of the abyss. Therefore "Thou shalt not take the Name of YHVH thy God in vain, for YHVH will not hold him guiltless that taketh His Name in vain."

The Divine Name must be kept holy continuously and, in principle, it unites man with God at all times. Every day of his life, man must invoke the Name which saves and delivers him, and which so fills him with the Divine Presence that It abides, remains and acts within him as a living temple. Yet there is one day that is particularly propitious for the union of man with God, being consecrated to the revelation of His *Shekhinah*, a day when the Lord rests fully in Israel and when Israel finds complete repose in Him. This is the Sabbath: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work...For in six days YHVH made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day: wherefore YHVH blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."

Thus, Israel must sanctify the Divine Presence: (a) by union with the One; (b) by affirming His Oneness; (c) by the pure invocation of His Name, and (d) by contemplative repose on the Sabbath. However, Israel must also realize the Divine Presence in the neighbor, beginning with the veneration of father and mother: “*Honor thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which YHVH thy God giveth thee.*” The Scriptures promise long life in reward of the observance of this commandment. By long life the Scriptures mean eternal life. The words “...upon the land which YHVH thy God giveth thee,” refer to the higher region where the Divine Majesty is contemplated as if in a mirror which reflects the light. This commentary in the *Zohar* (2:93a) shows the very broad relevance of this precept; but love for parents must extend to one’s neighbor in general, as is made clear in another scriptural command: “Love thy neighbor as thyself” (Levit. 19:18).

The last six commandments deal with love of one’s neighbor; after the command to honor one’s father and mother, the Scriptures insist that we abstain from any wrong against our neighbor. For only where wrong is absent can real good be done, the Supreme Good be actualized, and the Presence of God be realized in ourselves and our neighbors. “*Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbors’ wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor’s.*”

After the great Sinaitic theophany that was crystallized in the Decalogue, which is a revelation whose every word was an aspect of God Himself—from His first word, *Anokhi*, “I,” to His last, *re’ekha*, “thy neighbor”—, YHVH proceeded, on the express demand of the people, to speak to Moses alone, and entrusted to him, on behalf of Israel, His Code of the Covenant (cf. Exod. 20:22–23:19). This was ratified, after Moses had read out the Book of the Covenant, in the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrificed animals. In fact, after he received the first Tablets of the Law, “Moses wrote down the words of God,” which he “read out in the presence of the people” at the moment when the Covenant was concluded. It was only afterwards, at the end of the forty days and nights he spent on Mount Sinai before the face of the Lord, that he received the “two Tables of the Testimony,” inscribed on both sides; “on the one side and on the other they were written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing of God, graven upon the tables” (Exod. 32:15–16). But these tablets were broken because of the adoration of the golden calf. Then, when Moses gained Divine forgiveness for Israel, YHVH told him “Hew these two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest.” And when Moses retreated for the second time to the mountain, where he spent another forty days and forty nights before the face of God, once more “YHVH wrote upon the tables the words of the Covenant, the ten commandments” (Exod. 34:1, 28).

As we have seen, however, before they were inscribed these three successive times—in the “Book of the Covenant,” written by Moses, and on the first and the second “Tables of

Testimony” engraved “by the finger of God”—the Sinaitic words had been revealed directly to Israel by YHVH, when “the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking.” (Exod. 20:18) Israel saw what it heard: it saw the divine voices as flames or spiritual illuminations which took the shape of sacred words and letters. And “each word was divided into twenty sounds; and those sounds appeared before the eyes of Israel as seventy shining lights.”¹⁷ That is,

Each word (that came from God’s mouth) encompassed all the implications and derivatives of the Law as well as all the mysteries or hidden aspects that pertained to them; each word, indeed, was like a treasure filled with precious goods...each word revealed itself through its seventy aspects (which formed the basis of other aspects and interpretations), to the number of the six hundred thousand children of Israel that were present at Sinai, and even more, since all the souls of earlier and later generations were also present at the Theophany; this means that each fundamental interpretation could take the color of each receptacle of the revelation of the One. Each word received fifty minus one crowns on one side (the “right” or clement side) and the same number (or principles of exegesis) on the other¹⁸ (the “left” or the side of rigor). That is why each biblical law is susceptible to forty-nine arguments in one sense and forty-nine in the other. Because of this diversity of possible interpretations of each word of God, the Scriptures compare them to a fire with myriads of sparks; but it also says that each Divine Word is “like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces” (and frees the hidden sparks), as it is described in Jer. 23:29: “Is not my word like as a fire? sayeth the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?”¹⁹

The word of God was His light that Israel “heard and saw at the same time” and from which “letters of white fire, revealing Grace, and of black fire” (which manifest rigor), hung in the air and detached themselves.²⁰ Then Israel saw a great light appear, that absorbed all the others,²¹ being both their synthesis and their source. That source of light was the *Shekhinah*, itself emanating from the Ancient of Days, the Supreme Principle, whose Real Presence it is. From it descended the “heavenly dew” of which “two drops were transformed into precious stones. God blew on these stones, and they became two tablets (of transparent sapphire)... On the back of

17. *Zohar* 2:146a.

18. The number forty-nine comes about from the seven *Sefirot* of cosmic construction, each of which is reflected in the other, so that each of them is “sevenfold”—which amounts to the forty-nine Sefirotic aspects. On the other hand, each of them contains, in a different “blend” Divine Grace and Rigor; this leads to forty-nine clement or positive interpretations and forty-nine rigorous or negative interpretations.

19. *Zohar* 2:83b.

20. *Ibid.* 2:84b.

21. *Ibid.* 2:146a.

the tablets could be read what was written on the front, and on the front could be read what was written on the back.”²² This was the substantial revelation of God through His Real Presence on Mount Sinai, the radiation of His Presence through His Light, the embodiment of His Light in His Word and the crystallization of His Word, or spoken doctrine, and of His written doctrine; all this took place in the self-same supra-temporal moment of the great Theophany.

This revelation of the Torah, which is both spoken and written as we have seen, is fulfilled through the conscious union of the chosen people with Him who revealed Himself. First He revealed Himself to Israel as the “One without second”; then He showed Himself in His ten fundamental aspects, the *Sefirot*, and next in the form of the “raiment” of the *Sefirot*, the Ten Commandments, which contain the whole substance of the Torah, progressively revealed through the intermediation of Moses. And the prophecy of Moses itself is the substance of all the later revelations of the prophets and the hagiographs of Israel: “Moses had pronounced all the words of the other prophets, as well as his own [which contain the words of the other prophets], and whoever prophesied [in Israel] would only express the substance of the prophecy of Moses.” Thus: “What the prophets were destined to announce to later generations, was received from Mount Sinai.” (*Midrash, Shemoth R.* 42:8; 28:6). And the Talmud confirms: “Even that which a distinguished disciple was destined to teach in the presence of his Master, had already been said to Moses on Mount Sinai” (*Yer. Pe’ah*, 2:17a). This implies that nothing which is said by a Jewish prophet or by a spiritual master or disciple interpreting Scripture according to the rules of traditional exegesis could be in contradiction with the scripts that were revealed by the intermediation of the great servant of God; nothing whatsoever could be added to it or omitted from it. The words of God, which He Himself engraved in the Tables of Testimony, were followed by Moses and constitute the Torah; and the writing of the prophets and the hagiographies followed as developments from the Torah, from the single revelations of YHVH.

The written Torah and the spoken Torah

After the descent of the “Ten Commandments engraved in stone,” the “Torah was written in earliest times in separate scrolls” (*Mishnah, Gittin* 60a) and was later brought together in a single book, the Pentateuch. This is the Book of the “Torah of Moses.” Tradition adds that

Moses wrote this book, including the parable of Balaam (Num. 22) as well as the narrative of Job. Joshua wrote his own book and the last eight verses of Deuteronomy (concerning the death of Moses). Samuel wrote his own book, Judges and Ruth. David wrote the psalms with the (spiritual) collaboration of the ten elders, who are: Adam (Ps. 139), Heman (Ps. 88), Yeduthun (Ps. 39, 62, 77), Asaph (Ps. 73–83) and the three sons of Kore (Ps. 42–84 s.; 87 s.) Jeremiah wrote his own book, the Book of Kings and Lamentations. Hezekiah and his associates were responsible for the books of Isaiah, and

22. Ibid. 2:84a, b; 85a.

Solomon, namely, Proverbs, The Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. The men of the Great Synagogue were responsible for Ezekiel, the Twelve [lesser prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi] for Daniel and Esther. Esdras wrote his own book and the genealogies of the Chronicles up to his time; Nehemiah finished the Chronicles” (*Mishnah, Baba Batra, 14b et seq*).

All these revelations which were consigned to writing from the “written Torah” or “written doctrine” (Torah *shebikhtav*) in the broadest sense. This is the Hebrew Bible which Jewish tradition subdivides into “twenty-four books” in the following order: the five books of Moses; the eight books of the Prophets; Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; the Twelve lesser prophets mentioned above, whose writings are considered as a single book and the eleven Hagiographs: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (considered as one book) and Chronicles. The exact date when this scriptural canon was established definitively by the spiritual authorities of Israel is uncertain; it could not have been before the third century B.C.E., and there were probably discussions as late as the first century C.E. concerning the suitability for canonization of certain books, such as the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and Esther. In the end the existing canon was consecrated by this formula: “The One and Only, Blessed be He, has said: ‘I have written twenty-four books; add nothing to them...’” (*Midrash, Bemidbar R. 14:4*).

But everything that the Lord has written, He also has spoken. He enunciated it in substance on Mount Sinai to the whole of Israel and He elaborated on it in His revelations to Moses and the other prophets, and though He insisted that no other *sacred writings* should be added to His “twenty-four books”, He did not forbid *sacred exegesis*, spoken tradition and its recording in writing. The spoken tradition goes back to His own word that is contained in the Scriptures and which can be interpreted in many valid ways that unveil His mysteries: aspects of Him who spoke and who, in His word, revealed Himself.²³ However, exegesis at any level can only be orthodox and effective if, in fact, it represents the “spoken Torah,” which is not simply a collection of interpretations that have been appended to it by men, but which is really of superhuman origin. It is the divine revelation or word hidden in Scripture as the “spirit of the letter”; this spirit has been crystallized by the sages of Israel, in its esoteric aspect, in the

23. There was, however, a school of thought in Israel, that of the Sadducees, which, from the 2nd Cent. B.C.E., rejected all words of traditions that had not been chronicled in the written Torah. In opposition to the Pharisees, who cultivated the spoken Doctrine, they fiercely denied the orthodoxy of that Doctrine. Because their Judaism based itself exclusively on the written code of the Pentateuch centering on Temple ritual, the destruction of the Temple almost immediately brought about the extinction of the Sadducees' trend. Pharisaism, on the contrary, allowed Israel to adapt the religion to the fearful conditions the Jews now faced, by turning to traditional interpretation of the Scripture; without the spoken Torah, Judaism would no longer exist.

teachings and the writings of the Kabbalah, and in exoteric mode in the teachings and writings of the Talmud and their rabbinical expansion.

Although the “spoken Torah,” as an interpretation of the “written Torah,” may appear to have been developed later, actually, as we have seen, both were revealed at the same time; at Sinai, Israel saw the spiritual contents of the letters that were written in heaven. The purely spiritual, luminous Word of God was His “spoken Torah” which immediately took shape in His “written Torah,” and this written record was destined to be a permanent point of departure and an established criterion for any analysis and application of revealed Truth and Divine Will. Therefore, exegesis and the realization of the contents of the Torah are nothing more than the extraction and assimilation of the spirit, or the light, that was crystallized in the “letter.” The two *Toroth* are two aspects of the single Sinaitic revelation, which complement each other perfectly in the divine work of illumination and redemption of the Chosen People. As in the Kabbalah, the Talmud insists on this twofold unity of the revelation, but it envisages the spoken Torah in the first place under its aspect of exegesis, that is, as a Torah that appears to devolve from the written Torah. What does the scriptural text mean when it says: “I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them” (Exod.14:12)?

The “tables of stone” are the Decalogue (which represents the synthesis of the whole Torah, written and spoken, together with the Prophets and the Hagiographs); the “law” is the Pentateuch (*Hamishah humshe Torah*, the “five fifths of the Torah” or five books of Moses); the “commandments” are the *Mishnah* (or repetition of the spoken revelation), from Moses to Esdras who transmitted it, with the Scripture, to the doctors of the “Great Synagogue,” or *Soferim*, “Men who dealt in scriptural Science”; they repeated it to the *Tannaim* or Authorities of the doctrine, the last of whom, Yehudah the Saint, who died about 220 C.E., completed the compilation and final written version of the *Mishnah*; the phrase “*which I have written*” refers to the Prophets and the Hagiographs (which, in the treatise *Rosh hashanah*, 7a of the *Mishnah*, are together described by the term *Qabbalah* which, as we have seen, means “esoteric tradition”; in fact, the prophets and the hagiographers were the real masters in this tradition and confirmed, revived and fortified Judaism “from within”); “*that thou mayest teach them*” refers to the *Gemarah* (the “complement” to or commentary on the *Mishnah* which represents the whole of the account of the *Amoraim*, the “orators” or “interpreters” of the spoken Doctrine which follows the *Tannaim*—third–fifth century C.E.); thus, it is the *Mishnah* and the *Gemarah* which combine to form the Talmud, the exoteric “study” of the Torah—*Talmud Torah*—in the strict sense of the word. We must add that the *Gemarah* of the Talmudic schools of the Jews exiled in Babylon and the *Gemarah* of the Palestine Jews, being based on one and the same *Mishnah*, finally resulted in the “Babylonian Talmud” and the “Palestinian” or “Jerusalem Talmud” respectively. The Talmud deals with both the “active” and the “contemplative” aspects of the religion: traditional activity is described by all the relevant texts in the *Halakhah*, the “Way” to be followed according to the Law, whereas the contemplative aspects are created in the *Haggadah*, the biblical and symbolical “Narrative”; this latter aims at a greater spiritual understanding of the

Torah, in order to lead to the “Knowledge of the Holy One, blessed be He” which is, strictly speaking reserved to those who are initiated in the Kabbalah; thus, the *Haggadah* forms one of the links between exoterism and esoterism. Finally, the Talmud also takes in the numerous *Midrashim* or rabbinical “treatises” which appeared in great numbers up to the twelfth century C.E.; together with the *Mishnah* and the *Gemarah*, they constitute the Talmud in the broader sense of the word, but not the whole “spoken Torah” itself. The “spoken Torah” also comprises the esoteric commentary on the Scriptures; the *Qabbalah* or “Receiving” of pure and universal Truth, which in its turn is chronicled in a rich traditional literature concerning the “Mysteries of the Torah.” The text (of the scriptures interpreted in this fashion) shows that “all this was given to Moses at Sinai” (*Berakhot* 5a). Let us recall that they received not only “that which the Prophets were destined to announce to the latter generations,” but also that “even that which a distinguished disciple was destined to teach in the presence of his master, had already been said to Moses on Mount Sinai.”

The Kabbalah

Another text in the Talmud, part of which we quoted at the beginning of this article, alludes to the precedence of the *Qabbalah* (Kabbalah) in the simultaneous act of divine revelation and its reception by man; as we have seen, the Kabbalah or direct “reception” of the Divine “Mysteries of the Torah” on Sinai, took place first of all, being the direct entry of an entire people into the “inward” or esoteric field of religion, their spiritual union with God Himself, under the guidance of Moses: “Moses, [and with him the whole of Israel], received (*qibbel—qabbalah*) the written [and spoken] Torah on the summit of Mount Sinai; he transmitted it [with all its basic interpretations, rules and levels of sacred exegesis, both esoteric and exoteric] to Joshua; Joshua transmitted it to the Elders, the elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets transmitted it to the men of the Great Synagogue ” (*Pirkei Avot* 1:1). All this took place “from inward to outward”; from the “*qabbalah*” or direct “reception” of the only Real and True to the exoteric “study” of the Torah, *Talmud Torah*; and all this was made possible by the spoken tradition itself protected by revealed hermeneutic rules. It was essential for the spoken revelation made to Moses and Israel to contain in itself that rule which laid down the indisputable exegetical criteria since otherwise it could well have withered with the passing of time into even more deviated speculation and finally have succumbed to heterodoxy. These rules, or methods of exegesis, are a kind of unalterable framework which have supported the changeless teaching of the spoken doctrine down through the centuries; because of the various degrees of understanding and application, they extend from elementary exoterism to the highest realms of esoterism. The practice of exegetical methods can be reduced to four, and the initials of the words describing them form the key word PaRDeS, the “Paradise” of drawing near to God. They are: *Peshat*, “Simple ” literal interpretation of the Scriptures; *Remez*, “Allusion” to the manifold meanings concealed (in the symbolism of the phrases, letters and signs of the Torah); *Derash*, Homiletic “exposition” of

doctrinal truths which embrace all possible interpretations of the revelation; and *Sod*, “Mystery,” initiation into the “Mysteries of the Torah” (*Sitre Torah*), the esoteric teaching of the Kabbalah.

These basic categories of exegesis amount to four degrees of spiritual ascent of which the second and third form the passage between exoterism and esoterism. Indeed, the methods which correspond with these intermediate categories are used by both Talmudists and Kabbalists; but although the Talmud joins the Kabbalah in this respect — and prepared for it to a certain extent — it is centered on the “logic” of it, whereas the Kabbalah identifies itself with the “Holy Spirit” (*Ruah ha-Qodesh*) which surpasses human reason and unites man with Him Who reveals Himself:

Consider how Scripture proceeds where man is concerned: first it proceeds to man.... And when man approaches Scripture, it speaks to him through the curtain [the “letter”] which still separates it from him.... Then man slowly begins to understand: he is at the stage of syllogistic interpretations. Then Scripture speaks to man through a more transparent veil, the veil of enigmas and parables which, by unveiling their symbolism, lead him to the real and purely spiritual significance of the “letter”.... And finally, when man has familiarized himself with Scripture [at the stage when he moves from the “letter” and its symbolism to the “inspired word”], the Scripture shows itself openly and reveals the [divine] Mysteries and the secret ways [which lead to the One], which it has kept hidden since the beginning of time [and the “sacred store” of which it is the *Sod*, or the *Qabbalah*]. Only then can man come to a perfect knowledge of the Scriptures, and only then does he become “Master of the House” [the universal House of God], for all the Mysteries have been revealed to him, and not one of them remains hidden” (*Zohar* 2:99a,b).

Let us quote that other passage from the *Zohar* concerning the ascent from the “letter” or the “body” of the Torah up to its “soul,” its “root,” its divine essence:

The foolish see only the clothing of a man; if it is beautiful, the wearer is also beautiful. But the clothing covers something even more precious, and that is the soul. The Torah also has a body, which is the commandments [objects of the *Halakhah*],...it also has raiment, and those are the narrations corresponding to the *Haggadah* which, from one point of view, is inferior to the *Halakhah*, and, from another, superior; ...Finally, the Torah has a soul which was penetrated by those who were present near Mount Sinai, that is the fundamental root of all things, the real Torah [the real, revealing and redeeming Presence of God, which is realized directly by the *Qabbalah*] (3:152a).

Although the two exoteric and esoteric domains may be very clearly distinguished in the ascent to the summit of the “inward Sinai,” they are also intertwined, as we have seen, in order to lead man, by spiritualizing his body and his soul, to the encounter with “Him Who descends upon the mountain” of the heart. In fact, after Moses, Joshua, the Elders and the Prophets, and

the elite of the Great Synagogue, it was the greatest “men of scriptural science”²⁴ from among the *Tannaim*, *Amoraim*, and *Rabbanim* who were masters of both the Talmud and the Kabbalah, that is, of the whole spoken Tradition; they formed the main “links” in the “chain of Tradition” (*shalshleth ha-Qabbalah*) which is outwardly Talmudic, but inwardly initiatic or Kabbalistic. This uninterrupted “chain” is destined to last until the final coming of the Messiah; exoterism and esoterism must fulfill each other through the centuries and millennia, like body and soul, in order to constitute the viable unity of the Tradition reflecting the “Higher Unity”:

For, even above [in the heavenly realms] there are clothing, body, soul, and also Soul of the soul. The heavens and their hosts are the clothing. The “Community of Israel” is the [mystical, heavenly, and spiritual] body that accepts the soul, which is named “Beauty of Israel” [the Revelation of the Supreme, His Eternal Torah, His luminous and beautiful Descent]; and this Soul of the soul is the Ancient of Days [the Supreme Self]. All these [divine, spiritual, and heavenly] realities are linked [to one another and to the Holy Tradition which reflects them and manifests them on earth]: “Woe to the guilty who pretend that the Torah [the Divine Reality of the tradition, the luminous Presence of the Supreme] is nothing but a simple narrative...” (*Zohar* 3:152a).

The Kabbalah is distinguished from the Talmud as is the soul from the body; in other words—symbolically—it is like the midmost organ of the body, the heart, which directly receives the “soul (of Scripture) revealed to those present at Mount Sinai”; and by receiving it today, just as at Mount Sinai, the Kabbalah identifies itself immediately with that soul which, as we have seen, is the light, the Real Presence of the “Supreme Soul.” The Kabbalah animates, illuminates and sanctifies the “body”—which is at the same time the letter of the Scripture, the whole Mosaic law and the chosen people itself—in order to unite it with the *Shekhinah* and, through that, with the Holy One, Blessed by He. In order to achieve that purpose, the Kabbalah uses, as we have seen, amongst others, the same methods as the Talmud, the methods of the *Halakhah* and the *Haggadah*, as well as the exegetic modes *Peshat*, *Remez* and *Derash*; and in connection with the latter, it uses the sacred science of letters and numbers.²⁵ But even more, and by definition, the Kabbalah uses methods which are proper to it, such as the science of the *Sefirot* and the divine Names. These two fundamental sciences belong respectively to the two great Kabbalistic categories: the “theoretical” or contemplative Kabbalah (*Qabbalah yiunit*) and the

24. Editor’s Note: Here, as elsewhere in the translations of Schaya’s writings, we should remember that the French word *science*, though translated by its English cognate, can also mean “knowledge.” A traditional linguistic relationship between science and knowledge continues to exist in many European and Semitic languages although the terms in English are now quite segregated.

25. The three best known procedures of science of letters or numbers in Judaism are the *Gematria*, which makes use of the numerical values of the Hebrew letters; *Notarikon*, which uses the initial, middle and final letters of the words; and *Temurah*, the method of permutations and combinations of letters.

“practical or operative Kabbalah (*Qabbalah ma’asit* which, in this case, does not refer to its deviations into magic).

These two categories complement each other and interpenetrate. In fact, although the “way of the *Sefirot*” (*derekh ha-Sefirot*) is mainly contemplative and the “way of the Names” (*derekh ha-Shemot*) is operative, the latter sustains contemplation by the illuminative and unitive grace of the invocation of the Sacred Names, which correspond to the *Sefirot* or divine aspects; moreover, the contemplation of the *Sefirot* is operative in itself; like true contemplation of the Divine, it contains its own transforming graces, the greatest of which is to metamorphose the contemplating subject into the contemplated Object. However, these graces can also join with invocation to guide the Kabbalist who proceeds according to the initiatic rules and in particular with the required *kawwanah* (intention, attention or concentration) to meeting and union with Him Who reveals Himself.²⁶ In other Kabbalistic methods, such as the Vision of the “Chariot” (*Merkabah*) or the divine Throne, which is associated with the revelation to Ezekiel and which implies a spiritual ascent through the heavens or different super-terrestrial degrees of the cosmos, the invocation of the Sacred Names plays an important role in connection with contemplation. In all these methods there is, in fact, a spiritual progress, or ascent through these cosmic degrees or directly beyond them as far as to the sefirotic degrees, whose acme is *Keter Elyon*, the “Supreme Crown,” identical with *Anokhi*, the Divine and Infinite “Self.” This is also true of such methods as the spiritual realization of the “work of Genesis” (*Maaseh Bereshith*), the metaphysical object of which is the eternal “Ontogenesis,” namely, the divine “Emanation” (*Atsiluth*) of the *Sefirot* from the “Supreme Crown” into creation, “a descent” which is finally crystallized in that of the *Shekhinah*, or Divine Immanence, which the Kabbalist “receives directly” as a revelatory and real Presence so that he might be united with It and re-ascend, by Its grace, to the Supreme Principle.

26. This unifying meeting can involve different modes of union; amongst others, it can renew the Sinaitic separation of the body from the soul which then ascends to the Supreme Essence. An illustration of this is given by the following narrative concerning Rabbi Moshe of Kobrin (who died in 1858, and was one of the spiritual successors of the famous Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, who was called Baal Shem or Baal Shem Tov, the “Master of the Good (Divine) Name”, founder of Polish Hassidism, 1700-1760): “When Rabbi Moshe was interrogated by a writer about the Kabbalah, or secret Doctrine, and the *kawwanot* or secret intentions aimed at a supra-terrestrial effect, he answered, ‘Listen to me well: The word *qabbalah* is derived from *qabbal*, to “accept” or to “receive,” and the word *kawwanah* comes from *kawwen*, to “orientate” or “direct toward.” For, the ultimate significance of all the wisdom of the Kabbalah is to accept the yoke of the divine Will and the final significance of the practice of the *kawwanot* is the orientation of one's heart toward God. When someone says “The Lord is my God,” which means that He is mine and I am His—how could his soul not leave his body?’ As soon as he had spoken these words, he fell into a deep ecstatic trance” (Excerpt translated from the *Erzählungen der Chassidim* by Martin Buber, p. 368, Manesse-Verlag, Conzet & Huber, Zurich, 1949).

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

Knower of the Unseen, He revealeth unto none His secret.

Save unto every messenger whom He hath chosen, and then He maketh a guard to go before him and a guard behind him.

That He may know that they have indeed conveyed the messages of their Lord. He surroundeth all their doings, and He keepeth count of all things.

Qur'an, 72: 26-28.